OLD JIM CASE of South Hollow

A.P. 24
25

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/oldjimcaseofsout00riceiala

OLD JIM CASE OF SOUTH HOLLOW

OLD JIM CASE, THE VILLAGE ORACLE

Old Jim Case
of
South Hollow

By

EDWARD I. RICE

NEW YORK
Doubleday, Page & Company
1909

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED, INCLUDING THAT OF TRANSLATION
INTO FOREIGN LANGUAGES, INCLUDING THE SCANDINAVIAN

COPYRIGHT, 1909, BY DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
PUBLISHED, FEBRUARY, 1909

TO MY SON

EDWARD FLINT RICE

THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

2137890

FOREWORD

EVERY man, woman and child around South Hollow knew Old Jim Case. His well-worn slouch hat, his large, baggy trousers, soft shirt, and handkerchief carelessly tied about his neck, possessed almost the dignity of landmarks.

The old fellow's smile, that gave a downward bend to his heavy, round moustache, and his beaming countenance, made it easy to liken him to a walrus; but a friendly walrus he was. It was one of his favourite sayings that "Good nature is the cheapest commodity in the world," and he always had it in generous abundance.

CONTENTS

PEOPLE OF THE STORY

Old Jim Case — The village oracle.

Cal Hemingway — The genial proprietor of the general store.

Hiram Wilcox — Who knows everybody's business.

Frank Ridgeway — A young man, honest and ambitious, who is unappreciated by many of his fellow townsmen.

Henry Bennings — Clerk in the bank, whose methods are not beyond criticism.

The Honourable Timothy Salmon—President of the South Hollow Bank, who aspires politically.

Hattie Salmon — The banker's daughter.

Orlie Sprague — An honest farmer who believes everybody else to be the same.

Betsey — His wife.

ELMER PERKINS — The village undertaker, with an eye for business, but no business.

POP — The proud keeper of the village tavern.

THE WIDOW WETHERBY — The village gossip.

BENNETT — The old stage driver who makes daily trips between South Hollow and Syracuse.

EPH LANCASTER — The village carpenter.

ELDER ARMSTRONG — One of the pillars of the Church.

THE LIGHTNING ROD AGENT — A typical country drummer.

FRANK DUNBAR — A hermit.

EDWARD BAILEY — An unscrupulous gambler from the city.

WINNIE FOWLER — The oldest inhabitant.

JIM CALLOWAY — The village constable.

QUIGLEY — An old chum of Jim's who is always ready for a 'coon hunt.

OLD JIM CASE OF SOUTH HOLLOW

CHAPTER I

TOWN GOSSIP IN THE GENERAL STORE AT SOUTH HOLLOW

A PEEK into the "general store" at South Hollow any Saturday night would show every sugar barrel occupied and the counter holding its full capacity. In fact, there would be standing room only, and very little of that, not that the store was swamped with business, but Old Jim Case was there. On these occasions he told of his experiences, how he had a wild hunt for a 'coon; made a horse trade; lost a big trout; or about his only trip to the Metropolis, to which he always referred as "the last time I was in New York."

It was Saturday night, and the usual crowd had gathered. The regular every-night sitters were in their chairs around the old stove which

had occupied its dignified position for a number of years beyond mortal ken.

If all the letters on the weather-stained sign across the building had been visible, they would have read, as they once had in ages past,

CALVIN AVERY HEMMINGWAY

GENERAL STORE

Among his varied activities, Mr. Hemmingway was the proud postmaster of South Hollow; and his stock was a miscellany from all-day suckers to ploughs and harrows. But nobody ever thought of calling the proprietor anything but "Cal," unless it might be on a Sunday when he was a little over-spruced.

Cal himself, tall and round-shouldered, was always working about in his shirt sleeves, scarcely ever accomplishing much, or, at the bottom of his heart, ever zealous to accomplish much. When he stood behind the counter making a cornucopia out of brown paper to be

filled from the old tin scoop which for years had been working in and out of the sugar barrel, he was a study in character. By standing on tip-toes, he could easily brush the cobwebs off the ceiling, but he never did!

On this particular Saturday night Old Jim Case was holding his hearers spellbound. "You could have heard a peanut crack," to quote a local pleasantry. He was telling of his younger days when his favourite drink was a "stone wall," a weird combination of hard cider and squirrel whiskey. "Squirrel whiskey," Jim Case took pains to explain to strangers, "makes you want to climb a tree."

"I 've always noticed," spoke up Old Jim, as he looked about him, "that us farmers, when we git on a biled shirt and a derby hat, feel about the same as a city feller wearin' a soft shirt and a slouch hat. We sort o' b'lieve that it 's our duty to over-in-dulge. In the old days I wuz one o' them kind what could n't even pin a badge on my coat

without a-feelin' that I had a licence ter paint the town red."

"Yes," laughed Cal, "there hain't no sadder sight than ter see a perfectly sober man all covered with ribbins and badges."

"Wa'al," resumed Old Jim, "'T wuz one o' them nights when I 'd ben im-bibin' putty free that I crawled up into the hayloft of an old barn an' dropped off ter sleep. 'T wuz n't long before I wuz awaked by someone a-hollerin'. I raised myself up by leanin' on one elbow, an' listened. I knew that voice. 'T wuz Lem Wetherby. 'Jim,' he wuz a-cryin', 'I 've got 'em, I 've got 'em.' Thinkin' he wuz a-foolin' as usual, I hollered back in a jokin' sort o' way, 'Rats!' 'Yes, rats,' he cried. 'Now I know they 're real, 'cause you see 'em too. There 's hundreds of 'em.'

"I lighted my old lantern, held it up high, and sure enough there wuz Lem stabbin' away with the pitchfork, every now and then comin' within a few inches of my feet. I

did n't realise then what the matter wuz until he leaned over an' in a tremblin' voice whispered into my ear, 'Jim, they 're all *plaid rats!*'

"Then I understood an' started out fer help, and when I come back with the doctor we found the plaid rats wuz gone." Jim raised his old slouch hat, and then added, "An' so wuz Lem."

"Dead huh?" exclaimed one of the listeners.

"Yes, sir, dead! And after the funeral I went an' bought Lem a stone slab 'stead of a stone wall, and I had it put up at the head o' his grave. It 's the one on the east side o' the cemetery, under that weepin' willow. I picked out the spot myself."

Old Jim squinted and rubbed at his eyes with the back of his big, freckled hand. Then straightening up, he added, "The reason I 'm a-tellin' of it ta-night is 'cause 't wuz twenty-seven years ago ta-day that we put it thar, and, fellers, I hain't taken a drink sence, not from that day ta this."

"We 'll all agree," drawled out Hiram Wilcox, "that Jim Case deserves a lot o' credit, an' that he 's ben a public benefactor ter South Hollow, fer sence Lem Wetherby died a-stabbin' plaid rats an' Jim swore off a-drinkin' squirrel whiskey, the village has ben a-runnin' along most peaceful, and 't wan' 'til here lately that the town folks got ter gossipin' again."

Hiram ran his fingers through his long gray whiskers and scratched his chin.

"It seems that Frank Ridgeway," he went on, "is bein' talked of as a good candidate fer our next town drunk — that is, if he don't brace up putty soon."

"Wa'all," said Jim, "mebbe these stories what y'u ben hearin' about that boy be true, and mebbe they hain't; but if they be, somebody ought ter have a friendly talk with him, fer he kin quit the habit same 's I did, 'cause I hain't no better than anybody else. It jest takes a leetle will power, that 's all."

Cal Hemmingway was on his mettle at this.

Ostentatiously arranging some boxes on the shelf and listening attentively to every word that had been said, he now wrote down on a piece of paper a memorandum pertaining to the business and stuck it emphatically on the spindle for future reference. Then he spoke up. "That 's all well enough fer y'u ter talk, Jim Case, but ye see y'u and Frank Ridgeway be two different people. Y'u cultivated your love fer liquor yerself, and Frank Ridgeway come naturally by hisn. 'T wuz handed down ter him. As Elder Armstrong would say, 't wuz he-red-itary."

"He-red-itary nothin'!" interrupted Old Jim. "I don't take no stock in these hand-me-downs. A man 's got ter stand up e-rect, an' be sized up fer jest what he is himself. Nobody is goin' ter take time these days ter hunt up family trees."

"Wa'al," continued Cal, "there hain't none of us what kin say we 've ever seen Frank Ridgeway liquored up. Course, we 're hearin' stuff about him all the time, and I

guess there hain't no doubt but what it 's true; still, I allow that p'rhaps he can't help it, and that mebbe he hain't ta blame."

Cal climbed up on the end of the counter, and, putting his hands firmly on each knee, leaned forward and went on with what was clearly meant in confidence.

"I remember gettin' over-gauged once myself when it would n't 've jest done ter a-met the church folks, and 't wan't my fault neither. Ye see I got up with an awful cold — could n't hardly speak — so I thought I 'd take a little whiskey with syrup. Somebody wuz a-tellin' how it would knock colds sky-high. I kind o' spent most o' my time over ter the tavern that day, re-ligiously at-tendin' ter that cold. The furst time I went over there I could n't hardly talk, so I held one hand up ter my throat, and pointed with the other ter the Old Crow and syrup bottle. When I come out o' there the last time, they say I could n't only talk but it appeared that I could holler putty good and loud, but I 'll be danged if I could

walk furst-rate. Ye see it kind o' drove the cold, as it were, from my throat and lungs down somehow inter my legs."

"Yes, I guess so," retorted Old Jim. "Probably ye had what Dave Slocum 'ud call legeritis. He says it generally attacks ye comin' hum from the tavern, goin' out ter meet a man, er right after a bad cold. Says it 's most noticeable on Fourth of July and St. Patrick's Day, but has ben known ter appear about twelve o'clock P. M. at the endin' of a birthday."

In the general uproar that followed, one of the sitters came forth with the remark that Dick Spencer had got so he 'd catch cold on purpose so as to have an excuse to drink whiskey and syrup.

"I 'll have an excuse in about a minute, Mr. Smarty, ta spoil that lovely complexion o' yourn," growled out Spencer. Old Jim was just in time to catch the insulted gentleman's arm and twist from his upraised hand a bar of soap which, in a minute more, might

have broken up the party. He pushed Spencer down into his seat, and replaced the soap in the box on the counter. As he did so he added "Don't git riled up, Dick. I 'll swear ye 'll take a drink jest as often as anybody, and that ye don't need no excuse neither."

With this, the great pacificator reached over, and, as he took another handful of peanuts out of the brown sack, said, "Pop over ter the tavern wuz a-tellin' 'bout a brand o' whiskey that he called Phonograph Rye. Said he named it that 'cause it could talk, and anybody what 'd take a couple o' drinks o' that liquor could n't stop a-talkin'; said he 'd guarantee they would n't run down in all night. Why, he told about a deaf and dumb man a-comin' in there one day with some friends and how he took four drinks out o' that bottle and went out a-talkin' jest the same as the rest. Now with y'u, Cal, it 's jest a question as ter whether y'u knocked out that cold er not, but what we were discussin' wuz how ter cure Frank Ridgeway's appetite

fer liquor, that is, providin' all this 'ere gossip be true."

"I cured the cold all right," answered Cal, as he slid down off the counter, "and the headache, too, and what 's more, I 'd like ter cure Frank Ridgeway."

Hiram Wilcox, who had been sitting tipped back in his chair, nodding agreement and dissent in turn to what was said, suddenly grew too vigorous in his movements and found himself, with a crash, on the floor. He looked about him at first pugnaciously, and, discovering that he alone was to blame, continued the discussion, unabashed.

"I guess y'u folks don't remember Frank Ridgeway's father, Ralph Ridgeway, do ye? Wa'al, sir, I knowed him years ago. In them days they used ter call him Budge. Guess he got that name from budgin' all the time. He went away from these parts and everybody wuz mighty glad, I reckon, and hoped he 'd stay, but finally after a year er so he came trampin' back. He went straight ter his

father 's house, opened the door, walked in, and said, 'Father, I 've come hum ter die.' The old man looked over his spectacles, and said, 'Budge, ye 're a liar; ye 've come hum ta spend the winter.' Wa'al, sir, dy ye know I kin remember when he came in the tavern one mornin' 'bout eleven o'clock. He wuz half full at the time, but that did n't matter; he wanted another drink. 'Budge,' said Pop, the tavern keeper, 'ye can't have another drink until jest before ye go ta bed.' 'Pop,' Budge answered, 'give me the drink and I 'll go ta bed now.'"

Hiram squinted his eye, adjusted his glasses, and then went on.

"Budge Ridgeway could drink more whiskey than any man that ever lifted a glass in these parts. He kept a-goin' from bad ter worse until finally his wife and the women folk got up a sort o' temperance society, a-thinkin' perhaps they could reform him. But he kept right on a-drinking jest the same.

"One day Budge went out fishin' and it

seems he could n't git his pole jest where he wanted it, so he climbed out on the limb of a tree, and as luck would have it the darned limb broke, and poor Budge went down inter the water and drownded, and, boys, that 's the story of Frank Ridgeway's father."

There was dead silence until Old Jim spoke up. "P'rhaps there *is* some excuse fer the boy. Anyway, I think it 's a putty good joke on the women folks. Ye see they 'd ben a-hollerin' fer 'bout ten years how whiskey would kill Budge, and it seems it wuz water after all."

CHAPTER II

AN ACCOUNT BALANCED

THE little village of South Hollow seemed wrapped in peace and quiet, except for the clang of the church bell ringing out the announcement of the Wednesday evening prayer meeting.

Many of the town folks were wending their way in the direction of the little white church on the corner. Among them was the Honourable Timothy Salmon, straight as an arrow, gray-beard, high hat of the old-fashioned type and his long frock coat surely carried the air of genuine dignity. By his side walked his only child, a beautiful girl of nineteen. She had the features of her mother; but no remembrance of her, as she had died when she was but a child.

Not far behind came Henry Bennings, the

new clerk in her father's bank. He was what might be called a handsome fellow, with light hair and curling moustache. He dressed a little loud for a village boy; perhaps a bit extravagant, but he always had an individuality that made him appear different from the rest, and a swaggering walk that, with the older folks, might have appeared affected. He caught up with the Salmons just as they were turning in through the door of the old meeting house, and was in time to accept an invitation to occupy a seat in their pew. During the service he held half of the open book as they stood and sang hymns together. When the meeting was over, Henry Bennings accompanied Hattie Salmon home, as her father had unfinished work at his office.

It was a delightful summer night, warm, with a little shifting breeze, and they found it very comfortable on the porch, where they spent the balance of the evening.

Frank Ridgeway had been employed in the village bank eight years, and now held the

position of cashier. He was bright, accurate, and a most willing worker, a man of good judgment, and quick at reading human nature. It was not that he lacked ambition that he allowed himself to become what appeared to be a permanent fixture in the country bank, for he had often thought how he might do better in the city, but there was something that held him from leaving the village — a something that he had never told, not even to his mother.

The day had been a busy one at the bank and he was just getting ready to close up, when Timothy Salmon arrived and walked around behind the counter, jingling his keys in an effort to find the smallest one, which finally opened his desk. As he pushed back the roller top he glanced over at Ridgeway.

"Been working overtime, Frank?"

"That is nothing unusual for me, sir," was Ridgeway's reply.

The president settled down in his chair,

and after adjusting his spectacles, took some papers from a pigeonhole.

"Well, my boy, work never hurt anybody that I ever knew."

He tapped his letter-opener on the desk, as he glanced over a paper lined with figures.

Frank observed him closely, hoping that he would look up, but the old gentleman seemed absorbed in his work, so he walked to the counter and tried to kill time by straightening things around. He filled an inkstand and put new pens in the old penholders. After a time the president called to him. "Did Miller take care of that note? It was due to-day."

"Paid half," came the answer, "and renewed the balance for one month."

"Huh!" Salmon drew from his vest pocket a little book in which he made an entry. "One month, hey?"

"Yes, sir; he expects to get some pension money at that time."

"Oh, that 's so; come to think he did leave

the village for a couple of weeks during the war. How about Dick Spencer? My book here says he agreed to pay when he sold his corn."

"Guess he has n't sold it yet."

"No; probabilities are he never will. Don't see how I ever came to take his story for corn." The old man laughed a little at his own joke, and turned over another page. "By the way, Frank, what became of that note of Orlie Sprague? Seems to me we called that paper, did n't we?"

"Yes, sir; don't you remember? And Old Jim Case paid it."

"So he did. So he did! The old fool! He 'd do well to mind his own business. I 'd liked to have got hold of that farm myself."

Salmon gritted his teeth and looked at the next line.

"Here 's Perkins, the undertaker; why don't he pay that sixty dollars? No reason why we should drop him just because it 's charged over to profit and loss."

"I saw him last week. Says he expects to make a payment within ten days at the latest providing things come about as he hopes."

Salmon lowered his book and looked at the ceiling. "Don't believe his hopes will pan out, for the doctor told me yesterday that Winnie Fowler was improving, and that, while he was over eighty, he thought if he got well that he was good for ten years yet."

"I suppose that means that we will have to wait." Ridgeway covered his mouth to hide a smile.

The president sighed. "Yes; and the worst of it is Perkins will forget how to conduct a funeral if somebody don't give him a chance to keep his hand in pretty soon."

Frank Ridgeway was now leaning with one elbow on Mr. Salmon's desk; his expression had changed. He thought the time had arrived for him to speak for himself.

"I have something to say to you, Mr. Salmon, and I guess this is the best opportunity I may have, while we are here alone."

The old gentleman placed his penholder between his teeth, and after using his blotter, looked up.

"I will be through at the bank when we close Saturday noon — through for good."

The president returned the penholder to its proper place. His chair squeaked as he turned to one side and with a surprised expression looked squarely at Ridgeway. The light shone against the boy's face, and he could see that he was in earnest.

"Through! Huh, let 's see!" He rubbed his hands back and forth along the arms of his chair. "You 've been here six, seven — yes, it 's eight years."

"Yes, sir; eight years," repeated Ridgeway. "Eight long years, and I might ask if you have not been satisfied with my work?"

"You know better than to ask such a question. We shall miss you, my boy." He spoke in a fatherly tone, hoping possibly that he would change his mind. "But what 's the meaning of all this, and so sudden?

Has someone been showing you how to get rich quick?"

"I never expect to be rich; but there are personal reasons why I must go."

"It is n't that you don't like Henry Bennings, is it?" he asked, as he removed his specks and rubbed them with his handkerchief.

The question took Ridgeway by surprise, and after a moment's thought he answered, "I have never said that I objected to Mr. Bennings, but from the stories he has told about the village, it is evident that he does n't like me."

Here the old man straightened back in his chair. "Do you deny whatever he may have said?"

Ridgeway buttoned up his coat and shoved both hands in his side pockets. "Mr. Salmon, to you it is not necessary for me to deny or affirm anything. You have just said that I have been in your employ for eight years. Am I to believe that you, too, are ready to believe these stories?"

It was evident that Salmon had really taken a liking to Henry Bennings, for he looked angry, at Ridgeway's remarks; and, turning back to his desk, he fumbled about in his vest pocket and once more produced his memorandum book.

"By the way, Frank, how about that two hundred and fifty dollar note of your father's?" He opened a little drawer, and taking the note out, said, "Here it is, signed 'Ralph Ridgeway.' I know it 's outlawed, but you agreed to pay it if I would promise at the time not to make the matter public. How about that, hey?" He laid the note on his desk, and rubbing his hands together, looked toward Ridgeway.

Frank was looking out of the window. He turned quickly. "I told you, sir, that if you would give me time that I would pay every dollar of it, for I never wanted my mother to know of that affair of father's, as you know he gave her trouble enough."

Salmon returned the note to the drawer,

saying, "He made everybody trouble; he was a common ———"

Before he had time to say "drunkard," Ridgeway broke in, "That will do. I told you, sir, that I would not leave the bank until that note was paid in full with interest. I now have to my credit in this bank the amount, and a little more. You shall be paid in full to-morrow. Then you will have kept your promise and I mine. You know, Mr. Salmon, that you never could have collected a cent, but to save my mother's feelings I am paying it. You know that the original loan was only two hundred dollars, and that the fifty was your bonus; to be plain, usury — the old, old trick to beat the law."

Ridgeway stopped abruptly. He saw that he was forgetting himself. He thought of Hattie Salmon, and reaching for his hat, he said, "To-morrow, sir, we shall balance accounts; and for myself I shall rule up the past and start my life over again, and with a new set of books."

CHAPTER III

THE DEPARTURE

WHEN Jim Case was n't fishing or hunting or making a horse trade, he was generally playing checkers. He always carried, rolled up in one pocket, an old piece of oil-cloth on which was a print of a checker-board, and a set of checkers in the other. These he would flash out on the least provocation, arranging the checkers and asking some bystander to lead off. Although Jim played with all comers, it was rarely that his opponent ever worked his way into the king row.

This night, while he was playing a game with Cal Hemmingway and the usual crowd looked on idly, the bell, which for years had announced the arrival of a possible customer, set to jingling. The store door opened and a

lady entered. Cal, at this particular time, was watching Jim get into shape to take three for one, and it was not until many moves had been made that he deigned to look up. It was some time before the game was finished, as they would both look at the board and whistle or hum a tune for many minutes before each move.

The customer waited patiently until at last the game was over. You could have told that Jim Case had won the game by the way Cal shuffled along behind the counter and grumbled to the lady, "Wa'al, what kin I do fer ye?"

She was very anxious to purchase a few yards of mosquito netting, and added that there seemed to be a great demand for mosquito netting this season.

Cal answered her very abruptly.

"We hain't got no skeeter nettin' — hain't had none fer more 'n a week — hain't goin' ter keep it no more. It 's got so that we'd no sooner get a-playin' a game o' checkers than

some darned woman 'ud come in and always want skeeter nettin'. Got ter be sech a bother had ter cut it out."

As the lady went out with a disgusted and forlorn look, Cal turned and scuffled along back. Old Jim had carefully picked up the checkers and placed them with the oilcloth in his pocket.

"Ye see it 's a good deal as Cal says about this 'ere he-red-itary," said Hiram Wilcox, continuing a conversation that the game had more or less interrupted. "There 's a lot in this havin' things born in ye, and Frank Ridgeway, bein' a chip o' the old block, might 'a' acquired a likin' fer liquor.".

Here the squeaky voice of Elmer Perkins, the village undertaker, chimed in. "It appears that it hain't all drinkin' that Frank Ridgeway 's bein' accused of. Jest what has ben a botherin' the community and a-settin' 'em all a-talkin' is what he could 'a' done with all the money he drawed out o' the bank.

Ye see last Decoration Day he met Eph Lancaster and showed him his bank book, and at that time he had there in the bank more 'n two hundred dollars what he said he 'd saved up. Wa'al, here yesterday, Henry Bennings told the Widow Wetherby that fer some reason er other the account had ben balanced. So it must 'a' ben that he 'd drawed it out fer somethin'."

"P'rhaps he 'd ben gamblin' it away," said Hiram Wilcox.

"Or drinkin' it up," said Cal.

"Wa'al, Henry Bennings says he 's putty sure it 's a leetle o' both," squeaked Perkins, with a wise look, at the same time putting the question to Jim Case. "What 's your idee about where the money went?"

"Wa'al, I 've ben listenin' ter all o' you, and I think jest at this time I 'd ruther foller the old rule: it 's ter think twice before a-speakin' and then ter jest say nothin'."

At this moment the front door flew open and closed with a bang, and a young man

with a somewhat tanned but clear complexion entered and threw down a travelling bag, tossed his cane on the counter and stood, tall and erect, before the self-elected jury of South Hollow. A half-hidden smile hovered about the corners of his mouth. The keen, searching glance from his dark eyes showed defiance and self-respect.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, with mock dignity, "whose case is being decided to-night by this worthy assemblage?"

"We were jest a-talkin' a leetle while ago about your father, Frank," said Hiram Wilcox.

"Yes," interrupted Perkins. "We were a-sayin' that yer father, Ralph Ridgeway——"

"Never mind now," said the young man quickly. "I 've come over here to say good-bye. I 'm going away for good. South Hollow and I 've got out of step. All the old women and gossips and storekeepers and sitters around seem to be spending most of their time criticising folks. Well, I have

come to the conclusion that instead of being too bad for South Hollow I 'm too good. But before I left I did want to say good-bye to you fellows and tell you all that whatever you heard about my dissipating was n't true and I hope you 'll always remember me as you have known me rather than from what you have heard."

Here he passed around behind the old stove, and taking them each in turn by the hand with a firm grip, bade them good-bye; and then, picking up his bag and cane, made his way out to the old stage which had been waiting at the store door. They all followed, including Cal, who dragged the mailbag, and stood on the steps waving their hands as the stage driver swung his whip and drove away.

When the stage was out of sight they all turned and walked slowly back into the store, each taking the same seat he had previously occupied. Not a word was spoken for a

long time. Jim Case kept busy cleaning out his pipe with his jack-knife, while Hiram Wilcox whistled and kept time, swinging his leg back and forth. Cal Hemmingway busied himself sorting the evening mail. Finally he stopped, and, leaning over the counter, said "I tell ye it 's too blamed bad fer South Hollow ter lose a chap like that Frank Ridgeway. He 's a mighty likely boy after all."

"Them 's my sentiments," spoke up Hiram, shifting one leg over the other. "That boy wuz n't never 'preciated 'round here neither. He 's a boy what takes after his mother."

"What on earth ails ye, Wilcox?" said Elmer Perkins. "Did n't ye just say that he took after his father? Hain't ye jest branded him as a chip o' the old block, and ben a-tellin' how that wuz probably the cause o' his drinkin'?"

