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Title: Silas Strong, Emperor of the Woods

Author: Irving Bacheller

Release date: September 30, 2015 [EBook #50091]

Most recently updated: October 30, 2015

Language: English

Credits: Produced by David Widger from page images generously provided by the Internet Archive

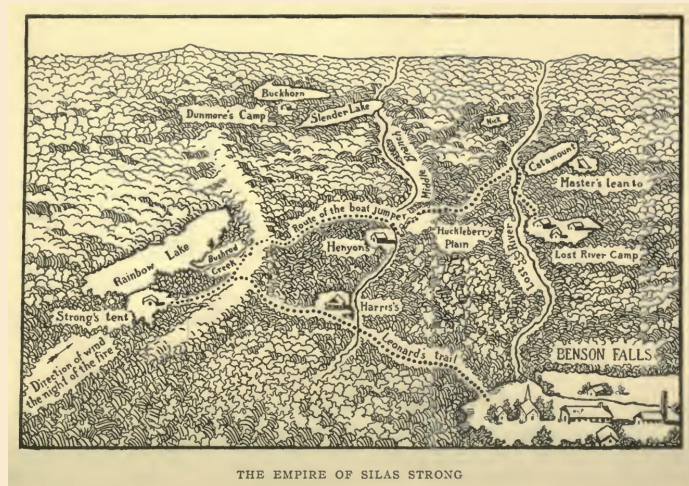
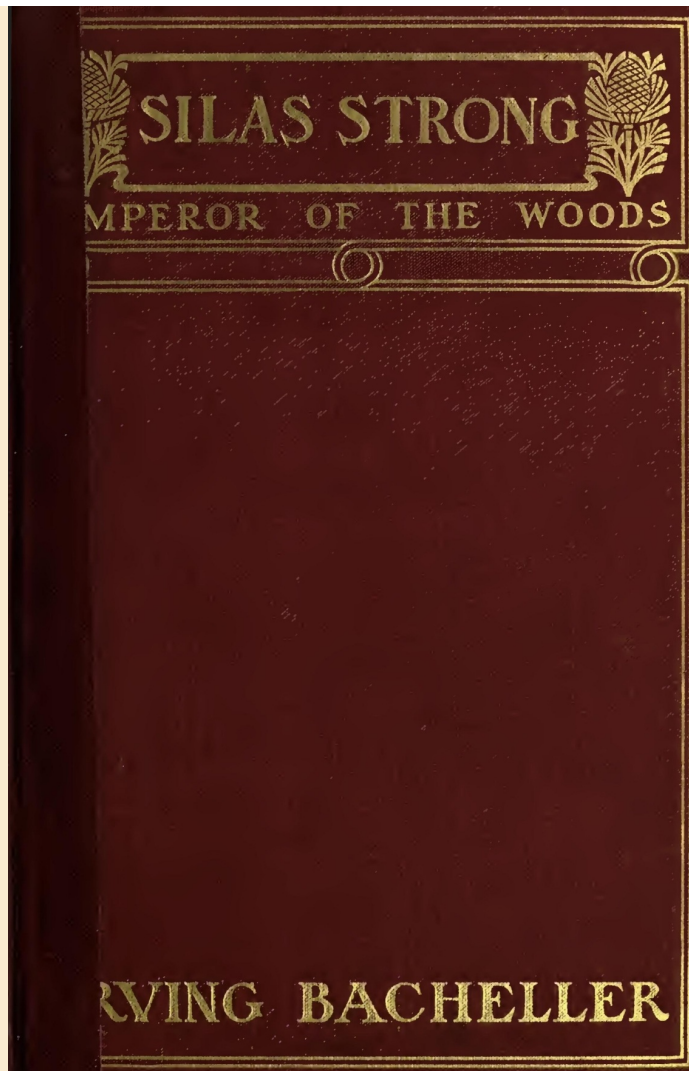
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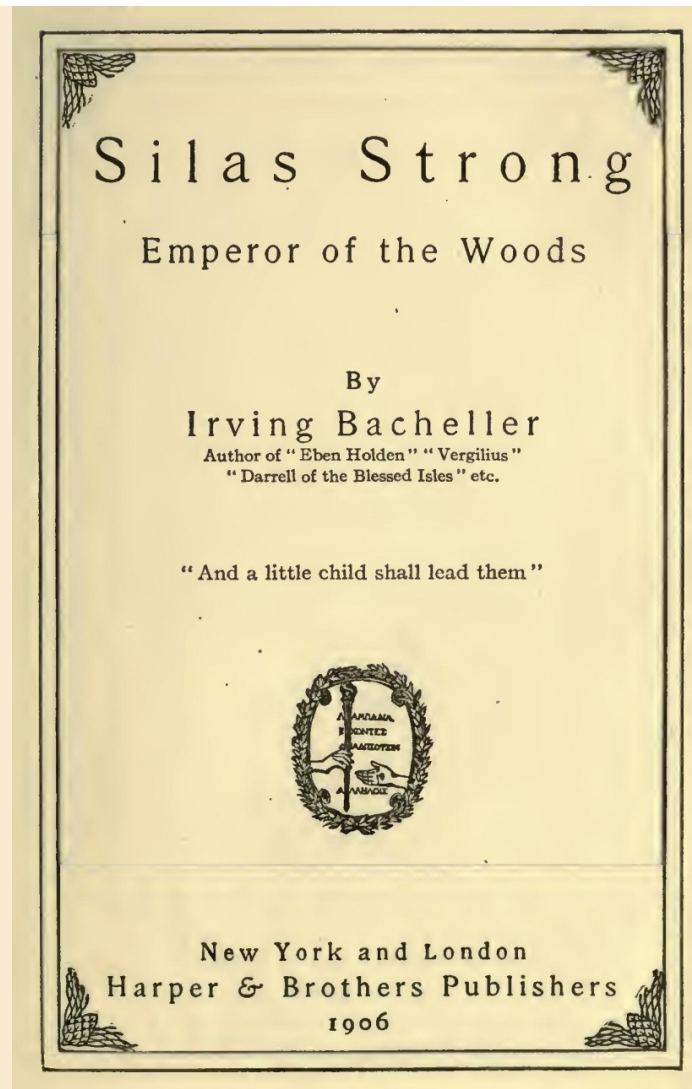
**SILAS STRONG,
EMPEROR OF THE WOODS**

By Irving Bacheller

New York and London Harper and Brothers Publishers

1906





TO MY FRIEND THE LATE ARCHER BROWN

in memory of summer days when we wandered far and sat down to rest by springs and brooks in the doomed empire of Strong and talked of saving it and of better times and knew not they were impossible.

Some of the people of these pages, when the author endeavored to regulate their conduct according to well-known rules of literary construction, declared themselves free and independent. When, urged by him, they tried to speak and act in the fashion of most novels, they laughed, and seemed to be ashamed of themselves, and with good reason.

They are slow, stubborn, modest, shy, and used to the open. Not for them are the narrow stage, the swift action, the fine-wrought chain of artful incident that characterize a modern romance.

Of late authors have succeeded rather well in turning people into animals and animals into people. Why not, if one's art can perform miracles? This book aims not to emulate or amend the work of the Creator. Its people are just folks of a very old pattern, its animals rather common and of small attainments. It is in no sense a literary performance. It pretends to be nothing more than a simple account of one summer's life, pretty much as it was lived, in a part of the Adirondacks. It goes on about as things happen there, with a leisurely pace, like that of the woods lover on a trail who may be halted by nothing more than a flower or a bird-song. One day follows another in the old fashion of those places where men go for rest and avarice quits them with bloody spurs and they forget the calendar and measure time on the dial of the heavens.

The book has one high ambition. It has tried to tell the sad story of the wilderness itself—to show, from the woodsman's view-point, the play of great forces which have been tearing down his home and turning it into the flesh and bone of cities.

Were it to cause any reader to value what remains of the forest above its market-price and to do his part in checking the greed of the saws, it would be worth while—bad as it is.

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SILAS STRONG

THE song of the saws began long ago at the mouths of the rivers. Slowly the axes gnawed their way southward, and the ominous, prophetic chant followed them. Men seemed to goad the rivers to increase their speed. They caught and held and harnessed them as if they had been horses and drove them into flumes and leaped them over dams and pulled and hauled and baffled them until they broke away with the power of madness in their rush. But, even then, the current of the rivers would not do; the current of thunderbolts could not have whirled the wheels with speed enough.

Now steam bursts upon the piston-head with the power of a hundred horses. The hungry steel races through columns of pine as if they were soft as butter and its' bass note booms night and day to the heavens. Hear it now. The burden of that old song is m-o-r-e, m-o-r-e, m-o-r-e!

It is doleful music, God knows, but, mind you, it voices the need of the growing land. It sings of the doom of the woods. It may be heard all along the crumbling edge of the wilderness from Maine to Minnesota. Day by day hammers beat time while the saws continue their epic chorus.

There are towers and spires and domes and high walls where, in our boyhood, there were only trees far older than the century, and these rivers that flow north go naked in open fields for half their journey. Every spring miles of timber come plunging over cataracts and rushing through rapids and crowding into slow water on its way to the saws. There a shaft of pine which has been a hundred years getting its girth is ripped into slices and scattered upon the stack in a minute. A new river, the rushing, steam-driven river of steel, bears it away to the growing cities. Silas Strong once wrote in his old memorandum-book these words: "Strong says to himself seems so the world was goin' to be peeled an' hollered out an' weighed an' measured an' sold till it's all et up like an apple."

On the smooth shore of the river below Raquette Falls, and within twenty rods of his great mill, lived a man of the name of Gordon with two motherless children. Pity about him! Married a daughter of "Bill" Strong up in the woods—an excellent woman—made money and wasted it and went far to the bad. Good fellow, drink, poker, and so on down the hill! His wife died leaving two children—blue-eyed little people with curly, flaxen hair—a boy of four a girl of nearly three years. The boy's full name was John Socksmith Gordon—reduced in familiar parlance to Socky. The girl was baptized Susan Bradbury Gordon, but was called Sue.

Their Uncle Silas Strong came to the funeral of their mother. He had travelled more than eighty miles in twenty-four-hours, his boat now above and now beneath him. He brought his dog and rifle, and wore a great steel watch-chain and a pair of moccasins w with fringe on the sides, and a wolf-skin jacket. He carried the children on his shoulders and tossed them in the air, while his great size and odd attire seemed to lay hold of their spirits.

As time passed, a halo of romantic splendor gathered about this uncle's memory. One day Socky heard him referred to as the "Emperor of the Woods." He was not long finding out that an emperor was a very grand person who wore gold on his head and shoulders and rode a fine horse and was always ready for a fight. So their ideal gathered power and richness, one might say, the longer he lived in their fancy. They loved their father, but as a hero he had not been a great success. There was a time when both had entertained some hope for him, but as they saw how frequently he grew "tired" they gave their devotion more and more to this beloved memory. Their uncle's home was remote from theirs, and so his power over them had never been broken by familiarity.

Socky and Sue told their young friends all they had been able to learn of their Uncle Silas, and, being pressed for more knowledge, had recourse to invention. Stories which their father had told grew into wonder-tales of the riches, the strength, the splendor, and the general destructive power of this great man. Sue, the first day she went to Sunday-school, when the minister inquired who slew a lion by the strength of his hands, confidently answered, "Uncle Silas."

There was one girl in the village who had an Uncle Phil with a fine air of authority and a wonderful watch and chain; there was yet another with an Uncle Henry, who enjoyed the distinction of having had the small-pox; there was a boy, also, who had an Uncle Reuben with a wooden leg and a remarkable history, and a wen beside his nose with a wart on the same. But these were familiar figures, and while each had merits of no low degree, their advocates were soon put to shame by the charms of that mysterious and remote Uncle Silas.

There was a little nook in the lumber-yard where children used to meet every Saturday for play and free discussion. There, now and then, some new-comer entered an uncle in the competition. There, always, a primitive pride of blood asserted itself in the remote descendants, shall we say, of many an ancient lord and chieftain. One day—Sue was then five and Socky six years of age—Lizzie Cornell put a cousin on exhibit in this little theatre of childhood. He was a boy with red hair and superior invention from out of town. He stood near Lizzie—a deep and designing miss—and said not a word, until Sue began about her Uncle Silas.

It was a new tale of that remarkable hunter which her father had related the night before while she lay waiting for the sandman. She told how her uncle had seen a panther one day when he was travelling without a gun. His dog chased the panther and soon drove him up a tree. Now, it seemed, the only thing in the nature of a weapon the hunter had with him was a piece of new rope for his canoe. After a moment's reflection the great man climbed the tree and threw a noose over the panther's neck while his faithful dog was barking below. Then the cute Uncle Silas made his rope fast to a limb and shook the tree so that when the panther jumped for the ground he hung himself.

To most of those who heard the narrative it seemed to be a rather creditable exploit, showing, as it did, a shrewdness and ready courage of no mean order on the part of Uncle Silas. Murmurs of glad approval were hushed, however, by the voice of the red-headed boy.

"Pooh! that's nothing," said he, with contempt. "My Uncle Mose chased a panther once an' overtook him and ketched him by the tail an' fetched his head agin a tree, quick as a flash, an' knocked his brains out."

His words ran glibly and showed an off-hand mastery of panthers quite unequalled. Here was an uncle of marked superiority and promise.

There was a moment of silence in the crowd.

"If ye don't believe it," said the red-headed boy, "I can show ye a vest my mother made out o' the skin."

That was conclusive. Sue blushed for shame and looked into the face of Socky. Her mouth drooped a little and her under lip trembled with anxiety. Doubt, thoughtfulness, and confusion were on the face of her brother. He scraped the sand with his foot. He felt that he had sometimes stretched the truth a little, but this—this went beyond his capacity for invention.

"Don't believe it," he whispered, with half a sneer as he glanced down at Sue.

Lizzie Cornell began to titter. All eyes were fixed upon the unhappy pair as if to say, "How about your Uncle Silas now?" The populace, deserting the standard of the old king, gathered in front of the red-headed boy and began to inquire into the merits of Uncle Mose.

Socky and Sue hesitated. Curiosity struggled with resentment. Slowly and thoughtfully they walked away. For a moment neither spoke. Soon a cheering thought came into the mind of Sue.

"Maybe Uncle Silas has ketched a panther by the tail, too," said she, hopefully. Socky, his hands in his pockets, looked down with a dazed expression.

"I'm going to ask father," said he, thoughtfully.

It was now late in the afternoon. They went home and sat in silence on the veranda, watching for their father. The old Frenchwoman who kept house for him tried to coax them in, but they would make no words with her. Long they sat there looking wistfully down the river-bank.

Presently Sue hauled out of her pocket a tiny rag doll which she carried for casual use. It came handy in moments of loneliness and despair outside the house. She toyed with its garments, humming in a motherly fashion. It was nearly dark when they saw their father staggering homeward according to his habit. They knew not yet the meaning of that wavering walk.

"There he comes!" said Socky, as they both ran to meet him. "He can't carry us to-night. He's awful tired."

They thought him "tired." They kissed him and took his hands in theirs, and led him into the house. Stern and silent he sat down beside them at the supper-table. The children were also silent and sober-faced from intuitive sympathy. They could not yet introduce the topic which weighed upon them.

Socky looked at his father. For the first time he noted that his clothes were shabby; he knew that a few days before his father had lost his watch. The boy stole away from the table, and went to his little trunk and brought the sacred thing which his teacher had given him Christmas Day—a cheap watch that told time with a noisy and inspiring tick. He laid it down by his father's plate.

"There," said he, "I'm going to let you wear my watch."

It was one of those deep thrusts which only the hand of innocence can administer. Richard Gordon took the watch in his hand and sat a moment looking down. The boy manfully resumed his chair.

"It don't look very well for you to be going around without a watch," he remarked, taking up his piece of bread and butter.

His father put the watch in his pocket.

"You can let me wear it Sundays," the boy added. "You won't need it Sundays."

A smile overspread the man's face.

The children, quick to see their opportunity, approached him on either side. Sue put her arms around the neck of her father and kissed him.

"Tell us a story about Uncle Silas," she pleaded.

"Uncle Silas!" he exclaimed. "We're all going to see him in a few days."

The children were mute with surprise. Sue's little doll dropped from her hands to the floor. Her face changed color and she turned quickly, with a loud cry, and drummed on the table so that the dishes rattled. Socky leaned over the back of a chair and shook his head, and gave his feet a fling and then recovered his dignity.

"Now don't get excited," remarked their father.

They ran out of the room, and stood laughing and whispering together for a moment. Then they rushed back.

"When are we going?" the boy inquired.

"In a day or two," said Gordon, who still sat drinking his tea.

Sue ran to tell Aunt Marie, the housekeeper, and Socky sat in his little rocking-chair for a moment of sober thought.

"Look here, old chap," said Gordon, who was wont to apply the terms of mature good-fellowship to his little son. Socky came and stood by the side of his father.

"You an' I have been friends for some time, haven't we?" was the strange and half-maudlin query which Gordon put to his son.

The boy smiled and came nearer.

"An' I've always treated ye right—ain't I? Answer me."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, folks say you're neglected an' that you don't have decent clothes an' that you might as well have no father at all. Now, old boy, I'm going to tell you the truth; I'm broke—failed in business, an' have had to give up. Understand me; I haven't a cent in the world."

The man smote his empty pocket suggestively. The boy was now deeply serious. Not able to comprehend the full purport of his father's words, he saw something in the face before him which began to hurt. His lower lip trembled a little.

"Don't worry, old friend," said Gordon, clapping him on the shoulder.

Just then Sue came running back.

"Say," said she, climbing on a round of her father's chair, "did Uncle Silas ever ketch a panther by the tail?"

The children held their breaths waiting for the answer.

"Ketch a panther by the tail!" their father exclaimed. "Whatever put that in your head?"

Sue answered with some show of excitement. Her words came fast.

"Lizzie Cornell's cousin he said that his Uncle Mose had ketched a panther by the tail an' knocked his brains out."

Their father smiled again.

"That kind o' floored ye, didn't it, old girl?" said he, with a kiss. "Le's see," he continued, drawing the children close on either side of him. "I don' know as he ever ketched a panther by the tail, but I'll tell ye what he did do. One day when he hadn't any gun with him he come acrost a big bear, an' Uncle Sile fetched him a cuff with his fist an' broke the bear's neck, an' then he brought him home on his back an' et him for dinner."

"Oh!" the girl exclaimed, her mouth and eyes wide open.

Socky whistled a shrill note of surprise and thankfulness. Then he clucked after the manner of one starting his horse.

"My stars!" he exclaimed, and so saying he skipped across the floor and brought his fist down heavily upon the lounge. Uncle Silas had been saved—plucked, as it were, from the very jaws of obscurity.

When they were ready to get into bed the children knelt as usual before old Aunt Marie, the housekeeper. Sue ventured to add a sentence to her prayer. "God bless Uncle Silas," said she, "and make him very—very —"

The girl hesitated, trying to find the right word.

"Powerful," her brother suggested, still in the attitude of devotion.

"Powerful," repeated Sue, in a trembling voice, and then added: "for Christ's sake. Amen."

They lay a long time discussing what they should say and do when at last they were come into the presence of the great man. Suddenly a notion entered the mind of Socky that, in order to keep the favor of fortune, he must rise and clap his hand three times upon the round top of the posts at the foot of the bed. Accordingly he rose and satisfied this truly pagan impulse.

Then he repeated the story of his uncle and the bear over and over again, pausing thoughtfully at the point of severest action and adding a little color to heighten the effect. Here and there Sue prompted him, and details arose which seemed to merit careful consideration.

"I wouldn't wonder but what Uncle Silas must 'a' spit on his hand before he struck the bear," said Socky, remembering how strong men often prepared themselves for a difficult undertaking.

When the story had been amplified, in a generous degree, and well committed to memory, they began to talk of Lizzie Cornell and her cousin, the red-headed boy, and planned how they would seek them out next day and defy them with the last great achievement of their Uncle Silas.

"He's a nasty thing," the girl exclaimed, suddenly.

"I feel kind o' sorry for him," said Socky, with a sigh.

"Why?"

"Cos he thinks his uncle beats the world an' he ain't nowhere."

"Maybe he'll want to fight," said Sue.

"Then I'll fetch him a cuff."

"S'pose you was to break his neck?"

"I'll hit him in the breast," said Socky, thoughtfully, feeling his muscle.

Sue soon fell asleep, but Socky lay thinking about his father. He had crossed the edge of the beginning of trouble. He thought of those words—and of a certain look which accompanied them—"I haven't got a cent in the world." What did they mean? He could only judge from experience—from moments when he had stood looking through glass windows and showcases at things which had tempted him and which he had not been able to enjoy. Oh, the bitter pain of it! Must his father endure that kind of thing? He lay for a few moments weeping silently.

All at once the thought of his little bank came to him. It was nearly full of pennies. He rose in bed and listened. The room was dark, but he could hear Aunt Marie at work in the kitchen. That gave him courage, and he crept stealthily out of bed and went to his trunk and felt for the little square house of painted tin with a slot in the chimney. It lay beneath his Sunday clothes, and he raised and gently shook it. He could hear that familiar and pleasant sound of the coin.

Meanwhile his father had been sitting alone. For weeks he had been rapidly going downhill. His friends had all turned against him. He had been fairly stoned with reproaches. He could see only trouble behind, disgrace before, and despair on either side. He held a revolver in his hand. A child's voice rang out in the silence, calling "father."

Gordon leaned forward upon the table. He began to be conscious of things beyond himself. He heard the great mill-saw roaring in the still night; he heard the tick of the clock near him. Suddenly his little son peered through the halfopen door.

"Father," Socky whispered.

Gordon started from his chair, and, seeing the boy, sat down again.

Socky was near crying but restrained himself. Without a word he deposited his bank on the table. It was a moment of solemn renunciation. He was like one before the altar giving up the vanities of the world. He looked soberly at his father and said, "I'm going to give you all my money."

Gordon said not a word and there was a moment of silence.

"More than a dollar in it," the boy suggested, proudly.

Still his father sat resting his head upon his hand in silence while he seemed to be trying the point of a pen.

"You may give me five cents if you've a mind to when you open it," Socky added.

Gordon turned slowly and kissed the forehead of his little son. The boy put his arms around the neck of his father and begged him to come and lie upon the bed and tell a story.

So it happened the current of ruin was turned aside—the heat-oppressed brain diverted from its purpose. For as the man lay beside his children he began to think of them and less of himself. "I cannot leave them," he concluded. "When I go I shall take them with me."

In the long, still hours he lay thinking.

The south wind began to stir the pines, and cool air from out of the wild country came through an open window. Fathoms of dusty, dead air which had hung for weeks over the valley, growing hotter and more oppressive in the burning sunlight, moved away. A cloud passing northward flung a sprinkle of rain upon the broad, smoky flats and was drained before it reached the great river. All who were sick and weary felt the ineffable healing of the woodland breeze. It soothed the aching brain of the mill-owner and slackened the ruinous toil of his thoughts.

Gordon slept soundly for the first time in almost a month.

II

NEXT morning Gordon felt better. He began even to consider what he could do to mend his life. The children got ready for Sunday-school and were on their way to church an hour ahead of time. Sue, in her white dress and pretty bonnet, walked with a self-conscious, don't-touch-me air. Socky, in his little sailor suit, had the downward eye of meditation. Each carried a Testament and looked neither to right nor left. They hurried as if eager for spiritual refreshment. They were, however, like the veriest barbarians setting out with spears and arrows in quest of revenge. They were thinking of Lizzie Cornell and that boy of the red head and the doomed uncle. Socky's lips moved silently as he hurried. One might have inferred that he was repeating his golden text. Such an inference would have been far from the truth. He was, in fact, tightening the grasp of memory on those inspiring words: "an' Uncle Sile fetched him a cuff with his fist an' broke the bear's neck, an' then he brought him home on his back an' et him for dinner." They joined a group of children who were sitting on the steps of the old church. Their hearts beat fast when they saw Lizzie coming with her cousin, the red-headed boy.

A number went forth to meet the two.

"Tell us the badger story," said they to the red-headed boy.

"Pooh! that ain't much," he answered, modestly.

"Please tell us," they insisted.

"Wal, one day my Uncle Mose see a side-hill badger—"

"What's a side-hill badger?" a voice interrupted.

"An animal what lives on a hill, an' has legs longer on one side than on t 'other, so 't he can run round the side of it," said he, glibly, and with a look of pity for such ignorance.

"Go on with the story," said another voice.

"My Uncle Mose sat an' watched one day up in the limb of a tree above the hole of a badger. By-an'-by an ol' he badger come out, an' my uncle dropped onto his back, an' rode him round an' round the hill 'til he was jes' tuckered out.

Then Uncle Mose put a rope on his neck an' tied him to a tree, an' the ol' badger dug an' dug until they was a hole in the ground so big you could put a house in it. An' my uncle he got an idee, an' so one day he fetched him out to South Colton an' learnt him how to dig wells an' cellars, an' bym-by the ol' badger could earn more money than a hired man."

"Shucks!" said Socky, turning upon his adversary with sneering, studied scorn. "That's nothing!"

Then proudly stepping forward, he flung the latest exploit of his Uncle Silas into the freckled face of the red-headed boy. It stunned the able advocate of old Moses Leonard—a mighty hunter in his time—and there fell a moment of silence followed by murmurs of applause.

The little barbarian—Lizzie Cornell—had begun to scent the battle and stood sharpening an arrow.

"It's a lie," said the red-headed boy, recovering the power of speech.

"His father's a thief an' a drunkard, anyway." That was the arrow of Lizzie Cornell.

Socky had raised his fists to vindicate his honor, when, hearing the remark about his father, he turned quickly upon the girl who made it.

What manner of rebuke he would have administered, history is unable to record. The minister had come. The children began to scatter. Lizzie and her red-headed cousin ran around the church. Socky and Sue stood with angry faces.

Suddenly Socky leaned upon the church door and burst into tears. He dimly comprehended the disgrace which Lizzie had sought to put upon him. The minister could not persuade him to enter the church or to explain the nature of his trouble.

When all had gone into Sunday-school, the boy turned, wiping his eyes. Sue stood beside him, a portrait of despair.

"Le's go home an' tell our father," said she.

They started slowly, but as their indignation grew their feet hurried. Neither spoke in the long journey to their door. They ran through the hall and rushed in upon their father who sat reading.

"Oh, father!" said the girl, in excited tones; "Lizzie Cornell says you're a thief an' a drunkard."

Gordon rose and turned pale.

The hands and voices of the children were ever raised against him.

"It's a lie!" said he, turning away.

He stood a moment looking out of the window. He must take them to some lonely part of the wilderness and there make an end of his trouble and of theirs. He turned to the children, saying, "Right after dinner we'll start for the woods."

So it befell that in the afternoon of a Sunday late in June, Socky and Sue, with all their effects in a pack-basket, and their father beside them, started in a spring-wagon over the broad, stony terraces that lift southward into thickening woods, on their way to great peril.

And so, too, it befell that in leaving home and the tearful face of dear Aunt Marie, they were sustained by a thought of that good and mighty man whom they hoped soon to see—their Uncle Silas.

III.

THE day was hot and still. Slowly they mounted the foot-hills between meadows aglow with color. The country seemed to flow ever downward past their sleepy eyes on its way to the great valley. The daisies were like white foam on the slow cascade of Bowman's Hill, and there were masses of red and yellow which appeared to be drifting on the flats. A driver sat on the front seat, and Gordon behind with Socky and Sue. The little folk chattered together and wearied their father with queries about birds and beasts. By-and-by the girl grew silent, her chin sank upon her breast, and her head began to shake and sway as their wagon clattered over the rough road. In a moment Socky's head was nodding also, and the feet of both swung limp below the wagon-seat.

They had seemed to sink and rise and struggle and cry out in the silence, and were now as those drowned beneath it. Gordon drew them towards him and lifted their legs upon the cushioned wagon-seat. He sat thinking as they rode. They had been hard on him—those creditors. He had not meant to steal, but only to borrow that small sum which he had taken out of the business in order to feed and clothe the children who lay beside him. True, some dollars of it had gone to buy oblivion—a few hours of unearned, of unholy relief. How else, thought he, could he have stood the reproaches of brutal men?

They arrived at Tupper's Mill late in the afternoon. There Gordon found a canoe and made ready. At this point the river turned like a scared horse and ran east by south, around Tupper Ridge, in a wide loop, and, as if doubting its way, slackened pace, and, wavering right and left, moved slowly into the shade of the forest, and then, as if reassured, went on at a full gallop, leaping over the cliff at Fiddler's Falls. Below, it turned to the north, and, seeming to see its way at last, grew calm and crossed the flats wearily, covered with foam.

Socky woke and rubbed his eyes when he and his sister were taken out of the wagon. Sue continued to sleep, although carried like a sack of meal under the arm of the driver and Silas Strong laid amidstships on a blanket. Mr. Tupper, the mill man, gave them a piece of meat which, out of courtesy to the law, he called "mountain lamb." With pack aboard and Socky on a blanket in the bow, Gordon pushed his canoe into the current.

All who journeyed to the Lost River country from the neighborhood of Hillsborough arrived at Tupper's late in the afternoon. There, generally, they took canoe and paddled six miles to a log inn at the head of the still water. But as Gordon started from Tupper's Mill down stream he had in mind a destination not on any map of this world. Socky sat facing him, a little hand on either gunwale.

Socky had thought often that day of the incident of the night before and of his father's poverty. Now he looked him over from head to foot. He saw the little steel chain fastened to his father's waistcoat and leading into the pocket where he knew that his own watch lay hidden. The look of it gave him a feeling of great virtue and satisfaction.

"Father, will you please tell me what time it is?" he inquired.

Gordon removed the watch from his pocket. "Half-past six. We've got to push on."

It was fine to see that watch in his father's hand.

"I'm going to give it to you," said the boy, soberly. "You can wear it Sundays an' every day."

Gordon looked into the eyes of his son. He saw there the white soul of the little traveller just entering upon the world.

"I'm going to buy you some new clothes, too," said Socky, now overflowing with generosity.

"Where'll you get the money?"

"From my Uncle Silas." After a few moments Socky added, "If I was Lizzie Cornell's father I'd give her a good whipping."

They rode in silence awhile, and soon the boy lay back on his blanket looking up at the sky.

"Father," said he, presently.

"What?"

"I'm good to you, ain't I?"

"Very."

There was a moment of silence, and then the boy added, "I love you."

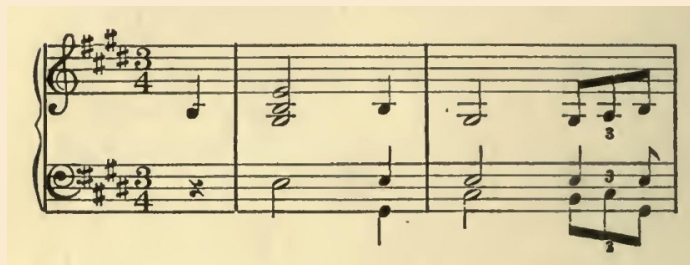
Those words gave the man a new sense of comfort. If he could have done so he would have embraced his son and covered his face with kisses.

The sun had sunk low and they were entering the edge of the night and the woodland. Soon the boy fell asleep. The silence of the illimitable sky seemed to be flooding down and delightful sounds were drifting on its current. They had passed the inn, long ago and walls of fir and pine were on either side of them. Gordon put into a deep cove, stopping under the pine-trees with his bow on a sand-bar. Then he let himself down, stretching his legs on the canoe bottom and lying back on his blanket.

For a long time he lay there thinking. He had been a man of some refinement, and nature had punished him, after an old fashion, for the abuse of it with extreme sensitiveness. He had come to the Adirondacks from a New England city and married and gone into business. At first he had prospered, and then he had begun to go down.

He had been a lover of music and a reader of the poets. As he lay thinking in the early dusk he heard the notes of the wood-thrush. That bird was like a welcoming trumpeter before the gate of a palace; it bade him be at home. Above all he could hear the water song of Fiddler's Falls—the tremulous, organ bass of rock caverns upon which the river drummed as it fell, the chorus of the on-rushing stream and great overtones in the timber.

Sound and rhythm seemed to be full of that familiar strain—so like a solemn warning:



A long time he sat hearing it. He began to feel ashamed of his folly and awakened to the inspiration of a new purpose. He rose and looked about him.

When you enter a house you begin to feel the heart of its owner. Something in the walls and furnishings, something in the air—is it a vibration which dead things have gathered from the living?—bids you welcome or warns you to depart. It is the true voice of the master. As Gordon came into the wilderness he felt like one returning to his father's house. In this great castle the heart of its Master seemed to speak to him with a tenderness fatherly and unmistakable.

A subtle force like that we find in houses built with hands now bade him welcome. "Lie down and rest, my son," it seemed to say. "Let not your heart be troubled. Here in your Father's house are forgiveness and plenty."

He put away the thought of death. He covered the sleeping boy and girl, pushed his canoe forward upon the sand, and lying back comfortably soon fell asleep.

He awoke refreshed at sunrise. The great, green fountain of life, in the midst of which he had rested, now seemed to fill his heart with its uplifting joy and energy and persistence.

He built a fire under the trees and broiled the meat and made toast and coffee. He lifted the children in his arms and kissed them with unusual tenderness.

"To-day we'll see Uncle Silas," Gordon assured them.

"My Uncle Silas!" said the boy, fondly.

"He's mine, too," Sue declared.

"He's both of our'n," Socky allowed, as they began to eat their breakfast.

IV

SILAS STRONG, or "Panther Sile," as the hunters called him, spent every winter in the little forest hamlet of Pitkin and every summer in the woods.

Lawrence County was the world, and game, wood, and huckleberries the fulness thereof; all beyond

was like the reaches of space unexplored and mysterious. God was only a word—one may almost say—and mostly part of a compound adjective; hell was Ogdensburg, to which he had once journeyed; and the devil was Colonel Jedson. This latter opinion, it should be said, grew out of an hour in which the Colonel had bullied him in the witness-chair, and not to any lasting resemblance.

As to Ogdensburg itself, the hunter had based his judgment upon evidence which, to say the least, was inconclusive. When Sile and the city first met, they regarded each other with extreme curiosity. A famous hunter, as he moved along the street with rifle, pack, and panther-skin, Sile was trying to see everything, and everything seemed to be trying to see Sile. The city was amused while the watchful eye of Silas grew weary and his bosom filled with distrust. One tipsy man offered him a jack-knife as a compliment to the length of his nose, and before he could escape a new acquaintance had wrongfully borrowed his watch. His conclusions regarding the city were now fully formed. He broke with it suddenly, and struck out across country and tramped sixty miles without a rest. Ever after the thought of Ogdensburg revived memories of confusion, headache, and irreparable loss. So, it is said, when he heard the minister describing hell one Sunday at the little school-house in Pitkin, he had no doubt either of its existence or its location.

All this, however, relates to antecedent years of our history—years which may not be wholly neglected if one is to understand what follows them.

After the death of his sister—the late Mrs. Gordon—Strong began to read his Bible and to cut his trails of thought further and further towards his final destination. A deeper reverence and a more correct notion of the devil rewarded his labor.

It must be added that his meditations led him to one remarkable conclusion—namely, that all women were angels. His parents had left him nothing save a maiden sister named Cynthia, and characterized by some as "a reg'lar human panther."

"Wherever Sile is they's panthers," said a guide once, in the little store at Pitkin.

"Don't make no dif'er'nce whuther he's t' home er in the woods," said another, solemnly.

That was when God owned the wilderness and kept there a goodly number of his big cats, four of which had fallen before the rifle of Strong.

Cynthia, in his view, had a special sanctity, but there was another woman whom he regarded with great tenderness—a cheery-faced maiden lady of his own age and of the name of Annette.

To Silas she was always Lady Ann. He gave her this title without any thought or knowledge of foreign customs. "Miss Roice" would have been too formal, and "Ann" or "Annette" would have been too familiar. "Lady Ann" seemed to have the proper ring of respect, familiarity, and distinction. In his view a "lady" was a creature as near perfection as anything could be in this world.

When a girl of eighteen she had taught in the log school-house. Since the death of her mother the care of the little home had fallen upon her. She was a well-fed, cheerful, and comely creature with a genius for housekeeping.

June had come, and Silas was getting ready to go into camp. There was no longer any peace for him in the clearing. The odor of the forest and the sight of the new leaves gave him no rest. Had he not heard in his dreams the splash of leaping trout, and deer playing in the lily-pads? In the midst of his preparations, although a silent man, the tumult of joy in his breast came pouring out in the whistled refrain of "Yankee Doodle." It was a general and not a special sense of satisfaction which caused him to shake with laughter now and then as he made his way along the rough road. Sometimes he rubbed his long nose thoughtfully.

A nature-loving publisher, who often visited his camp, had printed some cards for him. They bore these modest words:

S. STRONG

GUIDE AND CONTRIVER

He was able in either capacity, but his great gift lay in tongue control—in his management of silence. He was what they called in that country "a one-word man." The phrase indicated that he was wont to express himself with all possible brevity. He never used more than one word if that could be made to satisfy the demands of politeness and perspicacity. Even though provocation might lift his feeling to high degrees of intensity, and well beyond the pale of Christian sentiment, he was never profuse.

His oaths would often hiss and hang fire a little, but they were in the end as brief and emphatic as the crack of a rifle. This trait of brevity was due, in some degree, to the fact that he stammered slightly, especially in moments of excitement, but more to his life in the silence of the deep woods.

