

The
Ponkаты Branch Road



By
Sophie
Swett

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“AND THERE WAS THE SQUIRE LOOKING DOWN AT TOM.”

(See page 48.)

THE
PONKATY BRANCH ROAD

AND OTHER STORIES FOR
YOUNG PEOPLE

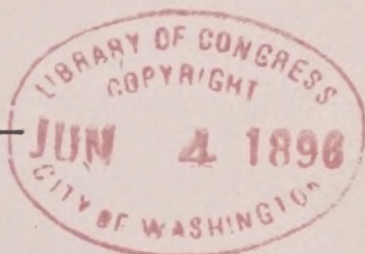
BY

Miriam

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"THE MATE OF THE MARY ANN,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY W. P. BODFISH



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BOSTON
LOTHROP PUBLISHING COMPANY
1896

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TYPOGRAPHY BY C. J. PETERS & SON,
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THE
PONKATY BRANCH ROAD.

THE PONKATY BRANCH ROAD.

CHAPTER I.

TOM HAS A PLAN.

“THERE ain’t enough public spirit in this town to set a hen,” grumbled Uncle Jeremy Whittaker from his coigne of vantage, the sugar barrel in the Ponkaty village store. “One don’t want the railroad to come for fear he’ll have to set back his garding fence a foot or two, and another one is all het up because it ain’t agoin’ through his cow paster. Says I, let it come if it goes plumb through my settin’-room and kerchunk into the meetin’-house! There’s where I be on the railroad question.”

“It ain’t agoin’ no’eres near your settin’-room nor the meetin’-house nuther,” quavered

old Simeon Downs. "It will either strike a bee-line from Beersheby Junction across Purgatory Swamp and Grindall's medder, or else it'll come up through Skunk Holler and Brimblecom's paster, and the station will be sot right there on the Baxter wood-lot at the cross-roads."

A boy's head appeared suddenly above the molasses hogshead which stood behind Uncle Jeremy's sugar barrel, —a reddish, round, boy's head, with a pair of alert hazel eyes and a decidedly snub nose.

"Look out there, Tom Baxter!" called Rankin Judson, the storekeeper. "Do you s'pose I hire you to set the place afloat with the best New Orleans molasses?"

"If it should turn out so, the Baxter wood-lot would be about the most val'able piece of propuppy in town," said Phineas Hicks, the postmaster. "They do say Gran'ma'am Tobey is broke of her rest worryin' for fear her young turkeys will be run over, or the hen-house sot afire, bein' right on the aidge of the woodlands."

“Come to think on it, ’twas that very piece of woodland that they claim old Mr. Baxter give a deed on to his son Thomas,” pursued Simeon Downs.

“I guess that deed wan’t nothin’ but vain imagination,” said Uncle Jeremy. “Where there’s propuppy quarrels, there’s apt to be vain imaginations. If there was a deed, why wa’n’t it recorded, or why didn’t Thomas Baxter have it? The records are right there, now, in the court-house to Shawmkeag.”

“The records can be burnt up, and they *was*, long o’ the old court-house,” piped old Simeon, shrilly triumphant.

Uncle Jeremy was the village oracle, but the group pressed closer around Simeon Downs; — to every soul comes its moment of triumph. Uncle Jeremy hitched around on his barrel, and inquired of Rankin Judson the price of “aigs”; but for once the storekeeper was oblivious of commercial interests. And as for Tom Baxter, he leaned over the counter towards Simeon Downs, his freckled face pale, but looking as if a live coal burned behind it.

“That old story 'bout a deed is jist as tedious as a last year's almernick,” said Uncle Jeremy contemptuously. “I don't believe that there ever was no deed; sounds to me like one of them stories that is made up out of whole cloth, and all pictured out in the story-papers.”

“Cyrus Quimby, that was a jestice of the peace then, was a witness to that deed,” said Simeon Downs; and his cracked old voice seemed suddenly to have grown firmer as he found that his grasp on memory did not fail. “Cyrus Quimby and Laban Hinckley it was that fetched old Nathan Baxter home from singin' school when he was took with that spell. A master hand for singin' was old Nathan, jest as the squire is now; and he used to kinder pester 'em to singin' school, singin' the old penny'r'yal hymns. He'd carry his old singin' books, and make folks sing out of 'em whether or no; and he would sing up so loud himself that't would drownd everybody else. That night when the spell took hold of him he was singin' old Balermy, a-keepin' time,

and thinkin' he was doin' the whole business, more'n the singin'-master. Shortness of breath ketched him, and a terrible faintness; he wouldn't let 'em send for a doctor, nor for a carriage to fetch him home. He had the clear Baxter grit, the old man had. But on the way home — as I was sayin', Cyrus Quimby and Laban Hinckley walked home with him — on the way home, the spell ketched him agin, and he calc'lated he was dyin'. He groaned, and took on that he hadn't done right to his son Thomas; he'd bore him such a grudge for marryin' Adolphus Pomeroy's daughter — there was an old feud between him and Pomeroy — that he'd cut him off without a cent in his will."

"They'd got him under the horse-sheds there to the old meetin'-house, and Cyrus Quimby told him that he could make a codicil to his will, or a deed of gift of some of his property to his son Thomas, right then and there. Laban Hinckley had a lantern, and Cyrus had a pencil, and there was a fly-leaf of the old singin'-book for paper. Seein' he and

Laban was there for witnesses, it would stand the law, so Cyrus said. That deed was wrote under them old horse-sheds, by the light of Laban Hinckley's lantern, on a fly-leaf of that old singin'-book — a deed of gift to his son Thomas — of that whole woodland lot, the most valooable proputtty that Nathan Baxter had, without 'twas the saw-mill!" Simeon Downs shook a lean fore-finger impressively at the group of interested listeners. "And Cyrus Quimby had that deed recorded the next day; but Nathan Baxter he seemed to get well, and the Baxter propensity to hold on to a grudge riz up and got the upper hands of him ag'in. But he never destroyed that deed. How do I know?" — this was in answer to a question asked somewhat sarcastically by Uncle Jeremy Whittaker who felt that his laurels were withering. "Because Laban Hinckley told me that Nathan Baxter told him jest before he died. He died of a shock that next fall. Laban thought he meant to tell him where the deed was, but 'twas too late. Laban felt some as if he'd

ought to make a stir about it; I expect that was one thing that drove him off to Californy. You see, he was beholden to Squire Baxter, and the squire ain't jest the man that anybody wants to tackle. Besides, Tom Baxter was wore out, and discouraged; he never had the Baxter grit anyhow." Simeon lowered his voice, but Thomas Baxter's son had sharp ears.

"It wouldn't have been no use to try to get the woodland; anybody with a grain of sense could see that," said Uncle Jeremy Whitaker. "If the deed was made, who was a-goin' to prove it? Cyrus Quimby never knew nothin' after he fell off the beam in his barn, and Laban Hinckley went away off to Californy, and nobody ever heard from him afterwards. I hope nobody won't be foolish enough to stir up that old deed again; it's jest heathen mythology, that's what 'tis."

"It's all fate and foreordination, like everything else in the world; some gets propuppy, and some must go without," said Absalom Kittredge who had drunk himself into the poorhouse.

"It all depends," said Enoch Filkins, the schoolmaster, in his slow, drawling voice, "it all depends upon the kind of stuff there is in young Tom Baxter."

Young Tom Baxter was lighting the lamps now, for the early spring twilight was closing in; but he heard, and his heart swelled within him.

"Tom, are you coming home to supper now?" called a girl's voice. It was a girl of fifteen with a thin and eager face. "I came over for a quart of molasses and some peanuts. We're going to have an orgy." Tom had come near her, and she put her lips to his ear. "Garry is coming over," she whispered. Tom felt it to be a shock to descend from a Great Plan which was developing in his mind, from a Burning Resolve which he had made as soon as he heard the story of that deed, to a peanut taffy orgy in honor of their cousin Garafelia. Orgy, by the way, was Garry's name for the festival. Peace was imitating Garry's way of talking. Garry was a nice girl enough; but, after all, she was Uncle Wil-

lard's daughter. Uncle Willard was Squire Baxter, the great man of Ponkaty; he had influenced his father to cut off his younger son, Tom's father, without a penny; he had held out no helping hand in his brother's illness and poverty; every one knew him to be hard and grasping. It was Tom's opinion that the deed of gift, which in view of the railroad's coming had become rich in possibilities, was concealed or had been destroyed by him.

"The fly-leaf of an old singing-book," murmured Tom to himself. They were in the street now, and he was holding an umbrella over his sister Peace's head, while his little sister Sharly splashed on ahead, defiant of mud-puddles in her first rubber-boots. Tom stopped suddenly; he didn't remember whether the fly-leaf had been torn out of the book or not. He must go back and ask Simeon Downs.

"Tom, why are you stopping?" asked Peace impatiently. "You are holding the umbrella so that little rills are running down my back."

“I must wait; I mustn't let anybody know,” murmured Tom, going on again.

“About Garry? why, of course not; we never do,” said Peace. “I'm not quite sure about that receipt for taffy.” There was a little wrinkle of worry between Peace's brows. “I think that perhaps a little more butter, and vanilla instead of lemon”—

Tom scowled at her dreadfully.

“Grandma Peacey was over,” she continued, ignoring the scowl. “Garry is going away to school to-morrow. Grandma cried about Julius; it's five years to-day since he went away.”

While Peace chattered, those wonderful possibilities that had dawned upon Tom grew and grew. He wished that it were some great and valiant deed that he had to do; it might prove to be that to “tackle the Squire,” but it would be useless to do that until he could find a deed written on the fly-leaf of an old singing-book. While the taffy orgy was at its height, Tom slipped away. He had buttered tins in a lukewarm way, and shown a

flagrant carelessness in the important matter of flavoring; but Peace had not thought he would be so rude as to go away. Garry liked Tom; she thought he was uncommonly satisfactory for a boy.

There was also something of the flavor of stolen fruit about the intercourse between the cousins; for it had always been frowned upon by the Squire, whose enmity against his younger brother and his brother's wife had even extended to their children. They never dared to let the Squire see them together. Garry's visits to the little weather-painted cottage in Barberry Lane were always secret, and Grandma Peacey's (as they always called their Grandmother Baxter) were scarcely less so; for, though she would go to see "poor Tom's children," and had never shared in the feud against the Pomeroy's, Tom's wife's family, yet she was a little woman, whose name befitted her nature, and she had a dread of her son's frown. As for the Barberry Lane cousins, they were never known to darken the door of the great white house on Butternut Hill.

After all, they got along very well without Tom, as Garry said. The Tackaberry boys and girls, who lived across the field, came in, and they had games and dancing; and Grandma Pomeroy, who was very old and always sat in the chimney-corner, sang to them in a thin, but soft and sweet old voice the songs of her youth. In the midst of the gayety there came a smart rat-a-tat of the ancient knocker; and when Jerome Tackaberry opened the door, a young man's voice asked the way to the hotel. He had driven from Bathsheba Junction with some friends and had missed the way.

"I'll tell you who they are," said Jerome Tackaberry, with breathless eagerness, peering through the window into the rainy darkness as the carriage drove away. "They're the engineers that are goin' to survey the road. When the railroad's comin' a place begins to get lively, I tell you!"

"What was the young man like?" asked Garry; "his voice sounded familiar."

"Tallish, glasses and side-whiskers, no Pon-

katy in him," said Jerome Tackaberry concisely.

Talk about the coming railroad and the prospective business of Ponkaty was even more exciting than games or dancing or peanut taffy. Little Lewellyn Tackaberry cherished confident hopes that the cars would run over the schoolhouse, and bring the circus every day; and Grandma Pomeroy said that, if they went through the string-bean patch or her tansy-bed, she wouldn't begrudge it, for then they should know something about the fashions, and she shouldn't be wearing a stand-up feather in her bonnet after Eliza Tinkham from the Corner said stand-up feathers were out of date.

Garry said suddenly that she must go home; but it was still early and they had one more dance, and grandma sang another song to wind up the festivities. It was "The Sailor's Return," a pathetic old song which set forth the grief of the returned wanderer when no one knew him.

"And looking round the group he cried,

“Do none remember me?””” piped Grandma Pomeroy’s cracked treble, and Garry astonished them all by bursting into tears.

“It’s — it’s only because it’s five years to-day since Julius went away,” she said; “and that young man’s voice, and the song, and all.”

Tom had slipped away from the party to go up to the Squire’s house. He meant to find out, if possible, where those old singing-books which his grandfather had treasured were kept. Of course it was a forlorn hope; the fly-leaf upon which the deed was written had probably been carefully torn out, and kept with other valuable papers or destroyed. Tom reasoned shrewdly that the former course was the one likely to have been pursued by the Squire; he was punctilious in observances, and would be likely to keep to the letter of the law. They talked much about the Squire in the circle of choice spirits that voiced the public sentiment in the store where Tom worked on half-holidays and at intervals between school-hours; and Tom thought he understood his character pretty well.

Garry had said that her father and her step-mother had gone to the Village Improvement lecture; but, as Tom looked in at the sitting-room window, he saw that Deacon Amos Pingree was sitting with Grandma Peacey before the fire. The deacon was proverbially slow of speech; and Tom felt, with a sinking heart, that he would not soon take leave.

He saw some old books that looked like singing-books on the top shelf of the Squire's ancient secretary, and his heart burned within him.

After a little hopeless waiting, he went to the kitchen door and presented himself, dripping and white with eagerness, before Arianna, the ancient serving-maid who had been in the family when Tom's father was young.

"Sakes alive! you most give me a turn," cried Arianna; "you look so kind of white and peaked, and jest like your father, for all the world." Arianna's last words were swallowed up by the pantry into which she had vanished.

"'Tain't as if there hadn't been wrongs enough done to make ghosts walk, if there was

any such things!" she continued, reappearing with a huge pan of doughnuts, half a mince pie, and some apple turnovers — the same kind, she explained, that she used to make for "that poor lamb Julius."

"I don't want anything to eat," protested Tom. "I want to see grandma." But he was forced to swallow a cup of tea, a somewhat difficult exploit, as Arianna meanwhile excitedly and affectionately patted him upon the back. "You have to give the deacon a little start," she explained, when Tom had finished his tea; "he's so dretful long-winded."

"Deacon Pingree, I hope that careless Charlissy hain't set nothin' afire over to your house, but there's a terrible queer light on the aidge of the woods," she said, opening the sitting-room door.

"It's nothing but the electric lights at the Junction," said Tom stupidly. But the deacon was gone, pulling on his mackintosh as he went.

Arianna sat down calmly, ran her knitting-needle through her little pug of hair, and sang, "'The judgment day is a rollin' round,

a rollin' round.' ” Tom carefully closed the sitting-room door behind him; this matter was between Grandma Peacey and himself.

“Did you know that grandfather made a deed of gift of a tract of woodland to my father?” he asked.

Grandma Peacey trembled in all her small frame.

“He said he had done something for Tom! —it was when he was dying; he tried to tell me what it was and there wasn't time. I looked among his papers; I looked them over and over before —before your Uncle Willard had them, and there was nothing there. I think Laban Hinckley knew something about it, but he was afraid of your Uncle Willard. Nobody could ever stand up against Willard, not even his father.”

Tom hesitated. He wished to tell his grandmother all that he knew, but her mind had weakened with age; a secret would not be safe with her.

He walked over to the secretary, and looked through its glass doors at the books.

“You can’t get at those books; your uncle always carries the key with him,” said Grandma Peacey.

Tom felt a desperate impulse to smash the glass and reach those old singing-books. But perhaps — probably — there was no deed there; and he would only arouse his uncle’s suspicions, and hinder his further search.

“Nobody could ever stand up against Willard,” repeated Grandma Peacey musingly, as she gazed into the fire.

CHAPTER II.

THE "OLD FOLKS'" REHEARSAL.

THE spring came slowly up Ponkaty way, and the railroad seemed even more slow in coming. The route was still uncertain; the surveyors, with their mysterious appliances, were as often to be met with in the depths of Purgatory Swamp as in Brimblecom's pastures or Squire Baxter's woodland. And they were provokingly uncommunicative. It was the general complaint that no one could get a word with the one who seemed to be the leader, the tall young man with whiskers and glasses, whose call had interrupted the taffy orgy in Barberry Lane. There was no hope now that the celebration of Ponkaty's centennial as a town would also celebrate the completion of the railroad, but Squire Baxter enthusiastically urged on the preparations for

the centennial celebration. He said — and the saying was echoed by most of the philosophers who sat in the store — that, if the railroad company had any idea of “backing out,” it would influence them against such a proceeding to know that Ponkaty was wide awake, and meant to be something anyway.

The third of June was the centennial anniversary; and it was proposed to celebrate it in Temple Grove, a beautiful tract of woodland where Ponkaty’s noted camp-meetings were held. It was expected that the festivities would be like an old-fashioned muster and a Fourth of July celebration in one. A procession was planned, somewhat after the fashion of the “antiques and horribles” of a city Fourth of July; that idea had originated with Squire Baxter, and he was already scouring Ponkaty and the adjacent towns for the most ancient domestic and agricultural implements, costumes, and equipages, and for the oldest inhabitants to appear in the procession with the old curiosities, and display them to the best possible advantage. The Squire meant

to have a concert, too, in the grove, an old-fashioned "sing," with old Ezra Loomis's tuning-fork — the very tuning-fork that had been used at the first church service in Ponkaty — to give the key. They were to sing only the old "pennyryal" hymns; the Squire had one of the ancient books, "Perennial Hymns," from whence the name "pennyryal" had been derived.

The singers were to be David Wasgatt of Crow Hill, who was ninety, and whose proud boast it was that he had sat in the seats for forty years; Mrs. Bathsheba Day and Mrs. Phoebe Quint who claimed to be ninety-two, but who openly scorned and denied each other's claim to this great age; and Dr. Follansbee, who was thought to be too young, being only eighty-one, but who was chosen because he could sing.

There was to be a rehearsal of this choir at Squire Baxter's house. The Squire evidently thought it well to begin early; in fact, it had been suggested to him that a good many rehearsals might be necessary, owing to the

facts that the rivalry between Mrs. Day and Mrs. Quint, beginning with age, had extended to music, and each was determined to drown the other's voice, and that David Wasgatt's deafness caused him to continually sing out of tune.

When Tom heard of the rehearsal he had an idea. Those old singing-books on the top shelf of his uncle's secretary had haunted him day and night; he had revolved in his mind countless plans of getting possession of them, none of which seemed practicable. He said to himself that he meant to come into his rights, not skulk into them; but how was it possible to employ straightforward methods to find what was fraudulently concealed?

One night he dreamed that the brass claw-feet of the old secretary had developed into whole brass griffins of extraordinary size; one wore his uncle's high silk hat, and had his uncle's wen upon his brass forehead, and the other sang out of tune like old Mr. David Wasgatt, but vocally announced that he was the lawyer of the Ponkaty Branch Road. It

was after he dreamed this queer dream that Tom decided he must be present at that rehearsal. He could not have explained just why the dream should influence him in that way; he was a level-headed boy, who knew that two and two make four and that a fantastic or an evil dream means only indigestion; — Peace called them "pound-cake dreams;" but it is not always easy, even for the most sensible people, to tell why things influence them, and Tom felt himself beckoned by the brass lawyer of the Ponkaty Branch Road.

No invitations to the rehearsal were given, but it was understood that the neighbors were to "drop in" if they chose to do so. Jerome Tackaberry, who blew the organ in the Ponkaty church, felt a right to go, by virtue of his office; and he also expected that he might be needed to play on the old parlor organ in the sitting-room at the Squire's. The pedals of that organ were hard to work; and, as Jerome explained to Tom, the girls didn't like to tackle it. Garry had forsaken it altogether since she had a fine new piano in the

parlor, but Jerome had heard the Squire say that he preferred it as an accompaniment to church music. 'Titia Parkins, over on Pigeon Hill, could play on it, for she had one just as heavy; but in the Squire's organ the wind had a way of giving out suddenly, and, as Jerome had shrewdly observed, "'Titia Parkins liked to show off and didn't want to be mortified.'" So he cherished lively hopes of being an active participant in the rehearsals for the great celebration, and Tom listened enviously and lay awake nights trying to plan a way to share the freedom of the rehearsals with Jerome.

After all, it was fate—or Providence, just as you choose to call it—that found out the way. On the day of the first rehearsal Jerome Tackaberry, performing in his father's barn, before a group of youthful spectators, the flying trapeze act, for which he was famous, had been obliged to turn an extra and unexpected somersault to dodge a small tow-head whose owner's reckless enthusiasm had drawn it too near to the performer's heels, and had thereby sprained his wrist.

He found that the Squire had depended upon him to play the accompaniments upon the uncertainly winded old organ, and was much disturbed in mind when he appeared at the rehearsal with a lame and bandaged wrist.

A messenger who was despatched in haste to Pigeon Hill returned with the graphic statement that Miss 'Titia Parkins was just taking her hair out of papers to go to a dance at the Corner; moreover, the young lady had candidly avowed that she wouldn't be seen playing on that wheezy, squeaking old thing.

While the Squire's wrath was directed against Miss 'Titia Parkins, Jerome diplomatically seized the moment to say that he knew a fellow who could play on that organ like a house afire. He had never taken any lessons, but he had lots of music in him.

"Why didn't you bring him along with you, when you knew you couldn't play?" demanded the Squire irately.

Jerome Tackaberry hesitated, surveying the toes of his shoes, apparently with new and keen interest.

“*He* hasn’t got his hair in curl-papers, has he?” asked the Squire, seeking to disguise his wrathful impatience by weak pleasantry.

“No, it isn’t that,” answered Jerome seriously; “but — he’s Tom Baxter.”

The Squire glanced uneasily around among his guests, and a flush mounted to his forehead. He always resented it that his family affairs should be matters of public discussion; he was especially sensitive in the matter of the quarrel with his younger brother, for he knew it was the general sentiment in Ponkаты that Thomas Baxter had been unjustly treated.

“You go and tell him that I want him to come and play on the organ,” he said to Jerome, in a peremptory and matter-of-course way. “Music in him! of course he has,” he muttered, as if to himself; “there never was a Baxter who hadn’t.”

All around the great sitting-room people were exchanging furtive glances, and wondering if the millennium were coming with the Ponkаты Branch Road; there were a few, however, who understood the Squire well enough

to know that all he meant was to have some one to play that organ anyway, and not to have any one suppose that he couldn't have young Tom Baxter if he wanted him.

As soon as Jerome Tackaberry had gone on his errand, the Squire was seized with a real fear lest Tom should not come, and he should be mortified in the presence of all those people. That little beggar might have the Baxter will; there was enough of it to go 'round, the Squire said to himself, with a grim chuckle. The boy's father had been a weakling; he had taken out of kin; things would not be as they were to-day if it had not been so; in the depths of his secret consciousness the Squire acknowledged that. But things were quite as they should be, he could always lay that flattering unction to his soul; it would not be fitting that children with Pomeroy blood in their veins should inherit his father's property. Not only had the feud been ancient and deep between the two families, but the Pomeroy's were unambitious and thriftless; what had been gained by sturdy struggle and

held with honest pride for generations should not be squandered by such as they.

