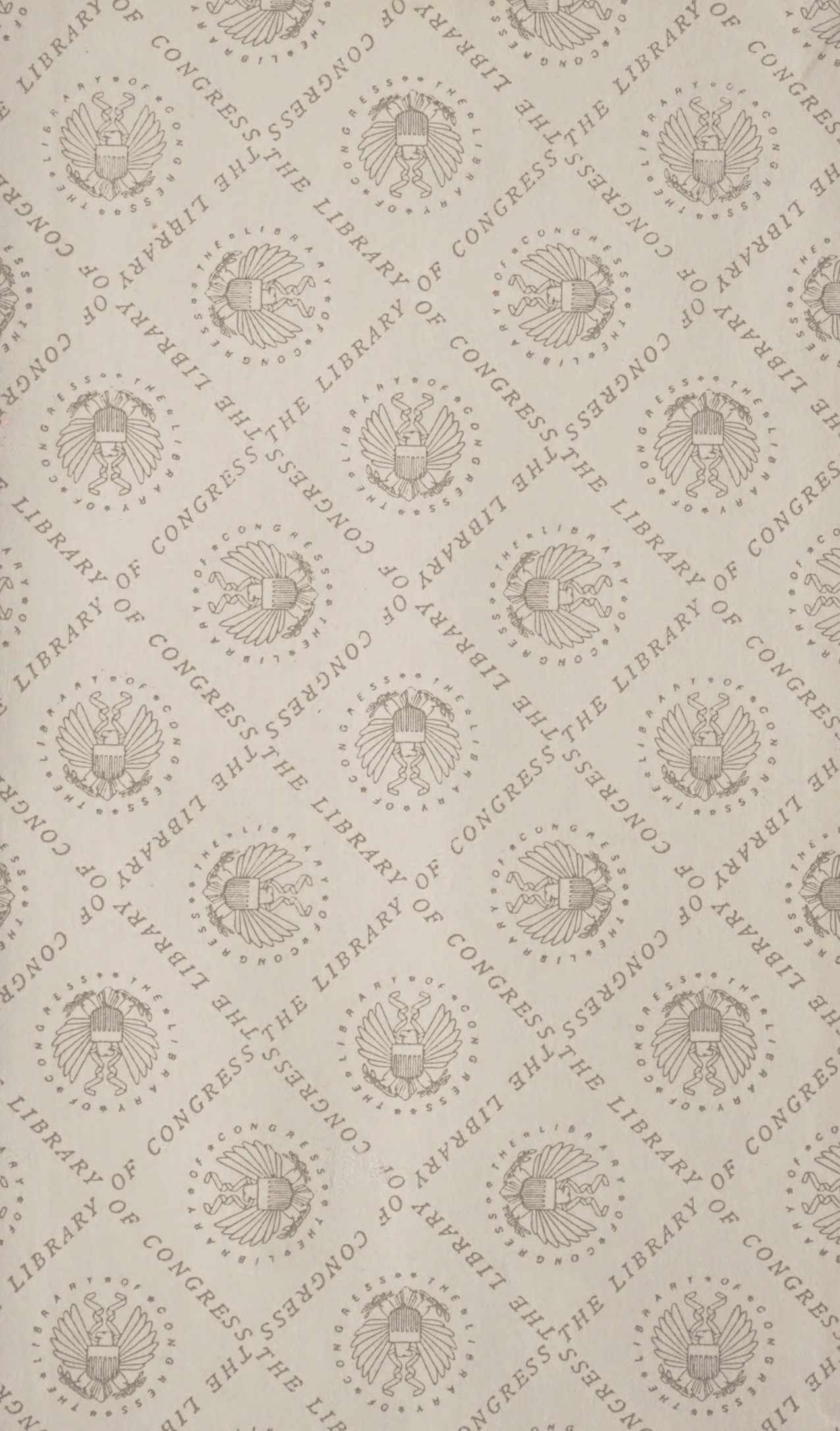


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LEND A HAND

by CHARLES M. SHELDON
Author of "IN HIS STEPS"



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Lend a Hand

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LEND A HAND

BY

CHARLES M. SHELDON

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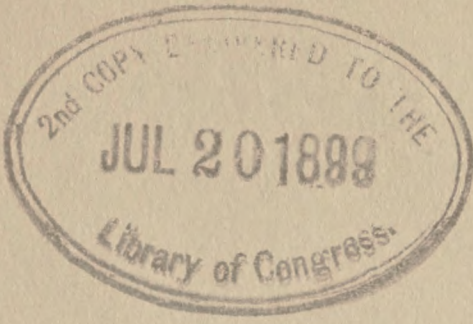
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LEND A HAND



Old Judge Brewster was unpacking a box of books in his library. There was a smile on his stern face as he took out certain volumes and arranged them in a particular case of books that were evidently bound in the most expensive style.

He had been at work for half an hour handling the books slowly and lovingly when a servant came into the library with a telegram.

“The boy is waiting, sir,” she said, as the judge made no movement to sign the book she held. She had put the telegram on a table where the judge had motioned her to place it.

“The boy can wait a little longer,” replied the judge curtly, and he went on with his work.

The servant, who understood Judge Brewster’s ways, hesitated only a moment. She laid the book down by the side of the telegram and went out of the room.

Five minutes went by. The judge continued his unpacking. His disregard for the telegram was characteristic of his grim nature. The boy was sitting on the front door step, whistling a popular tune.

He was no more disturbed by the delay connected with the telegram than the judge was. He was used to carrying messages of all kinds to all kinds of people, but he was not used to this contempt for telegrams that was being shown on this occasion. Nevertheless he was well satisfied to sit out there in the sun and whistle, until his book came back with the judge's signature.

