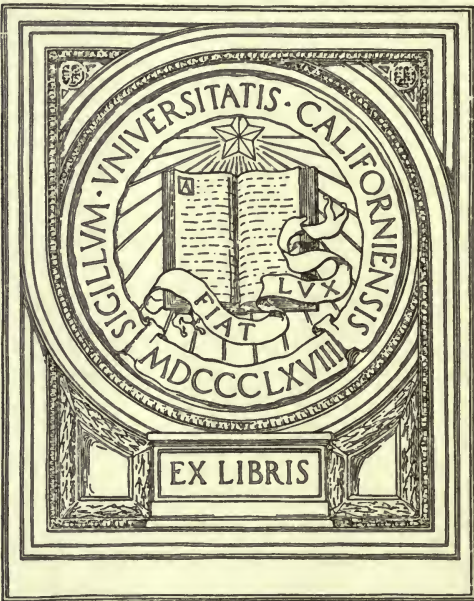


*The Balance
of Power*

by Arthur Goodrich

GIFT OF
Miss Ella Castelhun



Jessie M. Clifton.

from her friend.

Xmas. 1906.

"Marguerite"



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The Balance of Power



“Now she returned to the edge of the cliff.”

(See page 60)

The
Balance of Power

A Novel

By
Frederick
Arthur Goodrich

Illustrated by Otto Toaspern



New York
The Outing Publishing Company
1906

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Gift of Miss Ella Castellum

THE OUTING PRESS
DEPOSIT, N. Y.

To My Father

WHO HAS ALWAYS BEEN, AS WELL,

MY FRIEND AND COMRADE

M209356

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THE BALANCE OF POWER

CHAPTER I

THE GARDEN OF MEMORIES

THE settlers of Hampstead, Connecticut, stopped half way up the red-soiled incline which separates beyond into two broad summits. The town grew up the rest of the way, unsatisfied until it reached the top, first of West Hill and later of the lower East Hill. The factories took the only place left, the lower half of the incline at the bottom of which runs Hampstead River, deep and narrow, evidently planned to furnish power for mill-wheels.

High on the summit of West Hill, where even in the early eighties the factory owners and officers and the professional people lived and looked down upon the workers in the shops whose frame houses dotted thickly the eastern summit, were two houses side by side, of which the owners were proud and the rest of the town envious. One was built of irregular gray stone, square and strong; over its front and sides crept thick ivy which turned a wonderful red in the autumn; before it spread a broad trim lawn shaded with big trees and bordered with a high hedge, and behind it stretched terrace after terrace of orchard and garden. The other was obviously new, an

expensive mongrel structure of brownstone, brick and wood, culminating in a tower which was the wonder of the town. The ground which ran from the porch to the street was spotted with new grass and old turf, and the short yard at the back was still in straggling confusion.

Many people came to the stone house daily, for Doctor Gilbert lived there—quick, nervous, kindly Doctor Gilbert whom the well-to-do respected and liked and the poorer people loved. Wealthy as he was—for his father had left him not only the big gray house and broad acres of land but a considerable fortune as well, made in trade with the West Indies—there was never a sick child so far away, nor a night so cold, nor a simple kindness so slight that the Doctor was not ready at the call for help. Impractical fine gentleman of the old school! Many a sick German woman in a cottage on East Hill had slept for the first time in a week of nights while the big man hummed Schubert songs in his mellow baritone; many a miserable little Irish lad chilled in a shanty, the cracks of which yawned invitation to snow and winter cold, bolted bitter medicine so as to hear the merry gentleman tell stories of the Civil War or of that strange and wonderful court of King Arthur; many an ailing clerk or bookkeeper laughed himself well at the Doctor's quaint wit, and poverty-bound fathers blessed him with tears in their eyes as they watched their children eating unexpected Christmas dinners.

He was as tender as a woman, and yet strong men had hung their heads before the tempest of his anger. As a young man he had seen visions, some of which he had realized and many of which he had forgotten. Now he dreamed dreams. They were all about a boy with tawny

locks who often sat wide eyed on a hassock before the big fireplace in the library listening to the rambling reminiscences of bluff Colonel Mead, who had fought Indians on the plains, or to the Doctor's own stories, perennially new. He planned the boy's future a dozen times every day, and when his wife with characteristic Scotch practicality started him awake with a short bit of worldly common-sense, he only smiled and went back to his dreaming.

Neighbors saw little in the boy to account for the Doctor's pride. He was a gawky lad, tall for his age, and his large nose and ears and chin forbade even the Doctor to call him handsome. And yet, when he smiled there was something about the gray eyes and the twist of the mouth that wholly satisfied those who loved him. He had a queer little mind that would focus itself to only one thing at a time and which would not listen to anything else until this one thing was settled conclusively.

"Ef ye want a thing, no matter what it is," the Colonel once remarked approvingly of the boy's persistence, "ye've got to go after it an' stay after it till ye git it. Jack's got the right idea. Jest wantin' never brought anythin', so far ez I know, but want."

Mr. Hardy, the man who had built the house next door, was a man of early middle age. His father had started the now famous mills of Hardy & Son, when Hardy after a hurried schooling had joined him. Much of their success had been due to the younger man who by strict economy and relentless energy had built up the factories to their present size, the largest in Hampstead. Although he was now president of the company, Hardy's

front door opened punctually every morning at half-past seven and closed behind him at quarter-past six at night, a phenomenon which interested greatly the mathematical mind of the Doctor's boy.

The Hardys had occupied their new home only two or three days on an afternoon when the Doctor's boy was playing croquet on the second terrace. All at once the boy instinctively straightened himself from a regrettable "flinch" and turned slowly about. The delightful sense of being alone with his little dream world had for some reason vanished.

Standing in a narrow gap in the hedge, surrounded by the fresh green, was a strange little figure of a girl and, behind her, a boy somewhat larger than Jack.

"Hello, boy," said the girl.

"Hello," said Jack cordially, after a moment's inspection of the pair. "Come on in." The girl advanced slowly and shyly, hugging a small decapitated doll. The boy with her marched briskly forward and then, suddenly, with a proud wave of his hand, he stood on his head for a few seconds, by way of introduction.

The girl meanwhile had propped her headless doll on a seat that surrounded a broad-trunked apple tree, and looked about her. The place was a fairy land to her and she sighed with delight. She looked with awe at the boy who lived and who actually played croquet in the midst of all this wonder.

"Can I look at the roses?" she asked, pointing to the rows of bushes beyond.

"Of course," said Jack readily. "And I'll show 'em to you."

"Oh, come on," said the strange boy. "I'll wrestle you or I'll beat you to the fence and back or——"

"We'll do that afterwards," Jack's tone was decisive, "after we see the flowers," and he started after the girl.

"Oh, you're afraid, you are," taunted the other boy. "Look at this," and he turned two or three handsprings on the grass. To the evident joy of the flushed lad, the girl turned from the roses in time to see the last rapid turn. Jack watched quietly, his fists doubling convulsively. Then he followed the girl. "You'd better come along," he called over his shoulder. And the boy reluctantly followed, turning cartwheels and handsprings on the way. Jack led them past tangled masses of roses, beds of vari-colored pansies and arbors of honeysuckle, and, beyond a sentinel apple tree, through the lanes of a small produce garden. Back of this truck garden was a line of trees and bushes that surrounded a little clearing, in the midst of which was a frame summer-house, and to this they finally came and sat down. The little girl had not said a word, and she sat still for a moment.

"I'd like to live here," she said at last enviously.

"Oh, I know lots of better places," the strange boy remarked quickly, looking jealously from one to the other.

Jack glowered silently. Then he turned to the girl with a new interest.

"So do I. I'd like to go out West. Say," he went on, suddenly growing alert, "do you know Colonel Mead? He's fought real Indians."

The strange boy noticed that the girl was watching Jack with open admiration.

"Colonel Mead?" he broke in sullenly, eager for trouble. "He's an awful old liar anyhow. I heard——"

Jack's face suddenly turned white and his gray eyes burned black. His small fists doubled up and he jumped to his feet.

"You take that back," he cried.

"I won't," said the large boy, dodging out on the turf and pulling off his coat. Almost before he was ready Jack was on him like a pent-up hurricane, and they were fighting furiously. For a moment the girl watched them, fascinated. Then she jumped up quickly and ran out of the summer-house past the clinching, fighting, panting pair, and straight down the path they had come.

Mrs. Gilbert was sitting placidly sewing in the library when Ellen opened the door and let in a slender, sobbing, breathless little figure.

"Well, well," ejaculated motherly Mrs. Gilbert, "whatever is the matter with the lassie?" and she put her sewing quickly aside.

"Oh, come quick, please," panted the girl; "your little boy and Willie McNish are fighting out in your garden. I lost my way and I'm afraid they'll both be killed and—and Willie's the biggest."

Mrs. Gilbert was a large but very active woman. Almost before the girl knew it they were down the long stairs that led to the garden, and were hurrying along the shortest path to the summer-house. By the time they passed the roses the tired girl was lagging far behind. When Mrs. Gilbert reached the edge of the little clearing she stopped suddenly. There before her was Jack, one eye already swollen, helping the other boy to his feet and

wiping the blood from his nose and from a nasty cut in his cheek. Mrs. Gilbert breathed a sigh of relief and waited.

"I'm awfully sorry," said Jack, and his little form was trembling with reaction. "I shouldn't have hit you here in our yard, but you made me mad."

The other boy nodded, then he put out his hand. "Say," he said, "I thought you were a sissy, but you aren't. You're all right." And they shook hands manfully.

At this point Mrs. Gilbert, seeing the little girl coming, broke in. "Laddie," she said, coming upon them abruptly, "I'll take Willie to the house and stop that wretched bleeding, and you take the little girl to her home."

That was all she said, except to thank the little girl and to ask her to come and see her. But on the way to the house she asked the McNish boy about it in her kindly way, and the boy told her frankly everything. Meanwhile the girl and Jack, one eye already turning black, followed them down the path.

The girl rescued her doll from the bench and they went on to the hole in the hedge.

"My name's Clare, and I live in here." She pointed to the new Hardy house.

"My name's Jack," said the boy.

"I like your yard," said the girl judiciously, "but your house isn't as nice as ours. Good-by."

That night when Jack had gone to bed early with a bandage over his ugly black eye, the Doctor and Mrs. Gilbert sat in the library. The Doctor's eyes seemed fixed on an old and favorite copy of Horace, and his

wife's seemed to be unraveling some of the tangles of yarn she was knitting. Now and then each glanced furtively at the other and then quickly back to book and task. At last their eyes met and each stood discovered. Mrs. Gilbert shook her head at him with a merry twinkle in her eye.

"There must be a deal of reading on that one page, David," she said. "You've been reading it for an hour or more."

"I thought you were asleep, you worked so slowly," laughed the Doctor.

"Well," said his wife after a moment.

"Tell me all about it again," said the Doctor capitulating.

So she told the story of the fight over again for the third time, losing not one detail.

"The other lad's a good one, too," she said at the end, with a characteristic sense of justice.

"The only thing Jack said to me," said the Doctor proudly, "was that he'd do it again, and that McNish's boy fought well. He's got a Gilbert temper."

"It may have been a Gilbert temper but they were Mackenzie blows he struck," said his wife. "I saw the other boy's face."

"I believe you're proud of it," laughed the Doctor.

"I'm glad you haven't spoiled him yet," retorted his wife.

"You're a great and good woman, Janie," said the Doctor. "I'm going to give him money and education enough to make him rich and famous."

"But who'll make him happy?" asked his wife wistfully.

The Doctor rose to his feet and went around the table to her. He kissed her brow reverently.

"To have such a mother is sufficient, dear," he said.

As time went on the three children grew more and more inseparable. Genial Mr. McNish soon came almost as often as did Billy, and many an evening during the winter that followed, when patients would let him, the Doctor played cards till bedtime with McNish and the Colonel. Mrs. Gilbert alternated her time between the home and the church, busy always. The two boys and the girl studied and played happily enough. Clare's nurse was their only menace. One day when the girl had been rudely summoned away from the garden, the two boys followed her belligerently to the gap in the hedge.

"We'll take care of her when we grow up," said Jack sternly, holding out his hand.

"You bet we will," said Billy, shaking the hand solemnly.

The usual number of people were sick and needed the Doctor, and yet things seemed somehow different with him. He had a new habit of always getting a New York paper as early as possible, and spending an hour or more poring over it. He grew absent-minded and occasionally seemed almost depressed. No one had ever heard him sigh until that winter, but when Mrs. Gilbert rallied him about it he laughed his old laugh and said that it was a sigh of sheer joy. Nevertheless he aged rapidly, month by month, and sometimes sat strangely silent through whole evenings before the library fire. But he was never more thoughtful of his wife nor more tender with Jack. One night when the Spring was coming on and he sat by

the window with the boy, watching the rivulets from the melting snow that ran down the garden paths, he patted Jack lightly on the back.

"When you grow up you'll be a big man," he said, "and you'll take good care of the mither, eh, Jack?"

"I'll help you, of course," said Jack slowly, "but you see I've promised Billy I'd help him take care of Clare."

"When Jack is a big man," laughed Mrs. Gilbert, who had come up behind them, "you and I, David, will be old enough to take care of ourselves, and he'll go out into the big world."

"Out in the big world," said Jack wistfully. "I'd like to go out in the big world."

"And after he got there," went on Mrs. Gilbert softly, "he'd come back again because he'd want love more than anything in the big world."

"And isn't there love in the big world?" asked the boy wonderingly.

"Not the same sort of love, laddie," said his mother; and Jack looked from his mother to his father and back again, and nearly understood.

When Decoration Day came the Doctor put on his G. A. R. badge and tramped down town with Mr. McNish.

"The Spring's going to put you to rights," said his friend, as he thought he noticed that the Doctor's step was lighter and that his cheeks had more color. "You've been a bit down this Winter, just as Tom Nelson always was just before a battle. He was always all right when the fight began."

"I'm all right," said the Doctor. "To tell you the truth

I've been worried. I've been trying to make money this year to lay up for the boy, and I'm afraid——"

McNish stopped suddenly. There was real pain in his face. He waited.

"I've lost a good deal in stocks during the winter," went on the Doctor, "and I've been trying to win it back in a mine out in Colorado, but I'm afraid—I'm not much of a business man, Donald."

A band in the distance started up "Tenting To-night on the Old Camp Ground," and memories suddenly flooded the minds and hearts of both men. The old familiar strains thrilled them silent, and they locked arms and walked on hurriedly down the street. They were late, but they stopped for mail at the post-office and then rushed on, crowding the letters into their pockets. As they fell into line, for the Doctor insisted on marching with the rest, McNish said, putting his hand on the Doctor's shoulder, "You must tell me all about it to-night," and the Doctor nodded.