That young Tom had the Baxter look ; the Squire almost wished that he had not sent for him. He wished he had provided some one to play ; there were a dozen girls in the neighborhood who could play on that organ, if they would.

The Squire heaved a sigh of relief when Jerome Tackaberry arrived, breathless, and Tom's carroty head appeared, towering up behind him.

The Squire and Tom scowled at each other ; that was the Baxter way. Moreover, they had never spoken to each other in their lives, and there was an awkwardness about beginning. The Squire's mind returned complacently to the music ; this fellow had no more backbone than his father ; he had come meekly at his first bidding ; he could easily twist him around his finger.

Tom showed an easy mastery of the old organ, and he was irreproachable in the matter of time ; he could play, although he had never

been taught; there was so much Baxter in him, thought the Squire.

Tom played, and his mind, which had been in a tumult, gradually grew calm; it was about all that a fellow could do to keep those pedals going. And the Squire made him play the accompaniments over and over; he was determined to bring those queer old voices into harmony. Mrs. Phœbe Quint persisted in singing do-re-mi instead of the words of the hymns, and Mrs. Bathsheba Day said she was so put out by it that she couldn't sing; and then they both cried; and Mr. David Wasgatt complained of everybody's time, and Ezra Loomis said that Mr. David Wasgatt "flatted." It was very tiresome, and Tom could not even get a chance to see whether the books out of which they were singing were the ones that he had seen on the top shelf of the old secretary.

The leaves of the book he was using had accidentally slipped back, and he had seen his grandfather's name, Nathan Baxter, written on the blank page; he had seized a moment

when the Squire's back was turned to him to look at the fly-leaves in the back, but not one was missing, and there was no writing on any. Of course a deed would not be left in that way; it was a foolish, cheating hope that had beguiled him. Tom's spirits fell to zero; and he wished he had not come here, like a servant, at his uncle's bidding. A mirror hung over the organ, and Grandma Peacey looked at his reflection in it with a sympathizing, affectionate look that comforted him a little. She was trying to relieve the strained relations between Mrs. Quint and Mrs. Day; and Tom watched the little comedy in the mirror, feeling it a relief in the monotonous repetition of a solo in which Mr. David Wasgatt sang hopelessly below the pitch.

When it came to the "British yoke and galling chain," they all sang with such a will that time and tune, differences of opinion, and small personal animosities, were all thrown to the winds. Old Ezra Loomis flourished his tuning-fork with wild enthusiasm; and his voice regained suddenly something of the

power which had made people flock to the Ponkaty church to hear him sing. Mr. David Wasgatt began to make dancing-school bows to Grandma Peacey, and Mrs. Quint and Mrs. Day smiled at each other through tears.

Tom surveyed the lively scene in the mirror with a boy's delight, which almost soothed the soreness of his uncle's presence, when suddenly there appeared in the mirror a reflection which made his heart stand still. The old organ uttered its great squeak of collapse. Tom struggled still, with hands and feet, but the notes of the "British Yoke" were hopelessly mixed up; his eyes were riveted upon the mirror.

The Squire turned, book in hand, and the spell was broken. Tom pulled himself together like one awakening from a dream, and regained control of the pedals and the notes. He had a confused idea that the old miracle of the handwriting on the wall had been repeated. The Squire had faced his choir in his solicitude for its correct performance; and, as he stood with his back to the organ, the pages of his

book were reflected in the mirror. Tom's startled eyes suddenly caught sight of handwriting in the mirror; it was so black and distinct that for an instant he fancied that it was upon the mirror's surface. Another glance showed him that it was a reflection from the white inside of the cover of his uncle's singing-book.

It was not easy to read the writing backwards; it was Tom's desperate effort to do this which had caused the collapse and squeak of the organ. It happened that he and Peace had once practised reading writing in the looking-glass for fun, but that had been when they were younger. He had been able to read only a few words, but they had been enough to convince him that this was the deed of gift written by his grandfather under the old horse-sheds at the church by the light of Laban Hinckley's lantern! It had been written, not on a fly-leaf, but on the inside of the cover; and the Squire had allowed it to remain there, either because he had considered it of no consequence, or because it was a salve to his conscience, an

answer to any possible future accusations, that he had never concealed it.

Tom played with new spirit and vigor. The Squire was conscious of a queer little thrill of family pride in the "young beggar's" skill; but Tom did not for one moment lose sight of that singing-book in his uncle's hand.

Refreshments were served in the dining-room when the rehearsal was over; the fragrance of Arianna's coffee was beguiling, and the Squire with gruff cordiality urged Tom to stay. Tom went into the dining-room with his grandmother; to gentle little Grandmother Peacey it really seemed as if the railroad were bringing the millennium. But Tom felt that to eat a mouthful would choke him. He slipped away from his grandmother and from Arianna's assiduous attentions; back into the sitting-room he stole, when he was sure that he was unobserved. The singing-books were scattered about on the organ, on the table, on the old secretary. Hark! some one was coming. Tom's heart beat like a trip-hammer; but he seized the book—it had a

glazed cover—and tore off the under side of the cover, slipped it under his jacket, and stole softly out at the front door.

He ran as if he were pursued; he was carrying to his mother relief from the grind of poverty, and from the rankling injustice she had borne so long; he was carrying a future for Peace and Sharly and himself.

It was not until he had almost reached Barberry Lane that he drew the book-cover out from beneath his jacket, and looked at it in the bright moonlight—a blank surface! He had torn off the wrong cover. There must have been two covers that were glazed.

His foolish haste, a miserable little mistake, had destroyed his great opportunity.

His first impulse was to rush wildly back, but a second thought convinced him that it would be useless. He stood still, overwhelmed by his defeat, while, wafted on the breeze, came once more to his ears the thrilling strains of the “British yoke and galling chain.” The choir was singing in friendly unison on its homeward way.

CHAPTER III.

THE SQUIRE DOES NOT HAVE HIS WAY.

THROUGH Purgatory Swamp and across Grindall's meadow was to be the route of the Ponkaty Branch Road, after all; that was the report that was flying about the town, and the surveyors seemed to have settled upon Purgatory Swamp as their base of operations. For once Squire Baxter's proverbial luck seemed to have deserted him; for this route gave his woodland a wide berth, and set the station far from any of his possessions.

Many people were wondering "how the Squire would take it;" but Uncle Jeremy Whitaker was of the opinion that "it was the main p'int that the railroad was comin' anyhow, and Squire Baxter had brains enough to see an advantage, even if it didn't chuck him under the chin."

Tom Baxter went down to Purgatory Swamp, led by a curiosity to see what was going on, as soon as he heard that the route was fixed upon. He went through Grindall's meadow—walking along on the top of the stone wall, although the stones were insecure, and the newly tasselled alders switched him in the face—just because he was a boy; and whistling for the same reason, although he was troubled and perplexed. Just before him in the meadow he saw the flutter of a dark blue cotton dress, and a blue-and-green plaid shawl, which he knew costumed the gaunt form of Arianna.

Tom had not seen Arianna since he had fled from her coffee and cream-pie on the night of the rehearsal. He felt an impulse to overtake her, and try to discover whether the Squire had expressed any suspicions or conjectures about the torn singing-book. When the Squire was wrathful, no one was more likely to know it than Arianna. Jerome Tackaberry's sprained wrist had been well in time for the second rehearsal, and Tom had



"THOROUGHWORT IS DRETFUL GOOD FOR A COLD," SAID
ARIANNA.

no excuse for going. If he could have gone, it would have been useless, he felt, since the torn cover would have put his uncle upon his guard.

Tom feared that he was not naturally a diplomat. He wasted time trying to compose leading questions which should draw out all Arianna's information, without betraying his intense interest in the old singing-books; by that time Arianna had covered the ground in such an astonishing way that he did not overtake her until she had reached the little log camp on the edge of the swamp, where the surveyors were quartered. She was talking with one of the young men when he came up; it was the tall young man with glasses, whose voice had thrilled Garry's heart with vague associations.

Tom was within hearing, while yet the trees screened him from sight; and he heard Arianna say, in the plaintive, high-keyed voice that, with her, signified deep feeling:—

“Thoroughwort is dretful good for a cold, and there's some that it 'pears to agree with

pertickerler. I noticed, to meet'n', Sunday, that you had a real hackin' cough." She had drawn a bottle of thoroughwort tea from her basket, and was pressing it upon the young man. "And boys — young folks, I mean — are so apt to take off their flannels too early in the spring, pertickerlerly stockin's, and bein' damp down here on the aidge of the swamp, anyhow, I kind of thought" — Arianna had produced some stockings of her own knitting, soft and warm.

Tom wanted to laugh outright; it was just like Arianna, she was always wanting to coddle somebody. She probably had her basket full of goodies now for those shiftless Fulkersons down by the pond. The Squire stood in awe of Arianna, and his wife was too glad to have all the domestic care and responsibility taken off her to interfere with her. But Tom wondered, with a little mortification, what she would make this city young man think of Ponkaty folks, with her blue yarn stockings and her thoroughwort tea.

Tom saw him flush under his bronzed skin,

and hoped he wasn't going to be angry and hurt Arianna's feelings. She seemed to have asked him something about the color of his skin; for Tom heard him say that the trade winds had bronzed him, and yellow fever in a Calcutta hospital had finished up his complexion. The same fever had weakened his eyes, he explained, so that he was obliged to wear colored glasses.

Arianna seemed to be uttering little high-keyed ejaculations of sympathy; the leaves rustled so that Tom did not distinctly hear what she said. He realized suddenly that he was listening to what was not meant for his ears, and moved hastily and noiselessly away. He went out through a narrow woods-road into the highway, and waited beside the bars for Arianna to come out. He thought he would like to have a little talk with that affable young surveyor.

Arianna came along the road and through the bars which he had let down for her without once looking at him. She was wiping her eyes; but her face was beaming, and she

walked as if on air. She was crying about the dangers the young man had passed, and happy because she had carried him blue yarn stockings and thoroughwort tea, Tom thought absently. Perhaps, if he had not been so absorbed in his own affairs, he would have considered the matter a little more deeply. But Peace said Tom never was very good at putting two and two together. She thought it was his blunt nose.

“Don't put up those bars!” cried a sharp voice; and there was the Squire looking down at Tom from his old roan horse, Cyclops. The roan was half-blind and hard-bitted, but the Squire would ride no other horse; he was fond of animals — they were not so apt to oppose his will as were human beings.

Who was not going to Purgatory Swamp to-day? Tom turned homeward reluctantly. On his way through the woods-road the Squire turned suddenly and looked at Tom. He had scarcely been conscious of Tom's existence until the night of the rehearsal. He had restored the singing-books to their place on the top shelf of the ancient secretary himself.

He always took care of those books himself, and carried the key of the secretary about with him. There were several ancient and curious volumes locked up there. He had never admitted, even to himself, that the old deed written on a book-cover could have any significance or value; he had been directed to it by his father's gestures and half coherent words when he was dying (he had been quicker of perception than his mother); but a dying man's mind was weak. His father had yielded to the impulse to forgive his younger son once before when he had thought he was dying, and had made that absurd deed, only to repent of it as soon as he recovered. No one could say that the deed had ever been concealed; there it was on the blank inside cover of the old singing-book.

It was an old story now; of the witnesses, one was a wreck mentally; where the other was no one knew. There was no one to push the claim, if it could be proven to be a legal one. But as Squire Baxter thought of

these things he turned in his saddle, and looked at his nephew Tom. The boy had a strong face — a Baxter face; he wished that his son Julius had looked like that. He shook off the memory of Julius's face with a pang the next moment; he never allowed himself to think of his son.

It was not worth the while to think of that little beggar Tom either; he would probably turn out a milksop like his father — or clear Pomeroy; he had a snub nose in his Baxter face, — the Pomeroy nose.

So the Squire rode on to Purgatory Swamp, his mind filled with the determination to bend things to his will. It had so happened to him in life, that he seldom failed to bend things to his will.

Arianna had gone her way with an empty basket and a full heart; and the young man remained standing as she had left him at the door of the log camp, when the crackling of twigs under the horse's hoofs aroused him from reverie.

The Squire scowled at him as he dismounted

— that was inevitable ; but he smiled afterwards, shrewd gray eyes and all, and held out his hand with an appearance of frank cordiality. He was a small man, and his back was bowed. Oddly enough, his bowed back seemed to contribute like his strong, square chin to the aggressiveness of his appearance.

The younger man towered above him with an effect of strength and agility and an air of self-poise. With the eyes hidden, the most expressive face is baffling. The Squire had an uneasy sense of possible pitfalls in his way more dangerous than those of Purgatory Swamp. The idea suggested his first remark.

“ Expensive work to run a railroad through this swamp.”

“ It will skirt the swamp on the eastern side ; very little filling-in will be necessary,” answered the young engineer, with polite definiteness. “ The selection of this route seems to remove some difficulties,” he added, averting his face from the Squire with the air of critically surveying an imaginary railroad-track from the swamp across the meadow.

The gleam in the Squire's shrewd gray eyes grew into an intense spark.

"The more direct route would be through the hollow and those level pasture lands, and thence through my woodlands to the centre of town," he answered. "They're my woodlands; I don't disguise the fact that I have an axe to grind." The Squire said this lightly, with a laugh; but the next moment he laid his hand upon the young man's shoulder. "And I'm willing to pay for grinding it," he said impressively.

The young engineer flushed, and then grew so white that the bronzing upon his skin had a curious mask-like effect.

"The decision rests with you, I suppose," said the Squire slowly. In his narrow walk of life it had never happened to him to have reason to doubt his purchasing power, and he did not doubt it now.

"I have not absolute authority," said the young man, speaking as if with difficulty. "The opinion of my associate McPhail would have as much weight as mine."

"I will make it to your advantage — greatly

to your advantage — to have the railroad come through my land.” The Squire’s voice was thin and strained with eagerness, and his hold upon the young man’s shoulder was a clutch. “It is not so much for the money in my pocket as it is to have the town grow up on the land that has been in my family for generations. I — I’ll make it worth your while!”

The engineer kept his face averted; he seemed trying weakly to slip away, but the strong clutch held him.

“I’m an old man,” pursued the Squire, his voice weakening; “an old man, and a disappointed one. I have no son to bear my name” —

The young man turned suddenly. With his head thrown back, his tall strength contrasted still more strikingly with the bowed weakness of the old man. The weakness seemed to strike him; for the ring of scorn in his voice, when he began to speak, changed suddenly to a pitying softness.

“I am employed by the railroad company; its interests are mine,” he said. “If you had

a son, would you like to believe him capable of accepting a bribe?"

"I should like to believe him capable of putting an honest dollar in his pocket," said the Squire testily. A certain reddish gleam came into his eyes, with which those who knew him were well acquainted; but he controlled himself.

"Come, come! you and I are men of the world," he said easily. "We know how things go; the railroad company is looking out for its own advantage; and if you and I don't look out for our own, nobody else will. How much difference does it make to the company, anyway? while to me" —

The Squire's voice, husky with feeling, evidently moved the young man.

"A town is not always built up with reference to the location of the railroad," he said.

"It will be in this case; you know it as well as I do," rejoined the Squire eagerly. "Ponkaty is all ready for a start—what they call a boom nowadays; the railroad is going to give it. Building will begin at the rail-

road; there will be the centre of the town." He shook a lean forefinger dramatically towards his woodland; his face was alight with something like the fire of youth.

"That route would be expensive," objected the young man; "there are rocks to be blasted; the grading below and above the Hollow would cost a good deal."

"What's a little cost more or less to a great company?" said the old man contemptuously. "Of course, I could go directly to the company" —

"It would be the better way," said the young man quietly.

"But they're difficult to deal with — those great companies. Go to the man you can pay when you want anything done; that's my motto."

The young man winced; it was evident that the Squire had thought him only temporizing.

"You must understand that my honest service belongs to the railroad company, and that I can accept pay only for that." He spoke

in a gentle explanatory way as if to a child, and yet with a hopeless cadence in his voice ; it does not take long to learn how hopeless is the deafness of the inner ear.

“You are a fool !” shouted the Squire, and the reddish gleam in his small eyes seemed to shoot forth sparks. “You mean to say that the railroad is going to leave me out in the cold, and the fact that I and my ancestors have made Ponkaty what it is doesn’t count ?”

“That would be a matter for the railroad company to consider,” said the young man quietly. The Squire repeated his very uncomplimentary opinion of the young engineer, and a still more uncomplimentary one of railroad companies. He mounted his horse hastily ; he knew that he could not trust himself much longer with that imperturbable young jackanapes.

“I’d have you know, sir, that I shall have my way about this thing !” he called from his saddle. “I do have my way pretty much in Ponkaty, and if you attempt to put any hindrances in my path” —

The young man bowed gravely in a non-committal, way which exasperated the Squire.

“You’ve got a will of your own, haven’t you?” he roared; “you young jackass!”

The young man smiled a little, — a flitting smile, which did not seem to relax the tense muscles of his face. “Yes; but it doesn’t come into this matter,” he said.

He had taken off his hat, and as the Squire looked back at him through a tangle of foliage a sudden idea seemed to strike the old man.

“Not so old as that,” he murmured; “not so old, — if he is alive, — and with more sense by this time, or he couldn’t be my son!”

The old roan brought up against the bars while the Squire was deep in reflection, — that young rascal Tom had probably put them up again just to annoy him. As he prepared heavily to dismount, a cheerful voice called to him to wait. A young man was coming along the road, an athletic fellow, who walked with a peculiarly springing step; he was strikingly fair of complexion, and his face was

somewhat effeminate in spite of his size and muscle. This was McPhail, whom that whiskered popinjay had called his "associate." The Squire remembered to have heard that he was a nephew of the president of the road. He had thought that might make matters more difficult. But, as he gazed down upon the newcomer as the young man let down the bars, he made up his mind to try his purchasing power here.

"He doesn't look like a fool," was what the Squire said to himself.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW TOM SAW THE CENTENNIAL.

THE tall and whiskered young surveyor — Ferguson, they called him — was pushing matters with a will. Already there were gangs of laborers at work upon the grading of the road-bed. There had come to be a general satisfaction with the route, as, on the whole, the most direct and central. Purgatory Swamp was beginning, if not exactly to blossom like the rose, to be a much less unsightly and unwholesome feature of the landscape; its owners were to drain and fill in the land; and the county commissioners were preparing to carry the highway through there. Everything seemed to be arranged for the best interests of the town; people were beginning to say openly that it would do no harm for Squire Baxter to find out that he didn't own Ponkaty. Then,

suddenly, orders came from the railroad company that the route was to be changed! Through Skunk Hollow, expensive grading or not, the tracks were to be laid, and through the Baxter woodlands!

The work done on the Swamp route had been considerable, and the change involved delay and useless expense.

Young Ferguson went about with his face set rigidly, and had little to say. McPhail had gone away a few days before the new orders came. He needed a vacation, he said. He had reported at the company's office, and a substitute had been sent to Ponkaty. Ferguson understood perfectly that this was Squire Baxter's triumph, and that the Squire's money was in McPhail's pocket. He had not known his colaborer for long, but he was not surprised.

McPhail was a good fellow, and he meant to have a good time; he didn't especially mean anything else. It is so rarely that any one means to do an evil thing! Ferguson understood; he had been familiar all his life with the

lack of that moral perception which Arianna called "a realizin' sense."

After he had gone about with that rigid face for a day, and lain awake for a night on his bed of hemlock boughs in the camp, looking up through the smoke-hole to the far distant skies, Ferguson wrote to the directors explaining the matter.

Two of the directors came to Ponkaty in haste. They shook their heads, and said that it was a bad business. McPhail was the favorite nephew of the president of the road; and the president had gone abroad for his health. He was in a critical condition, and it would not do to have the matter come to his ears at present. Moreover, Squire Baxter was a rich man, and of influence in the county; it would be for the interest of the road to avoid a public scandal.

So Purgatory Swamp was once more abandoned to the frogs and muskrats and the will-o'-the-wisps that haunted it by night; the engineer's log cabin was moved bodily to Skunk Hollow. The Squire had carried the day.

Of the village oracles, none were satisfied, unless it might be Uncle Jeremy Whittaker, who was willing to have even his own "garding sass" run over, if the railroad would only come.

Young Tom Baxter was tantalized more cruelly than ever by a hope that seemed so near and yet was so unattainable. There was poverty in the little house in Barberry Lane; his mother was growing paler every day with her over-burden of work and care. She worked at dressmaking and tailoring, and anything that she could find to do. She was worried now lest the railroad should bring new shops and new fashions that would throw her out of work. Tom was growing a big fellow; he was shooting up like Jack's Beanstalk this summer, and he was very strong; but he felt as if he hated his very brawn and muscle since it would do so little to help his mother. He was beginning to hate his slow wits, too, that would not show him the way to rescue their rightful inheritance from the Squire's clutches. He worked at all the "jobs" he could find, but

boys were more plentiful than jobs in Ponkaty. It began to look as if he must ask his uncle for a situation in his sawmill before long. That would be a galling necessity; he had not mentioned it to his mother, whose heart was set upon having him go to the Byfield Academy.

He had gone so far as to consult Lawyer Skimpole about the deed; that was just after it was settled that the railroad's route was to be through the Baxter woodlands. The lawyer had been inclined to make light of the matter at first. He said there had been some story about a deed of gift years ago; it was "ancient history" now. Still, if Tom had the deed in his possession there might be something to talk about.

The result of this interview with the lawyer was that Tom determined to enlist Arianna in his service, and make another effort to get possession of that ancient hymn-book which had the deed written upon its cover.

He went boldly up to Butternut Hill on a June afternoon. Garry had come home for the summer vacation full of what Tom somewhat

scornfully regarded as "freaks" and "fads," though Peace thought them most delightful new ideas. Garry was already teaching Peace to take photographs, and Peace talked as if dark closets and "developing" were the most important things in life. She had practical ideas also. She said that Ponkaty, if it grew as people expected it would, now that the railroad was coming, would soon need a photographer, and it was just the business for a woman. Garry had lent her a small camera; and she was photographing everything, from Tom's tiny terrier Jupiter—who did not take it in good part, and howled piteously at sight of the camera—to the great tent that was being erected for the centennial celebration.

Here was Garry on the lawn photographing the old summer-house—and Tom had hoped to steal around to the back door and see Arianna unobserved. It was Tom's opinion, just then, that girls and photography were both a nuisance.

"Oh, do come here, Tom, just for a minute and let me take you!" called Garry. "Every

one has gone down to the tent except grandma and me. Grandma is up in her room. Do listen, Tom!"

"British yoke and galling chain" came floating to their ears in Grandma Peacey's shrilly sweet, quavering old treble.

"Those old tunes are getting to be a craze, Tom. I heard father say he was going to send the old books to the Junction to be rebound, they're getting so worn out."