Silas Strong had filled his great pack at the store and was nearing his winter home—a rude log-house in the little forest hamlet. He let the basket down from his broad back to the doorstep. His sister Cynthia, small, slim, sternfaced, black-eyed, heart and fancy free, stood looking down at him.

"Wal, what now?" she demanded, in a voice not unlike that of a pea-hen.

"T'-t'-morrer," he stammered, in a loud and cheerful tone.

"What time to-morrer?"

"D-daylight."

"I knew it," she snapped, sinking into a chair, the broom in her hands, and a woful look upon her. "You've got t' hankerin'."

Silas said nothing, but entered the house and took a drink of water. Cynthia snapped:

"If I wanted t' marry Net Roice I'd marry 'er an' not be dilly-dallyin' all my life."

Cynthia was now fifty years of age, and regarded with a stern eye every act of man which bore any suggestion of dilly-dallying.

"Ain't g-good'nough," he stammered, calmly.

"You're fool 'nough," she declared, with a twang of ill-nature.

"S-supper, Mis' Strong," said he, stirring the fire.

Whenever his sister indulged in language of unusual loudness and severity he was wont to address her in a gentle tone as "Mis' Strong"—the only kind of retaliation to which he resorted. He shortened the "Miss" a little, so that his words might almost be recorded as "Mi' Strong." In those rare and cheerful moments when her mood was more in harmony with his own he called her "Sinth" for short. In his letters, which were few, he had addressed her as "deer sinth." She was, therefore, a compound person, consisting of a severe and dissenting character called "Mis' Strong," and a woman of few words and a look of sickliness and resignation who answered to the pseudonyme of "Sinth."

Born and brought up in the forest, there was much in Silas and Cynthia that suggested the wild growth of the woodland. Their sister—the late Mrs. Gordon—had beauty and a head for books. She had gone to town and worked for her board and spent a year in the academy. Silas and Cynthia, on the other hand, were without beauty or learning or refinement, nor had they much understanding of the laws of earth or heaven, save what nature had taught them; but the devotion of this man to that querulous little wild-cat of a sister was remarkable. She was to him a sacred heritage. For love of her he had carried with him these ten years a burden, as it were, of suppressed and yearning affection. Silas Strong alone might even have been "good enough," in his own estimation, but he accepted "Mis' Strong" as a kind of flaw in his own character.

Every June he went to his camp at Lost River, taking Sinth to cook for him, and returning in the early winter. Next day, at sunrise, they were to start for the woods.

To-day he helped to get supper, and, having wiped the dishes, put on his best suit, his fine boots, his new felt hat, and walked a mile to the little farm of Uncle Ben Roice. He carried with him a gray squirrel in a cage, and, as he walked, sang in a low voice:

"All for the love of a charmin' creature,
All for the love of a lady fair."

It was like any one of a thousand visits he had made there. Annette met him at the door.

"Why, of all things!" said she. "What have you here?"

"C'ris'mus p-present, Lady Ann," said he.

It should be said that with Silas a gift was a "Christmas present" every day in the year—the cheerful spirit of that time being always with him.

He proudly put the cage in her hands.

"Much obliged to you, Sile," said she, laughing.

"S-Strong's ahead!" he stammered, cheerfully.

This indicated that in his fight with the powers of evil Strong felt as if he had at least temporary advantage. When, perhaps, after a moment of anger it seemed that the Evil One had got the upper hold on him, he was wont to exclaim, "Satan's ahead!" But the historian is glad to say that those occasions were, in the main, rare and painful.

"Strong will never give in," said Annette, with laughter.

Strong's affection was expressed only in signs and tokens. Of the former there were his careful preparation for each visit, and many sighs and blushes, and now and then a tender glance of the eye. Of tokens there had been many—a tame fox, ten mink-skins, a fawn, a young thrush, a pancake-turner carved out of wood, and other important trifles. For twenty years he had been coming, but never a word of love had passed between them.

Silas sat in a strong wooden chair. Under the sky he never thought of his six feet and two inches of bone and muscle; now it seemed to fill his consciousness and the little room in which he sat. To-day and generally he leaned against the wall, a knee in his hands as if to keep himself in proper restraint.

"Did you just come to bring me that squirrel?" Annette inquired.

"No," he answered.

"What then?"

"Squirrel come t' b-bring me."

"Silas Strong!" she exclaimed, playfully, amazed by his frankness.

He put his big hand over his face and enjoyed half a minute of silent laughter.

"Silas Strong!" she repeated.

"Present," said he, as if answering the call of the roll, and sobering as he uncovered his face.

In conversation Silas had a way of partly closing one eye while the other opened wide beneath a lifted brow. The one word of the Emperor was inadequate. He was, indeed, present, but he was extremely happy also, a condition which should have been freely acknowledged. It must be said, however, that his features made up in some degree for the idleness of his tongue. He brushed them with a downward movement, of his hand, as if to remove all traces of levity and prepare them for their part in serious conversation.

"All w-well?" he inquired, soberly.

"Eat our allowance," said she, sitting near him. "How's Miss Strong?"

"S-supple!" he answered. Then he ran his fingers through his blond hair and soberly exclaimed, "Weasels!"

This remark indicated that weasels had been killing the poultry and applying stimulation to the tongue of Miss Strong. Silas had sent her fowls away to market the day before.

"Too bad!" was the remark of Lady Ann.

"Fisht?" By this word Silas meant to inquire if she had been fishing.

"Yesterday. Over at the falls—caught ten," said she, getting busy with her knitting. "B-big?"

"Three that long," she answered, measuring with her thread.

He gave a loud whistle of surprise, thought a moment, and exclaimed, "M-mountaneyous!" He used this word when contemplating in imagination news of a large and important character.

"How have you been?"

"Stout," he answered, drawing in his breath.

Annette rose and seemed to go in search of something. The kindly gray eyes of Silas Strong followed her. A smile lighted up his face. It was a very plain face, but there was yet something fine about it, something which invited confidence and respect. The Lady Ann entered her own room, and soon returned.

"Shut yer eyes," said she.

"What f-for?"

"Chris'mas present."

Silas obeyed, and she thrust three pairs of socks into his coat-pocket. With a smile he drew them out. Then a partly smothered laugh burst from his lips, and he held his hand before his face and shook with good feeling.

"S-socks!" he exclaimed.

"There are two parts of a man which always ought to be kep' warm—his heart an' his feet," said she.

Silas whacked his knee with his palm and laughed heartily, his wide eye aglow with merriment. His expression quickly turned serious.

"B-bears plenty!" he exclaimed, as he felt of the socks and looked them over. This remark indicated that a season of unusual happiness and prosperity had arrived.

Worked in white yarn at the top of each leg were the words, "Remember me."

"T-till d-death," he whispered.

"With me on your mind an' them on your feet you ought to be happy," said Annette.

"An' w-warm," he answered, soberly.

Presently she read aloud to him from the *St. Lawrence Republican*.

"S-some day," said Silas, when at last he had risen to go.

"Some day," she repeated, with a smile.

The only sort of engagement between them lay in the two words "some day." They served as an avowal of love and intention. Amplified, as it were, by look and tone as well as by the pressure of the hand-clasp, they were understood of both.

To-day as Annette returned the assurance she playfully patted his cheek, a rare token of her approval.

Silas left her at the door and made his way down the dark road. He began to give himself some highly pleasing assurances.

"S-some day—tall t-talkin'," he stammered, in a whisper, and then he began to laugh silently.

"Patted my cheek!" he whispered. Then he laughed again.

At the store he had filled his pack with flour, ham, butter, and like provisions for Lost River camp. At Annette's he had filled his heart with renewed hope and happiness and was now prepared for the summer. While he walked along he fell to speculating as to whether Annette could live under the same roof with Cynthia. A hundred times he had considered whether he could ask her, and as usual he concluded, "Ca-can't."

The hunter had an old memorandum-book which was a kind of storehouse for thought, hope, and reflection. Therein he seemed always to regard himself objectively and spoke of Strong as if he were quite another person. Before going to bed that evening he made these entries:

"June the 23. Strong is all mellered up.

"Snags."

With him the word "meller" meant to soften, and sometimes, even, to conquer with the club.

The word "snags" undoubtedly bore reference to the difficulties that beset his way.

V

SILAS and his sister ate their breakfast by candle-light and were off on the trail before sunrise, a small, yellow dog of the name of Zeb following. Zeb was a bear-dog with a cross-eye and a serious countenance. He was, in the main, a brave but a prudent animal. One day he attacked a bear, which had been stunned by a bullet, and before he could dodge the bear struck him knocking an eye out. Strong had put it back, and since that day his dog had borne a cross-eye.

Zeb had a sense of dignity highly becoming in a creature of his attainments. This morning, however, he scampered up and down the trail, whining with great joy and leaping to lick the hand of his master. "Sinth" walked spryly, a little curt in her manner, but passive and resigned. Silas carried a heavy pack, a coon in a big cage, and led a fox. When he came to soft places he set the cage down and tethered the fox, and, taking

Sinth in his arms, carried her as one would carry a baby. Having gained better footing, he would let Sinth down upon a log or a mossy rock to rest and return for his treasures. After two or three hours of travel the complaining "Mis' Strong" would appear.

"Seems so ye take pleasure wearin' me out on these here trails," she would say. "Why don't ye walk a little faster?"

"W-whoa!" he would answer, cheerfully. "Roughlocks!"

The roughlock, it should be explained, was a form of brake used by log-haulers to check their bobs on a steep hill. In the conversation of Silas it was a cautionary signal meaning hold up and proceed carefully.

"You don't care if you do kill me—gallopin' through the woods here jes' like a houn' after a fox. I won't walk another step—not another step."

"Rur-roughlocks!" he commanded himself, as he tied the fox and set the coon down.

"Won't ride either," she would declare, with emphasis.

"W-wings on, Mis' Strong?" Silas had been known to ask, in a tone of great gentleness.

She would be apt to answer, "If I had wings, I'd see the last o' you."

Then a little time of rest and silence, after which the big, gentle hunter would shoulder his pack and lift in his arms the slender and complaining Miss Strong and carry her up the long grade of Bear Mountain. Then he would make her comfortable and return for his pets.

That day, having gone back for the fox and the coon, he concluded to try the experiment of putting them together. Before then he had given the matter a good deal of thought, for if the two were in a single package, as it were, the problem of transportation would be greatly simplified. He could fasten the coon cage on the top of his pack, and so avoid doubling the trail. He led the fox and carried the coon to the point where Sinth awaited him. Then he removed the chain from the fox's collar, carefully opened the cage, and thrust him in. The swift effort of both animals to find quarter nearly overturned the cage. Spits and growls of warning followed one another in quick succession. Then each animal braced himself against an end of the cage, indulging, as it would seem, in continuous complaint and recrimination.

"Y-you behave!" said Silas, wamingly, as he put the cage on top of his basket and fastened a stout cord from bars to buckles.

"They 'll fight!" Sinth exclaimed.

"Let 'em f-fight," said Silas, who had sat down before his pack and adjusted the shoulder-straps.

The growling increased as he rose carefully to his feet, and with a swift movement coon and fox exchanged positions. Sinth descended the long hill afoot, and Silas went on cautiously, a low, continuous murmur of hostile sound rising in the air behind him. Each animal seemed to think it necessary to remind the other with every breath he took that he was prepared to defend himself. Their enmity was, it would appear, deep and racial.

At Cedar Swamp, in the flat below, the big hunter took Sinth in his arms. Then the sound of menace and complaint rose before and behind him. Slowly he proceeded, his feet sinking deep in the wet moss. Stepping on hummocks in a dead creek, he slipped and fell. The little animals were flung about like shot in a bottle. Each seemed to hold the other responsible for his discomfiture. They came together in deadly conflict. The sounds in the cage resembled an explosion of fire-crackers under a pan. Sinth lifted her voice in a loud outcry of distress and accusation. Without a word the hunter scrambled to his feet, renewed his hold upon the complaining Sinth, and set out for dry land. Luckily the mud was not above his boot-tops. The cage creaked and hurtled. The animals rolled from side to side in their noisy encounter. The indignant Sinth struggled to get free with loud, hysteric cries. Strong ran beneath his burden. He gained the dry trail, and set his sister upon the ground. He flung off the shoulder-straps, and with a stick separated the animals. He opened the cage and seized the fox by the nape of the neck, and, before he could haul him forth, got a nip on the back of his hand. He lifted the spitting fox and fastened the chain upon his collar. Then Silas put his hands on his hips and blew like a frightened deer.

"Hell's b-bein' raised," he muttered, as if taking counsel with himself against Satan. "C-careful!" He was in a mood between amusement and anger, but was dangerously near the latter.

A little profanity, felt but not expressed, warmed his spirit, so that he kicked the coon's cage and tumbled it bottom side up. In a moment he recovered self-control, righted the cage, and whispered, "S-Satan's ahead!"

The wound upon his hand was bleeding, but he seemed not to mind it.

Having done his best for the comfort of his sister, he brushed the mud from his boots and trousers, filled his pipe, and sat meditating in a cloud of tobacco-smoke. Presently he rose and shouldered his pack and untied the fox and lifted the coon cage.

"I'll walk if it kills me!" Sinth exclaimed, rising with a sigh of utter recklessness.

"T-'tain't fur," said Strong, as they renewed their journey.

It was past mid-day when they got to camp, and Sinth lay down to rest while he fried some ham and boiled the potatoes and made tea and flapjacks by an open fire.

When he sat on his heels and held his pan over the fire, the long woodsman used to shut up, as one might say, somewhat in the fashion of a jack-knife. He was wont to call it "settin' on his hunches." His great left hand served for a movable screen to protect his face from the heat. As the odor and sound of the frying rose about him, his features took on a look of great benevolence. It was a good part of the meal to hear him announce, "Di-dinner," in a tender and cheerful tone. As he spoke it the word was one of great capacity for suggestion. When the sound of it rose and lingered on its final r, that day they arrived at Lost River camp, Sinth awoke and came out-of-doors.

"Strong's g-gainin'!" he exclaimed, cheerfully, meaning thereby to indicate that he hoped soon to overtake his enemy.

The table of bark, fastened to spruce poles, each end lying in a crotch, had been covered with a mat of ferns

and with clean, white dishes. Silas began to convey the food from fire to table. To his delight he observed that "Mis' Strong" had gone into retirement. The face of his sister now wore its better look of sickness and resignation.

"Opeydildock?" he inquired, tenderly, pouring from a flask into a cup.

"No, sir," she answered, curtly, her tone adding a rebuke to her negative answer.

"Le's s-set," said he, soberly.

They sat and ate their dinner, after which Silas went back on the trail to cut and bring wood for the camp-fire. When his job was finished, the rooms were put to rights, the stove was hot and clean, and an excellent supper waiting.

Strong's camp consisted of three little log cabins and a large cook-tent. The end of each cabin was a rude fireplace built of flat rocks enclosed by upright logs which, lined with sheet-iron, towered above the roof for a chimney. Each floor an odd mosaic of wooden blocks, each wall sheathed with redolent strips of cedar, each rude divan bottomed with deer-skin and covered with balsam pillows, each bedstead of peeled spruce neatly cut and joined—the whole represented years of labor. Every winter Silas had come through the woods on a big sled with "new improvements" for camp. Now there were spring-beds and ticks filled with husks in the cabins, a stove and all needed accessories in the cook-tent.

Ever since he could carry a gun Silas had set his traps and hunted along the valley of Lost River, ranging over the wild country miles from either shore. Twenty thousand acres of the wilderness, round about, had belonged to Smith & Gordon, who gave him permission to build his camp. When he built, timber and land had little value. Under the great, green roof from Bear Mountain to Four Ponds, from the Raquette to the Oswegatchie, one might have enjoyed the free hospitality of God.

From a time he could not remember, this great domain had been the home of Silas Strong. He loved it, and a sense of proprietorship had grown within him. Therein he had need only of matches, a blanket, and a rifle. One might have led him blindfolded, in the darkest night, to any part of it and soon he would have got his bearings. In many places the very soles of his feet would have told him where he stood.

Long ago its owners had given him charge of this great tract. He had forbidden the hounding of deer and all kinds of greedy slaughter, and had made campers careful with fire. Soon he came to be called "The Emperor of the Woods," and every hunter respected his laws.

Slowly steam-power broke through the hills and approached the ramparts of the Emperor. This power was like one of the many hands of the republic gathering for its need. It started wheels and shafts and bore day and night upon them. Now the song of doom sounded in far corridors of the great sylvan home of Silas Strong.

It was only a short walk to where the dead hills lay sprinkled over with ashes, their rock bones bleaching in the sun beneath columns of charred timber. The spruce and pine had gone with the ever-flowing stream, and their dead tops had been left to dry and burn with unquenchable fury at the touch of fire, and to destroy everything, root and branch, and the earth out of which it grew.

It concerned him much to note, everywhere, signs of a change in proprietorship. In Strong's youth one felt, from end to end of the forest, this invitation of its ancient owner, "Come all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Now one saw much of this legend in the forest ways, "All persons are forbidden trespassing on this property under penalty of the law." Proprietorship had, seemingly, passed from God to man. The land was worth now thirty dollars an acre. Silas had established his camp when the boundaries were indefinite and the old banners of welcome on every trail, and he felt the change.

VI

IT was near sunset of the second day after the arrival of Sinth and Silas. They sat together in front of the cook-tent. Silas leaned forward smoking a pipe. His great, brawny arms, bare to the elbow, rested on his knees. His faded felt hat was tilted back. He was looking down at the long stretch of still water, fringed with lily-pads, and reflecting the colors of either shore.

"You ain't got a cent to yer name," said Sinth, who was knitting. She gave the yam a pull, and, as she did so, glanced up at her brother.

"B-better times!" said he, rubbing his hands.

"Better times!" she sneered. "I'd like to know how you can make money an' charge a dollar a day for board."

Sportsmen visiting there paid for their board, and they with whom Silas went gave him three dollars a day for his labor.

The truth was that prosperity and Miss Strong were things irreconcilable. The representatives of prosperity who came to Lost River camp were often routed by the eye of resentment and the unruly tongue. Strong knew all this, but she was not the less sacred on that account. This year he had planned to bring a cow to camp and raise the price of board.

"You s-see," Strong insisted.

"Huh!" Sinth went on; "we'll mos' kill ourselves, an' nex' spring we won't have nothin' but a lot o' mink-skins."

Miss Strong, as if this reflection had quite overcome her, gathered up her knitting and hastened into the

cook-tent, where for a moment she seemed to be venting her spite on the flat-irons and the tea-kettle. Strong sat alone, smoking thoughtfully. Soon he heard footsteps on the trail. A stranger, approaching, bade him good-evening.

"From the Migley Lumber Company," the stranger began, as he gave a card to Strong. "We have bought the Smith & Gordon tract. I have come to bring this letter and have a talk with you."

Strong read the letter carefully. Then he rose and put his hands in his pockets, and, with a sly wink at the stranger, walked slowly down the trail. He wished to go where Sinth would not be able to hear them. Some twenty rods away both sat down upon a log. The letter was, in effect, an order of eviction.

"I got t' g-go?" the Emperor inquired.

"That's about the size of it," said the stranger.

"Can't," Strong answered.

"Well, there's no hurry," said the other. "We shall be cutting here in the fall. I won't disturb you this year."

Silas rose and stood erect before the lumberman.

"Cut everyth-thing?" he inquired, his hand sweeping outward in a gesture of peculiar eloquence.

"Everything from Round Ridge to Carter's Plain," said the other.

Strong deliberately took off his jacket and laid it on a stump. He flung his hat upon the ground. Evidently something unusual was about to happen. Then, forthwith, he broke the silence of more than forty years and opened his heart to the stranger. He could not control himself; his tongue almost forgot its infirmity; his words came faster and easier as he went on.

"N-no, no," he said, "it can't be. Ye 'ain't no r-right t' do it, fer ye can't never put the w-woods back agin. My God, sir, I've w-wan-dered over these hills an' flats ever since I was a little b-boy. There ain't a critter on 'em that d-don't know me. Seems so they was all my b-brothers. I've seen men come in here nigh dead an' go back w-well. They's m-med'cine here t' cure all the sickness in a hunderd cities; they's f-fur 'nough here t' c-cover their naked—they's f-food'nough t' feed their hungry—an' they's w-wood 'nough t' keep 'em w-warm. God planted these w-woods an' stocked 'em, an' nobody's ever d-done a day's work here 'cept me. Now you come along an' say you've bought 'em an' are g-goin' t' shove us out. I c-can't understand it. God m-made the sky an' l-lifted up the trees t' sweep the dust out of it an' pump water into the clouds an' g-give out the breath o' the g-ground. Y-you 'ain't no right t' git together down there in Albany an' make laws ag'in' the will o' God. Ye r-rob the world when ye take the tree-tops out o' the sky. Ye might as well take the clouds out of it. God has gi'n us g-good air an' the woods an' the w-wild cattle, an' it's free—an' you—you're g-goin' t' turn ev'rybody out o' here an' seize the g-gift an' trade it fer d-dollars—you d—little bullcook!"

A "bullcook," it should be explained, was the chore-boy in a lumber-camp.

Strong sat down and took out an old red handkerchief and wiped his eyes.

He was thinking of the springs and brooks and rivers, of the cool shade, of the odors of the woodland, of the life-giving air, of the desolation that was to come.

"It's business," said the stranger, as if that word must put an end to all argument.

A sound broke the silence like that of distant thunder.

"Hear th-that," Strong went on. "It's the logs g-goin' over Rainbow Falls. They've been stole off the state l-lands. Th-that's business, too. Business is king o' this c-country. He t-takes everything he can l-lay his hands on. He'd t-try t' 'grab heaven if he could g-git over the f-fence an' b-back agin."

"I am not here to discuss that," said the stranger, rising to go.

"Had s-supper?" Silas asked.

"I've a lunch in the canoe, thank you. The moon is up, an' I'm going to push on to Copper Falls. Migley will be waiting for me. We shall camp there for a day or two at Cedar Spring. Good-night."

"Good-night."

It was growing dark. Strong's outbreak had wearied him. He groaned and shook his head and stood a moment thinking. In the distance he could hear the hoot of an owl and the bull bass of frogs booming over the still water.

"G-gone!" he exclaimed, presently. Soon he added, in a mournful tone, "W-wouldn't d-dast tell Mis' Strong."

He started slowly towards the camp.

"I'll l-lie to her," he whispered, as he went along.

Before going to bed he made this note in his memorandum-book:

"June the 26 More snags Strong says trubel is like small-pox thing to do is kepe it from spreadin."

VII

SINCE early May there had been no rain save a sprinkle now and then. From Lake Ontario to Lake Champlain, from the St. Lawrence to Sandy Hook, the earth had been scorching under a hot sun. The heat and dust of midsummer had dimmed the glory of June.

People those days were thinking less of the timber of the woods and more of their abundant, cool, and living green. The inns along the edge of the forest were filling up.

About eleven o'clock of a morning late in June, a young man arrived at Lost River camp—one Robert Master, whose father owned a camp and some forty thousand acres not quite a day's tramp to the north. He was a big, handsome youth of twenty-two, just out of college. Sinth regarded every new-comer as a natural enemy. She suspected most men of laziness and a capacity for the oppression of females. She stood in severe silence at the door of the cook-tent and looked him over as he came. Soon she went to the stove and began to move the griddles. Silas entered with an armful of wood.

"If he thinks I'm goin' to wait on him hand an' foot, he's very much mistaken," said Sinth.

"R-roughlocks!" Silas answered, calmly, as he put a stick on the fire.

Sinth made no reply, but began sullenly rushing to and fro with pots and pans. Soon her quick knife had taken the jackets off a score of potatoes. While her hands flew, water leaped on the potatoes, and the potatoes tumbled into the pot, and the pot jumped into the stove-hole as the griddle took a slide across the top of the stove. And so with a rush of feet and a rattle of pots and pans and a sliding of griddles and a banging of iron doors "Mis' Strong" wore off her temper at hard work.

The Emperor used to smile at this variety of noise and call it "f-f-female profanity," a phrase not wholly inapt. When the "sport" had finished his dinner, and she and her brother sat side by side at the table, she was plain Sinth again, with a look of sickliness and resignation. She ate freely—but would never confess her appetite—and so leisurely that Strong often had most of the dishes washed before she had finished eating.

The young man was eager to begin fishing, and soon after dinner the Emperor took him over to Catamount Pond. On their way the young man spoke of the object of his visit.

"Mr. Strong, you know my father?" he half inquired.

"Ay-ah," the Emperor answered.

"He's been a property-holder in this county for five years, every summer of which I have spent on his land. I feel at home in the woods, and I cast my first vote at Tifton."

Strong listened thoughtfully.

"I want to do what I can to save the wilderness," young Master went on.

"R-right!" said the Emperor.

"If I were in the Legislature, I believe I could accomplish something. Anyhow, I am going to make a fight for the vacant seat in the Assembly."

Strong surveyed him from head to foot.

"I wish you would do what you can for me in Pitkin."

"Uh-huh!" Strong answered, in a gentle tone, without opening his lips. It was a way he had of expressing uncertainty leaning towards affirmation. He liked the young man; there was, indeed, something grateful to him in the look and voice of a gentleman.

"You'll never be ashamed of me—I'll see to that," said Master.

Having reached the little pond, Strong gave him his boat, and promised to return and bring him into camp at six. Here and there trout were breaking through the smooth plane of water.

The Emperor took a bee-line over the wooded ridge to Robin Lake. There he spent an hour repairing his bark shanty and gathering balsam boughs for a bed. Stepping on a layer of spruce poles over which the boughs were to be spread, in a dark corner of the shanty, his foot went through and came down upon the nest of one of the most disagreeable creatures in the wilderness. He sprang away with an oath and fled into the open air. For a moment he expressed himself in a series of sharp reports, Then, picking up a long pole, he met the offenders leaving their retreat, and "mellered" them, as he explained to Sinth that evening.

"T-take that, Amos," he muttered, as he gave one of them another blow.

It should be borne in mind that he called every member of this malodorous tribe "Amos," because the meanest man he ever knew had borne that name.

He put his heel in the crotch of a fallen limb and drew his boot. Then he cautiously cut off the leg of his trousers at the knee, and, poking cloth and leather into a little hollow, buried them under black earth.

Slowly the "Emperor of the Woods" climbed a ridge on his way to Lost River camp, one leg bare to the knee. Walking, he thought of Annette. Lately misfortune had come between them, and now he seemed to be getting farther from the trail of happiness.

At a point on Balsam Hill he came into the main thoroughfare of the woodsmen which leads from Bear Mountain to Lost River camp. Where he could see far down the big trail, under arches of evergreen, he sat on a stump to rest. His bootless foot, now getting sore, rested on a giant toadstool.

Thus enthroned, the Emperor looked down at his foot and reconsidered the relative positions of himself and the Evil One. His faded crown of felt tilting over one ear, his rough, bearded face wet with perspiration, his patched trousers truncated over the right knee, below which foot and leg were uncovered, he was an emperor more distinguished for his appearance than his lineage.

He took out his old memorandum-book and made this note in it with a stub of a pencil:

"June the 27 Strong says one Amos in the bush is worth two in yer company an a pair of britches."

The Emperor, although in the main a serious character, enjoyed some private fun with this worn little book, which he always carried with him. Therein he did most of his talking, with secret self-applause now and then, one may fancy. It has thrown some light on the inner life of the man, and, in a sense, it is one of the figures of our history.

VIII

SILAS put the book in his pocket and looked down the trail. Some ten rods away two children were running towards him, their hands full of wild flowers. They were Socky and Sue, on their way to Lost River camp, and were the first children—save one—who had ever set their feet on the old trail. Gordon walked slowly, under a heavy pack, well behind them. They knew they were near their destination. Their father could scarcely keep them in hailing distance.

Sue had observed that Socky's generosity in the matter of the tin bank had pleased her father, and so, after much thought, she had determined to make a venture in benevolence.

"When I see Uncle Silas," said she, "I'm going to give him the twenty-five cents my Aunt Marie gave me."

"Pooh! he's got loads of money," Socky answered.

They stopped suddenly. Sue dropped her flowers and turned to run. Socky gave a little jump and recovered his courage. Both retreated a few steps. There, before them, was the dejected "Emperor of the Woods."

"Says I!" he exclaimed, looking down calmly from his throne.

Socky glanced up at him fearfully.

"Who b-be you?"

"John Socksmith Gordon."

"T-y-ty!" exclaimed the Emperor, an expression, as the historian believes', of great surprise, standing, perhaps, for the old oath "By 'Mighty." It consisted of the pronunciation of the two letters separately and then together.

The Emperor turned to the girl. "And y-yourn?" he inquired.

"Susan Bradbury Gordon," she answered, in a half-whisper.

"I tnum!" exclaimed the Emperor, shaking his bootless foot, whereupon the new-comers retreated a little farther. The singular word "tnum" expressed an unusual degree of interest on the part of the Emperor. "G-goin' fur?" he inquired.

"To Lost River, to see my Uncle Silas."

The Emperor gave a loud whistle of surprise, and repeated the exclamation—"I tnum!"

"My father's coming," said Socky, as he pointed down the trail.

"Whee-o!" whistled the "Emperor of the Woods," who now perceived his brother-in-law ascending the trail.

"Old man, what are you doing there?" Gordon asked.

"Thinkin' out some th-thoughts," said the Emperor, soberly, as he came into the trail, limping on his bare foot, and shook hands. There were greetings, and the hunter briefly apologized for his bare leg and explained it.

"Well, how are you?" Gordon asked.

"S-supple!" Strong answered, cheerfully.

The children got behind their father, peering from either side of him as they saw this uncouth figure coming near. Sue pressed the hand of her brother so tightly as to cause the boy to break her hold upon him.

"R-ride?" said the Emperor, putting his great hand on the head of the boy and shaking it a little. Socky looked up at him with large, wondering, timid eyes. Sue hid her face under the coat-tails of her father.

"They'd rather walk; come on," said Gordon.

The men proceeded slowly over the hill and down into the valley of Lost River. The children followed, some twenty paces behind, whispering together. They were still in happy ignorance of the identity of the strange man.

"S-sold out—eh?" said the hunter.

"Sold out! Sorry! They're going to shove a railroad in here and begin cutting."

A smothered oath broke from the lips of the Emperor. Gordon came near to him and whispered:

"Sile," said he, "don't swear before the kids. I'm bad enough, but I've always been careful about that. Going to leave 'em here if you'll let me."

"G-good—" The Emperor stopped short and his voice fell into thoughtful silence.

As they came in sight of the little clearing and the tent and cabins of Lost River camp, Sue and Socky ran ahead of the men.

"I'm in trouble," Gordon went on. "My account at the mill is overdrawn. They've pushed me to the verge of madness. I must have a little help."

The woodsman stopped and put his hand on the shoulder of Gordon.

"Been f-foolish, Dick?" said he, kindly.

"I'm done with that. I want to begin new. I need a little money to throw to the wolves."

"How m-much?"

"Four hundred dollars would do me."

Strong beckoned to him.

"C-come to my goosepen," said the hunter, as he led the way to an old basswood some fifty paces from the camp. He removed a piece of bark which fitted nicely over a hole in the tree-trunk. He put his hand in the hole which he called a goosepen and took out a roll of bills.

"You save like a squirrel," said Gordon.

"Dunno no other w-way," Strong answered as he began to count the money. "Three hundred an' s-seventy

dollars," he said, presently, and gave it to his brother-in-law. He felt in the hole again. "B-bank's failed!" he added.

The kindness of the woodland was in the face of the hunter. He was like an old hickory drawing its nourishment from the very bosom of the earth and freely giving its crop. Where he fed there was plenty, and he had no more thought of his own needs than a tree.

"Thank you' It's enough," said Gordon. "Better keep some of it."

"N-no good here," Strong answered, with his old reliance on the bounty of nature.

"I'll go out to Pitkin in the morning. I'm going to get a new start in the world. If you'll take care of the children I'll send you some money every month. You've been a brother to me, and I'll not forget."

The Emperor sat upon a log and took a pencil and an old memorandum-book from his pocket and wrote on a leaf this letter to Annette:

"Deer frend—I am wel compny com today I dunno when I'll see you. woods is hot and dry fish plenty Socks on feel splendid hopin for better times "yours trewly

"S. Strong.

"P. S.—Strong's ahed."

In truth, the whole purpose of the letter lay in that laconic postscript, expressing, as it did, a sense of moral triumph under great difficulties.

The Emperor stripped a piece of bark off a birch-tree, trimmed it with his knife, and, enfolding it around the letter, bound it in the middle with a long thorn which he drew out of the lapel of his "jacket." He handed the missive to Gordon, saying, "F-for Ann Roice."

The children stood peering into an open door when the men came and flung down their packs.

Sinth had gone to work in the garden, which was near the river-bank. Silas Strong entered his cabin. The children came to their father, who had seated himself on a chopping-block. Having forgotten the real Uncle Silas, they had been looking for that splendid creature of whom they had dreamed.

"Father," Socky whispered, "where is Uncle Silas?"

"That was Uncle Silas," said Gordon.

The eyes of the children were fixed upon his, while their faces began to change color. The long, dark lashes of little Sue quivered for a second as if she had received a blow. Socky's glance fell; his trembling hands, which lay on the knee of Gordon, seemed to clutch at each other; then his right thumb stood up straight and stiff; his lips parted. One might have observed a little upward twitch of the muscles under either cheek. It signaled the first touch of bitter disappointment.

"That man?" he whispered, looking up doubtfully as he pointed in the direction of the door into which Strong had disappeared.

"That's Uncle Silas," said Gordon, with smiling amusement.

Socky turned and spat upon the ground.

Slowly he walked away, scuffing his feet. Sue followed with a look of dejection. They went behind the camp and found the big potato-hole and crawled into it. The bottom was covered with dry leaves. They sat down, but neither spoke. Socky leaned forward, his chin upon his hands.

"Do you like Uncle Silas?" Sue whispered.

For a moment Socky did not change his attitude or make any reply.

"I wouldn't give him no twenty-five cents," Sue added.

"Don't speak to me," Socky answered, with a quick movement of his knee.

It was a time of sad discovery—that pathetic day when the first castle of childhood falls upon its builder.

"I'm going home," said Sue.

"You won't be let," Socky answered, his under lip trembling as he thought of the old lumberyard.

Suddenly he lay over on the leaves, his forehead on his elbow, and wept in silence. Sue lay beside him, her cheek partly covered by golden curls. She felt badly, but did not give way. They were both utterly weary and cast down. Sue lay on her back and drew out her tiny doll much as a man would light a cigarette in his moment of abstraction. She flirited it in the air and brought it down upon her breast. The doll had come out of her pocket just in time to save her. She lay yawning a few moments, then fell asleep, and soon Socky joined her.

Gordon lay down upon a bed in one of the cabins. He, too, was weary and soon forgot his troubles. The Emperor, having shifted his garments, went behind the camp and stood looking down at his sorrowing people. A smile spread over his countenance. It came and passed like a billow of sunlight flooding over the hills. He shook his head with amusement.

Soon he turned away and sauntered slowly towards the river-bank. These, children had been flung, as it were, upon the ruin of his hopes. What should he do with them and with "Mis' Strong"? Suddenly a reflection of unusual magnitude broke from his lips.

"They's g-got t' be tall contrivin'," he whispered, with a sigh.

Sinth, who had been sowing onions, heard him coming and rose to her feet.

"G-Gordon!" said he, pointing towards camp. "Anybody with him?" she asked.

"The childem," said he. "G-goin't' leave 'em."

Sinth turned with a look of alarm.

"C-can't swear, nuther," Strong added.

"He can take 'em back," said Miss Strong, with flashing eyes and a flirt of her apron.

"R-roughlocks!" the Emperor demanded, in a low tone.

"Who'll tek care of 'em?"

"M-me."

"Heavens!" she exclaimed, her voice full of despair.

"C-come, Mis' Strong." So saying, Silas took the arm of his complaining sister and led her up the hill.

When he had come to the potato-hole he pointed down at the children. They had dressed with scrupulous care for the eye of him who, not an hour since, had been the greatest of all men. The boy lay in his only wide, white collar and necktie, in his best coat and knee-breeches. The girl had on her beloved brown dress and pink sun-bonnet. It was a picture to fill one's eyes, and all the more if one could have seen the hearts of those little people. A new look came into the face of Sinth.

"Land sakes!" she exclaimed, raising one of her hands and letting it fall again; "she looks like Sister Thankful—don't she, don't she, Silas?"

Sinth wiped her eyes with her apron. The heart of Silas Strong had also been deeply touched.

"R-reg'lar angel!" he exclaimed, thoughtfully. After a moment of silence he added, "K-kind o' like leetle f-fawns."

They turned away, proceeding to the cook-tent. Sinth looked as if she were making up her mind; Silas as if his were already made up. Sinth began to rattle the pots and pans.

"Sh-h!" Silas hissed, as he fixed the fire.

"What's the matter?" she demanded.

"W-wake 'em up."

"Hope I will," she retorted, loudly.

Strong strode off in the trail to Catamount Pond, where he was to get Master.

Zeb, the bear-dog, had been digging at a foxhole over in Birch Hollow. Growing weary and athirst, by-and-by he relinquished his enterprise, crossed to the trail, and, discovering the scent of strangers, hurried home. Soon he found those curious little folks down in the potato-hole. He had never seen a child before. He smelled them over cautiously. His opinion was extremely favorable. His tail began to wag, and, unable to restrain his enthusiasm, he expressed himself in a loud bark.