"Never ye mind what I said, Elmer," retorted Hiram, growing a trifle red. "P'rhaps you fellers don't recklect back when

that boy's mother wuz the puttiest gal in these parts. Her name then wuz Susan Redfield. She came from the real old stock, the kind what came over in the Mayflower, and I tell ye a feller what 's got a good mother is putty apt ter make a darned good man."

By this time the crowd had thinned down to the regular sitters, and Old Jim, noticing that Cal was getting ready to close up, started in to help. He was familiar with the daily manipulation of the boxes and other plunder, and knew how to fix things for the night. As he was dragging a couple of chairs back to the rear of the store, he said, "Wa'al, Frank Ridgeway wanted us to remember him as we knowed him ruther than from what we 'd heared, and what I liked about him most o' al wuz that in biddin' us good-bye he did n't say nothin' 'bout nobody else, ner try ta explain matters; seemed ta know that us fellers would n't ask it of 'im and that the rest on 'em would n't 'a' be-lieved him if he had."

As Cal blew out the last lamp, they all walked down toward the door.

The town clock was striking nine as the proprietor turned the key in the store door and everybody started for home, each with a yawn bidding his host good night.

CHAPTER IV

FRANK RIDGEWAY'S LONELY RIDE IN BENNETT'S OLD STAGE

THE creaking old stage slowly dragged its way up the long, winding road from South Hollow to the summit of the hill. Frank Ridgeway was its sole passenger. Old Bennett, the driver, sat up in front, a dark, round-shouldered sphinx, slowly swaying from side to side with the jolts of the waggon. Incessantly he plied his stubby whip on the "off nag," which, never changing her gait, jogged along, always a little behind and utterly contemptuous of the lash.

As old Bennett was stone deaf, conversation was impossible. Furthermore, Frank was in no talking mood; so he brooded alone with his own thoughts. The boy had now come to a true perception of his situation. He was

on his way into the big world. In the past he had visited Syracuse and a few other towns in the immediate vicinity; but the thought of leaving South Hollow, leaving his friends, and leaving *her* — he felt unmanly, shameful tears coming in spite of the bold front he had put up in his farewells at the old store.

After a few jabs and pokes with his handkerchief, he clenched his teeth hard. "I'll forget it all," he said to himself as he looked out of the side of the old stage.

The cool night air felt good against his flushed cheeks. They had reached the summit now and the moon was just rising above the fog bank shrouding the valley below, and away ahead he could see the bright lights of the city.

It was a wonderful summer's night. The singing of the insects; the glistening dew; the soft perfume from the pine woods nearby — could any man forget his sweetheart on such a night? Frank Ridgeway found it beyond him. His resolutions faded and seemed to

mingle and melt in the soft haze, and Hattie Salmon's face appeared to brighten through the shadows, and the ghost of her voice rang in his ears.

"The dearest girl in all the world," he said, half aloud. "No, I can't forget her. How could she have believed all those busybodies said?"

Frank grew weary with the unhappy thoughts that crowded themselves into his tired brain. He shifted his satchel to the seat opposite him and leaned back from sheer exhaustion. As the old South Hollow stage descended the long succession of hills, he lived over again in his mind the one romance of his young life. Memory's panorama moved quickly, its scenes passing distinctly before him as though pictured by a biograph thrown up against the faded top of the old vehicle: the church social at the town hall where he had first met Hattie; the many nights he walked home with her from prayer meeting; the day he drove her to the picnic

at Green Lake (it was there she had given him her tintype); the sleigh ride and the dance at Cardiff, where she had shown that she thought well of him; then the Thanksgiving dinner at her house when they had "pulled the wish-bone" and he had won! Would the wish he made that day ever come true?

Then the picture changed. Henry Bennings moved into South Hollow to work in her father's bank, and met Hattie Salmon at Nellie Lockwood's surprise party and saw her home; the night he called and met Bennings in Hattie's parlour and for the first time found that he had a rival; the days that followed when people began to look at him queerly and suspiciously; the night that he found his mother crying and unwilling to believe the stories she had heard about his gambling and drinking on the sly; and at last the cruel climax, when Hattie too believed the rumours of his dissipation in spite of his protests of innocence; and then his discovery

that Henry Bennings was the author of it all. After that there had come his hard fight with himself through the long, silent nights when his thoughts reeled with suggestions as to what was best to do. Should he seek reconciliation with Hattie and publicly show up Bennings? Or should he go away? or stay and prove the stories untrue? And then, one morning, the question solved itself in a letter from a relative in New York. Would he care to leave the country and try a position in the big metropolis? He decided at once to go. "The gossips' yarns will take care of themselves," he thought; and he suddenly wished to leave a narrow-minded community that loved gossip so well. Now he was on the way to better himself in the world. His new plans for his future were all made, and as he dreamed of them in the jostling, creaking old stage, he dared to look far ahead — some day ——

"Ye 're jest in time ter git yer ticket," yelled Old Bennett in a deaf man's toneless

voice, as the stage coming to a sudden stop sent the boy's satchel tumbling to the floor.

After the boy's hasty hand-shake and a parting farewell, Bennett stood and watched Frank Ridgeway disappear through the big doors of the station. Then he climbed back up into the seat, picked up the reins, and, with a cluck at the old team, swung around and started rattling on his way homeward, back to South Hollow.

CHAPTER V

THE WIDOW WETHERBY MAKES AN EARLY MORNING CALL

EARLY next morning, while the dew still sparkled along the roadside, the Widow Wetherby picked her way gingerly along the gravel walk down the main street of South Hollow.

Mrs. Wetherby was the widow of the seer of plaid rats to whose memory Old Jim Case had erected a simple stone monument. The widow's duties and functions were peripatetic. The schoolma'am of the district and holding the record at the weekly sewing circle and Foreign Mission Society as the chief newsmonger of the village, she was primarily an improvement on the daily press, for the newspaper never reached town until the arrival of the afternoon stage.

On this beautiful morning the widow was out as usual on the alert for news. Down the street she made her way, until she came abreast of the big garden which spread its breadth on the sunny side of the pretentious residence of the Honourable Timothy Salmon. She craned her neck over the high stone wall and almost danced with delight when she saw Hattie Salmon's pink sunbonnet moving amid the tall hollyhocks.

Hattie, the one bright sunbeam in the life of the Honourable Timothy Salmon, the Autocrat of South Hollow, lifted her long, dark eyelashes, and with a bewitching smile, sent her greetings over the old wall.

"Good morning, Mrs. Wetherby."

"Good mornin', Harriet. S'pose you heard the news?"

"No," replied Hattie, with an air of sarcasm. "I would n't be expected to know the news. This is my first sight of you to-day, Mrs. Wetherby."

"Oh, my goodness, now! Wa'al, if it

wan't fer me, there are a lot of people that would n't never know what wuz goin' on in this village from one end o' the year to t'other. I *did* think 't would interest you some to know that that loafer, Frank Ridgeway, hez at last quit South Hollow *fer good.*"

"What 's that you say — Frank Ridgeway — gone away?"

Hattie turned away, pretending to gather more flowers. Her cheeks, that a moment before were like the roses beside her, were pale.

"Yes," gleefully resumed the widow. "He told the boys over ta the store that this village wuz n't big enough fer him and Henry Bennings both ter live in. Guess p'rhaps he thought there wuz n't enough whiskey and tobaccy and girls in such a small town fer both on 'em. I 'll bet now, if the truth wuz known, he 's taken somethin' with him what ain't hisn. The tavern keeper lost his solid gold specks and commenced to suspect Frank Ridgeway, when he happened ter find 'em under a newspaper in the settin'-room. I

said prob'ly the reason he did n't have 'em wuz 'cause they wuz lost and he could n't find 'em. I told Calvin Hemmingway if I wuz him I 'd take an inventory o' the store but he said he 'd take a chance on Frank Ridgeway's honesty. That 's jest like the men — always stickin' up fer each other no matter what happens. Guess p'rhaps he 'll change his tune when he hears what Frank Ridgeway did with all his money what he drawed out o' the bank. Henry Bennings wuz a-tellin' me confidentially that ——"

The widow turning at this moment, was surprised to find herself without a listener; for, during her talk, which was fast and almost in one breath, her curiosity had got the better of her and she had been looking up and down and across the street, fearful of missing something or somebody, so she had not noticed that Hattie had fled. At the discovery, the widow nervously tied her bonnet-strings under her chin, and, throwing her nose high in the air, turned on her heel and walked back up

the street, mumbling to herself about the ingratitude of some folks.

In the meantime Hattie Salmon was sitting in the seclusion of her own room, in silence, behind the bolted door.

"Frank gone away, and for ever," she mused, and buried her head among the soft pillows on the broad window seat. She did not weep, but remained motionless for a long time. Suddenly she arose to a sitting posture, and drawing aside the curtains, looked out of the window. "Why should I care?" she said to herself with a toss of her head, gazing long and steadily at the heat waves dancing on a neighbouring roof.

"But I do seem to care, Frank," she sighed at length, "more than you know."

She crossed the room to her dainty writing desk, opened a tiny drawer, and from among her keepsakes drew forth the shorter part of a turkey's wishbone, around it was tied a bow of blue ribbon. "I have surely — lost," she murmured, and, opening the window

screen, she was about to throw the treasure into the garden below. But she did n't. Girls never do.

She closed the window screen again, and reasoned with herself. Why should she keep her part of the wishbone? Last Thanksgiving Day — how far away it seemed; why should she keep it? Why should n't she? It was an unlucky token, but it was a remembrance of a golden day she would never forget.

The breakfast bell rang, and she smoothed her hair and went downstairs to preside at the table of her austere father, making an unusual effort to appear calm and natural.

Timothy Salmon appeared to be in the best of spirits on this occasion, and this gave Hattie courage. She poured the coffee and helped her father to a liberal portion of ham, then braced herself for the question uppermost in her mind.

"Father," said she, with forced playfulness.

"What is it, daughter?" said his Honour, with a benign smile.

"Father," said Hattie, this time with less assurance, "do you know why Mr. Ridgeway has gone away?"

"Why, no," he replied, "unless he has tired of our society."

"But," she continued, "you know he has left South Hollow for some reason. Do you believe all the gossipy stories that were told about him? Don't you think he was a straightforward young man? Why did you invite him to our Thanksgiving dinner? You have n't asked him here to dine since. But you have never said you believed those awful stories that have been told about him."

She rested her elbows on the table and looked squarely across at her parent. "Do you really and truly believe that Frank Ridgeway drew his money out of the bank and spent it in gambling and drinking?"

Timothy Salmon remained silent for several seconds, while his features assumed a serious expression. "Well, Harriet," he finally replied, "while I cannot understand your

concern for the welfare of the character of this Frank Ridgeway, I will give you my honest opinion. I do not believe Mr. Ridgeway spent that money in dissipation."

Although Hattie's spirits rose many points at her father's answer, she did not betray her feelings in the least, and when the meal was finished she went directly to the piano and played and sang an old love song many times over.

After that she went up to her room and replaced the bit of wishbone in the drawer among her treasures.

CHAPTER VI

A HORSE TRADE

THE old tavern was well filled with farmers who were impatiently waiting for the *Gazette*, the South Hollow weekly. Some were tipped back in their chairs, talking over the crops; others were arguing out the coming political situations; not a few were in the bar-room, much interested in the caprices of five grimy dice that rattled along the bar. Pop was frantically busy drawing beer and punching away at an old rusty cash register. In the corner of his mouth he held a short, well-chewed stub of a black cigar.

Pop himself was a stubby, round-shouldered little man, with a shiny bald head and long, wavy, jet black side whiskers. The whiskers gave an unquestionable dignity to the yellow diamond cross which had adorned his shirt

front for the forty years he had been landlord of the South Hollow Hotel.

Among those waiting for the papers was Old Jim Case. He sat in the corner looking out of the window. Pop walked over and spoke to him: "Wa'al, Jim, they say ye did n't play the tip that wuz given the boys over ter the county fair — the one ter back Nancy Jinks in the two hundred dollar trot. How is it that ye dodged that? Ye 're the only one that did n't git scooped. They all sorter thought 't wuz a sure thing."

"Have a sure thing every year, don't they?" replied Jim, still gazing out of the window.

"Dunno but they do, when ye come ter think of it."

"Wa'al, when they handed it out ter me, I jest told 'em I 'd seen the pictures."

"What d' yer mean by that?" said Pop, rather bewildered.

"Mean by it! Why, did n't ye ever hear 'bout Old Dave Slocum a-buyin' the drink down in New York. Ye see Dave got

kind o' faint and went inter the hotel and asked fer some rye whiskey. The bartender set out the bottle and gave him a leetle ticket marked twenty-five cents or somethin' like that. Dave did n't notice the amount until after he 'd had his drink, and then he said, 'What 's all this? I kin git all the liquor I want hum fer ten cents a drink.' 'Wa'al,' sez the man, 'guess ye don't know where ye be. This is the Hoffman House, and we have ter git our price. Ye see that picture over there? — wa'al,' sez he, 'that cost fifty thousand dollars.' Dave looked at it and said 't wuz a real good one. Then the feller said, 'See that one over there? Wa'al, that cost seventy-five thousand dollars.' 'Jimminy Cracker,' sez Dave, as he walked over and stared at it fer 'bout ten minutes. Then he came back and paid the price. Later in the day he went in fer another drink, and the feller give him another one of them tickets. Dave got mad and banged a dime down on the bar. As he stamped away,

he snorted out, 'Ye be danged. I've seen yer pictures.'"

Just then the door opened and a boy with intricate designs of smut on his face hollered out, "Clear the track there, you yaps!" and a bundle of papers came sliding along the floor from his arms.

"Wa'al, here ye be," said Pop, pulling out his knife, and leaning over to cut the string.

In a jiffy each man had his paper and all was quiet as they proceeded to post themselves on what had been going on in and about the village, fearful that they might miss something. The only sound for some time was the occasional rustling of a paper. The first man to speak was Old Jim. "I see here that Irey Green has sold his waggon," he said.

"Get out! Hain't sold that waggon o' hisn with the red wheels, has he?" exclaimed Pop doubtfully, putting down his *Gazette* and pushing his glasses up on his forehead.

"Yep. It sez here't he sold it yisterday."

"Don't it tell who he sold it ter?"

"Eph Lancaster, it sez."

"Wa'al, I want ter know! What 'd he give fer it?"

"Give twenty-one dollars."

"Wa'al, said! I swan I did n't know that Eph Lancaster had means."

"Did n't know Eph Lancaster had means!" repeated Old Jim scornfully. "Why, his father died eight years ago and left him five hundred dollars, and then, besides, he 'd ben a-workin' right along at his carpenter's trade. I guess, Pop, ef the truth wuz known, that Eph is rich."

"Let 's see," said Pop, tapping his head a few times with his forefinger, "he had a brother what came inter the same amount o' money at that time, did n't he?"

"B'lieve he did," answered Jim, putting the paper to one side and leaning over to tighten up his shoestrings. "But ye see he got the swelled head and moved ter the city — wanted ter be pointed out as one o' Syracuse's business men, ye know. But he lost

all his money before he got ter the pointin' out stage."

"He did, hey? What kind o' business d' he go inter?"

"Why, he opened up some kind o' shop — makin' buckets, er somethin' — don't know as I kin jest tell ye; anyway, one o' the city fellers wuz a-tellin' me how Sidney Lancaster lost all his money in a bucket shop o' some kind. I asked him ef 't wuz lack of attention er poor judgment, and he said it could n't 'a' ben lack of attention, 'cause he wuz right there a-watchin' the figures from ten in the mornin' 'til three in the afternoon. Wa'al, I did n't want ter say too much, but I thought ter myself, 'a feller what don't git around ter his business till ten in the mornin' and then 's tired enough ter quit by three won't never set the world on fire."

Jim yawned, and, picking up his paper, continued his reading. Pop straightened his sheet out with a slap of his hand, and, pushing his spectacles back down over his nose,

mumbled out, "That Sidney Lancaster never did have over 'n above business a-bil-ity." Then he bowed his head, once more absorbed in the news. He scanned the different headlines for a time and finally looked up with an exclamation. "It sez here that Sam Hemsted is a-goin' ter build his store up higher. Wonder how much higher?"

"Dunno," said someone. "But I 'll bet 't won't be any higher than the mortgage."

"Wa'al, boys," continued Pop, "what d' think? Did any o' ye read this 'bout Silas Weaver losin' that bay mare o' hisn? Too bad, too bad, I tell ye. Wa'al bred mare, ye know. Had a ped-igree longer 'n from here ter the bridge."

"What did she die of?" asked one of the listeners.

"Why, it sez here that she had sort of a sinkin' spell. Kind o' laid down like, and before Silas could git her up — wa'al, why she jest died, that 's all."

"Ef Silas could n't git her up, I 'll swear

there could n't nobody," said Old Jim, looking over his glasses. "No, sir, nobody."

"Wa'al," came a voice from the other side of the room, "I want ter say this ter ye, Jim Case, I know that he thought so much o' that 'ere hoss that he would n't drive her, that 's what. Jest kind o' pensioned her, as it were."

Old Jim crumpled up his paper and shoved it back behind his chair. "Wa'al, sir, let me tell ye somethin'. Ye know the reason why he did n't drive that hoss? Wa'al, 't wuz 'cause he could n't."

"Could n't drive her," exclaimed three or four at the same time, as Pop leaned over the desk and asked, "What d'ye mean, Jim? Why, Silas Weaver told me 'imself one day last summer when I wuz out ter his farm that there wuz a bay mare that he did n't think he 'd ever part with."

"Never did, did he, till she dropped dead?" replied Old Jim, slapping his old slouch hat first against one knee and then the other. After a second's pause, he added, "Could n't

'a' parted with her without the aid of a hoss pistol."

"How be it that you seem ter know so much 'bout this particular bay mare?" inquired Pop, as he looked at Old Jim with an air of doubt.

"How be it? Wa'al, sir, I 'll tell ye. It 's 'cause I owned that particular bay mare once myself; that 's how."

"*Y'u* owned Silas Weaver's bay mare," rang out nearly every voice in the room. The few who had not fully followed the run of talk, now put down their papers.

"Yes," replied Old Jim, with half a smile, "I owned her; owned her fer 'bout an hour, but 't wuz long enough ter find out all her points. I were n't so particular at the time 'bout her ped-igree. I could tell without a-askin' that she wuz well bred by the way her coat shined, and so long as I wuz tradin' hosses I did n't think 't wuz necessary ter remind Silas as ter what might be her good points."

Jim looked around the room and, taking out a package of tobacco from his coat pocket,

poked his fingers inside and pulled out a reasonable portion of scrap. Then be passed the package to one of the listeners, who, at first sight of it, had held out his hand. "Wa'al," said Jim, "seein' ye 've all put down yer papers, guess I might as well go ahead and tell ye about it."

He shifted his quid and stroked his moustache. "Ye all know how I used ter take one er two helpers and start out through the country with a string o' 'bout twenty er thirty hosses, old plugs, skates, er whatever ye might call 'em?" he began. "Wa'al, ye know we were always ready ter sell, trade, er make some kind o' a deal with any farmer who 'd be a-lookin' fer what might appear ter be a real bargain.

"I remember one time I wuz a-drivin' a particular good lookin' hoss that appeared ter be somewhat of a trotter, and a bystander who 'd ben a-watchin' his movements finally stepped up ter me, and, seemin' ter know who I wuz, sez, 'Jim, jest 'bout how fast kin that hoss trot?'

"'Oh, I dunno,' sez I. 'I take 'im out and drive 'im like hell fer 'bout three minutes and call it a mile.'"

Old Pop chuckled appreciatively at this. "Wa'al, boys," he asked, "how's that fer makin' a record?"

"Wa'al, ye know," continued Jim, "it got so I commenced ter think that when it come ter tradin' hosses I wuz jest about as smooth as the next man, havin' on that particular trip disposed o' all I had but four or five, and all o' 'um at good profits.

"'T wuz long 'bout noon time, this particular day that I 'm a-tellin' 'bout, when we happened ter overtake a farmer who wuz a-crossin' the road jest ahead. He wuz a-carryin' a pail in each hand, but when he saw us a-comin' he stopped, put down his pails, pushed back his broad-brimmed hat, and jest stared at me with his mouth wide open.

"'Kin ye tell us the main road that leads over ter Plainville?' sez I.

"He put one hand 'longside o' his ear and jest said, 'Huh?'

"I repeated my question, this time a-leanin' over until I nearly fell off the hoss, and hollerin' good and loud.

"'Oh,' sez he, pointin' up the road, 'ye go straight ter the top o' that hill 'til ye come ter God's barn, and then,' said he, pointin' his finger up the road, 'then ye take the furst turn ter the left.'

"'God's barn,' sez I. 'What in thunder d'ye mean by that?'

"'Wa'al,' sez he, 'ye see that red barn on the hill yonder? A while ago they had a fire up there, and as the wind wuz a-blowin' a regular gale, everythin' burned down 'ceptin' that barn, and since then,' sez he, with a sort o' grin, 'everybody 'round here has always called it God's barn.'

"At this he picked up his pails, kicked the gate open with his foot, and went on whistlin' inter the yard.

"When I reached the top o' the hill I

happened ter look up and see an old feller on the top o' the red barn, busy a-shinglin' the roof. I stopped and called out ter 'im, askin' whether there 'd be any objections ef we turned our hosses inter the next lot while we eat our dinners.

"The man on the barn did n't stop a-hammerin', but a leetle weazened voice came back in good-natured tones and said we could. Wa'al, when I heared that voice I knowed 't wuz old Silas Weaver; could 'a' told it a mile off."

"Yes, anybody 'd know Weaver's voice that 'd ever heared it once," said Pop. "But go ahead."

"Wa'al, after we 'd driven the hosses inside the gate, as usual I began a-lookin' 'round and my eye fell upon a mighty likely lookin' bay mare a-feedin' over in the next lot. I watched her a bit, and then walked around sort o' indifferent like. Before I knowed it, I wuz over beside the old red barn, a-standin' at the foot o' the ladder. The next minute I raised my head and called up to Silas, a-sayin',

'Don't s'pose ye ever trade hosses, d'ye?' The old feller 's hammer fell ter the roof with a bang. Why, he did n't even wait ter reply, but jest come down that 'ere ladder two rounds at a time. When he struck the ground he turned toward me, emptyin' the nails out o' his mouth inter the palm o' his hand, and a-sayin', 'Why, Jim, I 've ben known ter do sech a thing. What 's yer proposition?' he added, lookin' me over.

"'I s'pose that bay mare over in the lot there is yourn?'

"'She 's all mine, I reckon,' sez he, kind o' stubborn like.

"'Wa'al, I 'll trade ye that gray,' sez I, a-pointin' over in the next lot, 'and I 'll give ye this ter boot.' I held out a gold watch. He took it in his hand furst a-puttin' it up ter his ear and then a-turnin' it over back and forth a couple o' times; after that he flopped it inter his pocket and started up the ladder again, a-sayin', 'Wa'al, sir, ye 've made a deal; take her, she 's yourn.'

"When he reached the roof he commenced a-hammerin' away, and I walked back and told the boys how I 'd made the best hoss trade o' the season. 'Don't find an easy mark like that once in ten years,' sez I, as we started on our way after dinner, I a-leadin' the new bay mare. Wa'al, sir, we 'd a-gone probably a couple o' hundred feet er so when this likely lookin' bay mare came ter a halt. She would n't back up nor she would n't go ahead, and the next minute she commenced ter wabble back and forth, and finally I 'll be blamed ef she did n't go down in a heap. Wa'al, we 'd no sooner get her up than down she 'd go again, and at last I had ter give it up. I wiped the beads o' perspiration off my brow and trudged along back up the dusty road until I turned inter the lot where Silas Weaver wuz still a-hammerin' away on the barn roof.

"'That bay mare is down and out and we can't git her up,' I called out. 'Come over here ter see how ye 'd trade back.'

"Old Silas looked down and sez, sort o' unconcerned, 'I kin git her up all right. Ef ye want ter trade back, why I 'll keep the bay mare and the gold watch and ye kin go over and git yer gray.' As I turned ter go, he sez, 'I tell ye I 'd hate ter lose that bay mare, 'cause ye see I 've traded her nine er ten times, and, honest Injin, ye fellers got her further than anybody else ever got her before.'"

"Guess old Silas Weaver kind o' got the hook inter Jim that time, did n't he?" said a voice from the corner of the room.

Pop slapped his hands down on the desk and laughed. "I guess that wuz one on y'u, Jim," he said gleefully.

"There 's jest a leetle more ter this story," insisted Old Jim. "Ye see, 'bout six weeks after that I happened ter go ter the city, and hearin' there wuz goin' ter be a hoss sale, I hurried up with my errands and got over there jest as they were auctionin' off a hoss and buggy, and I want ter tell ye 't wuz 'bout the raciest lookin' outfit that I ever laid my eyes

on, and the furst thing that I knew I wuz a-biddin' fer it like a drunken sailor.

"Wa'al, I bought the hull darned shootin' match fer three hundred and twenty-five dollars, and got right in and drove hum.

"Wa'al, jest as I wuz a-comin' up the road towards the hut-tel, Silas Weaver wuz a-sittin' out there, tipped back in his chair, and when he saw me a-movin' along at a pretty good clip and the sun a-shinin' against them fresh painted, red wheels, he got right up outer his chair and stood a-leanin' against the post, sort o' cranin' his neck. Gee whiz! how that brass trimmed harness did glitter.

"'What ye ben a-gittin'?' sez he, as I pulled up in front o' the steps.

"'Ben over ter the city,' sez I, 'and when my eyes lit on this 'ere turnout I jest could n't walk away.'