"I—I would like to see those old books," said Tom, his heart almost bursting.

"They're in the old secretary—if father hasn't sent them away. Go and see," said Garry carelessly, loath to leave her photographing.

Tom went in. His opportunity had come! No scruples should hinder him now! He was prepared to burst locks, break glass, do anything, to come to his own.

The books were gone!—gone to the Junction to be rebound; that precious cover might even now be ground up at the paper-mill!

"Tom! Tom! where are you going in such

a hurry? O Tom, I wanted to *take* you!" wailed Garry.

Tom was going to the bookstore at the Junction upon the chance that it might not yet be too late to rescue the cover of "Perennial Hymns."

It was fifteen miles to the Junction. After he had walked seven, "across lots," he overtook Eli Stebbins, who was going to the Junction to get his mowing-machine repaired, and Eli gave him a lift. Eli jogged along comfortably, and gossiped lightly, while Tom's brain was in a whirl. It was maddening to remember that the deed had been almost within his grasp, and he had failed to secure it. He was dull of wit; it must all be due to his blunt nose, as Peace said.

He jumped off the wagon, and ran for the last two or three miles.

After all, the bookseller had received no books to be rebound. Tom asked him boldly; he did not care if the Squire found it out. He meant to go to him and denounce the fraud, and demand his rightful inheritance.

He scorned to wait for the slow-going Eli. Nevertheless, Eli overtook him ; for he had the sad heart that tires in a mile, and they did not reach home until nearly midnight.

Peace was sitting up for him, and had kept something hot on the stove — Peace knew how to be a sister. But she *would* keep talking. Tom thought wearily that perhaps girls had to. She said that Garry had come down that evening ; and she recounted innumerable things that Garry had “taken,” and that she meant to “take.”

“Garry said you came up and went into the house. I didn’t think you would ever go into that house, Tom, unless you were sent for, as you were to the rehearsal. Garry said that the old singing-books that you wanted to see were up in Grandma Peacey’s room, and she was singing out of them all by herself. Isn’t it too funny the craze that everybody has for those old hymns? Garry said her father couldn’t get a chance to have them rebound, they were in such demand.”

Tom had jumped up and seized his cap.

The books were in Grandma Peacey's room! if he could by any means awake her without arousing the household — "Garry said her father had taken the books down to the tent now. They're going to have a rehearsal there to-morrow; no admittance except to the choir. Tom, what is the matter? What *do* you want of those old books?"

Peace spoke impatiently; she thought Tom was behaving very queerly lately. Nobody knew what in the world he had been to the Junction for; but Tom was apt to be provokingly close-mouthed.

Tom went up-stairs to bed silently, heavily. Peace heard him stumble up two or three stairs, and thought affectionately what a good, stupid fellow he was. He took things hard too, and worried about them. "Tom, don't let things trouble you," she called after him softly, so that her mother should not hear; "I'm going to take care of the family with my photography!"

"Girls think such a lot of themselves," grumbled Tom. Yet Peace was "considerable

of a girl," he said to himself, before she began to "take" things.

Ponkaty was early astir on its centennial morning. You would have thought to hear people talk that a town a hundred years old was as great a marvel as the "one-horse shay."

"Little of all we cherish here
Wakes on the morn of its hundredth year,"

Mr. Holmes declares; but Ponkaty had awakened, and with a railroad all its own rapidly nearing completion. There were sleepy towns near Ponkaty that were a hundred and more, and had never thought, as their inhabitants said, of making a fuss about it; but it was between planting and haying, and they didn't allow their mild scorn of Ponkaty's airs to prevent them from having a good time. Throngs of people poured into Ponkaty by every road, before the sunrise bells had ceased to ring, to see the antique procession. The great tent, — people had been inclined to laugh because Squire Baxter would have so big a one, — where there were to be speech-making, and a collation, and the old folks' "sing," was speedily filled.

This day was to be Tom Baxter's Opportunity; it was spelled with a big O in his mind. If he did not succeed to-day he would denounce his uncle; he would cry aloud their wrongs. But he knew in his heart that the result would be what Lawyer Skimpole predicted, — without the deed in his possession the Squire was "too big a man to fight."

The books were piled upon a table on the platform. Nearest the platform were the reserved seats for the worthies of Ponkaty and the adjoining towns; boys were not allowed within those sacred precincts — certainly not Tom Baxter. But Tom edged up as near to the platform as he could, and all through the long speeches he kept his eyes riveted on those books. There were *two* with glazed covers; that was why he had made that heart-breaking blunder. The torn cover made it easy to distinguish the right one now. It was an older book also; it was the only copy of the "Perennial Hymns," the oldest singing-book of all.

When the books were in the hands of the

choir, Tom still kept his eye on them. He would not allow himself to be carried away by the tide of enthusiasm that swept over the audience when the old people in their ancient costumes, with their ancient, quavering voices, sang the songs that they had first sung with young voices when all was fresh and new. The young people laughed till they cried; and the old people laughed too, although their tears came first.

Grandma Peacey sang "Come my beloved, haste away;" and a pretty pink color came into her cheeks, and Tom thought he had not seen her look so happy since Julius went away. Mrs. Phœbe Quint patted Mrs Bathsheba Day, and called her "dear," and Mrs. Quint handed Mrs. Day her smelling-salts, and Mr. David Wasgatt "flatted" as much as he liked, and every one thought it was beautiful.

As soon as the "sing" was over, the audience broke up into little groups, the seats were piled away, and the more social part of the festivities began. The queer old house-

hold and farm implements that had been in the procession were on exhibition. There were carding and spinning and weaving and churning and threshing and cheese-making at one side of the tent, while at the other the long tables were being spread with toothsome old-fashioned dainties.

But Tom hovered near the platform, and kept his eye on the old books. His uncle was on the platform still; he was showing the "Perennial Hymns" to a clergyman from the Junction. Tom heard him say that the book was valuable because there were few copies in existence.

He laid the book upon the table, and turned away. Tom had one foot upon the platform; he was glad to take what belonged to him boldly, like that; it did not seem so sneaking. "Tom Baxter!" called one of the Tackaberry girls shrilly, "Viola Brimblecom wants you to come and help her with her candle-moulds; the candles wouldn't harden in the ice, and the fat is running all over everything!"

Tom stepped back; the Squire turned at that moment, scowling at Tom, — but mildly, because his mood was joyful, — and took up “Perennial Hymns” again; the Junction clergyman wished to show it to a friend.

Tom looked back as he went mechanically to the help of distressed Viola Brimblecom. Peace and Garry were together near the platform, and the Squire saw them together, and did not even scowl; he seemed to feel that a general amnesty should be extended for this day. Those foolish girls, Tom saw, had their cameras and were taking things; sometimes a fellow did wish that his sister would be a little less frivolous.

He meant to go back as soon as the Squire had put those books on the table again; nothing now should hinder him from gaining possession of that cover — nothing.

The tallow difficulty was soon adjusted; then Grandma Peacey wanted Tom to help Mrs. Loomis with her carding, and there began to be the innumerable demands that people are apt to make at such places on a boy,

“as if he were made of Injy rubber and no feelin’s,” Jerome Tackaberry grumbled, being similarly imposed upon.

While Tom carded, with no love for ancient fashions in his heart, an excitement arose near one of the doors. Drunken Josh Grindall, the unworthy son of a respectable Ponkaty farmer, was declaring his purpose to wreak vengeance on Squire Baxter, because he had prevented the railroad from going through the Grindall meadows according to the original plan. One of the workmen on the railroad, who had been discharged for drunkenness, was with Josh, and there was some difficulty in ejecting the two men. Ferguson, the young surveyor, had helped to put them out, and they had both heaped torrents of abuse on him for having “sold out.”

McPhail had appeared at the celebration; people said he had come back on purpose, and Squire Baxter was inclined to make much of him, inviting him to a seat on the platform; but he had held aloof, and seemed to find his chief satisfaction in casting furious glances at

young Ferguson, who bore them with entire composure.

Tom broke through the crowd while the excitement caused by the drunken intruders was at its height; the platform was deserted. Now he thought his time of triumph had come.

The table was bare save for the visiting clergymen's tall hats! Every book had disappeared. There was something ridiculous about it; that fact exasperated Tom the more. It was like the farce, "Here She Blows!" that Peace and he had seen at the Byfield Academy Exhibition, in which a series of absurd catastrophies hindered a man at every turn.

But small mischances should not be allowed to hinder a matter in which so much of right and wrong were involved. Tom felt that his methods were wrong; in spite of Lawyer Skimpole, he would act straight-forwardly, and fight the Squire if necessary.

Ponkaty's centennial should mark his assertion of manhood; one could not be a boy when one had so much depending upon him.

He had once heard the Squire say that what people amounted to depended very much upon the shape of their noses. He might live to find out that there was something of a boy behind a snub nose! That very night he would go to the Squire and demand their rights, — the woodlands which had been deeded to his father.

CHAPTER V.

A BAXTER IN PONKATY.

IT was deep into the twilight of the late June evening when Tom set out for Butternut Hill with the determination to demand the restitution of the property that had rightfully belonged to his father. He had waited because he knew that his uncle was entertaining the notabilities who had come to the centennial celebration; they would have departed by the time he reached the house, for they all had some distance to go.

It had been hard to wait; he had whittled the toughest of pine-knots, and snubbed Peace, and rudely called the centennial celebration (of which in his heart he was proud) "a monkey show;" but this disturbance of mind and temper had not dulled in the least the edge of his resolve.

As he was crossing the field, — a short cut to the hill, — Jerome Tackaberry called after him that he had seen that McPhail fellow riding off lickety-split towards the Junction, with his face as white as a sheet, and he shouldn't wonder if he and that Ferguson fellow had had a fight; everybody thought that McPhail had something to do with changing the railroad's route when Ferguson didn't want it changed, and Uriah Metcalf had heard the two young men exchanging hard words that afternoon.

Tom scarcely listened. Jerome Tackaberry had a lively imagination any way, and liked to have something going on. Moreover, Tom said to himself grimly that he had all the fighting on his own account that he could attend to, without meddling with other people's.

Tom's way "across lots" led him along by the Squire's sawmill. It was a large old mill which Tom's grandfather had built. More than one towering tree from the Baxter woodlands had there been transformed into a great ship's mast, and been started down the little

river on its way into the world. But the Kateechee was a very little river, and its current was slow, much too slow for the Squire's ambition; and of late the saws had rusted, waiting for the railroad.

They would start up again soon, now that the railroad was there to carry the woodlands' wealth into the world.

There came to Tom's ears a queer sound from the mill. Was his imagination so vivid that he already heard the sound of the machinery? It came again; it sounded like a human groan.

Pshaw! Tom shook off the nervous feeling that came over him. The wind and the river made noises that seemed to creep into an unoccupied building in the night.

Tom walked on, whistling a little; the bravest boy is not above keeping his courage up in that way upon occasion. When he reached Butternut Hill, there were guests still there. The Squire was sitting on the piazza with them; there were cigars and stories and laughter. Tom resolved not to give up. How-

ever late it might be when his uncle's visitors left, he should still listen to him.

Tom did not overrate himself; he knew that the excitement of the day had lent an artificial aid to his courage; when to-morrow's inevitable reaction came he could not tell how much of that courage might have vanished.

He lingered for a while behind the arbor-vitæ hedge, then he walked around to the back part of the house. There was a light in the window of the great buttery. Arianna was making bread there, singing, "The Day is a-wasting," as she worked:—

"Lord in the twilight, Lord in the deep night,
Lord in the midnight, be thou nigh,"

rang out her shrill treble, arousing a bird whose sleepy note sounded like a remonstrance. Tom wandered off down the hill; he felt suddenly impelled to go towards the mill and listen for that queer noise again. When a boy went where there were lights and voices he got rid of that creepy feeling, and did not think it would come on again.

Butternut Hill was long and steep. As Tom

neared the foot he became aware that a mist was arising from the river. It already lay in dense masses upon the low meadows, although upon the hill the atmosphere had the thin dryness of a long, early summer drouth.

Above the mill the mist arose in heavy black clouds. What did that mean? queried Tom. Was it an effect of shadow or of atmospheric conditions?

There was an odor of burning; but he had been conscious of that ever since he left Barberry Lane. Many enthusiastic Ponkaty citizens had been giving small displays of fireworks, and the boys had fired crackers as if it were the Fourth of July. But this was more — it was different! The black cloud above the mill was pierced by a thin tongue of flame; and Tom ran towards the mill shouting “Fire! Fire!” at the top of his voice.

There were no houses in the vicinity of the mill; the Squire’s was the nearest. The wind carried his voice in the opposite direction. There must be ways to get water quickly from the river. While these thoughts crowded upon

Tom's bewildered brain, he was pushing open the great door of the mill. Blinding, suffocating smoke drove him back, but not before a gasping cry for help had reached his ears. This was no sound of a summer night; it rose above the roar and crackle of the fire. If he had only heeded the mysterious sound he had heard at first he might have saved a human life. He shouted as he fought his way along, and the voice answered imploring him to hasten.

A great pile of boards extended through a doorway and overhung the river. There was almost always a pile of boards in that place; many a surreptitious "teeter" had Tom enjoyed upon it. A sudden flash of flame showed him a recumbent figure upon the pile. The man had evidently crawled by inches far out upon a board that overhung the river; but in the current of air caused by the doorway the flames were leaping towards him.

Tom never knew how he reached the helpless man; he was blinded and dazed, but he found himself out upon the overhanging board that tilted under his weight.

He thought to go back as he had come, dragging this weight, but the flames were having a wild and weird witch dance in that doorway; suddenly they burst through the roof, and to Tom it seemed that all the universe had turned to roaring flame.

Faintly through the roaring there came to his ears the sound of the church-bells ringing the alarm. It dissipated the sense of dreadful nightmare. He felt under the board, and found that the pile was deep. He could make his way down hand over hand, until the drop to the river would be but slight; but with this helpless burden it was impossible.

“Go along! Don’t mind me!” said the burden suddenly; “you can’t, you know.” The man half raised himself; and he looked so weirdly white in the dazzling light that even sensible Tom could scarcely overcome the impression that it was a ghost.

“You’re — you’re Ferguson!” he stammered, with an accent of relief as he bent over and tried to lift the sufferer. “And — and” — was it because the colored glasses were gone, or

had peril sharpened Tom's dull wits? — "and you're Julius Baxter!" he shouted. "You just cling to me — so — and we'll drop to the river together. It's the only way!"

Such a calamity was this to wind up Ponkaty's glorious day! The mill was an old building; but it had been built firmly, and there had been extensions and improvements. That very day Squire Baxter had talked of his plans to enlarge it. Ponkaty's methods of fighting fire were but primitive; but where water was so close at hand the mill might have been saved if the fire had been discovered just a little sooner. It must have smouldered for a long time before it burst into flame; for all at once, as was testified by young Pel Judson, who gave the alarm, "all at once there was flame everywhere." It was suspected that Josh Grindall, who had vowed vengeance upon the Squire, had carried his threat into execution when he was drunk; and this theory was borne out by the fact that Josh disappeared from Ponkaty, and was next heard from in Arizona.

Early the next morning a report reached Butternut Hill that Tom Baxter was missing. Jerome Tackaberry brought the story, and the Squire heard it as he was leaning over his fence surveying the ruins of his mill. The Squire had fought fire with the best; he had been almost all night about the ruins, and had not sought his bed at all. He had shown an undaunted front, and talked of plans for rebuilding even while the flames raged. But in the fresh morning light he looked old and shaken; and he called to Arianna, who was going to and fro between the garden and the kitchen, that he wished she would sing a wholesome, lively tune if she had got to sing. Arianna was singing with unusual unction, "The judgment day is a-rollin' 'round."

Arianna, who had stopped to listen, was surprised to see that the Squire seemed really moved at Jerome Tackaberry's account of Tom's disappearance, and of the anxiety they were suffering in the little house at Barberry Lane.

"Mebbe we've all got hearts — some'eres,"

she said to herself with a sense of discovery. Aloud, she said that for her part she wa'n't afraid but what Tom Baxter would light on his feet.

“They don't know what's become of that young Ferguson, either,” Jerome Tackaberry went on, eager to be the purveyor of thrilling news. “They've found those colored glasses of his among the ruins of the mill, and they've picked up a hat with his name in it, in the river.”

“He's drowned! Oh, he's drowned!” cried Arianna wildly. “Oh, that blessed boy that I promised his mother I'd look out for! —oh, my lamb Julius!”

The Squire turned a livid face upon her. “Julius? Julius?” he murmured. “‘Would you like to think your son capable of accepting a bribe?’” The Squire repeated the words with a hoarse and dreadful chuckle, the color returning to his face with a rush. Then suddenly his old features worked pitifully.

The next moment he was lying on the grass,

while Arianna tried frantically to loosen his necktie, and Jerome Tackaberry ran for the doctor.

It was a stroke of paralysis, the doctor said, and the issue was doubtful: he might never regain consciousness; he might yet live for years.

"He'll come to," said Arianna with calm confidence.

And he did. He opened his eyes with the old shrewd gleam in them, and looked grimly defiant at the doctor. He tried to raise himself; and it became evident that one side was paralyzed. He looked at what had been his good right arm with piteous surprise; his strong features worked weakly again.

"My son! my son Julius!" he murmured.

Arianna drew forward the no-wise reluctant Jerome Tackaberry.

"You tell him the whole story; there ain't nothin' in this livin' world that'll do him so much good," she said.

"Them two have got back, Ferguson and Tom Baxter," said Jerome Tackaberry, think-

ing it not at all remarkable that the latest news should conduce to the Squire's recovery. "Bill Hackett fetched 'em up from the Bend in the stage. They're down to Barberry Lane, and there's a whole crowd there, shoutin' and cheerin' Tom Baxter, because he's a hero for savin' that feller's life."

"He's safe?—unharm'd?" gasped the Squire.

"Tom?—oh, the other feller! He got an awful knock on the head. McPhail gave it to him; he come up from the city a purpose, because Ferguson told on him for—for selling out." Jerome Tackaberry's honest face grew red with the consciousness that he was trenching upon personalities.

"He accepted a bribe; the other fellow—Ferguson—wouldn't!" There was a curious ring of pride in the Squire's mocking voice.

"He crawled into the mill, Ferguson did,—they was right near there when McPhail hit him,—and then those drunken fellers set it afire. 'Twas when 'twas all ablaze that Tom Baxter happened along and heard him holler;

he ketched hold of him, Tom did, and jumped into the river. 'Twas an awful close shave, you'd better believe!" Jerome's narrative became more graphic as excitement overcame his self-consciousness. "And it took some gumption to drop kerchunk into the river in all that blindin', suffocatin' smoke with another feller hangin' on to you! Tom ketched hold of some boards, and the other feller got so't he could hold on a little too, and they floated down the river, clear down to the Bend; and come daylight, Amos Crandall, out fishin' for perch for breakfast, he picked 'em up. If they ain't about the used upedest lookin' folks you ever see!"

"Bring them here, both of them, at once!" ordered the Squire. "Tom Baxter! Tom Baxter saved his life!" he repeated musingly. Arianna slipped out of the room; and from the corridor her voice floated back, less shrill than usual, — softened perhaps by tears, — but insistent, "The judgment day is a-rollin' 'round, a-rollin' 'round."

"Tell Arianna Pettingill that if she ever

sings that hymn in my house again, she leaves my employ!" cried the Squire in a voice that paralysis had not broken. "No — no — no; you needn't!" He sank back and spoke softly, "Singing didn't bring it."

They fully justified Jerome Tackaberry's description when they arrived, Julius coming eagerly to his father's side, his white face full of pity, Tom hanging back embarrassed by conflicting feelings.

"Ferguson! *Ferguson!*" was the first thing the Squire said when his son took the disabled hand tenderly in his.

"Does the name matter so much, father?" he said soothingly. "The man who gave me my opportunity in life, and who left me his fortune, wished me to take his name. He was a passenger on board the ship on which I ran away to sea. I nursed him through a fever. He was an engineer — an enthusiast in his profession. I am going to Paris to study" —

"You will leave me — the wreck that I am now?" asked the Squire half angrily, half piteously.

“But I shall come back often, father; and I will make you proud of me” —

“I want to be proud of Ponkaty,” said the Squire in his own testy way. “I want a Baxter in Ponkaty as long as the world stands! Tom Baxter, do you want to go away from Ponkaty?”

“No,” said Tom — “but” —

A spark showed itself in the Squire’s small, shrewd eyes; the grimmest of grim chuckles came from his pale lips.

“But you want the deed! That’s it, isn’t it?” he said.

Tom had had a sufficient shock to feel that the world was topsy-turvy, anyway; now the Squire seemed a magician before whose keen eyes his secrets were written out — as the deed had been written on the looking-glass.

“I knew it all the time! all the time!” chuckled the Squire. “I never hid the deed. All the fools in Ponkaty have been whispering about that deed, and there it was in plain sight! You shall have the singing-book, Tom Baxter! If you can prove the deed is legal,

why, there'll be a Baxter in Ponkaty! I don't mean that I'm going to die. I shall pull through this; but I want a Baxter in Ponkaty! Arianna! Where's Arianna? I gave her the books to take care of yesterday."

"Land sakes! them old books? I carried 'em up into the attic; they was too rubbishy to put into the secretary again."

She returned from the attic with her arms full. "If I'd thought they was of any use I wouldn't have put 'em there; them pesky mice got a foul of 'em. I expect nothin' but what it's the very one you want that they've ate. They seemed to kind of take a fancy to that glazed stuff."

Arianna held up the "Perennial Hymns." It was the back part of the cover that was gnawed half off!

Tom might certainly be forgiven for feeling utterly desperate and discouraged then. It was as inevitable as the Fates in a Greek tragedy that something should come between him and the possession of that old singing-book cover just in the nick of time. The

fatalities happened in the most natural way too, — in a way that was the more aggravating because it seemed farcical.

Tom turned his face away. Peace had told him that when he turned pale his freckles stood out like spots on a veil; that drew people's attention.

The Squire was chuckling in intervals between strongly expressed opinions of Arianna's intellectual abilities.

His queer conscience was evidently satisfied with the idea that Providence had settled the matter. No, not quite satisfied.

"We'll make it right, Tom," he said. "I'll make it worth your while to stay in Ponkaty."

But Tom felt that he wanted his rights; he didn't want to be the Squire's pensioner. This last fatality, to have his inheritance gnawed away by mice, seemed too much to bear.

An exclamation from Garry aroused him from his gloomy reflections.

In the midst of her tearful joy over Julius, Garry had suddenly caught sight of the gnawed cover.

“That’s what Peace and I both took!” she exclaimed. “We’ve got *bea-u-tiful* photographs! We took the title-page because they said it was a curiosity; then Peace espied the writing, and we photographed that. We like to practise with writing. I have a perfect copy.”

The Squire looked at it curiously when she brought it—a perfect copy of the old deed! So did Tom. (It may as well be recorded here that he afterwards made a polite acknowledgment to Garry and Peace of a changed opinion of girls and photography.)