The judge deliberately finished taking all the books out of the box, and placed them carefully on the shelves. Twice he changed the location of a certain volume. At last he seemed satisfied with the arrangement, and turned towards the table where the telegram lay.

He opened it without any show of curiosity and read it through mechanically.

“Come at once. Monroe has had serious accident.
“Harold West, Hope College.”

Judge Brewster had two passions; a love of books, and a love of his only son Monroe. He had just been gratifying his first passion; his second seemed likely to prove a source of bitterness and anguish to him.

The stern old face grew white as he grasped the meaning of the message, and for a moment he held the back of a chair with a hand that trembled in spite of its agonizing grip on a support that seemed very frail for the massive frame of the man who stood there staring hard at the yellow piece of paper still held in the other hand.

He read the message again, and his form stiffened

as if to repel a shock. Then he picked up the book, signed his name and took out his watch. He took three strides to the door, opened it and called for the servant.

When she came he ordered her to carry the book out to the boy and then he turned to his telephone and called for a hack.

“Tell the driver to be here at once. I must catch the No. 5 for the East,” he ordered sharply.

Half an hour later he had telegraphed to Hope College that he was on the way to his son and an hour after he was seated in the train, a two days' journey before him, his heart tossed with a tempest of fear and his mind going over and over the words of the telegram while his body was carried on towards the grim uncertainty outlined by the words, “serious accident.”

Three days later a curious group of people at Waverley station watched a tall, large man get out of the west-bound flyer, No. 7. There was some respect but not any kindlier feeling shown in the faces of the platform loungers as Judge Brewster went forward and stood silently by the baggage car until a long plain box was carried out and placed in the undertaker's wagon. Then the judge, in company with two friends, drove up to the undertaker's and an hour afterwards a hearse brought a coffin out to Judge Brewster's and they brought it into the library, and when the people had gone away for a little while, Judge Brewster opened the coffin and looked down at the face of his only son.

It was said about Waverley that afternoon that Judge Brewster never shed a tear during the funeral service. But those who knew, or thought they knew him, said his hard old heart was broken. The day after the funeral the judge shut himself into his library and refused to see any one. The old brick mansion on Summit Hill contained a rich, educated, broken-hearted man, who was apparently without God and without hope in the world.

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“Donald! Donald!” the voice of a girl called out of the kitchen of a farm house to a boy who was sitting in the other room, buried in a book.

Perhaps the word “buried” is too weak a word to describe the condition of the boy. “Drowned” would be a good substitute, or even “cremated.” He was totally insensible to all outside noises. It was refreshing or would have been to any one outside the family to see how completely oblivious the boy was of everything on earth except his book.

“Donald!” the voice called again. And then the owner of the voice stopped her work and came to the door of the kitchen and looked into the other room.

She was a determined looking girl with a good honest face. She was not pretty in the ordinary sense, but there was a pleasant expression in her eyes and she had the hearty look that always goes with health when the owner of it is a person of decided character.

The boy in the other room had his elbows on a table and the book lay between them. A small kerosene

lamp was very close by him and the room was only dimly lighted by it.

“Donald!” cried the girl again, and as she spoke she stepped into the room. “I want you to get me a pail of water. And your father has been calling you for some time. He wants you to help him at the barn about something.”

Still the boy did not move, nor give any sign that he heard. He turned over a leaf and went on reading, the look on his face as intent on the matter in the book as if he were in the middle of a desert island a thousand miles from any other human being.

The girl went up to the table very deliberately and blew out the little lamp.

The look of dismay on the face of the boy must have been remarkable if his action was anything to judge his feelings by. There was a sudden scramble of hands and feet as he felt the book disappear so suddenly and unexpectedly, and a wail in his voice that made the girl laugh out loud.

“Oh, what did you do that for? I was in the most interesting part!”

“Donald Wallace, you get a pail of water for me first and then go out to the barn and help your father,” said the girl as she went back into the kitchen.

“Why didn’t you call me if you wanted me?” asked the youth, coming to the kitchen door. He was absolutely good-natured after the first shock of the lamp episode was over, and he took up the water pail and started to go outdoors.

“Call you! Is my voice like the voice of many waters?”

“It’s like the voice of a pail of water a good many times,” replied Donald a little humbly, but with more humor than most people imagined he had.

“Do you mean to say that you never heard me call you?”

“I never did. You know I didn’t, Florence. I’m always ready to answer when I do hear; isn’t that so?”

“Why, yes, I believe you are,” replied the girl as good-naturedly as the boy. “But when you get hold of a book you wouldn’t hear the last trump, to say nothing of the first. I’ve a good mind to hide your book for a week.”

“No, don’t do that!” the boy spoke in a tone of alarm, as if the thing had happened once before. “I’ll keep one ear open after this.”

“One ear. If you had a dozen ears they wouldn’t hear anything when you are reading. But I won’t touch the book if you’ll get the water. And there’s your father calling you again.”

The boy went out hurriedly and came back in a few minutes with the water. He set it down on the bench and the girl said in a hearty voice, “Thank you! I would have gone after it myself, but I want to get this work done before your mother and the girls get home.”

“I’ll bring in the water and the wood, of course. That isn’t a girl’s work,” said Donald as he started to go out to the barn.

“All right,” said the girl with great good nature.

“Hope you’ll always have the same advanced ideas on woman’s rights.”

“Hope I shall,” replied Donald as he disappeared in the direction of the barn.

A little later the entire family, including the mother, who had driven into town with the two girls, both of them several years younger than Donald, were in the sitting-room of the little farm house. The girl in the kitchen was still at work doing the last things.

Mrs. Wallace was showing some purchases she had made in town.

“There’s the baby’s shoes and Helen’s hat. And here is the cloth that Florence wanted for aprons. Florence, won’t you come in and see if this is what you want?”