Mrs. Gilbert and Jack watched them march by, and Jack and the Doctor saluted solemnly. Ten minutes later Doctor Gilbert left the line to stop at a house opposite the gate of the cemetery, where a child was sick. The little girl had not been sleeping and he gave her some medicine. He decided to wait a few minutes to see how it operated and, because the mother had left the room, he pulled out his letters. He started to read; suddenly his face went white, and without a murmur his big form relaxed and he sank to the floor.

Over in the cemetery a bugle played "taps" for the weary soldiers who were tenting on the old camp ground.

"The Doctor's big, tender heart," said Moriarty, Hardy's superintendent, that night, "had been working so hard all his life that it plumb gave out."

That afternoon a boy and a girl were sitting looking out at the gathering twilight from a rear window of the Hardy house. Jack had been taken over there to get him out of the way of it all.

"Let's go out in the garden," he said at last, and together they stole out and through the gap in the hedge. There were lights upstairs in the stone house, but below a single dim glimmer in the library.

"God's bigger out here," he said in an awed voice.

The little girl put her hand over his.

"It's getting dark and I'm afraid," she said.

"So'm I—a little," admitted the boy. Then suddenly a new thought came to him. "If father was here I think he'd tell me to take care of the mither," he said impulsively, and with that he started for the house. The girl watched him for a moment and then sped toward the gap in the hedge. From there she saw him mount the steps.

Mrs. Gilbert, dry-eyed, sitting alone in the darkened library saw the boy come across the room toward her.

"I've come to take care of you, mither," he said stalwartly.

"Oh, my laddie, my laddie," she cried, as the pent-up tears burst forth. She knew already how soon she would need his care.

CHAPTER II

THE PRESIDENT BLACKS HIS OWN SHOES

THE doors of the new Municipal building slammed now and then as if to awaken the drowsy Main Street of Hampstead. It was Spring once more, but twenty years had passed since Dr. Gilbert died, twenty long years for the young, twenty short years for the older people of the now thriving city. It was Wednesday night, and the stores were closed and dark, except for an occasional red or green light that marked a druggist's long vigil, and except for the inviting entrance of the Hampstead Hotel, flanked by a flaring glare of brilliancy. The few people who strolled aimlessly up and down the sidewalk had wandered in to the center in search of something to do, and were disappointed.

Shortly a cart was driven up beside the dilapidated bandstand at the end of the green opposite the Municipal building. The horse was unhitched and was led away, while the man left in the derelict cart lit two campaign torches and, fixing them securely in opposite corners of his improvised stage, he stood forth for a moment, his fingers thrust in his tightly buttoned coat of clerical cut, that all might see. He had a square, dumpy body and crooked legs about which soiled gray trousers wrinkled from the end of his short coat to their tattered bottoms. His coarse, pudgy face which had been clean-shaven some

three days before, beamed with an odd mixture of child-like good humor and pompous pride upon the dozen boys who had gathered silently about the cart. A moment later he was sitting on a campstool picking at a banjo, and reciting in a megaphonic baritone the trials of a man and a maid

“A suckin’ cider throo a straw.”

Almost instantly a large and constantly growing crowd surrounded him, coming it seemed out of nowhere from every direction: loafers from the post-office steps, traveling men from the hotel, couples from the park benches, and all the floating population which, blocks away, heard the shouted melody. Windows went up in the buildings about the square, and curious faces peered out, and across the way in the Municipal building the first arrivals at the regular meeting of the Common Council crowded each other to stare down at the little man with the big voice.

“Say, ’tis a good thing for the telephone company that there ain’t many voices loike that wan,” remarked Mr. Moriarty. “Sure all he needs to do is to open the window an’ talk. The feller at the other end o’ the wire’d hear him all right.”

“A suckin’ cider throo a straw-aw-aw-aw,” sang the little man, his mouth excavating his face from ear to ear. The crowd grinned and a few mouths yawned wide in unconscious imitation.

As the song was finished a large automobile came noisily down the street and stopped at the curb. An elderly man with a red, scowling face alighted, followed

by two middle-aged women whose angular lines suggested propriety and loneliness, and a young girl who, disregarding a proffered hand, sprang down unaided. The three women turned to watch the scene in the square.

"Isn't it picturesque?" said Miss Snifkins' friend from Boston, whose voice dropped at the end of a sentence in an incline down which sentimentality oozed audibly. "See, Cordelia, the city square, the lights of torches lighting up a sea of faces and there in the center that figure which is to say the least—ah—unusual. It's really poetic."

"Yes, it reminds you of 'there was a sound of deviltry by night,' as Billy McNish says about our motor," laughed Clare Hardy, her bright black eyes dancing.

Miss Snifkins looked at her friend apologetically, and turned back in time to see the little man put a ball of lighted paper in his mouth.

"Disgusting," she said, and she followed Mr. Hardy, who was calling them with some irritation from the doorway.

"For all the world like a frog," remarked the girl derisively, as she watched the little man hop from one side of the cart to the other in his efforts to be amusing.

"How very clever," assented Miss Snifkins' friend politely, and they followed the others. As they reached the doorway they stopped and looked back at the square where the little man was suddenly silent. He had attracted his crowd and he had amused them. It was manifestly time for business. He reappeared from the shadows of the front of the cart holding high in one hand a flat, round tin box. The index finger of the other hand he shook accusingly at the awestruck crowd.

“Did you know,” he asked in a hoarse whisper that grew to a loud, menacing shout, “that the President of the United States blacks his own shoes?” He paused proudly to note the effect of his words. “No, not for exercise, strenuous man of action tho’ he be; not because he has to, certainly not—he could undoubtedly borrow the money for a shine from the Secretary of the Treasury; not because he wants to take meat and drink from the poor boy, who, like an artist, wields a brush for a living. Shall I tell you why, my friends? It is a precious secret! Because—because—he has learned that it is easier to black his own shoes with Diamond Blacking than to have anyone black them for him.”

Three of the party at the door of the Municipal building had gone in after the opening sentence, but the girl remained, her eyes sparkling with the humor of it. At last she closed the door and hurried up the stairs to find her father stamping the corridor, impatient at the delay.

“I wonder if it can be true,” said Miss Snifkins’ friend dreamily, as they entered the large room at the front of the building.

“If what can be true?” the girl asked.

“If the President *does* black his own shoes,” said Miss Snifkins’ friend.

Samuel Hardy had intended to be a spectator at this particular meeting of the Common Council, but he had had no idea of acting as a chaperon. Mrs. Hardy, however, had happened to mention the fact casually to Cordelia Snifkins, the English teacher at the High School, and Miss Snifkins had repeated it to her friend who taught “government” and other studies in a Massachusetts



*“The President of the United States blacks
his own shoes.”*

boarding-school. Mr. Hardy, after some argument during which he found opportunity to occasionally interject "yes" or "no," consented to take them to the meeting, and discussed the matter rather abruptly with his wife afterwards. Clare Hardy had attached herself to the expedition at the last moment because there seemed to be nothing else to do.

The "city fathers," as the *Hampstead News* called the members of the Council, were taking their places for the meeting, when the party, led by Mr. Hardy, marched in and found seats at the rear of the room. Two or three older men bowed to the manufacturer, and Alderman William McNish smiled and returned the girl's bright little nod, while some of the younger men nudged each other and winked visibly. Clare Hardy, noticing them, flushed at their rudeness.

"Have you ever attended one of these meetings before?" asked Miss Snifkins, when they were all settled as comfortably as possible on the long wooden benches.

"No," said Clare Hardy sweetly, but in a tone loud enough for some of the offenders to hear. "The men I usually see have manners."

A tall, sad-looking man, also a spectator, sitting directly behind them suddenly bent double in a paroxysm of silent laughter, whispered to his companion, and then was convulsed once more.

The routine business of the Council was quickly disposed of—cleared away to gain time for the final discussion and decision concerning the Street Railway Bill. Hampstead had grown rapidly in the last few years, and the Street Railway Company was anxious to more than

double its length of track within the city. The terms of the bill proposed, however, seemed so favorable to the company that it was generally conceded that the bill would be rejected until large modifications were made. In fact, the only popular clause in the bill was the promise of the much-needed Broad Street extension within six months. Ex-Congressman Strutt arose to present the company's case, and Mr. Hardy ignored a question from Miss Snifkins' friend and leaned forward to listen. The novelty of parliamentary practice had lost its first interest for Clare Hardy, however, and she was enjoying, instead, the comments of the tall man behind her.

She knew the tall man. His name was Tubb, and he was a grocer. His greatest rival, Mr. Butterson, was a councilman and sat over at the right, his chin sunk upon his breast, sleeping peacefully. The rivalry between the two had been bitter. Mr. Tubb had conducted the leading grocery store in town under the simple sign, "Tubb—Grocer," until Mr. Butterson had opened "The Hampstead Cash Provision Store," and the populace, always eager for a change, had rushed to the new shop. Mr. Tubb had retaliated by rechristening his store "The New York Grocery," and considerable custom returned temporarily. Mr. Butterson changed his sign to the "United States Cash Store," and Mr. Tubb responded with "The World Grocery," while the sign painters smiled as they added up their bills. "The World Grocery" stared Mr. Butterson in the face daily until at last he evolved "The Universal Cash Grocery Store." After that for months Mr. Butterson watched Mr. Tubb's store narrowly, wondering what he would do if Tubb went higher. Mr. Tubb,

however, had had an inspiration, and his opponent, riding one day on a street-car, had read the result in black type on a white card:

“If you want to buy some grub
Come and call on Mr. Tubb.
He will trust you for your food
And you can bet his food is good.”

Mr. Butterson went home that night pondering. All day long in the store the miserable doggerel had echoed from the change trolley and from the hum of conversation on the floor. The next day he called to Gilshannon, the *News* reporter, who was passing the store, and they conversed in whispers for some time, after which Gilshannon went down to the *News* office and laughed all by himself. And only the week before this Common Council meeting, another card had appeared beside the Tubb advertisement:

“We ask cash while others trust.
We’ll be here when others bust.
Number Seven Railroad Street
Everything that’s good to eat.”

Mr. Butterson was in the Council; therefore Mr. Tubb always attended the meetings; and therefore, also, he laughed convulsively at Clare Hardy’s reference to “manners.” Now he was describing to his companion, evidently a stranger, the importance of Ex-Congressman Strutt, the insignificant looking little man who, in slow, matter-of-fact tones that implied logic, was explaining the great services which the Street Railway Company had done to Hampstead.

“Strutt’s had good luck, that’s all,” the girl heard him say. “He was poor’s Job’s turkey when he started readin’ law. But the old man he was studyin’ with, I fergit his name, he took to Strutt and when he died, Strutt got his practice. Even then he couldn’t ‘a’ made a livin’ if he hadn’t played politics—a lawyer can’t in these parts. Somehow ‘r other he got next to Alonzo Hubbard, and he’s stuck to him closer than the bark to a tree ever since. He never pays any attention to anybody unless he happens to feel like it, and when somebody said they wanted an independent candidate for Congress, they decided Strutt was the most *independent* man in the district. Some folks voted for him to get him out o’ town but, Lord, there wasn’t any losin’ Strutt. And now that measly little shrimp’s an officer at Hubbard’s factory. He’s got a lot of stock in this electric company; he an’ Hubbard practically own the gas company, and I don’t know what all more. Yes,” he added, “he trades at Butterson’s.”

Clare Hardy leaned back, smiling at the ceiling with half-closed eyes. The Ex-Congressman still drawled on.

“The Mayor?” continued the whispered voice behind her. “His name is Brett. He runs a bank here, a bank his father started. Only one trouble with Brett. He drinks. Don’t look it, does he, white face and all; but he’s got a fine wife. He always was a high flyer and when she came here—she was German and didn’t know a word of English—he used to go ‘round to where she was visitin’ and teach her. One night she went out to dinner and some women asked her if she didn’t think the weather was all right. ‘Damfino,’ says she. Brett’d

told her that meant 'yes, indeed.' Fact! After that she sort o' laid fer him, and one night he put his arm 'round her and kissed her. 'You know what this means in all languages,' she says. Brett, he didn't want to show his ignorance, so he says 'Yes,' and they was married."

Ex-Congressman Strutt finished abruptly and sat down, and a portly man with chin whiskers arose and began to speak in a persuasive, almost timid voice. Through the open window came the plank, plank, of the banjo, and occasionally the words of the fakir's song.

"Merrivale, that is," went on the voice behind Clare Hardy. "Made his money in real estate. Knows his business, he does. He's a Baptist, too, next pew to mine and o' course he trades with me. He boomed a lot o' swamp land out near Tareville three years ago; had a brass band and a free lunch and such like; marked the place out in streets and sold lots faster 'n you kin flap pancakes. Seemed like everybody had always thought that place was the only place on earth to build a house. He paid the old widow that owned the swamp ten thousand dollars for it, and he cleared up about twenty-five thousand in a few weeks. No one ain't ever built there though. You can see the signs—Pine Street, and Plum Street, and the rest—from the cars. The lots is all just long grass and weeds. Oh, he's sharp, he is, and he's one of the best Christian men in town. He gives more to our church than anybody, I guess."

Clare Hardy looked Captain Merrivale over quizzically and felt impulsively sorry for his wife. She soon forgot them both, however, and stared about the bare room in search of something more interesting. She watched the

Mayor as he lolled back indifferently in his armchair behind the desk, until he looked up and across at her, and she turned to Miss Snifkins with a wry face and a feeling of sudden dislike for him which she could not explain. Shortly, however, the meeting gained her undivided attention for the first time. Captain Merrivale had completed his remarks in favor of the bill, and Alderman McNish took the floor. Clare Hardy leaned forward with frank interest, not noticing the curious looks that were turned toward her nor her father's grim stare as the young man began in opposition to the bill. It was evident from his opening sentence that he was personally popular. He had a merry, jaunty manner that caught every listener's attention and the real orator's gift that held them. He talked conversationally and well, and yet the girl admitted against her wish, long before he was through, that he was not moving his audience—that he was not using his power so much to influence votes as unconsciously to increase his own reputation. To her feminine judgment Billy sometimes posed. She felt that he was posing now and the thought hurt her. Something was lacking in his speech, seriousness or vigor or something else, she was not sure what, and she was sorry. He retired, flushed by the considerable applause that followed his remarks, and he could not understand the frown that still creased her forehead, when he stole a glance back at her.

Clare Hardy heard only indistinctly the short remarks that followed from various parts of the hall, and with them mingled the noises from the square below. She was trying to understand why Billy had failed. A motion to have the voting secret caught her attention at last, and

she looked up in time to see an exceedingly large and awkward man rise from the seat beyond Billy McNish. His irregular, homely features were kindly but set with decision, and he leaned his great bulk on one broad rough hand flattened on the rail before him.

"I don't believe in that," he began in slow, drawling tones. He hesitated until the rustle of the people turning toward him should die away, and suddenly, as if in answer to his remark, came the echoing voice from the square, clearly audible to everyone in the room:

"It's a fact, sir. The President of the United States blacks his own shoes."