The children awoke, and Zeb retreated. Socky and Sue rose, the latter crying, while that little, yellow snip of a bear-dog, with cross-eye and curving tail, surveyed them anxiously. He backed away as if to coax them out of the hole. When they had come near he seemed to be wiping one foot after another upon the ground vigorously. As he did so he growled in a manner calculated to inspire respect. Then he ran around them in a wide circle at high speed, growling a playful challenge. Socky, who had some understanding of dogs, dashed upon Zeb, and soon they were all at play together.

IX.

ON Catamount Pond young Master had enjoyed a memorable day. He was an expert fisherman, but the lonely quiet of the scene had been more than fish to him: of it was a barren ridge, from the top of which a broken column of dead pine, like a shaft of wrought marble, towered straight and high above the woods. The curving shore had a fringe of lily-pads, starred here and there with white tufts. Around thickets of birch, on a point of land, a little cove was the end of all the deer-trails that came out of Jiminy Swamp. It was the gateway of the pond for all who journeyed thither to eat and drink. There were white columns on either side, and opposite the cove's end was a thicket of tamarack, clear of brush. A deep mat of vivid green moss came to the water's edge. When one had rounded the point in his canoe, he could see into those cool, dark alleys of the deer, leading off through slender tamaracks. A little beyond were the rock bastions of Painter Mountain, five hundred' feet above the water.

The young man, having grown weary of fishing, leaned back, lighted his pipe, and drifted. He could hear the chattering of a hedgehog up in the dry timber, and the scream of a hawk, like the whistle of some craft, leagues away on the sunlit deep of silence. A wild goose steered straight across the heavens, far bound, his wings making a noise like the cleaving of water and the creak of full sails. He saw the man below him and flung a cry overboard. A great bee, driven out of a lily, threw his warning loop around the head of the intruder and boomed out of hearing. Those threads of sound seemed to bind the tongue of the youth, and to connect his soul with the great silence into which they ran.

Robert Master had crossed that desert of uncertainty which lies between college and the beginning of a career. At last he had made his plan. He would try in his own simple way to serve his country. He was a man of "the new spirit," of pure ideals, of high patriotism. He had set out to try to make his way in politics.

He had been one of the "big men," dauntless and powerful, who had saved the day for his *alma mater* more than once on the track and the gridiron. Handsome was a word which had been much applied to him. Hard work in the open air had given him a sturdy figure and added the glow of health and power to a face of unusual refinement. It was the face of a man with whom the capacity, for stern trials had come by acquisition and not by inheritance. He had cheerful brown eyes and a smile of good-nature that made him beloved. His father was at the big camp, some twenty miles away, his mother and sister having gone abroad. He and his father were fond of their forest home; the ladies found it a bore. They loved better the grand life and the great highways of travel.

Master sat in the centre of his canoe; an elbow rested on his paddle which lay athwart the gunwales. He drifted awhile. He had chosen his life work but not his life partner. He pictured to himself the girl he would

love, had he ever the luck to find her. He had thrown off his hat, and his dark hair shone in the sunlight. Soon he pushed slowly down the pond. In a moment he stilled his paddle and sat looking into Birch Cove. Two fawns were playing in the edge of the water, while their dam, with the dignity of a matron, stood on the shore looking down at them. The fawns gambolled in the shallows like a colt at play, now and then dashing their muzzles in the cool water. Their red coats were starred white as if with snow-flakes. The deer stood a moment looking at Master, stamped her feet, and retired into one of the dark alleys. In a moment her fawns followed.

Turning, the fisherman beheld what gave him even greater surprise. In the shadow of the birches, on a side of the cove and scarcely thirty feet from his canoe, a girl sat looking at him. She wore a blue knit jacket and gray skirt. There was nothing on her head save its mass of light hair that fell curling on her shoulders. Her skin was brown as a berry, her features of a noble and delicate mould. Her eyes, blue and large, made their potent appeal to the heart of Master. They were like those of his dreams—he could never forget them. So far it's the old story of love at sight—but listen. For half a moment they looked into each other's eyes. Then the girl, as if she were afraid of him, rose and disappeared among the columns of white birch.

Long he sat there wondering about this strange vision of girlhood, until he heard the halloo of Silas Strong. Turning his canoe, he pushed for the landing.

"L-lucky?" Strong asked.

"Twenty fish, and I saw the most beautiful woman in the world."

"Where?"

"Sitting on the shore of Birch Cove. Any camp near?"

The Emperor shook his head thoughtfully as he lighted his pipe. The two made their way up the trail.

"W-wonder if it's her?" Strong whispered to himself as he walked along.

After supper that evening Silas Strong gathered a heap of wood for a bonfire—a way he had of celebrating arrivals at Lost River camp. Soon he was running upon hands and knees in the firelight, with Socky and Sue on his back.

"Silas Strong!" was the scornful exclamation of Sinth, as she took a seat by the fire, "P-present!" he answered, as he went on, the children laughing merrily. "Be you a man 'or a fool?"

"Both;" he answered, ceasing his harlequinade. Sinth began her knitting, wearing, a look of injury. "Plumb crazy 'bout them air children!" she exclaimed.

The "Emperor of the Woods" sat on a log, breathing heavily, with Sue and Socky upon his knees.

"B-bears plenty, Mis' Strong," was the gentle reply of Silas.

"Mis' Strong!" said she, as if insulted. "What ye Mis' Strongin' me for?"

When others were present she was wont to fling back upon him this burning query. Now it seemed to stimulate him to a rather unusual effort.

"S-some folks b-better when ye miss 'em," he suggested, with a smile of good-nature.

Miss Strong gathered up her knitting and promptly retired, from the scene. Sue and Socky lay back on the lap of their Uncle Silas looking into the fire. They now saw in him great possibilities. Socky, in particular, had begun to regard him as likely to be useful if not highly magnificent.

Sue lay back and began to make a drowsy display of her learning:

"Intry, mintry, cutry com,
Apple-seed an' apple-thorn,
Wire, brier, limber lock,
Twelve geese all in a white flock;
Some fly east an' some fly west
An' some fly over the cuckoo's nest."

Miss Strong returned shortly and found the children asleep on the knees of their uncle. In a moment Silas turned his ear and listened.

"Hark!" he whispered.

They could hear some one approaching on the dark trail. A man oddly picturesque, with a rifle on his shoulder, strode into the firelight. He wore knee-breeches and a coat of buckskin. He had a rugged face, a sturdy figure, and was, one would have guessed, some sixty years of age.

A fringe of thin, white hair showed below his cap. He had a white mustache, through which a forgotten cigar protruded. His black eyes glowed in the firelight beneath silvered brows. He nodded as they greeted him. His ruddy face wrinkled thoughtfully as he turned to Gordon.

"It's a long time," said he, offering his hand.

"Some years," Gordon answered, as he took the hand of Dunmore.

"W-welcome!" said Silas Strong.

"Boneka!" Dunmore exclaimed, gruffly, but with a faint smile. For years it had been his customary word of greeting.

"The Emperor and his court!" he went on, as he looked about him. "Who are these?" He surveyed the sleeping children.

"The Duke and Duchess of Hillsborough—nephew and niece of the Emperor," Master answered, giving them titles which clung to Socky and Sue for a twelvemonth.

"The first children I've ever seen in the woods except my own," said the white-haired man.

Zeb ran around the chair of the Emperor, growling and leaping playfully at Socky and Sue.

"The court jester!" said Dunmore, looking down at the dog.

He stood a moment with his back to the blazing logs.

Then he went to the chair of the Emperor, and put his hand under the chin of little Sue and looked into her face. In half a moment he took her in his arms and sat down by the fireside. The child was yawning wearily.

"Heigh-ho!" he exclaimed; "let's away to the Isles of Rest."

He rocked back and forth as he held her against his breast and sang this lullaby:

"Jack Tot was as big as a baby's thumb,
And his belly could hold but a drop and a crumb,
And a wee little sailor was he—Heigh-ho!
A very fine sailor was he.

'He made his boat of a cocoa-nut shell,
He sails her at night and he steers her well
With the wing of a bumble-bee—Heigh-ho!
With the wing of a bumble-bee.

'She is rigged with the hair of a lady's curl,
And her lantern is made of a gleaming pearl,
And it never goes out in a gale—Heigh-ho!
It never goes out in a gale.

'Her mast is made of a very long thorn,
She calls her crew with a cricket's horn,
And a spider spun her sail—Heigh-ho!
A spider he spun her sail.

'She carries a cargo of baby souls,
And she crosses the terrible nightmare shoals
On her way to the Isles of Rest—Heigh-ho!
We're off for the Isles of Rest.

'And often they smile as the good ship sails—
Then the skipper is telling incredible tales
With many a merry jest—Heigh-ho!
He's fond of a merry jest.

'When the little folks yawn they are ready to go,
And Jack Tot is lifting his sail—Hee-hoo!
In the swell how the little folks nod—He-hoo!
Just see how the little folks nod.

'And some have sailed off when the sky was black,
And the poor little sailors have never come back,
But have steered for the City of God—Heigh-ho!
The beautiful City of God!"

The white-haired man closed his eyes and his voice sank low, and the last words fell softly in a solemn silence that lasted for a long moment after the lullaby was finished. Presently Sinth came to take the sleeping child.

"These little folks will take our peace away from us," said he, in a warning tone.

"Why?"

"The call of the sown land is in their voices," said he. "They give me sad thoughts."

Sinth smiled and introduced the young man to Dunmore.

"Boneka!" said the latter as they shook hands.

The curiosity of Master was aroused by the strange greeting. He smiled, and answered, modestly, "I don't understand you."

The stranger sat silent, gazing into the fire, until Silas, who was evidently in the secret, said to his guest, "Tell 'em."

"There was once a very wise and honored chief," began Dunmore, after a pause, and looking into the eyes of the young man. "Long before the lumber hunter had begun to shear the hills, he dwelt among them, with his good people. He was a great law-giver, and his law was all in two words—'*Be kind.*' Kindness begat kindness, and peace reigned, to be broken only by some far-come invader. But as time went on quarrels arose

and the law was forgotten. Thereupon the chief invited a great council and organized the Society of the Magic Word. Every member promised that whenever the greeting 'Boneka' were given him, he would smile and bow and answer, 'Ranokoli.' The greeting meant 'Peace,' and the answer, 'I forgive.'

"Then, one by one, the law-giver called his councillors before him, and to each he said: 'The Great Spirit is in this greeting. I defy you to hear it and keep a sober face.'

"Then he said 'Boneka,' and the man would try to resist the influence of the spirit, but soon smiled in spite of himself, amid the laughter of the tribe, and said 'Ranokoli.' Thereafter, when a quarrel arose between two people, an outsider, approaching, would greet them with the magic word, and immediately they would bow and smile, and answer, 'I forgive.' But, nevertheless, if one had wronged another he was justly punished by the chief. So it was that a great ruler made an end of quarrels among his people."

"A grand idea!" said young Master. "Let's all join that society."

"Those in favor of the suggestion will please say ay." It was Dunmore who put the question, and, after a vote in its favor, dictated the pledge, as follows:

"For value received from my Loving Father, I promise to give to any of His children, on demand, a smile and full forgiveness."

All signed it, and so half in play the old Society of the Magic Word was revived at Lost River camp.

The white-haired man rose and walked to the trail and turned suddenly.

"Strong," said he, "I'm leaving the woods for a week. If they need your help at home they'll send word to you."

With that he disappeared in the dark trail.

The three other men still sat by the camp-fire.

"Who is Dunmore?" Master inquired, turning to Gordon.

The latter lighted his pipe and began the story.

"An odd man who's spent the most of his life in the woods," said Gordon. "Came in here for his health long ago from I don't know where; grew strong, and has always stuck to the woods. Had to work, like the rest of us, when I knew him. Thirty years ago he began work in this part of the country as a boom rat—so they tell me. It was on a big drive way down the Oswegatchie.

"Before we bought the Bear Mountain and Lost River tracts we were looking for a good cruiser—some one to go through here and estimate the timber for us. Well, Dunmore was recommended for the job, and we hired him. He and I travelled over some thirty thousand acres, camping wherever night overtook us. It did not take me long to discover that he was a gifted man. Many an evening, as we sat by our lonely fire in the woods, I have wept and laughed over his poems."

"Poems!" Master exclaimed.

"That's the only word for it," Gordon went on. "The man is a woods lover and a poet. One night he told me part of his life story. Sile, you remember when the old iron company shut down their works at Tifton. Well, everybody left the place except Tom Muir, the postmaster. He was a widower, and lived with one child—a girl about nineteen years old when the forest village died. Dunmore married that girl. He told me how beautiful she was and how he loved her. Well, they didn't get along together. He was fond of the woods and she was not.

"For five years they lived together in the edge of the wilderness. Then she left him. Well—poor woman!—it was a lonely life, and some tourist fell in love with her, they tell me. I don't know about that. Anyhow, Dunmore was terribly embittered. A little daughter had been born to them. She was then three years of age."

"She's the angel y-you met to-day over by the p-pond," Strong put in, looking at Master.

Gordon lighted his pipe and went on with his story.

"Dunmore said that a relative had left him a little money. I remember we were camping that night on the shore of Buckhorn. Its beauty appealed to him. He said he'd like to buy that section and build him a camp on the pond and spend the rest of his life there.

"'But,' said I, 'you couldn't bring up your daughter in the woods.' Buckhorn was then thirty miles from anywhere.

"'That's just what I wish to do,' he answered. 'The world is so full of d——d spaniels'—I remember that was the phrase he used—and there's so much infamy among men, I'd rather keep her out of it. I want her to be as pure at twenty as she is now. I can teach her all I wish her to know.'

"Well, I sold him the Buckhorn tract. He built his camp, and moved there with the little girl and his mother—a woman of poor health and well past middle age. He brought an old colored man and his wife to be their servants, and there they are to-day—Dunmore and his mother and the girl and the two servants, now grown rather aged, they tell me."

"They have never left the woods?" said Master, as if it were too incredible.

"Dunmore goes to New York, but not oftener than once a year," Gordon went on. "He has property—a good deal of property, I suppose, and has to give it some attention. The others have never left the woods."

"Sends home b-big boxes, an' I t-tote 'em in," Silas explained.

"Do you mean to tell me that Dunmore's daughter has never seen the clearing since she was a baby?"

Strong's interest was thoroughly aroused. He took off his coat and laid it down carefully, as if he were about to go in swimming. He was wont to do this when his thoughts demanded free and full expression.

"B-been t' Tillbury post-office w-with the ol' man—n-no further," Strong explained. "Dunmore says she 'ain't never s-seen a child 'cept one. That was a b-baby. Some man an' his w-wife come through here w-with it from the n-north th-three year ago."

"Fact is, I think he feared for a long time that his wife would try to get possession of the child," said Gordon. "Late years, I understand, the girl has had to take care of the old lady. In a letter to me once

Dunmore referred to his daughter as the 'little nun of the green veil,' and spoke of her devotion to her grandmother."

Gordon rose and went to his bed in one of the cabins. Strong and the young man kept their seats at the camp-fire, talking of Dunmore and his daughter and their life in the woods. The Emperor, who felt for this lonely child of the forest, talked from a sense of duty.

"S-sail in," he presently said. "S-sail in an' t-tame her."

"I don't know how to begin."

"She'll be there t-to-morrer sure," Strong declared.

"So shall I," said the young man.

"C-cal'late she's w-wounded, too," Strong suggested. "B-be careful. She's like a w-wild deer."

They were leaving the fire on their way to bed. The young man stopped and repeated the words incredulously—"Like a wild deer!"

"T-take the ch-childem with ye," Strong advised. "She'll w-want t' look 'em over."

X

SOCKY woke early next morning, and lay looking up at the antlers, guns, and rifles which adorned the wall. On a table near him were some of the treasures of that sylvan household—a little book entitled *Melinda*, a dingy Testament, a plush-covered photograph-album, and a stuffed bird on a wire bough.

Sinth and the album were inseparable. She sometimes left the dingy Testament or the little book entitled *Melinda* at her Pitkin home, but not the plush-covered album. That was the one link which connected her, not only with the past, but with a degree of respectability, and even with a vague hope of paradise. What a pantheon of family deities! What a museum of hair and whiskers! What a study of the effect of terror, headache, rheumatism, weariness, Sunday apparel, tight boots, and reckless photography upon the human countenance!

Therein was the face of Sinth, indescribably gnarled by the lens; a daguerreotype of her grandmother adorned with lace and tokens of a more cheerful time in the family history; faces and forms which for Sinth recalled her play-days, and were gone as hopelessly.

Just after supper the night before, Socky had seen his uncle apply grease to a number of boots and guns. The boy had been permitted to put his hands in the thick oil of the bear, and, while its odor irked him a little, it had, as it were, reduced the friction on his bearings. Since then the gear of his imagination had seemed to work easier, and had carried him far towards the goal of manhood.

Immediately after waking he found the bottle of bear's-oil and poured some on his own boots and rubbed it in. He was now delighted with the look of them. It was wonderful stuff, that bear's-oil. It made everything look shiny and cheerful, and gave one a grateful sense of high accomplishment.

Soon he had greased the bird and the bush, and the oil had dripped on the album and the dingy Testament and the little book entitled *Melinda*. Then he greased the feet and legs of Zeb, who lay asleep in a corner, and who promptly awoke and ran across the floor and leaped through an open window, and hid himself under a boat, as if for proper consideration of ways and means. In a few moments Socky had greased the shoes of his sister, and a ramrod which lay on the window-sill, and taken the latter into bed with him.

Soon he began to miss the good Aunt Marie, for, generally, when he first awoke he had gone and got into bed with her. He held to the ramrod and sustained himself with manly reflections, whispering as they came to mind: "I'm going to be a man. I ain't no cry-baby. I'm going to kill bears and send the money to my father, an' my Uncle Silas will give me a rocking-horse an' a silver dofunny—he said he would."

He ceased to whisper. An imaginary bear had approached the foot of the bed just in time to save him, for the last of his reflections had been interrupted by little sobs. He struck bravely with the ramrod and felled the bear, and got out of bed and skinned him and hung his hide over the back of a chair. He found some potatoes in a sack beside the fireplace, and put down a row for the bear's body and some more for the feet and legs. Then he greased the bear's feet and got into bed again, for Sue had awoke and begun to cry.

"What's the matter?" he inquired.

"I want my Aunt Marie," the girl sobbed.

"Stop, Uncle Silas 'll hear you," said Socky.

"I don't care."

"I'd be 'shamed," the boy answered, his own voice trembling with suppressed emotion.

Since a talk he had had with his father the day before, he felt a large and expanding sense of responsibility for his sister. Just now an-idea occurred to him—why shouldn't he, in his own person, supply the deficiencies of the great man they had come to see?

"I'll be your Uncle Silas," he remarked. "I'm a man now, an' I've killed a bear."

"Where is he?"

"Dead on the floor there."

She covered her face with the blankets.

"I'm going to have a pair o' moccasins an' a rifle, an' I'll carry you on my b-back." He had stammered on the

last word after the manner of his uncle.

Just then they heard a singular creaking outside the door, and before either had time to speak it was flung open. They were both sitting up in bed as their Uncle Silas entered.

"I tnum!" said he, cheerfully.

Suddenly he saw the bird and the books and the table-top and the potatoes and the ramrod and the hands of Socky. He whistled ruefully; his smile faded.

"W-well greased!" he said, looking down at the books and the bird.

He found a gun-rag and wiped up the oil as best he could.

"She'll r-raise—" The remark ended in a cough as he wiped the books. Then he covered them with an empty meal-bag.

The children began to dress while Strong went half-way up the ladder and called to Gordon, still asleep in the loft above. Then he sat on the bed and helped the boy and girl get their clothes buttoned..

"My little f-fawns!" he muttered, with a laugh.

He had sat up until one o'clock at work in his little shop by the light of a lantern. He had sawed some disks from a round beech log and bored holes in them. He had also made axles and a reach and tongue, and put them together. Then he had placed a cross-bar and a pivot on the front axle and fastened a starch-box over all. The result was a wagon, which he had arisen early to finish, and with which he had come to wake "the little fawns." Now, when they were dressed, he sat them side by side in the wagon-box and clattered off down the trail.

At first the children sat silent, oppressed as they were by the odor of bear's-oil, not yet entirely removed from their hands and faces. As the wagon proceeded they began to laugh and call the dog. Zeb peered from under the friendly cover of the boat, and gave a yearning bark which seemed to express regret, not wholly unmingled with accusation, that on account of other engagements he would be unable to accept their kind invitation. At the boat-house were soap and towel and glad deliverance from the flavor of the bear. On their return "Mis' Strong" met them at the door of the cook-tent. She raised both hands above her head.

"My album!" she gasped.

"T-y-ty!" the Emperor whispered.

"An' the book my mother gave me!" she exclaimed, her tone rising from despair to anger. "They're ruined—Silas Strong!"

"N-nonsense," said her brother, calmly.

"Nonsense!" she exclaimed, tauntingly. "Silas Strong, do you know what has been done to 'em?"

"G-greased," he answered, mildly. "D-do 'em good."

She ran into the cook-tent and returned with the sacred album. There was an odd menace in her figure as she displayed the book. She spread it open.

"Look at my grandfather!" she demanded.

The bear's-oil had added emphasis to a subtle, inherent suggestion of smothered profanity in the image of her ancestor. It had, as it were, given clearness to an expression of great physical discomfort.

"L-limber him up," said the Emperor, quite soberly.

Master and Gordon were now approaching. The former took off his hat and bowed to the indignant Sinth and blandly remarked, "Boneka, madam."

The men had begun to laugh. Sinth changed color. She looked down. A smile began to light her thin face. She turned away, repeated the magic word in a low voice, and added, "I forgive." She walked hurriedly through the cook-tent to her own quarters, and sat down and wept as if, in truth, the oil had entered her soul. It was, in a way, pathetic—her devotion to the tawdry plush and this poor shadow of her ancestor—and the historian has a respect for it more profound, possibly, than his words may indicate. She would have given her album for her friend, and it may be questioned if any man hath greater love than this.

When she entered the dinner-tent and sat down to stir batter for the excellent "flapjacks" of Lost River camp, the children came and kissed her and stood looking up into her face. Socky had begun to comprehend his relation to the trouble. Shame, guilt, and uncertainty were in his countenance. Urgent queries touching the use and taste and constitution of batter and its feeling on the index-finger of one's hand were pressing upon him, but he saw that, in common decency, they must be deferred.

"Aunt Sinthy," said the little Duke of Hillsborough.

"What?" she answered.

"I won't never grease your album again."

The woman laughed, placed the pan on the table, and put her arms around the child. Then she answered, in a tone of good-nature, "If it had been anything else in this world, I wouldn't have minded."

Just then Zeb slowly entered the cook-tent. He had got rid of some of the oil, but had acquired a cough. The hair on every leg was damp and matted. He seemed to doubt his fitness for social enjoyment. In a tentative manner he surveyed the breakfast-party, as if to study his effect upon the human species. The Emperor patted him and felt of his legs.

"What's the matter o' him?" Sinth inquired.

"G-greased!" said the Emperor, with a loud laugh, in which the campers joined, whereat the dog fled from the cook-tent.

"S-slippery mornin'!" Strong exclaimed, while he stood looking through the doorway.

"Hard t' keep yer feet," said Sinth, who had caught the contagion of good feeling which had begun to prevail. It was, indeed, a remark not without some spiritual significance.

So it befell: the spirit of that old chief whose body had long been given to the wooded hills came into Lost River camp.

Gordon hurried away after breakfast. While the children stood looking down the trail and waving their hands and weeping, Silas Strong ran past them two or three times with the noisy little wagon. Its consoling clatter silenced them. There had been a deep purpose in the heart of the Emperor while he spent half the night in his workshop. Gordon had laughingly explained the cause of their disappointment on arriving at Lost River camp. Strong was trying to recover their esteem.

"C-come on!" he shouted.

Soon Socky and Sue sat in the little wagon on their way to Catamount Pond with their Uncle Silas and the young fisherman.

XI.

THE sky was clear, and the rays of the sun fell hot upon the dry woods that morning when Master and the children and their Uncle Silas reached the landing at Catamount. Its eastern shore lay deep under cool shadows. The water plane was like taut canvas on which a glowing picture of wooded shore and sky and mountain had been painted. Golden robins darted across a cove and sang in the tree-tops.

Master righted his canoe and put the children aboard and took his place in the stern-seat.

"I'll slip over to R-Robin," said the Emperor as he shoved the canoe into deep water. With him to "slip" meant to go, and in his speech he always "slipped" from one point to another.

Master pushed through the pads and slowly cut the still shadow. The inverted towers of Painter Mountain began to quake beneath his canoe. Sue sat in the bow and Socky behind her. The curly hair of the girl, which had, indeed, the silken yellow of a corn-tassel, showed beneath her little pink bonnet. Something about her suggested the rose half open. Socky wore his rabato and necktie and best suit of clothes. They were both in purple and fine linen, so to speak—no one had thought to tell them better.

As they came near the point of Birch Cove, Master began to turn the bow and check his headway. There, on a moss-covered rock, stood the maiden whom he had seen the day before. A crow with a small scarlet ribbon about his neck clung upon her shoulder. The girl was looking at the two children. The bird rose on his wings and, after a moment of hesitation, flew towards them, the ends of the scarlet ribbon fluttering in the air. Socky drew back as the crow lighted on a gunwale near his side. Sue clung to the painter and sat looking backward with curiosity and fear in her face. The crow turned his head, surveying them as if he were, indeed, quite overcome with amazement.

"Sit still," said Master, quietly. "He won't hurt you."

The bird rose in the air again, and, darting downward, seized a shiny buckle above the visor of the boy's cap, which lay on the canoe bottom, and bore cap and all to his young mistress. Socky began to cry with alarm.

Master reassured him and paddled slowly towards the moss-covered rock. Silently his bow touched the shore. He stuck his paddle in the sand. He stepped into the shallow water and helped the children ashore. In the edge of the tamaracks and now partly hidden by their foliage, Miss Dunmore stood looking at the children. Her figure was tall, erect, and oddly picturesque. Somehow she reminded Master of a deer halted in its flight by curiosity. Her face, charming in form and expression, betrayed a childish timidity and innocence. Her large, blue eyes were full of wonder. Pretty symbols of girlish vanity adorned her figure. There were fresh violets on her bodice, and a delicate, lacy length of the moss-vine woven among her curls. The girl's hair, wonderfully full and rich in color, had streaks of gold in it. A beaded belt and holster of Indian make held a small pistol.

"Miss Dunmore, I believe?" he ventured.

The girl retired a step or two and stood looking timidly, first at him and then at the children. Her manner betrayed excitement. She addressed him with hesitation. "My—my name is Edith Dunmore," she said, in a tone just above a whisper. With trembling hands she picked a spray of tamarack that for a moment obscured her face.

"You are the nun of the green veil. I have heard of you," said Master.

"I—I must not speak to you, sir," she said, as she retreated a little farther.

"My name is Master—Robert Master," said he. "I shall stay only a minute, but these children would like to know you." While speaking he had returned to his canoe. Socky and Sue stood still, looking up at the maiden.

"Children!" she exclaimed, in a low, sweet, tremulous, tone, as she took a step towards them. "The wonderful little children?"

"Sometimes I think they are brownies," he answered, with a smile of amusement. "But their uncle calls them little fawns."

Her right hand, which held the spray of tamarack, fell to her side; her left hand clung to a branch on which the crow sat a little above her shoulder, and her cheek lay upon her arm as she looked down wistfully, fondly, at the children. Her blue eyes were full of curiosity.

Socky and Sue regarded the beautiful maiden with a longing akin to that in her. In all there was a deep, mysterious desire which had grown out of nature's need—in them for a mother, in her for the endearing touch of those newly come into the world and for their high companionship. Moreover, these two little ones, who had now a dim and imperfect recollection of their mother, had shaped an ideal—partly through the help of Gordon—to take its place. Therein they saw a lady, young and beautiful and more like this one who stood

before them than like any they had yet beheld. Sue grasped the hand of her brother, and both stood gazing at the maiden, but neither spoke nor moved for a moment. Edith Dunmore leaned forward a little, looking into their faces.

"Can you not speak to me?" she asked.

Socky began to be embarrassed; his eyes fell; he shook his head doubtfully.

Edith Dunmore looked up at the stalwart figure of the young man. Their eyes met. She quickly turned away. The tame crow, on the bough above, began to laugh and chatter as if he thought it all an excellent joke.

"May—I—take them in my arms?" she asked, with hesitation.

"Yes; but I warn you—they have a way of stealing one's heart."

"Ah-h-h-h-h!" croaked the little crow, in a warning cry, as if he had seen at once the peril of it.

She had begun to move slowly, almost timidly, towards the children. She knelt before them and took the little hand of Sue in hers and looked upon it with wonder. She touched it with her lips; she pressed it against her cheek; she trembled beneath its power. The touch of the child's hand was, for her, it would almost seem, like that of One on the eyes of Bartimeus. Suddenly, as by a miracle, Edith Dunmore rose out of childhood. The veil of the nun was rent away. She was a woman fast coming into riches of unsuspected inheritance. She put her arms about the two and gently drew them towards her and held them close. Her embrace and the touch of her breast upon theirs were grateful to them, and they kissed her. Her eyes were wet, her sweet voice full of familiar but uncomprehended longing when she said, "Dear little children!"

"Tut, *tut!*" said the tame crow, who had crept to the end of his branch, where he stood looking down at them. In a moment he began to break the green twigs and let them fall on the head of his mistress.

Sue felt the hair and looked into the face and eyes of the maiden with wondering curiosity. Socky ran his fingers over the beaded belt. Both had a suspicion which they dared not express that here was an angel in some way related to their mother.

"You are a beautiful lady," said the boy, with childish frankness.

Master has often tried to describe the scene. He confesses that words, even though vivid and well spoken, cannot make one to understand the something which lay beneath all said and done, and which went to his heart so that for a time he turned and walked away from them.

"Do you remember when you were fairies?" the girl asked of the children.

The latter shook their heads.

"Tell us about the fairies," Sue proposed, timidly.

"They are old, old people—so my father has told me," said the beautiful lady. "They came into this world thousands of years ago riding in a great cloud that was drawn by wild geese. The fairies came down, each on a big flake of snow, and got off in the tree-tops and never went away. At first they were the teentiest folks—so little that a hundred of them could stand on a maple leaf—and very, very old. My father says they were never young in their lives, and I guess they have always lived. They rode around on the backs of the birds and saw everything in the world and had such a good time they all began to grow young. Now, as they grew young they grew bigger and bigger, and every spring a lot more of the little old people came out of the sky and began to grow young like the others. And by-and-by some of them were as big as your thumb and bigger."

"How big do they grow?" the boy asked.

"As they grow young they keep growing bigger. By-and-by the birds cannot carry them. Then they have to walk, and for the first time in their lives they begin to get hungry and learn to cry and nobody knows what is the matter with them. The fairies complain about the noise they make, and one night a little old woman takes them down into the woods to get them out of the way. And violets grow wherever their feet touch the ground, and they sit in a huckleberry bush and make a noise like the cry of a spotted fawn. The fawns hear them and know very well what they are crying for. The fawns have always loved them. When the fairies come down out of the tree-tops they always ride on the fawns, and where they have sat you can see a little white spot about as big as a flake of snow. That's why the fawns are spotted, and you know how shy they are—they mustn't let anybody see the fairies. Well, the young ones sit there in a huckleberry bush crying. The little animals come and lick their faces and tell them of a wonderful spring where milk flows out of a little hill and has a magic power in it, for even if one were crying and tasted the milk he always became happy. The young fairies climb on the backs of the fawns and ride away. By-and-by the fawns come to their mothers and their mothers tell them that no one who has teeth in his head can drink at the spring. So they wonder what to do. By-and-by they go to the woodpecker, for he has a pair of forceps and can pull anything, and the woodpecker pulls their teeth. Then the young fairies do nothing but ride around—each on a spotted fawn—and drink at the wonderful spring and grow fat and lazy, and the birds pull every hair out of their heads to build nests with. They live down in the woods, for they cannot climb the trees any more, and one day they fall asleep for the first time and tumble off the fawns and lie on the ground dreaming.

"They dream of the fairy-heaven where they shall grow old again and each shall have a mother and his own wonderful spring of milk. Now that day trees begin to grow in the ground beneath them. The trees grow fast, and all in a night they lift the sleeping fairies far above the ground. The wind rocks them and they lie dreaming in the tree-tops until a crane, as he is crossing over the sky, looks down and sees them and goes and takes them away. You know the cranes have to go through the sky every day and pick up the young fairies."

She paused and sat holding the hands of little Sue and looking at them as if their beauty were a great wonder.

"Where do they take them?"

Master was returning, and the girl rose like one afraid and whispered to the children, "I will tell you if—if you will come again."

"I shall ask your father if I may come and see you," said Master as he came near.

"Ha! ha! ha!" the bird croaked, fluttering in the air and lighting on the shoulder of his mistress.

The children stepped aside quickly, as if in fear of it.

She took the crow on her finger and held him at arm's-length. He turned and tried to catch an end of the scarlet ribbon. She was a picture then to remind one of the days of falconry. She ran a few paces up a green aisle in the thicket. She stopped where the young man was unable to see her.

"Could—could you bring the children again, sir?" she asked.

"On Thursday, at the same hour," he answered.

He heard again the warning of the little crow and her footsteps growing fainter in the dark trail of the deer.

XII.

MASTER paddled slowly to the landing where he had left Strong, and gathered lilies while they waited. He pushed up to the shore as soon as the Emperor had arrived. "Sp'ilt," said the latter, pointing in the direction of Robin Lake.

"You mean that we cannot use the camp over there?"

"Ay-ah," Strong almost whispered, with a face in which perspiration was mingled with regret and geniality.

"S-see 'er?"

"Yes," Master answered. "The children were a great help. She fell in love with them. We are to meet her again Thursday."

"Uh-huh!" Strong exclaimed, in a tone which seemed to say, "I told you so."

"S-sociable?" he inquired, after a little pause.

"No, but interested."

"Uh-huh, says I!" the Emperor exclaimed again, with playful conceit. When he was in the mood of self-congratulation he had an odd way of bringing out those two words—"says I."

"She was afraid of me. I backed away and said very little," Master explained.

"Th-they'll t-tame her," the Emperor assured him.

"She has a wonderful crow with her," said the young man.

"Her g-guide," Strong explained. "Alwus knows the n-nighest way home."

"If you'll help me, I'll make my camp here," said Master.

"Ay-ah," the Emperor answered.

His manner and his odd remark were full of approval and almost affectionate admiration. In half a moment his tongue lazily added, "L-lean her 'gin th-that air rock." In his conversation he conferred the feminine gender upon all inanimate things—a kind of compliment to the sex he revered so highly.

"How long will it take?"

"Day," said Strong, surveying the ground.

"I have to speak in Hillsborough on the Fourth. Suppose we tackle it on my return?"

Strong agreed, and while he and the children set out for camp Master remained to fish.

Two "sports" had arrived in the absence of the Emperor and were shooting at a mark—a pastime so utterly foolish in the view of Silas Strong that he would rarely permit any one at Lost River camp to indulge in it. He who discharged his rifle without sufficient provocation was roughly classed with that breed of hounds which had learned no better than to bark at a squirrel.

"Paunchers!" he muttered, as he came up the trail.

It should be explained here that he divided all "would-be sportsmen" into three classes—namely, swishers, pouters, and paunchers. A swisher was one who filled the air within reach of his cast, catching trees and bushes, but no fish; a pouter, one who baited and hauled his fish as if it were no better than a bull-pout; a pauncher was wont to hit his deer "in the middle" and never saw him again.

The Emperor stopped suddenly. He had seen a twig fall near him and heard the whiz of a bullet.

"Whoa!" he called, his voice ringing in the timber. "H-hold on!"

The Migleys—father and son—of Migleyville, hastened to greet the "Emperor of the Woods."

They were the heralds of the great king of which Strong had complained that night he laid his heart bare and whose name was Business—a king who ruled not with the sword, but with flattery and temptation and artful devices. The Emperor knew that they were the men who had bought his stronghold; that they were come to shove the frontier of their king far beyond the Lost River country; that axes and saws and dams and flooded flats and whirling wheels and naked hill-sides would soon follow them.

"How are you, Mr. Strong?" said the elder Migley, who, by his son, was familiarly called "Pop." He overflowed with geniality. "Glad to see you. Hot an' dry out in the clearing. Little track-worn. Thought we'd come in here for a breath o' fresh air an' a week or two o' sport. Have a drink?"

He winked one eye in a significant manner, which seemed to say that he had plenty and was out for a good time.

"N-no th-thanks," said Strong, as he surveyed the stout figure of the elder Migley.

Here was one of the royal family of Business, in dress neatly symbolic, for Mr. Migley wore a light suit of

clothes divided into checks of considerable magnitude by stripes that ran, as it were, north, south, east, and west. The broad convexity of his front resembled, in some degree, an atlas globe. One might have located any part of his system by degrees of latitude and longitude. His equator was represented by a large golden chain which curved in a great arc from one pocket of his waistcoat to the other. As he walked one might have imagined that he was moving in his orbit. His large, full face was adorned with a chin-whisker and a selfish and prosperous-looking nose. It had got possession of nearly all the color in his countenance, and occupied more than its share of space. The son, "Tom," had older manners and a more severe face. He carried with him a look of world-weariness and a sense of all-embracing knowledge so frequently derived from youthful experience. He was the-only-son type of domestic tyrant—overfed, selfish, brutal, wearied by adulation, crowned with curly hair.