“Yes, ma’am, in a minute,” replied the girl, and very soon she joined the family.

“Did you get my book, mother?” inquired Donald eagerly, while the women were discussing the apron cloth.

“No, dear, I couldn’t find it. I don’t think there are any copies of that in town.”

The boy’s look expressed great disappointment. He was silent a moment. Then he said, “Judge Brewster has it. But it’s no use. He wouldn’t lend it.”

“How do you know he wouldn’t?” asked the girl.

“Oh, that makes me think!” exclaimed Mrs. Wallace. “Judge Brewster brought home the body of his son Monroe from Hope College to-day. He was killed in an accident of some sort.”

There were several exclamations.

“Monroe Brewster was a promising young fellow,” said Mr. Wallace thoughtfully. “About the age of our boy. A great student, too, I understand.”

“It must be a great blow to him. Think of him alone in that great house with all those books. They say he loved only his books and his son.”

“A man can’t love books with much comfort after losing such a boy,” said Mr. Wallace again with grave thoughtfulness, and the talk of the family drifted into other subjects. They had known the Brewsters only slightly.

But that night Donald Wallace lay awake a long time thinking about the books in Judge Brewster’s library. He had a passion for reading. His father had promised him that if the crops turned out well that summer he would send him to college in the fall. The boy looked forward to that event with an eagerness that craved all the preparation possible. He found himself praying for rain and good weather and began to think of the crops as a part of the possibilities that were to figure in his opportunity to gratify his most thirsty soul for reading and mind culture.

He had helped himself so far. Every farm house between his father’s and the town of Waverley had contributed to his devouring book appetite. Many of the small libraries in the town had also yielded up their best volumes to him. But Judge Brewster’s house was unknown to him except for its reputation as containing the finest library and art collection in the State.

The boy thought of all this a great deal. This evening after the news of the death of Judge Brewster's son, Donald Wallace thought of the old man, stern, alone, in his library.

It was a week after Judge Brewster had buried his son that Donald, his mother and one of the sisters had gone to Waverley on some errands. The youngest child remained at home with Florence Raynor, who had been working for the Wallaces now for five years. She was an orphan and had grown up to be one of the family circle. Mrs. Wallace, who had been in feeble health for many years, trusted Florence as if she had been her own daughter. The last seen of her by the mother and Donald, as they drove into town, she was standing by the door of the farm house cheerily waving a dish towel at them while little Louisa stood by her side waving her hand in farewell.

Three hours later a tremendous change had taken place in the soft, sultry afternoon. A black cloud of gigantic, threatening shape had come up swiftly out of the southwest, and the air had blown hot and then died out to a deadly stillness.

Florence came to the door of the farm house, and, shading her eyes, looked off across the familiar stretch of road. There at a distance of three miles she thought she could make out the sorrel team with Donald and the mother and young Helen on the way home. Little Louisa was upstairs asleep. Mr. Wallace was at the farther end of the farm, where he had gone to see about some stock.

The air suddenly stirred and a darkness like even-

ing grew about the farm, although it was only four o'clock. The wheat and corn fields, magnificent stretches of color, bent to that strange wind as if in fear of the coming terror.

And then Florence realized what was to take place. She rushed upstairs and looked out of the west windows. She had never seen so awful a sight. The great cloud was twisting and roaring, and all under and around it white and green lightning played. The roar had deepened into an awful sound which leaped as it were right out of a vacuum of silence.

She snatched up the child and ran downstairs. The cellar door opened from the kitchen and so swiftly had the storm come up and burst upon the land that she had barely time to open the door and run down the cellar steps with the child before the cyclone was roaring through the grove which surrounded the house. Another moment and it had lifted the house from its foundations, dashed it into the barns and whirled the fragments into a scattered ruin.

To Florence clinging convulsively to the frightened, crying child there in the dark it seemed as if the very world itself were being torn into pieces. The torrents that fell immediately following the whirlwind drenched her and the child. Then great hailstones came crashing down and the brave girl crouched in a corner of the now open cellar and protected the baby with her own body. In the darkness, broken by the most vivid streaks of lightning, she heard a

voice. It was Donald, who, with his mother and Helen, had driven up just as the cyclone had passed.

“She’s safe, mother! They’re both safe! Thank God!” Donald cried, slipping down the wet walls and scrambling over the ruins that lay about. The mother and Helen ran up and all rejoiced together even with the storm still howling fearfully around them and a darkness unnatural and dense still blotting out the middle of that afternoon.

Then as the storm gradually ceased and the light came back, they all huddled together, becoming conscious of the total ruin wrought to property and crops. But where was the father? Donald thought it and Mrs. Wallace spoke it.

They began at once to search for him, Florence carrying the baby and Donald leading and carrying by turns Helen. Mrs. Wallace was calm, but deathly pale. She and Donald had actually seen the farmhouse lifted from its place, whirled up like a toy and dashed down as if with intelligent malignity. She had feared the worst for her baby and Florence. They were alive as by a miracle, but how about her husband?

Out by the old fringe of timber, by the brook which was now a sullen, muddy stream twenty feet wide, they came upon the body of Richard Wallace. He lay under the trunk of a large tree, his face peaceful enough, killed instantly. The little group kneeled about the silent form, and in the whole wide universe of suffering it seemed to them in that moment of awe and grief as if God had gone out of his

world and left no one in charge of his children except the spirit of accident and caprice.

Judge Brewster sat in his library reading. It was a winter afternoon and a storm was sweeping over Summit Hill. The snow piled up around the old brick house in heaps of fantastic design and the wind howled over the chimneys and blew into fierce jets the generous fire in the grate.