A suppressed titter grew into loud unrestrained laughter. Billy McNish, whose sense of the ridiculous was strong, lay back in his seat and shook for joy. Mr. Butterson awoke suddenly, and became very red before his blinking eyes showed him that they were not laughing at him. Directly in front of the speaker a coarse looking man with a face covered with red blotches, and with eyes that looked out sneeringly from under a low, overhanging brow, grinned up at him and laughed tauntingly, occasionally beating his open hand on the bench to add to the din. Captain Merrivale, nodding to the Honorable Strutt, started to applaud vigorously, and others took it up, laughingly. Even Mr. Hardy's face relaxed, and Miss Snifkins and her friend giggled nervously. Clare Hardy was smiling also, but the tall speaker's evident earnestness had caught her attention, and she watched him as he stood, his face flushed with embarrassment, his shoulders braced back, protruding chin set firmly although his mouth was smiling, waiting for the others to

laugh themselves out. At last the Mayor called for order, and it came slowly, the noise breaking out afresh as someone closed the windows. When, at last, there was quiet once more it seemed to Clare Hardy that it had come more in response to the speaker's silent command than because the Mayor had asked for it, and she felt intuitively that this man had an indefinable something which Billy lacked. Not until they were waiting for him rather than he for them, did he speak.

"Our friend believes in publicity," he drawled at last. "So do I. A secret ballot on a thing like this is a sneaking ballot. As I said," he smiled an illuminating boyish smile, "I don't believe in it."

Nevertheless the Council, to Clare Hardy's surprise, voted for the secret ballot. Many who had listened during the evening with a bored look of dignity on their faces, were laughing again with easy good nature as they voted. The little man in the square seemed to have driven the serious spirit from the meeting. Clare Hardy, leaning back and watching the big man talking with Billy McNish, heard Mr. Tubb's inevitable comment:

"Gilbert," said Mr. Tubb, "Jawn Gilbert. He's had a hard row to hoe. Father was rich and died broke when he was a kid. Jack, he had to go to work in the shops and he's made good tho' a lot of folks that used to toady to th' old doctor—his father—you know—don't have anything to do with him. He's straight as a string and strong as an ox. Why, he came down to me a few weeks ago and showed me where I'd undercharged him fourteen cents, tho' I guess he needs every penny he can get; an' tho' he's as easy goin' and good tempered a fellow

as y'ever see, they say he licked Martin Jethro an' Tom Grady together one day down at Hardy's. They ain't either of 'em slouches either. That's Jethro sittin' in front of him. Oh, he's got the right stuff in him. He ain't any piece of fancy work to be used for decoration. Look at his jaw."

The secret ballot had been taken and the Mayor was about to announce the vote. Gilbert sat straight in his seat, his chin protruding solid and strong in the profile. Then there arose a low hum of surprise from the thirty or more visitors, and many Council members looked at each other questioningly. The bill had passed, and the Hampstead Street Railway Company had its added franchise at its own terms.

"D'clare! Strutt's got 'em," ejaculated Mr. Tubb. "Funny, ain't it? Does it just the way Neely—he's that long slim feller with the watery eyes—does with ten-pins. Watch him roll and looks like he ain't throwing the ball hard enough to get down to th' other end, but somehow or other he gets a ten-strike every time."

Clare Hardy smiled across at Billy McNish, whose face was frankly disconsolate. Looking beyond she saw Gilbert, who had not moved when the vote was announced and who sat looking thoughtfully at Mayor Brett; and her face flushed slightly as she remembered what Mr. Tubb had said about the people who had toadied to the Doctor. She had not spoken a dozen words to John Gilbert in as many years.

The meeting adjourned quickly, and Mr. Hardy left the ladies to join the Mayor and Captain Merrivale and others who were congratulating the Ex-Congressman on the suc-

cess of the bill. Billy McNish emerged from a group that were laughing again with Gilbert about the interruption of his remarks, and came to greet Clare Hardy.

"I'd like to know what you're doing here?" he said, after he had been introduced to Miss Snifkins' friend, who was tremulous and ill at ease in the presence of his greatness. Miss Snifkins and her friend explained simultaneously and with some confusion.

"I wanted to hear you make a speech," said Clare Hardy, her eyes dancing.

Billy flushed self-consciously, and Miss Snifkins and her friend turned to watch the others who were beginning to leave the hall.

"Well, how was it?" Billy was looking frankly for approval.

"Oh, you did very well," said the girl provokingly.

"Best speech I ever made and all because you were here, although I'll admit you nearly knocked me when you came."

"They passed the bill," said Clare viciously.

"Yes. I don't understand it either."

"Never mind, Billy, you'll make better speeches."

"You're mighty unsatisfactory, Clare."

"So are you."

Someone called Billy away before he could retort. Mr. Hardy rejoined the ladies and hurried them out of the rapidly emptying room, Clare Hardy nodding a smile to Billy from the doorway. In the street they found the square deserted; the cart and the crowd and the little fakir had melted away as if by magic.

"Wonder if he sold all o' the President's shoe blackin',"

Mr. Tubb was heard remarking. "Wonder what the great man 'll do if he has."

Two men came down the steps as they sat waiting for Mr. Hardy to start the motor. They were arm in arm, and were talking vigorously. Clare Hardy watched them swing rapidly up the street, Gilbert with long methodical strides and Billy McNish with quicker, more nervous steps, until they were lost in the shadow.

"How'd you like it, sis?" said Mr. Hardy, with a sigh of relief when later they had deposited Miss Snifkins and her friend at Miss Snifkins' house and had started for West Hill.

"I learned a good deal I didn't know before."

"Huh," ejaculated Mr. Hardy, "I thought you left that to the schoolmarms. What did you find out?"

"Oh, that Captain Merrivale's a good Christian who sells lots for a good deal more than they're worth," rattled off his daughter, counting each detail on her fingers; "how that disgusting Mr. Brett happened to marry such a charming woman; that Mr. Neely is a good bowler; that Jack Gilbert isn't a piece of fancy work, and many other things. You see, I sat in front of Mr. Tubb," she added, in answer to the amazed look on Mr. Hardy's face.

"Why did Billy McNish oppose that bill?" she asked a minute later.

"Party politics, I guess," said Mr. Hardy.

"And why did you favor it?" she asked again.

"Because there's money in it for me, but that's a family secret."

Clare Hardy stared out at the lights in the houses and the tree shadows nearer by that scuttled past them, and

tried to understand the ways of men. As they turned in at the narrow driveway, however, a familiar voice caught her ear.

"And say, Jack," Billy was calling up the street, "remember, the President of the United States blacks his own shoes."

Clare smiled across at her father, but he was busy with the machine.

CHAPTER III

"IF YE GIT HOT UNDER THE COLLAR, TAKE IT OFF"

THE heart of modern Hampstead is in its factories, and the casual traveler, hurrying past over any one of the three lines of railroad, hears its trip-hammer pulse and feels its throbbing power long before the train reaches the large stone station at the center. Looking out, he catches glimpses of the solid mass of brick ramparts whitened now and then for better light, that line either side of Hampstead River from the Hardy works on the north to the newer Hubbard mills at the south. From the windows blackened faces peer down at him and grimy hands wave him a careless welcome. When the train stops a crowd of passengers bustle out upon the platform: emigrants with awkward bundles, and sullen faces, timid faces, grinning faces, stolid faces, all talking at once, a medley of Italian and Polish dialects; hurrying noisy young men with heavy satchels of samples; keen-eyed, square-jawed, silent men who have the look of the shops, and an occasional more elderly man, slower of step, his shrewd eyes fixed on the pavement before him as if lost in a maze of figures and estimates. And all of them are, or soon will be, part of the vast machine of machines the train has left behind along the river bank.

Life in Hampstead is largely a matter of habit. In the morning, at the shriek of the "quarter whistle," which is

the Pied Piper of Hampstead, half of the population flows down West Hill, and down East Hill, where a colony of Poles are elbowing American citizens of Irish birth, and up from the South End, conglomerate of Germans and Swedes, and from across the river, "Little Italy," as it is called, where new streets are christened every week and where Mike the Padrone bullies his following down and up and across and into the mills, where the doors close after them. The better half remains at home, and the center is rural with milk wagons and grocery teams and a load of hay now and then in its season. The ebb and flow at noon is followed a little later by incoming groups of women shoppers who make Mr. McNish's big department-store their headquarters for the afternoon, while at night when the stores are open, and especially on Saturday nights, Main Street approximates the bedlam of a metropolis. Hampstead men seldom stay up late at night, except to get the news of some unusual event, like the Presidential election or a championship prize-fight, and even for these midnight is usually the limit of the vigil. And Hampstead thinks as it lives. When Captain Merrivale's son, who teaches in a college, came home one summer, workmen, who could not understand how anyone could make a living without going into the shop at seven and coming away at five, shook their heads and remarked that "young Merrivale couldn't be doin' very well," and kindly old Mr. McNish said seriously that it seemed a pity for a young man, who evidently had so much ability, to be wasting his time when he might make money in business.

The Honorable Strutt had once called Hampstead in a

speech long remembered by its citizens, "the city of ideas," which Billy McNish promptly paraphrased and said that the Congressman had meant "I Deus." Mr. Strutt probably meant that among the citizens there were an unusual number of inventive Yankees, who found constantly new things for the factories to make and new ways of making things, or that the city was progressive and was well supplied with public buildings and schools. Otherwise it is very much like the country boy who at ten is wearing the outgrown clothes of six. Its philosophy is elementary and its tastes are unsophisticated of standard. Its people work hard every working day; all but a very few, from Alonzo Hubbard down to the poorest day-laborer, earn more than they spend, and nearly all of them live in detached houses and are respectable, church-going and law-abiding. It is a contented community, and if it is seldom swept by enthusiasm, it is grounded in sound common-sense and is impelled forward by steady ambition.

It is a home-loving town, and on Decoration Day, when the thinned ranks of the Grand Army had passed, ranks led by Captain Merrivale, who had enlisted as a private in '63, who had been taken ill before he reached Washington, but who nevertheless had always enjoyed the martial title; and flanked on the last line by Mr. McNish, who had been a Major in the regulars but who remained plain Mr. McNish, the people hurried back to their homes and left the streets at the center quiet save for occasional stragglers. Billy McNish, however, fat and roly-poly in his khaki, returned after the parade to his law office. There he threw up the windows and let the light and air

stream in over musty books and paper-strewn desk. He stood moodily looking out for a moment. Then he turned to the stubby, straight little Irishman with black coat, red hair and pug nose, who had followed him in and who now stood waiting, fingering a derby hat which had once been black.

"Sit down, Moriarty," said Billy good-humoredly, "and have a cigar," opening up a box out of one of the desk drawers. After seeing his guest pulling and puffing noisily, he lit a cigar himself and settled back in the big office chair. The breeze from the window ruffled up his long curly hair, making more boyish his round face, clean shaven save for a closely trimmed mustache. For a moment they sat silent, Moriarty's eyes fixed on the wastebasket, Billy's on the ceiling.

"I'm going to be absolutely frank with you, Moriarty," said McNish at last. Moriarty leaned forward and took his cigar from his mouth.

"You're talking about trying to make me a judge. Now a judge, Moriarty, is a man who is considered to be wise because he never smiles and because he don't talk." Billy stopped and looked out of the window for a moment. "Now, I'm not that sort. I like a good time. I've got to laugh and to talk from late in the morning until early in the morning," he said with a merry grimace that was attractive. "So I can't be a judge, but I can be a politician. Moriarty!" he went on, "I want to be Mayor of Hampstead; later I want to be Governor, and after that Congress or something else—anything I can get."

Moriarty studied the ash of his cigar microscopically.

"'Tis a good cigar," he said finally. "It burns like a

Manyool Garcy. It burns straight. Take it aisy," he said quickly, noticing Billy's nervous drumming with his fingers on the chair arm. "I'm comin' to that. You burn straight, too; you've got a good head well connected with yer tongue; fer political purposes you're a hero who fought in Cuby even if you only got as far as Camp Alger. But politics is like a horse race. How you look beforehand don't count so much as the way you come down the stretch."

"Well, what's the matter with me?" asked Billy, laughing. "Haven't I staying powers?"

"I'll tell ye, sir. It'll be close this Fall. It's always close. The Demmycratic candidate 'll need the union vote. Unions don't like lawyers. I wonder why. And they hate Sam Hardy, and ye're Sam Hardy's lawyer."

"Hardy gave me that cigar that burns so straight," laughed Billy.

"Hardy?" ejaculated Moriarty. "He did?" With a quick movement he threw the partly smoked cigar on the floor and stamped the fire out of it. Then he rose to his feet. "'Tis an insult to let any respectable man smoke after him without warnin'," he said angrily.

"Have one of mine to take the taste out of your mouth," said Billy soothingly.

Moriarty hesitated a moment. Then he leaned over and took it just as the door opened quietly and let in the tall, broad-shouldered form of John Gilbert. He was fanning himself with a slouch hat, and he smiled broadly as he saw the two men before him.

"Hello," he drawled. "Am I interrupting a conspiracy?"

"How are ye, Jack?" said Moriarty heartily, rising and putting out his rough hand.

Billy, evidently embarrassed, fiddled with a penholder on the desk.

"Why, I'd just as soon have you know, old man," he said at last. "We've been talking about whether I should run for Mayor in the Fall. There seems to be a demand for young men, eh, Moriarty?"

"Yis," replied the Irishman, who remained standing. "An' I was just agoin' to think it over, ye know." He caught Billy's glance and added quickly—"Some more, av coorse."

"Good idea," remarked Gilbert, looking with a whimsical smile from one to the other, as if he understood all that had not been told him. "If I can help, you know where I am, Moriarty."

The Irishman had reached the door, but he turned now as a sudden thought came to him.

"Ye *can* help," he said. "Ye've got a big pull with the men in the last two years—the union men especially."

"Oh, I don't know," Gilbert replied, slowly shaking his head. "But of course you can bank on anything I can do—both of you——"

Moriarty went down the stairs slowly. As he reached the street he stopped, leaned over and slapped his knee vigorously. Then, suddenly coming to himself, he looked shamefacedly up and down the street to see if anyone had noticed him do it. "He's the man, not the other wan. I wonder," he had muttered as he smote his knee. And he stood thinking for two or three minutes before he moved off down the street.

"Why weren't you at the town meeting last night, Jack?" asked Billy, upstairs, after Moriarty had gone.

"I was there," grinned Gilbert, sitting in the seat Moriarty had vacated. "Down in back. Didn't stay through."

"That's just the trouble with you, Jack," began Billy impulsively. "You always take a back seat. I'll bet you saw me all right."

Gilbert nodded.

"And to-day here I tramp around with my medals on; probably looked a holy show. D'ye think I do it for fun? Every few steps I took I was cursing myself for an ass."