"Look at that boy," the elder Migley whispered, pointing at the fat young man of twenty-three who sat on a door-sill cleaning his rifle. "Ain't he a picture? Got a fast mark in Hash-ford Seminary." Mr. Migley owned a number of trotting-horses, and his conversation was always flavored with the cant of the stable.

Strong looked sadly at the fat young man, who was, indeed, the very personification of pulp, and thought of the doom of the woods.

The elder Migley, as if able to read the mind of Strong, offered him the consolation of a cigar. Then he reached to the pegs above him and lowered a quaking whip of greenheart which he had put together soon after his arrival.

"Heft it," he whispered, pressing his rod upon the Emperor. "Ain't that a dandy?"

He looked into the eyes of the woodsman. He winked a kind of challenge, and added, "Seems to me that ought to fetch 'em."

"Mebbe," Strong answered, gently swaying the rod. He was never too free in committing himself.

"Got it for Tommy," said the new sportsman. "Ketched a four-pounder with it—ask him if I didn't." Mr. Migley had the habit of self-corroboration, and Strong used to say that he never believed that kind of a liar.

"Le's go an' try 'em," Migley suggested.

The Emperor smoked thoughtfully a moment.

"D-down river, bym-by," he said, pointing at the cook-tent as if he had now to prepare the dinner.

Strong had seen the Migleys before, although he had never entertained them. They had paunched and pouted in territory not far remote from Lost River, and won a reputation which had travelled among the guides. They worked hard, and hurried out of the woods with all the fish and meat they could carry, and no respect for any law save one—the law of gravitation. They sat down or lay upon their backs every half-hour. Now, it seemed, they were to abandon the vulgar art of the pouter for one more gentle and becoming.

Strong hastened to the cook-tent, where he found Sinth treating the children to sugared cakes and words of motherly fondness.

"Teenty little dears!" she was saying when Silas entered the door.

She rose quickly, and hurried to the stove with a kind of shame on her countenance. Silas kept a sober face while he went for the water-pail, as if he had not "took notice." His joy broke free and expressed itself in loud laughter on his way to the spring.

"Snook!" Sinth exclaimed, her face red with embarrassment as she heard him. She poked the fire with great energy, and added: "Let the fool laugh. I don't care if he did hear me."

A new impulse from the heart of nature entered the Migley breast. Father and son were seeking an opportunity to use their muscles. The son seized a girder above his head and began to chin it; the father went to work with an axe, and his enthusiasm fell in heavy blows upon a beech log.

Strong peered through the window at him and muttered the one contemptuous word, "W-woodpecker!"

A poor chopper in that part of the country was always classed with the woodpeckers.

Dinner over, the elder Migley opened his tin fishing-box and displayed an assortment of cheap flies and leaders.

"Well, captain," said the young man, as he turned to Strong, "if you'll show us where the trout live, we'll show you who they belong to." He passed judgment and bestowed rank upon a great many people, and most of his brevets, if he had been frank with them, would have put his life in peril.

"Pop" Migley touched a rib of the Emperor with his big, coercive thumb, shut one eye, and produced a kind of snore in his larynx.

The wit of his son had increased the cheerfulness of Mr. Migley. He began telling coarse tales, and continued until, as the Emperor would say, he had "emptied his reel." The man who talked too much always had a "big reel," in the thought of the Emperor, and "slack line" was the phrase he applied to empty words.

With everything ready for sport, they proceeded to the landing on Lost River and were soon seated in a long canoe.

"We'll t-try Dunmore's trout," said Strong as they left the shore.

"Dunmore's trout?" said the elder Migley.

"Ay-uh," the Emperor answered. "He hitched onto an' l-lost him."

"Oh, it's that fish I've heard about that grabbed off one of Dunmore's flies," said the elder Migley.

"Uh-huh," the Emperor assented.

As a matter of fact, the old gentleman who lived on the shore of Buckhorn had done a good deal of talking about this remarkable fish.

Father and son sat with rods in hand while Strong worked through the still water and down a long rush of rapids and halted below them near a deep pool flecked with foam.

"C-cast," said he.

With a wild swish and a spasmodic movement of arm and shoulder, "Pop" Migley, who sat amidships, tipped

the canoe until it took water.

Strong dashed his paddle and recovered balance. The young man swore.

"C-cast yer *f-flies*," Strong suggested, and his emphasis clearly indicated that the fisherman should cease casting his body.

Again the *nouveau* worked his rod, whipping its point to the water fore and aft. Flies and leader clawed over the back of Silas Strong, fetching his hat off. Before he could recover, the young man went into action. Strong ducked in time to save an ear, splashing his paddle again to keep the canoe on its bottom. The tail-fly had caught above his elbow. When Strong tried to loosen its hold the young man was tugging at the line. Strong endeavored to speak, but somehow the words wouldn't come. Suddenly the other rod came back with a powerful swing and smote him on the top of his head.

He had been trying to say "See here," but his tongue had halted on the *s*. Then he took a new tack, as it were, and tried a phrase which began with the letter *g*, and had fair success with it.

Both Migleys gave a start of surprise. The Emperor waited to recover self-control and felt a touch of remorse.

"Le' me c-climb a t-tree," he suggested, presently.

The elder Migley burst into loud laughter.

"Stop fooling!" said the young man. "I'd like to get some fish."

He swung his rod, and was again tugging at the shirt-sleeve of the Emperor.

Strong blew as he clung to the leader.

"C-cast c-crossways," he commanded, with a gesture.

The fishermen rested a moment. A hundred feet or so below them Strong saw a squirrel crossing the still water. Suddenly there was a movement behind him, and he sank out of sight. In half a moment he rose again, swimming with frantic haste to reach a clump of alder branches. Strong knew the mysterious villain of this little drama of the river, but said not a word of what he had seen.

The "sports" resumed fishing with less confidence and more care. Soon they were able to reach off twenty feet or so, but they raked the air with deadly violence, and every moment one leader was laying hold of the other or catching in a tree-top. Strong pulled down bough after bough to free the flies. Presently they were caught high in a balsam.

"Take us where there's trout. What do you think we're fishing for, anyway?" said young Migley.

"B-birds," Strong answered, as he continued hauling at the tree-top with hand and paddle. He used language always for the simple purpose of expressing his thoughts. Soon the elder Migley began to feel the need of information. He passed his rod to the Emperor.

"Show me how ye do it," said he.

Strong paddled to a large, flat rock which rose, mid-stream, a little above water. He climbed upon it and sat down lazily.

Nature had taught him, as she teaches all who bear heavy burdens, to conserve his strength. He had none to waste in the support of dignity. When he sat down his weight was braced with hand, foot, and elbow so as to rest his heart and muscles. Now he seemed to anchor himself by throwing his right knee over his left foot. His garment of cord and muscle lay loosely on his bones. There was that in the pose of this man to remind one of an ox lying peacefully in the field. He drew a loop of line off the reel, and with no motion of arm or body, his wrist bent, the point of the rod sprang forward, his flies leaped the length of his line and fell lightly on the river surface. They wavered across the current. He drew another loop of line. The rod rose and gave its double spring, and his flies leaped away and fell farther down the current. So his line flickered back and forth, running out and reaching with every cast until it spanned near a hundred feet.

Still the Emperor smoked lazily, and, saving that little movement of the wrist, reposed as motionless and serene as the rock upon which he sat.

Suddenly Strong's figure underwent a remarkable change. He bent forward, alert as a panther in sight of his prey. His mouth was open, his eyes full of animation. The supple wrist bent swiftly. The flies sprang up and flashed backward; the line sang in its flight. Where the squirrel rose a big trout had sprung above water and come down with a splash. But he had missed his aim. Again the flies lighted precisely where the trout sprang and wavered slowly through the bubbles. A breath of silence followed. The finned arrow burst above water in a veil of mist; down he plunged with a fierce grab at the tail-fly. The wrist of the fisherman sprang upward. The barb caught; the line slanted straight as a lance and seemed to strike at the river-bottom. The rod was bending. The fish had given a quick haul, and now the line's end came rushing in. The shrewd old trout knew how to gather slack on a fisherman. Strong rose like a jack-in-the-box. His hand flashed to the reel. It began to play like the end of a piston. He swung half around and his rod came up. The fish turned for a mad rush. With hands upon rod and silk the fisherman held to check him. Strong's line ripped through the water plane from mid-river to the shadow of the bank. The strain upon the fish's jaw halted him. He settled and began to jerk on the line. Strong raised his foot and tapped the butt of his rod. The report seemed to go down the line as if it had been a telephone message. It startled the trout, and again he took a long reach of silk off the reel. Then slowly he went back and forth through an arc of some twenty feet, and the long line swung like a pendulum. Weakened by his efforts, he began to lead in. Slowly he came near the rock, and soon the splendid trout lay gasping from utter weariness an arm's-length from his captor.

As the net approached him he dove again, hauling with fierce energy. The man was leaning over the edge of the rock, his rod in one hand, his net in the other. He came near losing his balance in the sudden attack. He scrambled into position. Again the trout gave up and followed the strain of the leader. Strong let himself down upon the river-bottom beside the rock, and stood to his belt in water. The fish retreated again and came back helpless and was taken.

He filled the net. A great tail-fin waved above its rim. The Emperor hefted his catch and blew like a buck deer, after his custom in moments of great stress. Then came a declaration of unusual length.

and timely cough.

"Bym-by I come up kind o' dost an' where that I
could see
Zeb was jumpin' like a rabbit an' a-hollerin' t' me;
An' I could see the ol' bear's home all underneath a
ledge,
An' the track of his big moggasins up to the very edge.
I took an' fetched some pine-knots an' a lot of ol'
dead limbs,
An' built a fire upon his door-step an' let the smoke
blow in;
An' then I took a piece o' rope an' tethered Zeb away
So's that he'd keep his breeches fer to use another
day.
An' purty soon I listened an' I heard the bear
a-coughin',
An' he sneezed an' bellered out as if he guessed he'd
be excused.
All t' once he bust out an' the rifle give a yell,
An' I wouldn't wonder if he thought—"

The narrator was halted for half a moment by another frog in his throat—as he explained. Then he went on:

"An' Zeb he tore away an' took an' fastened on the
bear,
An' they rolled down-hill together, an' the critter
ripped the air,
An' I didn't dast t' shoot him for fear o' killin' Zeb,
So I clubbed my rifle on the bear an' mellered up his
head."

Moist with perspiration, Silas Strong rose and stood by the bedside and blew. Fifty miles with a boat on his back could not have taxed him more severely. He answered a few queries touching the size, fierceness, and fate of the bear. Then he retreated, whispering as he left the door, "Strong's ahead."

Zeb lay on the foot of the bed, and Socky, being a little timid in the dark, coaxed him to lie between them, his paws on the pillow. With their hands on the back of Zeb, they felt sure no harm could come to them.

"Do you love Uncle Silas?" It was the question of little Sue.

Socky answered, promptly, "Yes; do you?"

"Yes."

"Hunters don't never wear good clothes." So Socky went on, presently, as if apologizing to his own spirit for the personal appearance of his uncle. "They git 'em all tore up by the bears an' panthers."

"That's how he got his pants tore," Sue suggested, thinking of his condition that day they met him on the trail.

"Had a fight with a 'kunk," Socky answered, quickly. He had overheard something of that adventure at Robin Lake.

They lay thinking a moment. Then up spoke the boy. "I wisht he had a gold watch."

With Socky the ladder by which a man rose to greatness had many rounds. The first was great physical strength, the next physical appearance; the possession of a rifle and the sacred privilege of bathing the same in bear's-oil was distinctly another; symbols of splendor, such as watches, finger-rings, and the like, had their places in the ladder, and qualities of imagination were not wholly disregarded.

Sue tried to think of something good to say—something, possibly, which would explain her love. It was her first trial at analysis.

"He wouldn't hurt nobody," she suggested.

"He can carry a tree on his back"—so it seemed to Socky.

"He wouldn't let nothin' touch us," said Sue, still working the vein of kindness which she had discovered.

"He's the most terrible powerful man in the world," Socky averred, and unconsciously twisted the soft ear of Zeb until the latter gave a little yelp of complaint.

"He can kill bears an' panthers an' deers an'—an' ketch fish," said Sue.

"He could swaller a whale," Socky declared, as he thought of the story of Jonah.

"Aunt Sinthy has got a hole in her shoe." The girl imparted this in a whisper.

Both felt the back of Zeb and were silent for a little.

"She blubbers!" Socky exclaimed, with a slight touch of contempt in the way he said it.

"Maybe she got her feet wet and Uncle Silas Spanked her."

"Big folks don't get spanked," the boy assured Sue.

"Do you like her?"

He answered quickly, as if the topic were a bore to him, "Purty well."

Sue had hoped for greater frankness. Her own opinion of her Aunt Cynthia, while favorable, was unsettled. She thought of a thing in connection with her aunt which had given her some concern. She had been full of wonder as to its hidden potentialities.

In a moment Sue broached the subject by saying, "She's got a big mold on her neck."

"With a long hair on it," Socky added. "Bet you wouldn't dast pull that hair."

Sue squirmed a little. That single hair had, somehow, reminded her of the string on a jumping-jack. She reflected a moment, "I put my finger on it," said she, boastfully.

"That's nothing," Socky answered. "Uncle Silas let me feel the shot what he got in his arm. Gee, it was kind o' funny." He squirmed a little and thoughtfully felt his foot.

Sue recognized the superior attraction of the buried shot and held her peace a moment. Both had begun to yawn.

"Wisht it was t'-morrow," said Sue.

"Why?"

"'Cause I'm going to see the beautiful lady."

"An' the crow, too," Socky whispered.

They were, indeed, to see her sooner than they knew—in dreamland.

Zeb now retired discreetly to the foot of the bed.

After a little silence Sue put her arms about her brother's neck and pressed him close.

"Wisht I was in heaven," she said, drowsily, with a little cry of complaint.

"Why?"

"So I could see my mother."

"She's way up a Trillion miles beyond where the hawks fly," said the boy, as he gaped wearily.

Thereafter the room was silent, save for the muffled barking of Zeb in his slumber. He, too, was dreaming, no doubt, of things far away.

XIV

THEY were a timely arrival—those new friends who had found Edith Dunmore. She was no longer satisfied with the narrow world in which her father had imprisoned her, and had begun to wander alone as if in quest of a better one. That hour of revelation on the shore of Birch Cove led quickly to others quite as wonderful.

She had no sooner reached home than she told her grandmother of the young man and the children who had come with him to the shore of Catamount and of a strange happiness in her heart. It was then that a sense of duty in the old Scotchwoman broke away from promises to her son which had long suppressed it.

As they sat alone, together, the old lady talked to her granddaughter of the mysteries of life and love and death. Much in this talk the girl had gathered for herself, by inference, out of books—mostly fairy tales that her father had brought to her—and out of the evasions which had greeted her questioning and out of her own heart.

Her queries followed one another fast and were answered freely. She learned, among other things, a part of the reason for their lonely life—that her father was not like other men, not even like himself; that their isolation had been a wicked and foolish error; that men were not, mostly, children of the devil seeking whom they might destroy, but kindly, giving and desiring love; that she, Edith Dunmore, had a right to live like the rest of God's children, and to love and be loved and given in marriage and to have her part in the world's history.

All this and much good counsel besides the old lady gave to the girl who sat a long time pondering after her grandmother had left her.

In the miracle of birth and the storied change that follows dissolution she saw the magic of fairyland. To her Paristan had been much more real than the republic in which she lived.

She longed for the hour to come when she should again see those wonderful children and the still more wonderful being who had brought them in his canoe.

Next morning she set out early in the trail to Catamount with her little guide and companion. She had named him Roc, after the famous bird of Oriental tradition. She arrived there long before the hour appointed. Slowly she wandered to the trail over which Master and the children would be sure to come. She approached the camp at Lost River and stood peering through thickets of young fir, She saw the boy and girl at play, and watched them. Soon Master came out of one of the cabins. Now, somehow, she felt a greater fear of him than before, yet she longed to look into his face—to feel the touch of his hand.

The crow had taken his perch in a small tree beside his mistress. He seemed to be looking thoughtfully at the children, with now and then a little croak of criticism or of amusement, ending frequently in a sound like half-suppressed laughter. He raised a foot and slowly scratched his head, a gaze of meditation deepening in

his eyes. Suddenly his interest seemed to grow keener. He moved a step aside, rose in the air, and approached the children. Darting to the ground, he picked up a little silver compass which, one of them had dropped, and quickly returned with it. The children called to Master, and all three followed the crow. His mistress, scarcely knowing why, had run up the trail, and Roc pursued her with foot and wing, croaking urgently, as if his life and spoil depended on their haste. Reaching a thicket beside the trail, she hid under its sheltering cover and sat down to rest. The crow, following, scrambled upon her shoulder and dropped the bit of silver into her lap. She held his beak to keep him quiet when Master and the children came near, but as the latter were passing they could hear the smothered laughter of Roc.

In a moment Socky and Sue ran to their new friend, while Master waited near them. The crow spread his wings and seemed to threaten with a scolding chatter. The girl threw the bird in the air and took the hands of the children and drew them to her breast. She held them close and looked into their faces.

"Dear fairies!" said she, impulsively kissing them.

"Tell us where the cranes go with—with the young fairies," Sue managed to say, her hands and voice trembling.

Miss Dunmore sat looking down sadly for a little before she answered. Sue, curiously, felt "the lady's" cheeks that were now rose-red and beautiful.

"I will tell you what my father says," the latter began. "The cranes take them to Slum-bercity on a great marsh and put them in their nests. The heads of the young fairies are bald and smooth and the cranes sit on them as if they were eggs. By-and-by wonderful thoughts and dreams come into them so that the fairies wake up and begin crying for they are very hungry. They remember the spring of milk, but they are so young and helpless they can only reach out their hands and cry for it. Some of the cranes stand on one leg in the marsh and listen. The moment they hear the young fairies crying they fly away to find mothers for them. The unhappy little things are really not fairies any more—they are babies. Some of the cranes come and dance around the nest to keep them quiet, and the babies sit up and open their eyes and begin to laugh, it is so very funny. And that night a big crane sits by the side of each baby and the baby creeps on his back and rides away to his mother. And he is so weary after his ride that he sleeps and is scarcely able to move, and when he wakes and smiles and laughs, he remembers how the cranes danced in the marsh."

Curiously, silently, the children looked into her face, while she, with wonder equal to their own, put her arms around them.

"My father says that there are no people—that we are really nothing but young fairies asleep and dreaming up in the tops of the trees, and that the fairy heaven is not here."

She gazed into the eyes of the boy a moment, all unconscious of his mental limitations. Then she added, "You're nothing but a big fairy—you're so very young."

Socky drew away with a look of injury and threw out his chest.

"I'm six years old," he answered, with dignity. "In a little while I'll be a man."

Miss Dunmore drew them close to her and said, "I wish I could take you home with me."

"Have you any maple sugar there?" the little girl inquired.

"Yes, and a tame fox and a little fawn."

"But you ain't got no Uncle Silas," said the boy, boastfully.

"Ner no Aunt Sinth," Sue ventured. Then, with her tiny fingers, she felt the neck of "the beautiful lady" to see if there were a "mold" on it. She was thinking of one of the chief attractions of her aunt. In a moment she added, "Ner no Uncle Robert." They had begun to call him Uncle Robert.

"Is he the man I saw?" the maiden asked.

Both children nodded affirmatively.

"Do you love him?"

"Yes; would you like to take him home with you, too?" Socky asked, with a look of deep interest. If they were to go he would wish to have his new uncle with them, and Sue saw the point.

"He can carry you on his back and growl jes' like a bear," she urged. "He can put his mouth on your cheek and make such a funny noise."

Miss Dunmore looked away, blushing red. It was a curious kind of love-making. She whispered in the ear of the little girl, "Would you let me have him?"

Sue looked up into her eyes doubtfully.

"She wants our Uncle Robert," Socky guessed aloud.

"But not to keep?" Sue questioned, as if it were not to be thought of.

The eyes of the children were looking into those of "the beautiful lady."

"I couldn't have him?" the latter asked.

"We'll give you our coon," Sue suggested, by way of compromise.

"I am sure he—your uncle—would not go with me," Miss Dunmore suggested.

Socky seemed now to think that the time had come for authoritative information. He broke away and called to his new uncle.

The maiden rose quickly, blushing with surprise. She turned away as Robert Master came in sight, and stood for half a moment looking down. Then, stooping, she picked a wild flower and timidly offered it. The act was full of childish simplicity. It spoke for her as her tongue could not. Knowledge acquired since she saw him last had possibly increased her shyness.

"She wants you," said the boy, with vast innocence, while he looked up at the young man.

"I wish I could believe it were true," said Master, as he came nearer by a step to the daughter of the woodland.

She turned with a look of fear and said, "I must go," as she ran to the trail, followed by Roc.

A little distance away she turned, looking back at the young man. Something in her eyes told of a soul beneath them lovelier than its nobly fashioned house. Moreover, they proclaimed the secret which she would fain have kept.

"Shall we shake hands?" he asked.

She took a step towards him and stopped.

"No," she answered.

"I must see you again," said Master, with passionate eagerness, fearing that she was about to leave.

She looked down but made no answer. The children put their arms about her knees as if to detain her.

"You will not forget to come Thursday?" he added.

"The beautiful lady" stood looking at him, her left hand upon her chin, her arms bare to the elbows. A smile, an almost imperceptible nod, and the eloquence of her eyes were the only answer she gave him, but they were enough.

"Will you not speak to me?" the young man urged, as he came nearer.

She stood looking, curiously, until he could almost have touched her. Then, gently, she pushed the children away and fled up the trail, her pet following. In a moment she had gone out of sight.

She was like the spirit of the woodland—wild, beautiful, silent.

XV

HERE was a great marsh around a set-back leading off the still water near Lost River camp. There the children had seen many cranes, and they did not forget that certain of them had stood upon one leg.

After supper that evening they sat together whispering awhile and presently stole away. There was a trail for frog-hunters that led to their destination. They ran, eagerly, and, just as the sun was going down, stopped on a high bank overlooking the marshes. It was a broad flat covered with pools and tall grasses and bogs, crowned with leaves of the sweet-flag and with cattails and pussy-willows. Now it was still and hazy. The pools were like mirrors with the golden glow of the sky and soft, dark shadows in them.

Far out on the marsh they discovered a crane strolling leisurely among the bogs, and began to chatter about him.

They looked and listened until the sun had gone below the tops of the trees. Then cranes came flying homeward out of the four skies, and, one by one, lighted on the edge of a bog some two or three hundred feet from the children. Sue uttered a little cry of joy. The cranes stood motionless with heads up.

"They're listening," Socky assured his sister.

Bull-frogs had begun croaking and a mud-hen was making a sound like that of a rusty pump. The children now sat on the side of the bank and leaned forward straining their eyes and ears.

Soon the far, shrill cry of some little animal rang above the chorus of the marsh. The children took it to be a baby, and seemed almost to writhe with suppressed laughter mingled with hopeful and whispered comment. In his excitement Socky slipped off his perch and came near rolling down the side of the bank. One of the cranes began to shuffle about, his wings half open, like an awkward dancer. Soon the whole group of birds seemed to be imitating him, and each shuffled on his long legs as if trying to be most ridiculous. The dusk was thickening, and the children could only just discern them. They sat close together and held each other's hands tightly, and looked out upon the marsh and were silent with awe and expectation. Suddenly the cranes scattered into the bushes and the sedge. Socky and Sue were now watching to see them fly. It was almost dark and a big moon seemed to be peering through the tops of the trees. Soon the great birds strode slowly in single file past the wonder-stricken two.

"See the babies! See the babies!" Sue cried out.

They squirmed and shivered with awe, their lips and eyes wide with amazement. In the dim light they imagined that a baby sat on the back of each crane. Sue had no sooner cried out than there came a flapping of wings that seemed to fill the sky. The feathered caravan had taken to the air and were swinging in a wide circle around the edge of the marsh. They quickly disappeared in the gloom.

"Gone to find mothers for 'em," said Socky, in a trembling whisper.

The children had suddenly become aware that it was quite dark, but neither dared speak of it. They still sat looking out upon the marsh and clinging hand to hand. Soon a procession of grotesque and evil creatures began to pass them: the great bear of the woods who had swallowed alive all the little runaways, and who, having made them prisoners, only let them come out now and then to ride upon his back; the big panther-bird who lured children from their homes with berries and flowers and nuts and, maybe, raisins, and who, when they were in some lonely place, dropped stones upon their heads and slew them; odd, indescribable shapes, some having long, hairy necks and heads like cocoa-nuts; and, lastly, came that awful horned creature, with cloven hoofs and the body of a man, who carried a pitchfork and who, soon or late, flung all the bad children into a lake of fire. Socky and Sue covered their faces with their hands. Suddenly a prudent thought entered the mind of the boy.

"I'm going to be good," said he, in a loud but timid voice. "I love God best of every one." His sister gave a little start.

In half a moment she suggested, her eyes covered with her hands, "You don't love God better than Uncle

Silas?"

Socky hesitated. Prudence and affection struggled for the mastery.

"Yes," he managed to say, although with some difficulty. "Don't you?"

Sue hesitated.

He nudged her and whispered, "Say yes—say it out loud."

The word came from Sue in a low, pathetic wail of fear.

"I ain't never goin' to tell any more lies," the boy asserted, in a firm, clear voice, "er swear er run away."

They both gave a cry of alarm, for Zeb had sprung upon them and begun to lick their faces. Their aunt and uncle had missed them and Zeb had led his master to where they sat.

Strong had heard the children choosing between him and their Creator and understood. Socky and Sue, after the shock of Zeb's sudden arrival, were encouraged by his presence and began to take counsel together.

"We better go home," said Socky.

"What if we meet something?"

"Pooh! I'll crook my finger to him an' say, 'Sile Strong is my uncle,'" Socky answered, confidently. "You'll see him run fast enough."

It was a formula which his uncle had taught him, and he had tried it upon a deer and a hedgehog with eminent success.

The Emperor had planned to give them a scare by way of punishment, but now he had no heart for severity. He walked through the bushes whistling. He said not a word as he knelt before them—indeed, the man dared not trust himself to speak. With cries of joy they climbed upon his shoulders and embraced him. Strong rose and slowly carried them through the dark trail. He could not even answer their questions. He was thinking of their faith in him—of their love, the like of which he had never known or dreamed of and was not able to understand. Sinth was out with a lantern when they returned. The children were asleep in his arms.

"Sh-h-h! Don't scold, sister," said he, in a voice so gentle it surprised himself. They put the children to bed and walked to the cook-tent. Strong told of all he had heard them say.

"I dunno but you'll have to whip 'em," said Sinth.

Strong was drying the little boots of the boy. He touched them tenderly with his great hand. He smiled and shook his head and slowly stammered, "If we're g-goin't' be g-good'nough t' 's-sociate with them we got t' wh- whip ourselves."

He rose and put a stick of wood on the fire.

"Th-they think I'm m-most as good as God," he added, huskily, and then he went out-ofdoors.

Before going to bed that night he made this entry in his memorandum-book:

"Strong won't do he'll have to be tore down an' built over."

XVI

THE Migleys had engaged Strong to take them out of the woods next day. They were going to the Fourth-of-July celebration at Hillsborough. Master was going also, be orator of the day. Strong, hearing the talk of the others, had "got to wishin'," as Sinth put it, and had finally concluded to go on to Hillsborough and witness the celebration. So Master had sent for his guide to come and stay at Lost River camp until the return of Silas.

The Emperor was getting ready to go. Some one had told him that a man at Hillsborough was buying coons and foxes for the zoological gardens in New York. He considered whether he had better take his young pet coon with him. In that hour of expanding generosity when he had broken his bank, as the saying goes, he had forgotten his new responsibilities. There were the children, and that necessity which often awoke him at night and whispered of impending evil—he must leave his old home and find a new one somewhere in the forest. The little people would need boots and dresses, and why shouldn't they have a rocking-horse or some cheering toy of that character? Such reflections began to change—to amend, as it were—his view of money.

Furthermore, Sinth had no respect for coons. Ever since the Emperor had captured him, much of her ill-nature had been focussed upon the coon.

"W-woods g-goin'," he mused, as he fed the little creature. "W-we got t' git t-tame."

"You better take him along," said Sinth, as she came out of the cook-tent. "Jim Warner got ten dollars for a coon down to Canton las' summer."

"C-come on, Dick," said the hunter, with some regret in his tone as he fastened the coon's cage upon his basket.

Strong looped a cord through the wire and the buckles of both shoulder-braces. Master had taken the river route, and would drive to Hillsborough from Tupper's. Strong and the Migleys were going out through Pitkin. The "sports" had been on their way for more than half an hour. Strong put his arms in the straps and followed them. He turned in the trail and called back:

"B-better times!" he shouted. It was a cheerful sentiment which he often expressed in moments of parting with Sinth.

"Don't believe it," Sinth answered.

"You s-see," he insisted, and then he disappeared in the timber.

As the travellers went on, the Migleys exhibited increasing respect for the law of gravitation. They gave their coats to the Emperor, who studiously kept as far ahead or behind them as possible to avoid conversation. He was "tongue weary," and told them so.

Late in the afternoon they came to a new lumber-camp. "The Warren job" had pushed its front across the old trail. What desolation had fallen where Strong passed, two weeks before, in the shadow of the primeval wood! Its green roof lay in scraggled, withering heaps; the under thickets had been cut away; the ferns lay flat, blackening on the sunburned soil. An old skeleton of pine lifted its broken arms high above the scene of desolation, and one could hear its bones creak and rattle in the breezy heavens.

Great shafts of spruce and pine were being sawed into even lengths and hauled to a skidway. Busy men looked small as ants in the edge of the high forest. Some swayed in pairs, "pulling the briar," as woodsmen say of those who work with a saw.

Strong and the Migleys halted to watch the downfall of a great pine. Soon the sawyers put their wedge in the slit and smote upon it. The sheet of steel hissed back and forth. Then a few blows of the axe. The men gave a shout of warning and drew aside. The great tree began to creak and tremble. Slowly it bent and groaned; its long arms seemed to clutch at the air. Then it pitched headlong, its top whistling, its heavy stem shaking the ground upon which it fell. A voice of thunder seemed to proclaim its fate. The axemen lopped off its branches, and soon the long column lay stark, and the growth of two centuries had come to its end. Strong and his companions stood a moment longer watching the scene.

"Huh!" the Emperor grunted, with a sorry look as they passed on.

Near sundown they came into the cleared land—the sandy, God-forsaken barrens of Tifton, robbed of root and branch and soil, of their glory, and the one crop nature had designed for them. The travellers passed a deserted cabin on a hot, stony hill. In its door-yard they could see a plough and an old wagon partly overgrown with weeds. Some one had tried to live on the spoiled earth and had come to discouragement. Where ten thousand men could have found healing and refreshment there was not enough growing to feed a dozen sheep. Here a part of the great inheritance of man had been forever ruined. Strong spoke of the pity of it.

"Can't be helped," said the elder Migley. "A man has a right to cut and sell his timber."

Strong made no question of that, claiming only that the cutting should be "reg'lated," an expression which he rarely took the trouble to explain. It stood for a meaning well considered—that the forest belonged to the people, the timber to the owner of the land; that the right of the owner should be subject to restraint. He should be permitted to cut trees of a certain size only. So the forest would be made permanent, and the owner and the generations to follow him would get a crop of timber every eight or ten years.

The sun was setting when they came into the little forest hamlet. The Migleys put up at the Pitkin general store, where one might have rude hospitality as well as merchandise. There Strong left pack and coon behind the counter and hastened to the home of Annette. The comely young woman rose from the supper-table and took both his hands in hers.

"Strong's ahead!" he answered, cheerfully, as she greeted him.

In response to her invitation he sat down to eat. Her father lighted his pipe and left them. Silas told of the wishers and the big trout and the children.

"M-me an' Sinth is b-bein' cut over," here-marked, with a smile, as he thought of the children.

"What do you mean?"

"B-bein' cleared an' p-ploughed an' sowed."

She laughed a little as the Emperor unfolded his pleasantry. He thought of his improved account in the matter of swearing and of the better temper of Sinth.

"G-gittin' p-proper," he added.

Annette was amused.

"G-got t' leave Lost R-river," he said, presently.

"Got to leave Lost River!" Annette exclaimed.

"Ay-ah," Strong answered. He looked down for a second, then he added, sorrowfully, "G-goin' to tear down the w-woods."

"It's an outrage. Couldn't you go to the plains?"

"S-sold an' f-fenced."

"How about the Rag Lake country?"

"B-bein' cut."

Annette shook her head ruefully.

"W-woods got t' g-go," said Strong, leaning forward and resting his elbows on his knees. .

"What'll you do?"

"G-git tame," Strong answered, as he rose and went to the squirrel cage and began to play with his old pet. The little animal came to his wire gateway and stood upon the palm of the Emperor's hand.

"T-trespasser!" he remarked, stroking the squirrel. "Th-they'll have me in a c-cage, too, purty s-soon."

He put the squirrel away and offered his hand to Annette.

"S-some day," he whispered.

"Some day," she answered, with a sigh.

"Y-you're g-goin' to hear me d-do some t-talkin'," he assured her. The Lady Ann had often mildly complained of his reticence.

They now stood in front of the little veranda. She was looking up at him.

"It'll 'mount to s-suthin', t-too," he went on. It seemed as if he were making an honest effort to correct the idleness of his tongue. He was looking down at her and groping in his mind for some other cheerful sentiment. He seemed to make this happy discovery, and added, "W-won-derful good t-times comin'."

With a full heart she pressed his great hand in both of hers.

"K-keep ahead," said he, cheerfully, and bade her good-night.

With this he left her and was happy, for the taming of Sinth had seemed to bring that "some day" of his promise into the near future.

At the Pitkin general store his two companions had retired for the night, and he joined a group of woodsmen who occupied everything in the place which had a fairly smooth and accessible top on it. They were all in debt to the storekeeper and seemed to entertain a regard for him not unmingled with pity. This latter sentiment was, the historian believes, rather well founded. They called him "Billy," with the inflection of fondness. Two sat slouching, apologetically, on the counter. One rested his weight, as tenderly and considerately as might be, on a cracker-barrel. Another reposed with a look of greater confidence on the end of a nail-keg. They were guides, two of whom had come out for provisions; the others, like Strong, were on their way to Hillsborough.

"Here's the old Emp'ror," said one, as Strong entered and returned their greetings and sat down astride the beam of a plough.

"I'd like to know what he thinks of it," said a guide from the Jordan Lake country.

Strong looked up at him without a word.

"A millionaire has bought thirty thousand acres alongside o' my camp," the guide explained. "He won't let me cross on the old trail. I had to go six mile out o' my way to git here."

He smote the counter with his fist and coupled the name of the rich man with vile epithets.

"My father and my grandfather travelled that trail before he was born," the angry woodsman declared.

Strong leaned forward, his elbows on his knees, and looked at his hands without speaking. One laughed loudly, another gave out a sympathetic curse.

"I'll git even with him—you hear me." So the aggrieved party expressed himself.

"How?" Strong inquired, looking up suddenly.

"I'll git even. I'll send a traveller into that preserve who'll put him off it." He spoke with a sinister suggestion.

"Huh!" the Emperor grunted. He understood the threat of the other, who clearly meant to set the woods afire.

"Ain't I right? What d' ye come to, anyway, when ye think it all over?" The words came hot and fast off the tongue of the com-plainer.

"F-fool," Strong stammered, calmly. There was something in his way of saying it that made the others laugh.

A faint smile of embarrassment showed in the face of the angry woodsman.

"Me or the millionaire?" he inquired.

"B-both," Strong answered, soberly, as the storm ended in a little gust of laughter.

Strong had stripped the guide of his anger as deftly as a squirrel could take the shell off a nut. In the brief silence that followed he thought of another maxim for his memorandum-book, and soon it was recorded therein as follows:

"Man that makes trouble sure to have most of it."

Presently he who sat on the cracker-barrel remarked, "If them air woods git afire now, they'll burn the stars out o' heaven."

All eyes turned upon the once violent man.

"Of course, I wouldn't fire the woods," he muttered. He was now cool, and could see the folly and also the peril which lay in his threat. "I never said I'd set the woods afire, but the ol' trail has been a thoroughfare for nigh a hunderd year.—I believe I've got as good a right to use it as he has."

"Th-think so?" the Emperor inquired.

"Yes, sir."

"Then d-do it," Strong answered, dryly. There was much in those three words and in the look of the speaker. It said, plainly, that the other was to do what he thought to be right and never what he knew to be wrong.

"Lumbermen are more to blame," said another. "Where they've been nobody wants to go. They cut everything down t' the size o' yer wrist an' leave the soil covered with tinder-stacks. They think o' nothin' but the profit. Case o' fire, woods 'round 'em wouldn't hev a ghost of a show."

"Look at the Weaver tract," said he who sat on the nail-keg. "Four thousand acres o' dead tops—miles on 'em—an' all as dry as gunpowder. If you was t' touch a match there ye'd have to run fer yer life."

"Go like a scairt deer," said he of the cracker-barrel. "'Fore it stopped I guess ye'd think the world was afire."

"W-woods g-goin'," said the Emperor, sadly.

He thought of the cold springs at which he had refreshed himself in the heat of the summer day and which were to perish utterly; he thought of the brooks and rivers, slowing their pace like one stricken with infirmity, and, by-and-by, lying dead in the sunlight—lying in a chain of slimy pools across the great valley of the St. Lawrence; he thought of green meadows which, soon or late, would probably wither into a desert.

"What 'll become of us?" said he on the nail-keg.

"Have t' be sawed an' trimmed an' planed an' matched an' go into town." It was the voice above the cracker-

barrel.