The judge was evidently not very much interested in his book. Once he laid it down and walked over to the window and looked out. Then he came back to his chair and sat for several minutes looking into the fire.

He had picked up his book again and was carelessly turning over its leaves when the door-bell rang, and a moment later the servant came to the library door.

“There is a young man wants to see you, sir.”

The judge did not even turn around in his chair. He said curtly:

“Tell him to come in here.”

The servant looked surprised, but after a moment of hesitation she went out again.

The judge still continued to sit in front of the fire with his back to the door. When the young man entered the library the judge remained seated in the same position.

There was a moment of awkward silence. The judge finally broke it by saying, still not turning around:

“Well, what do you want?”

“I don't want anything, sir, unless you are willing to grant my request in the same spirit that I make it.”

Judge Brewster turned around suddenly and confronted the speaker. What he saw was a young man about twenty-one, with a frank, clear-eyed face and a very determined and intelligent look in his eyes. The judge was interested in spite of his nature. Still he did not ask his visitor to take a seat.

“What do you want?” he asked again, this time a shade less curtly.

“I want to borrow some books if you are willing to lend them.”

“Borrow some books!” the judge exclaimed. It is doubtful if he had ever loaned a book in his life.

“Yes, sir. I am studying certain subjects out on a farm and I have used up all the books from the library in town that will help me. I have heard of your library, of course. It is said to be the best in the State. I thought it would do no harm to come and ask you, sir, if you were willing to loan me certain volumes. You could do no more than refuse me, at any rate.”

The young man paused suddenly, as if he had a fear of making too long a speech, and looked around at the rich book shelves with a hungry glance that had some effect on the judge.

“Won't you sit down?” he said, after a pause, during which he had stared hard at the young man.

The visitor took a chair, and looked at the judge calmly. Judge Brewster coughed a little nervously.

“What’s your name, young man?”

“Wallace—Donald Wallace. I live on a farm four miles west of town.”

“Ah! you are the Wallace whose father was killed in the cyclone three years ago?”

“Yes, sir. The same week that you——”

“What is that? Go on.”

“The same week that you lost your son, sir. Pardon me, if I ought not to have mentioned it. Father was talking of your loss only two days before he was killed.”

“By an accident,” said the judge in a low voice. He turned around to the fire and stared into it so long that Donald was afraid he had forgotten that he had a visitor.

After a while the judge turned around again.

“What books do you want to borrow?” he asked abruptly.

“I want especially some books on English History and Literature. You see I am studying in the Chautauqua course and I want to supplement it with side-reading. I have Joy’s ‘Twenty Centuries of English History’ and Judson’s ‘Europe in the Nineteenth Century’ and Professor Beer’s ‘From Chaucer to Tennyson’ and Miss Hale’s ‘Men and Manners of the Eighteenth Century’ and Winchell’s ‘Walks and Talks in the Geological Field.’ Now there are certain books bearing on all these subjects that I am anxious to get. They are expensive books and I have thought a good many times this year about asking you for the loan of a few books from your library, but

I never could quite get up the courage to come and ask. I don't think I'm very brave naturally."

The judge moved a little uneasily.

"But you finally did pick out a nice day to come and test your courage?" he said with a short laugh.

"I don't mind a little storm like this," replied Donald simply.

"Did you come in from the farm just on purpose to ask for these books?"

"Yes, sir. In the winter time we have a good deal of leisure on the farm, and the evenings are the best times for reading."

There was another pause and the judge stared hard under his great eyebrows at the sturdy young farmer.

"Are you studying and reading all alone?"

"No, sir. There is a young lady studying the course with me." There was a shade of embarrassment in Donald's tone that the sharp-eared judge detected.

"Your sister, did you say?"

"No, sir. She is a young lady who has worked in our family several years."

"You mean the hired girl?" asked the judge with coarse bluntness.

Donald looked very direct into the judge's face.

"That is not what any gentleman would call her, sir."

The judge chuckled. He was amused and beginning to be interested.

"Then you and this young lady are pursuing this

Chautauqua course together. How long a course is it?"

"Four years. We expect to graduate next year."

"And then what?"

Donald colored. "Really, sir, am I obliged to answer? Is this a court room?"

The judge smiled. The first time he had smiled that way since his son died.

"Good! I don't blame you, young man. But why don't you take a regular college course, instead of this Chautauqua plan?"

"I can't leave mother and the girls, my sisters. You see, sir, since father's death we have had a succession of poor crops and there has been nothing for me to do but stay by and do the best I can. Mother has never been well since father was killed."

There was another moment of silence in the library. The judge moved again uneasily. The storm outside seemed to be increasing.

"Suppose I should lend you some books. I suppose you would never return them. That's the way with all book borrowers!" the judge growled.

"No fear of that, sir," replied Donald with a smile. "I'll return them fast enough in order to get more."

"You will, eh?" snarled the judge. But his look was not as fierce as his voice.

"I'm not in the habit of loaning books," he continued shortly.

"So I've heard," replied Donald simply.

"You have, eh? Well, it's nobody's business.

But suppose I let you take a book or two, will you promise to return them on the time that I say?"

"Yes, sir, whatever I promise I'll live up to," said Donald earnestly.

The judge hesitated. Why should he acknowledge a growing interest in this young fellow? He was about the age his own son would have been if he had lived. He was poor, a student evidently, he was making a struggle to help his mother, he was determined to get an education. The judge drifted back in memory to his own meagre, starved boyhood, and its bitter fight for a college course. He had hoped to save his own boy from such an experience by giving him all the help his father had lacked. Could he pass it on now in some way to this other young man who had come four miles through such a storm to ask such a small favor?

"What books do you want?" The voice came out of an ungracious silence and made Donald start.

"If you would let me look over your list of English poets, sir?" asked Donald quietly.