"That pretty typewriter girl of Hardy's said, 'Ain't he lovely?' when you passed," broke in Gilbert, smiling.

"That's just it," went on Billy eagerly. "Everybody in town knows me because I always take a front seat. They forget you because you always hide away out of sight."

"I suppose you're right," Gilbert said after a slight pause. "I'll try to brace up; but I can't talk, Billy, and a crowd scares me.

"Say, Billy," Gilbert went on, "why did Hardy let in Brett and Merrivale to his board of directors?"

"How should I know?" puzzled Billy.

"Thought you might. And where did Brett get money enough to buy two big blocks of Hardy stock?"

"I don't know. Has he?"

"So I heard. I just wondered about it, that's all. Thought you might know."

But Billy did not know, and was chagrined that he did not, for Billy never liked to admit his ignorance of any-

thing. Soon Gilbert arose to go and Billy, slamming down the window, went with him. Opposite the photographer's display at the foot of the stairs they stopped for a moment. The central picture was that of a slender girl in evening dress, whose wavy dark hair swept a broad forehead and about whose full lips and cheeks there played a tantalizing smile. The portrait caught the eyes of both men as they stopped. They stood for a moment, staring at it without speaking.

"Can I congratulate you yet, Billy?" asked Gilbert in a low voice.

McNish shook his head.

"I wish you could," he said simply. "She's the best ever."

Their ways divided at the corner, for Billy was going to the armory, and Gilbert turned up West Hill alone, past the clumsy new brick blocks of the business section which were gradually encroaching on the residential property beyond. A few old soldiers who drifted quietly by him, younger, louder men in militia uniform and an occasional sight-seer or two only accentuated the holiday emptiness of the streets. Farther on he could see at the summit of the hill the far-away gaunt gray outline of the old Gilbert house, sturdy and firm as it had been when the Doctor left it for the last time twenty years ago. It seemed now to cry invitation to Jack every time he passed it, going to and from the little cottage beyond, where he and his mother lived.

Mr. McNish had bought it to save it from the ruin the fatal letter had brought, and had mortgaged his future to do it, though the future luckily had taken care of the

mortgage afterwards. Jack had been kept at school until he had finished the High School course, and then, with the student's mind he had inherited from the Doctor, had put aside thoughts of college and had gone to work for Hardy & Son. There were debts to be paid and a future to be made for his mother and for himself. Mr. McNish had offered him a place in his store, but the young fellow had refused the kindly suggestion. "You've been a very good friend to us, sir," he had said gravely, "and I think I had rather work for someone else." So Mr. McNish admired him all the more, and although it hurt his mother to see him come home with his white hands daubed with inerasable grease and dirt, she approved. It had been hard for the boy at first, for he was proud, and it hurt him to see his former friends gradually become polite and restrained. The girls he knew soon merely bowed to him, and even the boys lost something of their former good comradeship as their different tasks drew them apart from him. Billy McNish alone remained entirely unchanged. Billy went to Yale and to Law School and came back as loyal a friend of Jack's as before. He enlisted and became a lieutenant of volunteers at the time of the Spanish War, and when he arrived in Hampstead again Jack was the first person he had gone to see. Billy went to all the social affairs of the clique of well-to-do people who were considered the society of the city, but there had never been a time when their friendship had wavered. In the meantime Jack had made new friends among the men of the shops. The older mechanics welcomed him for the old Doctor's sake, and in common with the others grew to like him. Only a few had been jealous of his slow advance

to the position of assistant superintendent of the large mills, for everyone knew that he had earned it by persistent work. There were many indeed who said without hesitation that even Simpson, the superintendent, did not know the shops as well as Gilbert did. And it had been work, day in and day out, and at night self-imposed tasks of study to perfect his equipment.

At first he rebelled bitterly against it all; this driving work into which he had been forced. He felt the relentless power of circumstance wedging him into a narrow niche. It suffocated him, and he tried to turn on it and beat it back. He hated the machines, hated the dirt, hated the badly ventilated rooms. He wanted to learn, learn, learn. And yet his mother, patiently caring for the little cottage with the same grace and even greater tenderness, never heard a word of complaint, and only a few times did her keen mother's eyes get a fugitive glimpse of his trial. The only person to whom he ever unburdened himself was the Colonel. Once he let the whole flood of his disappointment and discouragement loose in the Colonel's little sitting-room, edged with bows and arrows, wampum necklaces, snowshoes, saddles and a hundred and one relics of the grizzled old man's career on the frontier. When he was through the Colonel patted him on the back roughly. "Don't git grouchy ef things don't come your way, my boy," he said. "Ef ye're grouchy ye can't blame 'em."

From the rebellion of the first year he relapsed into stolid, dull plodding, seeing little light ahead, but saving a little money from his pitiful salary to reduce the indebtedness that stared him constantly in the face. Again it was

the Colonel who put him to rights, for Jack was sensitive and looked up to the Colonel much as he had as a boy. "How's the traveling?" asked the Colonel one night. "Well, I'm doing my best," said Jack lackadaisically. "Doing your best, my boy," said the Colonel, blinking at Jack over his spectacles, "ain't any good on earth ef it don't git you whar ye want to go."

In the last two or three years the work had had a new zest for him. To meet problems and solve them; to know men and lead them; to build up achievement after achievement, piece by piece, began to appeal to him. His imagination, dulled before, began to find music in the clanging drill, an epic in the swinging machines, drama after drama in the human toil all about him. And his mother, watching him, day by day, smiled more often at her thoughts, as she saw his step grow more brisk and his little attentions to her become more spontaneous than they had been. His big body, hardened by rough toil, was strong beyond his own knowledge of it, and he had evolved a calmer philosophy than most men of his years.

He was thinking now of the shops, puzzling over the same questions he had asked Billy McNish. The Doctor had bought a few shares of Hardy stock during the winter preceding his death, and they had held these alone out of the wreck of his fortune because the stock paid large dividends. Now the dividends had shrunk to almost nothing, and there had been no evidence until recently that anyone cared to buy the stock even at a low figure. Why was Mayor Brett buying it? And whom was he buying it for? Everyone knew that the Mayor had no considerable amount of money free for investment. Gilbert

was frankly puzzled. At intervals he thought of Hardy himself, the gruff "old man." Then suddenly his mind ran off to greet the quaint figure of a little girl or to bow coolly to a tall young woman with wavy black hair bordering a broad forehead. He caught himself and blushed boyishly. It was remarkable, he thought, how plainly the little girl came back to him through all the years during which he had occasionally met the young lady and returned her pleasant nod. And it was remarkable, too, how clearly he remembered each change he had seen in her when she had been away at various times at college and elsewhere.

And so he came to Colonel Mead's square frame house, which was set, old and contented looking, in the midst of thick trees and untrimmed bushes. Neighbors of the Colonel often complained to each other because his house alone, in a line of fresh modern dwellings, was dingy and the place unkempt. One of them, bolder than the rest, one evening when the Colonel was showing his curios, wrote her name in the dust on some old firearms and, shaking her smudged forefinger at the old veteran, remarked that cleanliness was next to godliness.

"Cleanliness, my dear madam," the blunt old blasphemer had answered, "may be next to godliness, but comfort's better'n either of 'em."

And the rugged old philosopher from experience continued to live his life in his own way. As to other people's opinions it wasn't difficult, he often said, to think just as bad things of them as they could possibly think of him.

Gilbert turned in at the sagging gate and mounted the worn steps. Having rung the bell he sat down on the

veranda rail to wait. As he did so his eye, through the vista of trees, caught sight of a little boy on the other side of the street, standing terrified as a huge dog, a big Dane, bounded about him in awkward playfulness. Almost immediately a tall, willowy girl appeared and put one hand on the frightened boy's shoulder and the other on the dog's head, and patted them both until the boy stopped whimpering and the dog's tail wagged vigorously. Gilbert felt that he could almost see the tantalizing smile about Clare Hardy's mouth as she made the boy's hand smooth the big dog's back. Then with the youngster, whom Gilbert had recognized as the son of the Rev. Brice, the new Methodist minister, almost reconciled, she disappeared behind the trees, the dog bounding on ahead.

"When ye've ridden that rail ez fer ez the door o' the ranch ye kin git down an' come in," remarked the Colonel's voice reflectively from the doorway, and Gilbert, laughing, disentangled himself from the railing and followed the old man in.

"Ef I'd 'a' known it wuz only you I wouldn't 'a' put my collar an' coat on," the Colonel said. "It's remarkable how ashamed civilization and women makes ye feel of a good clean neck and a shirt fresh from washin'."

They sat down in the little sitting-room whose windows were all wide open, and the Colonel began working upon a basket he had been weaving when Jack rang the bell.

"Well," remarked the Colonel, looking up. "What's on yer mind, my boy? Pry it off an' let's look at it."

Gilbert took out his pipe, filled it and lighted it before he answered, and the Colonel went back to his work.

"Has Brett tried to buy your Hardy stock, Colonel?"

"What?" The veteran stared at Jack in evident amazement. Gilbert repeated the question.

"No," said the Colonel, "he ain't; but he wouldn't need a regiment of men to make me do it."

"You're a director in the concern."

"That's whar ye're wrong," returned the Colonel. "Thar ain't but one real director and that's Hardy. An' when he gits throo directin', thar won't be nothin' left fer the ravens to pick but bones. An' I'd rather hev most anybody else a raven than me. Thar ain't but one man in this here town," went on the Colonel reflectively, "thet riles me worse'n Sam Hardy and that's old Hubbard. One's vinegar an' th' other's molasses. One sours my stummick an' th' other makes me sick. What's the matter, boy?"

Gilbert's chair, which had been tilting back, had returned to its normal position with a crash, and there was a gleam in Gilbert's eyes as he stared at the Colonel. After a moment he leaned back and smiled.

"It just occurred to me that Brett might have a good deal of 'molasses' behind him, Colonel," he drawled.

Colonel Mead looked thoughtfully over his glasses at the young man.

"Hubbard, eh?" he remarked at last. "Like ez not, Jack. Like ez not."

Gilbert sat silent for some minutes, during which the Colonel, who, from experience, was a wise man and considerate, returned to his basket-weaving.

Alonzo Hubbard, starting after Hardy had achieved his first successes, had gradually built up a still larger business, and, within the last few years, had gained con-

trol of many of the smaller Hampstead concerns. It had been Hubbard's competition that had reduced the profits of half of Hardy's business, before the growing company in Westbury, ten miles away, had come to undersell Hardy on the other half. Hubbard was the richest man in Hampstead, and Mayor Brett was one of his closest social and business friends, although Brett was also ostensibly a friend to Hardy. Jack thought it all over rapidly.

"With good management we could make a lot of trouble for Hubbard and a lot of money for Hardy & Son," Gilbert said slowly.

"Holdin' four deuces ain't any good if ye're playin' whist," replied the Colonel. "Ye can't hev good management with Hardy, an' ye've got to play with him."

"The old man is queer," said Jack, shaking his head disconsolately. "He's as proud as Punch of the shops. Look at that two hundred thousand dollars surplus we made years ago. He'd rather quit than spend a penny of that. And we need it. Lord, how we need it! It makes me hot under the collar to think of it."

"Ef ye git hot under the collar," remarked the Colonel out of the wisdom of experience, "take it off."

"Colonel," went on Gilbert in the tone of a man who is telling a secret of which he is ashamed, "I've been studying the business pretty hard and pretty closely. I've got it all planned out on paper—machines, organization, everything. And there are some patents, too; that is to say, they are not patents yet—inventions I've been thinking about. If I only had a chance to——"

"But ye hev'n't, boy," broke in the Colonel, putting

aside the basketry, his interest in which had been feigned ever since Jack's arrival. "Ye hev'n't an' ye won't hev. Don't git impatient, Jack. I got impatient with a mule once, a good many years ago, and when I came to, I was whole rods back of whar I was before. An' what's more, I didn't want to go ahead agin fer days. Felt the humiliation chiefly in my stummick, whar I'd connected with the mule's heels. Well, Hardy's a good deal of a mule. You jest stay on his back an' be thankful ye're thar."

Gilbert smiled genially at the Colonel's sober face.

"I've been thinking of putting my plans before him—the whole thing, Colonel."

"Don't ye do it, Jack. When ye git all yer plans on paper, fold 'em up nice an' even an' put 'em in the fire an' whistle 'Yankee Doodle,' an' go back to work. Ez fer old Hubbard, ef he *is* after Hardy's he'll likely git it. Never heard o' Hubbard goin' after anything an' not gettin' it, did ye? An' ef he ain't—why he ain't, thet's all."

The Colonel nodded his head vigorously to assure himself of the last statement.

"I'll have to work it out my own way, I guess." Gilbert rose to go. "But," he added, his lips smiling but his eyes fixed soberly on the Colonel's, "whatever that is, I know you'll help me."

The Colonel pushed the arms of his chair and hopped to his feet in spite of his rheumatism. He took Jack's big hand.

"Ef ye wuz to try to move Pike's Peak into Connecticut," he said half complainingly, "I reckon I'd hev to git a crowbar an' help. But go slow, boy, go slow an' watch

the bushes; don't trust anybody but yerself and don't trust yerself out o' yer own sight. Ye've done well an' ye're doin' well," he went on, his anxiety showing in his voice. "I don't want to see ye do as yer father did——"

"I don't want to do any better, Colonel," said Jack quietly, putting his hand on the old man's arm.

"No," said the Colonel slowly. "I don't know ez ye do. Gawd bless him——" and they were silent for a moment.

He stood at the door until Jack was out of sight, admiring and worrying, for, although he would not have admitted that he cared much for anyone, he loved Jack like a father.

As for Gilbert, he forgot his problem just outside the gate, in boyish enthusiasm at the sunset that threw its red radiance over the hill's summit and crowned the great gray house of his memories with glittering color. Even if there had been no sunset to set his pulses thrilling with a sudden joy in life, he would have forgotten the shops and their future when he came in sight of home. His mother opened the door of their modest cottage as soon as he came in sight, and stood watching him as he hurried up the walk. She was little changed. Gray hair, it is true, sprinkled the brown-gray threads that the years had woven out of peaceful dream textures. There were creases about her mouth and eyes, marks of her calm, almost unceasing smile, and the tears she had shed had only made her eyes, still unhidden by glasses, more steady and kind. The same musical voice greeted him.

"The afternoon has gone very slowly, laddie."

"Oh, no, mither," laughed Jack, putting his arm about

her waist and leading her into the little dining-room. "It's gone so fast that I couldn't get to you until it was 'clane gone intoirely,' as Moriarty says."

"That's the way with you men," she said reproachfully, after they had seated themselves at the big dining table which Mrs. Gilbert had refused to give up when they left the old house and which nearly filled the little room. "Things to do and folks to see, while the women sit and knit and think, or sew and think, or make beds and think or do nothing but think. Ah, laddie, I'm sorry for the poor women who have anything but pleasant thoughts like mine."