"'Ef ye got the time,' sez he, 'I 'll let ye take me 'round the circle; kinder like the looks o' that hoss.'

"I leaned over and, takin' a-hold o' his arm,

helped him inter the seat. I only had ter give a leetle slack ter the lines and that hoss stepped off at a pace that surprised me 'bout as much as it did Silas. Pretendin' not ter notice the hoss, he finally sez, 'Don't like them red wheels; looks too much like a circus.'

"'I hain't a-tryin' ter sell it ter ye,' sez I, kinder independent-like. 'Ye 're a-ridin' on yer own invitation.'

"'I know 't I be,' sez he, 'and I want ter say that I ain't ashamed neither. What 'd ye have ter cough up; mind tellin'?'

"'Don't mind tellin' *you*.' As I said this it occurred ter me that right here wuz my chance ter tack on a fair profit, fer I could see where I might git a bite. I began my tactics by talkin' ter the hoss, a-sayin' 'Whoa, boy! Steady now! Careful there!' at the same time a-tryin' ter think how big a price he 'd believe. At last the hoss settled back inter an easy trot, and as I leaned forward ter put the whip back in the socket, I said, 'Why, I only give four hundred dollars fer the hull business.'

"He loosened his hat-band, which had ben pulled down tight behind his ears, and sez, 'four hundred dollars, hey.'

"'Yep,' sez I, 'ter be honest with ye, Silas, I don't need another hoss and wagon, but ye know I jest got enough hoss blood in my veins ter make me itch all over when I see one that suits.'

"By this time we were back and had pulled up in front o' the tavern, and when he stepped out he walked 'round in front o' the hoss, once more sizin' up the hull appearance. Then he glanced back at me and sez, 'As ye say, ye don't need another hoss and buggy any more 'n a cat needs six tails, and while I hain't ben a-advertisin' it 'round, I don't know but I 'd do business myself, providin' I 'd come across jest what I wanted."

"'Don't know nobody 'round here what 's got anythin' ter show ye,' sez I, sort o' leadin' away, as it were.

"'Don't, hey?' sez he, a-walkin' 'round on the other side. 'Nice, shiny coat.' He

rubbed his hand over the hoss's back, and sez, 'Don't know but what I 'd be willin' ter give ye what ye paid and buy the cigars ter boot.'

"'Yes, I guess so; don't s'pose my time 's worth as much as a settin' hen,' sez I, as I drove on hum, and he went back and sat down on the piazza.

"Wa'al, boys, d'ye know when I took the harness off o' that blamed hoss he commenced ter kick and rear and jump, and the very devil himself could n't git him inter the stall. I 'd heared 'bout them critters before, and I commenced ter understand how 't wuz that they wanted ter sell him all hitched ter the wagon ready ter be driven away, and the further the better.

"'Wa'al,' sez I ter myself, as I stood there a-holdin' the harness, 'Jim Case, ye 're gettin' easier pickin' every day.' Then I jumped ter one side jest in time ter dodge the left hind leg and ter see him leave a perfect imprint o' his shoe in the side o' the barn wall. It 's there yet, Pop, and every time I see it, a cold

chill runs up and down my back. 'Whoa there!' I yells out ter the beast. 'What d'ye think I am? A punchin' bag?' He said 'Biff!' with his heels, and sent a wooden pail right through the winder.

"Wa'al, after a while I managed ter git the harness back on, and after that he wuz as mild as a Maltese kitten. I got in and drove out as if nothin' had happened. As I come along by the tavern here, there wuz Old Weaver. He waved his hand as I expected he would, and I swung 'round and drew up ter the curb.

"'Hain't changed yer mind, have ye?' sez he, lookin' kinder serious like.

"'Not exactly,' sez I, 'but as I've ben a-thinkin' it over, y'u and me have ben good friends fer more 'n twenty years and I don't want ter have anythin' come between us now. It sort o' seems ter me that, seein' ye know I don't really need this outfit, you might always have a kind o' feelin' agin me if I don't sell it ter ye, and I would n't have our friendship interfered with fer a train load o' hosses. So

as I say, after thinkin' it all over, I 've made up my mind, as seein' it 's you, ter let ye have the hull thing jest as it stands fer four hundred and twenty-five dollars. Seems as though, under the circumstances, ye 'd orter be willin' ter let me have twenty-five dollars fer my time.'

"'Huh!' he whinnered out with that husky voice of hisn. 'Twenty-five dollars fer a day o' *your* time; I guess not!' *I* wuz jest a-thinkin' ter myself how I 'd have ter make it four hundred dollars and be satisfied with seventy-five dollars profit, and lucky to get rid o' that hoss at any price, when he up and sez, 'I 'll tell ye what I 'll do. I 'll jest give ye four hundred and ten dollars spot cash, and ye kin drive me over ter Salmon's bank and I 'll git y'u the money.'

"When he said this, I cramped the wheel about as quick as he dropped the hammer that day on the barn roof, and helped him ter get in, and we drove over ter the bank at an awful clip. Old Weaver counted over the four

hundred and ten dollars, and I handed him the ribbons. He left me and the money at my house and drove on hum.

"A few days after that I met him over in Cal's store. I wuz a-sittin' on the counter, openin' and shuttin' my knife, when he dropped in ter do some tradin.' Before he knowed it, he wuz a-standin' right in front o' me. 'Oh!' sez he, 'Jim Case, hey?' Then he drew back and cracked his whip until it sounded like a giant fire-cracker.

"I never moved a muscle. 'Orter wind that 'ere lash 'round yer blame hide, that 's what!' sez he, and the fire seemed ter stream out o' his eyes like a searchlight. 'So ye 're the man, be ye, who thinks such a hell of a lot o' my friendship?' He even took the liberty o' snappin' his fingers within a few inches o' my nose. 'Would n't part with it fer a train load o' hosses, would ye?' The old man's lips fairly trembled, he wuz so mad, and, when he caught his breath, he went on, 'Ye think I bought that horse ter use

as a hay tedder? Why,' sez he, 'as soon as I got hum and took the harness off, he commenced and kicked everythin' in the barn ter pieces, 'ceptin' the mowin' machine, and when he come ter that, he broke his leg, and I had ter shoot him.' He stopped short, and, holdin' up his fist in my direction, he sez, 'Jim Case, ye 're nothin' but a plain robber, fer I did n't have that hoss more 'n three hours after payin' y'u that money.'

"Thinkin' things had gone far enough, I slid down off the counter and walked up to where he stood, until our noses nearly touched. 'Mr Weaver,' sez I, 'guess ye 're so blamed mad that ye 've forgotten somethin'. Seems ter me as though I did n't own that bay mare o' yourn more 'n an hour, and if ye 'll look there in yer pocket at my gold watch that ye 're a-carryin', p'rhaps ye 'll find it 's time ter be a-goin', 'cause ye hain't got much of an excuse ter be 'round a-squealin' 'bout a hoss deal

when ye kep' one on hand yerself jest ter cheat folks with.'

"Wa'al, he went out and slammed the door behind him, and, boys, he hain't spoken ter me from that day ter this. Don't know as I care so much," said Old Jim, as he folded up his paper and shoved it into his pocket, "only I may 've lost another chance fer a hoss trade, that 's all."

While Jim had been spinning this yarn, Winnie Fowler, who sat next to him, had slid down so that his coat collar was even with the back of the chair, with both feet braced against the top round, his knees almost on the level with his head, his long arms reaching out between. In his little dried-up hands he held a copy of the *Gazette*, apparently much interested in the news.

"Gettin' posted, Winnie?" said Jim, nodding at the boys and beckoning his thumb at the shrivelled old man, whose lips were keeping time with his eyes as they followed back and forth across the lines. "Seems ter

me," went on Jim, with a grin, "as though ye 'd played that bluff about long enough; ye hain't a-foolin' anybody, 'cause they 've all knowed fer twenty years er more how 't ye could n't read ner write."

"Can't, hey?" replied Fowler, folding his specks and hurriedly putting them into a shiny case before anybody could ask him to read something.

Old Jim continued. "D' ye think folks have forgotten 'bout the time ye sat right here in this very room pretendin' ter be a-readin' the newspaper and ye had it upside down all the time? Why, everybody in the village knows about that."

Old Fowler made no reply, but looked down, tapping the heel of his boot with his cane, as Jim went on, "Ye remember sittin' there a-lookin' at that picture o' the ship upside down, furst a-lookin' with one eye and then with t' other, until finally I asked y'u if there wuz any news, and y'u looked up and sez 'Terrible wreck at sea.' Ye remember that,

don't ye? And then somebody told y'u if you 'd turn the paper right side up you 'd save a lot o' lives."

Old Fowler finally looked up at Jim. Wa'al don't know as y'u got so much ter brag about; never heard o' y'u a-teachin' school anywhere." The weazened little man's voice quavered and Jim realised then that his feelings were wounded, so he arose and patted old man Fowler affectionately on his back.

"Course, Jim," the old man said, as he got up with the aid of his hickory stick, "I never claimed that I could read any length o' time, but fer a leetle while, I tell ye, I kin read; honest, I kin, Jim, fer a leetle while."

"Never mind, Winnie; don't ye get mad. What ef ye can't read? There are plenty of us here that are always glad ter read ta ye. 'T war n't your fault 'cause ye had ter work when ye orter ben a-goin' ter school, and now that ye 're old and bent-over, ye need n't be ashamed o' what ye don't know 'bout books,

'cause we all know yer heart's in the right place and that 's enough."

Old man Fowler, who had passed his eightieth mile-stone, slowly sipped away at a glass of ale. His cane was hooked on his arm at the elbow and one foot rested on the iron railing; his nose was thin and peaked, and his face wrinkled and freckled. He wore a derby hat, much too large, shoved down behind his ears, and every time he smiled his drawn mouth sank back in from his prominent cheek bones. As he reached over and picked up a piece of cheese from the plate that Pop had just set out on the end of the bar, he turned and said to Jim, "Seein' as ye 've ben chaffin' me, I 'm a-goin' ter git back at ye by a-tellin' one on you — one that goes back many moons, as the Indians 'ud say. Anyway, 't wuz before ye swore off drinkin' that 'Squirrel Whiskey,' as ye used ter call it. As I recollect, boys, 't wuz when county politics were a-runnin' mighty warm, and us Republicans 'round here were a-tryin' ter put up a

good, stiff fight. Frank Dunbar, the hermit, had the handlin' o' the campaign funds them days and it seems that he sent fer Jim Case, a-tellin' him ter go over ter the Town o' Spafford, and a-givin' him sixty-five dollars ter spend there electioneerin'. Wa'al, I happened in here ter the hut-tel the day after, and, seein' Jim, course I asked him how he thought things were agoin' in the Town o' Spafford. 'Don't know nothin' 'bout Spafford,' sez he, between hiccoughs and sort o' bracin' himself with one hand against the desk, 'but I kin tell ye right now that Central Square iz all right.'"

Here all the crowd burst into laughter, and as the old man took his last swallow and placed his glass back on the bar, he added, tapping Jim on the leg with his cane, "Ye darn cuss, ye spent all that money in Central Square, Oswego County, across the line, where 't wuz out of our district, and we got snowed under over in the Town o' Spafford. How 's that, boys? P'rhaps ef Jim Case 'd look back

he could remember a-seein' a ship upside down, er a couple o' moons and a plaid rat er two himself."

"Wa'al," said Jim, stroking his moustache, "I guess we 'd better call it even, Winnie. You and me are always a scrappin' 'bout somethin'. Ef 't ain't one thing it 's another. That 's how the boys get on ter all our secrets and know all about our business. O' course, we hain't done nothin' ter be ashamed of. Ef we had, we 'd have ter do our talkin' ter each other out in the centre of a ten acre lot."

CHAPTER VII

THE LIGHTNING-ROD AGENT HEARS OLD JIM'S STORIES

IF there had been no thunder storm with its accompanying rain and mud, the lightning-rod agent would have passed South Hollow by on the other side and wended his way onward to localities more promising for the sale of his doubtful wares; but a storm there was, and Old Bennett and his stage, finding the mire and the freshets more than they wished to cope with, abandoned their trip to the city, and the vender of wondrous rods could do naught but stay over night.

It was, of course, inevitable that he should wander finally into the general store, which his keen instincts promptly told him was the liveliest place in town. By setting up the

cigars and joining at once in the conversation, he introduced himself to the boys.

He was dressed in a light check suit and wore a little brown derby hat. Incessantly he alternated a pull at his slight tow-coloured moustache with a puff from his cigarette.

"I suppose you have a hose company?" he said, as he carefully dusted off the bottom of a chair with a pink bordered handkerchief and took his seat. "Every lively, up-to-date village like South Hollow has a hose company."

"Wa'al, ye kin jest bet we have," said Old Jim. "An' what 's more, we 've got them patent fire alarm boxes same as they 've got in the city. We had a deuce of a time gettin' 'em, though. Ye see this town is jest the same as all the rest — pollyticians fightin' each other all the time. There wuz one side that wanted fire alarm boxes, and while they admitted it might cost a leetle more at furst, they allowed we 'd be fixed fer all time ter come, and 't we might jest as well put 'em in furst as last. T' other side allowed 't would make taxes too

high, arguin' that what wuz good enough fer our fathers ought ter be good enough fer us, and that we 'd orter be satisfied." He paused long enough to open the door and let in his dog which had been whining outside. After Nero had curled himself up comfortably beside the stove, Old Jim resumed his discourse.

"Wa'al, Election Day come along with fire boxes the issue, and it seemed the majority wuz strong fer fire boxes, so up they went, and now 'bout every so often you 'll see a beautiful red box with in-struction stamped on the front: *In case of fire break the glass and turn the little handle to the right.* Wa'al, sir, ye know the fire bell had n't rung in South Hollow fer 'bout three years until we got them red fire alarm boxes, and then, by Jimminy, the trouble commenced. Why, the fire bell 'll ring sometimes twice in one night. Course, it 's always false alarm. Ye see, the boys, wantin' somethin' fer excitement, 'll go up ter one o' them red fire alarm boxes and call out

the department. It 's got so now that when they hear the fire bell ring, the Quick Step Hose Company jest laugh; havin ben fooled so often, there ain't none of 'em what 'll go. So if we ever do have a real fire, probabilities be the hull darn town 'll burn up before we kin git the volunteer firemen ter believe somethin 's really burnin'."

The dapper agent seemed greatly amused at Jim's narrative. He lighted another cigarette and leaned over to pet the dog and read the name on the collar.

"That reminds me," said Hiram Wilcox, "o' the time when everybody wanted ter git a new hand engine and we had it pretty near fixed ter get one, when Elder Armstrong preached a sermon a-sayin' the town needed furst o' all a new clock in the Presperterian Church steeple. He told as how the people who could n't afford a Waterbury watch might a-wanter see what time 't wuz, and that a new fire engine would only be protectin' the rich and taxin' the poor who did n't have

nothin' ter lose. Anyway he put it so strong that we got licked on Election Day and the clock folks won. 'Twuz n't long after that when the Elder's house ketched fire and burnt right down ter the ground. 'Bout everybody in the village turned out ter see the fire. The Elder wuz all excited, a-wringin' his hands and cryin', when Jim over there came a-walkin' up ter him and sez, 'Elder, it 's too bad 'bout yer house gettin' on fire, but there 's one satisfaction ye 've got, and it 's this, ye kin look up at that 'ere clock in the Pres-per-terian Church stee-ple and know jest what time it wuz when it burned down.' "

Someone was saying that soon after this South Hollow finally got her fire engine and that the man who got thanked for it most of all was Old Jim Case.

Here a little girl, swinging her yellow sunbonnet by the strings, came in the back door, and with a shy manner, said, "Mr. Hemmingway, my father wants ter know if y'u want him ter lend himself ter yer axe fer a leetle

while. He sez he 'd ruther lend than borrow."

"Ye 'll find it behind the door in the woodshed, Annie," answered Cal, with a broad grin, and out she went with a skip and a jump.

The drummer again undertook to guide the conversation.

"How is the fishing around here; any trout in these streams?" he queried patronisingly.

"Ye 'd better ask Jim Case there; he 's the champion fisherman o' these parts — knows every trout by name. Why, they say he kin call 'em right up ter the bait. I 've seen him bring 'em in here *that long*." Cal stood up straight behind the counter and stretched his arms out to their full length.

"Gee whiz!" said the stranger. "I 'd stay around here a month to get one as big as that." He turned to Jim and asked if they could n't arrange a trip. "We 'd have a good time and get acquainted," he added.

Old Jim sat motionless, a faint smile beneath his generous moustaches. "Guess we 'd git

acquainted all right," he finally chortled. Then his expression changed and he looked the lightning-rod man over from head to foot. "My friend," he said, "if ye want ter know the true character of a man, go fishin' with him. There 's nothin' that 'll tempt a selfish individual more than a good chance ter hog a trout stream. Nothin' 'll bring out a man's real qualifications quicker than when he hez jest hooked seventy-five cents worth o' fishin' tackle inter the top of a tall tree."

As the agent seemed genuinely interested in this phase of fishing, Jim went on.

"One hot summer's day I carried a bottle of ginger ale 'bout four miles until I come ter where I could anchor it in a cool stream. Then I hid a ham sandwich above it in the limb of a tree, and made up my mind that I 'd make fer that spot 'bout noon.

"When I came back fer 'em, I wuz 'bout as hungry as a wild animal and ye kin imagine my feelin's when I opened the paper and found a swarm o' red ants mo-nop-olisin' my

only sandwich. I reached inter the spring fer the bottle of ginger beer and placed it under my arm; then I started fer a comfortable lookin' stump that would make a good seat. I filled my pipe with tobaccer and felt in every pocket fer a match. O' course, they wuz all gone. This wuz such a shock that the bottle o' ginger beer slipped out from under my arm, struck a stone, and broke inter a hundred pieces. A combination o' this kind, I want yer ter understand, gives anybody a licence ter invent words. But a real fisherman never takes advantage o' such occasions, so I made a break fer a shady nook where I could let my flies skip and dance over an old log and managed ta fergit all my trials and tribulations.

"I fished all the favourite spots comin' down that stream and could n't even attract a chub. It bein' the Fourth o' July, I even went so fur as ter string my leader with red, white, and blue flies, but there did n't seem ter be a single patriotic trout in that stream. I had ter come ter the conclusion that it wuz my

unlucky day, and wuz about ter start fer hum when all of a sudden I went up inter the air like a sky-rocket. I thought fer a minute that I 'd stepped on a live wire, but a second look proved it ter be only a black snake 'bout four foot long.

"My furst thought wuz ter draw my revolver, but my hand shook so 'at I wuz afraid I might shoot t' other way and hurt myself; so I put my faith inter the butt end of my steel rod and commenced mowin' the air, at the same time advancin' step by step toward the mad, hissin' rep-tile.

"A moment later and I wuz a hero. I coiled the cold, clammy remains inter my fish basket, covered it with grass, and made fer *this* store. 'T wuz only a short walk, and when I arrived here there were all the boys a-settin' 'round. As I dropped in and swung my basket ter one side, I knowed that it would n't be long before Cal there would be reachin' inter that basket. It wuz one o' his tricks in them days. Sometimes it had been ruther

embarrassin' fer me ter show up empty-handed, but on this par-tic-ular occasion Cal Hemmingway could go jest as far as he liked.

"'T wuz n't long before Cal sauntered around ter the basket, and as he lifted the cover, he sez, 'Wa'al, Jim, what kind o' luck d' ye have ta-day?' at the same time runnin' his hand down through the grass. As he felt all them coils, s'posin' 'em ter be brook trout, he sez, 'Wa'al, y'u certainly did fool 'em to-day, by gosh; good sized ones too. I would n't 'a' be-lieved there wuz ez many in the hull darned county.' I sez, 'They did take a-hold tolerable good. Take one out, Cal, and show the boys.' As I sez this, all eyes were on that basket, and Cal whipped out the monstrous black snake. With a yell like a savage, he dropped the curlin' body of the repulsive reptile and bolted fer the door. So 'd all the rest of 'um, leavin' in their trail a scatterin' pile o' tumblin' chairs, boxes, and barrels. I sat right here on this very tea-chest, jest bustin' my

sides a-laughin' to think how Cal had snooped inter my fish basket once too often."

The lightning-rod agent seemed to be having the best time of his life. He pulled down his vest, and, adjusting his bow tie, explained with feeling: "I want to tell you chaps that this little unexpected visit is a real treat to me, and, upon my honour, I 'd stay here a week, only I must get back to the factory and help take inventory."

"Inventory," repeated Old Jim, scornfully. "Y'u ought ter take inventory the way Cal Hemmingway does. The first o' last January he sez ter me, 'Jim, I owe jest two hundred dollars.' Then, like a soldier, he started at the front o' the store, and, takin' a pace er two, he looked 'round and sez, 'There 's one hundred.' Then he took a couple o' long strides more, and stoppin' again, he looked up at the stock and sez, 'There 's another hundred, and, by cracky Jim, all the rest is Cal's.'"

Shortly after this, before the laughter at

Cal had died away, Henry Bennings and some of his city friends came stamping into the store, just back from a day's hunting. They ordered cigars in loud tones, and were soon boisterously recalling an episode of their trip up the creek. They had encountered, one of them said, the queerest sort of an old man.

"Why," said Bennings, "the old cuss, he would n't move an inch or speak, no matter what we 'd say or do."

"Yes," said a tall, slim youth, who shone with the glamour of "father's money," "we fired a few salutes for his benefit with our shotguns, but even that would n't make him budge. He just sat there like an old mummy."

During the course of this conversation, Jim Case had been an earnest listener from his seat on the tea-chest behind the old stove. At its close, however, he arose to his full height, straight as a ramrod to the peak of his flapping slouch hat, and stepping forward until he had a fair and square view of these city sportsmen in the light of the big kerosene

lamp, he carefully sized them up. Then he spoke slowly but decisively. "Yes, boys, and ye 'll find that 'old mummy' sittin' right there in the same place every day 'bout the same time; don't make no difference what the weather is, he 's there winter and summer. Y'u fellers would n't 'a' thought when y'u see him that he wuz rich, would ye? Wa'al, sir, he had more 'n five thousand dollars left him jest the same, but it 's mighty leetle he evere cared fer it. Ye see he don't talk much ter folks; don't like ter be 'round where they are. He 'll come ter that window over yonder and peek in furst ter see if there are any strangers inside, and if there be, why he 'll turn away and won't come in. Some folks think he 's a leetle off, but that 's 'cause they don't know the story of his life same as I do."

The hunting party had suddenly become curious regarding this queer old character they had met, and waited in silence for Jim to continue. He, however, puffed away at his pipe and sharpened his knife by rubbing

the blade back and forth on the side of his boot.

After a long silence the lightning-rod agent said, "Well, Mr. Case, you are n't going to stop short like that, are you?"

Another added, "I 'll stay here all night to hear a good *funny* story; come on, Jim, let 's have it."

Jim snapped the big jack-knife shut and shoved it way down into his pocket.

"Wa'al, boys, I happen ter know Frank Dunbar, the old man y'u saw sittin' there; I knowed him when he come here forty years ago, when he wuz a political leader 'round here in the Hollow and handled all our campaign funds. His father wuz a doctor and made a lot o' money in his day and Frank wuz a great help ter him 'cause he wuz shrewd and wide-awake every minute. Finally he married a mighty putty gal that lived over in Cardiff. They come here ter South Hollow fer a time, until Frank bought a farm on the other side o' the creek and built a comfortable hum.

"Wa'al, 't wuz n't a great while before they had a leetle gal born, the puttiest leetle thing ye ever see, looked jest like her mother, great, big, blue eyes, and curly hair; and Frank Dunbar wuz prosperous, everythin' comin' his way; altogether they wuz about the happiest couple in the hull country. When they 'd want ter come over here ter the village, as it wuz quite a long drive from their place by the south road, they used ter make a short cut by drivin' across the creek from the rear o' their lot. This saved 'em 'bout two miles.

"Wa'al, one day in the spring of the year when he and his wife and that leetle baby were drivin' hum from South Hollow, they found the creek had ben risin' all day and it wuz jest a-bilin'. Ye all know what them spring freshets are around here when the snow starts and goes off in a day. Dunbar looked the situation over and thought he could make it, but when they were about in the middle o' the stream, the old horse kind o' lost his footin' and somehow that angry current turned his

buggy clean over. Frank Dunbar grabbed his baby and made the fight o' his life, swimmin' against the swift current, at the same time a-hollerin' ter his wife ter hang on ter the buggy. Finally he reached the shore and laid the leetle child on the grass and ran back ter help his wife, but when he 'd got there she 'd ben carried down the stream. He got sight o' her fer a minute, but only ter see her go down under a lot o' float wood. One hope wuz left him. He hurried back ter where he had left his child, but when he got there all he could see wuz the fresh dirt where the bank had caved and washed away, leavin' only the prints o' two leetle arms that had slid down and gone with the ragin' current.

"It wuz right there, boys, where y'u saw him a-sittin', and he hain't missed a day sence that time a-bein' there jest at the time o' day when it happened. He 'll sit there and stare inter that water fer hours, and then ye 'll see 'im go back ter the house where he has lived alone by himself all this time. So now if ye

happen ter see him a-sittin' there again, boys, I 'd cut out that monkey play and shootin', 'cause he don't interfere with nobody, and there ain't so much satisfaction, as I kin see, a-botherin' a man who has kept his sorrows ter himself all these years."

A profound hush hung over the dimly lighted store. You could have heard a mouse whisk his tail on the fly-specked shelves. The listeners sat in silence, subdued and ashamed. Old Jim Case wheeled abruptly and went back to his seat on the green tea-chest behind the rusty stove.