"You'll find them on the third shelf there at your left," said the judge briefly, and Donald walked over to it and was soon lost to all knowledge of the judge and the storm and his surroundings.

The judge watched him from under his heavy eyebrows, and a smile of real pleasure crossed his face as he noted the fact that his visitor was already a thousand miles away from the place where he was standing.

Five minutes went by. It was getting darker and

darker in the library, but Donald had happened to take down one of the volumes of English poets printed in unusually large type, and he read on, oblivious of everything.

“When you get through the book, young man,” said the judge suddenly, “it will be supper time.”

Donald made no sign that he heard any one speak. The spell of the book was upon him. The judge watched him with increasing interest.

“If he were my own boy, now,” muttered the judge. Then he spoke to Donald again.

“Have you ever been to Chautauqua? I suppose not?”

Donald turned over a leaf and read on. The judge smiled again, and then he suddenly rose and walked over to the large west window and pulled down the heavy curtain.

The effect was very much the same as when, years before, Florence had blown out the little kerosene lamp. Donald stood in the dark, feeling of the book and wondering at first what had happened. Then he stammered:

“I beg pardon, sir. I forgot where I was.”

“That’s all right,” said the judge, a little gruffly. “It’s time to turn on the light, and I always hate to mix sun and electricity.”

He touched the key and turned on a blaze of illumination that was in startling contrast with the twilight of a moment before. Donald, with the book in his hand, still stood by the shelves.

“Well, is that the book you want?” asked the judge, going back to his chair.

“Yes, sir, if you are willing.”

“You’ll promise to take good care of it, not take it out to the barn or leave it in the hay-field overnight?” said the judge, a little roughly.

“I think too much of a good book to abuse it,” replied Donald, in a voice that showed he felt hurt by the judge’s suspicions. “See here, sir. I brought this to carry the books in.”

Donald drew out of his pocket a large piece of oil-skin which he had cut out and arranged in a pocket-like form and had used several times in carrying the books he had already borrowed.

“Umph! Not bad! So you expected to get something when you came to see me?”

“Yes, sir, I had faith enough to come prepared.”

“Help yourself, then.”

“I’ll take just this one, and the volume on Tennyson for Florence, if you are willing.”

“You can take them on one condition, that you return them promptly at two o’clock three weeks from to-day. Will you do that?”

“I will, if it is possible for me to come,” replied Donald, sturdily, as he rolled the oil-skin about the books and tied them up carefully. He took up his hat and made a step towards the door. The judge was still watching him curiously.

“Better stay to supper,” he said abruptly.

Donald said in telling his experience to the family afterwards, “I was just taken off my feet by the invitation.” Outwardly he showed no surprise to the judge.

“Thank you, sir, but I couldn’t. Mother would be anxious about me. I don’t mind the storm.”

The judge let him get as far as the door. Then he called out to him:

“If you find the storm too bad, come back and stay over night.”

“Thank you, sir, I don’t think I shall. I’m used to being out in rough weather, and I rather like it.”

He went out and left the judge still sitting by his open fire surrounded by his shelves of books. But he was not the same man who had sat there an hour before. Another human being had come into his thought, and as he idly turned another leaf of his book he turned the leaf of a new experience with more interest in his old heart than he had felt for many a weary year.

.
“A young woman to see you, sir,” said the servant to Judge Brewster as he sat in his library.

The judge took out his watch.

“Five minutes of two. If that young man doesn’t come back with those books right on time I’ll never have any interest in another human being. They’re all alike.”

“Show her in here,” he added, in a louder tone.

There came into the library a young woman who looked frankly and pleasantly at the judge. He could not help himself when he said out of his starved old heart: “I like her face.”

“I’m Miss Raynor, and I’ve brought back the books that Mr. Wallace borrowed three weeks ago.

Donald—Mr. Wallace” (the girl colored slightly) “was hurt last week in the wood lot, and is not able to walk yet.”

“Seriously hurt?” asked the judge quickly, as he rose and motioned Florence to a seat.

“No, sir, we hope not. A tree that he was chopping down fell on him. The doctor thinks he will not be crippled. We had fears——”

The girl suddenly paused, and the judge noted her intelligent face with growing interest. There was also a tremor in the girl’s voice that told the judge something more. He was rough enough to take advantage of it.

“What difference does it make to you if he was crippled?”

The girl colored, then turned pale, and she rose.

“Do you mean to say, sir, that——”

She was turning towards the door, when the judge rose and did what he had not done for years. He apologized. Afterwards he remembered that the young woman was a hired girl. Nevertheless, it was with a grim sense of the unusual situation that he said:

“I beg pardon, Miss Raynor. I am a selfish, mean old man. Pray sit down again. It was altogether wrong for me to speak as I did.”

Florence smiled and sat down, looking at the judge with eyes that had traces of tears in them.

“Now then, my dear young woman, I suppose you want more books. I hope the young man is able to read while he is on the invalid list.”

“Indeed, he is!” replied Florence, eagerly. “His mother says he will probably be willing to remain an invalid the rest of the winter, as long as he can get new books.”

“Then I had better not let him have any more.”

“But I hope you will, sir. You see, we are planning to finish this course and graduate next year. We want to supplement the prescribed reading with a great deal more. You have no idea——”

The girl was going on eagerly, and the judge was watching her as he had watched Donald. She stopped suddenly and seemed confused by the judge’s look.

“Excuse me. But will you think me rude if I ask a question?” The judge spoke almost gently.

“No, sir,” said Florence, wonderingly, although Donald’s account of his interview had prepared her somewhat.

“Do I understand that you work in the kitchen on the Wallace farm?”

“Yes, sir, of course,” answered Florence, with an amused look.

“And yet you want to borrow books on English Literature? Now, the girls in my kitchen never want to read English Literature.”