"You make your thoughts pleasant, mither," said Jack, beaming at her over the fine old china and the simple meal.

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Gilbert earnestly. "I'm strong and well; how many women are that? Everyone is good to me and everyone is good to few women; and then I have you, laddie, and no other woman has you. It's a bonnie world," and she smiled tenderly at him.

"I believe if you were set alone on a barren island you'd still be happy," said Jack.

"No, I wouldn't," answered his mother. "But I'd have pleasant memories," she added more slowly.

Then, noticing with a woman's keen glance that Jack looked tired, she broke off into a recital of her day's work, filling it so full of merry anecdotes and clever insight into the good queer sides of people she had seen that Gilbert was soon laughing heartily. They waited on each other, each anticipating the other's wishes, and often she caught him watching for a hint of some service to be performed,

and often she gave the hint with enough secrecy to let him think he had discovered it himself. When they were done he helped her to take the dishes to the neat little kitchen with its old-fashioned sinks and modern gas stoves.

"There," she said, when the last of the fine old china had been stacked by the sink and the last bits of cold meat had been put away, "I'm going to leave those dishes until to-morrow morning, for to-night, laddie, is father's night."

Jack nodded, and going to a closet in the sitting-room he brought forth a packet he had taken from the bank vault the day before. Together they undid it, and, sitting on the broad sofa, they went over the enclosures one by one. There was a daguerreotype taken in winter quarters in '64, and the central figure in uniform looked much like Jack; there was the discharge with twenty-six battles entered on it; and a few letters which no one but Mrs. Gilbert had ever read; and then in natural sequence their marriage certificate, a number of notes from patients who wrote their gratitude in lieu of payment, a packet of unsettled bills, an old Spanish knife which Jack's grandfather had given the Doctor, and many other odds and ends, the last of which were some certificates of mining stock and a letter saying that the company had failed, the letter the Doctor had taken from the post-office twenty years before. They went over them silently, reverently.

"Why did father buy the mining stock?" asked Jack, fingering the certificates. He knew, but he knew also that she would like to tell him.

"It was for you, laddie," said his mother quietly. "He wanted you to be rich and famous."

"I wonder why he wished those things for me," said Jack musingly. "He never thought of them himself."

"Ah, that's where you're wrong," said his mother quickly. "Men, the best of them, are always wanting to do what it isn't in them to do. David wasn't the kind to make money, so down in his heart he wanted to. He was so modest he shrank from seeing his name in the paper, so in his inmost soul he thought fame must be a very fine thing. It isn't the thing they can put their hand on that most men want, but something that's far out of reach. I'm sometimes afraid you're the same at heart, laddie. I mind how as a child you always wanted the sugar-bowl that was at the other end of the table."

Jack smiled rather guiltily as he thought of the afternoon.

"But with him it was all for you. I sometimes think I was almost jealous of you and him because you thought so much of each other. And that's the big reason why I wish he was here to-night, to see you as you are now, laddie." And then, suddenly, she cried quietly into an old lace handkerchief. Jack put his arm about her shoulders and waited. After a moment she looked up at him and a rainbow of a smile broke out on the tear-stained face.

"You won't care, laddie, if your mither has one good cry a year," she said, "so long as it's a happy one. Do you mind how you said you'd take care of me and you no higher than that?" and she put out her hand three feet from the floor. "Well, you've done it and it's cost you a deal of sacrifice, and he'd be very glad."

"But I'm neither rich nor famous," he said lightly, as he began to tie up the packet.

"Which are only incidental."

"Wouldn't you like to live in the old house, mither?" suggested Jack insinuatingly.

"Well, I'd not say I wouldn't," said Mrs. Gilbert with a sigh. "But this does very well."

Just then the telephone bell rang and Jack answered it. He came back after a moment with a thoughtful look on his face.

"What was it?" asked Mrs. Gilbert curiously.

"Only Billy McNish asking me not to mention something he spoke of this afternoon."

"He's a careless, good lad," said Mrs. Gilbert. "Well?" she asked after a moment.

"But he doesn't wish me to mention it, mither," laughed Jack.

"He wouldn't mind your telling your mither," said Mrs. Gilbert, "and if he did he oughtn't to have told you. "However," she went on with a sigh, after waiting a moment more for Jack to surrender, "you're probably right to keep your word."

Jack did not go to bed immediately in his square front bedroom. He took a pile of loose papers from his worn desk and studied over them for nearly an hour. Then he lit a pipe, and rested his long legs on a chair opposite and thought, his eyelids half shut as if to concentrate his gaze into the future. And when he knocked the ashes out of his pipe and went to bed, he thought he had made up his mind, although he probably would not have admitted even to himself that he had been influenced by the memory of a quaint little girl, with whom he had played in the old garden long ago.

CHAPTER IV

THE ENTHUSIASMS OF JIMMY O'ROURKE

AFTER dinner one Sunday afternoon two or three weeks later, Mrs. Gilbert seemed restless. Twice she went to the front window and twice she returned with the same remark to Jack, who sat smoking in the back parlor.

"You should go out for a walk, laddie. 'Tis a fine, bright day."

Gilbert smiled whimsically at her insistence. It had become her habit on Sunday afternoons recently, to send him out for walks or for some other diversion while she invariably remained alone at home.

"Will you come along, mither?" he asked, as he arose and lazily yawned.

"No, no," said his mother quickly. "I'll stop here and write a letter or two."

Gilbert breathed deep of the fresh spring air outside and started down the street with long strides. Soon, however, he doubled back, and hurrying down along the side of the cottage, stealthily keeping to the grass, he let himself in quietly at the side door. From there he tip-toed through the dining-room, and listened to the tap-tap of his mother's foot in the next room—the regular tap-tap which meant that something was interesting her deeply. Then he threw the door open quickly and stepped

in, just in time to see her slip something beside her in the chair.

"My, but you startled me, laddie!" said Mrs. Gilbert, staring up at him innocently. "And I was just a-thinking of you."

For answer Jack leaned over her and caught up a book hidden away between the folds of her dress and the chair arm. It was Dumas—the wonderful old "Monte Cristo."

"I wanted to make sure that I'd left you in good company," said Gilbert, smiling boyishly down at his mother, who seemed to be rather enjoying her guiltiness.

"I was afraid you'd think I'd come to my second childhood," she confessed. "There's no time for me to read all the week, and I left him last week just where he'd come back. Run on with you now, for I want to see what he does."

And Gilbert "ran on," laughing, remembering how he had stayed up until after three in the morning some years before to find out the very same thing.

"A fine, bright day." There was certainly no doubt about that. The zest of it went to his head like wine and, intoxicated, he gave himself over to the mere fugitive impressions of things as he marched briskly down the long hill. He felt about him the tense quiet of the Sunday; even the trees whispered as if they were restrained by a strange awe, and the birds sang single notes and then seemed to listen as if for fear of punishment for a sacrilege. The roses were out in the old garden, for he caught the remembered scent amid all the confused fragrance that crept out over Mr. McNish's level green lawn. As

he looked across at Hardy's house his eye caught a flash of red at one of the tower windows, and he looked away quickly, wondering vaguely if it might be the little girl who had grown up. He saw a new bird's nest in the eaves of the Colonel's porch, and laughed to himself as he thought of the irascible veteran's probable language when he, in turn, discovered it.

At the Center he saw blonde-haired Miss Smith, the pretty typewriter girl at Hardy's, her full figure showing to its best advantage in tight-fitting black, making her way to the terminal of the trolley lines where a number of cars stood, already packed with people who were out to make the most of the holiday sunshine. And, as he walked on, he smiled so broadly that people meeting him smiled unconsciously as they watched him. He was thinking of the Colonel's roughhewn rules of life. "When ye find a real man," the Colonel had said, "grip him hard. Ef he turns on ye, shoot him; ef he's straight, die fer him. Don't shoot yer mouth off reg'lar; keep a lot o' ammunition and fire when ye see the whites o' their eyes. Don't be scairt o' doin' anything except what ain't square, but ef a woman comes near ye, run like hell." Gilbert always remembered this last clause whenever he saw Gerty Smith. There was something humanly fascinating about her that made him realize the meaning of the Colonel's warning. "There's only two calamities open to ye, my boy," the veteran had continued, "death an' marriage. Wait for both until ye're old an' philosophical." Surely he, John Gilbert, needed little advice about marriage. Here he was at twenty-nine with his heart as unscathed as it was innocent. "Troubles enough of my own," he

muttered good-humoredly to himself, "without adding on somebody's else, even if there were a somebody else."

"Good-day, Mister Gilbert."

Jack looked up to see the pompous bob from a pudgy, clean-shaven person clothed in a startlingly bright suit of large checks. The loud voice continued:

"Splendid weather for the President's shoe blackin'. Still use it!" The man looked down proudly at his shining shoes. "Reckon you'll never forget my blackin', eh?"

"Certainly made an impression on me that night," laughed Jack as he moved on. It was the street fakir of Common Council night, whose commercial possibilities Mr. Tubb, who ran a huge night lunch wagon in addition to his store, had been quick to realize; and who, the morning after, had given up without any seeming reluctance his precarious sales of Diamond Shoe Blacking to put on a white apron behind the counter of the "Excelsior" lunch cart. Peter Lumpkin, for such was his name, was already a town character and the lunch cart was doing a thriving business. He had merely transferred his performance from one wagon to another, and often now the megaphonic voice re-echoed up and down Main Street and put even passers-by in good humor.

Soon Gilbert left the long, curving street for the road that led to Clear Lake. It had been an aimless choice, and now he drifted on beside the dusty roadway, where huge sumach bushes stood out between him and the sun, and where golden-rod twisted about his ankles. A crowded electric car went spinning by him, and Simpson, his superintendent at Hardy's, leaned out and waved to him. And a few minutes later Gilshannon of the *News*

drew up alongside him on a bicycle, and rode back and forth across the road loafingly, that he might tell the big fellow some of the day's happenings. It was a bully good world, after all, Gilbert thought, as he tramped on alone after the reporter had pushed forward once more.

Looking up some minutes later, he saw half-a-dozen branches, heavily laden with early astrakhan apples, leaning over the roadside. With an unreasoning boyish elation he scrambled up the high bank and over a fence rail into somebody's property, and promptly climbed to the first broad crotch above. It seemed to him that he had suddenly climbed back into his boyhood as he filled his pockets with the round ripe fruit, and he wondered joyfully if the owner would not suddenly appear and chase him down the Sunday-silent road. He was so deep in his fancies, indeed, that he did not hear the hoof-beats or the rumble of the wheels until they were almost beneath him. Then he crouched back suddenly and the bough creaked under his heavy weight, and one shining apple was shaken from the end of the limb and dropped in Clare Hardy's lap. Startled, she glanced up straight at the tree, straight at him it seemed, and then disappeared, with Billy McNish who was busy with the horses, behind the partly thrown back buggy top. Gilbert watched the retreating carriage until it disappeared behind the curve beyond. Then he clambered down and over the fence and into the road again, laughing to himself over his narrow escape. She couldn't have seen him, he assured himself as he strolled along, munching at one of the apples, that tasted sweeter because it had been taken in the old boy's way. And Billy, bless him, hadn't even turned his head. Then he

thought of that fat pink apple that lay half hidden in the robe over her knees. He had given it to her, he mused, not as plain John Gilbert who worked in her father's shops to Miss Hardy, but as Jack, the small fool of a boy, to the little girl over the hedge. At any rate, he decided with a chuckle, he had kept his distance in presenting the gift. But soon his fancies grew lazy. He listened to the crooning of the insects and the chirping of the birds, and he walked on and on in a waking dream.

Clear Lake lies in a hollow between the hills about five miles from Hampstead Center. Its smooth surface mirrors the rugged evergreen heights that jut out above it, and the place, when people are there, is haunted with weird echoes. The Street Railway Company recently extended its lines to the lake side, and a more or less pretentious casino was built at the terminal. The road around the lake was improved, and cheap board pagodas were placed here and there at the water's edge. The old roundabout path up to the top of the highest crag of the ridge at the left, "The Lookout," as it was called, was left untouched, but a new, more direct climb was made, straight up the face of the rock, with rough wood stairs here and there to bridge over the impassable places. Of the crowds that came out from Hampstead on bright Sundays and holidays, however, few lost their breath and strained their muscles for the wonderful view from "The Lookout." The vast majority were content with mild flirtations along the level, winding road, or with seats in the pagodas, or with the revelries in the boats or the bowling alley or the swings or around the open-air lunch tables. It was toward "The Lookout," therefore, that

Gilbert, whom the glittering of the lake through the trees and the cries of many children had suddenly awakened from his dreams, was directing his way when he was way-laid by Jimmy O'Rourke. Jimmy was an office-boy at Hubbard's factory and a person of huge enthusiasms. Gilbert was one of Jimmy's enthusiasms, partly because he played a good game of baseball in the factory league, partly because he was large and strong while Jimmy himself was, in his own language, "a sawed-off little runt," and partly because Gilbert was the only grown man he knew who treated him with the respect his Irish blood told him he ought to demand from everyone.

"What are you doing out here, Jimmy?" asked Gilbert, as the boy tried laboriously to keep step with the big fellow's long strides.

"Oh, I'm just lukin' 'em over, sir." Jimmy flicked the ash from his cheap cigarette with self-conscious cynicism.

"Looking whom over?"

"Why, de girrls, av coorse. Say, dere perty cheesy, most av thim, but dere's wan peach. Dere she is now." Jimmy pointed toward a pagoda only a few yards away, and his voice sank into a whisper. "De wan in black. She hits de typewriter down at your place. Say," Jimmy stopped and stared up at Gilbert with a sudden inspiration. "Why don't ye get next?"

"Think it would be a good idea, Jimmy?" Gilbert's face was perfectly sober.

"Yep," returned the boy judiciously, "an' you'd win out hands down. Everybody looks up when she goes by, all right. Why, say, I was up to de bank de oder day—Boss sent me up fer some papers—and she was dere. An'

say, de Mayor was a lukin' at her somethin' more'n business-like, you bet. I cud see troo de glass all right. He fooled me all right about de papers, tho'. He sealed 'em up so tight an' loked at me so harrd, I was lukin' fer somethin' interestin', but it wasn't nothing but a lot o' figures on Hardy's station'ry."

"You seem to know pretty nearly everything that's going on." Gilbert stood now at the beginning of the ascent to "The Lookout."

"I keep me eyes open, you bet." Jimmy's tone was full of conscious pride. "Goin' up, sir? I may see you later, but now I got a feller to meet on de barrel business." Jimmy sold both old barrels and newspapers in his leisure moments.