CHAPTER VIII

OLD JIM TELLS CAL HENRY BENNINGS'S STORY

SOON after Bennings and his friends had gone out, Cal Hemmingway came around from behind the counter and took a seat close to Old Jim.

"Don't seem three months ago ter-night that Frank Ridgeway left the village, does it? Anybody heared anythin' from him?"

"Dunno as they have," answered Old Jim. "Probabilities be he 's got his hands full a-keepin' his watch and a-dodgin' gold bricks. Ye know them New Yorkers ain't like folks here in the Hollow. Ye 've got ter keep yer eyes pealed down there or they 'll cut the buttons right off yer coat. They jest think o' money, that 's all, and o' what they kin git off ye. Takes a pretty spry feller ter git on ter

their frame-ups, as we 'd call 'em in a crooked horse race, and jest as like as not they 're a-keepin' Frank Ridgeway mighty busy."

"Don't believe he 's ben any busier than a certain party right here in the village," said Cal, as he looked sharply at Jim. "Ye ben hearin' any gossip 'bout a certain party? 'Cause if ye hain't, why 't ain't fer me ter say nothin', but if ye have — wa'al, why, o' course, that 's different."

"Ye don't mean Henry Bennings, do ye?" whispered Old Jim.

"Wa'al, I guess ye 're pretty warm. What d' ye know 'bout him?"

"Know," answered Jim. "Why, I know the hull story, but I hain't s'posed ter tell nothin'. Ye see, I met Bennings in the city t'other night, and he rode over with me. Wa'al, it turned out ter be the roughest night I ever see, thunderin' and lightnin' and the rain a-pourin' down in sheets — one o' them nights that ye have ter snuggle up close ter each other, and ye 're apt ter git confidential

and tell things that ye would n't if the sun wuz a-shinin'."

"And did Henry Bennings tell ye somethin' that night?" asked Cal.

"Told me a hull lot o' things — guess 'bout everythin', fer he did most all the talkin' a-comin' over, only stoppin' now and then ter lift up the rubber blanket so as ter let the rain water run off er ter ketch his breath after a sharp clap o' thunder."

"Ye did n't promise not ter tell what he told ye, did ye?" inquired Cal, with an inquisitive look.

Old Jim pushed the tea-chest over nearer the sawdust box, and as he seated himself again he looked over at Cal and said, "Did n't promise nothin'. And seein' we 're all by ourselves, jest me and you, I 'm a-goin' ter give ye part o' the story anyway, and I 'll tell it jest as Henry Bennings told it ter me — that is, o' course, bein' as near as I kin remember it.

"Ye see we had n't a-ridden more 'n a mile

er so when, ter kind o' break the monotony, I remarked how I hoped the old mare had n't fergot how ter swim, 'cause if it kept on a a-rainin' it might be over our heads by the time we reached the village. This could n't 'a' struck him as so very funny, 'cause we splashed along through the mud and ruts fer 'bout five minutes before he even answered, and then he kind o' mumbled out that he would n't mind a-bein' drownded — said he 'd jest as soon be dead as livin'. 'What 's the trouble?' sez I. 'Don't like ter see a young colt like you a-gettin' discouraged so early in the season. Ye hain't hardly got ter goin' yet. Ye 're jest bein' kind o' tried out, as it were, ter see what class ye belong in. What ye got ter do is ter make a showin' in a heat er two before ye kin expect ter go out and win a race.'

"'Don't expect ter win nothin' in this life's race,' he grumbled. 'What I 'm afraid of jest now is o' bein' ruled off the track.'

"When he said this, Cal, I commenced a-thinkin', sort o' workin' my head like, and

finally I asked him right out, 'Ye hain't a-ben doin' any crooked work, have ye, Bennings?'

"'T wuz a pitchin' dark night and all I could see wuz the fire on the end o' his cigar and feel his feet a-bobbin' up and down on the bottom o' the waggon, as if he wuz a-pumpin' a church organ. He hesitated fer a time before answerin', and then, a-puttin' his arm along the seat around the back o' me, he leaned over and sez, 'Jim Case, I 've been a damn fool!'

"'Wa'al,' sez I, 'go ahead and tell yer story. A regret fer the past ain't no asset fer the present.'

"'Ye 're right, Jim,' sez he, as if he 'd kind o' collected himself. 'When ye start out in life, ye want ter be pretty sure ter start with yer right foot furst, fer it 's easier ter get out o' step than 't is ter get back in again.'

"'Wa'al,' sez I, 'y'u know ter make steel you 've got ter take the iron and git it ter a white heat and then hammer and hammer it, but when y'u get all done, why y'u 've got steel. Henry,' sez I, 'it 's the same with folks.

They 've got ter have a lot o' knocks and bangs and got ter go through a lot o' trouble and make a lot o' mistakes, but it all helps ter make 'um "steel," er, in other words, real men.'

"Finally he sez ta me, 'Jim, did you ever get inter any real trouble when you wuz a-drinkin'?' 'Trouble!' sez I, 'why, it kept me in trouble most o' the time. The trouble with drinkin' is that it makes y'u keep a-puttin' things off, and then, besides, y'u know a feller can't drink a lot one day and nothin' the next, fer when y'u get ter drinkin' y'u have ter keep a-drinkin'. It 's a good 'eal like a-fallin' off o' the roof of a fourteen-story buildin', y'u keep a-goin' down faster an' faster, an' when y'u do stop, why y'u hain't worth sweepin' up. I 've known a few that could handle the stuff and I 've known a hull lot what could n't. My father used ter say that when he 'd see a young man go up ter a bar in the mornin', all alone, and call fer a drink o' whiskey, that he 'd gamble on that

young man a-bein' pretty close ta the fallin'-off place. It 's what he used ter call "a-gettin' tight a-tryin' ta get sober."

"'I 'm a-tellin' y'u all this,' sez I, ''cause I saw y'u put one down the other mornin' over ta the hut-tel what wuz enough ta 've saved the lives of a half a dozen ordinary persons.'

"'I remember the time y'u mean,' sez he. ''Twuz a mornin' after a night that I 'd spent over ta the city a-playin' cards and the wheel.'

"'Hain't got ta gamblin' too, have y'u?' I asked him.

"'Not exactly,' sez he. 'Only played a few times is all.'

"Here I kinder pulled up the reins, and, as the old nag slowed down, I sez ter him, 'My boy, y'u don't want ter ferget that you 're a-holdin' a responsible persition over in the bank, and if I wuz y'u I 'd come pretty near a-steerin' clear o' cards and them gettin'-somethin'-fer-nothin' games, 'cause they

would n't be a-payin' the rent and a-keepin' open fer y'u if they did n't have some sort er percentage in their favour.'

"I told him that while I had n't ever been inter a real gamblin' place, I 'd ben 'round an' seen enough o' life so 's I wuz willin' ter go along a-mindin' my own business.

"Wa'al, Cal, we ploughed along in that mud, in and out o' the ruts, almost runnin' inter another rig once, 't wuz so dog blamed dark, and from the log bridge ter Sam Peters's place at the turn he did n't say nothin', and all that time I wuz a-thinkin' it all over ter myself, and I kinder thought that perhaps I 'd a-laid it on a leetle too thick, and so 's ter kinder let him down easy, I finally sez, 'Henry, y'u know every man hez ben a darn fool in his day, some time er nuther. I know darn well 't I have, fer it 's only two years ago over ta the county fair that a feller got me throwin' balls at a lot o' stuffed dolls. I paid the cuss ten cents fer ten throws, an' all I got back wuz a big, greasy, black ci-gar full

o' stems an' cracks. Betcha he did n't pay more 'n sixty cents a hundred fer 'um.'

"Bennings laughed a leetle fer the furst time, and as he thanked me fer tryin' ta console him, he reached in his pocket and pulled out a good cigar. 'Here, Jim,' sez he, 'try that one. 'T won't kill y'u.'

"I fumbled 'round in the dark until I reached it, and after gettin' a light off o' his stub, I made him promise ta quit his foolishness before Timothy Salmon, the president o' his bank, heared about it."

Old Jim wet the end of his bandana handkerchief, and as he proceeded to rub out a grease spot from his coat sleeve, he added, "'T wuz n't long before he turned his head towards me again and sez, 'Jim, I only wish that we 'd a-had this talk before, 'cause y'u might 've saved me from a lot o' real trouble. But it 's too late now, and all that I kin say is, that I 'm sorry.'"

All the while Cal Hemmingway had fairly lost himself in the story, and when Jim

stopped he stared at him and then blurted out, "Wa'al, what had he been a-doin'?"

"Dunno," replied Jim, shoving his handkerchief back in his hip pocket. "He did n't tell o' nothin' what he 'd ben a-doin' — jest kept a-tellin' how danged sorry he wuz he 'd a-done it."

Cal looked mystified for a few seconds and then said, "Don't believe there 's any truth in the story what 's a-goin' 'round the village 'bout him a-wantin' ta marry Hattie Salmon, do y'u?"

"Some o' the Widder Wetherby's get-ups, probably. She 's got so that when there hain't gossip enough fer the village folks, why she jest makes up a leetle."

"Wa'al, I know," resumed Cal. "But sence Frank Ridgeway went away, Henry 's a-ben goin' up ter see her pretty regular, an' what 's more, I seen 'um out buggy-ridin' here about three Sundays ago."

"Don't care if y'u did," broke in Old Jim. "She would n't give a hill o' beans fer Henry

Bennings. If y'u want ter know my opinion, why I kin tell y'u darn quick, fer I think it kind o' stung her heart pretty deep that time when the hull village got ter passin' round them stories 'bout Frank Ridgeway. Ye remember, Cal, how they got louder and louder, until, darned if they did n't seem ter clang from the old blacksmith's anvil and toll from the tall steeple o' the church, and sometimes ye could almost hear 'em re-echo from the town clock."

"Ye 're right, Jim," said Cal, smiling a bit proudly at his old friend's eloquence. "There were n't hardly a night that somethin' wuz n't bein' told right here in the store 'bout Frank Ridgeway." Cal pulled the cat off from the counter into his lap, and stroked her fur thoughtfully. Jim cracked a peanut and gave the shuck a preoccupied snap toward the cat, and continued:

"Wa'al, seein' you 've brought up the name o' Hattie Salmon, why I s'pose I might as well tell y'u the rest o' what Henry Bennings

wuz a-tellin' me that night, ridin' over in the rain. Y'u see he 'd been hard up fer money, and, as he wuz a-tellin', had ta have a hundred dollars darn quick somehow er 'nother."

Here old Jim lowered his voice, and, leaning over so that both elbows rested on his knees, he said, "Why, Cal Hemmingway, what d' y'u think that feller did?"

Call looked at him in silent, anxious questioning, and continued to stroke the cat, purring away on his lap.

"Wa'al, sir, he said he went over ta Hattie Salmon and started in a-tellin' her how he and Frank Ridgeway had been stanch friends from the first, even when the village gossips labelled 'em rivals."

"Started right off with a damned lie, did n't he?" said Cal. "They never were no friends, and I kin prove it."

Old Jim brooked but little interference, even from Cal, so he said somewhat sharply, "Who 's a-tellin' this 'ere story? Can't ye keep still? I 'm a-tryin' ter tell ye what Henry

Bennings wuz a-tellin' me. I hain't a-givin' ye my own opinion of it, be I? Bennings said he told her how her name wuz seldom spoken between him and Ridgeway, 'cause o' their *friendship;* said that he and Frank kept their inward feelin's ter themselves and let the gossips have their say. Then he told her how their friendship still went on, and, as Frank Ridgeway had met with a lot o' trouble durin' the past three months, that he wuz a-tryin' ter help him; said he could n't tell her jest what Ridgeway's trouble wuz jest then 'cause he 'd promised ter keep it a secret."

"I reckon he kin do about as much talkin' without a-sayin' anythin' as anybody I ever heared," said Cal.

"Wa'al, now wait," argued Jim; "p'rhaps it were n't Bennings himself that wuz a-doin' all the talkin', fer if ye could 'a' got a whiff o' his breath as I did ye might be willin' ter believe that it wuz the old Red Eye that wuz a-kind o' promptin' him ter tell what he did."

"Mebbe," said Cal. "Ye know a codfish breakfast and a rubber coat 'll keep a feller dry all day."

"But wait till I tell ye how slick he is," resumed Old Jim, squinting one eye. "Bennings said he asked her if she recollected how Ridgeway had left the village under a cloud, and then he told her how he wuz still under that cloud, but that with *his* assistance he believed and hoped that the silver linin', as he put it, would soon appear. Then he got right down ter business and told her that it wuz *money* Ridgeway needed; and she asked him if he could tell her where Frank Ridgeway wuz, but he said he 'd promised not ter tell anyone that until this 'ere trouble 'd been fixed up. Then he went on and told how she wuz the only one he 'd trust with his secret; said he 'd sent Ridgeway a hundred dollars, in fact all his savin's, but that he did n't know where ter get the rest, as Frank needed a hundred dollars more."

"Sent Ridgeway all his savin's! Ugh!"

grunted Cal. "Savin's nothin'! Don't believe all his savin's would 've bought a postage stamp."

Old Jim brought his fist down on the counter with a bang. "Cal Hemmingway, ye 've got that cuss sized up jest right. Darned if ye hain't. Fer jest as we were comin' round the Hog's Back he lighted up a fresh cigar and as he gave me a slap on the back he sez, 'Jim, did n't I hand her that story pretty well? But if I ever fall down in this 'ere game, or if she and Ridgeway should ever meet agin ——' Bennings kind o' shivered a bit at this thought, and then said, 'Wa'al, Jim, the day may come when I kin jump South Hollow, and then, why who 'll care anyway?' I told him if he 'd jump South Hollow without owin' anybody anythin' that I thought the village 'd be willin' ter chip in and buy a spring-board ter help him git as fur off as possible, and then I asked him if he got the hundred dollars. 'Did I git the money?' sez he. 'Course I got it.' Said

she went in the house a few minutes and when she came out she slipped a bulky white envelope inter his hand, at the same time a a-sayin', 'Let me help y'u, Henry, in the good cause o' placin' a silver linin' on that cloud fer Frank Ridgeway.' What 's the matter with that, Cal; hain't that jest like a woman?

"We wuz a-comin' inter the village by this time, and it only took a few minutes before I pulled up in front o' his boardin' house, and I out and asked him what he did with the money. 'Ain't got time ter tell ye now,' sez he, as he jumped out on ter the steppin' stone. 'Guess I 've talked too much as it is. Ye know, Jim, a rough night and a few drinks aboard is liable ter make a damned fool of a man.'

"Then he turned and ran through the pourin' rain inter the house, and I drove on hum, a-thinkin' o' that poor girl a-bein' fooled by that darned scoundrel."

"Quite a yarn," said Cal, as he pushed the cat off his lap on to the floor and walked back toward the desk. "Probabilities be we 'll

never hear the rest of it; won't be apt ter git the conditions jest right."

"Mebbe not," answered Jim.

Then they agreed to keep Henry Bennings's story to themselves, as Old Jim allowed that what folks don't know won't hurt 'em much.

CHAPTER IX

HENRY BENNINGS'S UNPLEASANT SURPRISE

WHILE Henry Bennings had perhaps told Old Jim much more than he had honestly intended to tell concerning his visit to Hattie Salmon and its purpose, yet, upon reaching his room afterward, he was able to congratulate himself that after all he had not divulged the real secret. After the girl had given him her money and he had bidden her good night, Henry Bennings hurried down the walk toward the tavern, a hundred thoughts tumbling through his brain.

"Well, I 'm out of one scrape but into another, and it will be a bad one if they ever find it out; but, after all, how can they find it out? I really don't believe Ridgeway will ever show up here again. The only reason he could ever have for remembering this spot

would be Hattie, and she admitted her ignorance of his whereabouts. But still, should she question me in the future about him, of his success or failure, it will keep me busy inventing lies for evermore."

A little farther down the street a new inspiration came to him. "Why can't I lose track of him altogether? That will stop all her questions. Or, better than that, make her believe him dead? That 's it! He 'll be dead! Then perhaps my chances as the son-in-law to the Honourable Timothy Salmon will look more rosy. By Jove, that 's a scheme! Frank Ridgeway, you 're a dead one, my boy; you 're going to die in about two weeks. You don't know it, Frank, but you 're sick in the hospital right now, and I am borrowing money from your sweetheart to buy pills for you." Henry laughed aloud at the thought. "Guess I 'll take a drink on that," he said, as he turned into the hotel.

He nodded to several men who were sitting about the place, and then pushed back the

door which led into the bar-room. He had taken only a few steps when he felt a sharp slap on his back. As he turned he saw a tall, square-shouldered individual, with a heavy black moustache, who said, in his harsh, familiar voice, "Henry, me boy, where in the devil *is* your hang-out? I 've been lookin' over this hull damned burgh fer y'u."

Henry Bennings was held in surprise for a moment, but his self-possession soon came back, and he took his friend by the arm and led him the full length of the bar; then, turning into a little side room, they seated themselves. Bennings kicked the door shut and they settled down for a heart-to-heart talk.

The old hotel keeper had been looking over the corner of his newspaper and had noticed the queer look on Bennings's face. He listened until he heard their door bang shut. Then he stepped behind the desk, and, swinging the old shabby register around, he ran his finger along the names. Three arrivals

had safely landed that night at the tavern, and one of them was a stranger. "That 's the feller," he said to himself as his finger stopped at the last name on the page. Being a little far-sighted, he pushed his spectacles up over his forehead, and then read, *Edward Bailey, Syracuse, N. Y.*

"Fer God's sake," he muttered, "that 's Bunk Bailey, the gambler, and supposed ter be the slickest one in the country! Wonder what 's up that he 's out here inquirin' after Henry Bennings. Don't look jest right fer him and a bank clerk ter be a-holdin' secret sessions in a country tavern."

His curiosity was aroused, and he walked to the farther end of the bar where he could pretend to be cleaning up, but where he could in reality catch all of their conversation that might drift his way from the little side room. Presently he was rewarded. "'T won't do. 'T won't do," he heard the harsh voice say. "You can't stave me off another day. D 'ye think I rode all these miles in that damned old

rattlebox for my health? Ye played the game and lost, and now it 's up to you to settle. See?"

"Not so loud; not so loud," interrupted Bennings.

The old hotel keeper had stopped wiping up. In fact he listened so earnestly that he shoved the towel in his top coatpocket where it dangled in the guise of a handkerchief.

"Played the game and lost, hey?" repeated the proprietor. "So Henry Bennings has ben a-monkeyin' with the buzz-saw. Guess I 'll say nuthin' and kind o' keep my eyes open in his direction."

The conversation had died down to a whisper. A little later the two men came out and left the tavern. As they did so, the landlord went in and turned down the lamp so that he could look out of the window through the half closed shutters. He saw them walk across the street and stop on the opposite side, where they lingered as if in further argument. Suddenly they stepped into the shadow of the

stairway leading up over the millinery store, where Henry Bennings took from his inside pocket a bulky white envelope and handed it to Bunk Bailey. Then he disappeared up the side street.

CHAPTER X

A STRANGER IN THE VILLAGE

THE hotel keeper was startled out of his reverie over the queer transaction by the impatient clink of a coin. He quickly turned up the lamp and hurried back into the bar-room to take orders. In front of the bar stood Eph Lancaster, the village carpenter, and at the extreme end, lazily leaning over on his elbows, an Onondaga Indian, who grunted out, "Gimme a drink of somethin'." Pop had not kept a hotel on the border of the Indian Reservation all these years without knowing what "somethin'" meant. He snapped the little tin off of a ginger ale bottle, and, as it is against the law to sell anything intoxicating to an Indian, he used the precaution of fixing the dose underneath the bar, and then, in an innocent sort of a way, set the glass down

before him. Pop knew the wants of all his customers, and, without asking a question, drew a large glass of ale for Eph Lancaster. Then turning to the faded Red Man, he asked, "I suppose the Indian Band is havin' their rehearsal in the blacksmith shop right along hain't they?"

The Indian seemed thoroughly satisfied with the concoction that Pop had fixed for him and nodded his head up and down, and with a voice way down in his throat, he let out a couple of grunts which Pop understood as "Yes."

"Well, sir," continued Pop, "the last time I heared 'em play I 'll be doggoned if they were n't the best band 't I ever hearn."

"So they be," said Eph. "But, hell, they ought ter be. They 've ben a-practisin' right there in the blacksmith shop every Friday night fer more 'n five years."

Pop collected the empty glasses, and after rinsing them in the sink below, placed them back on the shelf in time to answer his wife's call for supper.

"Seein' that I 'm kind a late fer my feed ta-night, guess I 'll go right along in. But I 'll be back agin after a little," he said, as he passed out and down the hall to the kitchen.

The Indian met his squaw outside and they started toward the bridge that leads in the direction of the Reservation.

Eph Lancaster picked up a fly-specked almanac and seated himself in an easy chair which tipped back under a side-light, and endeavoured to look up the signs of the zodiac. A moment later Bunk Bailey entered the room, wearing a satisfied look, having accomplished his purpose. He gazed around as if sizing up the place, and then walked over and spent some little time looking at a picture of a race horse, under which was printed, in large type, "Flora Temple, World's Record Time, 2:40."

"Well, I 'll be damned, if that hain't an old timer. I suppose they thought that wuz a-goin' like hell in them days. Well, don't

know but it wuz, considerin' that old, wooden, high-wheeled sulky; looks more as if it wuz a hay rake, don't it?"

Eph Lancaster was too busy with his almanac to answer, and Bailey moved along to the next picture. He wiped the dust off the glass with his handkerchief, and exclaimed, "Well, I declare; here *is* one that takes me back ta my boyhood days. Dexter, 2:17, hey! I 'd like to have a dollar fer every programme that I 've sold at the race track when I wuz a kid, with his name on it. 'T ain't a bad picture of him neither."

As Eph Lancaster would not enter into conversation, he walked back, and after fumbling over a stack of soiled papers that were piled up at the end of the desk, he finally picked out a back number of the *Police Gazette* and tried to amuse himself looking at the pictures. After a time he walked over to Eph and, tapping him on the shoulder, he inquired, in a moderate tone of voice, "'Bout how long d' ye s'pose I 'll have ter wait before the

proprietor of this establishment 'll make an appearance?"

Eph looked up from his book, and, with a yawn, answered, "Why, he went 'round inter the kitchen a while ago ter git some supper. Probabilities are that he won't be gone long, but if there is anythin' y'u want, jest help yerself; there 's three different kinds o' se-gars in that 'ere case, and the bar is right there in the next room. We always wait on ourselves when he 's eatin' er doin' his chores, an' we leave the pay in that se-gar box over there at the end of the shelf."

Bailey looked at the box, then down again at Lancaster.

"Y'u don't mean that he thinks people are as honest as all that, do y'u?"

Eph wet the end of his thumb, and, turning over a leaf, he replied, "*Folks what live here in South Hollow he knows be.*"

Bailey said no more; he crossed over to the washstand in the corner of the room and tried to adjust his tie in the wavy looking-glass

that hung above. He combed out his moustache, and, tipping his hat a little to one side, left the hotel.

It was not long after that some of the boys came in. They had come over from Cal's to quench their thirst and kill the taste of peanuts and tobacco. The first one in line who was rattling his coin, was known about the village as the "Tall Pine." His figure was long and spindling, and he spoke with a slow, lazy voice. As he tossed over the piece of money to the proprietor, he drawled out: "See there 's a stran-ger in town. Come over in the stage 's afternoon."

"Yes, so I see," replied the hotel keeper, as though it was an every-day occurrence to have a new arrival.

"Goin' ter stay here ter the tavern all night, er got 'quaintances?" queried the Tall Pine as he turned toward the sawdust box and blew the froth from his beer.

"I hain't supposed ter know everybody's business, be I? Y'u think I kin keep track of

all the travellin' public? There be folks goin' through South Hollow most every week that I never seen before ner never see agin," answered the old fellow, putting on an air of dignity that made his customers smile.

"What 's the name o' this newcomer?" continued the Tall Pine, as he counted over his change and dropped it into a grimy old shot-bag. He pulled the puckering-strings back together, and, winding them around, shoved the improvised wallet far down into his over-alls pocket.

The tavern keeper was still in the shadow of his "grouch."

"Guess if ye want ter know his name very bad, ye kin look it up on the hotel register, same as I had ter. It 's right there on the desk this side o' the cigar case."

They all moved over to the book and one of them opened it and read aloud, "Edward Bailey, Syracuse, N. Y."

"He hain't no hay buyer, ner he can't be here a-roddin' houses," said the reader.

"And 't ain't Bailey the circus man, 'cause *he's* dead," said the Tall Pine, as he turned to the hotel keeper. "Bennett wuz over ter Cal's a leetle while ago and he wuz a-sayin' that he 'd swear that he were n't no Methodist minister either, 'cause what he said on the way comin' over, referrin' ter the stage, wuz quite enough ter shock Old Elder Armstrong, who wuz along too. Why, Bennett told how it got where the Elder could n't listen to such cussin' and finally had ter call 'im down fer it, and when he did, this man Bailey jest looked at him 'bout a minute, and then, leanin' over toward 'im, said, in a gentle sort o' way, 'My leetle man, don't *you* know that profanity has been one thing that 's helped ter keep the Lord's name before the public fer over two thousand years?"

"How 's that fer bein' sacre-legious?" said the Tall Pine, as he wiped his hand across the bar in an effort to catch a nimble fly. "And then this man Bailey turned onter Old Bennett an' hollered out, 'Say, Rip Van

Winkle, can't ye git a gait on yer old ark and land me at the tavern? I 'm gettin' the fidgets in my feet.'"