“How do you know they don’t, sir? Did you ever talk with them about it?”

The judge stared.

“Talk with them about it? Why, I should think not.”

“You have a good many beautiful books in the

house. I should think the girls would be interested in some of them," continued Florence, simply, unconsciously smiting the judge's selfish indifference to the humanity nearest him a tremendous blow that even he felt.

"Why, why—what business is it of theirs——" he began to stammer angrily. Then he suddenly checked himself and sat staring at the hearty, healthy face opposite.

"You mustn't think that all the girls in kitchens are like you or all the young men on farms are like Donald."

"No, sir," murmured Florence, looking down at her hands. Then she lifted her eyes and spoke earnestly.

"But it must be a great power to possess, to have beautiful books and fine pictures, and an education and all the things that so many people would like to enjoy. I am sure we owe much to you, sir, for your kindness in loaning us the books."

Again the judge sat still, in silence staring at his visitor. There were things stirred in him by what she said that he was unwilling to look into carefully. It made him too uncomfortable.

"If you'll tell me what books you want, I'll bring them out myself. I want to see how the young man is getting on."

There was an abruptness about the judge's proposition that made Florence speechless.

"I drove in with the farm wagon," she began.

"I'll go out with my buggy," said the judge

briefly. And half an hour later he was on the way, following the farm wagon in which was a young woman considerably bewildered by the outcome of her first visit to old Judge Brewster's.

“Then, I understand, Mr. Wallace, that you refuse my offer?” said the judge, as he walked up and down in the familiar library.

“Yes, sir, I think I ought not to accept the money.”

The great west window was open, and the warm scent of fruit and flowers from the garden blew into the room on the June breeze.

The judge stopped by the window a moment and looked out. Then he turned abruptly round and blurted out:

“It's ungrateful in you. Don't you want to go?”

“Yes, sir, of course I do.”

“And yet you refuse the chance to go that is offered. Will you take it in the name of my boy, who would have graduated next week if he——”

“No,” replied Donald, gently. “I cannot take it even in his name. I do not want you to help me in that way.”

“What way, then?” growled the judge.

Donald hesitated. “I'm not the only young man, nor Florence the only young woman, who needs an education, sir. Just think of the large number of young people in Waverley who are not able to go to college! I would rather you would help some of them as you have helped me. Now, your library——”

Donald paused, and the judge glowered at him from under his formidable eyebrows.

“Your library, sir—why should it exist here with all its wealth of helpfulness unused? There are scores of people in the town and out on the farms who would be wonderfully helped if in some way you could get them and the books together, just as you have allowed me to come.”

“It would be a great scheme, wouldn't it, to turn my library into a circulating library, and for me to turn myself into a librarian and general director of useful reading for country people who can't afford to go to college?” asked the judge, sarcastically.

“Yes, sir, I think that would be a good thing for you to do,” replied Donald quietly, so quietly that the judge stared at him hard.

“You see, sir,” Donald ventured to continue, “ever since you came out to the farm that day when I was lying on my back after that accident, I have been doing a good deal of thinking along this line. You have done so much for me since that I cannot help wishing the same help might in some way come to other farmers' boys and girls and a good many others right here in Waverley. With a library like this, and”—Donald hesitated—“and with your intellect to direct its use or even to find out those who would be helped, it would be a wonderful blessing to very many young people.”

The judge did not say anything, and Donald walked over to the shelves like a person who was in the familiar habit of doing so, and took down a book.

He was soon absorbed in his volume, and did not hear the judge when he went out of the room. When he was ready to leave the house, Donald could not find him. He was not in his room, the servant said, and Donald went slowly back to the farm, thinking hard of the interview he had had with Judge Brewster, and wondering if anything would come of it.

That evening he told his mother about the judge's offer to send him to Chautauqua.

"Oh, why didn't you accept it?" cried the mother with enthusiasm.

"I didn't need it. I have saved up money enough of my own. Besides"—Donald went on slowly—"I don't care to go to Chautauqua alone."

Florence was in the kitchen finishing up the day's work. Mrs. Wallace sat looking at her son, and she seemed on the point of offering a suggestion, but after a few moments she went upstairs and Donald opened a book and began to read.

He read a little while, but did not seem interested, and finally, with a curious movement of hesitation, he laid the book down and went out into the kitchen.

"Don't you want a pail of water?" he asked.

Florence looked up from her work in astonishment. But a wave of color crossed her face and made it look quite pretty, as she stood there.

"Yes, if you can spare time from your reading to get it."

Donald took up the pail and went out without a word. When he came back he set the pail down on

the sink shelf and offered to wipe the dishes. Florence gave him a towel, and for a moment there was an awkward silence.

“I have decided to go to Chautauqua after all,” Donald said, as he laid a plate down on the table.

“Have you?” Florence spoke with an attempt at indifference, but she was trembling.

“Yes, you know we have finished the course, and I want to be at Chautauqua on Recognition Day. I have made enough money on the farm this year to go all right.”

“It will be very pleasant for you,” said Florence, choking down something very much like a sob.

“Well, it certainly will if—you see, I have decided that I don’t care to go alone,” Donald continued, wiping a saucer very hard.

Florence bent her head over the dishpan, and Donald kept on wiping the saucer, which was now polished exceedingly dry.

He paused suddenly, laid the saucer down and went over to Florence and put his hand on her shoulder.

“Dear,” he said, “I want you to go with me as my wife. Will you? It will be your wedding journey.”

The girl looked up at him, the great joy of a transforming love in her eyes.

“Do you mean it—Donald?” She spoke the familiar name with a new tone of voice.

“You know I do, dear; you know I have loved you for a long time, don’t you?”

“Yes,” she answered simply, still looking at him.