“That’ll be a good way to have it come out—eh, Julius?” said the Squire. “My daughter photographed it—it’s been right there all the time in that old book, and my daughter photographed it! I could have held on to it if I had had a mind to,—don’t you go to singing about the judgment day, Arianna Pettingill!—but we’ve got a railroad, and I want a Baxter in Ponkaty.”

FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS.

FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS.

CHAPTER I.

THE MINISTER'S FAMILY.

MISS FIFY BRIDGE went panting up Purgatory Hill, and dropped, exhausted, upon the minister's back doorsteps. She was rotund and heavy of person, and the earth seemed to be dissolving in mud. The January thaw had extended into February; and even in New England, where its vitals are of iron, it was evident that winter's heart was broken. The door was opened by a tall girl of sixteen, with a somewhat aggressive chin, and a pair of alert gray eyes under her rough curly brown bangs.

"It ain't true, is it, that the minister's selling out?" demanded Miss Fify with a gasp

compounded of curiosity and want of breath. The girl frowned a little. She had a ready smile, which showed little dents and dimples in her serious face, but also her brows knitted readily. As she looked at Miss Fify's voluminous flowered draperies, and the rusty crape veil—her joy and pride—which flowed incongruously over them, a sudden pang of homesickness seized her that she should soon see them no more. She had felt the same pang last night when she caught a sudden glimpse of the three tall pines on Sheepscott Hill, which seemed to prop up the sky. Miss Fify, with her basket of small wares, which she invariably described as "a little taste," was a bore, and many a time had Mary Olive wished herself far away from the lonesome frown of Sheepscott Hill; but there is a queer natural selection about the familiar things that clutch at one's heartstrings.

"Yes, we are going away," she said with a tremulous accent. "And of course," she added, "it wouldn't be worth while to carry our old furniture to Milbury."

“Now, you don't mean it, Mary Olive! Has your father got a call?” exclaimed Miss Fify.

Miss Fify did not mean to hurt the girl's feelings by implying that it was surprising that her father should have received a call. She was merely outspoken, and Mary Olive was used to her.

“He's to have the charge of a mission chapel,” the girl explained patiently. “Father is not young and he has those fainting-fits” —

“Nothing but indigestion; the pains he has with 'em show that,” said Miss Fify oracularly. “Some think he ain't so pale for nothing; but I've seen white-livered folks live to ninety, and them that was as red as pinies die young. A mission chapel — humph! I expect they think poor folks can stand a rattling of dry bones; but for folks that are heartsick with poverty, good, sweet, every-day gospel that keeps their hearts up and their tempers down is the kind.”

“Father's sermons are very deep; not every one can understand them,” said Mary Olive, with a touch of resentment.

“Well, if he can get enough to keep you, that’s the main point for you,” said the uncompromising Miss Fify.

Mary Olive’s cheeks glowed with the consciousness of a joyful secret. She was impulsive, and it cost her an effort to keep silent; but she reflected that if she should tell Miss Fify that her father’s aunt had left them five thousand dollars, all Canterbury, from Sheepscott Hill to the Four Corners, would know it before night.

“’Tain’t as if you and Samuel couldn’t do for yourselves—twins, and sixteen last September,” pursued Miss Fify, to whom the ages of all Canterbury were household lore. “You’ve kept the summer school at Mile End, and like as not they’ll give you a primary at Milbury. A lot of patience, and a little spark in your eye, and there you be for schoolkeeping. You’ve got ’em both, Mary Olive. As for Lowizy, that’s the oldest,—seventeen last winter, wa’n’t she? though she’s such a little mite of a thing,—she’s pink-and-white complected; and for some folks it’s

the business of life to be pink-and-white complected. Where's your father?"

"He has gone over to see old Mrs. Gaylord," said Mary Olive. "She had another attack of numbness, and thought she was dying."

"Cat's foot!" ejaculated Miss Fify. "Mary Jane Gaylord begun numb, and numb she goes on because she's got a chance to. Mary Olive, you haven't had a fortune left you, have you?"

For Mary Olive had selected from Miss Fify's stores a veil of dotted net, and some very ornamental hairpins which just matched her brown hair, and she had a reckless sensation, half delight, half fear; for all her life Mary Olive's purchases had been limited to stern necessities. She started guiltily at Miss Fify's question; but it was evident that Miss Fify had meant only a little joke.

"And a bottle of perfumery," said Mary Olive firmly, though with a little gasp.

Miss Fify asked many questions about the auction of the minister's household goods, which was to be held the next week. A bar-

gain was dear to Miss Fify's heart; and she gave Mary Olive much good advice, and called back, as she went away, that their going would be all right if the Lord went before.

"But 'tain't as if you hadn't got to fall into line yourself, and keep step lively," she added, with a wise shake of the head.

As Mary Olive stood in the doorway, gazing absently at Miss Fify's retreating figure, she caught sight of a little woman picking her way across the miry field. It was a bent little figure, and the hair above the forehead was silver in the sunshine; but the step was light with something like the elasticity of youth.

"It has made her young already, the brave little mother!" thought Mary Olive, with a thrill of joy. "She has been talking it over with her crony, Mrs. Tilly Sinclair; and they haven't had such a good time together since they were girls at Hillsboro' Bridge. It only means good times to Louly, not relief from care, for she never takes any; and Sam seems so slow and dull. When I asked him if it

didn't make him wild to think of having a chance to be somebody in the world, he said, in that gruff, bearish voice of his, that he never expected to have such fishing again as there was in the pool below Tumble Down Brook! And father—father is above it all; he leaves things to the Lord—and to mother! 'It's the Lord's will, Miranda,' he says when trouble comes; but mother feels like putting her good right arm to the wheel to keep the trouble from coming."

"Good right arm" had more than the usual significance in this case; for as she came nearer, across the sodden field, one saw that the little woman's left arm hung palsied at her side.

"Mary Olive!" she called eagerly, as she came through the gate, "I'm going to give Tilly that buff-sprigged sugar-bowl and cream-pitcher that she always liked so much. We shall have a whole new set; not picked up pieces that don't match, any more! I don't know as I ever had a chance to make anybody a present before." Her worn face was

radiant with childlike delight. Mary Olive picked up the little woman as if she were a doll, and, placing her in the threadbare old haircloth rocking-chair, she dropped down beside her with her chin resting on the chair's arm.

"Mother, how you have wanted things, and you never said a word!" There was a half-strangled sob in the clear young voice.

"Sometimes I have," admitted the little woman in a confidential whisper. "It wasn't high-minded; but at Conference times, when the ministers brought their wives, and there were not glasses enough to go round, and, manage all I would, the tin dipper would go to Mrs. Dr. Pillsbury! It's petty, I know, Mary Olive. Your father used to say, 'Life is larger than that;' but I'm glad it's over!"

"You never said a word," repeated Mary Olive tenderly, smoothing the mother's hard and worn little hand.

"Mary Olive," a shadow suddenly crossed the eager face, "Tilly Sinclair says I'm visionary; she thinks five thousand dollars isn't much."

“Much!” gasped Mary Olive. “She wouldn’t think it wasn’t much if she had ever tried to live on four hundred and fifty dollars a year that the congregation couldn’t raise! It will be riches for us, mother.”

A long, happy talk followed, of plans and prospects. Even the necessary economy seemed pleasant, as it is to healthy minds when it is without torturing anxiety. They rejoiced that there would be a chance for Sam — dear, stupid Sam, whom no one quite understood. Perhaps Louly might some time teach drawing, but it was difficult to tell what Louly would do.

Mary Olive had the sort of back that fits itself to the burden; but Mary Olive would feel the burden, and grow a little bitter under it. Louly came in with her sketch-book. She had been trying to pick up some hints from Mary Price’s teacher, she said. She was glad that in Milbury she could have lessons of her own. Louly had a very fair skin and a delicate, flower-like face; but her shoulders were stooping, like her mother’s, and her figure un-

gainly. Summer visitors to Canterbury were apt to be struck by Louly's beauty; but she lacked symmetry, and to Canterbury eyes, untrained in artistic values, symmetry was all. Her large-jointed hands were pathetically small and ugly, and her gait was peculiar; the country people laughed when they heard the summer visitors call her graceful. She had no faculty, and it was doubtful whether she had a good disposition; it was generally understood that Louly was "a trial."

"Hasn't Sam come back from the office?" asked Louly. "I should think it was time they sent the money. I can't go to Milbury without some new things." Mary Olive felt a guilty consciousness of the perfumery bottle in her pocket. The door opened slowly, the formality of knocking being dispensed with in Canterbury, and Mrs. Tilly Sinclair, pale and awe-stricken, laid her hand on the little mother's shoulder.

"Your husband, Miranda! But it was peaceful," she said brokenly; "very peaceful after the terrible pain. And you must have known

it would come soon! Angina pectoris, the doctor said. Mrs. Gaylord was very nervous, and screamed. We don't know whether that agitated him, or whether the attack would have come anyway. Miranda, don't look at me so!" as the bowed figure clung to her, scarcely seeming to understand. "God is above us."

Sam, short and sturdy, square of brow and chin, was coming through the gate with a letter in his hand and an eager expression — for Sam. He dropped the letter into his pocket as Mrs. Tilly Sinclair stood before him with her finger on her lip.

It was only three days after the mortal part of the Reverend Abel Pennock had been laid to rest in the bleak little Canterbury churchyard; and already his parishioners had begun to forget that they had ever, like Miss Fify Bridge, accused him of "rattling dry bones," and believed that they had always loved and prized him. And in the parsonage on the hill, Louly had already decided that black clothes

added to her picturesqueness, but not to Mary Olive's sallowness. To the widow her husband's death had been a bitter loss, but with all her anxieties her nature held a childlike optimism made of faith and trust; and for such natures God is constantly making all things new.

"I don't see why we should postpone the auction," Louly had said several times; and until now every one had gently "put the question by." But Louly was insistent now, and appealed to Sam. Sam was quite accustomed to being a little snubbed; it was curious to see how much importance the only masculine element had suddenly acquired.

"We've got to — to face the music, you know," said Sam gruffly. Sam had shown a depth of feeling which vaguely surprised his mother and sisters. There had always been a hope that some ability lurked behind Sam's somewhat stolid outward presentment, although he would never be "smart," like Tom Corry, who could puzzle the schoolmaster and outdo the lightning calculator at the show;

but no one had suspected that Sam had strong affections.

“I suppose we'd better have the auction while the roads are open,” said the mother. Mary Olive, who stood for stern propriety in the family, nodded a grave assent; and they all felt that the links of life had joined themselves together after the painful break which would always leave its mark. “We can't go to Milbury until we have a letter from the executor, and know when we are going to have the money,” continued the widow. “I suppose it is best to go,” she added tentatively. Sam had started up with a scowl of perplexity on his heavy brows.

“I had a letter postmarked Milbury,” he said. “It was — that day, and I don't know what I did with it. I haven't thought of it since.”

“If that isn't just like Sam!” exclaimed Louly, as Sam rushed to look in his overcoat pocket.

“It's no wonder that he forgot,” said Sam's mother gently.

Sam returned with the letter, a crumpled, unimportant-looking letter; but they all felt as if their great good fortune had suddenly appeared to them in tangible form. The name of a Milbury lawyer, the executor of the estate, and his office address, appeared upon the envelope, giving it a business-like character; and Louly was surprised that a check for five thousand dollars did not drop out when her mother opened it.

They gathered around their mother as she sat upright on the shabby, slippery haircloth sofa where she had been lying; and even Sam's dull face, with eyes still showing the heaviness of the bitter boyish tears that are seldom shown even to the most loving eyes—even Sam's face lighted with eagerness. Death and grief might lie close behind them; but life opened a fair vista before, with grinding poverty forever gone. They grew impatient as their mother pored over the letter. Was it because her eyes were dim with much shedding of tears that she could not read it? She looked up with quivering lips.

“I can't quite make it out,” she faltered. “It seems to be a little different from what we expected. Cyrus, Aunt Lovisa's step-son, is going to contest the will. Mr. Angier thinks the case won't come to court, but that there will be a compromise, and the estate will be divided among the testator's legal heirs, which will, of course, throw out the minor bequests entirely.”

Sam's strong face grew white. Slow Sam already understood.

“Minor bequests!” gasped Mary Olive. “That can't mean ours.” She was bewildered, and only realized that this astonishing person seemed to think, with Mrs. Tilly Sinclair, that five thousand dollars wasn't much.

“What do they mean? They can't help giving us ours. Aunt Lovisa meant us to have it!” cried Louly shrilly.

The widow realized everything at once; it was so much in the line of what had always happened to her! If the money had come to them it would have been harder to realize — like a dream coming true. Yet the childlike

soul would always go on half expecting her dreams to come true. She rose bravely to her full small height, although she trembled.

“If — if everything slips away, we must remember that God is sure,” she said.

“Why, they must give it to us!” broke in Louly’s shrill, insistent voice. “What could we do without it, now father is gone?”

“Mother, life can’t be so hard as this!” cried Mary Olive passionately. But the little mother knew that it was. Sam went to her, and put his sturdy arm around her shrinking shoulders. Sam was short, but the brown head rose above the silver one.

“This is what I’m for, to take care of you,” he said, in what Mary Olive called his “big bear voice.” “Down there in Milbury there’ll be a chance for a fellow.”

CHAPTER II.

THE COTTAGE AT MILBURY.

IT was arranged that they were to go to Milbury; in fact, those words of Sam's had seemed to settle the matter. The mother hid her doubts in her heart; there were "chances" in Milbury. The word, with its double significance, cast no chill upon the young hearts as it did upon the elder one; then there came an encouraging letter from Aunt Lovisa Whitney's daughter; and, after that, the mother's optimism asserted itself, and she was as eager as any.

Mrs. Lovisa Whitney was their father's aunt. They had scarcely known of her existence until, family ties and interests having suddenly revived in her failing heart and memory, she wrote to the minister, regretting a lifelong estrangement, and declaring her intention to remember him in her will. Within

three months had come a notice of her death and of the legacy. In the meantime there had been a brisk correspondence, and a visit of the minister to Milbury, which had resulted in his call to the mission chapel.

It was Mrs. Adelaide Bearse, Aunt Lovisa's daughter, who wrote. She seemed very much excited, and poured out, in many pages, the story of the wrongs she had suffered at Cyrus Whitney's hands. She said there was a little cottage not far from her own house which they might occupy, rent free; a place would be found for Sam in the mills, and for Mary Olive she could find a situation as nursery governess.

Mary Olive's young ambition might not be satisfied by the career of a nursery governess, but "Not what ye would, but what ye may," was Mary Olive's motto. She held it with some bitterness of heart, but she held it.

As for Sam, Mary Olive shrewdly suspected that Sam had very lately developed some ambitions, he listened so intently to old Simy Alcock and Deacon Porter, who sat in the store on stormy days and hotly discussed the

tariff question. Perhaps he meant to be a statesman or a great financier. Could he climb to such heights through the drudgery of the mills? Sam displayed a masterly activity in the preparations for removal. He posted bills, announcing the sale, in the store and on the astonished fences and stumps; and all Canterbury, and large delegations from the neighboring towns, came eagerly up the hill to the old parsonage, full of curiosity, of sympathy, and of a zeal for bargains.

It was all over at last; even the farming-tools and the spotted cow were sold. Desdemona, the ancient cat, was tearfully presented to Mrs. Tilly Sinclair, along with the buff-sprigged sugar-bowl and cream-pitcher; while Miss Fify Bridge went triumphantly down the hill, her ample flowered petticoats drawn up, washerwoman fashion, big with bargains.

The rickety old yellow stage left them at the Four Corners' Station early the next morning. Just as the train started, Mary Olive took out her shabby purse. The little wad of bills in one end was all that was left of her school

money; the larger roll in the other end was the proceeds of the auction. This was all the money they had in the world. Mary Olive counted it for the third time, without being able to make any more of it. But she looked out of the car window, and smoothed out the pucker between her brows; the frown of Sheepscott Hill was far behind them, and the world was all before.

The train plunged at last across the long bridge that spanned the river, out of the twilight gloom, into the babel and bewildering light of Milbury Station.

“Do put your hat on straight, Louly! We’re like pelicans of the wilderness; every one is looking at us,” said Mary Olive.

“I think you must be my cousins.” A girl with a gracious little flutter of manner and a pert, bird-like poise of the head, had stopped before the little party in the ladies’ room. At a glance Mary Olive recognized that, plain as her dress was, it would have been an impossibility to the Canterbury dressmaker; but it was vaguely encouraging that her nose turned

up. It did not seem to be within the power of a turned-up nose to be superlatively stylish or condescending. Certainly this nose was fascinatingly frank.

“Mamma meant to come; but we — we are in trouble, and mamma’s nerves are not strong,” she explained. “Here is Brinck! Brinckley Whitney; he’s another cousin, I think.”

A boy with a slightly crooked back and a thin, strongly marked face, and a scowl which Mary Olive decided to be worse than Sam’s, peered at them through his glasses, over the girl’s shoulder.

“They’re no relation to me; none at all!” he said brusquely, in a thin, high-keyed voice which was oddly like an old man’s, and immediately turned on his heel, and disappeared in the crowd.

“You mustn’t mind Brinck. He’s rude,” said the girl easily. “He’s Uncle Cyrus’s son, and he’s an only child, and he has never been well, and he’s queer, and puts on airs. He would get into the carriage because he

wanted to tell me about the robbery in Uncle Cyrus's counting-room. Peters is here with the carriage, and I'll bring him to take your things."

As she turned, Sam advanced, red with excitement and important with checks. He shook hands after an abashed and scowling fashion; and the new cousin regarded him somewhat doubtfully, although she had declared that she "could generally get along with boys."

"You're the one who draws, aren't you?" said the new cousin to Louly, as she followed an imposing coachman to the carriage. "You must come to my studio and see my sketches."

As they got into the carriage the boy Brinck suddenly appeared, his eyes fastened on Sam. The boys scowled mutually as their eyes met, with the sort of interest which boys of the same age are apt to show in each other. Then Brinck was lost to sight again in the crowd.

"You mustn't mind Brinck," Celia said again carelessly.

They dashed through short streets and long

and winding thoroughfares; it seemed an endless, homesick distance, for they had reached the stage of thorough weariness and discouragement. And the cottage was empty and shabby. Celia said that if mamma had thought she would have sent some one to make a fire; but it was so like mamma not to think! After a while, with warmth and light and their own things, and a cosey, camping-out feeling, it grew better. Sam had seen that there was a garden sloping to the river, which cheered his heart; and Louly found a fireplace, and kindled a fire in it. She sat over it and mused while the others worked to set things to rights. "I wonder why that girl didn't want me to draw well," she said twice to Mary Olive; and Mary Olive said, "What an idea!"

Celia was their earliest visitor the next morning. She bore profuse apologies from her mother, and was followed by Peters with a huge hamper containing a curious mixture of necessaries and luxuries, evidently packed in the hastiest manner. She followed the

hamper into the kitchen, in spite of Mary Olive's efforts to receive her more ceremoniously, and perched herself upon a flour-barrel in self-absorbed unconsciousness of being in the way. Of Sam's candid scowls she could not be unconscious.

"He ties his face into a hard knot like Brinck. Aren't boys funny?" she remarked frankly. "I wonder if Brinck will be able to bully you?" she added reflectively to Sam; "he'll try to. He stays about the mills half the time now. He's too ill to go to school, and he fought with his last tutor, so that I don't think Uncle Cyrus will get another one. His mother left him a lot of money, and it's all invested in the mills, so he thinks he has responsibilities. Boys are such a trial!" Celia sighed heavily. "Right in the midst of all this trouble about grandma's property, which was making mamma half crazy anyway, Harold had to run away. Mamma has had such a time with him ever since papa died! And yet I believe she thinks more of him than she does of any of us, unless it's little Kyrle, who

is a boy too — and if little Kyrle isn't a limb!"

"Your brother has run away?" asked the little mother, with a pang of sympathy in the thought that it might have been Sam.

"He has threatened to before, when mamma wouldn't give him money enough; but we never thought he would do it. Uncle Cyrus thought he ought to go to a military school, for the discipline, and mamma sent him; that was just after papa died, when we were on good terms with Uncle Cyrus. But Harold ran away, and came home. Then he thought he would like business, and Uncle Cyrus took him into his counting-room. Of course he couldn't stand that; he said military discipline was a joke compared to Uncle Cyrus's. Mamma said she wished there was a place for you in our mill," added Celia, turning suddenly to Sam; "but Uncle Alvin thinks it will be just as well for you at Uncle Cyrus's. He and Uncle Cyrus speak to each other just the same as ever — men are so queer!"

It came out in the course of Celia's discour-

sive talk that Sam was expected to report at Mr. Cyrus Whitney's mills as soon as possible; while "mamma" was convinced that Mary Olive was qualified to teach the young idea in her nursery. Celia now reached the subject which was evidently most important to her, and demanded to see Louly's sketches; and upon Louly's persistent refusal to unpack them, until she could do so comfortably, she invited her to go home with her to inspect her studio.

"She may help Louly about her drawing," said Louly's mother hopefully. She was always hopeful about Louly's drawing; she expected her to be a great artist. Mary Olive thought they might live to see Louly's name in the paper, — it would be just like Louly to get her name in the paper, — but *she* should have to earn the money.

CHAPTER III.

IT ALL DEPENDS ON THE BOY.

As she sat opposite Celia in the carriage, Louly resolved to tell Cousin Adelaide, as soon as she saw her, that they must have the five thousand dollars.

Around a bend in the river the road wound, and then the carriage turned in at an imposing granite gateway, and stopped before an ornate mansion, whose grounds sloped to the river.

Louly followed Celia up three long flights of polished stairs, and into a little tower room which seemed to be hung in space, the river below and the sky above. Even now, with the river frozen and the cold February sky, it was so filled with the sense of freedom and of nature's joy that its atmosphere was an inspiration; what it would be in spring's blue and brightness Louly could faintly imagine.

“It’s like being a bird!” she exclaimed.

“The room isn’t spoiled by fripperies, anyway,” said Celia with satisfaction. “Mamma keeps buying me elegant things, and I stuff them away in here,” opening a large closet into which satin draperies and cushions and a variety of costly adornments were carelessly thrown. In fact, the studio was empty of unnecessary furnishing. There was a water-color, unfinished, upon an easel, and pen and pencil drawings pinned upon the walls. Celia watched Louly with anxious scrutiny as she looked at the pictures.

“How well you know how,” said Louly slowly. She did not quite understand, herself, why she did not say bluntly, —

“They’re mechanical — there’s no life or sentiment in them; you *only* know how.” No one had ever thought Louly sympathetic; but certainly something in the wistful eagerness of the girl’s face had touched her, and softened the words on her lips.

“If you’re going to have lessons —” Celia hesitated a little, “you’ll find old Herr Seid-

erlich a delightful teacher, though he won't take you unless he really thinks you have talent. I have so many studies to hinder me," she added plaintively.