Gilbert climbed slowly the first long flight of wooden steps. Once in among the trees of the hillside the air grew cool. The odor of fresh evergreens mingled with the scent of the wet green leaves, that dangled in the waters of the mountain brook gurgling down over its rocky bed to the lake. From the top of the steps he emerged upon an upward stretch of smooth sod, treacherously slippery with pine needles and moss, where a thick sprinkling of trees alone kept him from slipping back with every few steps toward the edge of the cliff he had just ascended. Prodding his heels deep into the earth and pulling himself along by an occasional tree trunk, he toiled steadily upward. Now and then he paused to get his breath and to wipe the perspiration from his forehead. He was deep in thought now, for Jimmy had turned him back from the peaceful Sunday afternoon and its vagrant fancies to the shops and the

daily duties of life. It was not until he reached the crag beyond, therefore, that he noticed that the flight of steps, which usually reached up its steep side, was gone. The Winter snows and the Spring rains had evidently rotted the wood and loosened the supports, for the framework had fallen and lay, a tangled mess of rotten débris, in the brook which here ran along the base of the cliff. A few steps of the lower portion leaned in a straggling zig-zag against the rock's face, and Gilbert, steadying them with some small boulders, mounted to the top of the wreck. Reaching upward he found that his hands were still three or four feet from the upper ledge. He knew the place well. There was no way around, for the cliff was a long barrier, and the woods beneath it, a wilderness.

Turning back he found a soft bed of pine needles at the left of the path, from which a large evergreen cut off the edge of sun which still gleamed over the ledge above. There, pulling another of his stolen apples from a pocket, he threw himself down at full length. He decided philosophically that he was glad the steps were gone. Above there were distractions: the broad view with its changing colors on hill and water and, very likely, people as well, who had climbed up by the old path. Here he could think quietly. There was one joy greater than being with people when one wished to be with people, he assured himself, and that was to be alone when one wished to be alone. Here the intermittent hammer of a woodpecker in the thicket at his left and, from far below, the voices of men singing on the water alone reached him.

Hardy stationery filled with figures and sent from Brett to Mr. Hubbard. Jimmy O'Rourke had thought

the thing innocent enough. Perhaps it was. Gilbert shook his head over a particularly large bite of his apple and felt certain that the thing was not innocent. Hubbard was finding out how matters stood with Hardy & Son. Brett was secretary of the company and could tell him much that he might wish to know. There were some things, however, that only Hardy knew, things that were locked up in Hardy's head and Hardy's desk and Hardy's personal correspondence. And directly there entered this girl, this Gerty Smith at whom everybody looked when she passed, as Jimmy declared. She was Hardy's stenographer. Was Brett that kind of a man? Gilbert asked himself the question. Had he any right to think that the girl was untrustworthy? Was it any of his business, anyhow? He raised himself on his left hand and sent the apple core whirling straight at a tree about twenty yards down the way he had come. It smashed up against the trunk and fell in pieces. As it struck, Gilbert was startled by a suppressed exclamation from above and behind him. He half turned and leaned out inquisitively beyond the edge of his evergreen shelter. Then he pulled himself up to a sitting posture and brushed his clothes frantically as he slowly rose to his feet. When he stepped out from behind the evergreen he was conscious that his face was flushed and that his heart was beating more rapidly than it should.

"Oh," said a voice with that blurring richness that Gilbert remembered well, "it is Mr. Gilbert."

She had turned back as if to run away from the sudden appearance of man in the silent place, but now she returned to the edge of the cliff. She made a rare picture

as she stood there, her lithe, slender figure in its simple shirt-waist and short gray outing skirt, her dark, almost olive cheeks brightened with an unwonted flush, her black eyes sober but her full lips parted in a faint suggestion of a smile, and strands of the wind-tossed, jet-black hair sweeping her forehead. Her arms were filled with laurel, its pink-tipped blossoms creeping up caressingly about her neck. Behind her lay the background of dark green moving idly in the breeze above, and at her feet the perpendicular gray rock.

"Be careful how you step, Miss Hardy," warned Gilbert involuntarily. "The moss is slippery."

The black eyebrows almost met in a frown, and the girl, with a slight toss of her head, took a short step nearer the edge of the cliff.

"I sha'n't slip," she said decisively; "but will you please tell me how I can get down?"

"I don't know." Gilbert was smiling. "I've been wondering how I was going to get up."

Neither the remark nor the smile seemed to please the girl.

"That's really not half as important," she remarked with some irritation. "Billy—Mr. McNish, I should say—and I had an argument up on "The Lookout" as to which was the better way to come down and I—well, I've either to come this way now or give in. There must be some way," she said petulantly.

Gilbert looked about him, thinking rapidly to find some way out of the difficulty. Then, shaking his head, he stared at the blank face of the rock, noting its slight slope toward the top and the roughness of its surface,

which here and there showed short jagged prominences and indentations.

"I should think," called the girl tauntingly, "that a man who can climb other people's apple trees might——"

But Gilbert had made up his mind. He mounted the steps that he had already made steady, and caught almost recklessly at the first protruding bits of rock that might serve for the grip of his hand or for a foothold.

"Oh," whispered the girl, catching her breath. "I didn't really mean it."

Slowly Jack pulled himself upward, his teeth set and his eyes alight with the struggle of it. And it was a struggle. Crevices that had looked to be deep from the path were narrow and slippery now as he tried them, and jagged pieces of rock that seemed large enough for his whole hand he found now only catching the tips of his fingers. Once he slipped, and a sibilant drawing in of breath above him helped him to catch again the grip he had lost. Once he stopped for breath, his great body stretched like a huge spider across the gray side of the rock. But at last one big hand, its fingers bleeding from one or two surface cuts, grasped the upper ledge, and a moment later he dragged himself over the moss-softened edge.

"I—I didn't—think—you—saw me," he declared, breathing hard.

"Saw you—why——"

"In the apple tree, I mean."

"Oh."

There was a slight pause.

"I'll get my breath in a minute."

"You—you oughtn't to have done it."

"No, I suppose not. But the apples looked mighty good. He'll never miss 'em—the man that owns the tree, I mean."

"But I meant—this."

Clare Hardy pointed down over the cliff.

"It was foolhardy," she went on severely, "and, besides, it didn't help me a bit. It was only taking a dare. You are strong, though, Mr. Gilbert."

Gilbert's breath was coming more easily now, and he leaned over, examining closely the rock he had climbed. Then he turned and slid down over the edge, digging his feet in until they caught and he clung there, his broad shoulders still above the upper ledge.

"What are you going to do now?" gasped the girl.

"I'm going to take you down. Sit down, please," ordered Gilbert, "right at the edge, with your back to me."

"No," the girl shook her head, rebellious in her heart at the command of his voice. As she looked at him, however, she thought she saw a critical, quizzical smile in his gray eyes.

"I'm not afraid," she declared as if in answer. Then she hesitated, and a tide of pink ran into her cheeks.

"Of course not."

She stared at him questioningly for another minute. It was absurd, she told herself. She could not stand there forever with this big man smiling up at her, and she would not go back up to "The Lookout," leaving him there hanging to the rock. It was evident from that set jaw of his that he would wait until he had his way. And there was

Billy. She surrendered quickly and sat down as he had bade her. With a last look backward at the rough steps he must use, he put his arm about her waist and swung her clear. The descent would be slower than the upward climbing had been, and harder, he knew. The girl's weight quickly became like lead to his straining arm, and, with only one hand free, he was forced to lie flat on the slightly sloping rock and to make his steps short and sure. As he groped his way downward he felt stray wisps of her hair against his neck, and he realized that her face was pressed against his shoulder. She had caught one downward glimpse and, suddenly frightened, had blotted it all out against his protecting arm. He felt a sudden thrill as the sense of the clinging girl's nearness came to him. An elemental something within him made his arm tighten about her, but he did not realize it until his toes touched the wood of the steps. Then his grasp loosened mechanically, and he drew away to let her pass down before him, with a deep red in his cheeks that was not altogether the red of exertion.

"I think I should know better than to ever dare you again." Clare Hardy's cheeks were flushed, also, as she stood looking up at him from the bottom of the steps. "Now—I think—I'll hurry on and find—Mr. McNish. 'It's—it's only to keep one's nerves at a strain,' you know."

Gilbert nodded as she turned away.

"'And, baffled, get up and begin again.'"

She started slightly with surprise. He knew something of Browning then, this man who worked in her father's shops. Then the mark of the unerringly thrown core on a tree before her caught her eye.

“And, oh,” she called out, turning back, her eyes dancing, “I meant to tell you. I liked my apple.”

“It was stolen,” he retorted. He was still standing at the top of the steps, and as she hurried on down the path she could still see the picture of the large, broad-shouldered, awkward figure standing out against the great gray rock, with the brook and the trees and the sky for a frame, and it impressed her with a sense of grim strength, eternal determination, immovable firmness.

For some minutes after she disappeared—how long he did not know—Gilbert stood where she had left him, on the top of the steps, his back to the rock. It had been only a few seconds ago, it seemed to him, since he was sprawling in the shelter of that evergreen yonder. He went over and over again each detail of their conversation. He felt again the scraping of the rock. He remembered—yes, the whole thing had been foolhardy. He had been dared by a girl’s whim and yet, he smiled to himself, he was entirely glad that he had done it. She was not so different from the little girl of the old garden after all, and she liked the apple.

The melody of a popular song, shrilly whistled with the disjointed rhythm of scanty breath, from the path below warned him, and he had scarcely descended a step or two before Jimmy O’Rourke appeared at the turn below. The melody ceased instantly, and in its place came a long whistle that descended an octave in surprise.

“Hello,” called Jimmy, as he came panting up the incline. “Say, ye luk like Umslop-and-so-forth about to break de sacred stone.—Did ye ever read Allan Quartermain?—Only he was a nigger. Say,” he rattled on,

“who d’ye tink I just saw? Miss Hardy. Sure thing. An’ she near slipped down. Say,” Jimmy grew confidential, “she’s de goods. She kin travel on my ticket as fer as it goes. Say, she bowed to me. She did. Dat’s a fac’.”

Gilbert looked at the boy with a sober, almost anxious face. He was bathing his bruised fingers in the brook.

“Jimmy,” he remarked, “I’m a fool.”

“Whatcher talkin’ about?” scowled Jimmy.

“I ought to have gone down with her, that’s all.”

Light suddenly broke in upon Jimmy as he noticed the broken stairway.

“’Course—you seen her too. But say, what’s de matter wid yer clothes, an’ who busted de staircase, an’——”

“If an elephant chases a monkey up a match stick,” drawled Gilbert, “who owns the farm? Jimmy, I’m going home.”

Jimmy O’Rourke, frankly puzzled, frowned up at the big man.

“Say, I’ll go wid ye,” he said at last, judiciously.

CHAPTER V

THE DROWNING OF A DISAPPOINTMENT

WHEN the door closed behind his stenographer, Mr. Hardy opened a lower drawer in his desk, and helped himself from a small flask and glass he kept secreted there under lock and key. Then he lit the stub of a partly smoked cigar, rang her bell once more, and wrote his name busily three or four times across a blank sheet of paper. He was too occupied to look up when she appeared.

"You needn't open my mail for me after this, Miss Smith."

The stenographer grimaced at his broad back.

"Yes, sir," she said sweetly. "Of course I only did it to help you."

"I know," nodded Mr. Hardy, "but I'll do it for myself from now on."

As soon as she was gone he leaned back thoughtfully. He was one of those men who cannot bear a pretty woman's ridicule, and Miss Gerty Smith, during her eight months at Hardy & Son's, had almost terrorized him at times with her pert smile that was always half sneer. This order about his mail had been given not because he was in the least suspicious of Miss Smith. Mr. Hardy had never been suspicious of women. He had always looked upon them as quite too insignificant to require

watching. It was rather because he, being an old-fashioned business man, liked to do everything himself. There was even a certain childish joy about slitting the envelope edges and wondering what was going to be inside.

A certain matter might be mentioned in his mail at this particular time, also, about which he meant no one to know; and this feeling was of a piece with the pride that had led him in the beginning into the matter itself. Briefly, he had found the factory in need of ready money. There were large sums owed on the books which would more than meet the bills that bothered him, but he never had made anyone wait even a day for money owed by Hardy & Son. This was business sense as well as pride, but his feeling about his large surplus—the feeling that had kept him for years from touching that pile of gold for any purpose whatever—was pride pure and simple, which at last had made the surplus a personal fetiche. To obtain the ready money, therefore, he had sold the company's notes in New York. He had not asked permission of his directors. Hardy & Son's directors met only when they were elected and re-elected. The money he had expected was coming in, and he was certain that he could meet the notes when they came due. He still had three weeks to make up the total amount. He hoped, however, that no one in Hampstead or among the trade would hear of it. It was the first time since the early days of Hardy & Son that he had found himself so straitened financially.

The fact did not affect his confidence in the shops, however. Sooner or later these Westbury people, who had

pressed selling prices down almost to cost, would find their money gone and they would give up the losing fight; and then Hardy & Son would rise again, prosperous and triumphant, as it always had risen over the obstacles of the past. His flabby red face lost its almost perpetual frown as he thought of the eventual failure of this Westbury concern.

Samuel Hardy was one of those men who train themselves to look upon life as a kind of barbaric fight for supremacy; a fight in which the joy of victory is made keener by the humiliation and distress of those who are defeated. Winning of itself was to him justification for any course, and to the men who went down in failure he always applied the same dogma: "Served him right." Whether the men opposed to him fought courageously or not interested him little. The result alone was important—winning or losing. There was nothing of the sportsman about him. As he sat at his desk now he heard from beyond many closed doors the whirr and hum of machinery, the crash of heavy drops, the thudding of distant drills, the scraping murmur and regular clicking of a hundred lathes and automatic machines, the rattle and thump of old-fashioned foot presses mingling with the noise of great power presses like the purring of immense cats; a weird mass of sound, gigantic, chaotic. These were his single joy and inspiration. They formed to him a huge parade of power: bands playing, the multitude shouting, and the tramp, tramp, tramp of an army marching at his command. He had formed these regiments of men and machines; he had drilled them, marshaled them, led them day after day and year after year. There had

been mutinies, of course—whole lines of machines that had refused to work and men who had struck for larger wages and for shorter hours—but he had always beaten them back into line.

Through the window the warm June air, scented with wild-flower fragrance from the field on which he meant some day to build an additional shop, brought its message of peace, but he heard only the striving cries of a gang of yard workmen below, and the clang of the iron they were moving. He was a man who had refused the happiness that life offers, and who had tried to replace it with a happiness he manufactured for himself.

From superintendent to under-age boys, whom he smuggled into the mill, nearly everyone disliked "Sam" Hardy and feared him. The sound of his step, which every workman knew as well as he knew the old, frowning face, meant for each to work the machine to its utmost, with head and shoulders bent and eyes on the task, until the echo of the steps died away; and then to breathe again and to take things easily and to curse "the old man" to a neighbor while the machine took care of itself. Traveling men in the moderate-priced hotels to which he sent them, either sneered or trembled, according to their natural habit in the face of danger, when they found his letters at the desk. And Moriarty was not the only man upon whose patents Hardy had infringed when he was certain that the patentee had too little money to take the matter into the courts. The case of Moriarty had been particularly hard, however, because the little Irishman had served Hardy well for many years, and he was now fighting an unequal fight against his old employer, who, with

infinitely larger facilities, had paralleled every line of Moriarty's manufacture. Moriarty considered it to be personal spite, but he was mistaken. It was what Hardy, along with many others, called "business,"—a synonym with them for "any way to win."