"Not me," said the occupant of the nail-keg. "Too many houses an' folks an' too much noise. Couldn't never stan' it."

"Village is a cur'ous place," said another, who had never been sober when he saw it. "Steeple's an' buildin's an' folks reel 'round in pairs. Seems so the sidewalk flowed like a river, an' nothin' stan's still long 'nough so ye can see how 't looks."

The speaker was interrupted by the proprietor of the Pitkin general store, who came downstairs and flung himself on the top of the counter.

"Goin't' the Fourth?" said he of the cracker-barrel.

"Might as well—got t' hev a tooth drawn."

"I've got one that's been growlin' purty spiteful," said the nail-kegger. "Dunno but I might as well go an' hev it tore out."

"I got t' be snaked, too," said the cracker-barrel man.

"Reg'lar tooth-drawin' down thar to-morrer," said a voice from the counter.

"Beats all how the teeth git t' rairin' up ev'ry circus an' Fourth o' July," said the nail-kegger. The laughter which now ensued seemed, as it were, to shake everybody off his perch. The counter and the cracker-barrel expressed themselves in a creak of relief, and all went abovestairs save the Emperor. He cut a few boughs for a pillow, spread his blanket under the pine-trees, flung an end of it over his great body, and "let go," as he was wont to say. At any time of day or night he had only to lie down and "let go," and enjoy absolute forgetfulness.

XVII

AT the break of day next morning, Strong rose and called his fellow-travellers. Beside the turnpike he built a fire, over which he began to cook fish and potatoes and coffee. When the Migleys had come, all sat on a blanket within reach of their food and helped themselves in a fashion almost as ancient as the hills. Then Strong gave the coon his share, and washed the dishes and got his pack ready. It was a tramp of four miles to the station below Pitkin. They arrived there, however, before the sun was an hour high.

When they were seated in the end of the smoking-car, with coon and pack beside them, Mr. Migley began to reveal the plans of the great king, Business. Having increased his territory, he now felt the need of adding to his power. He must have more legislation, for there were to be ruthless changes of the map. Those few really free and independent people who dwelt in and near the Lost River country were to be his subjects and they must learn to obey. At least they must not oppose him and make trouble. Gently his envoy began.

"You know," said he, "there's to be a new member of Assembly in our district."

Strong nodded.

"I want my son to go," the elder Migley went on, as he winked suggestively. "He's going to make his home in Pitkin, and it's very necessary to his plans that you people should be with him. He's got the talent of a statesman. Ask anybody who knows the boy."

He paused a moment. The Emperor made no reply.

"Level-headed and reliable in every spot an' place, an' a good-looker," Migley continued, as if he were selling a road-horse, while he nudged the Emperor. "Look at him. I'd swap faces with that boy any day and give him ten thousand dollars to boot. Wouldn't you?"

Mr. Migley spoke in dead earnest. He pinched the knee of Strong and waited for his reply.

"W-wouldn't fit me," the Emperor replied.

"Pop" Migley took the answer as a compliment and gurgled with good feeling.

"Strong, you're a kind of a boss up here in the hills," said he. "There isn't a jay in the pine lands that wouldn't walk twenty miles to caucus if you asked him to."

"Dunno," Strong answered, doubtfully.

"I know what I'm talking about," said the lumberman, with a smile. "I want the vote o' the town o' Pitkin. If we get that we can give 'em all the flag."

Strong was not unaccustomed to this kind of appeal. There were not many voters in his town, but they always followed the Emperor.

"You can get it for us," Mr. Migley insisted.

"N-no."

"Why not?"

"I've promised to help M-Master."

"Oh, well, now, look here—you and I ought to be friends," said Migley. "We ought to stand by each other. You look out for me and I'll look out for you."

As he offered his alliance, Migley tenderly pressed the shoulder of Silas Strong. Then he put his index-finger on that square of latitude and longitude which indicated the region of his heart, and added, impressively, "I have the reputation of being true to my friends—ask anybody."

The hunter sat filling his pipe in silence.

"With what's pledged to us, if we get this town we can win easy."

Strong began to puff at his pipe thoughtfully. Here sat a man who could make or break him. His face reddened a little. He shook his head.

Mr. Migley had caught the eye of a man he knew—Joe Socket—postmaster and politician of Moon Lake. He rose, tapped the shoulder of Strong, and said, "Think it over." Then he hurried down the aisle of the car.

He leaned over and whispered into the ear of Socket, "What kind of a man is Strong?"

"Square," said the other, promptly. "A little cranky in some ways, but you can depend upon him. He'll do what he says—the devil couldn't turn him."

"He says he's pledged to Master—that chap who's come up here with a bag o' money. Do you think Master has bought him?"

"I don't think so. I suppose he could be bought, but—but I never knew of his taking money. The boys of the back country swear by the Emperor; they look up to him. Fact is, Sile Strong is a ——— — good fellow."

His oath seemed to contradict his affirmation.

"He's like a rock," said Migley. "The glad hand don't make any impression. What ye going to do with a man who won't drink or talk or swap lies with ye? I could put the poor devil out of house and home, but he don't seem to care."

"We'll turn him over to the Congressman," Socket answered. "He'll bring him into camp. If not we can get along without him."

The fact was the "Emperor of the Woods" was not like any other man they had to deal with—in history, character, and caliber.

He used his brain for a definite purpose—"to think out thoughts with," as he was wont to say, and if his heart approved of them they were right, and he could no more change them than a tree could change its bark or its foliage.

As yet the arts and allies of the flatterer had no power over him. He was content and without any false notion of his own importance.

XVIII

WHAT a fair of American citizenship was on its way to Hillsborough this morning of the Fourth of July! They that now crowded the train were like others travelling on all the main thoroughfares of the county—farmers and their wives, rustic youths and their sweethearts, mill-hands and mill-owners, teamsters, sawyers, axemen, guides, and storekeepers. They were celebrating a day's release from the tyranny of Business, and were not deeply moved by the tyranny which their grandfathers had suffered. History, save that of the present hour, did not much concern them.

They were mostly sound-hearted men. There were some who, in answer to the charge that a local statesman had got riches in the Legislature, were wont to say, "He'd be a fool if he hadn't." He was "a good fellow," anyhow, and they loved a good fellow. All the men of wealth and place and power were in his favor, and had practised upon them the subtle arts of the friend-maker. They would not have accepted "a bribe"—these good people now on their way to Hillsborough—but they could get all kinds of favors from Joe Socket and Pop Migley and Horace Dumay and other henchmen of the wealthy boss and legislator. They had yielded to the insidious briberies of friendship—warm greetings and handshakes, loans, small sinecures, compliments, pledges of undying esteem over clinking glasses, and similar condescension. They loved the forest and were sorry to see it go, but many of them got their bread-and-butter by its downfall—directly or indirectly—and then Socket, Dumay, and Migley were nothing more or less than lumber, pulp, and water-power personified. They were like the lords and barons of the olden time—less arrogant but more powerful. Indeed, Strong was right—the tyrant of the modern world is that ruthless giant that he called "Business," and his nobles are coal, iron, cotton, wool, food, power, paper, and lumber. These people on the edge of the woodland were slaves of power, paper, and lumber. With able and designing chiefs this great triumvirate gently drove the good people this way and that, and there was a little touch of irony in this journey of the latter to celebrate their freedom and independence.

One who knew them could not help feeling that the old martial spirit of the day was wholly out of harmony with their own. They were a peace-loving people, purged of their fathers' hatred, and roars of defiance found no echo in any breast—save those overheated by alcohol.

Some wore flannel shirts and the livery of a woodsman's toil; some, unduly urged, no doubt, by a wife or sister, had ventured forth in more conventional attire. They sat, as if posing for a photograph, galled, hot, gloomy, suspicious, self-suppressed, silent, their necks hooped in linen, their bodies resisting the tight embrace of new attire. In the crowd were a number to whom the reaping of the ruined hills, on either side of the train, had brought wealth and an air of proprietorship. Most of the crowd were in high spirits. The sounds of loud talk and laughter and the rankling smoke of cheap cigars filled the air above them. A lank youth under a dark, broad-brimmed hat, tilted backward, so as neither to conceal nor disarrange a rare embellishment of curls upon his brow, entered the car with another like him. His hair had the ginger-brown, ringletudinous look of spaniel fur. He began to whistle loudly and, as it would seem, prelusively. In a moment he was in full song on a ballad of the cheap theatres, with sentiment like his hair—frank, bold, oily, and outreaching.

As the train stopped at Hillsborough, Strong rose and put on his pack and left with the crowd, coon in hand. The sidewalks were crowded, and Strong took the centre of the street. There, at least, was comparative seclusion.

Silas had not travelled a block when, all unexpectedly, he became a centre of attraction. A group of whining dogs gathered about him, peering wistfully at the coon. They were shortly reinforced by a number of small boys, which grew with astonishing rapidity. Cries of curiosity and derision rose around him. Sportsmen who had visited his camp and who recognized him shouted their greeting to the "Emperor of the Woods." A "swisher" of some prominence in the little school of sportsmanship at Lost River came and dispersed the boys. The Emperor kicked at a dog and ran a little way in pursuit of him. He came back and set down the coon-cage and shook hands with his pupil. Immediately a dog, approaching from behind, sprang at the cage and tipped it over, and leaped upon it and began to claw. Strong seized and flung the dog away, and as he righted the cage its door came open and the coon escaped. Dodging his enemy, the little animal sought refuge in a thicket of people. Being pursued by dogs, and accustomed also to avoid peril by climbing, he straightway climbed, not a tree, but a tall sapling of a youth, from which the others broke away in a panic. They were opposite a little park, and the youth, not daring to lay hold of the animal, fled among the trees, pursued by Strong and two dogs and a throng of brave spirits who shouted information as to what he had best do.

For half a moment the frightened coon clung on a shoulder, his tail in the air, growling at the dogs. The latter leaped up at him, and he began to feel for more altitude. The youth, who had some knowledge of the nature of coons, ran to the nearest tree. Quickly the coon sprang upon it and scrambled far out of reach. He ran up the smooth shaft of elm and settled on a swaying bough some forty feet above ground. A crowd of people were now looking up at him.

"Coon in a cage is worth two in a tree," a man shouted.

Strong sat down beneath the tree and lighted his pipe and "thought out" another bit of wisdom for his memorandum-book. It was:

"Coon on yer shoulder worth less'n what he is anywhere." He sat in meditation—as if, indeed, he were resting in the wilderness. A cannon, not a hundred feet away, shook the windows of Hillsborough with a loud explosion for every star on the flag. A perpetual fusillade of fire-crackers seemed to suggest the stripes. Accustomed to woodland silences, the Emperor's feeling was, in a measure, like that of his coon. The "morning salute" ended presently, and then he uttered an exclamation which indicated clearly that he had been losing ground in his late struggle with Satan.

One of the guides with whom he had sat in the store at Pitkin came near. "Had yer tooth drawn?" was the question he put to the Emperor.

Strong was now looking at the empty cage. "Had my coon d-drawn," he answered.

"Where is he?"

"Up-s-stairs." Strong pointed in the direction of the coon's refuge.

Silas was now the centre of an admiring company. His former pupil had brought the president of the corporation of Hillsborough to meet him. The official invited Strong to participate in the games. The Emperor was willing to do anything to oblige, and walked with his new acquaintance to the public square.

A trial at lifting and carrying was the first number on the programme. The contestants leaned, with hands behind them, while others on a raised platform began to heap bags of oats upon their backs and shoulders. Loaded to the limit of their strength, they carried the burden as far as they were able and flung it down. One after another tried, and the last carried nine bags a distance of seven feet and was rewarded with many cheers.

It was Strong's turn now. He bent his broad back, and the loaders began to burden him. At ten they stopped, but Strong called for more. Three others were heaped upon him, and slowly he began to move away. One could see only his legs beneath his burden, which towered far above him. Ten feet beyond the farthest mark he bore the bags and let them down. The people began cheering, and many came to shake his hand and feel the sinews in his arms and shoulders. Of the trial at scale-lifting a woodsman who stood near gave this illuminating description, "When they all got through, Strong put on two hundred more an' raised his neck an' lifted, an' the bar come up like a trout after a fly." Silas Strong stood, his coat off, his trousers tucked in his boots, looking soberly at the people who cheered him. One eye was wide open, the other partly closed. There were wrinkles above his wide eye, and his faded felt hat, tilted backward and to one side, left his face uncovered. He had a new and grateful sense of being "ahead," but seemed to wonder if so much brute strength were altogether creditable.

Master was to address the people, and Strong was invited to sit behind the speaker's table with the select of the county. He accompanied the president of the corporation to the platform in the park, his pack-basket on his arm. More than a thousand men and women had gathered in front of them when the chairman introduced the young orator.

The speech delighted Silas Strong, and he summed it up in his old memorandum-book as follows:

"folks cant be no better than the air they brethe "roots of a plant are in the ground but the roots of a man are in his lungs

"whair the woods ar plenty the air is strong an folks are stout an supple like our forefathers when they licked the British them days they got a powful crop of folks sometimes fifteen in a famly the powr of the woods was in em. now folks live under a sky eight feet above their heads an take their air secont handed an drink at the bar instead of the spring an eat more than what they earn an travel on wheels an think so much of their own helth they aint got no time to think of their countrys when a man's mind is on his stummick it cant be any where else brains warnt made to digest vittles with old fashioned ways is best which Strong says is so also that a man had not oughto eat any more than what he's earnt by hard labor."

After the address Strong went home to dinner with Congressman Wilbert, the leading citizen of Hillsborough. That little town still retained the democratic spirit of old times. There one had only to be clean

and honest to be respectable, and the mighty often sat at meat with the lowly. Strong declined the invitation at first, on the plea that he had fried cakes in his pack-basket, and yielded only after some urging.

The statesman's wife received the hunter cordially and presented him to her daughter. The girl led Strong aside and began to entertain him. He had lost his easy, catlike stride, his unconscious control of bone and muscle. He looked and felt as if he were carrying himself on his own back. He seemed to be balancing his head carefully, for fear it would fall off, and had treated his hands like detached sundries in a camp-outfit by stuffing them into the side pockets of his coat. Gradually he limbered in his chair and settled down. His confidence grew, and soon he "horsed" one knee upon the other and flung his hands around it as if to bind an invisible burden resting on his lap. He carried this objective treatment of his own, person to such an extreme that he seemed even to be measuring his breath and to find little opportunity for cerebration. When the young lady addressed him he often answered with the old formulas of "I tnum!" or "T-y-ty!" They eased the responsibility of his tongue, and, without seriously committing him, expressed a fair degree of interest and surprise.

At the table Strong behaved himself with the utmost conservatism. They treated him very tenderly, and he found relief in the fact that his embarrassment seemed not to be observed. He thought it the part of politeness to refuse nearly everything that was offered and to eat in a gingerly fashion.

The Congressman had often heard of Silas and gave him many compliments, and finally asked what, in his opinion, should be done to protect the forest. Briefly Strong gave his views, and the other seemed to agree with him.

"I'll do what I can for the woods and for you, too," said the statesman. "You ought to be a warden with a good salary."

These kindly assurances flattered the "Emperor of the Woods." Insidiously the great world power was making its most potent appeal to him.

"I may ask you for a favor now and then," said Wilbert. "I'd be glad if you'd do what you could to help Migley. He needs the vote of your town."

Strong knew not what to say. "M-mind's m-made up," he stammered, after a little pause. When his mind was "made up" he had nothing further to do but obey its will. The other did not quite comprehend his meaning.

Strong in his embarrassment had put too much tabasco sauce on his meat. He blew, according to his custom in moments of distress, and took a drink of water. He looked thoughtfully at the small cylinder of glass. He tried to read its label.

"Small b-bore," he remarked, presently.

"Sh-shoots w-well," he added, after a moment of reflection.

Strong had begun to think of his coon, now clinging in a tree-top. Suddenly he had become too proud to try to sell him, but he could not bear to abandon his old pet. So while the others talked together he began to contrive against the dogs of Hillsborough. As he was about to leave, he asked Mrs. Wilbert where he could buy "one o' them l-little r-red guns," by which he meant a bottle of tabasco sauce. She immediately sent a servant to bring one, which the Emperor accepted with her compliments. His host went with him to a store where Strong invested some of his prize-money in "C'ris'mus presents"—so he called them—for Sinth and the "little fawns," filling his pack well above the brim.

Then, forthwith, Strong proceeded to the coon's refuge, in the public park, where, with the aid of a Roman-candle, as he explained to Sinth in the privacy of their cook-tent, he made the coon "l-let go all holts." The animal had been clinging high in the old elm, and, being stunned by his fall, Strong caught and held him firmly by the nape of the neck while he covered him with an armor of liquid fire from the tabasco bottle. The fur of back and neck and shoulders had now the power to inflict misery sharper than a serpent's tooth.

"D-Dick," he whispered, "Strong is 'shamed o' y-you. He c-can't 'sociate n-no more with c-coons in this v-village. But he won't let ye git t-tore up."

Strong carried his coon out of the park and let him down. In Hillsborough popular enthusiasm had turned from revelry to refreshment. The crowd, having retired to home and hostelry, had left the streets nearly deserted.

Strong's coon set out in the direction of the river, and soon a bull-dog laid hold of him. The dog gave the coon a shake, and began, as it were, to lose confidence. He dropped the hot-furred animal, shook his head, and tarried the tenth part of a second, as if to make a note of the coon's odor for future reference, and then ran with all speed to the river. He heeded not the call of his master or the jeering of a number of small boys. They were no more to him than the idle wind.

The coon proceeded on his way to the woods. Farther on three other dogs bounded into trouble, and rushed for water. The coon passed two bridges and made his way across an open field in the direction of Turner's wood.

Strong, whose hunger had not been satisfied, bought some cake and pie, and made for open country where he sat down by the road-side. Tree-tops above him were full of chattering birds, driven out of town probably by its hideous uproar.

The Emperor, having appeased his hunger, took half an hour for reflection. Before the end of it came he began for the first time in his life to suffer the penalty of idleness and high living. Indigestion, the bane of towns and cities, had taken hold of him. Before leaving he made these entries in his little book:

"July the 4

"This aint no place for Strong

"Man might as well be in Ogdensburg * as have Ogdensburg in him.

"Strong's coon snaked out of his cage contrived to git even also coon made free and independent."

His revenge was of such lasting effect that, some say, for a long time thereafter dogs in Hillsborough fled terror-stricken at the sight of a coon-skin overcoat.

XIX

MEANWHILE Socky and Sue, in Sunday costume, had gone out with their aunt for a holiday picnic in the forest. Sinth had been busy until ten o'clock preparing a sumptuous dinner of roasted wild fowl and jelly, of frosted cake and sugared berries and crab-apple tarts. They went to the moss-covered banks of a little brook over in Peppermint Valley, half a mile or so from the camp. Master's man carried their dinner and blankets, upon which they could repose without impairing the splendor of their dress. Sinth had put on her very best attire—a sacred silk gown and Paisley shawl which had come on a cheerful Christmas Day from her sister.

"Might as well show 'em to the birds an' squirrels," said she. "There ain't nobody else t' dress up for 'cept the little fawns."

The man left them, to return later for their camp accessories. Sinth played "I spy" and "Hide the penny" and other games of her childhood with Socky and Sue. She had brought some old story-papers with her, and when the little folks grew weary they sat down beside her on the blankets while she read a tale. To her all things were "so" which bore the sacred authority of print, and she read aloud in a slow, precise, and responsible manner.

It was a thunderous tale she was now reading—a tale of bloody swords and high-sounding oaths and epithets. Socky began to feel his weapon. Master had shaped a handle on a piece of lath and presented it for a sword to the little "Duke of Hillsborough." Since then it had trailed behind the boy, fastened by a string to his belt. He sat listening with a serious, thoughtful look upon his face. At the climax of the tale he raised his weapon. Presently, unable to restrain his heroic impulse, he sprang at Zeb, sword in hand, and smote him across the ribs, shouting, "Defend yourself!" Zeb retreated promptly and took refuge in a fallen tree-top, out of which he peered, his hair rising. Soon he satisfied himself that the violence of the Duke was not a serious matter. Socky ran upon him, waving his sword and crying, in a loud voice, "You're a coward, sir!" Zeb rushed through the ferns, back and forth around the boy, growling and grimacing as if to show that he could be a swashbuckler himself.

On his merry frolic he ran wide in thickets of young fir. Suddenly he began barking and failed to return. They called to him, but he only barked the louder, well out of sight beyond the little trees. Socky went to seek him, and in a moment the barking ceased, but neither dog nor boy came in sight of the others. Sinth followed with growing alarm.

Back in a mossy glade, not a hundred feet from where they had been sitting, she stopped suddenly and grew pale with surprise. There sat a beautiful maiden looking down at the boy, who lay in her arms. Sue, who had followed her aunt, now sprang forward with a cry of delight. The maiden rose, her cheeks crimson with embarrassment.

"Oh, aunt," said the boy, as he clung fondly to the hand of Edith Dunmore, "this is the beautiful lady."

"What's your name?" Sinth demanded.

"Edith Dunmore." The girl's voice had a note of sadness.

"My land! Do you go wanderin' all over the woods like a bear?" Sinth inquired.

The maiden turned away and made no answer.

"Land sakes alive! you 'ain't got no business goin' around these woods an' meetin' strange men."

"Oh, silly bird!" croaked the little crow from a bough near them.

"Mercy!" exclaimed Sinth, as she looked up at the ribboned crow. "It's enough to make the birds talk."

There were tears in the maiden's eyes, and the children glanced from her to their aunt, sadly and reprovingly.

Sinth, now full of tender feeling, put her arms around the neck of the girl in a motherly fashion. "Poor, poor child!" said she, her voice trembling. "I've laid awake nights thinkin' of you."

Something in the tone and touch of the woman brought the girl closer. Another great need of her nature was for a moment satisfied. She leaned her head upon the shoulder of Sinth, and her heart confessed its loneliness in tears and broken phrases.

"I—I followed you. I couldn't—couldn't help it," said she.

"Poor girl!" Sinth went on, as she patted the head of the maiden. "I've scolded Mr. Master. He oughter let you alone, 'less he's in love, which I wouldn't wonder if he was."

"Ah-h-h!" croaked the bird, as if to attract his mistress.

"Sakes alive!" exclaimed Sinth, looking up at the crow with moist eyes. "That bird is like a human bein'. Hush, child, you mus' come an' help us celebrate. Come on now; we'll all set down an' have our dinner."

Socky and Sue stood by the knees of the maiden looking up at her.

Gently the woman led her new acquaintance to their little camp, and bade her sit with the children. Sinth had a happy look in her face while she hurried about getting dinner ready.

"Jes' straighten the end, please—that's right," said she as Edith Dunmore put a helping hand on the snowy

table-cloth.

Sinth began to spread the dishes, and the maiden furtively embraced Socky and Sue. "My land! you do like childem—don't ye? So do I. They's jes' nothin' like 'em in this world."

"Dinner's ready," said Sinth, when all the dainties had been set forth. "Heavens an' earth! I'm so glad t' see a woman I could lay right down an' bawl."

"You have made me as happy as a young fawn," said Miss Dunmore. "I am not afraid of you or the children."

"Are you afraid of *him*?"

The maiden looked down, blushing, and almost whispered her answer. "Yes; I am afraid."

"He wouldn't hurt ye—he's jest as gentle as a lamb," said Sinth. She paused to cut the cake, and added, with a far-away look in her eyes, "Still an' all, I dunno what I'd do if he was to make love to me."

Sinth ate in silence for a moment and remarked, dreamily, "Men are awful cur'is critters when they git love in 'em."

For a little, one might have heard only the chatter of the children and the barking of Zeb. By-and-by the maiden said, "I am sure that Mr. Master is—is a good man."

"No nicer in the world," Sinth answered. "Pleasant spoke, an' he don't set around as if he wanted ye t' breathe fer him. He'll be a good provider, too."

After a few moments the children took their cake and went away to share it with Zeb and the tame crow.

"Do you—do you think he would care to see me again?" Edith Dunmore asked, blushing and looking down as she touched a wild rose on her breast.

"Course he would," Sinth answered, promptly. "Can't sleep nights, an' looks kind o' sick an' dreamy, like a man with a felon." Sinth looked into the eyes of the girl and added, soberly, "I guess *you're* in love with him fast enough."

"I do not know," said Miss Dunmore, with a sigh. "I—I know that all the light of the day is in his eyes—that I am lonely when I cannot find him."

Sinth nodded. "It's love," said she, decisively—"the real, genuwine, pure quill. Don't ye let him know it."

She sat looking down for a moment with a dreamy look in her eyes. "I know what 'tis," she went on, sadly. "Had a beau myself once. Went off t' the war." After a little pause she added, "He never come back—shot dead in battle." She began to pick up the dishes. Having stowed them in a pail, she turned and said, in a solemn manner: "He was goin' t' bring me a gold ring with a shiny purple stone in it. Not that I'd 'a' cared for that if I could have had him."

That old look of sickliness and resignation returned to the face of Sinth.

"Folks has to give fer their country," she added soon. "My father an' my gran'father an' my oldest brother an' my true love all died in the wars. I hope you'll never have to give so much."

A great, earth-quaking roar from far down the valley of Lost River sped over the hills, and shook the towers of the wilderness and broke the peace of that remote chamber in which they stood. It was Business breaking through the side of a mountain to make a trail for the iron horse.

"Blastin'!" Sinth exclaimed.

"It's the king of the world coming through the woods—so my father tells me," said Miss Dunmore.

Then, as if fearful that he might arrive that day, she rose quickly and said:

"I—must go home. I must go home."

Sinth kissed her, and the children came and bade her good-bye and stood calling and waving their hands as Edith Dunmore, with the ribboned crow, slowly went up the trail to Catamount.

XX

ON his way home at night Strong was really nearing the City of Destruction, like that pilgrim of old renown. Shall we say that Satan had filled the man with his own greatness the better to work upon him? However that may be, a new peril had beset the Emperor.

For long he had been conscious only of his faults. Now the thought of his merits had caused him to forget them. Turning homeward, the world in his view consisted of two parts—Silas Strong and other people. One regrets to say it was largely Silas Strong—the great lifter, the guide and hunter whose fame he had not until then suspected.

Master took the train with him that evening.

This old-fashioned man—Silas Strong—whose mind was, in the main, like that of his grandfather—like that, indeed, of the end of the eighteenth century—sat beside one who represented the very latest ideals of the Anglo-Saxon.

They were both descended from good pioneer ancestry, but the grandfather of one had moved to Boston, while the grandfather of the other had remained in the woods. The boulevard and the trail had led to things very different.

They had sat together only a few moments when the two Migleys entered the car. These ministers of the great king got to work at once.

"Hello!" said the elder of them, addressing Master. "I congratulate you. I told my son it was a great speech. Ask him if I didn't."

"I enjoyed your speech," said young Migley. "But there's no use talking to us about saving the wilderness. If we did as you wish, we'd have nothing to do but twirl our thumbs."

"On the contrary, you'd have a permanent business, whereas your present course will soon lead you to the end of it. I would have you cut nothing below twelve inches at the butt, and get your harvest as often as you can find it."

"'Twouldn't pay," said "Pop" Migley, with a shake of his head.

"You condemn the plan without trial," Master continued. "Anyhow, if an owner wants his value at once, let us have a law under which he can transfer his timber-land to the State on a fair appraisal."

"The State wouldn't pay us half we can make by cutting it."

"Probably not, but you'd have your time and capital for other uses. Then, too, you should think of the public good. You're rich enough."

"But not fool enough," said young Mr. Migley, in a loud voice.

The train stopped to take water, and those near were now turned to listen.

"I thought you were ambitious to be a public servant," said Master, calmly.

"But not as a professor of moral philosophy." This declaration of the young candidate was greeted with laughter.

"And, of course, not as a professor of moral turpitude," said the woods lover. "The public is not to be wholly forgotten."

"I'm for my part of the public, first, last, and always," young Migley answered.

It is notable that lawless feeling—especially after it has passed from sire to son—some day loses the shame which has covered and kept it from insufferable offence. Two or three citizens who sat near began to whisper and shake their heads. One of them spoke out loudly and indignantly; "His part of the public is mostly himself. He is trying to buy his way into the Assembly, and I hope he'll fail."

There were hot words between the Migleys and their accuser, until the lumbermen left the car.

Soon Master fell asleep. Strong took out his old memorandum-book and went over sundry events and reflections.

When Master awoke the Emperor still sat with the worn book in his hands.

"I've been asleep," said the young man. "What have you been doing?"

"Th-thinkin' out a few th-thoughts," Strong answered, as he put the book in his pocket.

The Emperor began to speak of the Congressman's courtesies in a tone of self-congratulation.

Master laughed heartily. "It was a pretty little plot," said he. "Those common fellows couldn't manage you, and they passed you on. I'll bet he asked you to help Migley."

Strong smiled and nodded.

"You haven't made me any promise, and I want you to feel free to do what you think best," said the young man.

The train pulled into Bees' Hill in the edge of the wilderness, and they left it and took quarters at the Rustic Inn.

Bees' Hill was a new lumber settlement where there were two mills, three inns, a number of stores, and a post-office. The bar-room was crowded with brawny mill-hands from across the border, in varying stages of intoxication. The inn itself was full of the reek of cheap tobacco and the sound of cheaper oaths. The most offensive in the crowd were of the new generation of back-country Americans. Their boastfulness and profanity were in full flood. They used the sacred names with a cheerful, glib familiarity, as if they were only saying "Bill" or "Joe."

The town had begun to ruin the woodsman as well as the woods.

Here were some of the sons of the pioneers—mostly "guides" and choremen of abundant leisure. Every day they were "dressed up," and sat about the inn like one who patiently tries his luck at a fishing-hole. They had discovered themselves and were like a child with its first doll. They had, as it were, torn themselves apart and put themselves together again. They had experimented with cologne, hair-oil, poker, colored neckties, hotel fare, and execrable whiskey. They were in love with pleasure and had sublime faith in luck. They spent their time looking and listening and talking and primping and dreaming of sudden wealth and kitchen-maids.

Strong and Master stood a moment looking at a noisy company of youths at the bar.

"They speak of the President by his first name, and are rather free with the Creator," said Master.

"J-jus' little mehoppers," Strong remarked, with a look of pity. In his speech a conceited fellow, who spoke too frequently of himself, was always a "mehopper."

"Large heads!" Master exclaimed, as he turned away.

"Like a b-balsam," Strong stammered. "B-big top an' little r-roots."

"And they can't stand against the wind," said Master.

Before he went to bed the Emperor made these entries in his memorandum-book:

"Strong says he had just as soon be seen with a coon as a congressman also that a fool gits so big in his own eyes he dont never dast quarrell with himself. Strong got to mehoppin. he has fit and conkered

"God never intended fer a man to see himself er else hed have set his eyes difernt."

XXI

IN the morning, a little after sunrise, Strong and Master set out across the State land stretching from the railroad to Lost River, a distance of some fourteen miles. Not an hour's walk from the station, at Bees' Hill, they passed another lumber job, where, on the land of the State, nearly a score of men were engaged felling the tall pines and hauling them to skid ways. The Emperor flung off his pack and hurried to the workers.

"Who's j-job?" he inquired.

"Migley's. We're working on a contract for the dead timber."

"Ca-call that dead?" Strong waved his hand in the direction of a number of trees, newly felled, which had been as healthy as any in the forest. "Q-quit, er I'll go to-day an' c-com-plain o' ye," he added.

"You can go to ——— if you like," said the foreman, angrily.

Quicker than the jaws of a trap Strong's hand caught the boss by the back of his neck and flung him headlong.

The dealer in hasty speech rose and took a step towards the Emperor and halted.

"B-better think it over," said Strong, coolly.

The boss turned to his men. He shouted at some eight or ten of them who had come near, "Are you going to stand there and see me treated that way."

"You fight your own battles," said one of them. "For my part, I think the Emp'ror is right."

"So do I," said another. "I've pulled the brier for you as long as I want to."

The rest of the "gang" stood still and said nothing.

"I'll go and see Migley about this," declared the foreman, who was walking hurriedly in the direction of his camp. He turned and shouted to the toilers, "You fellers can go 'histe the turkey.'"

One who had to pick up his effects and get out was told to "histe the turkey" there in the woods.

Strong and Master had a few words with the men and resumed their journey to Lost River.

As they walked on a brush whip hit the Emperor in the face. He stopped and broke it and flung it down with a word of reproof. He often did that kind of thing—as if the trees and brushes were alive and on speaking terms with him. Sometimes he would stop and compliment them for their beauty.

Soon the young man spoke.

"After all, the law is no better than they who make it," said he.

The Emperor turned as if not sure of his meaning.

"Bribery!" said Master. "Migley got a law passed which provides a fine so low for cutting State timber that he can pay it and make money."

"B-Business is k-king," said Strong, thoughtfully. He perceived how even the State itself had become a subject of the great ruler.

"And Satan is behind the throne," Master went on. "Down goes the forest and the will of the people. I tell you, Strong, the rich thief is a great peril; so many souls and bodies are mortgaged by his pay-roll and his favor. Look out for him. He can make you no better than beef or mutton."

They proceeded on their journey in silence, and, when the sun had turned westward and they sat down to drink and rest on the shore of Lost River, Strong began to write, slowly and carefully, in his old memorandum-book, some thoughts intended for his future guidance. And he wrote as follows

"July the 5

"Strong says 'Man that advises other folks to go to hell is apt to git thair first.'

"also that 'a man who loses his temper aint got nothin left but a fool.' Strong is shamed.

""Taint nuff to look a gift hoss in the mouth better turn him rong side out and see how hes lined."

Having "thought out" these thoughts and set them down, the Emperor rose and put the book in his pocket and hurried up the familiar trail, followed by his companion. A little farther on they met Socky, Sue, and Sinth.

"Merry C'ris'mus!" the Emperor shouted as he caught sight of them. He put his great hands upon their backs and drew the boy and girl close against his knees. "My leetle f-fawns!" he said, with a chuckle of delight, as he clumsily patted them. His eyes were damp with joy; his hands trembled in their eagerness to open the pack. He untied the strings and uncovered the rocking-horse and other trinkets.

"Whoa!" he shouted, as he put the little, dapple-gray, wooden horse on the smooth trail and set him rocking.

Cries of delight echoed in that green aisle of the woods. Strong put the children on the back of the wooden horse and gave a brass trumpet to Socky and buckled a girdle of silver bells around the waist of Sue. Then he put on his pack, lifted horse and children, and bore them into Lost River camp. The laughter of the young man joined that of the children.

"Silas Strong!" Sinth exclaimed, as the Emperor unloaded in front of the cook-tent.

"P-present!" he answered, promptly.

"Can't hear myself think," said she, with a suggestion of the old twang in her voice.

"N-now, t-try," said Silas Strong, as he gave her a little package.

The expression of her face changed quickly. With slow but eager hands she undid the package. Her mouth opened with surprise when she discovered a ring with a shiny, purple stone in it.

"G-gold an' amethys'!" the Emperor exclaimed, calmly and tenderly, his voice mellowed by affection.

"Gold an' amethyst," she repeated, solemnly.

"Uh-huh!" It was a low, affectionate sound of affirmation from the Emperor, made with his mouth closed.

Her lips trembled, her face changed color, her eyes filled. It was oddly pathetic that so vain a trifle should have so delighted her—homely and simple as she was. Since her girlhood' she had dreamed of a proud but impossible day that should put upon her finger a gold ring with a shiny, purple stone in it. Strong knew of her old longing. He knew that she had never had half a chance in this world of unequal burdens, and he felt for her.

"I tol' ye," said he, in a voice that trembled a little. "B-better times."

She looked down at the ring, but did not answer.

"That celebrates your engagement to the Magic Word," said Master.

She put it on her finger and gave it a glance of pride. Then she said, "Thank you, Silas," and repaired to her quarters and sat down and wept.

Her brother shouldered the axe and went to cut some wood for the stove. She could hear him singing as he walked away slowly:

"The green groves are gone from the hills, Maggie,
Where oft we have wandered an' sung,
An' gone are the cool, shady rills, Maggie,
Where you an' I were young."

XII

THE next was one of the slow-coming days that seem to be delayed by the great burden of their importance. With eager, impatient curiosity, Master had looked 'orward. Had he witnessed the first scenes of his own life comedy? If so, what would the next be?

He rose early and dressed with unusual care, and was delighted to see a sky full of warm sunlight. The children were awake, and he helped them to put on their best attire while Sinth was getting breakfast in the cook-tent. Soon, with Socky and Sue in the little wagon, he was on the trail to Catamount Pond. Strong was to come later and bring their luncheon and begin the construction of a camp.

On the way Master gathered wild flowers and adorned the children with gay colors of the forest floor. They found their canoe at the landing, and got aboard and pushed across the still water. The sky had never seemed to him so beautiful and silent. From far up the mountain he could hear the twittering of a bird—no other sound. The margin of the pond was white with lilies in full bloom. Their perfume drifted in slow currents of air. His canoe moved in harmony with the silence. He could hear the bursting of tiny bubbles beneath his bow and around his paddle.

Soon they came in sight of Birch Cove. There stood the moss-covered rock at the edge of the pond, but no maiden. Master felt a pang of disappointment. A fear grew in his heart. Would she not come again? Was it all a pleasant dream, and was there no such wonderful creature among the children of men?

He shoved his bow on the little sand beach and helped the children ashore.

In a moment they heard the voice of the crow laughing as if unable longer to control himself.

"I'm going to find her," said Socky, as he ran up the deer-trail followed by Sue.