"I'm going to work — I don't think I ever have worked," said Louly reflectively. Either the other girl's eagerness, or the atmosphere of her bare little sky-steeped studio, had stirred Louly's languid impulses.

"Mamma will look forward to my coming out," pursued Celia. "But I don't care for society. I want to be an artist. I wish we might be poor right away. Mamma declares that we shall be; she thinks of nothing but money, money, money!"

Louly shook her head with much decision, for Louly.

"It's very unpleasant to be poor," she said. "Not because one cares so much for having things; but — but in Canterbury they used to look at each other because Mary Olive did all the work. I heard that they said that I kept my hands white — as if I cared about my hands! It's only that I *can't* scrub and

sweep and wash dishes." Louly's delicate thin lips quivered.

"Can you draw?" demanded Celia, scrutinizing her with drawn brows. "Because if you can, you can earn money, and that is just as well."

"I have sketched just because I liked to. Do you really think I could earn money?" Louly's languid tones were sharp with eagerness. "Mary Olive thinks I don't care, but it almost kills me to be only a burden!" There was a strangling sob in Louly's throat. Mary Olive would certainly have thought she was dreaming if she had been there to hear.

"It's a very misunderstanding world," said Celia with a puzzled frown. "When you're not just like other people they don't know what to make of you. I think there's a great deal of misunderstanding in this quarrel over grandma's estate. Mamma thinks now that the robbery was only a scheme of Uncle Cyrus's to throw suspicion upon Harold. Some one robbed the safe, and Harold had been in the counting-room, and was trusted more than

any one. Jeff Carter, a young man whom Uncle Cyrus had discharged for misconduct, is suspected. They can't see how the thief could have got away; for Ferrin, the watchman, shot at and wounded him so there was a pool of blood on the flagstones. Jeff Carter can't be found. Of course it was he; but just because Harold ran away at the same time mamma has got that idea into her head."

There was a sudden onslaught of small fists upon the door, and shrill voices loudly demanded admittance.

"Go away, Daidy! I don't want you now, Kyrle!" cried Celia impatiently. "Oh, it's mamma, too!" as the door opened to admit a delicate, worn woman, whose sallowness and wrinkles were painfully accented by her rose-colored morning gown, with its profusion of lace and ribbons.

"Celia, the worst that I feared is true!" she cried. "Jeff Carter has appeared, and proved that he had nothing to do with the robbery; and Cyrus Whitney has set a sheriff upon the track of my innocent boy!"

Mrs. Bearnse's voice broke suddenly, and she wept unrestrainedly in a lace handkerchief.

"Some one has been imposing upon you, mamma, and you're so excitable," said Celia with an unmoved countenance.

"He sent me a letter — that man sent me a letter about what he was obliged to do. The Pennock boy brought it; he's down-stairs now. Are you one of the Pennock girls?" turning suddenly to Louly. "Well, you'd better go back to Canterbury! I can't do anything for you. We shall all be in the poorhouse soon, and my poor boy in prison. And Cyrus will crush you under his feet. You'd better go back to Canterbury; tell your mother I say so. Cyrus had better attend to his own son; he's cherishing a viper that will sting him. There's where the plot originated to ruin my poor Harold. Brinckley planned it, and his father helped him to carry it out."

"Mamma! mamma!" interposed Celia. But the torrent of words flowed on. Louly heard it, as, slipping out at the door, she hurried softly down-stairs. Louly loved smoothness

and peace, and never meant to have her nerves jarred by painful scenes. Sam stood stolidly upon the Turkish rug in the hall.

“She told me to wait. I don’t know what I’m to wait for,” he said in an injured tone.

“You come home; she has plenty of servants,” said Louly, whose pride had been wounded by the advice to go back to Canterbury. “Sam, is Mr. Whitney so dreadful? Will he give you a place in the mill?” she demanded, as they passed through the great gateway.

Sam nodded grimly, apparently in assent to both inquiries. Louly looked at him with sudden solicitude. With all its ruggedness of feature, Sam’s face had a soft, boyish bloom; his strong chin had a dimple that his mother loved. An indefinable change, it seemed to Louly, had passed over his face.

“Sam, will it be so very hard?” she asked anxiously. “You look as if—as if you would never be a boy again!”

“A fellow can stand things—but it isn’t going to be much like fishing in Tumble Down Pool,” said Sam dryly.

These were the things that had befallen him at the mill — things which he could not bear to tell Louly just then.

Mr. Cyrus Whitney, a tall, spare man, with beetling brows that instantly reminded Sam of the jagged overhanging rock on Sheepscott Hill, had looked up impatiently from his desk as Sam was ushered into the counting-room.

“Another boy?” he said. “Oh, yes; to take Raffin’s place. Let Wilson attend to him. Why did you bring him here?”

“Oh, I remember! you’re the Pennock boy,” he said wearily; and Sam received the painful impression that all boys were superfluous, and that he was criminally so. “If you’re not afraid of work, and can do as you are told, you’ll get along; but understand, you’re not to expect any favors.”

Sam thought with self-contempt, and with a lump in his throat which threatened to choke him, of the visions with which he had beguiled his homesick heart on the way to the mill. In these, Mr. Whitney had told him that he remembered his father as a boy, and that he

looked like him; had called him a brave boy, and said that he should not lack friends; had taken him to drive in his carriage, and invited him to dinner; had even said, like Celia, "Don't mind Brinck!"

"Take him to Wilson, and let him tell him when to report for work," said Mr. Whitney's hard, dry voice to the clerk. And Sam's courage rose suddenly to the occasion, with the sense of being thrown upon himself, which, in one way or another, sooner or later, comes to every one of us. As he was leaving the counting-room a hysterical, dishevelled woman appeared, half dragging a reluctant and abashed young man. Sam heard Jeff Carter's name from one and another, and the woman explained volubly where her son had been on the night of the robbery.

There was a whispered consultation between Mr. Whitney and several other men, while the woman's hysterical assertions ran on in endless repetitions. Ferrin, the watchman, was summoned, and testified with great positiveness that the man had been shot in the leg,

and must have been badly injured. Sam heard Harold Bearnse's name now; and Mr. Whitney, whose brows looked more than ever like Sheepscott crag, said there was "no time to be lost." Sam had gone to Wilson, the overseer, then, and been absorbed for the time in his own affairs. Wilson was rough and jocose in a way that was very trying to a boy's self-esteem; it jarred the sense of heroism he had felt in being thrown upon himself. He was a number — not even a boy — when he left Wilson. As he passed the counting-room on his way out, some one called to him, and asked him if he did not live in the Shrady Cottage that was near Mrs. Bearnse's house; if so, he could take a letter to her. He waited for the letter, which Mr. Whitney was writing; and a newcomer, a man with a pair of pleasantly twinkling eyes above a large nose, which seemed to wear spectacles on its own account, looked curiously at him.

"So you're Abel Pennock's son?" he said kindly. "Well, everything depends on what kind of stuff there is in a boy."

Sam's heart thrilled with a little comfort. This was Mr. Alvin Whitney, he was sure, and even in this excitement they must have spoken of him. But it all depended on the boy; one was stern and the other kind, but they both threw him on himself.

Before he reached the outer door Brinck suddenly waylaid him. The boy's sallow face was very pale, and his small, deep-set eyes were dark with excitement.

"You know the old mill that is just below your house? Well, meet me there this afternoon at three o'clock. It's a very important matter, and I don't want you to forget it."

Sam scowled darkly. He might be only a number in the mill, but he wasn't going to take orders from this fellow, with his squeaky voice and his airs! Louly sympathized with him, and said she wouldn't; but Mary Olive, who felt the indignity more than either of them, thought he would better go.

"You see how it is, Sam; there are more boys than places," she said practically. "If you couldn't get a place I don't know what

we should do. That boy is an only son, and I think he has things all his own way. If you're poor you have to bear things."

"Then money means everything!" said Sam, with a queer thrill in his voice as he rose sullenly from the back doorsteps, where he had been sitting, irresolute, while the kitchen clock — the same old clock, with a red-cheeked lady painted upon it, that had ticked away the easy hours in the Canterbury kitchen — slipped its hour-hand steadily beyond the three black marks on its dial. Mary Olive's dissent died on her lips; homesickness, the dreary bareness of the little house, and the uncongenial, menial work before her, had embittered her heart all day. She had refused to go down town with her mother and Louly to buy a carpet for the parlor — her mother, who was childishly delighted with the prospect of a new carpet, and Louly, who seemed wholly absorbed in the determination to find an artistic pattern. Of what use would it be to tell Sam that money was not everything?

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE OLD MILL.

SAM took his sullen way over their own garden slope to the river, and walked out upon its frozen surface, to avoid the stubbly frozen ground, to the point where the city's life upon the river began in mills and warehouses and wharves. The old mill — once occupied by the firm of Whitney & Bearnse, which had been dissolved by Mr. Bearnse's death — stood nearest to the little cottage, towering above it, in fact, with only a few feet of intervening ground. It was a very large wooden building, from which the machinery had been removed, leaving a gaping rent here and there, and having something of the pathetic aspect of a strong man shaken by illness, and uncertain whether he is to be rehabilitated for the world's work, or whether his end is near. Sam tried the

great door in the rear, found it locked, and was turning away with a sigh of relief, when he heard a side door open, and went around into the court. Brinck's thin, eager face looked out, and Brinck's nervous hand beckoned imperiously.

"This is my door; my — my quarters are in this side," he said. He drew Sam inside the entry-way, and seated him on one of the stairs, which was not wide enough for two. "I — I can't be here much of the time, and I have to keep something here which is very valuable. I don't want this spoken of to any one; my affairs are private. You live near, and I don't altogether trust Cary, the watchman. If you should hear or see anything — anything unusual, you are to let me know. You understand? Don't speak of it to any one, but let me know at once."

"I sh'an't be here," said Sam. "I'm going to work in the mill Monday."

"But you can keep watch while you are here, and report to me at the mill. I'm there most of the time. I feel as if I ought to see

how things are going on." In the obscurity of the entry-way Sam permitted his lip to curl. If the Canterbury schoolmaster had this sixteen-year-old fellow, he would take him down a peg!

"That fellow isn't all there," he said to himself, indulging in forbidden slang, after they had parted, with mutual scowls by way of good-by; and he ground his heels fiercely into the ice of the river in vague reprisal for the wounds which his pride had received from Brinck's overbearing manner. "But I suppose he has us all under his thumb because we're poor." Sam repeated to himself, with added bitterness, what he had said to Mary Olive, "Money means everything!" And he added a vow which only the frozen river and far-off unheeding sky could hear, but which stamped itself upon the boy's strong will, "I'll have money — somehow!"

He repeated to Mary Olive the opinion of Brinck which he had murmured to himself when he parted from him, and Mary Olive forgot to reprove him for the slang; but she

thought he must do as Brinck wished about everything. Celia came again that night just after Mrs. Pennock and Louly had returned from their shopping, and while Louly was drawing for Mary Olive the very artistic pattern of the new carpet, which would not be sent home for several days. Celia declared that it was so gloomy at home that it was impossible to stay there.

“Uncle Cyrus wrote mamma that he was going to have Harold arrested for his own good, and that made mamma furious,” she said. “She quotes that sentence from the oratorio, ‘He will pursue us until he destroys us,’ about Uncle Cyrus, though she would say that I was profaning Scripture if I did it; and she has sent her diamonds down to the security vaults for fear Uncle Cyrus will get them. I really fear for mamma’s mind. It was cruel of Harold to run away: but of course he couldn’t foresee the robbery; and, if he could, he wouldn’t have imagined that anybody could have such a dreadful suspicion of him. Money does make so much trouble!” Mary Olive echoed Celia’s

sigh, while Sam, in his corner, wondered why a fellow like Harold Bearse should have trouble about money.

“Poor Harold needed more money than anybody I ever saw,” added Celia naïvely. It soon became evident that in spite of her family troubles Celia was still intent upon seeing Louly’s sketches; and this time Louly was gracious, and produced not only her sketch-book, but her portfolio, — an old school atlas, — filled with hasty bits of Canterbury scenery and the Canterbury flora, even to the mullein and thistles which embowered the old parsonage’s back doorsteps. Celia was unwontedly cold and constrained; she called attention to many defects, and when she praised it was but faintly.

“And yet I really wonder that you could do anything at all without training,” she said, after she had even smiled a little at a sketch of pasture bars, — it was Mrs. Tilly Sinclair’s pasture, — with a clematis vine climbing and winding itself over them. Louly shut the old atlas with a little bang, and there were tears

of vexation in her eyes. She knew that the sketches were crude; that she had not the genius that can dispense with training, if indeed any genius can afford to do that; but, like Sam, she was beginning to find the airs of these rich people intolerable. Celia went away in the same constrained mood, accompanied by Sam, who reluctantly obeyed his mother's behest that he should escort her home, as she had walked and it was now dark. They walked for half the way in silence, and then Celia suddenly turned.

“I must go back! I'm sorry, but you won't mind a longer walk? I must make amends to Louly. I am curious, you know, and I let it get the better of me. I was afraid I should if she could draw. She has lots of talent, and I—I haven't a spark. I'm mean inside, and I have to fight it—that's all. You needn't tell.”

“They're a pretty queer lot,” murmured Sam to himself as he trudged obediently back by Celia's side.

“I just came back to say that I want you

to show your sketches to old Herr Seiderlich," she said easily to Louly. "He'll be sure to want to give you lessons for anything you like to pay; he's crazy to get hold of a genius, and I believe you are one!"

"You — you didn't act as if you did!" flashed Louly, swallowing a sob.

"Never mind; that's the way I act sometimes," said Celia lightly. "There's the loveliest little room for a studio in the old mill, and I'm going to get mamma to fit it up for you; it will take up her mind, and do her good. It's skyey, and full of glorious lights, and away off from everybody. I'll come down to-morrow morning, and we'll go and see it. And see here!" Celia produced from her purse a newspaper clipping; "this was in the *Gazette* last week. Stillman & Weeks, the great paper manufacturers, offer a prize for the best design for a nursery wall-paper, a floral design. I suppose people are tired of Bluebeard and Jack and the Beanstalk and the Mother Goose pictures that have been in fashion so long. The prize is an art school

scholarship. I thought it might be just in your line."

"Oh, if I only could!" gasped Louly.

"I'm going to try," said Celia. "I don't want the scholarship; mamma wouldn't let me go, but people would know that one can draw. I know the conditions by heart; you can keep the cutting. It's almost worn out, I've taken it out to give or send to you so many times, and then" — Celia looked up quickly; but Louly's eager eyes showed no suspicion of the reason for her hesitation. "I'm a horrid girl," said Celia contritely. "I hope you'll try it. It's just in your line."

Mrs. Bearse came down with Celia the next morning, evidently aroused to a real interest in fitting up a studio for Louly in the old mill. She wept hysterically at intervals about her son, and said Brinck was a little viper that had always been trying to sting him; but she forgot her trouble for a while in considering the color in draperies which would best suit Louly's complexion, and Louly quite forgave her for having advised their return

to Canterbury. Sam followed the party to the old mill. He remarked gruffly on the way that it would be lonesome for a girl, and there were rats and things, but subsided, feeling that he had done all that could be expected, when his objection was met by Mrs. Bearse's assurance that the presence of the watchman and the mill's proximity to the cottage made it a perfectly safe and proper place for a studio, and by Louly's prompt declaration that she was never lonesome or afraid.

The little room which was to become Louly's studio was higher than Celia's; and, though it did not overhang the river, it had much the same effect of being suspended between river and sky, so near was the mill built to the water's edge. The little carpenter work that was necessary was to be done at once, and the simple furnishings provided, and Louly's cup ran over.

"We may see your sister a great artist," Mrs. Bearse said to Mary Olive. Louly's fair face clouded when Mary Olive said bluntly that she hoped she would "earn some money."

“You must come up and see the children to-morrow, and begin your duties as governess as soon as possible,” Mrs. Bearnse returned. That meant that she must expect to earn the money, thought Mary Olive; and such sympathy as she had been able to feel in Louly’s happiness was spoiled.

Sam wandered around through the main building to the side wing where Brinck had told him his room was located. It was a long journey, and he opened several closed doors, and passed through a long tunnel-like entry into which no light could reach. Near the side staircase where Brinck had sat, a sound suddenly stopped him—a sound like a long-drawn sigh, which seemed to come from behind a closed door near him. The wind through some crevice, thought Sam; but there was no wind and no crevice. Suddenly from the same direction came a low, deep groan. Sam was a sturdy, sensible New England boy, with no belief in ghosts, and with an imagination unperverted by the sensational mysteries of vulgar fiction, but for a moment his

heart stood still. Was Brinckley there in distress? taken suddenly ill or hurt? he thought, seeking the most reasonable solution of the mystery. He would investigate. But with his hand on the door, and Brinckley's name on his lips, he heard a shout from the girls; they were calling to him on the other side of that dark tunnel, and he hurried to meet them.

“How did you dare to go through there?” demanded Celia. “How white you are! Did you see or hear the rats and things?”

CHAPTER V.

UP-HILL WORK.

SAM found himself needed at home for innumerable small tasks and errands, which he performed with that groan ringing in his ears, and his mind confused with the doubt whether he ought to go in search of Brinckley, or arouse the neighborhood, or hold his peace and ignore the mystery as no affair of his. He found it impossible to do the latter, pursued as he was by the thought that some one might be suffering pain which he could relieve, and early in the afternoon he was again at the great door in the rear of the mill. The door was locked; and, as he now remembered, Mrs. Bearse had sent the key to the carpenter who was to transform the little room in the tall wing for a studio for Louly.

Sam went around to the front and the side

doors, but they were all fastened. Then he returned to the little side door, which was directly under the room from whence the mysterious sound had proceeded, and knocked boldly and insistently. An iron shutter swung slowly aside from a window on the ground floor near the door, and an old Irishman thrust out a rubicund face, framed in grizzled hair and beard.

"Can't ye read 'No Admittance' at all, at all, or haven't ye eyes in your head?" he demanded.

"When I was in this building with Mrs. Bearse this forenoon, I heard a very strange noise, and I wish to have it explained," said Sam, with an unconscious adoption of Brinck's grandest air.

"A n'ise, is it? There's a dale iv rats," answered the old watchman in a somewhat subdued tone.

"There was some one in distress up in a room on the third floor," persisted Sam.

"Disthress, is it? An' are ye afther takin' a conthract to attind to all the disthress in the

world? It's a foine toime ye'll be havin'," said the old man with scornful condescension. There was evidently a secret which old Cary meant to keep.

"I shall be obliged to — to report the matter," said Sam, turning away in dire perplexity.

"Take the advice iv an ould felly, and kape a qui't tongue in your head! If ye report to Masther Brinckley, ye'll have your throuble for your pains, barrin' ye'll make him onaisy that has onaisiness enough already; if ye report to Misther Whitney himself ye'll do more mischief than we'll anny iv us live to see the end iv! D'ye moind this now — ye'll niver get hurted moindin' your own business, and ye'll niver learn to do it younger!"

Sam turned away, puzzled by the old man's mingling of jocularly and evident anxiety.

"Whisht now!" called the watchman in a cautious tone. "If it's throe what the carpenter's b'y is afther tellin' me, that some girl is go'n' to have a place fixed up aloft to take fortygraphs, or some such divarsion, ye just tell her that the place is black wid rats be-

yant the dark corridor! I'm afther sindin' word to Masther Brinckley, and maybe he can put a shtop to the foolishness; but if she comes ye tell her about the rats — how they squales and groans like, and how there do be mice that jumps out at ye, and runs down your back!"

It was evident that the old man was in Brinckley's confidence, and Sam began to feel that he was meddling unwarrantably in other people's affairs; but he doubted whether the fear of rats and mice would keep him on the other side of that dark corridor. He was very busy setting things to rights in the cottage the next day, but Mary Olive said his wits were wool-gathering. When she left him to go to Mrs. Bearse, she remarked sarcastically, and a little crossly, that she "didn't think it would look too set if the figures on the sitting-room paper all ran the same way." Sam had his mother's checked apron tied around his neck, and, with a pail of flour paste, was patching up rents in the sitting-room paper. Louly was up in her little room

under the eaves with her sketches of the Canterbury flora scattered around her. Mary Olive had said impatiently that she didn't see what good it was going to do to keep drawing those weeds over and over, for Louly had made Sam promise "solemnly" that he would not tell Mary Olive about the prize. She "wanted to surprise her when she got it," she said. Sam had shaken his head doubtfully; he felt that he knew more of the world than Louly did, since the experience which made him a number in Whitney's mill. "The many fail, the one succeeds," was in Sam's mind; but he could not bear to say it.

Meanwhile Mary Olive was walking faint-heartedly along the frozen river towards the mass of highly ornamented towers and gables at the river's bend. She was disheartened with overwork, and with the vexing problem of furnishing a house comfortably when one scarcely dared to spend a dollar, and also a little with the sense of being outside the pleasant artistic interests that were growing up around Louly. The pleasure was for

Louly, the drudgery for her; and yet Louly was the older. Which was true — that Louly couldn't or wouldn't do her share? It was the old problem, over which Mary Olive's brows had often ached in vain. Presently the crisp air and sunlight brought a little exhilaration and more wholesome thoughts, and Mary Olive began to run and slide on the ice. Suddenly there swooped down upon her a small figure, tangled its skates up in her skirts, and brought her down in a heap upon the ice.

“Can't you look out when you see a fellow coming?” demanded a small, indignant voice, while Mary Olive was fully aware that the onslaught was premeditated.

“If you're Miss Pennock, you better go back. I've got creepy things that I put down teachers' backs. Miss Tompkins had nervous prostration. I gave it to her,” proudly.

With a desperate sense that she must be equal to the occasion, Mary Olive uttered some of the dignified but beguiling pleasantries with which she had been wont to influence her

Canterbury pupils. The keen-eyed knickerbockered person replied in wholly unintelligible slang, and was off, making so directly for a large air-hole that Mary Olive shut her eyes. A small girl, with the same aggressive air, was seated upon the ice waiting for Mary Olive to come up.

“I don’t want to be told stories. I hate stories!” she cried shrilly. “And I sha’n’t be ashamed if I can’t write words when I grow up; but if you’ll save me your plum-cake at luncheon I won’t thump you.”

The “peaceful wiles” which beguiled the well-mannered Canterbury children would clearly be unavailing here.

A third child, an older girl, fat and frankly plain, with freckles and a turned-up nose like Celia’s, bore down upon Mary Olive. She seized her arm, and leaned her heavy weight upon it affectionately.

“I know I shall like you, and I’m going to be good and learn even ’rithmetic,” she declared earnestly, and Mary Olive’s soul felt soothed from its hurts. “Fractions and all,”

she continued with a little hug; "so I can get married soon like Dicky Prime's sister, and have a white silk trail and tall flowers in my hair."

With a joyous little skip of expectancy this one of Mary Olive's new pupils switched an imaginary train over the ice towards Kyrle and the air-hole.

When she reached the house Celia came to meet her, looking sunny and serene.