"*Old ark!* How 's that, boys? Don't Bennett's stately coach look as though it had been runnin' sence the flood? Guess he ought ter take the hint and buy a paint brush."

"Whatcha talkin' 'bout?" spoke up Jim Case, who had entered with Hiram Wilcox during the story.

"Why, there 's a stranger in town, registered here at the tavern as Edward Bailey from Syracuse. Wuz n't ever here before and we 're a-tryin' ter figure out who he is and what 's his business in these parts," answered the Tall Pine.

"Told Pop over there," he continued, pointing to the tavern keeper, "ter give 'im a room with a bath, and Pop asked 'im if he thought he wuz in a sanitarium. He ought ter 'a' told 'im 'bout the time that he closed up the hut-tel fer four days ter go an' paint Bill Daniels's barn — don't know what we 'd

done if Pop had n't been born in South Hollow, even if he ain't slick enough ter tell us all 'bout this 'ere stranger."

Old Jim put a thumb in each corner of his vest, and wiggled his fingers back and forth. "Boys," he said, "if he 'd ever been 'round the race track much you 'd a-knowed 'im. He hain't no professional gambler, 'cause they 're on the square. He 's jest a common crook, and known around as Bunk Bailey. Got the name from bunco-in' folks. I met 'im out in front a leetle while ago, and he wuz a-sayin' how he thought he 'd be a-goin' back in the mornin' on the furst stage, havin' finished up his business here. Business!" repeated Old Jim. "I 'd like ter know what kind o' business he 'd be a-havin' in this quiet leetle village. Anyway, boys, I 'd advise ye all ter lock up putty good and tight ter-night, 'cause ye can't tell, he might change his mind and want ter do a leetle more business, somethin' in the way o' a side line."

Old Jim cocked his hat back on his head a

couple of notches and strutted across the room with the air of a peacock. During the rest of the evening everybody walked around with hands in pockets and coats buttoned up tight.

CHAPTER XI

OLD JIM CASE GOES TO NEW YORK

IT WAS late one afternoon just before sunset when Old Jim and a friend from the city stopped at a little gurgling spring for a drink of cold water. They proceeded to unjoint their fishing rods and were willing to call it a day, having whipped the streams since early morning.

Jim's friend was a well-known business man of Syracuse, and his love for fine horses had been the means of bringing the two together and making them lifelong friends. Not a season had passed for many years that he had not been invited by Old Jim to have a day's trout fishing about South Hollow, and these trips were always anticipated, almost as much to hear Old Jim's many stories and quaint sayings as the satisfaction of bringing home a well-filled basket.

Old Jim was balancing himself with bent knees, dressing and cleaning the trout in the cold spring water. He diligently puffed away at his old clay pipe. Suddenly he stopped, and, with a satisfied air, tossed the last one into the basket. He cleaned his toad stabber, as he called it, by jabbing the knife a few times into the ground; and then, as he straightened up, he reached forward, handing the basket over to his friend. "Thar y'u be. Put the biggest one on top so 's y'u need n't be 'fraid o' liftin' the cover. How much 'll he weigh? Oh, guess he 'd go 'bout two and a quarter, and that hain't half bad, seein' he 's dressed."

"Well, Jim, I can't tell how grateful I am. I look forward from year to year to our day's fishing together. It is certainly a privilege, and one that I greatly appreciate."

The two had started over what is called the Indian Trail, which leads from the Onondaga Indian Reservation through the woods out into the main road, where Jim's companion had left his horse in a nearby barn. They tramped

along for some time. No sound disturbed the quiet, except the cracking, now and then, of a bough, or the scuffling of their feet through dead leaves.

Finally the long silence was broken by Jim's friend. "Ever been to New York?"

Jim walked straight ahead, turning his head neither to the right nor to the left.

"New York," he grunted. "Never been far outer Onondaga County, let alone New York."

There was a little time taken up climbing over an old rail fence, after which his friend continued, "Don't suppose you could get away for a few days? I leave Syracuse at 8.50 to-morrow morning. You 're invited to go along if you 'll promise to leave your pocket-book at home and not eat with your knife. What I want is good company and it would be a treat for me to show you around. If you will agree to go, you will be doing me a favour."

Even this did not give Jim Case the

expected shock. He never changed his step "I 'd do most anythin'," he answered back, "ter be a-doin' ye a favour, even if 't wuz ter go ter New York and give up my knife balancin' act which I 've re-ligiously re-hearsed three times a day fer over forty years. As fer time, guess I could afford ter lose a couple o' days' fishin'."

When they said good night at the turn of the road, both were talking at once, and their last words were, "8.50 A. M., New York Central Station."

Although Jim had tried to appear indifferent to this generous invitation, he could contain himself no longer. He looked back over his shoulder, and when assured that his liberal friend was well out of sight, having gone in the direction of his rig, he made at high speed for South Hollow. When he reached home he struck the gate with his fist, making it fly back against the picket fence with a slam. Over his head came the strap which held the well-filled fish basket. Everything was

hurriedly thrown down on the back porch and he rushed into the house.

The next morning Jim Case was on hand a full hour before train time. He walked up and down with a bundle under his left arm and a large, green umbrella in his right hand. He was provided with high overshoes, not knowing just what weather to expect in New York. He bought a paper at the news-stand because it had a picture of a horse on it; and then a glass revolver full of little round, red candies. The arrival of his host saved him further indiscretions and extravagances. Jim was at once introduced to a man who made the third of the party; and a few minutes later they had boarded the train and were on their way.

At about the same time, Jim 's wife put her basket over her arm and started across the street on her way to the general store to do her marketing. There was something of trouble and excitement in her bearing. As Cal Hemmingway came forward with pad

and pencil in hand to take her order, he inquired after Jim. "The widder Wetherby wuz jest in," he said, "and wuz a-tellin' how Jim had gone ter New York. I 'll betcha he wuz a leetle mite excited, were n't he?"

"Ex-cited!" spoke up Mrs. Case. "Guess you 'd a-thought so." She tossed her basket over on the counter and went on. "Ye orter a-seen him come runnin' inter the house last night when he come hum from fishin'. Instead o' callin' me and the children outer see his fish and ter explain how each one wuz hooked and hauled in, as he always has a-done fer years, he ran right through the kitchen and inter the hall, then whirled 'round the post at the foot o' the staircase like a circus clown, and went upstairs with a jump and inter his room.

"'T wuz n't only a few minutes before downstairs he cum, a-hurryin' inter another room; he fumbled 'round in a drawer fer somethin' and then, like a madman, shot upstairs agin.

"All o' this time me and the children stood a-lookin' on. We did n't speak; we could n't. We were all a-thinkin,' and all a-thinkin' the same; all a-thinkin' that Jim Case had gone crazy.

"After a while we partly came to and started up-stairs, one a-followin' the other, me a-leadin' ahead with the broom. We all crept quietly through the dark hall to Jim's room, and when I looked in, all I could see o' him wuz his legs a-stickin' out from under the bed. We could hear his hands a-slashin' back and forth, and he wuz breathin' hard. 'Thinks he 's a fish,' sez I to the frightened children. 'I always knowed fishin' would be the death o' him.'

"When he started ter draw himself out, we scattered and went jumpin' and tumblin' down-stairs agin, 'cause, ye see, we did n't know what he 'd be a-doin' next. Might get it inter his head that he wuz a whale. Bein' 's I wuz the last one ter reach the bottom, I turned and called out, 'Jim Case, what on

earth ails ye?' When I said this, he come ter the head o' the stairs, the beads o' perspiration droppin' from his forehead. Why, Cal Hemmingway, I only wish ye could 'a' seen him. He wuz covered with dust and dirt from head ter foot. I had ter laugh right out loud — I could n't help it — fer I understood when I saw him standin' there a-holdin' a collar button in his right hand."

"Them collar buttons be a darned nuisance," said Cal. "They 're always droppin' and rollin' under somethin'. If 't were n't fer keepin' a store and havin' ter wait on customers, I 'd wear a flannel shirt and a handkerchief 'round my neck same as Jim does. Don't s'pose I orter be talkin' agin collar buttons though, 'cause I sold more 'n three dozen right here in this store last year." Then Mr. Cal Hemmingway, merchant, straightened his lanky form and threw his shoulders back, as Mrs. Case went on with her story.

"Wa'al, sir, when Jim saw me laughin',

he jest started and stormed at me somethin' awful. Kind o' acted crazy-like again, and I commenced ter get worried 'bout him. He said he had troubles enough. Wanted ter know if I could n't see how busy he wuz, and fin'ly, after a while, told how he had ter take a run down ter New York the furst thing in the mornin'."

"'Goin' ter New York,' ses I, with tears rollin' down my cheeks. 'Ye mean, Jim Case, that ye 're goin' ter the lunatic asylum.'

"Wa'al, sir, when I came to from a faint, he stood there in his shirt sleeves, a-holdin' me in his arms. And then fer the furst time he told us how he 'd accepted an invertation ter go ter New York. Then he went and set the alarm clock and turned inter bed so 's ter be up and ready fer the 8.50 train."

"Probably he 's putty well along on his way by this time," said Cal. "The boys 'll be a-wantin' ter hear 'im tell all 'bout it when he gets hum. Got some nice Onondaga strawberries in this mornin' — raised over on the

Potter farm. Old Potter ye know ez a good-'eal like Jim, always a-jokin', and when I bought these berries o' him," Cal put his hand up to the side of his mouth, and, leaning forward, whispered in the matron's ear, "he told me that he raised berries in the summer and hell in the winter."

They both laughed as Cal held up a box and Mrs. Case picked off the largest one. Tasting of it, she said, "Guess I 'll take a box seein' Jim ain't hum. Ye see I can't have 'em when he 's here 'cause they don't do his rheumatiz any good. Now, let me see," she added, as she looked over her memorandum. She called off the articles and Cal placed them in her basket. In the meantime other customers had dropped into the store. Jim's trip to New York was the one topic of their conversation.

The following Saturday Jim returned. The news had got about and the crowd which gathered that night in the South Hollow general store was the largest assembly since last election. They began to arrive soon after

six o'clock. The town talk throughout the village all that day had been, "I see Jim Case is hum; better get around ter Cal's early ter-night ter hear all 'bout New York Town."

When Old Jim did arrive, every hat went up, and every throat yelled. In grateful acknowledgment of their reception, he gave them their choice of a plug of Battle Ax chewing tobacco or a bag of peanuts. At the request of Cal Hemmingway, Jim was given three formal cheers. When this ovation was concluded, the Peanut Squad mustered on the right-hand side of the stove while the Tobacco Brigade made a flank movement to the left where they could open up a line of fire at the sawdust box. Old Jim turned a soap box up on end and sat down. He looked the boys all over as he stroked his long moustache and filled his pipe full of Bull Durham. Then he began to puff lustily. He crossed his legs so his left elbow could rest on his knee and give him just the right distance to swing his pipe to and from his mouth between puffs.

"I don't hardly know where ter commence after seein' so much," said Jim, "but when the train pulled outer the station me and my two friends were a-settin' in green plush chairs that come way up ter the back o' our heads, and smokin' Flora de Flim Flam se-gars, er somethin' like that. I saved the gilt band on mine and my friends gave me theirn, so I have got three here in my tobaccer box." Everyone in the store craned his neck to see the largest and most elaborate cigar bands ever shown in or about South Hollow.

"And ter think them se-gars cost a quarter o' a dollar a-piece. As fur as I 'm concerned, I 'd a darned sight ruther have Cal's Golden Bucks fer a nickel straight. They sell 'umselves; don't need no gilt bands."

This was the sentiment of all those present. Old Jim paused while a drummer from the city offered to buy Golden Bucks for the crowd.

Cal Hemmingway opened the glass showcase, pulled out the box with the familiar

label, held it up, blew the dust off; and around they went.

After all who cared to smoke had lighted up, Jim continued:

"While my friends were in the leetle smokin' room, the coloured porter happened in there too, and the boys commenced ter tell, as a sort of a joke, so that he might overhear 'em, how extravagant *I* wuz. One of 'em said that while we were at the hut-tel he saw me give a five-dollar bill ter the waiter. 'Yes,' said the other, 'he gave two silver dollars ter the boy who carried his satchel down ter the station.' It wuz a sight for them ter see that coloured gentleman prick up his ears and take it all in. A little later he came up ter me with a big, long brush, and commenced operations. He brushed me the hul length o' the tunnel comin' inter New York. He wiped off my boots, cleaned my overshoes, and insisted on carryin' all my bundles. I 'll be blamed if I ever had so much attention in all my life; felt as though I wuz a millionaire

ridin' on a pass. As I left the car I jest dropped a nice, red apple inter his pocket, and, by Ginger! I told him if he ever came ter South Hollow, I 'd try and do as much fer 'im in return. I could n't see why he took sech a likin' ter me until my friends told me 'bout the joke afterward. Ye see, he must a-thought that I had what Old Dave Slocum used ter call *spenderitis* — said his boy always come down with it every time he went ter the city, and the fever 'ud last sometimes until he 'd spent and given away all his money."

Here the conversation halted long enough to allow Cal Hemmingway to attend to the wants of a waiting customer. Then Jim resumed his story.

"When we arrived in New York the furst place we went ter wuz the Waldorf-Astoria. It 's a hut-tel as big as Onondaga Hill — why, it could hold all South Hollow, Cedarville, Navarino, and the hull darn Indian Reservation at once. We put straight fer the dinin' room, or, as they called it, the Palm Room.

Ye 'd think, boys, that ye were in the Garden o' Eden. My friends started in orderin' oysters and celery and olives and sech, and thinkin' that wuz all we wuz goin' ter get I jest spoke right up and told 'em that I wuz hungry and wanted some meat and pertatoes. They asked me what kind o' pertatoes I wanted, and I told 'em the *Early Rose would do.* I don't jest believe that waiter knowed what I meant by the way he acted. Wa'al, we had plenty o' dinner before we got through, and then we all went over ter a place they called a roof garden, where they 'd a Hungarian orchestra a-playin'. My friends bein' fond o' music treated the leader and all the musicians, so they 'd play anythin' they wanted 'em to. Finally my friend called the leader over and told 'im ter play what I wanted, so I jest told 'im ter rattle off Money Musk, that that wuz good enough fer me. The feller looked kind o' worried-like, lifted his shoulders, wrinkled his forehead, and sayin' somethin' in a foreign tongue, walked away. Guess, p'rhaps, I 'd

stumped 'im, boys, 'cause he *did n't* play it."

Hiram Wilcox said, with a yawn, "It 's funny how they 'll put up with a feller down in New York that would n't do fer us up here in South Hollow."

"Wa'al, the next mornin'," continued Old Jim, "I got up 'bout six o'clock, jest like I always do, and I walked down 'bout fifteen flights o' stairs ter the office. The only man I saw when I got there wuz a big feller wearin' a blue jumper. He come up ter me and asked a lot o' questions. Wanted ter know if I had any baggage, and what train I wuz goin' on. I told him he 'd better learn ter mind his own business or he might get reported ter Mr. Waldorf. He walked away without sayin' another word when he saw that I wuz on ter him.

"Wa'al, sir, I walked up and down what the boys call Peacock Alley. I must 'a' walked at least five miles, as they did n't come down until 'bout ten o'clock, and all that time I 'll

be blamed if I see a person that I knowed or that knowed me.

"After breakfast my friends asked if I wanted ter walk down ter the Battery er ride, and I told 'em p'rhaps I could see the town better if I walked, so we started. Every big buildin' that we 'd come ter I 'd ask if that wuz the postoffice, till they promised they 'd tell me when we come ter it. At Fourteenth Street my shoes commenced ter pinch a leetle and I asked if we were n't putty near there. They jest answered me a-sayin' that when we turned inter Broadway Street again we 'd see green fields, but when we did, I looked straight fer miles and could jest see rows o' tall buildin's, so I told 'em if 't were n't too expensive I thought I 'd ruther ride, so we went over ter the Avenue and took the 'air line,' or what ye 'd call the elevated railroad.

"I wuz jest crazy when I saw that aquarium and all them fish. They 'd got everythin', from a cisco ter a sea-horse. The boys jest

had ter drag me away, or I 'll bet I 'd a-stayed there till time ter come back hum."

Jim shifted the soap box a bit, while Hiram Wilcox reached up, turned down a smoking lamp overhead, and cut off a fresh piece of plug.

"Wa'al," said Jim, "when we got back ter the Farmers' Exchange, as one o' my friends always called the Waldorf-Astoria, they found an inver-tation ter dinner ter be given by their friend, Charles Squab, and they seemed kind o' puzzled ter know jest what ter do with me, but as luck would have it, it happened that while we were a-talkin' the matter over, Mr. Squab came along and they got ter talkin' with 'im, and my friend had an idee which he sprung then and there. 'Squab,' said he, 'd' ye know who that old codger is over there?' I turned my head the other way, 'cause he wuz a-pointin' his finger straight at me. 'Wa'al, that 's Jim Case,' I heared him say, and then he added, 'What ye ask who Jim Case is? Did n't know Jim Case! Jim Case

of Montana, the multi-millionaire! Jim Case, the Copper King!'

"When he said all this I commenced ter get nervous. Squab scratched his head and my friend went on. 'Don't ye read the papers? Where have ye ben fer the last six months — in a trance?'

"Squab finally admitted that he had no doubt read of Jim Case, and that the name did sound kind o' familiar. Then my friend sort o' took Mr. Squab by the shoulder and led him ter a corner behind a big pillar, and said in a very low whisper, 'We 're goin' ter let ye in on somethin'. What if I should tell ye that papers will be passed by ter-morrow noon that give us one-half interest in the Jim Case Copper Mines? Ye see that 's what we 're here in New York fer, and that 's why Jim Case is here, to close the deal.'

"Deal! I thought, What the devil is he a-goin' ter do with me? I listened and heared him say, 'If this property is worth a cent, it 's worth a billion dollars. This Jim

Case is a queer old chap — don't care much fer money — and he 'll agree ter most anythin'. We 're ter have a stock company, with a capital o' five hundred million dollars. We give him forty million dollars in cash and sixty million dollars in preferred stock, makin' a total o' one hundred million dollars.' When he said that I turned ter one side, fumbled in my vest pocket and put back the gilt band on my twenty-five cent cigar. My pardner went on, 'We have already made arrangements with a Trust Company who have agreed ter underwrite the required bonds.'

"As he said this, he shoved both hands in his hip pockets and leaned back like a bank president.

"After this my friends and Charlie Squab sauntered along Peacock Alley and turned inter the restaurant. Then they sat down at a table with some other financial magnates that were friends of Squab, and my friend told the story over again, addin' some. By this time everybody wanted ter get in on the ground

floor. He showed 'um how they could earn two hundred per cent. annually, and when the party broke up, everybody wuz jest crazy ter meet this man Jim Case, the result bein' that I wuz introduced and invited ter be the guest o' honour at Charlie Squab's dinner. When I said I did n't have no festive clothes, they told me I could come jest as I wuz. So, boys, I went, the understandin' bein' that no business wuz ter be talked durin' the evenin'. That wuz so I would n't have ter answer questions. All I had ter do wuz ter refer ter Montana and the mines ruther than South Hollow and Onondaga Hill. I told a few stories that seemed ter amuse 'em, and picked up a few new ones that I brought hum to you boys.

"After dinner we all went ter the show, I bein' given the front seat in the box. Between the acts our party would walk out and meet friends and tell 'em this minin' story and then point ter me. 'That 's Jim Case in the furst box,' ye 'd hear 'em tell their friends.

Blamed if I did n't seem ter be of more importance than the actors, and everybody jest stared at me, I kin tell ye. Finally the news spread behind the scenes, and when the popular song man come out, he sung:

> "'There 's Jim Case from Butte, Montana,
> Who never brags nor hollers,
> But owns a copper mine, they say,
> Worth forty million dollars.'

"The song made a great hit, boys, and don't ye forget it. After the show a crowd of people waited outside ter see me come out. They hurried me inter a carriage and drove ter a restaurant on Broadway Street, where we had supper. The story followed me there and I 'll be blamed if people did n't pay fancy prices ter the head waiter ter get a table next ter Jim Case, the Copper King."

Jim leaned back and threw out his broad chest, pointed his finger at himself, and repeated, "Jim Case, the Copper King! That 's me, boys, that 's me!

"The next mornin' when I came down all

the boys in that hut-tel were a-hollerin' out my name. Ye could hear their voices ringin' in all directions.

"Listen fellers," he said, as he looked around the store. They were all staring at him and taking in every word of his story. "Jest think of it; while I wuz havin' breakfast my mail wuz brought in — over fifty letters! Hear that, Cal, over fifty! I 'll bet that 's more 'n ye get out o' yer old mail bag in a hull week, ain't it?"

Before Cal had a chance to make an indignant reply, Jim went on, "And what d' ye think, they were, all business schemes, proposals o' marriage, and hard luck stories callin' fer help.

"Wa'al, after breakfast I wuz told that about twenty people were a-waitin' in a red room ter see me on important business. Boys, that wuz too much fer yer Old Uncle Jim, so I got my friends together and told 'em that the joke had gone too fur, but they said I 'd have ter play it out until we left New York, and so when the train pulled out that night,

I stood on the rear platform, a-sayin' good bye ter hundreds o' curious people who were all a-rubberin' at me."

Old Jim drew a sigh of relief as he hit his pipe bowl on the heel of his boot. "Wa'al," he muttered, "I 'm glad it 's all over and I 'm back, fer I 'd a darned sight ruther be Jim Case right here in South Hollow with you fellers than ta be Jim Case, the Copper King, at the Waldorf-Astoria, with them millionaires."

CHAPTER XII

HIRAM WILCOX VISITS OLD JIM CASE

ONE day it was reported "around town" that Old Jim was "a little off the hooks." As he had been absent from Cal Hemmingway's store for several days, the proof of his indisposition was absolute. There was "a kind of lonesomeness," as Cal expressed it, among the regular sitters. When Hiram Wilcox volunteered to go and see Jim and try to cheer him up a bit, everybody chipped in and bought a bag of oranges for Hiram to take with him to the invalid.

When Hiram reached the house, he found that Jim was sick abed. As he entered the room, he said, "Wa'al, so ye 're a leetle off yer feed, eh? Ben eatin' somethin' p'rhaps that hain't sot jest right. I told the boys ye 'd overdo if they did n't stop a-settin' out that

free lunch over 't the tavern; told 'em ye 'd take anythin' that wuz bein' given away, from pickles and crackers ter measles."

Jim Case turned over in bed, readjusted his pillows, and said, "How be ye, Hiram? How 's all the boys and things down ta Cal's?"

"Oh, goin' 'bout the same, only we 've missed ye a lot, and Cal Hemmingway is certainly losin' his mind. Sez he 's goin' ter join them spiritualist folks — them what 's holdin' meetin's every Tuesday over at Widder Wetherby's. Must be eight or ten that belong now, and they 're the craziest set ye ever seen. Say that they kin hear spirit rappin's and have slate writin's and sech. Why, the Widder come over ter our house night before last and brought a slate with some writin' on it. She wuz all ex-cited and asked me if I knowed whose writin' 't wuz. I said, 'No, I did n't recognise the writin'.' 'Don't recognise it,' said she, kind o' mad-like. 'Why, Hiram Wilcox, ye ought ter be ashamed o' yerself. Ye don't know that writin'?

Why, it 's a message from *your* father.' 'Wa'al,' sez I ter her, 'if that 's my father's writin', he must 'a' improved like the devil durin' the last twenty years that he 's ben dead.'"

Jim laughed himself nearly into convulsions.

"As I said," continued Hiram, "Cal 's got it too. Jest sits 'round all day readin' them spirit books and don't pay no attention ter the store at all. Keeps talkin' about this wonderful spirit-medium who goes inter a trance and sees things."

Hiram leaned forward and, lowering his voice to a whisper, said, "She saw the Widder's husband t' other night; so Cal sez."

"What 's that ye say? She saw Lem Wetherby's spirit?"

"Wa'al, that 's what Cal sez, and what 's more, she told the very day 't he died. What d' ye think o' that?"

"Think! Don't think nothin', only that Cal Hemmingway an' the rest on 'em are a lot of ninnies. In the furst place, Hiram,

this 'ere woman 's ben a-hangin' around the village fer about three weeks, and the probabilities be that she got that date off o' the tombstone that I put up at his grave. That 's easy enough, hain't it?"

"Wa'al," said Hiram, straightening up. "Who 'd 'a' ever 'a' thought o' that!"

"Oh, nobody around this town 'ceptin' me and the Madam," Old Jim answered, rather sarcastically, and then added, "This woman is the same medium what stayed all summer over ta Fletcher's a couple o' years ago. They live over Onondaga Hill way, between Quigley's place and Mud Lake. She agreed ter pay 'um two dollars and fifty cents a week fer her board an' lodgin', and seein', while she wuz there, they could communicate with the departed, especially their boy, why they decided ter let her stay; but when she got ready ter leave and offered ta pay what she owed 'um, why the spirits, so Fletcher sez wrote on the slate 'Take no money from the medium." Course Fletcher hain't ben around

much and he thinks when a person looks real serious that they 're always honest and sincere, but you an' me know how that 's generally the time they need the most watchin'."

Then Jim inquired, "Wuz there anythin' else 't she did?"

"Yes; she told how Lem Wetherby wuz right there in the room, *only in spirit form*, and how if the Widder 'd only have faith and keep contributin' a little each week that in a short time she 'd be able ter see 'im herself. Jim, she got the Widder all worked up and a-cryin' like a baby."