Mr. Hardy was thinking of Moriarty, and of a threat the hot-headed little Irishman had made the last time they had met, when there was a knock at the door and there entered a puffy, perspiring person who seemed to be irritated by a sense of his own importance. Mr. Hardy recognized him as the Boston factory expert, who had been so persistent and so voluble with promises that, a week or two before, Hardy had given him a chance "to improve the system and to perfect the economy"—this was the expert's high-sounding phrase—of Hardy & Son.

"Well, what's the matter?" Mr. Hardy's keen, hard eyes had disconcerted many who came with juster cause, but the newcomer was too angry to notice them.

"A good deal is the matter," he sputtered. It is a strange fact that people who think that their dignity has been trifled with, almost always "sputter," and so forfeit all claim to the dignity they believe they possess. Pettiness almost always unmasks itself. "I can't stand the impertinence and the interference of your subordinates, sir."

The visitor drew in his breath sharply and then exhaled slowly, blowing out his cheeks as if by way of exhaust for his injured feelings.

"Well?" interjected Mr. Hardy shortly.

"I moved some machines in the finishing room this morning to try an experiment which I think will vastly

increase the efficiency of the room. I hadn't had them changed an hour, sir, when that young Gilbert came in and looked around and shouted out: 'Who moved those machines?' I remarked that I had moved them, and he said: 'Move 'em back to where you got 'em, and do it quick.' I said in a perfectly gentlemanly way that I wanted them to stay there until to-morrow. And would you believe it, Mr. Hardy, that common workman came up to me and threatened me. 'Who are you,' he said, 'to move my machines around?'—'his machines,' do you hear, Mr. Hardy? 'Now, you move 'em back, and within half an hour, or I'll take you by your neck and your legs and throw you out of the shop.' What do you say to that, Mr. Hardy?"

Mr. Hardy looked musingly into space, while the expert from Boston, breathing hard, waited for a vindication and for the reprimand or the dismissal of the workman Gilbert. The expert did not know that his moving the machines had delayed important work that was being pushed through to fill rush orders. His only thought was that he was the expert from Boston.

"Let's see," said Hardy finally. "The superintendent is away to-day, isn't he?"

"I don't know, sir. That's not my business."

Hardy's expression hardened, but he went on slowly.

"Then Gilbert is acting superintendent, isn't he?"

There was no reply.

"How much time did he give you, did you say?"

"Half an hour," choked the expert.

"And you've already lost half of it," said Hardy.

"Yes, sir, but——"

"I should say, my friend, that you have a good-sized job to do in the next fifteen minutes."

"But the threat, sir, the threat this man Gilbert made: what have you to say to that?"

"I've only got to say that from what I know of Gilbert, he's likely to do what he says he'll do."

The expert stared at Mr. Hardy unbelievably for a moment, and then, crestfallen, he retired, muttering to himself.

There was a grim smile on "the old man's" face as he swung back to his desk. He remembered many incidents in which John Gilbert had figured, and he liked them all; but perhaps none of them had appealed to his martial business heart as strongly as this humiliation of the pompous "know-it-all" expert, whose type had always been one of Mr. Hardy's pet aversions. He was in the habit of doing things on impulse, and it was characteristic of him that, long before the expert's fifteen minutes had passed, Mr. Hardy had pressed one of the buttons that studded his desk, and tilted back, smoking, waiting for Gilbert. Soon there was a decisive banging at the door, and the big, loosely hung figure, which looked bigger and more loosely hung in the torn and patched and grease-spotted overalls, entered. His solemn face was decorated with grime, and his hands were black and rough. The theoretical expert, with his comparatively small knowledge of practical factory affairs, was scarcely to be blamed for looking upon Gilbert as a common workman. The difference between the two men struck Hardy forcibly as he looked up at the assistant superintendent.

"Busy, Jack?"

The big fellow nodded and took a deep breath at the open window by which he stood.

"First breath I've had to-day, Mr. Hardy," he said, and a genial smile lit up the roughly cut, blackened features with a startling contrast that reminded Hardy suddenly of the early morning sun slanting across the uneven surface of a stern, rocky western land he had seen years before. "If this pace keeps up the machines 'll all have nervous prostration in a week."

Mr. Hardy came immediately to the point. It was one of the qualities Gilbert had always admired in "the old man," this blunt, straight-from-the-shoulder directness.

"Simpson's left," he said with jerky abruptness. He was watching Gilbert closely, and he saw the young man's start of surprise. "Told him not to say anything about it. I've known about it a month. He's gone to Hubbard's." Mr. Hardy frowned over the name. "They're welcome to him. Too much of the 'I think so, maybe,' and the 'I hope you'll approve, Mr. Hardy,' about Simpson to suit me."

As a matter of fact, Sam Hardy had thought well of Simpson until the superintendent had announced his decision to leave, but now, of course, he had changed his mind completely.

"I've thought about a man from outside," he went on, "some fellow with new ideas, some fellow who'd made a study of factories. Thought perhaps you was too young. Guess I was wrong. How'd you like to tackle it?"

"I'd like it, Mr. Hardy." Gilbert's eyes were bright and his jaw was set decisively. "And I think I can do it."

Mr. Hardy swung back to his desk with business-like energy.

"That's settled," he said gruffly. "You're boss. Nobody's to interfere with you. We'll talk about salary in a month or two. That's all, Jack."

But Gilbert was not ready to go. It seemed to him that the opportunity he had been waiting for, the opportunity he had been trying to make for himself, to lay before Mr. Hardy all the plans he had formulated for the shops, had come, and he seized it. A few moments later, at Mr. Hardy's own suggestion—Hardy had been unwillingly overborne by the young man's enthusiasm—he reappeared before the astonished president with a bundle of papers, containing the drawings and estimates he had been working over quietly for more than a year. He unrolled the precious sheets almost tenderly, and for a half hour Mr. Hardy listened to his rapid explanations. And the president, in spite of his immediate inward decision, did not stop him. He realized dimly that what Gilbert said was true, and that it was not the talk of a theorist but the concentrated experience of a practical man of the mills.

"Cost too much money," was his laconic conclusion when Gilbert had finished. "Impossible." And this was the answer with which he met each succeeding argument. "Can't spend a cent except on repairs for a year or two. Save it till then."

A year or two. By that time, as things were going now, Gilbert groaned to himself, the shops would be in infinitely worse condition than at present. By that time, if his intuition was correct, they might be in Hubbard's hands.

But Mr. Hardy had already dismissed him and his plans, and was again turning to the desk. Again Gilbert was not ready to go. He had carried out only part of his decision made weeks before. He had yet to tell Mr. Hardy his feeling about Hubbard—the feeling which, although it was based on conjecture, had been growing into a definite conviction. He had realized, when he decided to warn “the old man,” that Hardy might not take his interference kindly, and he realized it more clearly as, leaning on the desk top and looking down at the president, he saw the flabby face turn from red to purple as he talked, and a big hand doubled up until it lay like a mallet on the blotter. But this did not matter to Gilbert. It was the thing which, right or wrong,—and he believed it to be right—he had decided to do. Therefore he did it without a thought of flinching. Mr. Hardy interrupted him before he had spoken many sentences.

“That’s enough. I didn’t hire you to advise me about running this shop. I hire you to be superintendent, and I can fire you just as quickly as I hire you, and don’t you forget it.” Hardy’s eyes met Gilbert’s and he hesitated. When he spoke again his voice had lost its angry growl and was almost apologetic. “Run along now, Jack, and boss your machines, but don’t try to boss me. And, look here, don’t ever talk to me again about something that isn’t any of your business.”

Gilbert walked out without a word. The first rush of anger at the domineering words vanished before a humorous admiration for “the old man” himself and his unconquerable pride and spirit. In spite of his disappointment he smiled as he thought of Hardy as a kind

of industrial Canute, ordering back alone a tide almost as resistless as that of the ocean. It would be mightily hard on "the old man," he thought more soberly, when the inevitable happened; mightily hard on "the old man" and on everyone connected with him. He caught himself thinking of a tall, slender girl looking down—No, he'd better go back to work and boss the machines, as Hardy had said. It was positively sentimental for him to have that girl's face following him about as it had followed him ever since Sunday. It bothered him, too, that the quaint little girl seemed to have almost disappeared from his memories. He spent half an hour in the finishing room over the machines the expert had replaced bunglingly, and, when they were working properly, he moved his belongings into Simpson's old office. He bundled his precious papers roughly into the desk. Then he took them out with greater care and locked them away in one of the drawers.

"I'll use them yet, you pig-headed old simpleton," he whispered to himself, with a good-natured grin toward the president's office. But at that moment he could not have told even himself how.

When, an hour or more later, the whistle blew he "washed up" with the men, as usual. It did not occur to him at first to go to his new office with its comparatively clean little wash bowl, and when he did think of it, after two or three who had heard the rapidly traveling rumor of his advancement shook his hand, he decided impulsively that he preferred the sociability of the black old sink where the fellows he worked with jostled and laughed and pounded each other on the back in the joy



*“Run along now, Jack, and boss your machines, but
don't try to boss me.”*



of another day's work done. When he left the shop he turned down Main Street toward the Methodist church.

The Methodist church of Hampstead was a forbidding brick structure on Main Street, not far from the beginning of West Hill. Its high, tapering steeple stood out over the town like a menacing index finger of correction. Beyond the swinging green doors of the inner vestibule with their tiny glass windows, through which many young knights of the town caught glimpses of their fair ladies and waited with palpitating hearts for the last hymn and the benediction, the somberness of the rigid pew backs and the dark stained-glass windows was relieved only by a garish piece of red carpeting on the pulpit and the glint of the gilded organ pipes. On one evening in each month, however, the Thursday of the last week, a sacrilegious odor of steaming coffee stole up into the musty vestibule from below, and lured belated brethren and their families to the big room in the basement, where a picnic repast, prepared by the ladies who "furnished" for the church supper, awaited them. There, when the preacher finished his blessing, there broke forth such a noisy clatter of plates and silver, such a hum of good-fellowship over discussions of unimportant and interesting things, such shrieks of delight from the children at the mere suggestions of ice-cream and chocolate cake to come, that even sour old Mr. Butterson was forced to grit his teeth to keep from smiling.

Across at a short table by the white-washed wall, on the night of this June supper, the solemn young preacher was seen to slap Gilbert on the shoulder with something that approached heartiness, and Mrs. Brice, his more genial

if not his better half, twitted the big fellow about "something that happened at Clear Lake," until Gilbert, flushing fiercely, changed the subject. Mrs. Brice, he knew, had been a classmate of Clare Hardy's at college, and their former friendship had been renewed since the Brices had come to Hampstead. Next to Mrs. Gilbert at the table sat Mr. McNish and Billy—the elder McNish, whose kindly soul rejoiced in church suppers, and Billy, who had told Gilbert once with characteristic frankness that "church suppers were a dead easy way to get next to the people and to make a bluff at respectability." Then there was Colonel Mead, who looked across at Gilbert with pathetic resignation from his unsought location between little Molly Jethro, who spoke in monosyllables, and Mrs. Neely, whom Billy called "a rapid fire gun of talk loaded with blanks." The Colonel seldom appeared in the solemn auditorium upstairs. He had sworn off sermons when he swore off whiskey thirty years before, he declared. During occasional dyspeptic periods he railed alternately at the hypocrisy of church people and at the dishonesty of secret societies, but he belonged to four of the one hundred and one orders with which Hampstead men decorate themselves, and he always sat at this same table in the Methodist church basement on the last Thursday evening of the month. And last but not least, there was watery-eyed little Neely; local preacher, prayer-meeting exhorter, councilman and critic of life. The poor fund knew him only too well, for Neely had never been able to find steady work, but his fiery phrases never faltered, and his ability to find scandal anywhere and everywhere made him the friend of all who loved

gossip. When Neely was seen buttonholing the preacher or Mr. McNish there were immediately many good women who wished to talk with him confidentially.

At the moment Neely was discussing the theater. That was the primal sink of iniquity. It lured "our young men" to sin and to crime. It taught "our young women" the ways of wickedness. And yet "some of our own people" were attracted by this "superfluity of naughtiness." Neely did not like to mention names, but—Gilbert smiled grimly. He remembered seeing Neely convulsed with laughter over a cheap negro comedian in the five-cent vaudeville show at Clear Lake.

The embarrassed Colonel created a diversion by putting salt in his coffee and milk on his cold meat.

"We had a fine old general," put in Mr. McNish, to cover the Colonel's confusion, "who was always the pride of the boys because he was as calm as a church in the face of fire. At Second Bull Run he sat on his horse at the most exposed place in the line and calmly read a book. Whenever a particularly loud shell 'ld scream over his head, he'd turn a page and yawn. Pretty soon one took his horse, and when two of the men picked him up the book was still in his hand. But we reckoned he must 've been absent-minded, too, for the book was upside down."

As Mr. McNish finished his reminiscence the room became suddenly quiet. Then whispers, more startling yet in the stillness, came from the next table. It is remarkable how few people have the courage to hear their own voices in a silence. Gilbert turned with the rest to see that nearly every woman in the place was staring fascinated

at the doorway, and that men were moving uneasily in their chairs and trying lamely to draw the attention of the others away from the same spot. Then a voice, thick and maudlin, remarked in tones that carried to the farthest ends of the room:

“Want t’ see Molly, tha’s all.”

Gilbert knew the voice even before he saw the red, blotched face, and the lurching figure that hung to the post at the foot of the stairs, and he turned apprehensively to Molly Jethro, who, with drawn face, had started to rise and then had buried her face in her hands in sudden shame. Gilbert had given Jethro the afternoon off that day, and he understood now the use to which the councilman, who represented labor among “the city fathers,” had put his leisure. He was on his feet quickly, but Neely was ahead of him.

“Mrs. Jethro isn’t here,” he heard Neely say in his oily voice. “She’s probably home. You go along and find her, Martin, that’s a good man.”

“Good man,” muttered Jethro, “good man. No, you’re the good man, always talkin’ about sin an’ devils an’ that muck. Molly says you’re so good you ought to be a lesson to me. Think o’ that, a lesson to me. An’ all the time I know better. I know better. Old Hubbard’s money’s just as good to you as ’tis to me, eh, Mr. Neely?”

The last sentence was said in a whisper, but Neely started back against Gilbert with a panic of fear on his face.

“Stop him,” he panted, “stop him.”