In a moment they gave a cry of delight. Edith Dunmore had stepped from behind a thicket, and, stooping, had put her arms around the children and was kissing them. The cunning crow walked hither and thither and picked at the dead leaves and chattered like a child at play.

"Oh, it has been such a long time!" said "the beautiful lady," looking fondly into the faces of the little folk. "Where is he?"

"Over there," said Socky, pointing in the direction of the canoe. "I'll go and tell him."

"No," the maiden whispered, holding the boy closer.

"He wants to see you," said the boy,

"Me?—he would like to see me?" she asked.

"He wants you to go home with us," the boy went on, as if he were a kind of Cupid—an ambassador of love between the two. He felt her hair curiously and with a sober face.

"He has a beautiful watch an' chain," said Socky.

"An' a gol' pencil," said Sue.

"He's rich," the little Cupid urged, in a quaint tone of confidence.

"What makes you think he wants me?" the girl asked.

"He told Uncle Silas—didn't he, Sue?"

The face of Edith Dunmore was now glowing with color. She drew the children close together in front of her.

"Don't tell him—don't tell him I am here," said she, under her breath, as she trembled with excitement.

"He wouldn't hurt anybody," Sue volunteered.

The pet crow had wandered in the direction of the canoe. Catching sight of Master, he ran away cawing.

The young man started slowly up the trail. For a moment the girl hid her face behind the children. As he came near she rose and timidly gave him her hand. Quickly she turned away. His hand had been like those of the children—its touch had stirred new and slumbering depths in her.

"If—if you wish to be alone with the children," he said, "I—I will go fishing."

For a little she dared not look in his face. But since her talk with Miss Strong she was determined not to run away again for fear of him. She stood without speaking, her eyes downcast.

"You do want her—don't you, Uncle Robert?" said the youthful ambassador.

"You—you mustn't ask me to tell secrets," said the young man, as he turned away with a little laugh of embarrassment.

"Is your father at home?" he asked.

"He will return Saturday."

"If he were willing, would—would you let me come to see you?"

She hesitated, looking down at the green moss. "I—I think not," said she.

"You are right—you do not know me. But, somehow, I—I feel as if I knew you very well."

"Where do you live?"

"At Clear Lake in the summer—in New York City the rest of the year."

"I have never seen a city," said she, turning and looking up at him. "My father has told me they are full of evil men."

"There are both good and evil."

"Do you live in a palace?"

"It is a very large house, although we do not call it a palace."

"Tell me—please tell me about it."

Then he told her of his home and life and people. She listened thoughtfully. When he had finished she said, "It must be like that wonderful land where people go when they die." From far away they could hear the sound of a steam-whistle. Its echoes were dying in the near forest.

"It is the whistle," said she, looking away, her eyes wide open. "Every time I hear it I long to go. Sometimes I think it is calling me."

Neither spoke for a moment.

"It comes from a distant village where there are many people," she added. "Yesterday I climbed the mountain. Far away I could see the smoke and great white buildings."

"I go to that village to-morrow," said Master.

She dropped her violets and looked down at them.

"Would you care if you never saw me again?" he asked.

She turned away and made no answer.

In the silence that followed the young man was thinking what he should say next. She was first to speak, and her voice trembled a little.

"Could I not see the children?"

"If you would go to Lost River camp."

"I cannot," said she, with a touch of despair in her voice. "My father has told me never to go there."

The young man thought a moment. She turned suddenly and looked up at him.

"I know you are one of the good men," she declared.

"I am at least harmless," he answered, with a smile, "and—and you will make me happy if you will let me be your friend."

"Tut, *tut!*" said the little crow as he flew into the tree above her head.

"I would try to make you happier," the young man urged.

"How?" she asked.

"I could tell you about many wonderful things. You ought not to stay here in the woods," he went on. "Do you never think of the future?"

She turned with a serious look in her eyes.

He continued: "You *cannot* always live at Buckhorn. Your father is growing old."

"And he is well," said she. "My father has always taught me that Death comes only to those who think of him."

In the distance they could hear the thunder of a falling tree.

"Even the great trees have to bow before him," said the young man.

A moment of silence followed.

"Let me be your friend," he pleaded.

She thought of what her grandmother had lately said to her and looked up at him sadly and thoughtfully.

"But you—you would make me love you," said she, "and when you were like the heart in my breast—so I could not live without you—then—then you would leave me."

"Ah, but you do not know," he answered. "I love you, and, even now, you are like the heart in my breast—I cannot live without you."

He approached her as he spoke and his voice trembled with emotion. She rose and ran a short distance up the trail and stopped.

"Will you not stay a little longer?" he pleaded.

She looked back at him with a curious interest and the least touch of fear in her eyes. She moved her head slowly, negatively, as if to tell him that she would love to stay but dared not.

"May I see you here to-morrow?" he asked.

She smiled and nodded and waved her hand to him and ran away.

The crow laughed as if her haste were amusing.

Master sat awhile after she had gone. He could not now endure the thought of leaving. He had planned to go with Strong and visit a number of woodsmen at their camps, and talk to the mill-hands in a few villages on the lower river. It was a formality not to be neglected if one would receive the votes of Pitkin, Till-bury, and Tifton. But suddenly he had become a candidate for greater happiness, he felt sure, than was to be found in politics. His election thereto depended largely on the vote of one charming citizen of a remote corner of Till-bury township. Her favor had now become more important, in his view, than that of all the voters in the county. He would delay his canvass over the week's end.

So thinking, Master put off in his canoe with the children, gathering lilies until he came at last to the landing. There Sinth and the Emperor had just arrived.

"W-weasels," said Strong, with a little nod in the direction of his sister, who stood on the shore.

With him, as Master knew, the weasel had come to be a symbol of needless worry.

"About what?" Master inquired.

"L-little f-fawns."

"Keep thinkin' they're goin' to git lost or drownded," said she, giving each of the children a sugared cookie.

"Don't worry. I shall always take good care of the children," said Master.

"I know that, but I keep a-thinkin'. Sometimes I wisht there wasn't any woods. I'm kind o' sick of 'em, anyway."

Those little people with the dress, talk, and manners of the town—with a subtle power in their companionship, in their very dependence upon her, which the woman felt but was not able to understand—were surely leading her out of the woods. They had increased her work; they had annoyed her with ingenious mischief; they had harassed her with questions, but they had awakened something in her which had almost perished in years of disappointment and utter loneliness. At first they had reminded her of her dead sister, and that, in a measure, had reconciled her to their coming. Later, the touch of their hands, the call of their voices, had made their strong appeal to her. Slowly she had begun to feel a mother's fondness and responsibility and a new interest in the world.

Again sound-waves of the great whistle at Benson Falls swept wearily through the silence above them.

"Makes me kind o' homesick," said Sinth, as she listened thoughtfully. The Emperor had begun, just faintly, to entertain a feeling akin to hers.

Master helped her up the hill on her way to camp with the children. He returned shortly and gave a hand to the building of his little home on the shore of Catamount. It was to be an open shanty, leaning on the ledge, its pole roof covered with tar-paper, its floor carpeted with balsam boughs.

"Migleys have gone into c-camp at Nick Pond," said the Emperor. "Tol 'em I had t' go w-with you t'-morrer."

"I'm sorry that we have to delay our trip a little," said the young man.

Strong laughed.

"Mellered!" said he, merrily. He shook his head as he added, "You ain't g-givin' her no slack line."

After a little silence the hunter added:

"Don't t-twitch too quick."

It was a phrase gathered from his experience as a fisherman.

The young man blushed but made no answer.

"K-keep cool an' use a l-long line," Strong added.

XXIII

NEXT morning, an hour after sunrise, Master set out with the children. He promised Sinth that he would keep them near him and bring them back before noon. They shut Zeb in a cabin, and he stood on his hind feet peering out of the window and barking loudly as they went away. Master brought his blankets, rifle, books, and cooking outfit, for that day he was to take possession of the new camp. Strong had gone with the Migleys and their outfit in the trail to Nick.

It was another hot, still morning, but the eastern shore of Catamount lay deep under cool shadows when Master dropped his pack at the shanty. A deer stood knee-deep in the white border of lilies. It looked across the cove at them, walked slowly along the margin of the shaded water, and disappeared in the tamaracks. Master and the children crossed to Birch Cove, halloed, but received no answer, and sat down upon the high, mossy bank.

"Maybe she won't come?" Socky suggested.

"She will come soon," said Master.

Sue propped her little doll against a fern leaf and said: "Oh, dear! I wish she'd never go 'way."

"She's awful good"—that was the opinion of Socky.

"She wouldn't tell no falsehoods," Sue suggested.

"I wish she'd come an' live with us; don't you?" Socky queried, turning to Master. The little Cupid was searching for another arrow.

"Wouldn't dare say—you little busybody!" the young man replied. "You'd go and tell on me."

Both looked up at him soberly. Socky was first to speak. "Where'bouts does 'the beautiful lady' live?"

"Way off in the woods."

"At the home of the fairies?"

"No, but on the road to it."

"If she'd come an' live with us, she wouldn't have to fill no wood-box, would she?" Sue inquired.

"Or pick up chips," Socky put in, brushing one palm across the other with a look of dread. The children had discussed that problem in bed the night before. Their aunt had made them fill the wood-box and bring in a little basket of chips every night and morning. It went well enough for a day or two, but the task had begun to interrupt other plans.

"Oh no," said Master. "We'll be good to her."

Socky was noting every look and word—nothing escaped him. He felt grateful to his young lieutenant, and sat for a little time looking dreamily into the air. Then, with thoughtful eyes, he felt the watch-chain of the young man.

"You'd let her wear your watch—wouldn't you?"

"Gladly."

"She could look at my aunt's album," Sue suggested, as she thought of the pleasures of the camp.

Socky looked a bit doubtful.

"She mustn't git no grease on it or she'll git spoke to," Sue went on as she thought of the perils of the camp.

"Uncle Silas has put the bear's-oil away," said Socky, in a tone of regret. He thought a moment, and then added, "Ladies don't never git spoke to."

"You'd carry her on your back—wouldn't you, Uncle Robert?" inquired little Sue. Both children fixed him with their eyes.

"Oh no—that wouldn't do," said Master.

"Men don't never carry ladies on their backs," Socky wisely assured her.

"Uncle Silas carries 'em," Sue insisted.

"That's only Aunt Sinthy," said the boy, now a little in doubt of his position.

Just then they heard the crow chattering away up the dusky trail. The children rose and ran to meet "the beautiful lady," and their voices rang in the still woods, calling, "Hoo-hoo! hoo-hoo!" Master slowly followed so as to keep in sight of them. When he saw Edith Dunmore come out of a thicket suddenly and embrace them, he turned back and stood where he could just hear the sound of their voices.

She drew them close to her breast a moment, and a low strain of song sounded within her closed lips—that unconscious, irrepressible song of the mother at the cradle.

"Dear little brownies! I love you—I love you," she said, presently. Then she whispered, "Where is he?"

"Over there," the boy answered, pointing with his finger.

"Come, I'll show you," said Sue.

"Fairy queen—I dare not follow you," the girl answered. "I am afraid."

"He wants you to come and live with us—he does," the boy declared. "He'll be awful good to you—he said he would."

"Did he say that he liked me very much?" she asked.

"I wouldn't tell," said the boy, with a winsome look as he thought of Master's reproof.

"You wouldn't tell me?"

"'Cause it's a secret."

"You are like the little god I have read of!" Miss Dunmore exclaimed, drawing him closer. "Will you never stop wounding me?"

"Please come," said Sue. "You can sleep in our bed an' hear Uncle Silas sing."

"Where is your mother?"

"Dead," Sue answered, cheerfully.

"Way up in heaven," said Socky, as he pointed aloft with his finger.

"And your father?"

"Gone away," said the boy. "I give him all my money—more'n a dollar."

"And you live at Lost River camp?"

Socky nodded.

"Are they good to you?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"I wonder why he doesn't come?" said Miss Dunmore, impatiently.

"'Fraid—maybe," Sue suggested.

"Pooh! he ain't'fraid," Socky declared, as he broke away and ran down the trail. Miss Dunmore tried to call him back, but he did not hear her.

"The beautiful lady! She wants to see you," he said to Master, his eyes glowing with excitement.

The young man took the boy's hand. They proceeded up the trail in the direction whence Socky had come.

"You ain't'fraid, are you, Uncle Robert?" the boy asked, eager to clear his friend of all unjust suspicion.

"Oh no," Master answered, with a nervous laugh.

"He ain't 'fraid," the boy proclaimed as they came into the presence of Edith Dunmore. "He can kill a bear."

"Afraid only of interrupting your pleasure," said the young man as he approached her. She retreated a step or two and turned half away. The children began to gather flowers.

"I tremble when I hear you coming," said she, timidly. "You are so—" She thought a moment. "Strange," she added, with a smile. She looked up at him curiously. "So very strange to me, sir."

"You are strange to me also," he answered. "I have seen no one like you, and I confess to one great fear."

"What fear?"

"That I may not see you again," the young man answered, with a smile.

She stooped to pick a flower. Every movement of her lithe, tall figure, every glance of her eye seemed to tighten her hold upon him. He stood dumb in the spell of her beauty, until she added, sorrowfully, "I am afraid of you, sir—I cannot help it."

"I wish I were less terrible," he answered, with a sigh.

"I will not see you again."

"But—but I love you," he said, simply.

"When I am here I am afraid—when I go away I am sorry." Her voice trembled as she spoke. "I have no peace any more. I cannot enjoy books or music. I cannot stay at home. I wander—all day I wander, and the night is long—and I hear the voices of children—like those I have heard here—calling me."

There was a note of sympathy in his voice when he answered, "It is the same with me, only it is your voice that I hear."

She looked up at him, her face full of wonder.

"I think no more of the many things I have to do, but only of one," he said, with feeling.

Miss Dunmore seemed not to hear him.

"I think only of coming here," he added.

She stepped away timidly, and turned and stood straight as the young spruce, looking into his eyes.

"I, too, have no more peace," he said, restraining his impulse to go further.

"I must leave you—I must not speak to you any more," she answered.

"Stay," he pleaded. "I will be silent—I will say not a word unless you bid me speak—but let me look at you."

She stood a moment as if thinking.

"Do you hear that bird song?" she asked, looking upward.

"Yes, it has a merry sound."

"It is my answer to you," said she.

"Then I am sure you love me."

As he came nearer she retreated a little.

"I give you everything—everything but myself," said she.

"And why not yourself?"

Her voice had a plaintive note in it when she said to him, "There are those who need me more."

"I offer myself to you and to them also."

She stood with averted eyes. In a moment she said, "Tell me what are we to do when those we love die?"

"I, too, and all the children of men have that same worry," said he. "There's an old Eastern maxim, 'Love as many as you can, so that death may not make you friendless.'"

She walked away slowly. She stopped where the children sat playing and embraced them.

"Will you not say that you love me?" the young man urged.

The girl went up the gloomy trail with lagging feet as if it were steep and difficult. That clear-voiced love-call of the children halted her, and she looked back. Again the bird flung his song upon the silence. The sweet voice of the maiden rang like a bell in the still forest, as if answering the bird's message. "I love you—I love you," it said. Then she turned quickly and ran away.

XXIV

EDITH DUNMORE wandered slowly through deep thickets, and where she could just see the lighted chasm of Catamount between far tree-tops she lay down to weep and think and be alone. She was like some wounded creature of the forest who would hide, even from its own eyes, on the soft, kindly bosom of the great mother.

She had learned enough to have some understanding of that strange power which of late had broken every day into seconds. These little fragments of time had all shades of color, from joy to despair. She lay recalling those which had been full of revelation. In a strange loneliness she thought of all Robert Master had said, of far more in that wordless, wonderful assurance which had passed from his soul to hers. She knew that to be given in marriage was to leave all for a new love.

She knew better than they suspected—those few dwellers at Buckhorn—how dear, how indispensable she was to them. She knew how soon that loneliness, which had often seemed to fill the heavens above her, would bear them down. Yet she would not hesitate; she would go with him, and for this she felt a sense of shame.

She lay longer than she knew, looking up at the sky through needled crowns of pine. That passion which has all the fabled power of Fate was busy with her.

A band of crows had alighted in a tree above her head and begun cawing. Roc, who had gone to roost in a small fir, answered them. One dove into the great, dusky hall of the near woods and made it echo with his cawing. Roc rose and followed through its green roof into the open sky. The maiden called to him, but he heeded only the call of his own people, and made his choice between flying and creeping, between loneliness and joy, between the paths of men and that appointed for him in the heavens. His had been like her own decision—so she thought—he had heard the one cry which he could not resist. Lately she had neglected him. He had missed her caresses and begun to think of better company. Again and again she called, but he had gone quickly far out of hearing. She listened, waiting and looking into the sky, but he came not.

Master had taken the children home and returned to his little camp on the pond. She could hear the stroke of his axe; she could hear him singing. She fancied, also, that she could hear the children call—that little trumpet tone which had thrilled her when it rang in the woods. She rose and walked slowly towards the lighted basin below her. She could not bear to turn away from it. She would go down and look across from the edge of the thickets. She feared that she had too freely uncovered her feeling for him.

Soon she turned back, but then she seemed to be treading on her own heart. She ran towards the place where she had met him. She thought not of the children now, but only of the young man. She had heard her father say: "A man throws off his mask when he is alone. If we could see him then we should know what is in his soul." Could she look into his face while he knew not of her being near she would know if he loved her. She tried to enlarge this fancy into a motive. It failed, however, to end her self-reproaches. Soon, almost in tears, she began to whisper: "I do not care. I must see him again. I cannot go until I have seen him."

Moose-birds flew in the tops above her, scolding loudly, as if to turn her back. They annoyed her, and she stopped until they had flown away. She trembled as she drew near the familiar cove. Stealthily she made her way, halting where they had talked together. A solemn silence brooded there. She felt the moss where his feet had stood. He had held this fragrant, broken lily in his hand. She picked it up and pressed it to her lips. She slowly crossed the deep, soft mat sloping to the water's edge, and peered between sprays of tamarack. The shadows had shifted to the farther shore. A sprinkle of hot light fell upon her shoulders. The disk of the sun was cut by dead pines on the bald ridge opposite. She heeded not the warning it gave her, but only looked and listened. She could hear Master over at the landing, hidden by the point of Birch Cove. He was cutting wood for the night. Under cover of thickets, she made her way along the edge of the pond. It was a walk of more than half a mile around the coves.

By-and-by she could hear the tread of Master's feet and the crackle of his fire. She moved with the stealth of a deer. Soon she could smell the odor of frying meat and was reminded of her hunger. She passed a spring, above which a cup hung, and saw the trail leading to his camp. Possibly very soon he would be going after water. She knelt in a thicket where she could see him pass, and waited. For a long time she waited.

Suddenly she rose and peered about her. She paled with alarm. It was growing dusk; she had forgotten that the day would have an end. It was a journey to Buckhorn, and her little guide—where was he? Cautiously she retraced her steps along the shore. In a moment she began to weep silently. When she tried to hurry the rustling of the brush halted her. Had he heard it? What was that sound far up the ridge before her? She knelt and listened. It was a man coming in the distance. She could hear him whistling as he walked. Slowly he approached, passing within a few feet of her. She had often hidden that way from unexpected travellers in the forest. She waited a little and hurried on.

The thickets seemed now to hold her back as if to defeat her purpose. She got clear of them by-and-by and ran up the side of the ridge.

She peered about her, seeking the familiar trail. The dusk had thickened—her alarm had grown. She stopped a moment to make sure of her way. Again she hurried on. Soon she entered the little six-mile thoroughfare from Catamount to Buckhorn. She ran a few rods down the trail and stopped. It was growing dark; she could scarcely see the ground beneath her; she might soon lose her way in the forest. She leaned against a tree-trunk and shook with sobs, thinking of her folly and of her friends at home. Presently she ran back in the direction of Master's camp. She left the trail and went slowly down the side of the ridge. She must go and tell him that she had lost her way and ask for a lantern. She could see the flicker of his fire. She groped through the bushes to a little cove opposite, where, across water some twenty rods away, she could see his camp.

In the edge of the dark forest the girl sat gazing off at the firelight. She was weary and athirst; she was tortured with anxiety, but she could not summon courage to go. She could see the light flooding between tree columns, leaping into high tops, gilding the water-ripples. She could see shadows moving; she could hear voices. Light and shadow seemed to beckon and the voices to invite her, but she dared not go. She would boldly rise and feel her way a few paces, only to sit down again. Tales which her father had told her concerning the wickedness of men flashed out of her memory.

That light was on the edge of the unknown world—full of mystery and peril. She could not goad herself nearer.

XXV

IT was Strong who had passed Edith Dunmore as night was falling over the hollow of Catamount. He was returning from his day of toil at Nick Pond.

"Just in time," said the young man, who was eating supper at a rude table, from a pole above which two lighted lanterns hung.

The great body of the Emperor fell heavily on a camp-stool. He blew as he flung his hat off.

"Hot!" said he, and then with three or four great gulps he poured a dipper of water down his throat.

Master put a small flask on the table at which they sat.

"Opey-d-dildock?" Strong inquired, softly.

"The same," said Master. "Help yourself."

The Emperor obeyed him without a word.

"How's that?" inquired the young man.

"S-sassy," Strong answered, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

"Fall to," said Master, putting the platter of trout in front of him.

"Here's f-fishin'," said Strong, as he lifted a large trout by the tail.

"Good place to anchor. Anything new?"

"B-bear," Strong stammered, with a little shake of his head.

"Where?"

The Emperor crushed a potato' and filled' his mouth. He chewed thoughtfully before he answered, "Up t-trail."

"How far?"

Strong pointed with his fork. He stopped chewing and turned and listened for a breath. "B-bout mile." He sighed and shook his head sorrowfully.

"What's the matter?"

"F-feelin's!" Strong answered, pointing the fork towards his bosom.

"No gun?"

Strong nodded. It was a moment of moral danger. He knew that Satan would lay hold of his tongue unless it were guarded with great caution. He sat back and whistled for half a moment.

"S-safe!" he exclaimed, presently, with a sigh, as he went on eating.

"Which way was he travelling?"

"Th-this way—limpin'," said Strong.

"Limping?"

"W-wounded," Strong, added, softly, gently, as if he were still on dangerous ground.

They finished their meal in silence and drew up to the fire and filled their pipes.

He rose and lighted his pipe and returned to the table as soon as he had begun smoking. He took out his worn memorandum-book and thoughtfully wrote these words:

"July the 6

"See a bear—best way to kepe the ten commandments is to kepe yer mouth shet."

Strong resumed his chair at the camp-fire. Suddenly he raised his hand. They could hear the cracking of dead brush across the cove.

"S-suthin'," Strong whispered.

Again the sound came to their ears out of the silent forest.

"Hearn it d-dozen times," said the Emperor.

They listened a moment longer. Then Strong rose.

"B-bear!" he whispered. "Light an' rifle."

Master tiptoed to the shanty. He lighted the dark lantern—a relic of deer-stalking days—with which he had found his way to Catamount the night before. He adjusted the leathern helmet so its lantern rested 'above his forehead. He raised his rifle and opened the small box of light. A beam burst out of it and shot across the darkness and fell on a thicket. The spire of a little fir, some forty feet away, seemed to be bathed in sunlight. The beam glowed along the top of his rifle-barrel, and he stood a moment aiming to see if he could catch the sights.

Strong beckoned to him. The young man came close to the side of the hunter and suggested, "Maybe it's a deer."

"'T-'tain' no deer," Strong whispered. "S-suthin' dif'er'nt." He listened again. "It's over on th-that air cove."

He explained briefly that in his opinion the bear, being wounded, had come down for rest and water. He presented his plan. They would cross the cove in their canoe. When they were near the sound he would give the canoe a little shake, whereupon Master should carefully open the slide and throw its light along the edge of the pond. If he saw the glow of a pair of eyes he was to aim between, them and fire.

They tiptoed to the landing, lifted their canoe into water, and, without a sound louder than the rustle of their garments or the fall of a water-drop, took their places, Master in the bow and Strong in the paddle-seat

behind him. The hunter leaned forward and felt for bottom and gave her a careful shove. Then, with a little movement of his back, he tossed his weight against the cedar shell and it moved slowly into the black hollow of Catamount. The hunter sank his paddle-blade. It pulled in little, silent, whirling slashes. The canoe sheared off into thick gloom, cleaving its way with a movement soundless and indistinguishable.

For a few seconds Master felt a weird touch of the soul in him—as if, indeed, it were being stripped of its body and were parting with the senses. Then he could scarcely resist the impression that he had risen above the earth and begun a journey through the black, silent air. So, for a breath, his consciousness had seemed to stray from its centre; then, quickly, it came back. He began to know of that which, mercifully, in the common business of life, is just beyond the reach of sense. He could hear the muffled rivers of blood in his own body; he felt his heart-beat in the fibres of the slender craft beneath him, sensitive as a bell; he became strangely conscious of the great, oxlike body behind him—of moving muscles in arm and shoulder, of the filling and emptying of its lungs, of its stealthy, eager attitude.

The night life of the woods was beginning—that of beasts and birds that see and wander and devour in the darkness. From far away the faint, wild cry of one of them wavered through the woods. It was like the yell of a reveller in the midnight silence of a city.

The sky was overcast. Dimly Master could see the dying flicker of his firelight on the mist before him. A little current of air, nearly spent, crept over the pine-tops and they began to whisper. The young man thought of the big, blue, tender eyes which had looked up at him that day, so full of childish innocence and yet full of the charm and power of womanhood.

Master turned his head quickly. Near him he had heard the sound of a deep-drawn, shuddering breath, and then a low moan. He thought with pity of the poor creature now possibly breathing its last. He was eager to end its agony. He trembled, waiting for the signal to open his light. The bow brushed a lily-pad. He could feel the paddle backing with its muffled stroke. The canoe had stopped.

Again he heard a movement in the brush. It was very near; he could feel the canoe backing for more distance. Then he felt the signal. That little shake in the shell of cedar had seemed to go to his very heart. He raised his hand carefully and opened the lantern-slide. The beam fell upon tall grass and flashed between little columns of tamarack. At the end of its misty pathway he could just dimly make out the foliage. He could see nothing clearly.

Again he felt the signal. He knew that the hunter had seen the game. Now the light-beam illumined the top of his rifle-barrel.

Suddenly the trained eye of Strong had caught the gleam of eyes—then the faint outline of lips dumb with terror. He struck with his paddle and swung his bow.

The hammer fell. A little flame burst out of the rifle-muzzle, and a great roar shook the silences. A shrill cry rang in its first echo. The canoe bounded over lily-pads and flung her bow on the bank a foot above water. Master sprang ashore followed by Strong. They clambered up the bank.

"Strong, I've killed somebody," said the young man, his voice full of the distress he felt. He swept the shore with his light. It fell on the body of a young woman lying prone among the brakes. Quickly he knelt beside her and threw the light upon her face.

"My God! Come here, Strong!" he shouted, hoarsely.

His friend, alarmed by his cry, hurried to him. Master had raised the head of Miss Dunmore upon his arm and was moaning pitifully. He covered the beautiful white face with kisses.

Strong, who stood near with the lantern, had begun to stammer in an effort to express his thoughts.

"K-keep c-cool," he soon succeeded in saying.

"I switched the canoe an' ye n-never t-touched her. She's scairt—th-that's all."

Edith Dunmore had partly risen and opened her eyes. Master lifted her from the earth and held her close and kissed her. His joy overcame him so that the words he tried to utter fell half spoken from his lips. She clung to him, and their silence and their tears and the touch of their hands were full of that assurance for which both had longed.

"T-y-ty!" Strong whispered as he held the light upon them.

For a long moment the lovers stood in each other's embrace. . .

"I don't know why I came here," said she, presently, in a troubled voice.

He took her hands in his and raised them to his lips.

"I must go; I must go," she said.

"Come, we will go with you," said the young man.

He put his arm around the waist of the girl. They walked slowly up the side of the ridge, with Strong beside them, throwing light upon their path. Master heard from her how it befell that darkness had overtaken her in the basin of Catamount, and she learned from him why they had come out in their canoe.

"You will not be afraid of me any more," he said.

She stopped and raised one of his hands and held it against her cheek with a little moan of fondness. Curiously she felt his face.

"It is so dark—I cannot see you," she whispered.

"I loathe the darkness that hides your beauty from me," said the young man.

Strong turned his light upon her face. Tears glittered in the lashes of her eyes and a new peace and trustfulness were upon her countenance.

"We shall see better to-morrow," the young man said.

"My father is coming—he will be angry—he will not let me see you again—" Her voice trembled with its burden of trouble.

"Leave that to me—no one shall keep us apart," he assured her. "I will see him tomorrow and tell him all."

They walked awhile in silence. The whistle blew for the night-shift at Benson Falls. Its epic note bellowed over the plains and up and down the timbered hills of the Emperor. It seemed to warn the trees of their doom.

She thought then of the great world, and said, "I will go with you."

"And be my wife?"

"Yes. I am no longer afraid."

"We shall go soon," he answered.

A mile or so from the shore of Buckhom they could hear the voice of a woman calling in the still woods, and they answered. Soon they saw the light of a lantern approaching in the trail. For a moment Master and the maiden whispered together.

Soon the old nurse and servant of Edith Dunmore came out of the darkness trembling with fear and anxiety. Gently the girl patted the bare head of the woman as she whispered to her. In a moment all resumed their journey.

When they had come to Buckhom and could see the camp-lights, Master launched a canoe and took the girl and her servant across the pond. He left them without a word and returned to the other shore. Strong and he stood for a moment listening. Then they set out for their homes far down the trail. The Emperor was busy "thinking out thoughts."

"Mountaneous!" he muttered, "g-great an' p-powerful."

For the second time in his life he felt strongly moved to expression and seemed to be feeling for adequate words. Master put his arm around the big hunter and asked him what he meant.

"Oh-h-h! Oh-h-h!" Strong murmured, in a tone of singular tenderness. "P-purty! purty! w-wonderful purty! She's too g-good fer this w-world. I jes' f-felt like t-takin' her on my b-back an' makin' r-right across the s-swamps an' hills fer heaven."

The Emperor wiped his eyes and added:

"You're as handy with a g-gal as I am with a f-fish-rod."

Next day he noted this conclusion in his memorandum-book:

"Strong cant wait much longer. He's got to have a guide for the long trail."

XXVI

NEXT day Master went to Tillbury for his mail, a-walk of some twenty miles. He lingered for awhile near the shore of Buckhom on his way, but saw nothing of her he loved.

Two fishermen had arrived at Strong's, and the Emperor had taken them to spring holes in the lower river.

After supper that evening he built a big fire in front of the main camp, and sat down beside the fishermen with Socky and Sue in his lap.

Darkness had fallen when Dunmore strode into the firelight.

"Dwellers in the long house," he said, removing his cap, "I am glad to sit by your council fire."

"Had supper?" Strong inquired.

"No—give me a doughnut and a piece of bread and butter. I'll eat here by the fire."

He took the children in his arms while Strong went to prepare his luncheon.

"I love and fear you," said he. "You make me think of things forgotten."

Of late Socky had thought much of the general subject of grandfathers. He knew that they were highly useful members of society. He had seen them carry children on their backs and draw them in little wagons. This fact had caused him to put all able-bodied grandfathers in the high rank of ponies and billy-goats. His uncles Silas and Robert had been out of camp so much lately they had been of slight service to him. The thought that a grandfather would be more reliable, had presented itself, and he had broached the subject to little Sue. How they were acquired—whether they were bought or "ketched" or just given away to any who stood in need of them—neither had a definite notion. On this point the boy went to his aunt for counsel. She told him, laughingly, that they were "spoke for" in a sort of proposal like that of marriage. He had begun to think very favorably of Mr. Dunmore, and timidly put the question:

"Are—are you anybody's gran'pa?"

"No."

"Mebbe you'd be my gran'pa," the boy suggested, soberly. .

"Maybe," said Dunmore, with a smile.

"We could play horse together when Uncle Silas is away," was the further suggestion of Socky.

"Why not play horse with your sister?"

"She's too little—she can't draw me."

"Gran'pas don't make the best horses," Dunmore objected.

"Yes they do," Socky stoutly affirmed. "May Butler's gran'pa draws her 'round everywhere in a little cart."

"Well, that shows that old men can be good for something," said Dunmore. "Where's your wagon?"

Socky ran for the creaking treasure.

"Now get in—both of you," said the whitehaired man.

Socky and Sue mounted the wagon. Dunmore took the tongue-peg in both hands and began to draw them around the fire. Their cries of pleasure seemed to warm his heart. He quickened his pace, and was soon trotting in a wide circle while Zeb ran at his side and seemed to urge him on.

When, wearied by his exertion, he sat down to rest, the children stood close beside him and felt his face with their hands, and gave him the silent blessing of full confidence.

For Dunmore there was a kind of magic in it all. Somehow it faced him about and set him thinking of new things. That elemental appeal of the little folk had been as the sunlight breaking through clouds and falling on the darkened earth. In his lonely heart spring-time had returned.

The children climbed upon his knees, and he began a curious chant with closed eyes and trembling voice. The firelight fell upon his face while he chanted as follows:

"I hear the voices of little children ringing like silver
bells,
And the great bells answer them—they that hang
in the high towers—
The dusky, mouldering towers of the old time, of
hope and love and friendship.
They call me in the silence and have put a new
song in my mouth."

So he went on singing this rough, unmeasured song of the old time as if his heart were full and could not hold its peace. He sang of childhood and youth and of joys half forgotten.

Sinth stood waiting, with the food in her hands, before he finished.

He let the children go and began eating.

"This is good," said he, "and I feel like blessing every one of you. Sometimes I think God looks out of the eyes of the hungry."

After a moment he added: "Strong, do you remember that song I wrote for you? It gives the signs of the seasons. I believe we called it 'The Song of the Venison-Tree.'"

The Emperor looked thoughtfully at the fire and in a moment began to sing. It is a curious fact that many who stammer can follow the rut of familiar music without betraying their infirmity. His tongue moved at an easy pace in the song of

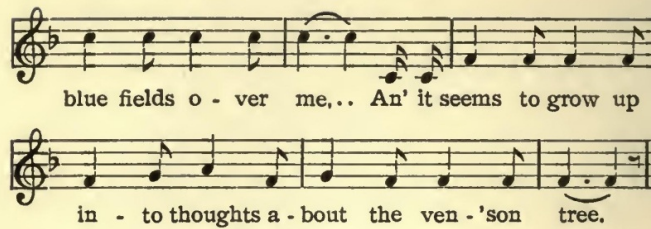
THE VENISON-TREE

THE VENISON-TREE

The bus - y cranes go back an' forth a -
plough-in' up the sky;.. The wild-goose drag comes
down the wind, an' goes a - tear - in' by;.. The
song - birds sow their mu - sic.... in the

The image shows a musical score for the song 'The Venison-Tree'. It consists of four staves of music in a single system. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a time signature of 6/8. The lyrics are written below the notes. The second staff continues the melody and lyrics. The third staff continues the melody and lyrics. The fourth staff concludes the phrase with a final note and a fermata over it. The lyrics are: 'The bus - y cranes go back an' forth a - plough-in' up the sky;.. The wild-goose drag comes down the wind, an' goes a - tear - in' by;.. The song - birds sow their mu - sic.... in the'.





“The busy cranes go back an’ forth a-ploughin’ up
the sky;
The wild-goose drag comes down the wind, an’ goes
a-tearin’ by;
The song-birds sow their music in the blue fields
over me,
An’ it seems to grow up into thoughts about the
ven’son-tree.

“The apple-blossoms scatter down—a scented summer
snow,
An’ man an’ wind an’ cloud an’ sun have all begun
to sow.
The green hopes come a-sproutin’ up somewhere in-
side o’ me,
An’ it’s time we oughter see the sprouts upon the
ven’son-tree.

“There’s velvet on the willow an’ there’s velvet on the
horn—
There’s new silk in the tree-top an’ the tassel o’ the
corn.
The woods are trimmed fer weddin’s—an’ we’re all in
Sunday cl’os,
An’ the bark upon the ven’son-tree is redder than
a rose.



“The days are still an’ smoky an’ the nights are
growin’ cold,
The maples are a-drippin’ blood, the beeches drippin’
gold;
The briers are above my head, the brakes above my
knee,
An’ the bark is gettin’ kind o’ blue upon the ven’son-
tree.”

Here the singer whistled and drummed with
his heels upon a log in imitation of the hurricane.
Then he began to sing of the coming of winter.

The white-haired man interrupted him. “’Tis
inadequate,” said he. “Let me try to express the
reaping of the north wind.” Dunmore turned
and spoke these lines, a frown suggesting the an-
gry sky upon his brow, a sound like that of the
rising storm in his heavy voice:

“What makes the big trees shake an’ groan as if they
all had sinned?
’Tis God A’mighty’s reaper with the horses o’ the
wind.
He will hitch with chains of lightning—He will urge
with thunder call—
He will try the rotten-hearted ’til they reel and break
and fall.”

“Now go on,” Dunmore requested, as he re-
sumed his chair, and Silas went on:

“The leaves are driftin’ in the ‘breeze an’ gethered
where they lie
Are the colors o’ the sunset an’ the smell o’ the
windy sky.
The squirrels whisk with loaded mouths an’ stop an’
say t’ me:
‘It’s time t’ gether in the fruit upon the ven’son-
tree.’