"The children are running wild," she said, "and mamma is in such a state! I thought she would better not see you, but she insists. It was in the newspaper this morning that Harold was suspected of the robbery, and that he had been traced to Canada!" Celia lowered her voice as she led the way up the polished oaken staircase. "I begin to be afraid it was Harold! He never seemed to care whether anything was right or wrong if he only got what he wanted, poor Harold! When people get to needing so much money it seems to make them perfectly reckless. Mamma wants to start for Canada at once, but I've

persuaded her to wait until she finds out just where Harold is. Perhaps you can get her to take a little interest in the children."

Mrs. Bearse walked the floor of her room, tearful and dishevelled, and poured out a torrent of invective against Mr. Cyrus Whitney, and of pity for "her poor, slandered, and hunted boy." It was only when Mary Olive arose to take her leave, finding it quite useless to stay, that her mind could be brought to dwell for a moment on the matter for which Mary Olive had been summoned.

"They're dear things; you won't have any trouble with them, that is, if you have the least force or tact. Miss Tompkins hadn't, and they never seemed to take to her. It's only a matter of gently guiding their sweet little impulses." And the children's mother wept afresh, apparently in sympathy.

You must begin Monday, and I shall expect you to stay all day. I paid Miss Tompkins twenty-five dollars a month and her board. I suppose I must say about thirty-five for you because you won't board here."

Mary Olive had cherished vague hopes of a larger salary, Mrs. Bearse had wished to show such lavish generosity in the fitting up of Louly's studio; she had not yet learned that with people of lightly generous impulses, giving is apt to be more liberal than paying.

"They're perfectly dreadful children, you know," said Celia calmly, as she closed the door of her mother's room. "All you can do with them is what poor Tompkins did, — keep them from breaking their necks, and from stabbing you with bonnet-pins. You see, if there's any trouble, mamma will take their part."

Mary Olive went home with her courage so collapsed that she poured out her woes upon Sam, the very thing she had resolved not to do. Sam and Mary Olive were beginning to understand each other, and Sam was feeling within him a chivalrous desire to stand between his sisters and the world; he wasn't going to be the man of the family for nothing! The patches on the hall paper — Sam was working in the hall now — were wrinkled

and askew. To this day Mary Olive cannot see them without remembering that day when, by her weakness, she added to the bitterness in Sam's boyish heart, and to the temptation which was lying in wait for him. But she could not bear to dim her mother's childlike hopefulness, which was in the ascendency in spite of fatigue and privation; and as for Louly — Louly would not understand; she was drawing those weeds.

“Never mind, Mary Olive, I'll have money somehow!” said Sam in his gruffest voice, and with his heaviest scowl.

Meanwhile Mary Olive's good angel — whose nose turned up, and who was obliged to struggle with an inclination to envy — had worn her thinking-cap for a few moments, and then returned to her mother's room.

“Mamma, what the children need is the kindergarten method. Why don't you send Mary Olive to Miss Fletcher's afternoon class to learn it? It would be a great thing for her because it's all the fashion, and the children would develop so rapidly.”

“Why, of course, of course! I meant to have a kindergartner, and then I forgot,” said mamma eagerly. “It will be just the thing for the dear things; and I’ll pay her tuition.”

“I think she will like to be independent; she can pay you afterwards,” said Celia.

“She’s a bright girl, and a worker,” said the good angel to herself. “She may get to be Miss Fletcher’s assistant, and the children can go there to school; it would be much better for them.”

So, even while Mary Olive was bewailing, there was a little rift in her clouded sky. She heard of it with wondering gratitude when she went, schooled to stern endurance, to her duties Monday morning; she thought that perhaps she had not quite understood that girl who seemed to take things so lightly. The kindergarten work was congenial, and opened a vista of new hopes and interests. It would not perhaps prove a royal road to the civilization of those spoiled children, but it was a novelty, and it interested them; and except when the bitterness which she had long har-

bored held sway,—it is so easy to receive such a guest, so difficult to drive it out!—Mary Olive was of good courage.

For Sam there seemed to be no good angel with a promise of better things. He was assistant to the porters, and the servant of the firemen. He packed and handled heavy cases, he wheeled barrows, he swept floors and lighted fires, and ran of errands for every one in the establishment. He had planned to go to the evening high school, but his round of drudgery left him far too weary of mind and body. Brinck was not at the mill. Sam heard that he was ill; he was subject to acute attacks, the result of his spinal disorder.

Life went well, apparently, with Louly. She had not disdained the fripperies which Mrs. Bearse's lavish generosity had provided for her studio. She had paid no heed to Mary Olive's suggestions that some of the exquisite hangings and dainty ornaments would relieve the dreary bareness of the cottage, in whose furnishing utility was the first consideration. The little bower of luxury seemed

queerly incongruous in the deserted old mill, which in its heyday had been devoted to stern utility. Celia disapproved of it as not having a work-day air, while it vaguely irritated Mary Olive to see with what a careless grace Louly adapted herself to her luxurious surroundings. Sketches of those Canterbury weeds were strewn over everything; she was always working away at those weeds.

It was two or three weeks after the studio was finished and furnished that Sam paid his first visit there. He went grimy from the mill, having got away earlier than usual on Saturday afternoon.

There was one good thing about Louly,— she never said that a fellow wasn't clean, or ought to wipe his boots; and she was glad to see him, and invited him to sit down on her little yellow satin ottoman. She said, with a little quiver of her thin, finely curved lips, that she was afraid that she was the only one who was having good times, and, with a long-drawn breath, "what if she shouldn't get the prize after all?" Sam said, in his

grimmiest tone, that one didn't always get the prize in this world.

"Somebody gets it!" said Louly eagerly; and she joyfully repeated the compliments which Herr Seiderlich had paid her.

"But I know what hard times you are all having, and it worries me," she continued. "And Mary Olive does the housework mornings and nights, and she is getting worn out with those dreadful children, and she has no time to make anything to wear, and Mary Olive loves pretty clothes, and—don't tell, Sam, for I want to surprise her, I am going to dye her brown cashmere dress for her, and trim it with the ribbon off my old grenadine."

Sam didn't know much about girls' fixings, but he grunted approval of Louly's undertaking, which she seemed to regard as a great one; dyeing a dress certainly seemed very unusual practical activity for Louly. "I don't feel satisfied with my design. I shall make it over a great many times yet; but it will take time to do that," Louly said.

“Here is where I keep the best sketch I’ve done yet,” she added. “Isn’t it a queer little cubby-hole? It was here already, where some part of the machinery came out, and it’s like a secret drawer; no one could ever find it. But Sam! I wish Mrs. Bearse wouldn’t do such queer things; see this.”

CHAPTER VI.

BEHIND THE DOOR.

LOULY drew out of her "cubby-hole" a tin padlocked box. "She came here yesterday, in such a state of mind, to hide this box away; she said she had just found five thousand dollars, in government bonds, among her mother's things, and she was determined that Cyrus Whitney shouldn't get them; she never meant to let the executor of her mother's estate know anything about them. It doesn't seem quite right, does it? That isn't anything to me, of course, but I don't like to have such things here; it makes me feel responsible. I told her I might run away with them, and she said she would rather I would than that Cyrus Whitney should have them. She said that five thousand dollars rightfully belonged to us; for her mother meant us to have it.

I don't see why he should contest his step-mother's will; but it seems that she had all his father's property, and there was an understanding that his share should come to him when she died. O Sam, if we only had that five thousand dollars! I think I realize now better than I could in Canterbury what it might mean to us."

Sam went out abruptly; he couldn't trust himself to speak of that money that might have been theirs. Instead of going directly out of the building, he went through the dark corridor, and stood listening near the door of the room from whence the mysterious sounds had proceeded. He had almost come to the conclusion that Brinck had been taken ill there, and that the stupid old watchman had made a mystery of the matter only to tease him, or perhaps that Brinckley, who was "cranky," as the mill-boys said, was sensitive about having any one hear his signs of distress. Nevertheless, he stood and listened; and presently he heard a sound as of some one turning heavily on a bed, with a smoth-

ered sigh. Sam coughed as a sign that he was there if he were wanted.

“Who are you?” called a cautious voice, after a moment’s hesitation.

“A friend,” responded Sam firmly, in soldierly fashion, but with his heart beating like a trip-hammer.

“If you’re a friend,” — the voice that was tremulous with weakness or anxiety broke suddenly, — “who are you?” it added hoarsely. Sam hesitated for a moment, and then decided that it was more manly for a fellow to tell his name.

“I’m Sam Pennock, from Canterbury,” he said.

“Oh, I know — you’re one of those country cousins. You work in Whitney’s mill, don’t you? and I suppose you’re sold to him body and soul.” The tone was hard and bitter now.

“I don’t think I could be sold,” said Sam slowly.

“Wait till you’re tried! Didn’t you ever hear that every man has his price?” said

the voice recklessly. "But I've got to trust you—I can't die here like a rat in a hole! Then I shall know whether you're sold or not. Or perhaps you've some decent feeling about you, and will burst open that door and help me to crawl downstairs. I'll make it worth your while!" The voice was a whisper hoarse with eagerness. "Isn't it enough for you to know that I am a prisoner here? and that I'll give you my word of honor (a slight falter here) that no harm will come of your letting me out? I—I've suffered a lot here!" It was a boyish voice, and it touched Sam's boy heart.

"I wish I could," he said; "but you see I don't know that I have any right."

There was a sound as if the prisoner had fallen back despairingly. He raised himself again suddenly.

"Wouldn't money give you any right?" he whispered eagerly. "But I don't suppose a country gawk like you knows the value of money." Sam drew a long breath; he thought he did know the value of money.

“I couldn’t let you out for that,” he said gruffly. “I don’t know what you may have done, or what you might do.” There was silence for the space of several minutes.

“I am awfully sorry for you,” said Sam, who was facing a situation of which he did not feel himself to be master; “if you would tell me who shut you up here, and what it’s for—you see, a fellow can’t burst other people’s doors open, and let out he doesn’t know whom.”

“You are not as fond of taking responsibilities as my Pooh-Bah of a cousin Brinckley, are you? He’s always talking about his responsibilities. Now you want to know who I am, do you? I’m Harold Bearnse, the bold burglar of whom all the town is talking. I’ve been tracked to Canada; that’s the latest news I’ve seen in the papers about myself.”

“How—how did you get here?” stammered Sam.

“Brinck. It was rather good of him, I’ll give the—the enemy of mankind his due. (I suppose you didn’t become accustomed to

plain language in the green fields of Canterbury; so I'll try not to use it.) That confounded watchman let his bullets fly helter-skelter in the dark, and shot me in the leg. (You see I pass lightly over the robbery. I suppose you think you couldn't steal; wait until you want money as badly as I did — money that ought to belong to you, and see.) That watchman with his masterly activity telephoned to the old man and raised Brinck first; he sleeps with one eye on the mill anyway, because the doctor told him his father was likely to have softening of the brain; that's a secret, but I'm not keeping secrets just now. I managed to climb over that fence behind the great pile of lumber. Brinck was prowling round with a lantern in search of the burglar, — he'd like to meet a burglar single-handed any time, and trust to his reasoning powers to overthrow him, — and he stumbled upon me. He had to stop awhile to think of his responsibilities; but he decided not to give me up to the officers. He helped me over here, tore up his shirt first to bandage my

leg. I don't know how we ever got here; the strength was pretty well gone out of his poor little crooked carcass, and I was in a dead faint when old Cary brought me up-stairs. He sleeps here, and Brinck roused him. I can't buy him over — but then Brinck has more money."

"And — and he keeps you here?" asked Sam, for the voice had ceased as if its owner were exhausted.

"He's trying to reconcile things with his reason and conscience, and it takes time," said Harold, evidently finding a little solace for his woes in being grimly sarcastic. "He got a doctor for me in the first of it, — a student, I think, who wanted a chance to experiment, or else he had his price, for he didn't ask any questions, — and he keeps me on all the luxuries of the season; Cary gets them somewhere, and papers and magazines and books that I never look at — don't care for anything but the sporting news myself; they never could make a mollycoddle of me. Think of a shaver like that Brinck having money

to do anything he likes with, and a fellow like me being kept so short that he's forced to make a common thief of himself — 'twasn't that though, you know, for Cyrus Whitney is robbing us. And what I've suffered in this place! I'm nothing but a skeleton."

"Is he going to send you to — to prison?" asked Sam, with a thrill of pity in his voice.

"N — no — that is, how can any one tell what his little drivelling conscience will lead him to do?" (Harold's quick ear had detected the pity, and that had modified his answer.) "He made me give up the money — that was when I thought I was going to die; I wouldn't do it now. But," quickly, "you needn't think I can't pay you if you'll help me to get away. I have money; my mother and Uncle Alvin keep hold of it till I'm of age, but they'll be glad enough to pay for being saved from disgrace. Brinck would let me go, so he says, only he is afraid that I will run into evil courses; the little canting rascal! When his spine got that curve a parson was spoiled. There's no make believe

about him, you know. I suppose he has worried himself sick trying to decide whether to let me go or not; he'd be only too thankful to anybody who would let me out!" There was silence for a moment after Harold's eager voice ceased.

CHAPTER VII.

SAM IS PUZZLED.

“YOU’D better make up your mind pretty quick. Cary’s never off the scent for long,” suggested Harold.

Sam was drawing one foot absently along the floor, and staring at the hand painted upon the little tin sign at the head of the stairs — “Exit to Shradý Court” — as if it were the finger of fate.

“You’ll only have to burst the door in, — it’s an old lock anyway, — and help me downstairs. I can crawl home on the ice,” pleaded Harold.

“A fellow can’t — can’t always tell what to do,” burst out Sam.

“I suppose you’re afraid. I’ve found out now whether you’re sold to Whitney,” cried Harold tauntingly.

“It isn’t that,” answered Sam slowly. “If I knew what was right” —

“Oh, you’re one of the canters too, are you?” sneered Harold. “Well, go home and take to your bed fussing over the right and wrong of it, like Brinck; and I’ll get desperate, as I came near doing yesterday, and strip the bandage off my leg, and bleed to death!”

Sam went slowly down-stairs, feeling as if the agony of disappointment that he had left behind him were clutching at his heart.

“If a fellow could only have plain sailing!” he muttered to himself.

The outer door at the foot of the stairs was locked as well as bolted, and the key had been taken away.

“Brinck didn’t mean to have him get away,” Sam said to himself, as he retraced his steps — softly, not to arouse false hopes — through the dark corridor to the main staircase.

Harold was a criminal against the law. How could he dare to release him? He was a poor, wounded fellow, who had restored the stolen

money, who perhaps had been wronged by those overbearing Whitneys — did he not know well how overbearing they were? How could he leave him there to suffer? The problem made Sam's slow brain dizzy.

The Misses Pennock were bidden to an ice *fête* on the other side of the river, or on that portion of it which adjoined the residence of one of the rich manufacturers, almost opposite the little cottage. The invitations were dainty, with a daintiness quite unknown to Canterbury, and in the most correct form. There was one for the little mother, and one for "Mr. Samuel Pennock," which brought a sheepish grin to Sam's face, and then a scowl because he had grinned. They would never know that the last invitation had cost much forcible argument, because the sender did think "one ought to draw the line at a mill-boy, no matter whose relative he might be."

Mary Olive had heard at her kindergarten class what a very exclusive affair the ice *fête* was to be, and had not cherished the least ex-

pectation of being invited. "It was Celia," she said, with a little mistiness in her delighted eyes; for Mary Olive was beginning to recognize her good angel.

It was not that they cared so much to go to the *fête*; the little mother said it was quite too soon after their bereavement for them to participate in the gayety (Canterbury had its conventionalities, which it called "proper feeling"); but it was good to feel that in this strange place there were sociable hands stretched out to them, that they were not to be shut out of good times. There were bonfires along the river-bank; the rope that enclosed a great expanse of ice was hung with Japanese lanterns; and, wafted across the river, came the enticing strains of a band. The little mother, who had a childish delight in brightness and gayety, said faintly, at length, that she thought they might go and look on for a little while. Sam would have preferred to stay at home. He said that to go to a party, even in Canterbury, made him feel as if he had too many legs and arms; but the man of the fam-

ily must make social as well as material sacrifices, and Sam offered his arm manfully to his mother.

Louly seemed wild with eagerness to go; she talked a great deal about what she was to wear; but that was like Louly. What was not like Louly was to disappear just in the midst of a delightfully social time, when Celia had introduced almost all the young people she knew to them, and some skates were being provided for Mary Olive and Louly, who had left their old ones in Canterbury. There was a chorus of wondering exclamations until a little daughter of the house suggested that she had probably gone with Gladys, an older daughter, to look at her sketches. Gladys had disappeared also, and they had been talking about the prize contest for which Gladys had also drawn a design. Just now drawing was sufficiently interesting to Louly to induce her to forego the delight of skating, so this explanation of her absence seemed probable. When nearly an hour afterward, Gladys appeared, having been to the house with a party

that preferred dancing in the house to skating, of which party Louly was not one, the matter assumed a different aspect. It was Sam who discovered this first, while his mother was talking with a group of matrons, and Mary Olive had skated to the far end of the enclosure; and Sam instantly set out across the river homewards. Before Louly was missed he had seen a little solitary figure flitting over the ice, and wondered vaguely who it could be. Louly might have been ill he thought—though it would be like Louly to let people know if she were ill. He found Louly sitting, breathless and panting, on the last of the little rickety steps that led from their garden to the river. She was resting her feet on an elaborate, swan-shaped, fur-lined sled.

“Carry it back, will you, Sam?” she gasped, giving the sled a little push towards him. “It belongs to that tall Howard boy in the Russian costume. I—I took it. If I had asked for it he would have wanted to come with me, or there would have been a great bother of questions. I had to come. I—I didn’t

feel quite right. And, Sam, I'm in great pain—in my wrist. I'm afraid I've sprained it."

"How did you do it?" demanded Sam, feeling the injured member and finding it already swollen.

"I—I—the sled was heavy, and—and it sort of jerked." This was lame, but then Louly's statements were apt to be a little lame and inconsequent.

"What did you take the sled for?" demanded Sam.

"I could coast across—and it was so pretty." Even this was not unlike Louly.

"You must have coasted a good deal to get so out of breath," pursued matter-of-fact Sam. "And you couldn't have been so very sick, or you wouldn't have felt like it."

"I feel better," Louly drew a long breath, "in spite of my wrist. I went away up the river, and coasted down."

"The sled isn't intended for that; I don't see how you could sit in it and make it go," insisted Sam.

“I sat on the side and pushed with my foot,” said Louly impatiently. “Sam,” tremulously, “that’s my right wrist. I can’t draw another design, and there’s only a week now! I was just ready to do a perfect one — still, the last one is pretty good. There are dandelion elves; the puffy seed-balls are the heads, and they have such queer long-stem bodies; and poppy ladies, and thistle grenadiers in a stiff row; there are so many queer figures to pick out that I’m sure children would go wild over such a nursery paper.”

“It’s a great pity to have gone and hurt your wrist,” said Sam discouragingly.

“Perhaps I shouldn’t have improved upon it. I’m pretty well satisfied,” said Louly. “Anyway I couldn’t help it.”

They sat in silence for a few moments, Sam feeling that life was offering quite too many problems to his slow brain, and that he might as well give up trying to guess what Louly had been “up to.” The bonfires made the whole expanse of ice between the two shores dazzlingly bright, and turned a great

yellow moon wanly white. In an interval between the band's rollicking tunes, a dull booming sound came to their ears.

"That's a big crack in the ice," said Sam, and thought of the time when Aaron Bridge was drowned in the Canterbury millpond.

"It isn't dangerous, is it?" asked Louly.

"I don't think so," said Sam. "But it's weakening, and all those fires and that crowd have an effect. It's awfully thick ice; it's been such a cold winter—and look at the snow on those hills! If there should come a sudden thaw now! They say it's raining up at Quinnebaug. Once, a good while ago, all the wharves and warehouses along here were carried away in a freshet. When they rebuilt them they made the wharves stronger, and set the warehouses farther back."

"If I hadn't dyed Mary Olive's dress this afternoon I couldn't have done it," said Louly, who found her sprained wrist more engrossing than thaws and freshets. "Sam, don't you tell Mary Olive yet," she added eagerly, "for I'm afraid it's streaked; she's depending upon it

for a best dress, and I'm afraid it's streaked!"

There was a sob in Louly's voice.

"How silly girls are! always thinking of clothes," reflected Sam.

"You'd better come into the house and let me put some arnica on your wrist. I don't see how you sprained it," he said.

"We can't get in; Mary Olive has the key in her pocket. I—I tried to get in at the window, and that hurt my wrist."

Here was another explanation! Sam's scowl grew heavy as he looked at her. But the fires were burning lower, and a cloud had drifted over the moon, and Louly was unconscious of the scowl. She was standing now, looking up at the old mill, gaunt and black in the waning, lurid light.

"The old mill is rather too near the river if there should be a freshet, isn't it?" she said half-absently. "I think mother and Mary Olive are coming. I hear voices. Do carry the sled back, Sam; that Howard boy will be sure to want it. Sam, don't tell Mary Olive about the dress, for I'm really afraid it's

streaked." Louly suddenly put her handkerchief to her eyes and began to sob and weep.

The brown cashmere *had* dyed streaked! Mary Olive espied it hanging in the woodshed early the next morning, although Louly had tried to hide it behind the tall clothes-horse hung with the ironing-blanket. Mary Olive shut her lips tightly; but they would open to say that she "never saw such a looking thing," and she "should think Louly might have known better than to touch it." Then she kissed Louly contritely, and said it was very good of her, and she could dip it again, and perhaps it wouldn't be streaked. Sam whistled shrilly, and went off pondering upon the silliness of girls.

But he had more important matters to reflect upon. The Quinnebaug rainstorm had come down the river, and there were already running brooks in the Milbury streets, and people were prophesying that the ice would go out in a few days. It was a gala day in Milbury when the ice went out; but once in a while the river "got on the rampage" as

Dan Philibeg, one of the workmen at Whitney's mill, said. Now a freshet was feared up at Quinnebaug, and that might mean danger for Milbury. Sam listened anxiously; he knew very little about freshets. In Canterbury there was only Tumble Down Brook to "get on the rampage;" and the worst damage that ever did was to flood Miss Fify Bridge's cellar, causing her to obtain sufficient damages from the town to buy an accordion, and have her photographs taken.

Dan Philibeg shook his head, and prophesied that people who lived on the river would be taking to their roofs before many days. Did they remember the time when the Quinnebaug Millerite meeting-house came plunging down the river with the bell ringing in the belfry, and a crowing rooster perched upon the ridge-pole? And below Milbury — ah, there were things in the river to make one shut one's eyes.