"Cryin' probably ter think he wuz a-comin' back. She did n't take on so much when he passed away. Beats all how ye kin see anythin' ye want ter in this world or the next as long as ye got the right disposition and the spondoolicks."

Hiram laughed at Jim's cold-blooded remarks, and combing his fingers through his whiskers, said, "Cal told me about one bad mistake that she made."

"What wuz that?" asked Old Jim, smoothing out the patch quilt.

Hiram was grinning from ear to ear when he replied, "She started in ter describe Lem, and spoke about his havin' lovely red whiskers, when the Widder bawled out between sobs, 'Why Lemuel could n't ever raise a beard.' Cal wuz a-tellin' how that remark nearly broke up the meetin', but he still thinks there 's a somethin' 't he can't explain about it, and when he gets a-thinkin' it over he gets sort o' absent minded. Fer instance, last Monday night Potter's boy came in fer a quart o' seed beans. Cal took the order and went ter get 'em. Putty soon he came back and told the boy that he 'd have ter take some other kind o' seed 'cause the cat wuz sleepin' in the bean barrel and he wuz n't a-goin' ter disturb her fer no five-cent sale. After some arguin' the boy took a package o' tomato seeds and went out, grumblin' ter himself that nobody hum liked tomatoes, but he s'posed they 'd be better than nuthin', and then he said, with a sort o'

silly grin as he looked over at me, 'P'rhaps we kin work 'em off on company."

"Beats all," said Jim, "what a likin' Cal has got fer that old Maltese cat. But say Hiram, who wuz it that 's got the village all tinctured up with this spirit business, anyway?"

"I dunno," replied Hiram, tipping his chair back, while he straightened out the rug from beneath the legs. "There 's this woman what 's runnin' the thing, and she 's got 'em all luney. Some say that Old Timothy Salmon is a-kind o' sparkin' up ter her, and there may be some truth in it, 'cause he put up five dollars towards gettin' her ter stay another week. I guess he 's thinkin' that p'rhaps she kin bring back the spirits o' some dead ones that departed this life a-owin' him somethin'."

"Don't doubt it fer a minute," said Jim. "Beats the very devil how Old Salmon 'll follow a feller that owes him money. Won't even stop at the grave. S'pose ye heared 'bout him tryin' ter squeeze poor Orlie Sprague, did n't ye?"

"No, don't know as I did. Seems ye get more real news a-lyin' here in bed than I do out 'round the village."

"Wa'al, I 'll tell ye," continued Jim. "'T wuz like this. Some time ago when things wuz flourishin' and Orlie Sprague wuz about the most likely farmer 'round here, the bank had a lot o' money that wuz n't workin', and its president, the Honourable Timothy Salmon, wuz a-schemin' all sorts o' ways ter get it out at interest. It happened 'bout this time that Orlie Sprague came ter town ter get his harness fixed, and by chance met the Honourable Timothy Salmon, who wuz more n' nice ter him — even took him up ter his house ter dinner — and durin' their conversation he asked Orlie why he did n't branch out a leetle, and told him how he 'd been a good, prosperous farmer, but that he wuz doin' things on a small scale and 'ought ter bore with a bigger auger,' as he put it. Said he ought ter buy the adjoinin' farm and work 'em both, and that if he did he 'd make twice as much money.

Orlie knowed that farm wuz twenty acres and Salmon told him how he could buy if fer five hundred dollars. Guess he fergot ter tell him how the bank already had a loan on it and the present farmer wuz n't even able ter pay the interest. Orlie allowed that it did sound good, but said he did n't have the ready money. Then the Honourable Timothy Salmon, banker and public benefactor, rubbed his hands tergether and told him, in the most benevolent way, that the bank would gladly loan him the money on his note, and so in a few days Orlie Sprague had purchased the next farm by a-borrowin' the money at Timothy Salmon's bank."

Jim paused long enough to give the old, brass-bound clock in the hall a chance to strike the hour, and then went on.

"Wa'al, ye see things went along in the usual way till here t' other day. Money tightened up and the bank could get better returns by sendin' it ter the city. 'T wuz at this time that poor Orlie opened his mail and

found a letter askin' him ter come ter South Hollow at once, that the Honourable Timothy Salmon wanted ter see him at the bank. Orlie hitched up Dolly and drove in the next mornin' and wuz told that his demand note must be paid in full within five days."

"Wuz n't in-vited up ter Salmon's house ter dinner this time, wuz he?" asked Hiram, with a grin.

"No," returned Jim; "I guess the free lunch over at the tavern would 've satisfied him that day, 'cause his appetite wuz n't jest up ter snuff.

"Wa'al, hearin' I wuz sick he come over here ter the house ter see how I wuz a-gettin' on, and I could tell by the way he acted that there wuz more on his mind than there wuz in his stomach. He 'd be a-talkin' and at the same time a-starin' up at the ceilin', furst a-sittin' in one chair and then a-shiftin' ter another.

"Finally I sez, 'Orlie, what 's up? Anythin' gone wrong? Furst he sez 'No,' at the

same time tryin' ter choke back the lump that riz in his throat, and turned his head, appearin' ter be lookin' out o' the window.

"'Orlie,' sez I again, 'there 's somethin' on yer mind and ye 've got ter cough it up.' When I said that, he broke down and told me the hull story."

"Wa'al, I 'll be danged," said Hiram. "Old Salmon likes ter profit by other folks's misfortunes, don't he? What 'd he finally do 'bout it?"

Jim hesitated for a minute with an embarrassment in his face that was almost a blush. "I did n't intend ter tell y'u that, but if y'u must know, why I jest went down in my sock, as the feller sez, and dug out the money fer him. At furst he would n't take it, but I told him he 'd got ter and that he could go over and tell the Honourable Timothy Salmon that while Jim Case wuz criticised by the Church folks 'cause he did n't put his name down on the subscription list fer money ter be sent ter the Foreign Mission, that he did have a leetle

on hand ter spare ter help a friend at home when he wuz squeezed by the bank president who willingly headed the list ter help the heathens. 'Tell him,' sez I, 'that 't wuz more satisfyin' ter me ter be in shape ter help an honest but unfortunate neighbour.'

"Wa'al, I tell ye he wuz grateful, Hiram ye ought ter a-seen him; his face lighted up with a smile that seemed ter shine through his trouble like a bit o' sunshine on a rainy day. As he stood in the door *tryin'* ter say good bye, I said, 'Orlie, it 's darned easy ter borrow an umbrella from a friend when the sun is a-shinin', but when it commences ter cloud up and looks like rain and when ye need it most, yer friend is putty toler-ble apt ter want it back. There 's a lot o' folks like Old Timothy Salmon, always bein' mighty free with their advice and a-tellin' what ye 'd better be a-doin' but I 've learned how ter let 'em talk and ter pay no attention to 'em, fer I 've noticed that generally the ones who 're a-tellin' me, ain't fixed no better off 'n I be. Ye know, Hiram,

there hain't nothin' much what come free that 's worth takin', and ye don't want ter do everythin' what folks be a-tellin' ye ter do. Jest figure things out fer yerself, and then stick ta 'em."

Hiram agreed that Jim was right, and after expressing his sympathy for Orlie Sprague and commenting upon Jim's generosity, he said, "Wa'al, Jim, guess I ought ter be a-goin', but I 'll call agin sure, fer it must be kind o' lonesome fer ye layin' here all day long. Has anybody else ben over ter see ye?"

"Yes," responded Jim, as he turned over on his back, with a far away look in his eyes. "Yes, Elmer Perkins, the undertaker, come in yisterday, and we had a sort o' a pleasant visit. But one thing, Hiram," here Jim's voice became a husky whisper, "Hiram," he repeated hoarsely, "that damned Perkins carried a yard stick instead of a cane, and now, Hiram, honest Injun, don't ye think it 's goin' a leetle too far fer an undertaker ter call on a sick man and bring a yard-stick? I asked him

how business wuz, and he sez, in a kind o' longin' sort o' way, that he had n't had a funeral in over a year."

Among the many antiques that made Jim's room attractive was an old-fashioned mahogany sideboard with claw feet and glass knobs, and when Hiram's eyes fell upon it, he arose and walked over to give it closer inspection. "By cracky, Jim, it 's a wonder ter me that some o' them collectors hain't a-gobbled up that 'ere piece before now."

"That 's what we fetched it upstairs fer, so 's they could n't see it; got ter botherin' us ter death, them what heared about it. Dare n't tell y'u what they 've offered, but we would n't part with that piece of furniture no more 'n we 'd part with one o' the children. It 's more 'n two hundred years old that we know of; used ter belong ter Old Colonel Harwood, back in the forties. They say he used ter be quite a feller fer takin' a nip, and that he kept all his liquid joy in that lower cupboard, and I guess p'rhaps it 's so, fer the

catch on that right door has been used so much in times gone by that every now and then it flies open of its own accord, and when I hear it, I always sez to myself, 'there goes the Colonel fer another drink.'"

"S'pose y'u know 'bout the village constable, Jim Callaway, joinin' another secret society?"

"Y'u don't say! Thought he belonged ta about everythin' goin'; wears emblems enough now ter make him round-shouldered; wuz a-tellin' me how he could n't take time ter change his vest, 'cause it 'ud take about all day ter transfer his badges."

"Wa'al, he 's up and done it," said Hiram, "jest as I 'm a-tellin' y'u; went over ter the city ter take the initiation and come back hum with a new button and a jag. Sez he 's a full-fledged member o' the T. U. A. P. of M., — sez it means The Upliftin' and Preservation o' Mankind."

"Wa'al, all I got ter say," replied Jim, "is that if he keeps a-joinin' things, he 'll have ter

carry his pins and buttons on a banner, 'cause the last time I see Jim Callaway it wuz over ter the meetin' o' the Hose Company and then he wuz a-wearin' everythin' from a Grand Army pin ter his sheriff's badge, and the probabilities be that he took that office jest so 's ter wear the tin star marked 'special.'"

After they had passed their jokes back and forth and talked over what was left of the town news, Jim grew serious, for it was his firm belief whenever he was taken ill that he was surely going to die. He lifted himself up so that he could rest by leaning on one elbow, and as he folded back the bed-quilt and ran his finger along the little squares, he said, "Hiram, you and me have ben a-settin' 'round these parts a good many years, and sometimes don't it occur ter ye that we 're gettin' 'round toward the home stretch? This life 's a kind of a futurity race, as it were, that we 're in-ter without havin' nothin' ter say 'bout it; and there 's a grandstand full o' people what 's a-watchin' and a-criticisin' how we 're

a-steppin'. Some 'll go ter the furst quarter like a whirlwind, and break and go all ter pieces at the half; but I 've tried ter kind o' take a gait that I could keep and go 'way 'round the track, and so I hain't disappointed anybody much. But, Hiram, ter be honest with ye, I think I 'm a-comin' down the last quarter. Ye know what I mean — gettin' near the wire that ends the race."

Hiram knew only too well what Jim Case meant, for Jim's wife had told him before he went up to Jim's room how he had been suffering with the rheumatism and that he thought he was done for.

"P'rhaps I kin make it a leetle plainer," continued Jim, "if I tell ye I 've made my will, and I guess I 'm all ready ter pass the Judges' stand. Now, if ye 've got any suggestions ter make, Hiram, why, now 's yer chance."

Hiram looked down at the floor and then up at the ceiling and nervously twirled his ivory-handled cane.

"Ye know, Jim," he said, "ye 've never

ben much of a church man and I 'd suggest that it might give ye a leetle consolation ter send fer Elder Armstrong and have him come over a leetle while every day and offer up a prayer fer ye."

Old Jim sat up erect in bed and turned so that he could squarely face Hiram Wilcox.

"Hiram," he said, "ye need n't send fer the Elder ner his pardner, Timothy Salmon, fer I 'll tell ye right now that I 'd ruther go to hell with you and Cal Hemmingway and the boys than ter heaven with Elder Armstrong and Timothy Salmon and their kind. Jest tell 'em that fer me." Here Jim, with a final gesture, sank back upon his pillows.

As Hiram left the room, he promised to deliver the message to all the boys at the old store and to tell them that Jim was hoping to be out and with them soon.

CHAPTER XIII

ELECTION DAY AT SOUTH HOLLOW

IT WAS a clear November morning, with a little flurry of snow, just the kind of a day that the politicians would call "real good Republican weather." Several groups of men were standing about on the main corners of the village, earnestly discussing the probable results of the day's election. The bar-room over at the tavern was closed tight and the curtains drawn back. A piece of paper, pinned on the door, bore the grave message: *Closed till after lection.*

The polls had opened at sunrise. "District No. 1" was located in the blacksmith shop. Two saw-horses with a plank across answered the purpose of a table, at which were seated the inspectors of election. During the year these "inspectors" are satisfied to follow the plough

or pitch hay from sunrise to sunset for one dollar and fifty cents a day, but on this occasion they were to receive five dollars for their day's work. Their duties were to sit behind the wooden box and check up the votes as they dropped into the slot. The hardest part of the day's work was to wait for the voters to come in, as there were only some twenty men to vote in this district. On ordinary occasions these men were cordial. As Jim Case would put it, "They 'd even let ye bite a chew of tabaccy off o' their plug;" but, when seated behind the ballot box on Election Day, they were entirely different people, refusing to recognise their own neighbour. As their acquaintances came in to vote, they suddenly would become so rigid and erect that they were in imminent danger of toppling over.

"Ballot number twelve," you would hear one call out, with a heavy bass voice. "What 's yer age, name, and address?"

After answering all their questions, the poor, trembling voter would retire to a booth —

a square, portable box a little larger than a coffin — where he could fold and unfold his ballot, a large, clumsy paper almost as big as a horse blanket. Suspended from the top of the booth hung a blunt pencil from a string. With this the voter made the little cross that indicated his intentions.

On this eventful day the matter at issue was: Should the Honourable Timothy Salmon be chosen for village president, or Calvin Avery Hemmingway, the genial proprietor of the South Hollow general store. The usual arguments had been made for and against both candidates, with lengthy discussions at the town hall, on the street corners, and in the tavern. For the past three weeks a large banner had been hanging between the four corners, flapping in the breeze, and bearing what was supposed to be a likeness of one of the candidates. To avoid any possible mistake, however, his constituents had printed under the picture, in big, square letters, *Vote for the Honourable Timothy Salmon.*

The real issue in this campaign was whether the village should purchase chairs for the town hall or continue to rent them from Elmer Perkins, the undertaker. The Honourable Timothy Salmon stood, as usual, for curtailing expenses rather than "spreading out," and he was decided in saying that he was not for spending the village money for "opera chairs," as he termed them. On the other hand, Jim Case, in arguing for Cal Hemmingway, said he thought it was a disgrace to South Hollow not to own and maintain chairs for use in the town hall. In support of his position, he cited a case when an Uncle Tom's Cabin troupe was to "show" at the hall on a Friday night and Perkins, the undertaker, happened to have a funeral the same day over at Cardiff. Perkins and the manager of the troupe drove six miles over to Cardiff and were obliged to give the family of the deceased free passes to the show in order to secure a postponement of the funeral. So they got the chairs and had the performance that night as advertised.

In the course of his speech, Old Jim spied a little gathering of coloured people among his listeners, and with outstretched arm he pointed directly at them. "To our coloured voters I want ter say that the great liberties an' priv-la-ges which ye possess ye owe ter the Re-publican party, and at every oppor-tunity in the history o' this village the coloured voters 've always shown by their dec-ler-ations and by their votes that they stand fer those principles which 'll best sub-serve our form o' government. The coloured voters o' this village possess too great a degree of in-tel-ligence, too much loy-alty ter the Re-publican party, too much love fer the honour an' fair name o' their village, too deep an in-terest in its welfare, progress, and prosper-ity ter be influenced in their suffrages by empty promises er by petty grievances, real er fancied. And I 'm sure that in this great crisis which the village faces, ye 'll not fail ter live up ter the tra-ditions o' yer race, and that ye, by yer votes, 'll prove ab-solutely true ter yer party and

Calvin Hemmingway, who has always treated all men ab-solutely equal, bein' willin' ter sell *his* goods ter *whoever* might call, regardless o' colour, race er creed."

Every night the week before election such meetings were held, the Honourable Timothy Salmon and Jim Case speaking alternately, first in the town hall and then on the hotel veranda.

The oldest inhabitants will always say that it was one of the hottest Election Days they had ever had in South Hollow. Everybody that had "turned twenty-one" was up early, ready to vote and impatient to hear the returns that were to be read that night at the tavern.

Jim Case spent most of the day at District No. 3, Whitlock's barn, where over two hundred votes would be cast. He was there before sunrise and when the first voter arrived, who was, of course, old Winnie Fowler. Although he was the oldest man in the village, for years he had boasted of casting the first vote of the day in his district.

As he pushed the door shut and stamped the snow off, he addressed the inspectors. "Good mornin', boys. Don't s'pose none o' y'u hez voted yet, 'cause y'u all agreed 't I could be number one if I 'd get here on time." He pulled out his watch, and, as he held it in the palm of his hand and rubbed his bony thumb back and forth over the open face, he continued:

"Wa'al, I 'm here and I got four minutes ta spare. I hain't missed a votin' ballot number one, right here in this very barn, fer over fifty years."

They all congratulated him on being on time and one of the inspectors, pointing over to Jim Case, said, "Do y'u know that feller over there?"

Fowler threw his head back a little, fixed his glasses on straight, and, taking a good look, answered, "Know Jim Case! Wa'al, I guess I orter. We 've belonged ta the same society fer over thirty years, our motto bein' 'Invincible in Peace and Invisible in War.' Hey, Jim?"

"That 's right," laughed Jim, as he gave the stove a shaking up and walked over to get another shovel of coal. "But what we 're all a-thinkin' about this mornin' is, who 's a-goin' ter be the next president o' this 'ere village."

Fowler turned a water pail upside down and, with a grunt, took his seat on it. Then he replied, "Wa'al, Jim, I sorter got a feelin' in my bones that this 'ere election ta-day is a-goin' ter be putty close. Course, Timothy Salmon 's a-goin' ter get there, but I kinder think Cal Hemmingway 's got a lot o' silent votes what 's a-goin' in fer him. Y'u see folks like ter go ta the show and they want ter know fer sure that there 'll be seats fer 'um ta set in when they git inter the hall, and they 're liable ta show their feelin's at the polls. Then again, there 's Perkins, the undertaker; he 's agin Hemmingway 'cause he wants the rent fer them chairs, and if the town owned their own, why he d be a-losin' as much as twelve dollars a year. I know, 'cause me and Pop wuz a-figurin' it up last night over ta the

tavern. Y'u see he gets a dollar a night fer 'um."

During Fowler's talk Jim had found a comfortable seat in an old buggy. As he removed his overcoat and carelessly threw it across the dashboard, he said, "Winnie, I s'pose you 're a-goin' ter cast this first vote o' the day fer the Honourable Timothy Salmon, hain't y'u?"

"Wa'al, sir," answered up Fowler as he banged his cane against the iron tire of the wheel, "while 't ain't none o' yer danged business, I 'm a-goin ter answer y'u by a-sayin' that I hain't fer seein' Elder Perkins lose that twelve dollars a year. He 's got ter live somehow and he hain't had a funeral sence Tyler Tompkins committed suicide by a-hangin' himself in the woodshed, and that hain't likely ta a-cur in our midst again in the Lord only knows when."

"No," said Jim solemnly. "Tyler Tompkins wuz the best friend Perk ever had, right up ter the last."

Fowler arose, and, pushing the pail back in its place, reached over, took his ballot and started for the little booth. As he did so, Old Jim got down out of the buggy, and, walking over, took Fowler by the arm and said, "Winnie, the trouble with y'u is that y'u don't take everything inta consideration. Y'u see if we buy chairs fer the town hall, we 'll own um' ourselves and won't have the expense o' rentin'. If Perkins can make money a-ownin' them chairs and a-rentin' 'um ta us, we ought ter make his profit fer the town by a-ownin' 'um and not havin' ta pay this rent; and then, besides, there be folks what has a feelin' regardin' seein' a show in the same chair what they 'd been sittin' in at a funeral. I tell y'u, it 's what keeps a lot o' folks from a-patronisin' the town hall."

The two men had crossed over and were now sitting perched up on the feed-box. Jim had started to cut his initials in the cover and Winnie Fowler was scratching his gray head and looking rather bewildered at the ballot.

Finally he looked up at Jim, and said "I ben a-thinkin' of all that, what y'u jest ben a-sayin'. I had n't a-looked at it in jest that light before."

As he said this, one of the inspectors called out, "Ballot Number One; Winnie Fowler; age 83. Come on, Winnie, and vote, fer there 's a lot more a-comin' up the driveway." And as the old man carefully let himself down from the oat-bin, he whispered to his mentor, "Here goes fer Cal Hemmingway, and I 'll see y'u later over ta the tavern."

Old Jim spent almost the entire day there until he felt confident that Whitlock's barn was a sure thing for Cal Hemmingway. Then he lost no time in getting over to Pratt's barber shop, District Number 2.

Pratt's barber shop was a veritable hole in the wall. With the cigar-stand and the barber's chair moved over in the corner, it left just enough room for a polling district, with nothing to spare.

Pratt himself had arranged to take

advantage of the occasion by having a day 's hunt. He voted early, and then went over and tacked a card on the barber's pole: *Fresh Paint.* Last election day the pole had been used as anchorage for tired and unsteady politicians until it was nearly cracked in two. Pratt was for taking no more chances.

"I guess that 'll make 'um sit up and take notice," he said, as he stepped back and gave it a look of satisfaction. Then he disappeared up the hill with his gun over his shoulder.

There were three Inspectors of Election in this District No. 2: Munroe Ostrander, Al Worden, and Hicks Toogood. Most of the day was spent playing dominoes and discussing county politics. Now and then a heated argument would be interrupted by the arrival of a voter.

It was late in the afternoon when Old Jim pushed open the door and, nodding to the inspectors, inquired, "How 's things a-goin' over here, boys?"

"Too one-sided ter be excitin'," answered

Munroe Ostrander, looking up with a yawn. "Why Timothy Salmon 'll look like a trottin horse in a runnin' race."

"Wa'al," said Old Jim, "Cal 's jest as sure o' gettin' Whitlock's barn as we are ta have day and night."

At this juncture, Steve Rogers entered. He walked up, and, after answering all the questions, was just about to enter the voting booth, when Old Jim's voice rang out, "Here Steve Rogers, you hain't got no business a-castin' that vote, an' y'u know it."

Steve Rogers stopped short as if a train robber had said "hands up!" and the three inspectors came to their feet as quick as if Pratt, the barber, had called "Who 's next?" Al Worden stepped forward, and, placing his hand on Jim's shoulder, said, "What do you mean, sir? To challenge this man's vote?"

"Call it anything y'u want ta," replied Jim, "but I 'll tell y'u all right here now that he 's got ter explain somethin' ta me before he kin make that vote count in this election."

Jim beckoned for Rogers to follow him outside. When the two were alone, Jim looked squarely into Steve Roger's face. "Steve, you know blamed well that you 've got a bet with Bennett, the stage driver. You bet him a plug o' tobacco that Timothy Salmon 'd get elected. Course, the wager hain't so much, but it 's a bet jest as much as if 't wuz a five-dollar note, and a man what 's got a bet on election, y'u know, kin be challenged at the polls and he 's liable ta lose his vote. I would n't 've said nothin', Steve, only Cal Hemmingway 's *our* friend and I want ta see him get elected. I knowed that y'u were a-goin' ter vote fer Salmon and I thought p'rhaps if I 'd remind y'u o' the time Cal wuz good enough ta lend y'u his rubber boots that day we went up the creek fishin', p'rhaps you 'd change yer mind."

Rogers looked at Jim long and steadily. Then, taking him by the hand, he said, "Why, Jim, I 'd do most anythin' fer y'u. You 're right about Cal a-lendin' me them boots and

I 'll swear that 's more 'n old Salmon 'd do fer me."

He took the ballot from his pocket and handed it to Jim, who marked it "Straight Republican," saying, as he handed it back, "Be around ter the tavern ta-night and I 'll show y'u how much I 'm obliged ta y'u."

The two walked back and Steve Rogers dropped an unchallenged vote in the box, and it counted one for Cal Hemmingway.

Old Jim shook hands with a few more straggling voters, and, after giving them each a little confidential talk, hurried out and up the street to see how things were going at the blacksmith shop. He arrived there just at sundown and as the polls were about to close. The big doors at the shop were swung to, and, while the crowds stood about peeking in at the windows, the inspectors were busy counting votes. Several bets had been recorded at the tavern during the day in the way of cigars, and Winnie Fowler bet Eph Lancaster a pint of

peanuts that Cal Hemmingway would get a majority of fifteen or more.

At eight o'clock the crowd was so large that you could not get within gun-shot of the tavern, which was filled to its utmost capacity.

After a time Old Jim came in. He elbowed himself through the crowd and pushed his way around behind the desk, where he stepped up into a chair and, taking a paper from his inside pocket, called out:

"If ye 'll all keep quiet, I 'll read ye the official returns from the three votin' districts, which are all in and correctly compiled."

Immediately the babel ceased. Pop, the proprietor, removed the little stick that let down the window so that the clouds of tobacco smoke could be exchanged for a bit of fresh air.

"Good idee," remarked Jim. "Guess p'rhaps now I kin read these returns without a-chokin' ter death." And then, after coughing a few times, he finally cleared his throat, and, holding the paper up under a smutty,

fly-specked lamp, proceeded with his announcements:

District No. 1; Blacksmith shop; 18 votes cast; Gives Cal Hemmingway 15, Timothy Salmon 3.

District No. 2; Pratt's barber shop; 60 votes cast; Gives Cal Hemmingway 43, Timothy Salmon 17.