“And,” continued Donald, with a tremor that was not fear, “you have loved me?”

“Longer than you have loved me,” she answered, and Donald Wallace then and there took advantage of his future wife’s hands being in the dish-pan to kiss her, because her eyes told him that he might.

After a moment Florence said, with a sober face that could not conceal her happiness:

“I’m afraid you have not counted all the cost, sir, in loving a ‘hired girl.’”

“No, I shall never be able to measure what it is worth to me.”

“But I am afraid we cannot both go to Chautauqua. How about the money?”

“I have enough. The crops have turned out beautifully.”

“Your mother——”

“Mother and the girls can get on nicely, and I have made arrangements with Petersen to manage the farm in August.”

“You must have taken some things for granted, sir, when you made all these plans.”

“Yes,” said Donald, laughing lightly, and Florence joined him.

She wiped her hands and went upstairs to her room. She soon came down with a small box, which she placed in Donald’s hands.

“It is my wedding dowry,” she said simply.

He opened it and saw notes and silver.

“It is every cent of it what I have saved from my

wages here in seven years," she said, with some pride.

Donald gravely counted it. "Four hundred and seventy-three dollars! Please remember, ma'am, that I proposed to you before I had a hint that you possessed this wealth!"

"Do you think it will be enough to keep us in Chautauqua a week?" asked Florence, as she stood by her lover enjoying his surprise.

"At least a month, I should say, besides buying two or three books, for ourselves and—for others."

"And for others," echoed Florence, looking up at her future husband with tears of joy.

.
On Recognition Day there walked down through the arches two of the happiest people in all Chautauqua. Everybody knew they were bride and groom, but nobody, except a very few, knew the little history that lay back of those happy faces, the man's self-reliant, sturdy, honest, noble; the woman's refined, loving, gentle, winsome. So much had study, and reverence for true learning and true love for each other wrought out in these two lives of workers, these two children of a common Father.

.
Back in Waverley in a library that had witnessed more than one transforming scene in a hard heart, an old man was walking up and down. The August heat was on the land, and the hum of its insect life droned into the stillness of the richly furnished room.

The old man laid a letter down on the table.

“Those young people seem to be enjoying their honeymoon there at Chautauqua. I’m not sorry I had a little share in it. But I’m too old to redeem a selfish past. Am I? What can old age, childless old age like mine, do for youth?”

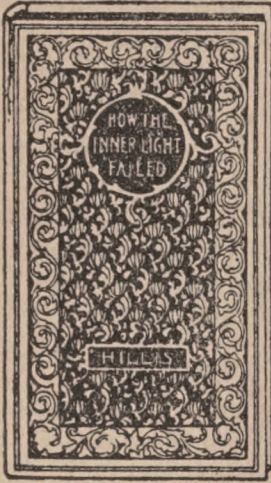
He asked the question aloud, but did not answer it. After a while he sat down in his familiar chair and took up a book. But he did not read. The vision of what he might do with his wealth and his books and his intellect to bless the world became a vision that revealed to his selfishly encrusted habits the possibility of even his old age to forget its bitter losses, come out of its narrow seclusion and Lend a Hand to the heart and mind of other children of God who were struggling into the light. And while this vision grew brighter, Donald and Florence came to the shore of the lake and looked out at the sunset.

“It will be a beautiful day to-morrow, dear,” said Donald, gently.

“Yes, to-morrow,” said Florence, softly.