But every one knew that Dan was a croaker; they laughed at him in the mill. Before he went home Sam wrote a note to Brinck on a

piece of wrapping-paper with a stubb of a pencil, but the words were strong. It was cruel to keep Harold imprisoned in the old mill; it might be dangerous. He should feel it to be his duty to inform the proper authorities. He carried the note to Mr. Whitney's door. His anxiety had increased so that he boldly asked to see Brinckley — spoken words were stronger than written ones. But the servant said he was not well enough to see any one at night. Sam said he would come in the morning, and then turned back and left the note — written words were stronger than spoken ones that came too late.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN EVENTFUL NIGHT.

THE sun shone brightly the next morning, and Sam felt as if his fears had been needless. Two days passed, with no answer from Brinck. On the third day it was warm and misty and drizzling; it was reported that it was still raining at Quinnebaug. People came to the river to see the ice go out, but they watched in vain.

In the evening Sam went out and looked anxiously up the river; there was a trickling of water, it seemed to come from every direction, and occasionally that dull booming sound that meant a fissure in the ice. Sam wandered out into the street to see if he could discover any signs of anxiety. Everything was as usual, except that Toby Wing, the lame cobbler, had hauled an old mud-

scow from the flats and was fastening it to his back porch; but Toby was half-brother to Dan Philibeg, and known to have, like him, an anxious mind.

There was a service in the little mission chapel that was set down among the warehouses and workmen's houses; and Sam leaned against the fence for a while, and listened to the music, and then went quietly home and to bed. Sam dreamed that Miss Fify Bridge had turned into one of Louly's thistle grenadiers, and was bearing down upon his bed in Toby Wing's mud-scow, and she said that the five thousand dollars which should have been theirs had been spent by the Canterbury selectmen in damming Tumble Down Brook. Suddenly the mud-scow struck the bed with a great crash, and Sam jumped up. He dressed himself as quickly as possible, hearing a roaring and crashing and a confusion of voices outside. The moon had struggled through the mist; and under it the river seemed full of great white, leaping, struggling monsters; and the river was everywhere. Sam

walked into it only a few feet from his own door. The old mill seemed to have been carried away, and to stand in the midst of the river, heaped around with plunging ice-blocks.

As his eyes became accustomed to the faint light, Sam saw other things besides the glittering white monsters in the river; there were huge logs and barrels and hencoops and boxes; a woodshed came down intact with what looked like a man clinging to the roof. Sam heard some one say that a dam at the falls just below Quinnebaug had given way. He made his way with great difficulty over the piled-up ice-blocks to the old mill. He slipped and fell headlong more than once, and was drenched to his neck in water.

Up to the very top of the great door in the rear the waves were washing; but at the side there seemed to be as yet only ice-blocks, over which he might climb. It was a long and laborious journey — that short space between the cottage and the old mill; his muscles, toughened by hard work and harder sports,

were cramped and aching, and his hands torn and bleeding. The side door was open, and into the entry way and upon the stairs the ice-blocks were hurled. At the head of the stairs a voice that sounded querulous and feeble was calling, "Cary! Cary!" In his strong arms Sam raised a small prostrate figure from the stairs.

"Put me down instantly!" said Brinck's thin, imperious voice. "Is it you, Sam Pennock?" There was an unmistakable thrill of relief in the voice now. "Rouse Cary, can't you? He is in there — Harold Bearse! It's not your affair, you know! but they gave me your note to-day; they thought I was too ill for letters before. I didn't know it was dangerous; but to-night I heard a man under my window say the flood was coming, and I got away. Where are you going?"

"We can't wait for Cary, you know," said Sam.

"There's a lantern and matches at the foot of the stairs. Cary keeps them there. I couldn't climb over the ice; you get it — quick!"

Sam had found the lantern almost before Brinck had done speaking. Brinck had a key to the little room, and he opened the door, while Sam held the lantern so that its light pierced every nook and corner. The room was empty!

“He’s got away,” gasped Brinck; “but the door was locked—and the outer door; I unlocked that” —

Sam had gone with the lantern; and Brinck stood alone in the darkness, calling wildly for Cary. Around through the dark corridor rushed Sam; the building seemed trembling to its foundations with the rush of mighty waters. Sam felt that at any moment it might collapse; Brinck was there helpless and alone, and yet there was something in Louly’s studio in that tin box in the “cubby-hole” that he meant to have! Was it of that he had thought all the time more than of Harold Bearse? He had meant to save Harold first, no one could say that he had not; but—was it Mary Olive who had said that money meant everything? He had found that it was true

in humiliations and miseries; in the hopeless shutting out of all chances, he had found it true!

It was one of the crises of life when the real self is dominant. Sam burst open the door of Louly's studio; the lantern threw a wan and ghostly light on all the pretty fripperies, as Sam trampled upon and ruthlessly overturned them in his haste. The floor seemed to reel under his feet; this wing would go first—and soon. He snatched the little tin box from its hiding-place, and thrust it into his pocket. It would have gone down in the flood; the bonds would have been lost; he might as well have them! Mrs. Bearse had said she would rather Louly would have them than Cyrus Whitney. There was just five thousand dollars; it was Aunt Louisa Whitney's, and she had willed it to them! Sam was rushing back to Brinck while these thoughts were in his mind. He found that Cary had appeared bewildered, and calling upon the saints to witness that he was guiltless in the matter of Harold's disappearance.

“It’s in the night toime he disappeared entirely, four nights ago,” said Cary, “and me wid the kay in me pocket,” and he produced his key in proof of his assertion; “and the door wide open and not a stitch iv him inside whin I brings his breakfast!”

Cary was carrying Brinck down-stairs in his arms by this time, but at the outer door he stopped. Water was now pouring into the hall, and the great mass of ice-blocks in the court was disintegrating.

“No man iv me weight could thrust himself” — began Cary. The building shook so that his sentence was cut short, and Cary began to rehearse his sins and beg for mercy. Sam thrust him aside, and half-dragged, half-carried Brinck out on the tossing, shifting blocks. Where he had crossed from the cottage was now a whirlpool of water. Under his feet the blocks were drifting apart. There was one chance — a desperate leap to a huge flat cake of ice that was floating along with the current; and Sam made it. He landed safely with his burden; but Brinck was hurt

so that he groaned with pain, and after a strong effort to hold himself upright dropped his head upon Sam's knee and fainted. The ice-cake drifted along down the river in momentary danger of being sunk by plunging heaps of ice, or wrecked by collision with some of the drifting *débris*. Brinck opened his eyes and shivered; his clothing was drenched, and the night air was cold. Sam took off his own coat, and wrapped it around him.

“How dared you help Harold Bearnse to get away? Of course I know that it was you! You will be discharged from my father's mill directly!” came in Brinck's feeble, arrogant little voice out of the darkness. “It makes no difference what—what you are doing for me now, even if you have saved my life,” persisted the feeble voice. “You had no right to meddle in my affairs. Did you ever read ‘Ninety-Three,’ that story of Victor Hugo's about the gun that got loose on the vessel's deck? A sailor risked his life to secure it and save other people's lives, but he was shot for disobeying orders. That was fine!”

“You’d better be sure that I have saved your life before you go into highfalutin,” said Sam dryly. “We’re likely to go under at any minute.”

“Where is Harold Bearse now?” was Brinck’s only response to this announcement; an unexpected one to Sam, who had said to himself that the little braggart would show the white feather as soon as he understood the danger.

A crash sounded above the ceaseless swash and jar, and suddenly their ice-raft rode on tumultuous waves. Sam looked behind him in the direction of the noise. In the faint moonlight, still shining through mist, he saw a great gap in the sky where the tall wing of the old mill had risen; that had been swept away; Louly’s studio was gone — and the rest of the building was left. Sam felt the tin box in his pocket with a thrill of exultation. Now no one would ever know, — to Sam’s mind bonds were like bank-notes, and no more easily traced, — it seemed almost providential!

He felt renewed hope and courage; and yet there was nothing to do but to drift, and the danger was increased by the flotsam from the mill. They were nearing the shore now. Sam kept himself prepared to jump to a stationary raft of ice or lumber whenever it was practicable; but it was only a very short and safe leap that he dared to undertake with Brinck in his arms, and he was forced to forego many a chance that would have meant safety to himself alone. They were drifting more rapidly now, and in clearer water, as the river widened; at this rate they would soon reach the open sea, and then —

Yet there had not come to Sam the temptation to leap from the perilous raft and save himself, leaving Brinck to his fate. The real Sam was uppermost; but at least — Sam said thank God! in remembering it afterward — at least that possibility was not in him. Ahead of them was a great “jam” of logs reaching to the shore; their ice-raft might drift just outside; it might be caught and held, and that would mean safety. Sam waited and

watched breathlessly. It missed! — no, it was caught by one end, drifted in towards the shore, and was lodged safely against the great “jam” of logs. Brinck’s querulous voice went on asking questions about Sam’s share in Harold Bearnse’s escape. Sam was uncertain whether he had realized the danger. His narrow, morbid mind seemed unable to harbor more than one idea. Sam scarcely heard him. That tin box in his pocket was becoming all the universe. “For the life is more than meat,” he recalled the anthem that the choir had sung at the mission chapel last night — was it only last night? it seemed ages ago and universes distant! That sentence from the anthem kept ringing in his ears. Did it mean that money was not everything? How could he restore those bonds? He did not know whether they rightfully belonged to Mrs. Bearnse or to the executor of the estate.

But it was queer, crouching there in the darkness, wet and shivering, with Brinck’s querulous complaints and threatenings running on endlessly, with that fierce temptation buf

feting him; above everything, a strain of insistent music, rang that saying of the old, old Book, "For the life is more than meat." Perhaps the reason it had seized upon him so was that it was like the comfort his father gave to his mother when she felt the small stings of poverty, "Life is larger than that."

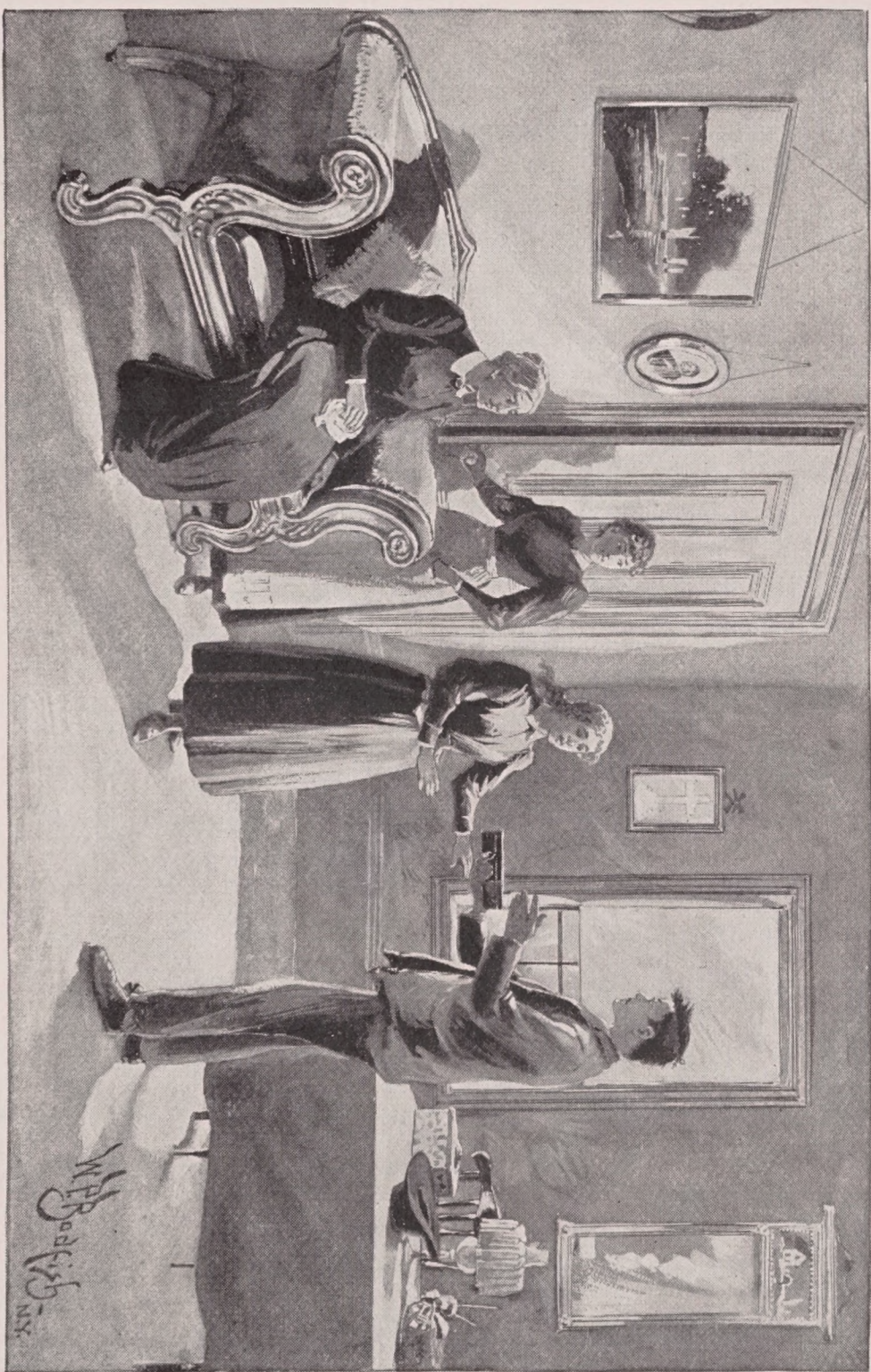
"Was it larger—larger even than money? Brinck fell asleep exhausted by his hardships; and Sam held the boy's head upon his knee, and crouched, cramped and aching, watching for the first glimmering of light that would enable him to make his way over the logs to the shore. It was but precarious footing when at length he dared to undertake it, carrying Brinck, the boy's arms clasped tightly about his neck; but when the shore was reached there were ready hands to help him. Mr. Cyrus Whitney's carriage was at the cottage door; something that seemed to Sam the distracted ghost of that stern and dignified gentleman seized Brinck, and wept over him. Cary had reported his rescue, and the two boys had been sought for all along the river.

Sam wished to hurry away; he said to himself that he must restore those bonds before he ate or slept. He knew the real Sam Pennock now, and he did not dare to trust him! But they clung to him — his mother, and the girls, and that cold-hearted Mr. Cyrus Whitney held both his hands in his own.

“I meant to help you along,” he said; “but I thought it better to find out what there was in you. I meant to give you a chance; be sure I mean it now!”

It was at this point that Brinck, white and bewildered, but always Brinck, poured out the story of Harold Bearse’s captivity and release. “It was he who let him out! and he had no right,” he cried fiercely, glowering at Sam.

“No, it wasn’t Sam; it was I!” said Louly calmly; “he was so miserable, poor fellow, and he said he would never do it again. I opened the door; my studio door-key just fitted the lock. I had to drag him down-stairs, and — and boost him out of the window, and that’s how I sprained my wrist. I carried him home on young Howard’s Russian sled. You ought



“I SAVED MRS. BEARSE’S BONDS,” HE SAID.

to have seen his mother! I didn't think it was any harm," added Louly meekly.

"You — you're a girl! I never know what to make of 'em!" said Brinck, as if that were the acme of accusation.

The little mother cried at the thought of Harold's mother's joy; and she wondered with a pang, as Mr. Whitney carried Brinck to the carriage, how long he would have a son.

"Sam! my design — if you had only thought of it!" wailed Louly. "Can any one have lost more than that in the flood? I might have won the prize! and now my wrist is sprained, and the designs must be sent in the day after to-morrow."

He might have saved the design if those bonds had not crowded everything else out of his mind, Sam reflected ruefully. "I saved Mrs. Bearse's bonds," he said gruffly, drawing the tin box from his pocket.

"Saved what?" gasped Louly. "Oh — oh! my design! Mrs. Bearse carried the bonds away the day before the *fête*. She said she was afraid the mill would take fire with all those

bonfires and lights; she was afraid it wasn't a safe place anyway, and she gave me the box. I wanted one with a padlock for my designs. Oh, here it is! my beautiful sketch, all safe and sound!"

Louly wept for joy, and then threatened to faint, and Mary Olive somewhat scornfully brought burnt feathers. Sam felt obliged to retire to the woodshed to reflect; he told his mother that he could not yet bring his mind to the changing of his clothes. Slow Sam had been through a profound experience.

"You must have had a dreadful night," said his mother, when at length Sam had changed his wet clothes and was drinking a cup of coffee.

"I — I got acquainted with Sam Pennock," said Sam hoarsely. But not even his mother ever knew the whole story. After all, it was Gladys Folliott whose design won the prize — Gladys Folliott who did not need the scholarship in the least. But while they were fearing that Louly would be broken-hearted, she came in with her face aglow, and a letter in her hand.

“They say my design is original and charming; if I had not lacked training I should have won the prize. They will buy the design, and they ask me to furnish others! Celia knows a girl who earns six hundred dollars a year in that way! Mary Olive, I sha’n’t be such a burden any more! It’s been so hard for you — and sometimes it has seemed as if I couldn’t bear it!”

“Louly, I’ve been so mean and horrid!” faltered Mary Olive. “I thought you didn’t care! I—I didn’t understand.”

Ah, the old French proverb is so wise, —
Comprendre c’est pardonner!

“Celia says, too, that Mr. Whitney has been to see her mother, and they think that, after all, the will may stand,” pursued Louly breathlessly. “Wouldn’t it be strange if we should get our money after all, just as we have learned how to do without it?” To learn how to do without it had been to learn some of the hidden things of God, — the courage, the simple faith, and the charity that make life good even in toil and struggle.

“I rather guess,” said slow Sam, in the Canterbury drawl of which the girls were trying to break him, “I rather guess that money isn’t everything, after all!”

THE RAVELLED MITTEN.

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THE RAVELLED MITTEN.

I.

THE BIRTHDAY PARTY.

IT had begun to look as if no one would go to Viola Pitkin's birthday party; it had been snowing for two days, and the drifts in some places were as high as a man's head. Patty Perley had tried to take an interest in the new lace pattern that she was crocheting, and in the paper lamp-shade she was making, for which Ruby Nutting had taught her to make roses that almost smelled sweet, they were so natural, and it was all in vain; and she quite envied Anson, who was trying to draw the buff kitten stuck into the leg of Uncle Reuben's boot. The kitten's squirming and the old cat's frantic remonstrances

were preventing the picture from being a success; but Anson was highly entertained, and didn't seem to care whether he went to the party or not. It was just when Patty was feeling irritated by this indifference that Uncle Reuben came in, and she heard him stamping, and shaking his clothes, in the entry, and saying, "Whew, this is a night!" Then her spirits went down to zero. But the very first thing that Uncle Reuben said when he opened the door was, —

“I've told Pelatiah to get out the big sled, and hitch up the black mare, and you'll get to your party if the snow is deep. And the sled is large; you'd better pick up all the youngsters you can along the way.”

Now, that was like Uncle Reuben as he used to be, not as he had been since Dave, his only son, ran away; since then he had not seemed to think there was anything but gloom and sadness in the world. Indeed, Dave's going had taken the heart out of the good times all over Butternut Corner. He was only sixteen, and a good boy, — his mother had meant that

he should be a minister, — but he got into the company of some wild fellows down at Bymport, and of Alf Coombs, a wild fellow nearer home, and then he had run away from home under circumstances almost too dreadful to tell. Burton's jewellery store at Bymport had been broken into and robbed of watches and jewellery, and the next morning Dave and Alf Coombs had disappeared. They had been seen around the store that night; Dave had not come home until almost morning. The boys had been gone nearly two months now, and the suspicion against them had become almost a certainty in most people's minds; indeed, it was reported that the sheriff had a warrant for their arrest, but as yet had not been able to find them.

With such trouble weighing upon them, Patty had felt as if it were almost wicked to wish to go to Viola Pitkin's party; but Aunt Eunice had said, with the quiver about her patient mouth that always came there when she referred to Dave, that the innocent must not suffer for the guilty; and she

had told Barbara, the "hired girl," to roast a pair of chickens, and make some of her famous cream-cakes also; for it was to be a surprise party, and each guest was to carry a basket of goodies for the supper.

And now Uncle Reuben had planned for them to go, in spite of the snow-drifts; so Patty began to feel that it was not wrong to be light-hearted under the circumstances.

"Take all the youngsters you can pack on," repeated Uncle Reuben, as Patty and Anson settled themselves on the great sled, and Pelatiah cracked his whip over the old horse; "only I wouldn't stop at the foot of the hill," — Uncle Reuben's face darkened suddenly as he said this, — "we've had about enough of Coombses."

Patty's heart sank a little, for she liked Tilly Coombs. They were rough and poor people, — the Coombs family, — "back folks," who had moved to the Corner only the summer before. The father drank, and the mother was an invalid, and it was the son Alf who was supposed to have had an evil influence

over Dave. Patty thought it probable that Tilly had been invited to the surprise party, because Ruby Nutting, the doctor's daughter, who had planned the party, would be sure to ask her. Poor people who would be likely to be slighted, and stray animals that no one wanted, — those were the ones that Ruby Nutting thought of first.

Along slid the great sled with its jingling bells, and out of her gate at the foot of the hill ran Tilly Coombs — the very first passenger. Patty couldn't help it. She didn't disobey Uncle Reuben's injunction not to stop; Tilly ran and jumped on.

"You'll let me go with you, won't you?" she panted. "I couldn't bear to miss it when she asked me! Some folks wouldn't, but *she* did. And I never went to a party in all my life! I couldn't bring anything but some doughnuts." Tilly opened her small basket, and by the light of Pelatiah's great lantern Patty saw the eager face darken suddenly. "I made 'em myself, and I'm afraid they're only middling. Doughnuts will soak fat,

though, won't they?" she added anxiously, as Patty gazed doubtfully at the soggy lumps laid carefully in the folds of a ragged napkin. "I never made any before."

It was altogether an affair of first times with Tilly—a happier thing in the way of party-going than of doughnut-making!

"They're very nicely flavored," said Patty, tasting critically; "and where there are so many things nobody will notice if they're not—not so very light."

Tilly's sharp, anxious face brightened a little; but she heaved a sigh and covered her doughnuts quickly as the sled stopped to take on Rilly Parkhurst and her cousins, the Stillman boys, and Kathie Loomis, who was visiting Rilly. The Sage boys came next, and Delia Sage, who was sixteen and had taught school, but was just as full of fun as if she were young. The jingling of the bells was almost drowned in chatter and laughter; and when Ruby Nutting joined it, she was greeted with a cheering that, as Pelatiah said, "must 'a' cracked the mill-pond."

The crowd increased; the baskets were all huddled together upon the seat with Pelatiah, and under the seat, and in the middle of the sled; no one could keep hold of his own, but there was no fear but that they would all know their own when they reached Viola's house.