“‘What makes ye look so anxious, an’ what makes
ye speak so low?’
‘It’s ‘cause I’m thinkin’ o’ the place where I’m
agoin’ t’ go.
This here I’ve been a-tinkerin’, which lays acrost
my knee,
Is the axe that I’m a-usin’ fer t’ fell the ven’son-
tree.

“‘I’ve polished up the iron an’ I’ve covered it with ile;
Its bit is only half an inch, its helve is half a mile.’”

The singer pursed his lips and blew in imita-
tion of the startled deer.

“‘Whew! what’s that so pesky? Why, it kind o’
frightened me.’
‘It’s the wind a-blowin’ through the top o’ the cute
ol’ ven’son-tree.’”

As the Emperor ceased, Dunmore turned
quickly, his black eyes glowing in the firelight.
Raising his right hand above his head, he chanted
these lines:

“The wilderness shall pass away like Babylon of old,
And every tree shall go to build a thing of greater
mould;
The chopper he shall fall to earth as fell the mighty
tree,
And his timber shall be used to build a nobler man
than he.”

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And every tree shall go to build a thing of greater mould;
The chopper he shall fall to earth as fell the mighty tree,
And his timber shall be used to build a nobler man than he."

"Wh-what do ye mean by his t-timber?" Strong asked.

"His character," Dunmore answered. "Men are like trees. Some are hickory, some are oak, some are cedar,
some are only basswood. Some are strong, beautiful, generous; some are small and sickly for want of air and
sunlight; some are as selfish and quarrelsome as a thorn-tree. Every year we must draw energy out of the
great breast of nature and put on a fresh ring of wood. We must grow or die. You know what comes to the
rotten-hearted?"

"Uh-huh," said the hunter.

"There's good timber enough in you and in that little book of yours," Dunmore went on. "If it's only milled

with judgment—some of it would stand planing and polishing—there's enough, my friend, to make a mansion. Believe me, it will not be lost."

Strong looked very thoughtful. He shook his head. "Ain't nothin' b-but a woodpecker's drum," he answered. After a moment of silence he asked, "What'll become o' the country?"

"Without forests it will go the way of Egypt and Asia Minor," said the white-haired man. "They were thickly wooded in the day of their power. Now what are they? Desert wastes!" Dunmore rose and filled his lungs, and added: "As you said to me one day, 'People are no better than the air they breathe.' There's going to be nothing but cities, and slowly they will devour our substance. Indigestion, weakness, impotency, degeneration will follow.

"Strong, I'm already on the downward path. Half a day's walk has undone me. I'll get to bed and go home in the morning."

XXVII

DUNMORE was up at daybreak. He set out in the dusk and, as the sun rose, entered the hollow of Catamount. Master met him on the trail.

They greeted each other. Then said the young man, "I have something to say regarding one very dear to me and to you."

Promptly and almost aggressively the query came, "Regarding whom?"

"Your daughter."

Dunmore took a staggering step and stopped and looked sternly at Master.

"I met her by chance—" the other began to say. Dunmore interrupted him.

"I will not speak with you of my daughter," he said. He turned away, frowning, and resumed his journey.

"You are unjust to her and to me," said Master. "You have no right to imprison the girl."

The white-haired man hurried on his way and made no answer.

Master had seen a strange look come into the eyes of Dunmore. That trouble, of which he had once heard, might have gone deeper than any one knew. It might have left him a little out of balance.

Full of alarm, the young lover hastened to Lost River camp. He found his friend at the spring and told of his ill luck. Without a word Strong killed the big trout which he had taken that day he fished with the pouters.

"D-didn't tell him 'bout that t-trout," he said to Master as he wrapped the fish in ferns and flung him into his pack. "Th-thought I b-better wait an' s-see."

He asked the young man to "keep cool," and made off in the trail to Buckhorn.

Always when starting on a journey he reckoned his task and set his pace accordingly and kept it up hill and down. He was wont to take an easy, swinging stride even though he was loaded heavily. Woodsmen who followed him used to say that he could bear "weight an' misery like a bob-sled." That day he lengthened his usual stride a little and calculated to "fetch up" with Dunmore about a mile from Buckhorn. The older man had hurried, however, and was nearing the pond when Strong overtook him.

"What now?" Dunmore inquired.

"B-business," was the cheerful answer of Strong.

"It'll be part of it to paddle me across the pond. I'm tired," said the other.

They walked in silence to the shore. Strong launched a canoe and held it for the white-haired man. Without a word he pulled to the camp veranda where Dunmore's mother and daughter stood waiting. The old gentleman climbed the steps and greeted the two with great tenderness.

"Snares!" he muttered, as he touched the brow of his daughter. "The devil is setting snares for my little nun."

Edith and her grandmother went into the house. Dunmore sat down with a stem, troubled look.

"Got s-suthin' fer you," said Strong as he held up the big fish. "C'ris'mus p-present!"

Dunmore turned to the hunter, and instantly a smile seemed to brush the shadows from his wrinkled face.

"It's your t-trout," the Emperor added. "S-see there!"

He opened the jaws of the fish and showed the encysted remnant of a black gnat.

"Bring him here," Dunmore entreated, with a look of delight.

Strong mounted the steps and put the trout in his hands.

"Sit down and tell me how and where you got him," said Dunmore.

Strong told the story of his capture, and the old gentleman was transported to that familiar place in the midst of the quick-water. The Emperor had not finished his account when the other interrupted him. Dunmore told of days, forever memorable, when he had leaned over the bank and seen his flies come hurtling up the current; of moments when he had heard the splash of the big trout and felt his line hauling; of repeated struggles which had ended in defeat. The white-haired man was in his best humor. Strong saw his opportunity.

"I w-want a favor," said he.

Dunmore turned with a look of inquiry. The Emperor urged his lazy tongue.

"Master w-wants t' go t' Albany an' f-fight them air cussed ballhooters. W-wisht you'd g-go out to caucus."

A "ballhooter" was a man who rolled logs, and Strong used the word in a metaphorical sense.

"I don't vote," said Dunmore, and in half a moment he added just what the Emperor had hoped for:

"What do you know about him?"

"He's a g-gentleman—an' his f-father's a gentleman."

A moment of silence followed.

"He's the b-best chap that ever c-come to my camp," Strong added.

Dunmore came close to the Emperor and spoke in a low tone.

"Tell him," said he, "that I send apologies for my rudeness—he will understand you. Tell him to let us alone awhile. I have been foolish, but I am changing. Tell him if marriage is in his mind I cannot now bear to think of it. But I will try—"

Dunmore paused, looking down thoughtfully, his hand over his mouth.

"I will try," he repeated, in a whisper, "and, if he will let us alone, some day I may ask you to bring him here. You tell him to be wise and keep away."

Strong nodded, with full understanding of all that lay behind the message.

The old lady came out of the door and that ended their interview. She spoke to Strong with a kindly query as to his sister, and then came a great surprise for him.

"I wish she would come and visit me," said the old lady. "And I would love also to see those little children."

Dunmore took the hand of his mother and no word was spoken for half a moment.

"It's a good idea," he said, thoughtfully. Then, turning to Strong, he added: "We shall ask them to come soon. I shall want to see those children again."

In the moment of silence that followed he thought of those little people—of how they had begun to soften his heart and prepare him for what had come.

The Emperor paddled back to the landing and returned to Lost River camp.

XXVIII

MASTER accepted the counsel of his friend and kept away from Buckhom. He was, at least, relieved of the dark fears which Dunmore's angry face had imparted to him. He left camp to look after his canvass and was gone a fortnight. Strong had promised to let him know if any word came down the trail from their neighbors. The young man returned to his little shanty at Catamount and suffered there a sublime sort of loneliness. The silence of Dunmore seemed to fill the woods. Every day Master went to Birch Cove and wandered through the deer trails. Every graceful thing in the still woods reminded him of her beauty and every bird-song had the music of her voice in it. He began to think of her as the embodied spirit of the woodland. She was like Strong himself, but Strong was the great pine-tree while she was like the young, white birches.

One bright morning—it was nearly a month after Strong had returned from Buckhom—Sinth put on her best clothes and started for the camp of Dunmore alone. The Emperor had gone away with some fishermen and Master with the children.

Sinth had said nothing of her purpose. Her heart was in the cause of the young people, and she had waited long enough for developments. The injustice and the folly of Dunmore filled her with indignation. She had her own private notion of what she was going to say, if necessary, and was of no mind to "mince matters."

She stood for a few moments at the landing on Buckhom and waved her handkerchief. The old lady saw her and sent the colored manservant to fetch her across. Dunmore and his mother welcomed her at the veranda steps.

"My land! So you're Mis' Dunmore!" said Sinth, coolly, as she took a chair and glanced about her.

"Yes, and very glad to see you."

"An' you've stayed fifteen years in this camp?"

The old lady nodded. "It's a long time," said she.

"It's a wonder ye ain't all dead—livin' here on the bank of a pond like a lot o' mushrats!" Sinth went on. "Cyrus Dunmore, you ought t' be 'shamed o' yerself. Heavens an' earth! I never heard o' nothin' so unhuman."

A moment of silence followed. Dunmore smiled. He had never been talked to in that way. The droll frankness of the woman amused him.

"I mean jest what I say an' more too," Sinth went on. "You 'ain't done right, an' if you can't see it you 'ain't got common-sense. My stars! I don't care how much trouble you've had. A man that can't take his pack full o' trouble an' keep agoin' is a purty poor stick. I know what 'tis to be disapp'inted. Good gracious me! you needn't think you're the only one that ever got hurt. The Lord has took away ev'rything I loved 'cept one. He 'ain't left me nothin' but a brother an' a weak back an' lots o' work t' do, an' a pair o' hands an' feet an' a head like a turnup. He's blessed you in a thousan' ways. He's gi'n ye health an' strength an' talents an' a? gal that's more like an angel than a human bein', an' you don't do nothin' but set aroun' here an' sulk an' write portry!"

Sinth gave her dress a flirt and flung a look of unspeakable contempt at him. The face of Dunmore grew serious. Her honesty had, somehow, disarmed the man—it was like the honesty of his own conscience. There

had been a note of strange authority in her voice—like that which had come to him now and then out of the depths of his own spirit.

"Suppose every one that got a taste o' trouble was t' fly mad like a little boy an' say he wouldn't play no more," Sinth went on. "My land! we wouldn't be no better than a lot o' cats an' dogs that's all fit out an' hid under a barn! Cyrus Dunmore, you act like a little boy. You won't play yerself an' ye won't let these women play nuther. You're as selfish as a bear. You 'ain't got no right t' keep 'em here, an' if you don't know it you better go t' school somewhere. Now there's my mind right out plain an' square."

She rearranged her Paisley shawl with a little squirm of indignation.

Dunmore paced up and down for half a moment, a troubled look on his face. He stopped in front of Sinth.

"Boneka, madam," said he, extending his hand.

"I forgive," said Sinth, quickly, "providin' you'll try to do better. It's nonsense to forgive any one 'less he'll quit makin' it nec'sary."

"I acknowledge here in the presence of my mother," said Dunmore, "that all you say is quite right. I have been a fool."

Sinth rose and adjusted her shawl as if to warn them that she must go.

"Wal, I'm glad you've come t' yer senses," said she, with a glance at the man. "'Tain't none o' my business, but I couldn't hold in no longer. I've fell in love with that girl o' your'n. She's as purty as a yearling doe."

"I don't know what I would have done without her," said the old lady. "Since she was a little girl she's been eyes and hands and feet for me. I fear that I'm most to blame for her imprisonment." As she talked the indignation of Sinth wore away. Soon Dunmore helped her into his canoe and set her across the pond.

"I'll find out about the young man," said he, as they parted. "He'll hear from me."

One day soon after that Dunmore began to think of the children. In spite of himself he longed to see them again. He started for the camp at Lost River, and planned while there to have a talk with Strong and Master. At Nick Pond, on his way down, he met the two Migleys.

After his interview with them he decided that he must have more information regarding the young man before going farther.

XXIX

MORE than a month had passed since the journey of Sinth to Buck-horn; but nothing had come of it. Silas, tramping with a party of fishermen, had met Dunmore one day, but the latter had stopped only for a word of greeting.

Master had left his little camp and Strong was to send for him on the arrival of important news. The candidate had canvassed every mill village among the foot-hills of the county but had found it up-hill work. Many voters had lately become bosom friends of Joe Socket, the able postmaster at Moon Lake. Once Master had wandered into the Emperor's camp with a plan to invade the stronghold of Dunmore and release the girl if, perchance, she might desire to be free. Strong had wisely turned the young man's thought from all violence. He had taken out his old memorandum-book and pointed to this entry:

"Strong says the best thing fer a man to do in hell is kepe cool. Excitement will increase the heat."

So a foolish purpose had ended in a laugh.

Since midsummer some rain had fallen, but not enough to slake the thirst of the dry earth. Now in the third week of September the tops were ragged and the forest floor strewn with new leaves and with great rugs of sunlight. Big, hurtling flakes of red and gold fell slowly and shook out the odors of that upper, fairy world of which Edith Dunmore had told the children.

One still, sunlit day of that week the old struggle between Satan and Silas Strong reached a critical stage. Sinth had gone for a walk with Sue and Socky, and young Migley, coming down from his camp at Nick, had found the Emperor alone. He was overhauling a boat in his little workshop. .

"Well, Colonel," said the young lumberman, "we want to know why you're fighting us."

Strong had lately gone over to the scene of his quarrel on the State land and plugged some of the pines with dynamite and posted warnings. He had rightly reckoned that thereafter the thieves would not find it easy to hire men for that job.

"You're f-fightin' me," said Strong, as he continued his work.

"How's that?"

"C-cause ye ain't honest."

"Look here, Colonel, you'd better fight for us." The young man spoke with a show of feeling. "We'd like to be friendly with you."

Strong went on with his work, but made no answer.

"We're only taking old trees that are dead or dying over there on the State land. Some of 'em are stag-headed—full of 'widow-makers,'" said Thomas Migley.

It should be explained that a big, dead branch was called a "widow-maker" by the woods folk.

"We shall obey the law and pay a fine for every stump," the young man continued. "That's square."

"N-no," said the Emperor, firmly. "That l-law was intended to p-protect the forest."

"You want us to be too ——— honest to live," said young Migley, with an oath.

"N-no. I'll t-tell ye what's the matter with y-you," said Strong. "Y-you 'ain't got no r-res-pec' fer God, country, man, er f-fish."

"You must agree to stand for us against all comers or get out of here to-morrow," the young man added.

"Th-that's quick," said Strong, as he laid down his draw-shave and looked at Thomas Migley.

"You can do as you like," said the latter. "We're willing to let you stay here as long as you want to."

Strong saw clearly that the words were a bid for his manhood. He weighed it carefully—this thing they were seeking to purchase—he thought of his sister and the children, of his talk with Master on the journey from Bees' Hill. The skin upon his forehead was now gathered into long, deep furrows. His body trembled a little as he rose and slowly crossed the floor. There was a kind of gentleness in his hand as he touched the shoulder of the young man. He spoke almost tenderly one would have thought who heard him stammer out the one word, "Run." Suddenly his big hand shut like the jaws of a bear on Migley's arm and then let go.

The young man hesitated and was rudely flung through the open door. He scrambled to his feet and made for the trail in frantic haste.

"R-run!" the Emperor shouted, in hot pursuit of young Thomas Migley, whose feet flew with ridiculous animation.

Strong stopped at the edge of the clearing. He leaned against a tree-trunk and shook his head and stammered half an oath. Soon he hurried into one of the cabins and sat down. He looked about him—at the fireplace and the mantel, at the straight, smooth timbers of young spruce, at the floor of wooden blocks, patiently fitted together, at the rustic chairs and tables, at the sheathing of riven cedar. He thought of all that these things had cost him and for a moment his eyes filled.

He went to the cook-tent and found a map and spread it on the table. He could go over on the State land, pitch a couple of tents and build a shanty with a paper roof and siding, and make out for the rest of the summer. There would be two rivers and some rather wet land to cross. For a few moments he looked thoughtfully at the map. Soon he took out his worn memorandum-book and wrote as follows:

"Sep the 25. Strong has a poor set of feel in's in him Satans ahed but Strong will flore him."

He took his axe and saw and went to a big birch-tree which he had felled in the edge of the clearing a few days before. He cut a twelve-foot log out of the trunk and began to hollow it. He stuck his axe when he heard Sinth and the children coming. He lifted Socky and Sue in his arms and carried them into camp.

"G-goin' t' m-move," he said to Sinth as he put them down.

"Move!" his sister exclaimed. "They're going to put us out?"

Gently, fearfully, he whispered, "Ay-uh—"

Sinth turned and hurried into the cook-tent. It was curious that she, who had raised her voice against the camp whenever a new plan had been proposed, who had seen nothing but folly, one would think, in its erection or their life in it, should now lean her head upon the table and sob as if her dearest possession had been taken away. The Emperor followed and sat down at the table, his faded crown of felt hanging over one ear—a dejected and sorrowful creature.

"D-don't," he said, tenderly.

The children stood with open mouths peering in at the door. Sinth's emotion slowly subsided.

"You've worked so, Silas," Sinth moaned, as she sat wiping her eyes. "You've had to carry ev'rything in here on your back."

After all, it had been a tender thought of him which had inspired all her scolding and her weeping. He had always known the truth, but he alone of all the many who had falsely judged her had known it. Strong sat looking down soberly in the silence that followed. His voice trembled a little when he spoke.

"G-got 'nother house," said he, calmly. His voice sank to a whisper as he added, "Couldn't b-bear t' see it t-tore down."

Failing to understand, she looked up at him.

"Myself," he added, as he rose and smote his chest with his heavy right hand. He explained in a moment—"M-Migley wanted t' b-buy me."

He put his hand on his sister's head and said, "B-better times." After a little silence he added, "You s-see."

He left her sitting with her head leaning on her hand in deep and sorrowful meditation. He had built a fire in the stove and got their supper well under way before she joined him.

While Sinth was making her tearful protest, the children sat on a log outside the door and were much depressed.

"Somebody's gone and done something to her album," Sue whispered. The album was, in her view, the storm-centre of the camp.

After Strong had gone to work getting supper ready the two came stealthily to the knees of their aunt.

"Aunt Sinthy," Socky whispered.

"What?" she asked, turning and beginning to smooth his hair with her hand.

"I'm going to buy you a new album." He spoke in a low, tentative, troubled tone. The boy's resources would seem to be equal to every need.

Sinth shook with silent laughter. In a moment she kissed the boy and girl and drew them to her breast with a little moan of fondness. Then she rose and went to help her brother.

A little before sundown they heard the report of a rifle which had been fired within a mile of camp. Strong stood listening and could hear distant voices. He walked down the trail and returned in half an hour.

"It's B-Business," he said to Sinth. "His army is c-comin'."

XXX

STRONG was chopping and hewing on his birch log until late bedtime. He was like Noah getting ready for the destruction of the world. Having finished, he took his lantern off a branch beside him and surveyed a singular device. He called it a boat-jumper, and, inspired by a thought of the children, whispered to himself, "Uncle S-Silas is improvin'." It was a mere shell about two inches thick, flat on the bottom and sheared on one end, canoe-fashion. It would serve as a jumper—a rough, sledlike conveyance—on the ground and as a boat on the rivers; it would carry Sinth and the children, with tents, blankets, provisions, and bedding enough to last until he could return for more.

He hurried to camp and helped his sister with the packing. When a dozen great bundles lay on the floor, ready for removal, Sinth went to bed. But the tireless Emperor had more work to do. He made two seats, with back-rests upon each, for the boat-jumper and fastened a whiffle-tree to the bow end of the same. On its stern he put two handles—like those of a plough—so that he might lay hold of them and steady the jumper in rough places.

Next morning a little before sunrise he made off on the trail to Pitkin.

At the general store and post-office in that hamlet he received a letter. It was from the forest, fish, and game commissioner, who thus addressed him:

"Dear Mr. Strong,—I hear that timber thieves and deer-slayers are operating on State land near Rainbow Lake. I learn also that you are about to leave your camp at Lost River. If that is true I wish you would accept an appointment as deputy for that district and go at once and do what you can to protect the valley of Rainbow. The salary would be five hundred dollars. A letter just received informs me that 'Red' Macdonald is there with dogs. If you could deliver him into custody you would be a public benefactor, but I warn you that he is a desperate man. Please let me hear from you immediately."

This gave Strong a new and grateful sense of being "ahead." Before leaving the post-office he penned his acceptance of the offer. Then he proceeded to the home of Annette and found her gone for the day. He sat down at the dinner-table and wrote these lines with all the deliberation their significance merited:

"Deer lady,—In Ogdensburg an' anxious to move. Patrick can snake me out. Meet me at Benson Falls Friday if possibul an' youll heare some talkin' done by yours hopin fer better times,

"S. Strong.

"P.S. Strong's ahead."

Meanwhile Sinth was in trouble. Young Mr. Migley had come, with a gang of sawyers and axemen, to dethrone the Emperor and take possession. He had his customary get-off-the-earth air about him—an air that often accompanies the title to vast acreage. He found only Sinth and the children and summarily ordered them to leave. Then she gave him what she called "a piece of her mind." It was a good-sized piece, all truth and just measure.

While the furniture was being thrown out-of-doors she got ready to go. In the heart of Sinth indignation had supplanted sorrow. It was in her countenance and the vigor of her foot-fall and in the way that she filled and closed and handled her satchel. Some of the brawny woodsmen stood looking as she and the children came out-of-doors—a solemn-faced little company. Something from the hearts of the men made Sinth touch her eyes with her handkerchief. Then a curious thing happened. Some of the lumber-jacks dropped their saws and axes.

Those people could forgive much in "a good fellow"—they could forgive almost any infamy, it would seem, but the stony heart. Let one do a mean thing and rouse their quick sympathies a little and their oaths were as a deadly, fateful curse upon him. They never forgot the tear of sympathy or the wrath of resentment.

The sorrow of the weak now seemed to touch the hearts of the strong. The children, seeing the tears of their aunt as she turned for a last look at her home, followed slowly with an air of great dejection. Then a strange pathos rose out of their littleness, and an ancient law seemed to be writ upon the faces of the men: "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in Me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

A murmur of disapproval arose, and suddenly one voice blared a sacred name coupled and qualified with curious adjectives—jumped up, livin', sufferin', eternal—as if it would be most explicit.

"Boys," the voice added, "I can't see no woman ner no childern treated that way."

A man took the satchel out of Sinth's hand.

"You stay here," said he. "We won't stan' fer this."

Another burly woodsman had lifted little Sue in his arms.

"I'm goin' down the trail to wait fer Silas," said Sinth, brokenly.

She put out her hand to take the satchel.

"We'll carry it an' the childern too," said the woodsman, whose voice, which had been harsh and profane, now had a touch of gentleness. They made their way down the trail in silence.

"He better try t' be a statesman," said one of the escort. "He ain't fit t' be a bullcook."

They passed a second gang with horses and a big jumper bearing supplies for the camp. The Emperor had surrendered; the green hills were taken. Half a mile or so from the camp Sinth halted.

"I'll wait here, thank ye," said she.

With offers of assistance the men left them and returned.

All through the night Sinth had been thinking of their new trouble and was in a way prepared for the worst. But now, as she was leaving forever the old, familiar trees and the still water she sat down for awhile and covered her face. Already the saws had begun their work. She could hear them gnawing and hissing and the shouts and axes of the woodsmen. Socky and Sue came near their aunt and stood looking at her, their cheeks tear-stained, their sympathy now and then shaking them with half-suppressed sobs. The reason for their departure and for the coming of the woodsmen they were not able to understand. Zeb lay lolling on his stomach, bored, but, like his master, hoping for better times.

"Aunt Sinthy—you 'fraid?" Sue ventured to ask, and her doll hung limp from her right hand.

Socky felt his sword and looked up into the face of his aunt.

"Where we goin'?" he asked, with another silent sob.

"Pon my soul, I dunno," Sinth answered, wearily.

"Don't you be 'fraid," he said, waving his sword manfully.

Sinth took her knitting out of the satchel and sat down comfortably on a bed of leaves. Zeb began to growl and run around them in a circle, like the cheerful jester that he was. It seemed as if he were trying to remind them that, after all, the situation was not hopeless. He continued his gyrations until Socky and Sue joined him. Soon the big trees began falling and their thunder and the hoots of the "briermen" echoed far. The children came to their aunt.

"What's that?" they asked, with awe in their faces.

"The trees," Sinth answered, solemnly. "They're a-mowin' of 'em down."

In a moment, thinking of the young man who had heartlessly put her out, she added:

"I guess he'll find he's hurt himself more'n he has us."

"Who?" Socky asked.

"That mehopper."

The children turned with a look of interest.

"What's a mehopper?" Socky asked.

Sinth sat looking thoughtfully at her knitting.

"He steals folks' albums," said Sue, confidently, "an' he can run like a deer."

"Ain't a bit like a deer," Sinth responded. "He can't go nowhere but down-hill—that's why ye always find him in low places—an' he's so 'fraid folks won't see him that he swears an' talks about himself."

Sue looked at her aunt as if she thought her a woman of wonderful parts.

"He better look out for the Sundayman," Sinth continued.

"Who's the Sundayman?" they both asked.

"He's a wonderful hunter an' he ketches all the wicked folks," Sinth answered. "An' them that swears he makes 'em into mehoppers, an' them that does cruel things he turns their hearts into stones, an' them that steals he takes away everything they have, an' if anybody lies he makes a fool of 'em so they b'lieve their own stories, an' he takes an' marks the face of every one he ketches so if ye look sharp ye can always tell 'em."

In a moment they heard some one coming down the trail. It was young Mr. Migley who suddenly had found himself in the midst of a small rebellion. Half his men had threatened to "histe the turkey" unless he brought back the "woman and the kids." It was not their threat of quitting that worried him, however—it was a consequence more remote and decisive.

"Miss Strong, I was hot under the collar," he began. "I didn't mean to put you out. I want you to come back and stay as long as you like. We can spare you one of the cabins."

"No, sir," Sinth answered, curtly.

"All right," said he, "you're the doctor."

In a moment she asked, "What you goin' t' do with them sick folks that's camped over at Robin?"

"I won't hurry 'em," said he; "but they'll have t' git out before long."

"It's a shame," Sinth answered. "You oughto hev consumption an' see how you'd like it."

"There are plenty of hotels east of here."

"But they're poor folks an' can't afford to pay board, even if they'd let 'em in, which they wouldn't."

"I can't help it—we've got to get these logs down to the river before snow flies—it's business."

With him that brief assertion was the end of many disputes. They were few that even dared question the authority of the old tyrant whom Silas had called Business.

The young man began to walk away. Sinth sent a parting shot after him.

"It's business," said she, "to think o' nobody but yerself."

It was long past mid-day when Silas came with the ox. He stood listening, his hands upon his hips, while Sinth related the story of their leaving camp and of Migley's effort to bring them back.

"S-Sawed himself off," said Strong, with a smile. "You s-see." The dethroned Emperor turned, suddenly, and drew a line across the trail with the butt of his ox-whip.

"All t-toe the s-scratch," he demanded, soberly.

He led Sinth and Sue forward and stopped them with their toes on the line. He motioned to Socky, who took his place by the others. Zeb sat in front of them. The boy seemed to wonder what was coming. His fingers were closed but his thumbs stood up straight according to their habit when the boy's heart was troubled.

"Th-thumbs down," Strong commanded.

He surveyed his forces with an odd look of solemnity and playfulness.

"S. Strong has been app'inted W-warden o' Rainbow V-valley," said the exiled Emperor. "F-forward march."

His command was followed by a brief appeal to the ox.

"Purty good luck!" Sinth exclaimed, with a look of satisfaction. "But they's a lot o' pirates over there—got t' look out fer 'em."

"They'll m-move," said Strong, as if he had no worry about that.

Slowly they went up the trail and soon reentered Lost River camp. The young lumberman saw them coming and went off into the woods.

Some men, who had been at work near, gathered about the Emperor and offered to stand by him as long as he wished to remain. Strong shook his head. "W-we got t' g-go," he stammered. He looked sadly at the fallen tree-trunks—at the door-yard, now full of brush. "D-don't never w-want t' s-see this place ag'in," he muttered.

He brought the boat-jumper into camp and loaded it. Then with Sinth on the bow seat and Socky and Sue behind her they set out, the men cheering as they moved away.

A clear space at the stern afforded room for the Emperor if he should wish to get aboard in crossing water and an axe and paddle were stored on either side of it.

Strong had tacked a notice on one of the trees, and it read as follows:

S STRONG

HAS MOVED TO RAINBOW LAKE

The camp was now in the shadow of Long Ridge. Sinth and the Emperor were silent. Bird-songs that rang in the deep, shaded hall of the woods had a note of farewell in them. The children were laughing and chattering as ox and boat-jumper entered the unbroken forest. Zeb stood in front of the children, his forefeet on the gunwale, and seemed to complain of their progress.

It was, in a way, historic, that journey of the boat-jumper, that parting of the ancient wood and the last of its children. Their expedition carried about all that was left of the spirit of the pioneer—his ingenuity, his dauntless courage, his undying hope of "better times." The hollow log, with its heart hewn out of it, groaning on its way to the sown land, suggested the fate of the forest. Now, soon, the Lost River country would have roads instead of trails, and its emperor would be a common millionaire. The jumper and the woodsman had had their day.

Slowly they pursued their way, skirting thickets and going around fallen trees, and stopping often to clear a passage. Strong followed, gripping the handles that rose well above the stern of his odd craft, and so he served as a rudder and support. An ox is able to go in soft footing, and they struck boldly across a broad swamp nearly three miles down the river shore.

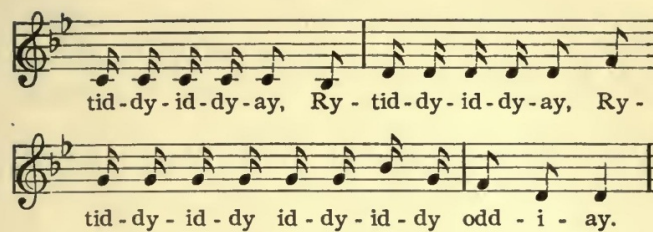
It was near sundown when they camped for the night far down the outlet of Catamount Pond. Strong put up a small tent and bottomed it with boughs while Sinth was getting supper ready. Their work done, they sat before the camp-fire and Sinth told tales of the wilderness. Sile sang again "The Story of the Mellered Bear," and also an odd bit of nonsense which was, in part, a relic of old times. The first line of each stanza came out slowly and solemnly while the second ran as fast as he could move his tongue. In his old memorandum-book he referred to it as "The Snaik Song," and it ran as follows:

THE SNAKE SONG

Meno In a sartin' vil - lage there did dwell... *piu* A

ver - y fine gal an' I knew her well, Ry - .





"In a sartin village there did dwell
A very fine gal an' I knew her well,

Chorus

Ry-tiddy-iddy-ay, ry-tiddy-iddy-ay,
Ry-tiddy-iddy-iddy-iddy-odd-i-ay.

And one fine morning she did go
Down in the meadow for to mow.

Chorus

And the very first thing that she did feel
Was a big black snake a-bitin' of her heel.

Chorus

An' her heel wasn't bigger than a robin's egg
An' the first she knew he swallowed up her leg.

Chorus

An' when he was tryin' fer to carry her off
She wiggled her toes 'til she made him cough.

Chorus

An' that did end the serpent's fun,
For he coughed her up an' away she run.

Chorus"



Strong whittled as he sang, and soon presented the girl with a straight rod of yellow osier upon which he had carved the brief legend, "Su—her snaik stick." If she held to that, he explained, no snake would be able to swallow her.

"I want one, too," said Socky.

"You m-mean a bear stick," Strong answered. "Girls have t' l-look out fer s-snakes an' boys for b-bears."

They were all asleep on their bough beds before eight o'clock.

At that hour which Strong was wont to designate as "jes' daylight" he was on his feet again. Whether early or late to bed he was always awake before dawn. Some invisible watcher seemed to warn him of the coming of the light. He held to one of the ancient habits of the race, for he began every day by kneeling to start a fire. He bent his head low and brought his lips near it as if the flame were a sacred thing and he its worshipper.

For a time that morning he was careful not to disturb the others. But having attended to Patrick, he hurried to call the children. He hurried for fear that Sinth would forestall him. He loved to wake and wait upon them and hear their chatter. Their confidence in his power over all perils had become a sweet and sacred sort of flattery in the view of Silas. He had, too, a curious delight in seeing and feeling their little bodies while he helped them to dress. Somehow it had all made him think less of the pleasures of the wild country and more of Lady Ann. That "someday" of his laconic pledge was drawing nearer and its light was in every hour of his life. The children were leading him out of the brotherhood of the forest into that of men.

He lifted the sleeping boy in his arms and gently woke him. Zeb had followed and put his cold nose on the ear of Sue. Soon the children were up and the Emperor kneeling before them, while his great hands awkwardly held a "teenty" pair of stockings.

Sinth awoke and jealousy remarked, "Huh! I should think you was plumb crazy 'bout them air childern."

Strong smiled and left them to her and began to prepare breakfast.

Soon all were on their way again, heading for the lower valley of Lost River. They crossed two ridges and entered a wide swamp. There were many delays, for they encountered fallen trees which had to be cleared away with axe and lever, while here and there Strong gave the ox a footing of corduroy. It was a warm day and the children fell asleep after an hour or so. Sinth, who had been tossed about until speech wearied her tongue and put it in some peril, sank into sighful resignation.

The jumper had stopped; Strong had gone ahead to look out his way. Reaching higher ground he saw man tracks and followed them to an old trail. Soon a piece of white paper pinned to a tree-trunk caught his eye. He stopped and read this warning:

"To Sile Strong

"You haint goin t' find the Rainbow country helthy place. If you go thare youll git hung up by the heels. I mean business."

The Emperor took off his faded crown. He scratched his head thoughtfully. That message was probably

inspired by some lawless man who had felt the authority of the woods lover and who wanted no more of it. He had heard that Migley had four camps on the Middle Branch, between there and Rainbow, and that they were full of "cutthroats." That was a word that stood for deer-slayers and all dare-devil men.

Whoever had put this threat in the way of the Emperor had probably heard of his appointment and was trying to scare him away. The offender might have been sent by Migley himself.

"W-We'll s-see," Strong muttered, with a stern look, as he returned to the boat-jumper. Many had threatened him, one time or another, but he never worried over that kind of thing. To-day, as on many occasions, he kept his tongue sinless by keeping his mouth shut, and, touching his discovery on the trail, said only the two words, "W-we'll see," and said them to himself. He didn't believe in spreading trouble.

Slowly they made their way to a bend in Lost River far from the old camp. As they halted to seek entrance to the water channel Strong came forward and poked the children playfully until they opened their eyes. Then he put a hand on either shoulder of Sinth and gave her a little shake.

"How ye f-feelin'?" he asked.

"Redic'lous," she answered, "settin' here 'n a holler tree jest as if we was a fam'ly o' raccoons." It was the most impatient remark she had made in many days.

"B-Better times!" said the Emperor. He smiled and sat down to rest on the side of the boat-jumper. He turned to the boy and asked, hopefully, "How 'bout yer Uncle S-Silas?"

It had been rough, adventurous riding, but full of delight for the children. That morning their uncle had loomed into heroic and satisfactory proportions. Socky had long been thinking of the little silver compass Master had given him one day and which hung on a ribbon tied about his neck. He hoped they might be going where there would be other boys and girls. He had been considering how to give to his uncle's person a touch of grandeur and impressiveness fitting the story of the "mellered bear" and his power and skill as a hunter. Soberly he removed the ribbon from his neck and presented the shiny trinket to his uncle.

"Put that on yer neck," said he, proudly.

"Wh-what?" his uncle stammered.

"C'ris'mus present," said the boy, with a serious look.

The Emperor took off his faded crown. He put the ribbon over his head so that the compass dangled on his breast.

"There," said Socky, "that looks a little better."

In a moment, with that prudence which always kept the last bridge between himself and happiness, he added, "You can let me have it nights."

Every night since it fell to his possession he had gone forth into the land of dreams with that compass held firmly in his right hand.

"Here's twenty-five cents," said Sue, holding out the sacred coin which her nurse had given her, and which, on her way into the forest, had been set aside for a sacrifice to the great man of her dreams. At last the two had accepted him, without reserve, as worthy of all honor. They could still wish for more in the way of personal grandeur, supplied in part by the glittering compass, but something in him had satisfied their hearts if not their eyes. He was again their sublime, their wonderful Emperor.

"You better keep it; you're going to buy an album for Aunt Sinthy," the boy warned her.

Her little hand closed half-way on the silver; it wavered and fell in her lap. She seemed to weigh the coin between her thumb and finger. She looked from the man to the woman. Socky saw her dilemma and felt for her.

"I'll get her an album myself," he proposed. In that world of magic where he lived nothing could discourage his faith and generosity. Their uncle lifted them in his arms and held them against his breast without speaking.

"You've squeezed them childern till they're black in the face," said Sinth, who now stood near him with a look of impatience.

She took them out of his arms and held them closer, if possible, than he had done.

At the edge of the stream he shouted, "All 'board!" The others took their seats, and the Emperor sat in the stern with his paddle. Socky faced him so that he could see the compass. He often asked, proudly, "Which way we goin'?" and Strong would look at the compass and promptly return the information, "Sou' by east." The river ran shallow for more than a mile in the direction of their travel. Patrick hauled them slowly down the edge of the current. Strong steadied and steered with his paddle as they crept along, bumping over stones and grinding over gravel until, at a sloping, sandy beach on the farther shore, they mounted the bank and headed across Huckleberry Plain.