THE END

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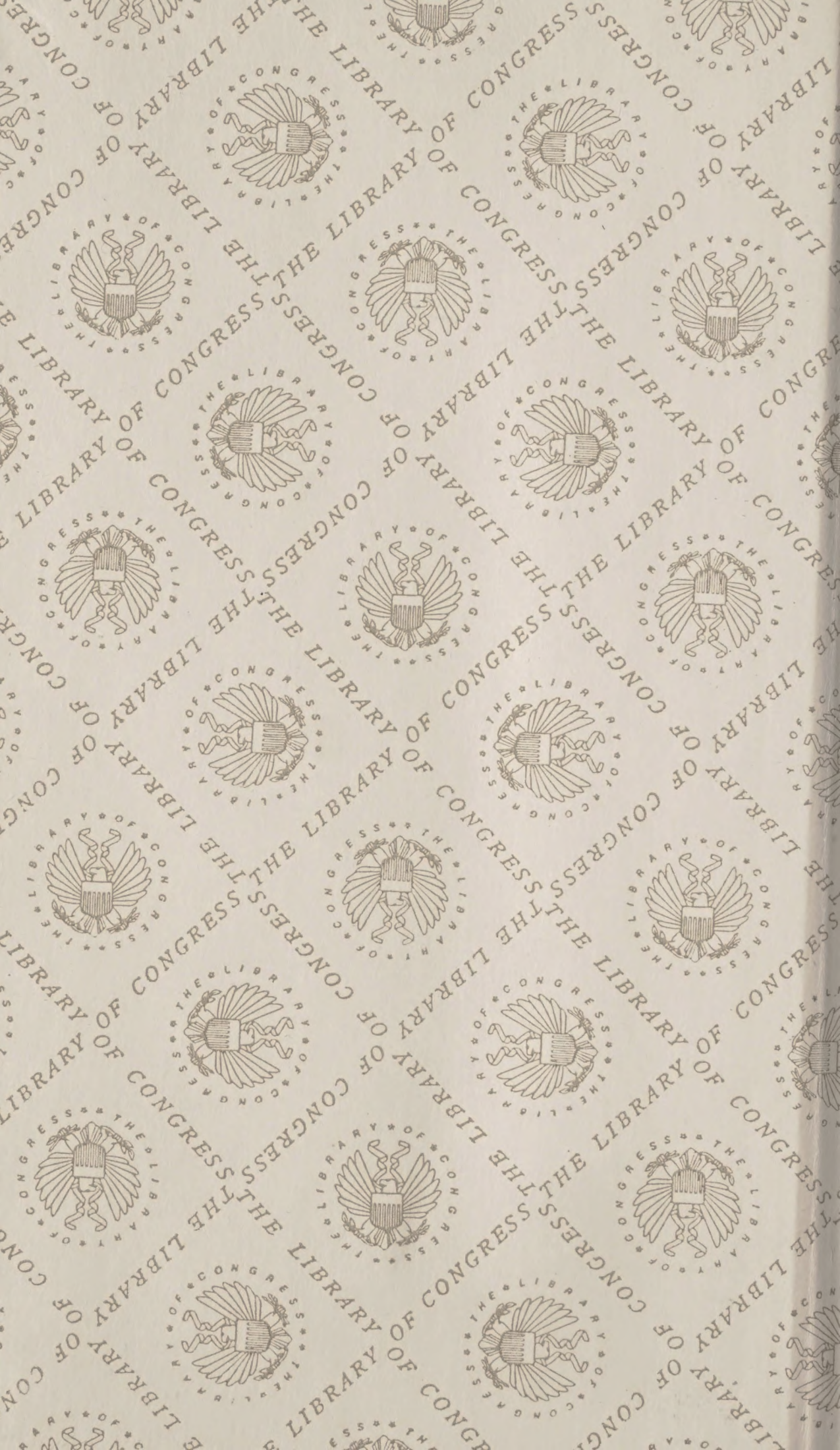
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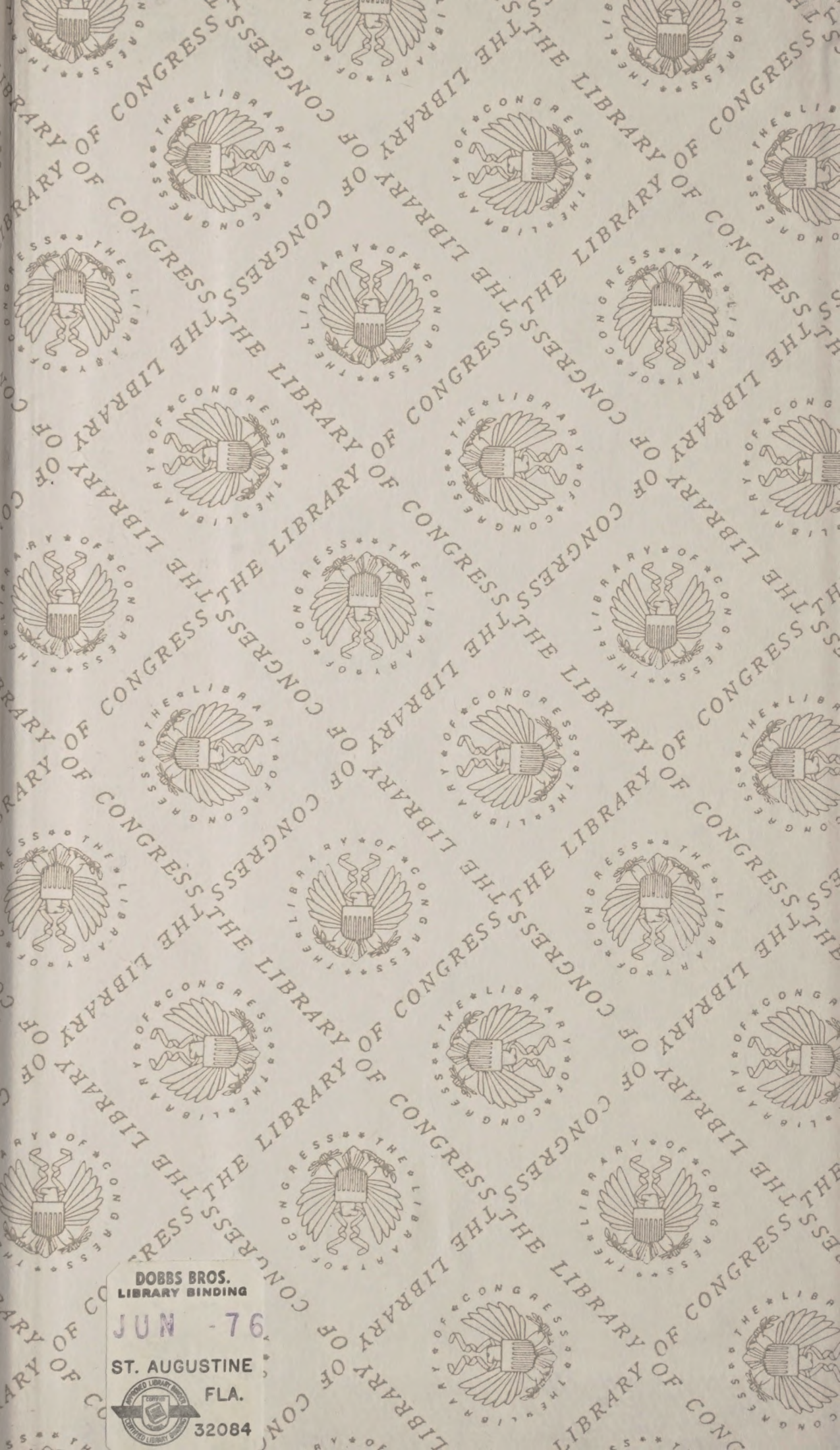
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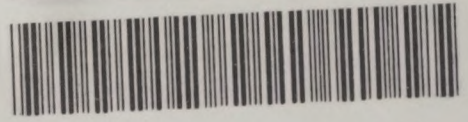
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