Suddenly Ruby Nutting was missed. She hadn't been as gay as usual; generally Ruby could be depended upon to stir up every one's wits and make the dullest party merry; but to-night she had been sitting in a corner talking in a low tone with Alvan Sage. Now she had disappeared; and Alvan Sage, looking very much surprised and bewildered himself, said that she had slipped off when they were going a little slowly up the hill, just as Pelatiah had held the lantern down to see if there was anything the matter with the horse's foot; she had said she would wait until Horace Barker's sleigh came along; either she thought the sled was too crowded, or she wanted to see some one who was coming with the Barkers. The latter explana-

tion was probable enough, for Chrissy Barker was on the "committee of arrangements," and had helped Ruby about the preparations.

So no one thought much more about it, although it didn't seem like Ruby to go off without saying anything. The sled party was the first to reach Viola's, and it was great fun to see her perfect surprise and delight when they trooped in. They all thought that Ruby Nutting should have been there then.

Patty had a surprise that was not pleasant. When her basket was carried in the cover was open, the cream-cakes were all jammed and half spoiled, and the two fine roast chickens were gone!

"See here! you can catch the thief by his mitten!" cried one of the boys. The rim of the basket was broken, probably by the thief in his haste, and to one sharply jagged end was attached a long, long string of red worsted. "Who has a ravelled mitten?"

The color came and went in Tilly Coombs's sharp, elfish little face; then she thrust her

hand into her pocket as if she was thrusting her mittens deep into it. Patty Perley happened to be standing close beside her, and saw her.

Patty was mortified to have come to the surprise party with only a few half-spoiled cream-cakes; but she was kind-hearted, and her first thought was a pitying one.

“They must be so very poor! Tilly wanted them for her sick mother,” she said to herself.

How Tilly could have taken the chickens from the basket, and where she could have concealed them, was a mystery. But Uncle Reuben believed that all the Coombs family were thievish and sly; perhaps he was right, and Tilly was used to doing such things. But even Uncle Reuben would not be very hard upon a girl who had stolen delicate food for her sick mother.

“’Sh! — ’sh! don’t say anything about it! It is of no consequence,” she whispered to some girls and boys who were loudly wondering and guessing about the mysterious theft.

Then they all went into the sitting-room, and the Virginia reel, the old-fashioned dance with which Butternut Corner festivities almost always began, was danced, and no one thought any more of the stolen chickens.

Ruby Nutting had come by this time, and she led the dance; as usual she was the life of the good time. She had come in Horace Barker's sleigh, and she gayly evaded the wonderings and reproaches of the party she had left. As the dance ended, Berta Treadwell beckoned slyly to Patty. Berta was Viola Pitkin's cousin, who had come all the way from California to visit her; she and Patty had "taken to" each other at once.

"I want you to see such a funny thing!" whispered Berta, drawing Patty out into the back entry. "That queer-looking girl they call Tilly, with the wispy black hair and the faded cotton dress, asked me to lend her a pair of knitting-needles! I got grandma's for her; and she snatched them out of my hands, she was so eager. 'You needn't tell anybody that I asked you for 'em, either,' she said, in that

sharp way of hers. I had such a curiosity to know what she was going to do with them that I watched her. After a while, when the reel was begun, and she thought no one was looking, she slipped out through the wood-shed into the barn. Come and peep through the crack!"

Patty followed Berta softly through the wood-shed, and looked through a chink in the rough board partition into the barn.

On an inverted bucket, with a lantern hung upon a nail over her head, sat Tilly Coombs diligently knitting. The barn was cold; the cattle's breaths made vapors, and there was a glitter of frost around the beams. Tilly was muffled in a shawl, but her face looked pinched and blue.

"What is she knitting? It looks like a red mitten," whispered Berta. "Is she so industrious? To think of leaving a party on a winter night to go out to the barn and knit! Do you think we ought to leave her there in the cold? I should think she must be crazy!"

Patty was drawing Berta back through the

wood-shed eagerly, in silence. Berta had not heard about the ravelled mitten; she did not know that Tilly was trying to knit it into shape again so it would never be known that it was her mitten that was ravelled.

“I know why she is doing it,” said Patty, “though I don’t see why she couldn’t have waited until she got home; but I suppose she is awfully anxious. Berta, don’t say that we saw her, or anything about the needles, to anybody. That will be kind to her, and she is so poor. Whatever you hear, don’t say anything.”

“I’m sure I don’t want to say anything to hurt her,” answered Berta a little resentfully; for she did think Patty might have told her all about it. “But I must say I think society in Butternut Corner is a little mixed.”

“Ruby asked her,” explained Patty. “I think it was right; Tilly never went to a party before.”

“Her way of enjoying herself at a party is a little queer,” said Berta unsympathetically.

And Patty thought she did not feel quite

so sorry as she had done that Berta was going back to California the next day.

She thought she would tell Ruby Nutting. Ruby would understand, and pity Tilly; but before she had a chance, while Horace Barker was singing a college song and Ruby was playing the accompaniment on the piano, a sudden recollection struck her that sent the color from her face. Aunt Eunice's spoons!

Aunt Eunice had said that there were never spoons enough to go round at a surprise party, and Viola Pitkin's mother was her intimate friend, so she wished to help her all she could, and she put a dozen spoons into the basket, — the solid silver ones that had been Grandmother Oliver's, — and charged Patty to take care of them. And it was not until she overheard Mrs. Pitkin whisper to Viola that she wasn't *sure* that there were sauce-plates enough that Patty remembered the spoons.

She had a struggle to repress a cry of dismay — those spoons were so precious! Uncle Reuben had demurred when they were put into the basket; but Aunt Eunice was proud,

and always liked to give and lend of her best. Patty felt as if she must cry out and denounce Tilly when she crept slyly in behind broad-backed Uncle Nathan Pitkin, and slyly warmed her benumbed hands at the fire. But Patty held her peace. When she had reflected for a few minutes, she knew that this was too grave a matter for fourteen-year-old wits to grapple with, and she must tell Uncle Reuben and Aunt Eunice.

Tilly Coombs was drawn into a merry game, — Ruby Nutting took care of that, — and before long her queer little sharp face was actually dimpling with fun, and her laugh rang out with the gayest! Patty Perley looked at her, and decided that it was a very queer world indeed; for her the joy of Viola Pitkin's party was done.

When they were all dressing to depart, Patty looked involuntarily at Tilly Coombs's mittens; in fact, many furtive glances were cast around at the red mittens by those who remembered the theft of the roast chickens. There were many of them, red being the fashionable color

for mittens at Butternut Corner; but apparently they were all sound and whole. Tommy Barker had one mitten with a white thumb, which his blind grandmother had knitted on in place of a torn thumb, and little Seba Sage had but one mitten; but that one was very dark red, not the vivid scarlet of the raveling.

Rilly Parkhurst whispered to Patty as she sat down beside her on the sled, "Tilly Coombs has the ravelled mitten! She is trying to cover it with her shawl; it is only a little more than half a mitten!"

Patty smothered an exclamation of doubt, and then she gazed curiously at Tilly's hands; but they were tightly, carefully covered by her shawl.

Could it be that after spending all that time in the cold barn she had failed to knit up her ravelled mitten? Tilly looked as if she had been having a good time. Under the light of Pelatiah's lantern her eyes were shining, her face rippling with smiles. Patty thought with wonder that she had not seen

her look so happy — well, certainly not since her brother Alf ran away.

“I must have grown plump at the party!” laughed Ruby Nutting. “One of my mittens is too tight around the wrist.” And Patty saw Tilly Coombs nervously fold her shawl more closely about her mittens.

Just before her own door was reached, Tilly Coombs leaned towards Patty and whispered, so that even Anson or Pelatiah should not hear, —

“I didn’t know there were such good times in the world!” she said, with her face aglow. “And Viola Pitkin’s Uncle Nathan ate one of my doughnuts!” But Patty shrank away from her.

II.

THE MISER'S DOOR-STONE.

TILLY COOMBS watched the sled as it went crunching and jingling up the hill, and then entered her house, with a long sigh that the party was over.

“I’m getting to have good times ; they treat me ’most as if I was other folks,” she said to herself happily. She would have liked to tell her mother about the good time, but her father had come home. She heard his querulous voice, and knew that he had been drinking just enough to make it unsafe to disturb him ; so she crept softly up to her room, — a cold and bare nook under the eaves. She pulled off her ravelled mitten and gazed at it ruefully. “That was an awful queer thing to do !” she said to herself aloud. “And my ! wa’n’t it cold in that barn ? But nobody saw me —

not a soul! Nobody will ever know! The worst of it is, if I had been ketched, then nobody would ever believe that Alf wasn't a thief. An awful queer thing!" For a minute or two Tilly was lost in painful and perplexing reflection. Then she suddenly shook her fist fiercely at her small, crooked reflection in the cracked piece of looking-glass upon the wall. "Tilly Coombs, don't you never darst to think, as long as you live, that anything *she* did was queer!" she said in an impressive whisper that echoed from all the empty corners of the dreary little room. And then Tilly tucked a ravelled mitten under the ragged ticking of her bed, and slept in peace.

While she slept, in the great farmhouse at the top of Butternut Hill they were still debating whether she should be arrested at once for the theft of the spoons, or whether Patty should try to influence her to confession and the restoration of the property.

It was Aunt Eunice who suggested the latter course. Uncle Reuben believed in stern justice. He said that the Coombs family was

a disgrace to the town; the father was drunken and good for nothing, and the son — His voice broke there; he had always felt that Alf Coombs was to blame for Dave's running away.

“We never heard anything really bad about Alf Coombs until — until he ran away,” Anson insisted. Aunt Eunice said she thought Mrs. Coombs seemed like a good woman; and Patty tried to defend Tilly, although it was difficult to explain her knitting up that ravelled mitten. She said Ruby Nutting wouldn't believe anything against Tilly, and you couldn't make her. But Uncle Reuben shook his head over that, and said he was afraid Ruby Nutting wasn't very sensible, and Ruby's father seemed to pity bad folks as much as good ones, and to take as much comfort doctoring them — without any pay.

But it was finally decided that Patty should tell Tilly of the proof of her guilt that had been discovered. If Patty failed to influence her, then Aunt Eunice would no longer object to her arrest.

Patty lay awake a long time that night, dreading her mission. She wished she might ask Ruby Nutting to help her; but Uncle Reuben thought it best that no one should be told. When she did sleep she dreamed a dreadful dream, in which Tilly Coombs was being pursued down the long hill, through the great snow-drifts, by an army of spoons with grotesque faces, their mouths made of the initial letter that marked the stolen spoons,—O for Oliver, Grandma Barclay's maiden name. They were driving Tilly into the mill-pond, which was open as if it were summer, in spite of the January drifts, and Patty awoke with a start and a cry. But bad as was the fantastic dream, Patty said to herself that the reality was worse.

When Pelatiah opened the back door the next morning, a fine pair of chickens plucked and dressed hung upon the knob. That circumstance seemed mysterious. Why should a thief who would steal a dozen spoons have a weak conscience in the matter of a pair of chickens? Where could Tilly Coombs

get a pair of chickens? Patty added these mysteries to the one about the ravelled mitten upon which Tilly had knit and knit and yet worn it unmended, and felt as bewildered as she did when Anson made her listen to something out of the rebus corner of the *Butternut Weekly Voice*. But Uncle Reuben still insisted that it was a clear case; the thief had restored the chickens in order to stifle suspicion about the spoons. As to how the thief became possessed of the chickens, — well, he “didn’t think it would trouble Coombses to rob hen-roosts.”

So, as Patty set out to accuse Tilly of the theft, the little spark of hope which the deepened mystery had aroused in her was almost quenched.

Tilly came to the door, and Patty tried to look at her with judicial severity, as she had seen Uncle Reuben look at offenders; but she broke down suddenly at sight of Tilly’s beaming, friendly face.

“O Tilly,” she cried, “you will give them back, won’t you? It was such a dreadful

thing to do! But no one shall ever know; Uncle Reuben says so, if you will only give them back."

The warmth and color faded out of Tilly's face until it looked wan and pinched.

"It's no matter about the chickens. You needn't even have given those back. Of course it's always terrible to — to take things; but if you'll only give back the spoons."

"*The spoons!*" echoed Tilly; and there seemed to be such genuine bewilderment in her tone that Patty felt inclined to believe Uncle Reuben's accusation that she was sly. "I don't know anything about any spoons."

"Tilly, your mitten caught on the basket and was ravelled, and — and I saw you knitting it up in the barn." Patty's tone was rather pitiful than accusing, but Tilly's face flamed angrily.

"I didn't s'pose you was one to go peeking round and spying on folks," she cried. "I guess I've got a right to do a little knitting anywheres that I'm a mind to, and — and you can't say 'twas a mitten."

“I saw it, Tilly, — a red mitten. This is the yarn that was caught on the basket.” Patty drew from her pocket the red raveling, wound upon a bit of paper.

“*Yarn!*” echoed Tilly, contemptuously taking a bit between her thumb and finger. “I call that worsted!”

“And are your mittens yarn?” cried Patty eagerly. “Because that would prove” —

“I never said they were,” said Tilly quickly, the color deepening in her cheeks. “I never said anything about them, and I sha’n’t show them to anybody. And I never saw your old spoons in all my born days — so there!” Tilly would have shut the door, but Patty prevented her.

“O Tilly, I’m afraid you don’t realize. Uncle Reuben will send a sheriff to arrest you. And the girls have thought so much of you — especially Ruby Nutting.”

“You needn’t say a word about *her*.” Tilly swallowed a lump chokingly. “You needn’t tell her, nor anything. She hasn’t got anything to do with it. She’s give me all

the chance I've had to get good times, and her father has been awful good to us; and now I suppose they won't be any more. But — but poor folks must expect to be called thieves, and took up. The worst is, now they'll be sure Alf broke into that store, and he didn't! no more'n your cousin did! No, that isn't the worst. The worst is that Miss Farnham, the milliner, won't have me now. She was going to take me half a day to do chores and help her; 'twas an awful good chance! It chirked mother right up to think we were going to be so much like folks, and now" — Tilly kept her voice steady, but it was by a strong effort.

"Tilly, it might come right now if you would only tell all about it," said Patty earnestly. "It seems as if there were some mystery."

"You go 'long home!" cried Tilly fiercely, and slammed the door upon Patty. Her sharp, hard little features were working convulsively, and Patty heard a long sob inside the door.

She went home feeling more strongly than ever that there was a mystery, and pleaded earnestly for Tilly. Aunt Eunice joined her, and promised to go and see Tilly's mother, and talk with her about the matter if Uncle Reuben would delay his sterner measures.

They might not have been able to persuade him to do so, — his bitter grief for his son had served to harden him against Alf Coombs's relatives, — if nature had not seemed to take Tilly's part and enforced a delay. The heavy snowfall was followed by a pouring rain, and what they called at Butternut Corner an old-fashioned January thaw. Uncle Reuben was a mill-owner, and his property was threatened by the freshet, so he had no time to think of Tilly Coombs.

Aunt Eunice had a touch of her old enemy, rheumatism, and could not go down to confer with Mrs. Coombs; so the matter remained unsettled.

On the very first day when the sun shone out Ruby Nutting came up the hill to ask Patty to take a walk. It made no difference

that they would go over shoe in mud with every step. Ruby wouldn't take no for an answer; that was the way with Ruby; besides, she said that this was something very particular. When they reached the foot of the hill Patty found herself being led into the road which bordered the old mill-pond, and she shrank back.

“Yes; we're going to Miser Jensen's house, but you needn't be afraid; he has gone away for the winter. There won't be any more clothes-lines or hen-roosts robbed now. And that makes me think. O Patty, what *did* your aunt think of those chickens that were tied to her door-knob? And what did you think of losing your nice roasted ones? But I didn't mean to tell you that I took them until you had seen poor Tramp. Your aunt liked Tramp; she will forgive me when she knows I took them for him.”

“*You* took them—for Tramp?” repeated Patty in bewilderment. “I heard that Tramp was mad!”

Tramp was an old dog that had roamed

the streets of Butternut Corner and Bymport for years, making his home for a week or two at one place or another, as the fancy seized him, generally welcome, for he was a favorite.

“He had one of his fits, — convulsions, in the street at Bymport; he has often had them at our house, poor fellow! It seemed as if he came there when one was coming on, knowing that we would take care of him. Some foolish person raised a cry of mad dog, and people chased him with pistols and clubs; he ran up here, and they lost track of him. That night on your sled Alvan Sage told me that he had heard a dog whining as if in pain, in the miser’s house; he said no one dared to go near, because they thought it must be the mad dog. That was a week after they had driven poor Tramp out of Bymport, and I thought of him suffering and without food, and I seized the first basket I could lay hands on, and pulled out a pair of roast chickens. I thought I never should get there through the drifts! I borrowed a

lantern at Jake Nesmith's, and it really wasn't far; but the drifts were so deep! The poor dog's leg had been hurt by a stone or a club so he could hardly move, and he was half frozen and starved. Patty, if you could have seen him eat your chickens, I know you would have thought it better than to have them for the party! I built a fire, —luckily there was wood in the cellar,— and I've been there every day in all the rain to take care of him. Papa has been with me; and to-morrow we're going to send Tramp to my Uncle Rufus at Bethel, who is very fond of dogs, and will take great care of him. We couldn't take him home, because Aunt Estelle is so nervous, and she wouldn't believe he wasn't mad. I knew you would like to see old Tramp."

"But—but the ravelled mitten!" faltered Patty, who couldn't as yet "see through things."

"How did you know about that?" asked Ruby in astonishment. "I caught my mitten on your basket in my haste to get the chick-

ens, and the edge was all ravelled off, and — the very queerest thing that ever happened! — some one knit it on again with yarn. The mittens are worsted; see the difference.” Ruby held up the mended mitten, with an edge of coarse yarn, to Patty’s gaze. “It was done at the party! I think it must have been Grandma Pitkin who did it. Perhaps it had dropped from my pocket in the dressing-room, and she saw it. Wasn’t it kind of her? I must go and thank her.”

Patty tried to say, “It wasn’t Grandma Pitkin; it was Tilly Coombs,” but there was a lump in her throat that choked her. And it happened that they just then reached a turn in the road and saw a girl’s figure ahead of them. She walked from side to side of the road, keeping her eyes on the ground, and occasionally prodding into it with a stick which she carried.

“It’s Tilly Coombs, and she seems to be searching for something,” said Ruby.

Patty darted on ahead, and seized Tilly around the neck with both arms. Even then

Patty saw how pitifully worn and pale the girl had grown. What had been only a little comedy to Ruby, pleasant because she had so happily relieved the dog's sufferings, had been almost a tragedy to Tilly Coombs.

"Tilly, can you ever forgive me?" said Patty, struggling with a tendency to cry. "I know all about it,—how you knitted the mitten to keep Ruby from being found out, and how you bore it all and didn't tell."

"You hain't been telling *her*?" said Tilly anxiously. "I don't think she knows she lost the spoons. I saw that she came down this road that night, and I've been hunting for them. I ain't going to have a mite of trouble come on her! She's been different to me from what anybody ever was before, not looking down on me as if I was the dirt under her feet. And her father too; he's come and come to see mother when he knew there wa'n't a cent to pay him with. I *have* bore a sight," — Tilly's strained voice threatened to break, — "but I can bear more. I won't have trouble come to her if I can

help it. You *hain't* been telling her all about it?"

Ruby came up to them before there was time for an answer.

"Hunting for something, Tilly?" she asked easily. "I'm afraid you won't find it in all this mud."

"No — no; I *hain't* found them," stammered Tilly, uncertain whether Ruby knew about the spoons. "But" — and her face lighted with sudden eagerness — "I've found something queer; you see if it isn't queer." Tilly turned back, running before them up to the door of the miser's little house. "No, it isn't the tracks," she added, as Ruby hurriedly explained about the dog, "it's the door-stone; it looks as if it had been moved lately. If you're looking along the ground, as I was, you'll notice it."

"Well, what if it has?" asked Ruby wondering, and a little impatient.

"Somebody might have hidden something there," said Tilly, whose longing to find the spoons was evidently desperate.

“Some of the miser’s treasures or his clothes-line booty,” cried Ruby gayly; for Miser Jensen was suspected of petty thieving, and Butternut Corner breathed more freely when his summer sojourn was over. “Girls, let’s pry the stone up!”

“I tried to alone, but I couldn’t,” said Tilly eagerly, bringing a long stake from the tumble-down fence.

The three girls tried for a long time with their united strength. The stone was flat and not very heavy, but was unwieldy; while Tramp, let out of the house, barked and capered with excitement in spite of his injured leg.

When at last the stone was overturned, there was indeed something snugly tucked into a hole dug beneath it,—a bundle tied up in a bandanna handkerchief. Miser Jensen always wore old-fashioned bandanna handkerchiefs. When the girls opened it they found it filled, not with spoils of the Butternut Corner clothes-lines, but with watches and jewellery, most of it marked with the name



“THERE WAS, INDEED, SOMETHING SNUGLY TUCKED INTO A HOLE.”

of Burton, the Bymport jeweller, whom Dave Perley and Alf Coombs were suspected of having robbed.

Patty burst into tears of joy.

“It was Miser Jensen who robbed the store! Tilly, don't you see what it means? No one can ever say it was the boys again!”

Tilly trembled in all her thin little frame, but her face was alight with joy. “I know where they are! I can tell now,” she said proudly. “Alf wrote to me. They are both in my cousin's store in L——; it is a jewellery store. It was because Alf liked to see watches and things fixed that he was always at Burton's, and so they suspected him. Dave didn't want to be a minister or a farmer, that was why he ran away; but he wants to come home. He says it doesn't pay to run away; and now he can!”

The cloud lifted from Butternut Hill! Patty hurried to tell Uncle Reuben and Aunt Eunice; it seemed to her too good to be true.

They forgot all about the spoons; even Tilly forgot them. And Aunt Eunice said

she didn't care anything about the spoons, but she would do everything to make amends to Tilly Coombs for the unjust suspicions.

The spoons were found the very next day. Jake Nesmith, the blacksmith, saw the corner of the napkin in which they were wrapped sticking out of a mud-puddle. Ruby had pulled them out of the basket with the chickens, and dropped them in the snow.

Alf Coombs is still in his cousin's store, but Dave has come home to Butternut Hill. He says he isn't sure that he shall ever be a minister or a farmer; but he is sure he shall never be wild again. The awful suspicion that fell upon him cured him of that. Miser Jensen was arrested, and confessed the theft; he escaped from prison, but there is no fear that he will ever return to Butternut Corner. Dr. Nutting wished to send Tilly to the Academy with Ruby, — the whole story of the ravelled mitten was told after the spoons were found; no one could expect a human girl like Patty to keep it, — but Tilly thought she had a knack for millinery, and she liked to be in-

dependent, and Miss Farnham wanted her; she says she is a good business woman, although she is only fifteen.

The doctor always takes off his hat to Tilly Coombs. The minister, who is his great friend, and hears a good deal about Butternut Corner people through him, does so too; and just now the young people of the Corner are making preparations for another birthday surprise party. They have hired the new Town Hall, because the little house at the foot of the hill wouldn't begin to hold Tilly's troops of friends; and everything is to be in the very best style that is known to Butternut Corner, because they want Tilly to feel that she is "just like other folks."



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