District No. 3; Whitlock's barn; 220 votes cast; Gives Cal Hemmingway 120, Timothy Salmon 100.

This gives Cal Hemmingway a total majority of 58."

Nearly every hat went up to welcome the new village president. Cal Hemmingway was called upon to make a speech. He had been sitting in the parlour with Hiram Wilcox, nervously waiting to hear the results, after which he was carried bodily across the street to the band-stand, the entire crowd following.

Jim Case was the first speaker, and he proudly stepped upon the band-stand. When the crowd quieted down, he said:

"Gentlemen, I 've heared it said that any

man who 'd ought ter be free, will be. Now 't will apply jest as well ter a village as 't will ter a person. Every townsman o' South Hollow who 's loyal ter this village ought ter be proud ter-night, fer this victory means freedom ter each and every one o' us. It means that we 'll be a-workin' fer ourselves and each other. It means that we 've at last cast off the cloak o' authority and become in-dependent, wherein we kin have an in-dividuality o' our own, and that we 'll no longer be subjects ter the dictations of an old fogy (cheers) who fer years has profited by our labours and misfortunes. It 's through his influence and power that the growth o' our village has ben stunted o' any possible progress. (More cheers.) The people o' South Hollow have ter-day proved ter the Honourable Timothy Salmon that it takes more 'n a white tie and a title o' 'Church pillar' ter make 'em believe in a man's sincerity. We 've showed him that we don't need no X-ray ter probe through his cloak o' religion, fer we know that

real religion means the doin' o' justice. It means a-givin' ter others the same rights what we 'd claim fer ourselves. Real religion consists in the duties o' man ter man.

"I tell ye, brother townsmen," continued Old Jim, with uplifted hand, "we 've heared it said that in the leetle things there wuz liberty; in the great things, unity; and in *all things*, charity. Cal Hemmingway don't carry no gold-handled cane, 'cause Cal 's poor; but he 's rich with honour; with integrity he 's also wealthy."

As he said this, he turned, and, taking Cal by the hand, introduced him as the new village president, amid prolonged cheers of the crowd.

The applause continued for several minutes, and then Cal spoke up, saying:

"Feller citizens, I want ter thank ye one and all fer the honour which ye 've bestowed on me in selectin' me fer yer president. Not bein' no speech-maker, I 'll jest say that I 'm a-goin' ter do the best I kin fer the village,

and if there be any errors in my administration, they 'll be errors o' the head instead o' the heart."

Here Cal made a modest bow and took his seat again. Then after the usual hand-shaking and congratulating, the noise subsided and died down.

A little later the crowd commenced to break up and go home, and the village of South Hollow was once again wrapped in peaceful slumber.

CHAPTER XIV

THE 'COON HUNT

"IT'S jest the night fer a 'coon hunt," said Cal, as Henry Bennings came in and closed the door.

The store was occupied by the regular sitters, and also some fellows who had ridden over in the old stage with Bennett from the city. A 'coon hunt had been arranged for this night and they were all waiting to go with Jim Case over to Onondaga Hill where the hunt was to take place. There was naturally much confusion about the old store. The counter was piled up with overcoats and sweaters, and Cal was never more busy in his life, filling lanterns and putting up lunches.

At last Cal stopped to rest. Presently the door opened, and in walked Old Jim leading Nero, his 'coon hound.

"S'pose ye got yer wife's consent ter stay out all night, hain't ye, Jim?" said Cal, as he folded his arms and winked at the boys.

Old Jim answered as he dumped his things on the counter. "Yes, got things all fixed. Ye know my wife 's got the most even temper ye ever saw — mad as a hatter all the time!"

Jim crawled up on a cracker barrel and listened patiently to what was supposed to be a new story that Old Bennett had just brought fresh from the city; and as he was the next one called upon, he laughed a little and said, "Wa'al, boys, I 'm jest out o' stories, but I kin tell ye an ex-perience I had a-comin' back from the North Woods a year ago this fall. Ye see, our train had jest stopped at a leetle side station and two old feller's got aboard that come in and took seats right in front o' me. One wuz a lettle, short, sawed-off, dried-up individual, over eighty years old, and the other wuz a regular giant. He wore gray whiskers, a broad-brimmed hat, and wuz carryin' an old-fashioned muzzle-

loadin' shotgun. Now, I wanted ter get inter conversation with 'em, so, takin' advantage o' the fact that one had a gun, I leaned over and asked if they were fond o' huntin'.

"The big feller turned half way 'round, and sez in a good-natured way, 'My friend, when I can't hunt I want ter die.' At the same time he pointed out o' the car window ter the great forest we were passin', and then sez, 'Me and Silas here have slung lead over every foot o' that ground from one end to t' other.

" 'I could tell ye a story 'bout a huntin' trip we had,' he sez, pointin' ter the leetle feller, 'but Silas there might object. Ye see I 've twitted him 'bout it fer fifty-two years.'

"Here Silas looked up with a grin, and sez, 'Oh, go on an' tell the story 'bout me. I guess if I 'd ben goin' ter get mad I 'd a-done so years ago.'

"The big feller with the gun shifted ter a comfortable position and commenced a-tellin'

me how Silas and himself, when they were boys tergether, once started out still-huntin' fer deer. He said they had a muzzle-loadin' shotgun that required percussion caps and after they 'd ben out a few hours, Silas came a-runnin' over ter him all out o' breath and told how he 'd lost the best shot he 'd ever had at a beautiful big buck. Silas sobbed as he told how he used every cap he had, but fer some reason the darned gun would n't go off, and at last he come away mad and disappointed. Ye see, he could n't understand what wuz the matter with that danged gun until the next day they took it ter his father, who wuz a gunsmith by trade, and when the old man took it apart ter see what the matter wuz ——' Here the old cuss commenced ter chuckle," said Jim, "and Silas looked a leetle sheepish.

"'His father found that Silas, in his ex-citement while loadin, had put in a chaw o' tobaccy instead o' powder.'

"As he finished the story, the train stopped

at their village and the two old fellers hustled out. I waved my hand as the train moved away, leavin' um both a-standin' on the platform, one a-swingin' his old gun, and the other his hat, still laughin' at the same old story that happened when they were boys tergether fifty-two years ago."

Just as Jim finished his story, someone drove up in front of the store, and a voice called out, "All aboard."

It was Perkins, the undertaker, driving his black team hitched to a democrat waggon. A lantern was tied on the dashboard.

"Hustle, you fellows," he called again.

The boys grabbed up their packages and Old Jim slid down off of the cracker barrel and followed out, with Nero's chain in one hand, and dangling a pair of time-rusted tree-climbers with the other.

The boys filed into the waggon and the team dashed away from Cal's store.

The night was damp, and not a little chill came from the wind that strikes down from

the northwest, but everybody was bundled up to the ears, and no one minded the night air.

Jim's famous 'coon hound Nero was on the rear seat, the most restless animal that ever lived, making life miserable for the boys who were attempting to quiet him. A cuff on the head told Nero that 'coon hunting was yet two hours to the bad, and with an impatient growl, he allowed his head to sink to a knee while he muttered his contempt in his own dog way.

The clouds that obscured the musky sky began to break the great fleecy masses scudding away to the east. A star peeping here and there gave the boys hope that the moon might yet be seen. A few drops of rain, a light gray in the northwest, was an indication that the sky was clearing, and the sight of the great north star caused an ejaculation of joy from the crowd.

Up the steep hill and away to the east, a drive of an hour brought the waggon in front of

a smart-looking farmhouse, through the windows of which a light twinkled, followed by a cheery "Hello!" and a good-natured farmer came out of the door, with a lantern in his hand, to receive his old friend, Jim Case, and the boys.

It was almost nine o'clock when everything had been put in shape in the farm barn.

Nero was acting badly. He tugged on the chain and howled because Jim would not release him. His nose followed the ground and he ducked here and there. But to release him now would spoil the night's fun.

Elmer Perkins shouldered a big pack basket, and Henry Bennings grabbed up the other. The city fellows who never threatened to work, each carried a lantern, while Jim — good-natured Old Jim, as hardy a 'coon hunter as Onondaga ever reared, followed on with his pipe held tightly between his teeth, the smoke from which, one of the city sports remarked, "was enough to kill any stray 'coon within a mile of the party."

But Old Jim did n't care; he was happy, infinitely so.

A walk of half a mile, and then Jim Case who was leading the dog, called out, "Lights low, all o' ye. There 's a cornfield and we 've got ter strike out fer that strip o' woods ter the right. Nero is wild ter go, and I 'm a-goin' ter give him his head."

The hunters, like ghostly figures, watched old Nero disappear in the woods. Then, finding a comfortable place to squat under a big tree, they pulled away at their pipes and cigars, their ears strained for a sound from the dog.

It is an interesting scene, what can be seen of it. The twinkling electric lights of Syracuse, far, far down in the valley below, the plaintive sighing of the trees, the ceaseless patter of the dry leaves as they strike the ground, the general quiet, broken only at intervals by the smothered conversation of the boys, is an experience never to be forgotten. Once the squeak of a cork and a suspicious

gurgle led Old Jim to investigate, but the only signs of liquid was one bottle marked "Spirits of ipecac" and two of "turpentine," so "not guilty" went through the crowd.

It must be understood that the dog hunts the 'coons. There is absolutely nothing to do except to wait until the hound strikes the track; and it is on one of these occasions that now and then a good story or experience is told.

Jim Case and "Quig," as Jim called the farmer who had joined them, had not seen each other in a long time. Jim inquired after all the Onondaga Hill folks, finally asking "Quig" how his rheumatiz wuz these days.

"Oh, 't ain't much better," said the old fellow, "kind o' comes and goes . I 've tried every patent medicine that wuz ever advertised and carried a horse chestnut fer nine years, but nothin' seems ter do it any good."

"Ever try 'lectricity?" asked Jim.

" 'Lectricity?" said Quig. "Yes, 't wuz 'bout a year ago last June that I wuz struck by lightnin' and wuz laid up fer nearly two

weeks, but it did n't seem ter help my rheumatiz any."

"What 's become o' the Stebbins family? Be they still a-livin' in the white house at the corners?" Jim questioned.

"Same place," replied Quig. "S'pose ye heared 'bout Stebbins's wife havin' the St. Vitus dance?"

"No," said Jim. "Did n't s'pose Stebbins's folks 'proved o' dancin'."

Quig laughed as he whittled away on a dead twig. "Yes, and she 's as bad off as I be," pointing with his stick at his glass eye; "lost one o' hern 'bout six months ago. The boys say she got ter shakin' with the St. Vitus and must 've shook it out. Ye see, when she wants ter talk, she has ter put a finger in each ear ter hold her head still, and then she 'll grunt a few times, meanin' that she 's gettin' ready. That 's a sort o' cue fer everybody ter keep still, and then she 'll start in and talk till both fingers get numb. Stebbins sez the trouble is she wants ter talk 'bout all the time

— don't seem ter mind the gettin' ready 't all."

The boys laughed heartily, and Old Quig rattled on. "There be three relatives that live with the Stebbins — all women folks and stone deaf. They had a funeral next door ter Stebbins's house t' other day and he had ter keep 'em all in the house, fer when they try ter talk ter each other on the front porch ye kin hear 'em talk a mile off, so out o' respect fer the dead, he kept 'em inside till the funeral wuz over.

"I wuz there ta dinner once," he continued, still whittling away, "and as these old women could n't understand ye 'd hear 'em say, 'Pass the trumpet' 'bout as often as 'Pass the bread.'

"By the way," added Quig, "whatever become o' yer old side partner, Lem Wetherby, Jim?"

Jim dropped his head a little as he replied, "Dead and buried years ago."

"Dead, eh! Ye don't say! What wuz the matter?"

"Got ter be an easy drinker."

"Did, hey? Then there wuz Steve Matthews what worked over ta the mill; is he around?"

"Nope. Moved over ta Cardiff and finally drunk himself ta death."

"Well said! Seems ez though all on 'um what I knowed over ta the Hollow had died o' the same thing. Is Irve Halcomb still hangin' around the tavern?"

"Nope. He 's gone with the rest. When he died two years ago, Pop jest poured him back inta the barrel," answered Jim, jumping to his feet. He had ears like a fox.

"That 's Nero. Hear him? There he goes again," said Perkins. "Let him give voice once more and he 's got a 'coon sure."

They were at the edge of the forest, from the recesses of which, perhaps half a mile away, came the deep bays of the hound; a yelp of joy is followed by a bark of satisfaction and exultation. Then it is quiet, and so plainly did they tell that he had a 'coon treed that it only took a few minutes for the husky hunters

to file over the fence and shoot into the forest once more.

Quig was the last one over. As he struck the ground, he cried out, "Come back here, you fellers, with that lantern. Dang it all! I 've lost my eye."

When the lantern arrived, he poked over the dead leaves until his glass eye appeared. In a minute it was slapped back in place and Quig and his assistant were again on their way following the dog.

In quick succession comes Nero's voice to the eager ears which drink in every sound. Then maddening and in greater volume his bays resound through the woods.

"He 's got him! He 's got him!" shouted Perkins, cutting a pigeon wing, forgetting for a moment that he was a staid undertaker.

"'Coon, sure enough," said Bennings, while Old Jim rolled his cud of tobacco to the other side of his jaw, and called out rather languidly: "'Coon nothin'. Wait 'till you fellers see that 'coon."

But Perkins was over the fence and making tracks for the interior of the forest. His lantern was a guide to the boys, falling over logs, scratching their hands on the brushwood, heedless of everything except that Nero's voice was sounding nearer every moment, while his bark was growing more terrific with every sound.

" 'Coon, boys, 'coon!" yells Perkins, in great glee.

He was the first there, and pointed the rays of his lantern at a dark object crouched in the fork of a small maple. Nero was very much excited, dancing about under the tree and refusing to be quieted. The boys were jumping about in preparation for the affray that was to follow. Jim only smiled. The cunning old codger had not said a word, but he did so later.

"I 'll tell you whether it 's a 'coon er not," said Perkins as he swung himself into the branches.

Nearer and nearer he climbed toward the object until he could almost touch it with his hand.

Around the tree the crowd formed a semi-circle. A faint, tearful, plaintive "Meow" from above, was the signal for a roar of laughter from Old Jim who fell all over himself in his efforts to make the most out of the joke.

It was rather a crestfallen lot that made a bee line through the woods a few minutes later, but no more so than Nero, who, robbed of his prey, refused to be comforted.

But he was ready for the word, and his master gave it to him.

Then began the tramp. Many miles they travelled that night. Down deep in ravines, clambering up the sides of precipices, wading through brooks, swinging into gullies, with only a small branch between safety and a broken limb, everything forgotten, including fatigue in the excitement of that three hours' tramp. Across the fields they plodded, the pack baskets weighing a ton by this time, and through the woods, the lanterns clearly showing the way, but not enough to save the hunters

from many a fall, and many 's the "dash it" that echoed through the woods that night.

Eleven o'clock came, and the next hour sped by. One o'clock, two o'clock, rolled around. Many times had Nero been sent into the depths of the forest, but each time he had returned in evident disgust. Old Jim had just started to tell the boys how blamed sorry he was that they had n't struck a 'coon track, when everybody came to a halt. Imagine the sensation when the dog gave voice, and but a few hundred yards from the spot where they were all huddled. The boys knew it was too late for cats, and down a steep embankment the whole crowd rolled, the lunch flying from the baskets and everybody landing at the bottom of the incline in one, big, struggling heap.

"Got one this time, all right. Talk about your whoppers. He 'll weigh twenty-five pounds sure," said Old Jim in great glee.

The lantern shed a meagre light, but its flickering rays were enough to locate Mr.

'Coon quietly perched upon a limb of an old basswood, his hair bristling in anger, while his teeth snapped viciously, his great bushy tail moving restlessly from side to side.

Now everything was ready and one of the party climbed into the tree and shook the 'coon down into the anxious jaws of the hound. Nero dashed upon his prey. It was a merry war: the 'coon and the dog had met. First it was the 'coon and then the dog. You could not tell one from the other in that fast and fierce battle. For ten minutes or more the din was terrific, but weight counts in a fight of this character, and it all came to an end suddenly. Nero jumped from his conquered foe to celebrate the victory and came to the chain licking his wounds.

The first rays of coming daylight now appeared over the hills beyond the Indian Reservation. Many miles had Jim Case led the boys and it was a foot-sore and weary gang that arrived at the farmhouse that crisp November morning.

CHAPTER XV

HENRY BENNINGS IN TROUBLE

HENRY BENNINGS arrived at the bank somewhat late in the morning. Unused to the hardships of 'coon hunting, he was naturally foot-sore and weary from loss of sleep and the all-night tramp over the hills. He was not in a very cheerful mood either as he opened the morning mail. The reading of a letter marked "Personal" gave him an unexpected shock and brought him to his feet. A gray pallor crept over his face as he read again the lines from a friend in a city bank, informing him that the bank examiner would probably visit South Hollow within a day or so.

After a moment's hesitation he seated himself at his desk again, and, unlocking his private drawer, brought forth a small red-covered book, which he opened, and, snatching

up a piece of blank paper, began to figure nervously with trembling fingers. Many times he referred to the little red book, and often stopped and gazed out into the cold, dismal street; then he would resume his figuring, while his face assumed a strained and unnatural appearance.

"What the devil shall I do?" he said at length. "This affair will drive me crazy. What a blame fool I've been anyway! A small grain of common sense would have told me that this system would surely end in this way. Damn that Bunk Bailey and his crooked deals anyway! I'd have made up that shortage all right with the money I obtained from Hattie if I had not been unlucky enough to meet him five minutes after I had mortgaged my soul and honour to obtain it. I am the most miserable man in existence. And, my God! to think of the lies I strung out to that poor girl. Why, I even had to tell her Frank died in the hospital, and the whole village believes the story now. I only wish

that their believing it might make it so. She thinks her savings have gone to ease and soothe Frank's last hours, when, in reality, they are lining Bunk Bailey's pockets. Think of it! And now I must dig up more money at once. How shall I ever do it?" Cold drops of moisture stood out on Henry's forehead as he crumpled the paper containing the figures and tossed it into the waste basket. "I must have one hundred dollars before we open up to-morrow to be on the safe side."

He dropped his head into his hands and sat thinking hard for a long time. Suddenly a voice from the desk window brought him to his senses. He hastily replaced the little red book, locked the drawer, and crossed over to answer the call.

It was old Orlie Sprague of Sprague Corners, who wanted to draw out one hundred and twenty-five dollars. Henry took his cheque and counted out his money. As he did so a desperate idea took possession of him. At the same time Sprague happened to remark,

"Guess you 'd better give me small bills, 'cause ter-morrow night I got ter pay off my farm hands, and besides I 've been a-buildin' an addition on ter my cow-barn."

"Just as you wish, Mr. Sprague," said Henry, rearranging the bills and handing them back. "Take good care not to lose them on the way home."

"Guess there hain't no danger o' that," replied Orlie, as he counted the bills over. "Never lost any as easy as that. It 's after workin' hard fer the hull season, and then findin' the crops don't pan out — that 's how I lose money, when I lose it."

"You should have a small safe out there to keep your money in, Mr. Sprague," said Henry.

"Don't have enough fer that," replied the old man. "Ye see, I always hide what leetle I have in the green vase on the sittin'-room shelf. Don't know why, but I always have. Seems as though that wuz a safe enough place. Don't believe a burglar would expect ter find money in sech a place as that, d' ye?"

"Burglar," thought Bennings. The word made him shake, but he made no answer and turned to his books.

As Orlie Sprague started to go, he said cheerfully, "Come out and see us some day, Bennings, and I 'll show ye a good farm." And then he stubbed along out.

He passed the time of day with a few acquaintances, finally swung himself into the old muddy buggy, and, slapping the lines up and down the old gray's back, with a "G'lang, Dolly," they jogged away up over the hill out of the village.

Sprague's Corners, where Orlie Sprague and his good wife had always lived, was at the end of a remote country lane leading off the main road, about six miles from South Hollow and twenty miles from the nearest railway station. Orlie seldom saw much of the outside world save an occasional trip to the feed mill store, or the bank at South Hollow. Visitors rarely came their way; wayfarers seldom left the main road, and so

seldom passed their isolated house. Whoever did go by, pedestrian, rider, or driver, constituted an event; and the two old people, rushing to the window, watched until the "event" was completely out of sight.

When Orlie returned this day from his trip to South Hollow and the bank he found a good, old-fashioned supper awaiting him. After the meal was finished, he and Betsey sat, as usual, in the front room, watching the sunset. Orlie was telling her about his trip to the village, when suddenly he shifted and said, "Hello, there comes Higgins's boy down the road and he 's carryin' a pail. Wonder what he 's got in that pail."

"Most likely it 's cranberries," said Betsey, craning her neck to see.

"Can't be cranberries," said Orlie, " 'cause they ain't ripe yet. Must be eggs."

"Nop, 'tain't eggs, 'cause the Higgins family only got six hens and they ain't a-layin'."

"Wa'al, mebbe he 's got cider in that pail,"

added Orlie, after which there was a silence, neither speaking for a long time.

Orlie finally began pulling on his boots and getting ready to go out to do his chores. His wife lighted the candle and started upstairs to bed. Half way up, she suddenly stopped and, turning her head slightly, said, with a yawn, "Orlie, I don't s'pose we 'll ever know jest what Higgins's boy had in that pail."

Orlie, making no reply, went over and lighted his lantern and then passed out through the woodshed into a well-worn path that led to the barn. He had been gone only a short time when the light flickered and grew dim. "What 's the matter?" he said, as he held up the lantern and gave it a shake.

"Wa'al, I 'll be darned if Betsey hain't gone and fergot ter fill ye up. Kind o' get neglected like, don't ye, when I go ter town? Never mind, we 'll have ter fergive her this time, 'cause she has a lot ter do when I 'm away."

By the time he was more than half way

back to the woodshed after kerosene, he came to a sudden stop.

"What 's all that?" he said under his breath. He heard a window open. He knew he was not mistaken, so he softly tiptoed to the corner of the house and looked around. An old apple-crate had been placed under the window. Orlie waited patiently. Presently he heard something fall to the floor and break, and a moment later saw a man letting himself quietly down from the window to the crate below. In one hand he tightly held a roll of bills.

Old Orlie was quick to grasp the situation. In a moment's time he had caught and thrown the man to the ground. The muscle that had been trained about the farm and in the woods proved too much for the intruder, who was already shaking with fright. A few punches over the head by the lusty old farmer, and he offered no further resistance.

"What d' ye mean by crawlin' inter my sittin'-room?" said Orlie, as he dragged him

around the house and carried him into the woodshed.

Betsey, aroused by the noise, came running downstairs in her nightdress. As she picked up a knitted shawl from the back of a chair and threw it over her shoulders, she called out, "Orlie Sprague, fer heaven's sake, what 's the matter — somebody been after the chickens again?"

"Bring yer light in here. I got somethin' ter show ye that 's bigger game 'n a chicken thief."

Betsey opened the woodshed door. There stood Orlie, wiping his brow with a bandana handkerchief, while on the floor before him lay the would-be burglar. Betsey threw up her hand. "Laws, Orlie!" she exclaimed, "ye hain't killed anybody, have ye?"

"Not much o' anybody," replied Orlie, as he loosened his neckband and rolled up his shirt sleeves. "Betsey," he went on, between breaths, "in about a minute more he 'd a-been gone with all the money in the green

vase. We 'd never a-knowed who took it either if ye had n't fergot ter fill the lantern. Ye see, I wuz a-comin' back ter get some oil and I happened ter hear the window open."

Stepping over to the prostrate form, he lifted his man up by the shoulders and Betsey leaned over a little and held out the light.

"Guess he ain't dead," said Orlie, as the captured man brought both hands up to cover his face. "He 's alive enough ter realise that he ain't fit ter be seen by decent folks."

Orlie took the light from Betsey and held it just above his prisoner. "Ye might jest as well show up, Bub," he said, " 'cause I 'm a-goin ter be kind ter ye — goin' ter give ye a night's board and lodgin' and a ride ter the village in the mornin', and I ain't a-goin' ter charge ye a red cent. Ye see, me and Betsey don't have very many callers, and when we do we can't get enough fer 'em." As he handed his wife the light, at the same time keeping both eyes on the man, he continued,

"I don't know as we kin get enough fer yew, but we 're a-goin' ter try and get 'bout five years."

Here Orlie reached over and pulled the man's hands away from his face. "Fer God's sake, Betsey," he exclaimed, "it 's Henry Bennings, cashier o' the South Hollow Bank!"

He paused, and then added, "Seems ter me as if I did invite him ter come out some day and see the farm, but I did n't expect he 'd come so soon. As I remember it, Bennings, I told ye some *day*. Can't show ye much at *night*."

Bennings was weak and exhausted with the pummeling that the old farmer had given him, with fright, and with nervous reaction. He willingly gave himself up to his plight; and on the next morning, Orlie Sprague turned him over to Jim Callaway, the village constable.

Henry Bennings made a clear confession of everything, admitting as well that he was the author of the lies that had driven Frank

Ridgeway away from South Hollow. He acknowledged that he had lost money gambling with Bunk Bailey at Syracuse, and that he had used the bank's funds, with the intention of repaying the bank with the money he had obtained from Hattie Salmon. Then he told of Bunk Bailey's unexpected visit to South Hollow that very night, demanding a settlement, which forced him to pay Bailey instead of the bank. He also told the story of Orlie Sprague's visit to the bank, and how, when he learned where the old farmer kept his money for safe keeping, he battled with temptation again, for thoughts of the bank examiner's visit had driven him to desperation, and to turn burglar seemed his only chance. He confessed that he fought hard against the criminal idea, but something seemed to whisper to him, "It 's your only chance. Go ahead!"