Noon-time had passed when they left the hot plain. They threaded a narrow fringe of tamaracks and entered thick woods again. At a noisy little stream near by they stopped for dinner. Strong caught some trout and built a fire and fried them, and made coffee. Sinth spread the dishes and brought sandwiches and cheese and a big, frosted cake and a can of preserved berries from the boat-jumper. They sat down to the reward of honest hunger where the pure, cool air and the sylvan scene and the sound of flowing water were more than meat to them, if that were possible.

Having eaten, they rose and pressed on with a happy sense of refreshment. A thought of it was to brighten many a less cheerful hour. Half a mile from their camping-place they found a smooth trail which led across level country to the Middle Branch. Socky and Sue were again fast asleep on the bottom of the boat-jumper long before they reached the river. When they halted near its bank a broad stream of deep, slow water lay before them. Strong unhitched the ox and led him along shore until he came to rapids where, half a mile below, the river took its long, rocky slope to lower country. There he tethered his ox and returned to fetch the others. He launched his boat-jumper and got aboard and paddled carefully down-stream.

Having doubled a point, they came in sight of a slim boy who stood by the water's edge aiming an ancient, long-barrelled gun. His head, which rested against the breech, seemed, as the Emperor reported, "'bout the

size of a pippin."

"E-look out!" Strong shouted, as the boy lowered his gun to regard the travellers with an expression of deep concern.

"See any mushrats?" the boy asked, eagerly.

"N-no; who're you?"

"Jo Henyon."

Strong had heard of old Henyon, who was known familiarly as "Mushrat Bill." For years Bill had haunted the Middle Branch.

"Wh-where d' ye live?"

"Yender," said the boy, pointing downstream as he ran ahead of them.

Presently they came to an old cabin near the water's edge with a small clearing around it. A woman wearing a short skirt and Shaker bonnet stood on one leg looking down at them. Children were rushing out of the cabin door.

"My land! where's her other leg?" Sinth mused.

The Emperor looked thoughtfully at the strange woman.

"F-folks are like cranes over in this c-country," Strong answered. "Always rest on one leg."

He drove his bow on a sloping, sandy beach. The woman hopped into the cabin door. Her many children hurried to the landing. A man with head and feet bare followed them. An old undershirt, one suspender, and a tattered pair of overalls partly covered his body. He walked slowly towards the shore. He was the famous trapper of the Middle Branch.

"F-fur to Rainbow T-Trail?" Strong inquired of him.

The latter put his hand to his ear and said, "What?" Strong repeated his query in a much louder voice.

"Fur ain't very thick," the stranger answered.

Strong perceived that the man was very deaf and also that he was devoted to one idea.

"B-big fam'ly," he shouted, as he began to push off.

The trapper, with his hand to his ear and still looking a bit doubtful, answered, "Ain't runnin' very big this year."

Thereafter the word "mushrats," in the vocabulary of Strong, stood for unworthy devotion to a single purpose.

Down-stream a little the ox took his place again at the bow of the boat-jumper. They struck off into thick woods reaching far and wide on the acres of Uncle Sam. A mile or so inland they came to Rainbow Trail, and thereafter followed it. Timber thieves had been cutting big pines and spruces and had left a slash on either side of the trail.

The travellers dipped down across the edge of a wide valley, and after climbing again were in the midst of burned ground on the top of a high ridge. Below them they could see Rainbow Lake and the undulating canopy of a great, two-storied forest reaching to hazy distances. Mighty towers of spruce and pine and hemlock rose into the sunlit, upper heavens.

It was growing dusk when, below them and well off the trail, they saw a column of smoke rising. They halted, and Strong stood gazing. The smoke grew in volume and he made off down the side of the ridge. He came in sight of the fire and stopped. Some one had fled through thickets of young spruce and Zeb was pursuing him.

Strong looked off in the gloomy forest and shouted a fierce oath at its invisible enemy.

Near him flames were leaping above a fallen top and running in tiny jets over dry duff like the waste of a fountain. Swiftly Strong cut branches of green birch and began to lay about him. He stopped the flames and then dug with his hatchet until he struck sand. He scooped it into his hat and soon smothered the cinders.

His face had a troubled expression as he returned to the boat-jumper.

"Who you been yellin' at?" Sinth asked.

"C-careless cuss," he answered, evasively.

Socky wore a look of indignation. He glibly repeated the oath which he had heard his uncle use.

"Hush! The Sundayman'll ketch you," Sinth answered, severely.

Strong gave a whistle of surprise.

"Uncle Silas ain't 'fraid o' no Sundayman," Socky guessed.

"Y-yes I be—could kill me with a s-snap of his finger," Strong declared.

Socky trembled as he thought of that one inhabitant of the earth who was greater than his Uncle Silas and said no more.

"S-see here, boy," said Strong, as he put his fingers under Socky's chin and raised his head' a little, "I won't never swear ag'in if y-you won't."

He held out his great hand and Socky took it.

"Y-you agree?"

Socky nodded with a serious look, and so it happened that Silas became the master of his own tongue. He had "boiled over" for the last time—so he thought. The old habit which had grown out of a thousand trials and difficulties must give way, and henceforth he would be emperor of his own spirit.

As to the fire and the man who had fled before him, Strong was perplexed, but kept his own counsel. He knew that the law permitted lumbermen to enter burned lands on the State preserve and take all timber which fire had damaged. A fire which might only have scorched the trunks while it devoured the crowns above them gave a rich harvest to some lucky lumberman. Having gained access, he stripped the earth, helping himself to the living as well as the dead trees. *Fire, therefore, had become a source of profit wherein*

lay the temptation to kindle it.

Silas Strong knew that his land of refuge was doomed—that the forerunner of its desolation was even then hiding somewhere in the near, dusky woods. He thought of the peril after a dry summer. The mould of the forest would burn like tinder.

The dethroned Emperor reached the shore of Rainbow, put up a tent, and helped to get supper ready. After supper he lay down to rest in the firelight, and told the children about the great bear and the panther-bird. Sinth, weary after that long day of travel, had gone to sleep. After an hour or so Strong rose and looked down at her.

"Sh-sh!—don't w-wake her," he warned them. "I'll put ye t' b-bed."

He helped them undress.

"You'll have to hear our prayers," Socky whispered.

Strong nodded. He sat on a box and they knelt between his knees and he put his hands on their heads and bowed his own.

When they had finished he bent lower and dictated this brief kind of postscript, "An' keep us from all d-danger this n-night."

They repeated the words with no suspicion of what lay behind them.

Then Socky whispered, "Say something 'bout the Sundayman."

"An' keep the Sundayman away," Strong added.

They repeated the words, and then, as if his heart were still unsatisfied, Socky added these, "An' please take care o' my Uncle Silas."

The Emperor lay thinking long after his weary companions had gone to sleep. He thought of that angry outcry and his heart smote him; he thought of the danger. Perhaps, after all, they would not dare to burn the woods now. But Strong resolved to keep awake and be ready for trouble if it came. By-and-by he lighted a lantern and wrote in his old memorandum-book as follows:

"Strong use to say prufanity does more harm when ye keep it in than when ye let it natcherly drene off but among childem it's as ketchin' as the measles. Sounds like thunder when it comes out of a boy's mouth an hits like chain lightnin'."

Long before midnight rain began to fall. Strong rose and went out under the trees and lifted his face and hands, in a picturesque and priestlike attitude, to feel the grateful drops and whispered, "Thank God!" It was a gentle shower but an hour of it would be enough. He went back to his bed and lay listening. The faded leaves that still clung in the maple-tops above them rattled like a thousand tambourines. After an hour of the grateful downpour Strong's fear abated and he "let go" and sank into deep slumber.

Almost the last furrow in the old sod of his character had been turned.

XXXI

THE sun rose clear next morning. Although a long shower of rain had come one could see no sign of it save in the drifted leaves. The earth had drunk it down quickly and seemed to be drying with its own heat. Strong felt the soil and the leaves. He blew and shook his head with surprise.

While the others lay sleeping in their tent, he made a fire and set out in quest of a spring. Half a mile or so up the lake shore a bear broke out of a thicket of young firs just ahead of him. Strong was caught again without his rifle. Satan came as swiftly as the bear had fled, but could not prevail against him. Strong was delighted with this chance of showing the strength of his new purpose. In among the fir-trees he found the carcass of a buck upon which the bear had been feeding.

"P-paunchers!" Strong muttered.

He climbed the side of the ridge and presently struck the trail leading into camp. Soon he could hear some one coming, and sat on a log and waited. It was Master, who had gone to Lost River camp and then followed the trail of the boat-jumper.

"Slept last night in a lean-to over on the Middle Branch," said he. "Been travelling since an hour before daylight and I'm hungry."

"N-news from the gal?"

"No. Have you?"

Strong shook his head solemnly. "They've t-took the hills, an' I've come over here t' work fer Uncle S-sam," said he.

"Warden?"

"Uh-huh—been app'inted," Strong answered, with a look of sadness and satisfaction.

"They're very cunning—Wilbert and the rest of them," Master said. "They've put a little salve on you and sent you out of the way. You're too serious-minded for them. That dynamite trick of yours set 'em all thinking. They won't keep you here long—you're too dead in earnest. But there's room enough for you over in the Clear Lake country, and when they get ready to shove you out come and be at home with us."

A moment of silence followed. The simple mind of the woodsman was looking deep into the darkness that surrounded the throne of the great king.

"You're camp looks as if it had been struck by lightning," Master added.

Strong showed the letter containing his appointment, and told of the threat to hang him up by the heels.

"The commissioner is on the square—he means well," said Master, "but they're using him. These lumbermen intend to drive you out of the woods, and they've got you headed for the clearing. You won't stay here long. In my opinion they'll burn this valley."

Strong looked into the face of the young man.

"What makes ye think so?" he asked.

"Because they want the timber, and because they've got you here," said Master. "I heard of your appointment. I heard, too, that Joe Socket and Pop Migley and Dennis Mulligan thought you were the right man for the place. I knew there'd be something doing, and I came in here to warn you. Don't ever trust the benevolence of Satan."

"By—" Strong paused and gave his thigh a slap. "I know w-what they're up to," he muttered, thoughtfully. "They'll make it too hot f-fer m-me here."

He told of the fire and the man who fled in the bushes.

"They're going to fire the valley, and don't intend to give you time to sit down," said Master. "It's a dangerous country just now."

"Have t' take Sinth an' the ch-childem out o' here r-right off," the hunter answered. "If you'll stay with 'em t'-day, I'll go an' g-git some duffle an' we'll p-put over the r-ridge with 'em t'-night."

Back at the old camp there were things he needed sorely, and he reckoned that he could make the round trip with a pack-basket by five in the afternoon.

"It's still and the leaves are d-damp," Strong mused. "Fire wouldn't run much t'-day."

"To-morrow I'll get a force of men and we'll surround this valley," said Master.

They hurried into camp and were greeted with merry cries. Soon they were sitting on a blanket beside the others, eating in the ancient fashion of the pioneer.

The young man had brought a letter from Gordon which contained a sum of money and welcome news. Sinth read the letter aloud.

"My dear friends," she read, "I had hoped to write you long ago, but I have been waiting for better news to tell. My struggle is over and I am now master of myself. I paid to my creditors all the money you gave me."

"Did you give him money?" Sinth looked up to inquire.

"Uh-huh," Strong answered.

"How much?"

"All I had."

"You're a fool!" Sinth exclaimed, and went on reading as follows:

"Socky had given me his little tin bank. It contained just a dollar and thirty-two cents. The sacred sum paid my fare to Benson Falls and bought my dinner. I got a job there in the mill and soon I expect to be its manager. I'm a new man. If you want a job I can place you here at good pay. In a week or two I shall—"

Sinth stopped reading and covered her face with her apron.

"What does it s-say?" Silas inquired, soberly.

She handed the letter to him, and he read the last words: "I shall come after the children and will then pay you in full with interest. No, I can never pay you in full, for there's something better than money that I owe you." Strong's face changed color. He dropped the letter and rose.

"W-well," he stammered.

"He sha'n't have 'em," said Sinth, decisively. "Tut, tut!" Silas answered.

He raised the boy in his arms and kissed him. "W-we're both f-fools," he said, huskily.

"You ain't exac'ly fools, but yer both childern," said Sinth, wiping her eyes.

"Well, you know the Bible says we must become as a little child," said Master. "After all, money is only a measure of value, and one thing it does with absolute precision—a man's money measures the depth of his heart."

XXXII

STRONG left camp with his pack and rifle and two bear-traps. He was nearing the dead buck when a shot stopped him, and a bullet cut through his left fore-arm. The deadly missile came no swifter than his understanding of it.

He dropped as if a death-blow had struck him, and, clinging to his rifle, crept in among the firs. He flung off the straps of his basket. He lay still a moment and then cautiously got to his knees. Blood was trickling down his hand, but he gave no heed to it. The ball had come from higher ground, towards which he had been walking. The man who had tried to kill him could not have stood more than two hundred feet away. Strong sat, rifle in hand, peering through the fir branches—alert as a panther waiting for its prey. Soon he caught a glimpse of his enemy fleeing between distant tree columns. The sight seemed to fill him with deadly anger.

He leaped to his feet, seized his pack-basket, and started swiftly in pursuit of him. He gained the summit of

the high ground and saw a broad slash covered with berry bushes and sloping to the flats around Bushrod Creek. A trail cut through it from the edge of the woods near him.

He stopped and listened. He could hear the sound of retreating footsteps and could see briars moving some thirty rods down the slash. His heart had shaken off its rage. He was now the cunning, stealthy, determined hunter. He saw a dry, stag-headed pine in the edge of the briars near him and hurried up its shaft like a bear pressed by the dogs. On a dead limb, some thirty feet above ground, he halted and looked away. He could see nothing of his unknown foe.

Slowly Strong descended from the dead tree. He had just begun to feel the pain of his wound. Blood was dripping fast from it; he looked like a butcher in the midst of his task. He muttered as he began to roll his sleeve, "G-guess they do inten't' shove me out o' this c-country."

He blew as he looked at the wound.

"B-Business is p-prosperin'," he went on, as he held one end of a big red handkerchief between his teeth and wound it above the torn muscles and firmly knotted the ends.

"W-war!" he muttered, as he went to the near bushes and began to gather spiders' webs.

It is to be regretted that for a moment he forgot his promise to Socky and "boiled over" from the heat of his passion.

He sat on the ground and with his knife scraped away the blood clots.

"D-damn soft-nose bullet!" he muttered, with a serious look, smoothing, down the fibres of torn flesh.

He spread the webs upon his wound, and held them close awhile under his great palm. Soon he moistened a lot of tobacco and put it on the webs and held it there. After an hour or so the blood stopped. Then, gradually, he relieved the tension of his handkerchief, and by-and-by used it for a bandage on his wound.

He rose and shouldered his pack and began to search for the tracks of his enemy. He soon discovered those of the bear which had fled before him that morning.

"S-see here, Strong," he muttered, "th-this won't scurcely do. I arrest you, S. Strong, Esquire. Y-you're my prisoner. T-tryin' t' kill a man—you b-bloodthirsty devil! C-come with me. We'll hunt fer b-bears."

The Emperor had often addressed himself with severe and even copious condemnation, but this was the first time that he had ever taken S. Strong by the coat-collar and violently faced him about.

He could see clearly where the bear had broken through the wet briars on his way down to the flat country. It was a moment of peril, and he gave himself no time for argument. He hurried away in the trail of the bear. It lay before him, unmistakable as the wake of a boat, and would show where the animal was wont to cross the water below. He came soon to a great log lying from shore to shore of that inlet of Rainbow which was called Bushrod Creek. He could see tracks near the end of the log, and there, with a spruce pole for a lever, he set his traps in the sand so that, if the first were not sprung, the second would be sure to take hold. He covered the great, yawning, seven-toothed jaws of steel and fastened heavy clogs upon both trap chains. Then he took the piece of bacon from his pack and hung it on a branch above the traps.

Shrewdly the hunter had made his plan.

That bear would probably return to the dead buck, and the scent of the bacon would attract him to that particular crossing.

He tore two pages from his memorandum-book, and wrote this warning on each:

STOP TRAPS AHED

S. STRONG.

He fastened them to stakes and posted them on two sides of the point of danger.

It was then past eleven and too late for the long journey to Lost River camp. He decided to go to Henyon's on the Middle Branch and get the trapper to come and keep watch while he took Sinth and the children to Benson Falls.

On his way out of the slash he killed a deer, and dressed and hung him on a tree. Then he set out for the trail to Henyon's.

He had walked for an hour or so when his pace began to slacken.

"T-y-ty!" he whispered, stopping suddenly. "S. Strong, what's the m-matter? Yer all of a-tremble."

Strong felt sick and weary, and took off his pack and sat down to rest on a bed of leaves. Then he discovered that the handkerchief upon his arm was dripping wet. Again he stopped the blood by cording.

He lay back on the ground suffering with faintness and acute pain. Soon obeying the instinct of man and beast, which prompts one to hide his weakness and even his death-throes, he crept behind the top of a fallen tree.

His heart had been overstrained of late by worry and heavy toil. Now for the first time he could feel it laboring a little as if it missed the blood which had been dripping slowly but steadily from his arm. At last a day was come that had no pleasure in it—a day when the keepers of the house had begun to tremble.

Soon the warm sunlight fell through forest branches on the great body of Strong, who had lost command of himself and become the prisoner of sleep.

In the memorandum-book there is an entry without date in a script of unusual size. Those large letters were made slowly and with a trembling hand. It was probably written while he sat there in the lonely, autumn woods before giving up to his weakness. This is the entry:

"Theys days when I dont blieve God is over per-ticklar with a man bout swearin."

XXXIII

SOON after breakfast that morning Master had hitched the ox to the boat-jumper.
"My land! Where ye goin'?" Sinth inquired.

"To-morrow we're going out to Benson Falls with you and the children," said Master. "I thought we'd better take the ox and what things you need to-day as far as Link Harris's. That's about four miles down the Leonard trail. The ox will have all he can do to-morrow if he starts from Harris's."

The young man said nothing of another purpose which he had in mind—that of learning, as soon as possible, the nearest way out of the Rainbow country.

"What does that mean?" Sinth asked.

"Only this—we may have trouble with these pirates, and we want to get you out of the way. We'll have to travel, and we can't leave you in the camp alone. You and the children can ride over, and we'll come back afoot."

So Sinth packed her satchels and a big camp-bag, and all made the journey to Harris's where they left the ox and the jumper.

It was near six o'clock when they returned to the little camp at Rainbow. Strong was not there, and after supper, while the dusk fell, they sat on a blanket by the fire, and Sinth raked the old scrap-heap of family history to which a score of ancestors had contributed, each in his time. It was all a kind of folk-lore—mouldy, rusty, distorted, dreamlike. It told of bears in the pig-pen, of moose in the door-yard, of panthers glaring through the windows at night, of Indians surrounding the cabin, and of the torture by fire and steel.

At bedtime Silas had not arrived. Sinth, however, showed no sign of worry. He knew the woods so well, and there were bear and fish and sundry temptations, each greater than his bed.

"Mebbe he's took after a bear," Sinth suggested, while she began to undress the children.

"You remember we heard him shoot soon after he left here," said Master. "It may be he wounded a bear and followed him."

"Like as not," she answered.

In a moment she put her hand on Master's arm and whispered to him.

"Say!" said she, "I don't want to make trouble, but if I was you I wouldn't wait no longer for that old fool."

She stalled the needles into her ball of yarn and rolled up her knitting. She continued, with a sigh of impatience:

"I'd go over to Buckhom an' git that girl, if I had to bring 'er on my back."

"That's about what I propose to do," said the young man, with a laugh.

"I'm sick o' this dilly-dally in'," said Sinth, "an' I guess she is, too."

With that she led Socky and Sue into the tent. When the others had gone to bed Master began to think of the shot which had broken the silence of the autumn woods that morning. He lighted a lantern and followed as nearly as he could the direction his friend had taken. By-and-by he stopped and whistled on his thumb and stood listening. The woods were silent. Soon he could see where Strong had crossed a little run and roughed the leaves beyond it. Master followed his tracks and came to the dead deer. He saw that a bear had found it, and near by there were signs of a struggle and of fresh blood. Now satisfied that Strong had shot and followed the bear, he hurried back to camp.

He spread a blanket before the fire and laydown to think and rest in the silence. Buck-horn was only four miles from the upper end of Rainbow. One could put his canoe in the Middle Branch and go without a carry to the outlet of Slender Lake—little more than a great marsh—then up the still water to a landing within half an hour of Dunmore's. He would make the journey in a day or two, and, if possible, take the girl out of the woods.

The night was dark and still. He could hear now and then the fall of a dead leaf that gave a ghostly whisper as it brushed through high branches on its way down.

Suddenly another sound caught his ear. He rose and listened. It was a distant, rhythmic beat of oars on the lake. Who could be crossing at that hour? He walked to the shore and stood looking off into inky darkness. He could still hear the sound of oars. Some one was rowing with a swift, nervous, jumping stroke, and the sound was growing fainter. Somehow it quickened the pulse of the young man a little—he wondered why.

XXXIV

MASTER returned to the fire and lay back on his blanket. Little puffs of air had begun to rattle the dead leaves above him. Soon he could hear a wind coming over the woodland. It was like the roar of distant sea-billows. Waves of wind began to whistle in the naked branches overhead. In a moment the main flood of the gale was roaring through them, and every tree column had begun to creak and groan.

Master rose and looked up at the sky. He could see a wavering glow through the tree-tops. The odor of smoke was in the air. He ran to call Miss Strong, and met her coming out of her tent. She had smelled the smoke and quickly dressed.

"My land, the woods are afire!" she cried.

The sky had brightened as if a great, golden moon were rising.

Sinth ran back into her tent and woke the children. With swift and eager hands the young man helped her while she put on their clothes. She said not a word until they were dressed. Then, half blinded by thickening smoke and groping on her way to the other tent, she said, despairingly, "I wonder where Silas is?"

A great, feathery cinder fell through the tree-tops.

"Come quick, we must get out of here," Master called, as he lifted the crying children. "We've no time to lose."

She flung some things in a satchel and tried to follow. In the smoke it was difficult to breathe and almost impossible to find their way. Master put down the children and tore some rope from a tent-side and tied it to the dog's collar. Then he shouted, "Go home, Zeb!" They clung to one another while the dog led them into the trail. Master had Socky and Sue in his arms. He hurried up the long slope of Rainbow Ridge, the woman following.

They could now hear the charge and raven of the flames that were tearing into a resinous swamp-roof not far away.

"Comin' fast!" Sinth exclaimed. "Can't see or breathe hardly."

"Drop your satchel and cling to my coat-tails," Master answered, stopping to give her a hold.

A burning rag of rotten timber, flying with the wind, caught in a green top above them. It broke and fell in flakes of fire. Master flung one off his coat-sleeve, and, seizing a stalk of witch-hopple, whipped the glow out of them. On they pressed, mounting slowly into better air. Just ahead of them they could see the wavering firelight on their trail. On a bare ledge near the summit they stopped to rest their lungs a moment.

They were now above the swift army of flame and a little off the west flank of it. They could see into a red, smoky, luminous gulf, leagues long and wide, beneath the night-shadow. Ten thousand torches of balsam and spruce and pine and hemlock sent aloft their reeling towers of flame and flung their light through the long valley. It illumined a black, wind-driven cloud of smoke waving over the woodland like a dismal flag of destruction. A great wedge of flame was rending its way northward. Sparks leaped along the sides of it like fiery dust beneath the feet of the conqueror. They rose high and drifted over the lake chasm and fell in a sleet of fire on the lighted waves. The loose and tattered jacket of many an old stub was tom into glowing rags and scattered by the wind. Some hurtled off a mile or more from their source, and isolated fountains of flame were spreading here and there on balsam flats near the lake margin. Some of the tall firs, when first touched by the cinder-shower, were like great Christmas-trees hung with tinsel and lighted by many candles. New-caught flames, bending in the wind, had the look of horses at full gallop. Ropes and arrows and spears and lances of fire were flying and curveting over the doomed woods.

The travellers halted only for a moment. They could feel the heat on their faces. Black smoke had begun to roll over the heights around them.

"It'll go up the valley in an hour an' cut Silas off," Sinth whimpered as they went on.

"He must have crossed the valley before now," the young man assured her.

The woman ran ahead and called, loudly, "Silas! Silas!" She continued calling as they hurried on through thickening smoke. They halted for a word at Leonard's Trail, which left the main thoroughfare to Rainbow, and, going down the east side of the ridge, fared away some ten miles over hill and dale to the open country.

It was at right angles with the way of the wind and would soon lead them out of danger.

"Make for Benson Falls with the childem!" cried Sinth. "I'm goin' after Silas." She knew that her brother would surely be coming—that, seeing the fire, he would take any hazard to reach them.

Master knew not what to do. He had begun to worry about the people at Buckhom, but his work was nearer to his hand. It was there at the fork in the trail. He sent a loud, far-reaching cry down the wind, but heard no answer.

"He'll take care of himself—you'd better get away from this valley," he called.

An oily top had taken fire below and within a hundred yards of them.

"Go, go quick, an' save them childern!" she urged. Then she ran away from him.

She hurried along the top of the ridge, calling as she went. A dim, misty glow filled the cavern of the woods around her. Just ahead drops of fire seemed to be dripping through the forest roof. It failed to catch. It would let her go a little farther, and she pressed on. A fold of the great streamer of smoke was rent away and rolled up the side of the ridge and covered her. She sank upon her knees, nearly smothered, and put her skirt over her face. The cloud passed in a moment. Her sleeve caught fire and she put it out with her hand. She felt her peril more keenly and tried to run. She heard Zeb sniffing and coughing near. Master had let him go, thinking that he might help her in some way. She stooped and called to him and took hold of the dragging rope. The dog pressed on so eagerly that he carried part of her weight. A broken bough in a tree-top just ahead of her had caught fire and swung like a big lantern. She had no sooner passed than she heard the tree burst into flame with a sound like the frying of fat. She felt her hand stinging her and saw that a little flame was running up the side of her skirt. She cried, "Mercy!" and knelt and smothered it with her hands. Gasping for breath, she fell forward, her face upon the ground.

"Silas Strong," she moaned, "you got to come quick or I won't never see you again." The dog heard her and licked her face.

Down among the ferns and mosses she found a stratum of clear air, and in a moment rose and reeled a few steps farther. The flank of the invader had overrun the heights. Her seeking was near its end. Showers of fire were falling beyond and beside her. She lay down and covered her face to protect it from heat and smoke. She rose and staggered on, calling loudly. Then she heard a bark from Zeb and the familiar halloo of Silas

Strong.

Through some subtle but sure intuition the two had known what to expect of each other and had clung to the trail. She saw him running out of the smoke-cloud and whipping his arms with his old felt hat. One side of his beard was burned away. He picked her up as if she had been a child and ran down the east side of the ridge with her, leaping over logs and crashing through fallen tops. Beyond the showering sparks he stopped and smothered a circle of creeping fire on her skirt. Sinth lay in his arms moaning and sobbing. He shook her and shouted, almost fiercely, "The leetle f-fawns—wh-where be they?"

"Gone with him on Leonard's Trail," Sinth answered, brokenly.

He entered a swamp in the dim-lighted forest, now running, now striding slowly through fallen timber and up to his knees in the damp earth. Every moment the air was growing clearer. He ran over a hard-wood hill and slackened pace while he made his way half across a wide flat.

When he struck the trail to Benson Falls the fire-glow was fainter. Now and then a great, rushing billow of light swept over them and vanished. He stopped and blew and put Sinth on her feet.

"Hard n-night, sis," said he, tenderly.

She stood and made no answer. In a flare of firelight he saw that she was holding out one of her hands. He struck a match and looked at it and made a rueful cluck. The fire of the match seemed to frighten her; she staggered backward and fell with a cry. He caught her up and strode slowly on. Soon she seemed to recover self-control and lay silent. He was in great pain; he was reeling under his burden, but he kept on. She put up a hand and felt his face.

"Why, Silas," she said, in a frightened voice, "you're crying."

It was then that he fell to the ground helpless.

XXXV

TERROR had begun to spread in the wilderness north of Rainbow. The smoky wind, the growing firelight had roused all the children of the forest. Chattering birds rose high and took the way of the wind to safety. One could see flying lines of wild-fowl in the lighted heavens; faintly, as they passed, one could hear their startled cries. Deer ran aimlessly through the woods like frightened sheep. From scores of camps on lake and pond and river—from Buckhorn, from Barsook, from Five Ponds, from Sabattis, from Big and Little Sandy, from Lost River—people, who had seen the fire coming, were on their way out of the woods.

Master ran at first down Leonard's Trail with the boy and girl in his arms. Soon his thoughts halted him. He had withstood the severest trial that may be set before a man. To be compelled to seek safety with the children, while a woman took the way of peril before his eyes, had made him falter a moment.

He hoped that Sinth had left the ridge, now overrun with flames, and fled down the slope. If so she would be looking for Leonard's Trail. He stopped every few paces and sent a loud halloo into the woods. Fire was crackling down the side of the ridge. As he looked back it seemed to him that the great lake of hell must be flooding into the world.

Soon the trail led him to Sinth, who was on her knees and sobbing beside her brother.

That wiry little woman had struggled there alone with energy past all belief. She thought only of the danger and forgot her pain. She had toiled with the heavy body of her brother, as the ant toils with a burden larger than itself, dragging it slowly, inch by inch, in the direction of Harris's. She had moved it a distance of some fifty feet before she heard the call of Master. Then she fell moaning and clinging to the hands of him she loved better, far better even, than she had ever permitted herself to know. It may well be doubted—O you who have probably lost patience with her long ago!—if anything in human history is more wonderful than the lonely struggle of hers in that dim, flaring, threatening hell-glow.

Master quickly knelt by the fallen Emperor. "What's the matter?" he asked.

"He's gi'n out—done fer me until he can't do no more," she wailed.

She put her arms around the great breast of the man and laid her cheek upon it tenderly. Then her heart, which had always hidden its fondness, spoke out in a broken cry:

"Silas Strong—speak t' me. I can't—I can't spare ye nohow—I can't spare ye."

The children knelt by her and called with frightened voices: "Uncle Silas! Uncle Silas!" Strong began to move. Those beloved voices had seemed to call him back. He put his hand on the head of Sinth and drew it close to him.

"B-better times!" he whispered. "B-better times, I tell ye, s-sis!"

He struggled to his knees.

"S-say," he said to Master, "I've been shot. T-tie yer han'kerchief r-round my arm quick." The young man tied his handkerchief as directed. Then Strong tried to rise, but his weight bore him down.

"Lie still," said Master. "I can carry you." He took the rope from Zeb's collar and looped it over the breast of the helpless man and drew its ends under his arms and knotted them. Then, while Sinth supported her brother, the young man reached backward over his shoulders and, grasping the rope, lifted his friend so their backs were against each other, and, leaning under his burden, struggled on with it, the others following.

It was a toilsome, painful journey to Harris's. But what is impossible when the strong heart of youth, warmed with dauntless courage, turns to its task? We that wonder as we look backward may venture to put

the query, but dare not answer it.

Often Master fell to his knees and there steadied himself a moment with heaving breast, then tightened his thews again and rose and measured the way with slow, staggering feet.

An hour or so later a clear-voiced call rang through the noisy wind. They stopped and listened.

"Somebody coming," said Master.

He answered with, a loud halloo as they went on wearily. Soon they saw some one approaching in the dusky trail.

"Who's there?" the young man asked.

"Edith Dunmore," was the answer that trembled with gladness. "Oh, sir! I would have gone through the fire."

"I know," said he, "you would have gone through the fire."

"For—for you," she added, brokenly.

Master dared not lay down his burden. He toiled on, his heart so full that he could not answer. The girl walked beside him for a moment of solemn, suggestive silence. She could dimly see the prostrate body of Strong on the back of her lover, and understood. What a singular and noble restraint was in that meeting!

"I love you—I love you, and I want to help you," she said, as she walked beside him.

"Help Miss Strong," he answered. "She is badly burned."

Little Sue was overcome with weariness and fear, and could not be comforted.

The maiden carried her with one arm and with the other supported Sinth. So, slowly, they made their way over the rough trail.

"How came you here?" Master inquired, presently.

"We saw the fire coming and hurried to Slender Lake, and fled in boats and came down the river."

When, late in the night, the little band of lovers reeled across the dimly lit clearing, it was in sore distress. Their feet dragged, their hearts and bodies stooped with heaviness. A company of woods-folk, who stood in front of Harris's looking off at the fire, ran to meet them. They lifted the dragging Emperor and helped the young man carry him in-doors. Master was no sooner relieved of his burden than he fell exhausted on the floor.

Edith Dunmore knelt by him and raised his hands to her lips. She helped him rise, and then for a moment they stood and trembled in each other's arms, and were like unto the oak and the vine that clings to it.

Dunmore and his mother stood looking at them. The white-haired man had taken the children in his arms.

"I thought she went to bed and to sleep long ago," he muttered.

"Without her we should have perished," said the old lady. .

"Yes, and she shall have her way," he answered. "One might as well try to keep the deer out of the lily-pads." He kissed the boy and girl, and added, with a sigh, "This world is for the young."

XXXVI

ALL stood aghast for a moment in the light of the lamps around the bed of Strong. His clothes were burned, bloody, and torn—they lay in rags upon him. His face and hands were swollen; part of his hair and beard had been shorn off in the storm of fire through which he had fought his way. He spoke not, but there was the grim record of his fight with the flames—of the terrible punishment they had put upon him while the sturdy old lover sought his friends. All hands made haste to do what they could for him and for the woman he had carried out of the fire of the pit.

He had told Master that Annette was waiting for him at the Falls. The young man sent Harris to bring her with horse and buckboard.

Strong lay like one dead while they gave him spirits and bathed his face and hands in oil. Soon he revived a little.

"It's Business," he muttered.

In a moment his thoughts began to wander in a curious delirium filled with suggestions of the old cheerfulness. He sang, feebly:

"The briers are above my head, the brakes above
my knee,
An' the bark is gettin' kind o' blue upon the ven'son-
tree."

Rain had begun falling and daylight was on the window-panes.

The dethroned Emperor continued to sing fragments of old songs so familiar to all who knew him.

"It was in the summer-time when I sailed, when I

sailed,"

he sang. Socky stood by the bed of his uncle with a sad face.

"Th-thumbs down," Strong demanded, faintly. Master went out on the little veranda and looked down the road. He could hear the voice of his friend singing:

"The green groves are gone from the hills, Maggie."

"It is true," thought the young man as he looked off at the smouldering woods. "They are gone and so are the green hearts."

Annette came presently and Strong rose on his elbow and looked at her.

"Ann," he called, as she knelt by his bedside. "To-day—to-day! It's n-no' some day any m-more. It's to-day."

He sank back on his pillow when he saw her tears, and whispered, almost doubtfully, "Better t-times!"

He leaned forward and put up his hands as if to relieve the pressure of his pack-straps, and in a moment he had gone out of hearing on a trail that leads to the "better times" he had hoped for, let us try to believe.

So ends the history of Silas Strong, guide, contriver, lover of the woods and streams, of honor and good-fellowship. He was never to bow his head before the dreaded tyrant of this world. We may be glad of that, and remember gratefully and with renewed thought of our own standing that Strong was ahead.

A curious procession made its way out of the woods that morning. Socky and Sue walked ahead. Master and Edith and her father followed. Then came the boat-jumper with Sinth and all that remained of Silas Strong in it; then the buckboard that carried Harris and old Mrs. Dunmore and the servants. Slowly they made their way towards the sown land.

"What ye cryin' fer?" a stranger asked the children as he passed them.

"Our Uncle Silas died," was the all-sufficient reply of Socky.

Soon they could hear the roar of the saws.

"Look!" said Dunmore to his daughter, as they came in sight of the mill chimney. "There's the edge of the great world."

He looked thoughtfully at the children a moment and added:

"It all reminds me of the words of a mighty teacher, 'A little child shall lead them.'"

And what of Migley and the rest? Word of his harshness in driving Sinth and the children out of their home had travelled over the land, and not all the king's money could have saved him. Master went to the Legislature—where God prosper him!—and the young lumberman was condemned to obscurity.

Master and Edith live at Clear Lake most of the year, and the cranes have brought them a young fairy regarded by Socky and Sue, who often visit there, with deep interest and affection. Sinth will spend the rest of her days, probably, in the home of Gordon at Benson Falls.

As to Annette, like many daughters of the Puritan, she lives with a memory, and her hope is still and all in that "some day," gone now into the land of faith and mystery.

The once beautiful valley of Rainbow was turned into black ruins that night of the fire. Soon a "game pirate," who had "blabbed" in a spree, was arrested for the crime of causing it. The authorities promised to let him go if he would tell the truth. He told how he had been with "Red" Macdonald that night and saw him fire the woods. They fled to the shore of Rainbow and crossed in a boat. Near the middle of the lake they broke an oar, and a mile of green tops had begun to "fry" before they landed. They ran eastward in a panic. They crossed Bushrod Creek on a big log that spanned the water. At the farther end of it Macdonald, who was in the lead, put his foot in one bear-trap and fell into another. His friend tried to release him, but soon had to give up and run for his life.

He went with an officer and found the heap of bones that lay between two rusty traps in the desolate valley.

"After all, he got exac'ly what was comin' to him," said he, looking down at the ghastly thing. "It was him shot the 'Emp'ror o' the Woods.'" Who was to pay Macdonald for his work? That probably will never be known.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SILAS STRONG, EMPEROR OF THE WOODS ***

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