"You know the rest," said Bennings, as he concluded his confession. His face was pale and haggard as he sat in the little

court room at South Hollow, awaiting his sentence.

It was a long ride which he took later in the day with Old Bennett and Constable Callaway; and, as the old stage reached the top of the hill, he turned and took one last sad look back into the serene, peaceful valley of South Hollow.

CHAPTER XVI

OLD JIM'S SECRET OUT

SINCE the night that Frank Ridgeway bade good bye to the crowd in Cal's store and drove away with Old Bennett, the boy had done well with himself. Enterprise and attention to business had in time made him manager of the Long Island Transfer Company, and his salary had grown, if not to ample, at least to comfortable proportions; and saving and thrift and right living had brought a snug bank balance to his credit.

With the exception of one memory, Frank had put South Hollow behind him and had devoted his energies to a struggle with the present. But in his heart of hearts he cherished a hope — that hope for the future which lends courage and ambition to all of us. At evening in his room, he dreamed

and planned and pleased his fancy with a picture of his own fireside, where he would some day see his family and his friends gathered. His was to be a home, he dreamed, such as he had known in his yesterdays, large and comfortable, with a glorious garden and cool, shading trees. And through the garden, or beneath the trees, there ever walked the tender form of Hattie Salmon.

Years had passed, yet he had not had the courage to write to her. "Wonder what she thought when she found I had gone?" he often asked himself. "And I wonder if she has ever thought of me since? Perhaps Henry Bennings — No! No! that could n't be," and he would turn away from the sad thought.

Month after month he passed in this way until one day it occurred to him that there were other people in South Hollow. There was Old Jim Case. Why had he not thought of Old Jim before?

This belated thought seemed to invigorate

his mind and body like an electric current. With a bound he reached his desk. "Old Jim Case," he repeated joyously. "Why the dickens have n't I thought of him before?"

Hastily snatching paper and pen, he began a letter to Old Jim, asking about Cal Hemmingway, and if Hiram Wilcox was alive; if the old town looked the same, and how his checker game was coming on these days; if it was as far to the king row for the boys as it used to be? Then without a falter he wrote a full and satisfactory explanation of the all-absorbing mystery of South Hollow; of what he had done with the money which was drawn from the bank and why he left South Hollow so abruptly. His simple request of Jim was that he hold his secret with him until the proper time should come. Frank felt sure that the trust would be kept. In closing the letter he asked, as though in a spirit of gossip, whether they were going to have the Salmon reunion at South Hollow

this year, and if so, when? Then, growing self-conscious, he requested Jim not to mention having heard from him.

When Jim Case received the letter he let out a warwhoop, which he quickly smothered; for he intended to do just as Frank had requested and to keep the contents of the letter a secret

However, when he went down to Cal's store that night, there seemed to be something the matter with him. He could not play checkers because he was unable to concentrate his thoughts. His pipe did n't have the same taste because he smoked it too fast. Anybody could see that something unusual was on Old Jim's mind.

Cal had been busy writing up his books and had stayed a little later than usual at the store, and Old Jim was sitting there thinking, while all the other "sitters" had gone home and left him.

"What 's ben the matter with ye, Jim? Ye hain't ben yerself all day," said Cal, looking

up from his work as he reached over and dipped his pen for a fresh supply of ink.

"Say, Cal," grunted Jim, "when someone tells ye somethin' and then tells ye ye must n't tell, it 's tough. It 's jest hell ter keep a secret, hain't it?"

"Dunno," said Cal; "never kept one."

"Wa'al, I hain't a-goin' ter keep this one much longer, er the fust thing I know I 'll be licked good and plenty at checkers. Missed a couple of goose walks ter-day, and all on account of that darned secret I 'm a-trying' ter keep. Ye see I 've ben a-thinkin' that if yew and I both knowed this secret tergether, we could help each other ter keep it, fer ye see if I should get ter talkin' too much, yew could kind o' snap yer finger er cough er somethin' and remind me, and I could do the same fer yew."

Cal Hemmingway suddenly stopped working. He swung his stool half way around from his desk, and, as he pushed his penholder back over his ear, he said, "O' course,

Jim, if ye think 't would be a help ter ye, why I 'd be willin' ter have ye tell me, and I 'll promise I 'll do the best I kin not ter tell another livin' bein'."

At this Jim rose and walked over close to Cal. Although they were all alone in the store, Jim looked carefully around and then leaned over and whispered in Cal's ear, "I 've heard from Frank Ridgeway."

"Frank Ridgeway!" exclaimed Cal. "Wa'al, I would n't a-believed it o' yew, Jim, fer ye ben a-laughin' and a-sayin' that it wuz all a humbug. What kind o' a communication wuz it? Slate writin' er table rappin's?"

" 'T wa'n't neither. What d' ye think I 'm a-talkin' 'bout? Spooks and fairies? I tell ye I heared from Frank Ridgeway. Had a letter from him. Now d' ye understand?"

"But Frank Ridgeway 's dead, 'cause Henry Bennings said so — said he died in some hospital down in New York," returned Cal.

"Don't ye believe he 's dead, fer ye 'll find him pretty much alive," said Jim.

"Get out! Ye don't mean he 's alive and livin', d' ye?" said Cal, stepping down from his high stool.

They both walked over and took seats by the old stove, and Cal said, "Did ye let him have it?"

"Have what?" said Jim, for the first time speaking above a whisper.

"Why, whatever 't wuz he wanted. He would n't be writin' yew after all these years without he wanted somethin', would he?"

"Wa'al, what he 's a-wantin' he 's a-goin' ter get, but he hain't asked *her* yet."

"Her!" said Cal, with a surprised look.

"Yes," said Jim. "It 's like this. I knowed he always cared fer Hattie Salmon and most everybody 'bout here knows she 's always ben in love with him. Now, I 'll tell ye, Cal — jest move up a leetle closer." Jim again lowered his voice and almost whispered, "Frank Ridgeway told me all about his troubles, that is, the troubles that sent him away from South Hollow. That

boy wuz square and don't ye ferget it. Listen ter me, Cal, and I 'll tell ye somethin' ye never knowed. Ye remember Hiram Wilcox's story of the drownin' o' Budge Ridgeway, his father?"

"Yes," assented Cal with interest. "What about it?"

"Hold yer hosses," said Old Jim. "Wait till I tell ye. When Budge died, he had a note in Salmon's bank fer two hundred and fifty dollars. No one knowed 'bout it, er fer what purpose 't wuz given, not even his mother. Frank, ye see, wuz a-sparin' of her feelin's, so he never told her 'bout it, but that boy jest worked hard and said nothin' and saved up his money a leetle at a time, and when Old Timothy Salmon closed down on that note, that boy wuz right there, and with the goods, and he paid that note in full. And then, without a word ter save himself, he stood fer all the lyin' gossip 'bout spendin' the money, which come from that jealous pup of a Henry Bennings, and jest as soon as I

read this letter that I got here, I saw through it all."

"Ye don't tell me so!" said Cal, with genuine surprise.

"Yes, I do tell ye so," repeated Old Jim, with assumed coolness. "And I 'll tell ye somethin' more. I 've written Frank Ridgeway that the Salmon reunion is ter be next week Thursday and that I 'd meet him Wednesday 'bout 7 P. M. in Syracuse, and that I 'd drive him over here after dark so that no one 'ud see him, and then I 'm a-goin' ter keep him under cover all day at my house."

"Wa'al," interrupted Cal, at the same time lighting a fresh cigar from the old stub, as if he had given up going home entirely. "Wa'al, how 're ye a-goin' ter get 'um tergether?"

"It 's ter be a surprise," said Jim, "the biggest surprise ever sprung on South Hollow. I 've hired the town hall fer Thursday night and the Onondaga Indian Orchestra is comin' over. I 'm a-goin' ter give them spiritualists

a seance that 'll be a real one, by hooky, and at the same time show 'em them new seats that the village got by electin' you president. Ter open the evenin' I 've made arrangements with Professor Kaleb Klucker, a medium, and at the close o' his performance he 's a-goin' ter do the spirit cabinet act." Here Jim glanced over his shoulders as if once more to make sure that they were alone in the store and then whispered again in Cal's ear.

"Wa'al, I 'll be darned," said Cal. "Ye 're a wonder, Jim Case, and no mistake about it."

"I figured it all out," chuckled Old Jim, "and it can't fail."

"Wa'al, I 'm with ye," said Cal, slapping Jim on the back, "and spirits er no spirits, ye kin call on me. I 'll do anythin' ter help Frank back ter his proper standin' in this community."

Then Cal went back to his desk and Old Jim started homeward with the heavy weight of a big secret lessened by half.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SALMON REUNION

IN AND about South Hollow there were many families bearing the same name, all of whom claimed to be the descendants of Abraham Conklin Salmon who came to this country and settled in the year 1772. It had been the custom for a long time for all these families to meet at South Hollow once every year and have a family reunion. This fact was responsible for the red, white, and blue streamers which decorated the tavern on this bright summer's morning, and also for the big sign which stretched across the four corners, with large letters spelling "Welcome."

Cal Hemmingway, the proprietor of the South Hollow store, and now the president of the village, had been anticipating this event

for some time, and therefore it was not wholly unexpected when he appeared in a "boiled shirt," brand new celluloid collar and a large red bow tie.

In order that the Salmon family should have particular attention when visiting his store, he had printed and hung up a sign on the lamp fixture, which read as follows:

NO CHECKERS OR DOMINOES
TO BE PLAYED IN THIS STORE
DURING THE SALMON REUNION

When Jim Case came in and saw that sign, he insolently remarked, "Afraid ter have 'em see ye git licked, eh?"

"Wa'al, I were n't afraid ter hang the sign up, wuz I?" was Cal's reply.

Cal confidentially expected the largest day's business of the year, and had ordered an extra box of Golden Buck cigars from the city,

which had arrived two days before. As he opened the box, the thought occurred to him that if he put them out on top of the showcase, it would save a lot of time and also the work of continually taking them out and putting them back; so he pinned a little card on the box cover, which read, "Try a Golden Buck," and left them on top of the showcase.

A little later the various Salmon families began to arrive in South Hollow. They came from every direction and in all kinds of rigs. At ten o'clock there was a string of waggons at least a quarter of a mile long lined up along the roadway. Everybody attending the family reunion wore a long yellow badge in the centre of which was a fish representing a salmon and the words "Family Reunion," underneath which was the date, 1772.

The first man to enter Cal Hemmingway's store on that eventful day was a little short farmer with chin whiskers. In one hand he held a badge. "Got sech a thing as a safety-pin?" he asked, holding the yellow ribbon

up to his lapel. Cal immediately produced the necessary article and pinned the badge in its proper place.

Here Jim Case spoke up: "I warrant ye found the roads kind o' muddy drivin' over, did n't ye?"

"Wuz n't so bad," replied the man with the yellow badge, "until we got ter comin' in ter South Holla."

"Where 'd ye hitch?"

"Put up over ter the tavern," replied the farmer, handing Jim a cigar. "It 's as good a place as ye got 'bout here, hain't it?"

Old Jim bit off the end of the cigar. "I s'pose 't is, it bein' the only one," said he sententiously.

Then he scratched a match along the counter, and, holding it up between his two hands, said, between puffs, "My — name — is Jim — Case. S'pose ye 're a Salmon."

"No. I hain't," responded the farmer, "but my wife wuz a Salmon. She wuz the only daughter of Theodore Cunningham Sal-

mon. Ye must 've heared o' him; died 'bout a year ago, and it 's six weeks ter-morrow that we put up a monument ter his grave that weighed two ton."

"Two tons!" repeated Jim, tossing the burnt match into the sawdust box. "It must 've ben a real whopper."

By this time a crowd had gathered at the South Hollow store. Presently Cal, in his capacity as postmaster, called out that there was an envelope that had come over in the last mail addressed to Mr. Salmon. Every man in the store jumped up.

"Wa'al," said Cal, "there 's only one envelope and 'bout twenty Salmons. Guess I 'd better get down the dice box."

Accordingly the box was brought forth and each had a shake, Philip Henry Salmon throwing the largest number and receiving the envelope, which he tore open. Then he read the contents aloud.

"On presentation of this card and five new subscribers to the *South Hollow Gazette*, we

will send free a twenty-five cent package of Shell-o-See.

"When fed to hens it is a guaranteed egg producer.

"When applied to lambs it makes the wool grow.

"Cures rheumatism, spavins, and colds.

"When taken in coffee, cures the liquor habit."

There was a look of disappointment on the face of every Salmon as Philip tore up the advertisement, put his hands behind him under his coat, and walked back to where Old Jim Case was sitting. That worthy had one hand in his pocket rattling his wooden checkers. He was more or less nervous, as his mind had not been exactly at ease since he had seen the sign which forbade his beloved game.

"That 's a di-rect shot at me, but I 'll get even with Cal," he said to himself, knocking the ashes off of his cigar with his little finger.

After a prolonged meditation, a new idea presented itself, and, calling Philip Henry Salmon to one side, in a confidential manner he told him that the proprietor of the store, having just been elected President of the village, had placed a box of cigars on top of the showcase and wanted all the Salmons to have a smoke on him.

"Ye see, Cal is big-hearted," continued Jim, "and he feels mighty bad 'cause yew people don't step up and have a smoke. He thinks mebbe ye don't like the brand, and I know ye 'd be doin' 'm a favour if ye 'll tell all the other Salmons how welcome they be ter them cigars. Every man's entitled ter 'em that wears a yellow badge. Ye 'll see it reads on the cover, "'Try a Golden Buck.' "

Philip Henry Salmon gladly agreed to inform his relatives of the proprietor's generosity; so, as it happened, while Cal was at the rear end of the store drawing some molasses, the Salmon family began to "light up." They came up, one, two and three at

a time, and in an unconcerned way helped themselves to cigars.

It was only a few minutes after Cal had returned to the front of the store that he observed two old gentlemen deliberately walk up and each take a Golden Buck. They lighted them, and, continuing their conversation, walked serenely away. As they opened the front door, Cal roared out, "Hey, there! Hain 't yew fellers what 's goin' out of that front door fergot somethin' ?"

They stopped, felt in each pocket, and promptly answered, "Nope; we did n't have no umbrellas," and closed the door after them.

"But ye had a couple o' Golden Bucks," Cal shouted, as he jumped over the counter and flew out of the door and up the street until he had overtaken them. His hands came down on their shoulders like sledge hammers. "Be ye a-goin' ter pay fer them cigars, er hain't ye ?"

The two old gentlemen leaned back, pulled

up their lapels and, flapping the yellow badges, said in chorus, *'We 're Salmons.*"

"Don't give a damn if ye 're swordfish, codfish, bullheads, er sunfish. Don't think fer one minute ye kin take me fer a sucker!"

One of the old gentlemen made an attempt to explain. He only got as far as "But," when Cal took the word out of his mouth, saying, "Don't ye call them cigars 'Buts' fer I saw ye take 'em out o' the Golden Buck box myself. What I want is ten cents — one dime — fer them cigars ye took!"

The two old gentlemen shook in their boots, dug out five cents each and hurried on.

Cal returned at once to the store and found that the Salmons had all gone over to the tavern so as to be in time for the family dinner. He then turned to Jim Case and told him that business had been just as good as he had expected — more people in the store than ever before in any one day.

At this moment he discovered the empty cigar box on the showcase, and with a look

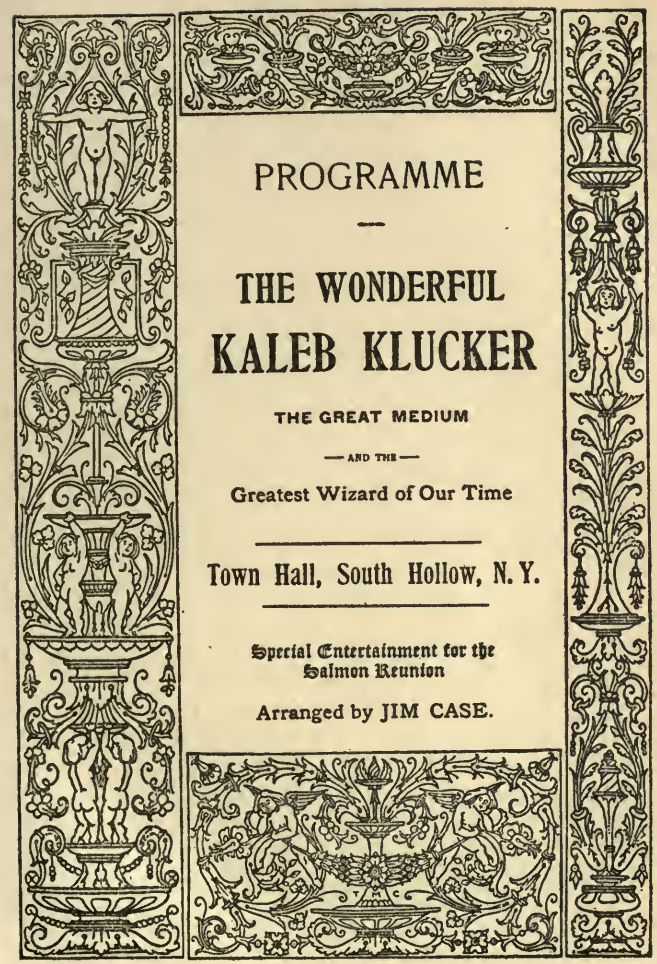
of surprise, he added, "And, by Ginger, we got rid of more Golden Buck cigars than ever before. Cleaned out a hull box, and, as ye say, Jim, they did n't have ter have no gold bands on 'em either."

CHAPTER XVIII

SPIRITS IN THE TOWN HALL

JIM CASE had completed the arrangements for the entertainment which he was to give in honour of the Salmon Family Reunion. After their dinner was over, all the Salmons were escorted by him to the town hall. Here, with the rest of the village, they were to witness the wonderful performance of Professor Kaleb Klucker, The Great.

Although a hard rain had started, it did not interfere with the interest South Hollow manifested in Jim Case's entertainment, and the town hall was packed. The Salmons were there in their glory and the best of humour, having just finished a good dinner at which they had all been the guests of the Honourable Timothy Salmon, who, with his



PROGRAMME

—

THE WONDERFUL
KALEB KLUCKER

THE GREAT MEDIUM

— AND THE —

Greatest Wizard of Our Time

Town Hall, South Hollow, N. Y.

Special Entertainment for the
Salmon Reunion

Arranged by JIM CASE.

PROGRAMME—*Continued*

During the Entertainment the Laws of Nature are defied

If conditions are right, a large piano will float over the audience and dispense spiritual music. The complex and seeming supernatural feats prevail throughout this act. Objects and figures are materialised and do their master's bidding.

The Professor will introduce, for the first time in South Hollow, the marvellous Spirit cabinet—the Wonder of Wonders—wherein tambourines rattle, banjoes play, and voices can be heard and recognised as those from the spirit world. The Professor promises to materialise departed friends from within this cabinet, and return them to life.

The curtain will rise promptly at 8 o'clock

N.B.—After the performance there will be dancing and music by the Onondaga Indian Orchestra and Brass Band.

No rowdyism will be tolerated

family, was seated in the front row as a guest of special honour.

After the janitor had fussed more or less successfully with the lamps which were to be used as footlights, the bell rang and the curtain, after several nerve-racking false starts, finally went up. A large American flag was used as a background, with heavy, red plush curtains for the sides. These belonged to the professor.

The Widow Wetherby played a slow march on the organ which had been put in the town hall for services while the interior of the Methodist Church was being redecorated; and the professor, in making his entrance, at first tried to keep step with the music, but at last gave it up and walked to the front. He appeared in a dress coat with a velvet collar, brown trousers, a black bow tie, and a celluloid dicky from which blazed a large six-carat rhinestone. Under his left arm he carried the "magic wand," a short ebony stick with brass tips.

He began the performance with the statement that his experiments were entirely independent of dexterity, and that he proposed to show one and all how, by the aid of occult science, he could perform wonders. Then he asked Jim Case to think of something. In an instant, the magician declared that the object of Jim's thoughts was a checker-board, and then casually took a rabbit out of Hiram Wilcox's hat. The audience applauded wildly at these and other clever tricks their entertainer performed.

Finally he came to the great masterpiece. "Ladies and gentlemen," he said, with profound solemnity, "I am about to introduce the wonderful spirit cabinet, the same as used by the marvellous and world-famous Davenports, and I intend to do everything exactly as advertised."

Here the American flag was drawn aside and the wonderful cabinet was exposed to view. It consisted of a platform and four poles with black plush curtains which were

hung on all sides. The front curtains were decorated with large gold letters, which read

KLUCKER THE GREAT

He turned the cabinet around to show all its sides and called attention to the fact that the four legs were high enough so that all could see underneath. Then he placed a chair inside and put a banjo on it; on the floor of the cabinet he put tambourines and bells. Then he closed the curtains. Immediately the banjo began to play and the tambourines and bells rattled and jingled. After a moment or two he drew back the curtains and everything was found to be just the same as he had placed it.

After a few more wonderful experiments, Jim Case stepped upon the stage. He held up his hand to check the applause which greeted him.

"My friends," said he, in a most solemn tone, "I am requested to announce the death of our oldest inhabitant, Mr. Winnie Fowler and to say that Elmer Perkins is wanted at the front entrance."

All was silent except the monotonous squeak of Perkins's shoes as he tip-toed up the aisle, an unconscious smile o'erspread his countenance when he caught many hopeful glances from his patient creditors.

Jim waited until he had passed out and then once more addressed the audience:

"The reason I 've hired this hall ter-night and en-gaged the Professor is because I had heard 'bout one particular manifestation which he claims he kin do, and he has assured me that he kin show this 'ere cabinet empty and in less 'n three minutes pre-duce a departed friend. Now, I 'm sure that there be some o' our townsmen and friends here ter-night what 's studied and got proof beyond a doubt o' this wonderful spirit power. I 've heard of a lot o' private and select gatherin's a-takin' place in this village, and I 'm sure that there be some o' the believers o' this great spiritual power with us here ter-night. Now, ter help things along, if some one 'll be kind enough ter call fer

sech a person or friend, why we 'll jest have a chance ter see whether the Professor is a-humbuggin' us er not."

Cal Hemmingway took his cue instantly, and, with a knowing, covert wink in Jim's direction, stood up, and, addressing the Professor, said, "If conditions be right, I 'd like ter call fer a friend who departed from South Hollow some time ago, 'cause I believe everybody here 'ud like ter see him, and so I call fer the spirit o' Frank Ridgeway."

Absolute silence fell like a mantle on the mystified audience. The dim lights that flickered from the smoky lamps cast a weird reflection about the dingy old hall. The only sound was the patter of rain on the tin roof. The dampness made the woodwork creak and crack, giving forth queer and uncanny sounds. It was, all in all, the natural night for a spiritual seance.

The Professor looked well his part as he walked toward the cabinet and closed the curtains. His hair was long and he rolled

his eyes about in the fashion of Svengali, chanting meanwhile a few words of magic. Then he slowly drew back the curtains before the astonished audience. There was seated, in what had been only a moment before an empty chair, the exact form and features of Frank Ridgeway.

The Professor waved his wand amid cheers that almost shook the very walls of the old town hall. As the applause rëechoed from the dim rafters, Hattie Salmon sat numb, as though death had claimed her also. She could not believe her eyes. Her heart gave one big throb as the curtains parted, and then stood still. Frank! Could it be? Was it a dream? She did not try to move, nor speak, nor breathe. The name formed on her lips again. Frank! The image she looked upon in that cabinet was the image engraved upon her heart so long ago. Was it all really a spiritual seance, or was it magic?

Slowly but truly the form of her lover came

down to the footlights, and then down the improvised stairs into the audience. He greeted his fellow friends one and all, all around.

Old Jim Case still stood on the platform, but he was not spellbound by supernatural influences. He was intently watching Hattie Salmon and the effect of his machinations. It warmed the cockles of Old Jim's heart, as recognition found its sweet, slow way into the souls of these two.

In the meantime Hattie had regained a partial composure, yet still hesitating to believe her eyes. Would he notice her? The thought brought a flush to her cold, white cheeks. In a moment he was by her side.

"Hattie," he said in a low voice. "Have you forgotten me?"

She scarcely comprehended her joy at his words. He drew her away to one side, to a corner apart from the chattering crowd.

"Hattie," he repeated, "do you remember your promise? Do you remember that Thanksgiving Day, the day your father invited me to dinner, when you presided and brought to me the hope I have always cherished? Have I won or lost?" he asked in a low, calm voice, as he held before her love-lit gaze a half of a whitened wish-bone.

"You have won," she said shyly. "But there are others anxious to see you now; we must wait, dear."

The chairs were quickly moved back. On to the stage, in place of the wonderful spirit cabinet, the Indian orchestra marched; and then there followed the liveliest dance ever seen in South Hollow. Before its close Old Jim Case announced the engagement of Hattie Salmon and Frank Ridgeway. As he concluded, he turned to Cal. "Ye know, Cal, sence Lem Wetherby died, I hain't had *much* to do with spirits, but ter-night I 'm intoxicated, and 't ain't from a-drinkin' Squirrel whiskey neither."

The sun was just peeping over the eastern hills into South Hollow when the Onondaga Indian Orchestra played their last piece. It was the Wedding March.

"BECAUSE NOBODY CAN'T PLEASE EVERYBODY
HAIN'T NO REASON WHY A FELLOW
SHOULDN'T TRY TO PLEASE SOMEBODY."

—*Jim Case.*

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
A 000 127 525 4