“Come on out of this, Jethro.” Gilbert linked his arm in that of the representative of labor and turned him toward the stairs.

"Oh, it's the new superintendent," sneered Jethro. "Think you're better'n we are—but ye ain't. Runnin' a shop now, aren't ye? Goin' to be a capitalist, soon; eh, me son? All right. All right. We've got 'em on the run. First 'twas ten hours a day; then 'twas nine; now it's eight with a good many; then t'll be seven, an' by an' by we won't work at all, an' we'll have old Hubbard an' Hardy a-blackin' our——"

Gilbert had not wished to use force, but Jethro hung back, determinedly, talking at full voice.

"Come on, Jethro. You're making a holy show of yourself." And Jethro felt a pull that made the muscles of his arm strain and ache. The preacher came hurrying up.

"I've telephoned for the police. They will be here in a few minutes," he said excitedly.

Whether it was the yanking pull or the police that changed Jethro's mind, his hand dropped from the post and they started up the stairs.

"Telephone to the police—nothing doing," Gilbert remarked over his shoulder to the preacher with a wink that even Mr. Brice understood, and the strangely assorted pair stumbled up and out into the street.

It was astonishing how interested those pleasant-faced, gentle-voiced church women were in Jethro, the moment his back was turned. They left their seats and gathered at the bottom of the stairs to watch his exit, and a few followed his lurching form up into the vestibule, and stood in the door until they saw Gilbert help him into a hack under the electric light at the corner. Then they went back with awed whispers and told each other what they

had seen, and stared sympathetically at poor Molly Jethro until that sensitive little creature shrunk away against the wall. At last Billy McNish, at the risk of his popularity, took her away, in the midst of a pitiless silence, to the preacher's study and left her there with Mrs. Brice, who had followed Billy's beckoning nod and her own better instincts.

After that, the gossip became mixed and gradually sweetened with chocolate cake, and the children, who had been silently listening to the helpful discourses of their elders, turned their attention to the ice cream, and the atmosphere of the room returned to the normal and humdrum. Mr. Neely, however, was still making spiteful remarks about Mr. Jethro's incapacity for telling the truth, punctuating them here and there with scriptural texts, and watching suspiciously with his watery eyes for a sign that anyone had heard the labor councilman's whispered remark. Finally he called Mr. McNish aside, and left the Colonel to the mercies of Mrs. Neely and a few other ladies, who wanted to know what that voluble person thought about how Mrs. Jethro must have felt when—and so forth. The poor Colonel pulled at his iron-gray mustaches that drooped in a curve like steers' horns, and thought words that are seldom used in churches. Mrs. Gilbert had long since left the table for the busier kitchen.

Sometime later, when Gilbert walked into the dimly lighted vestibule, he found the Colonel pacing up and down in contented solitude.

"S'pose I ought to hev stayed down there." There was a gleam in the veteran's eye as he pointed soberly at the

floor. "They jest nachurally can't tear ye to pieces when ye're with 'em. But I couldn't stand it any longer."

"Stand what?" Gilbert looked at the Colonel absent-mindedly.

"The women folks. Do ye know, boy, I never feel so lonesome ez I do when I get left alone with a pack of women, 'specially good women. I dassen't talk fer fear I'll swear er say somethin' thet ain't right an' proper, an' it sure makes me nervous to watch their mouths go, jest sayin' nothin' at all. Women talk jest like most Injuns fight. When they find a point they want to attack they creep up to within one hundred yards of it on one side; then they do the same on th' other side; then they try the left an' the right; and then most likely they give a war-whoop an' go runnin' off without ever attackin' the point they was aimin' at at all. But say what'd ye do with Jethro?"

"I took him home in a hack."

"Ye took him home in a hack!" echoed the Colonel. "Ye don't mean to say ye took that blaguard thet 'ld a soiled the dirtiest guardhouse in Fort Benton, that greaser thet a decent rope 'ld be ashamed to hev hangin' to it, thet mis'able, no-account pup thet a haff-breed cayuse wouldn't associate with—home in a hack! Home in a hack! Well, I'll be——" The Colonel stopped suddenly and looked cautiously about the vestibule. Then he came close to Gilbert and shook the whispered word into the big fellow's face, "damned."

There was something in Gilbert's eyes, as he saw them now at close range, that made the Colonel finish the word quickly.

"I had it all decided when I took hold of him." Gilbert spoke as if with restraint. "I put him in a hack and took him home. He cursed me all the way. I took him inside and undressed him, and he went on cursing. Then I telephoned Gilshannon and the *Register* to keep it out of the papers. I'd decided to do all that, but I came pretty near not doing it or doing something else. I didn't mind his cursing. That was amusing. But he said things that—well, I never came so near to smashing a man's head in before. I've walked off some of it, but I've got a good deal left. Oh, I'm a fool, I guess, Colonel."

And Gilbert left the surprised veteran abruptly and went downstairs. The ladies were disappointed in Mr. Gilbert that night. He was extraordinarily uncommunicative. They said to each other that it seemed a great pity that someone else had not gone with Mr. Jethro, in whom they were all so interested, someone who would tell them the rest of the story. But they hovered about him until Mrs. Gilbert came to his rescue. As the two started out, the elder McNish joined them, but at the street door he stopped suddenly.

"Forgotten something?" suggested Mrs. Gilbert.

"The Colonel and Billy," grimaced Mr. McNish. "I'm like Cap'n Sanford of the Seventh Massachusetts—I think it was the Seventh. Marched into camp at Kettle Run alone. When they asked him where his company was, Sanford scratched his head. 'Lordy,' he said, 'I knew I'd forgotten something.'"

Colonel Mead was sitting moodily in a corner downstairs, absorbed in an increasing ill-will against the world in general; but Billy had disappeared.

"Some girl, probably." Mr. McNish chuckled as he rejoined the others after a hasty search. "Billy's like Bill Jennings of the Fourth. When we were in camp down at Kettle Run, Bill'd come out of his tent 'at night and look around. Then he'd call two or three of the men. 'Mates,' he'd say—you see he was before the mast as a boy—'there's a girl or two about five miles and a half away north by northwest. Let's go and make a call.' And the boys said he never failed to make good."

They walked home slowly under the stars, Gilbert carrying his mother along on his arm after their usual custom, and the stout little Mr. McNish taking two steps to one of the gaunt Colonel's long strides. And for a time the pulsing stillness of the night put its seal upon their lips.

"Jack's all wrong." The Colonel was thinking aloud at last. "He can't run men by bein' good to 'em. He's got to fight. This world ain't a nursery er a Sundry School, an', I tell ye, the most low-down haff-breed on the Mexican border ain't half as wicked as some o' these Dagoes that 're workin' here in the shops. He's got to fight an' he don't know it."

Mr. McNish hummed a scrap of melody in his cracked tenor, as he watched the big figure that loomed ahead of them.

"I think I'll be sorry for them when he finds it out," he said.

"I caught a gang of 'em yesterday, stealin' apples in my back yard. An' when I told 'em to go they jest stared at me. They couldn't 've understood my remarks. If they had, an' wuz good Catholics, they'd 've vamoosed instanter."

He'd likely 've given 'em all the apples an' sent 'em home in a hack."

There was at least one person, however, who wholly approved of Gilbert's way of dealing with Jethro, and that was his mother. In some unaccountable way, also, her approval always satisfied him in the face of his inward doubts. In characteristic man fashion he told her little, and then depended much upon her woman's judgment, for, like most men, he intuitively had more faith in a woman's instincts than in his own reason.

When he left her that night, therefore, he put out of his mind, as unworthy of further thought, the fact that Jethro had called him a "scab" and a "leg-puller" and two or three unmentionable terms. Of course, he remembered that dictum from the Colonel's long experience with men. "Most any man can fool ye when he's sober," the Colonel had once said, "but git him drunk an' ye've got him with the cover off his heart." But, after all, what did it matter?

One thing alone remained to bother him. Jethro evidently knew something derogatory to Neely. There was no other explanation for Neely's amusing and childlike panic. There was nothing very extraordinary about that, in itself. Neely was far too much of a well-meaning but pointless joke, to be taken seriously. It was only the introduction of Mr. Hubbard's name that caused Gilbert to remember the incident at all. Gradually this wizened-up, insignificant-looking, gray-haired man, whom he knew merely by sight, was becoming to Gilbert's imagination a kind of threatening creature crouching away somewhere in the dark, and he had a human craving to turn the light

upon it. But he was a good man, this Alonzo Hubbard, in the opinion of the community, and, what was more, he was a successful man, which was much more important in the eyes of many—although, of course, they would never have admitted it. He was a devout churchman—hadn't he paid for those remarkable red plush seats in St. John's Church? He was a self-made man, and that was the only kind of a man that Hampstead had any respect for. And, although he was rich, he had not made enemies along with his money, as most rich men did. Hampstead mothers pointed him out to their sons as a model of propriety—and of success; and daughters, who were striving for a place in the small clique of people who styled themselves "society," lost much of their respect for their fathers because those hard-working men were not as successful as the rich Mr. Hubbard. And there were few men in this democratic Connecticut city who were not proud when Mr. Hubbard bowed to them in his icy way.

Gilbert understood Alonzo Hubbard little better than most of his neighbors did, but he was willing—and he was growing eager—to learn. And that was an advantage.

CHAPTER VI

AT MR. HARDY'S

IF the Hardy house on West Hill had grown old and familiar for twenty years to Hampstead, there was, nevertheless, a glaring newness about the interior to help it to retain its earlier reputation for novelty. The "old man" liked the smell of paint and varnish, and had a large part of the house painted and repapered every year. It changed its appearance almost as often as Mrs. Hardy changed her gowns, and Mrs. Hardy's gowns were the envy of Hampstead women. And between the two Sam Hardy seldom had more than a moderate-sized account at any of the banks. He never begrudged the money spent in these two forms of decoration, however. They satisfied his whims. He walked to church of a Sunday morning with a gleam in his eye, acutely conscious of every admiring glance at Mrs. Hardy's costume—his feet keeping time to the refrain that re-echoed in his exalted mind, "I paid for it, I paid for it." And inside the church, the gowns always furnished him more consolation than the sermon.

In the house, the parlors at present were modeled after some rooms that had taken Mr. Hardy's eye at the Waldorf Astoria. They were all in gilt and white. The library, next door, was walled with green burlap and contained many costly books with uncut leaves, a newly

patented chair with a mechanical book holder, and a Turkish cozy corner. The big dining-room was finished throughout with Flemish Oak, Rathskellar-like. Mr. Hardy received his ideas in New York and adapted them to Hampstead, even to hanging his pictures in such a way that they looked as if they had been hurled at the walls and had been allowed to remain wherever they struck. And of course there were hardwood floors covered with treacherous rugs, which were responsible for Mr. Hardy's attaining a rather incongruous, mincing gait, a hesitating, suspicious step, as if he were walking on ice.

And if it be remarked that the house both within and without was characterized, at the least, by an infinite variety, what shall be said of those who lived in it? Mrs. Hardy had objected regularly to every change that her husband ordered, and she had then gone quietly upstairs and read Marcus Aurelius. Her indifferent submission had grown to be as chronic as her objections. She was a languid woman with very tense ideas about the proprieties of life, ideas nearly all of which Mr. Hardy violated, purposely violated it seemed to her. She, therefore, lived, after her own fashion, an existence bounded by tea-cups and gossip, an occasional bit of fine sewing, and Marcus Aurelius. And the girl, who was like them both and totally different from either one, had missed most of the things that make a home better than a boarding-house, and was vaguely disappointed. Meanwhile the servants controlled the house, and Mr. Hardy paid the bills, and the neighbors spoke of the Hardys as "such a happy family."

Clare Hardy was lounging luxuriously on the broad window seat of her room in the tower, late that Friday

afternoon. The window was open and the fresh June air blew the heavy curtains about her. Although a book lay in her lap, she was looking down at the busy city below her, with its ragged line of brick blocks showing above the green of the trees. Long streaks of smoke twisted like ribbons from a hundred chimney mouths and marred the beyond of blue mystery about the hills. Far in the distance a long freight train was creeping along, a winding tendril of black against the hillside. She had often wondered as she looked from this same window what Ruskin would have said to the blur of dirty smoke and the sooty chimneys. And yet, down at the mills the noise and the quiet discipline, and the sense of an army of men doing things appealed to her imagination. And in either of these conflicting points of view she was different from her girl friends in Hampstead, to nearly all of whom Ruskin was merely a name that suggested a duty unperformed, and the shops a noisy, mussy place where the men made money. Yes, Clare Hardy was distinctly different, and she had sense enough to know it and to be glad of it. Not that there was any suggestion of snobbery about her. The girls all declared that she was "charming, lots of fun, and so refined," and the boys liked her, although, of course, they did not understand her. They were not to be blamed for that. She was never certain that she understood herself. If people now and then caught a stray end of a line of her character, they always found it tangled with half-a-dozen others before they really had a firm hold of it. And yet there was a fine frankness about her, a way of going straight to a point like a man. Nothing in other women amused and irritated her so much as their roundabout,

underneath, overhead, criss-cross methods of doing things. In short, she was as incomprehensible as her smile, which was alternately tantalizing and tender and malicious and mocking, and which was never quite the same for a consecutive half-minute.

It seemed to her this afternoon that nature, conventions and parents had combined to make girls useless and unhappy. She was desperately weary of her leisurely round of Women's Club meetings and eternal piano practice and insignificant church duties and occasional dances. She was sure there was no place in the world with so small a supply of originality as this town of Hampstead which she felt she hated and which she knew she loved. And perhaps this mood explains why the book in her lap happened to be her old character-study book. She had started this book in college instead of keeping a diary. Every girl she knew had a diary. Therefore Miss Hardy scorned the daily entry of trivial incidents and, instead, analyzed on paper the people she met who interested her. For a year or two the book had gathered dust upon her lowest book-shelf, but during the present week voluminous notes had been entered in it daily. Perhaps this same mood explained that John Gilbert was the character she was studying, and perhaps John Gilbert explained the mood. This is a problem that no mere man would attempt to solve.

At any rate, three pages of the book were already devoted to him. She remembered him as the strong, unyielding boy. With that strange feminine memory for little, far-off things, she recalled his struggle with Billy McNish on that first day in the old garden, and still

another short but decisive fight with Billy, the cause of which had been an argument as to whether or not her voice "had a fuzz on it." Billy had admitted in the end that it had. She remembered, with a combination of inward embarrassment and inward pleasure, how angry he had once become with a gypsy fortune teller who had said he would some day marry a blonde woman—and her eyes and hair were black. She remembered how the old house had been sold, how all the girls in her set had had nothing more to do with him when he went to work as a mechanic, and how he had suddenly dropped out of the circle of grown-up children and had become Mr. Gilbert. She remembered little concerning him during the years she had been away at college, and since she had graduated she had scarcely thought of him until that Common Council meeting a month ago. It was only since Sunday, however, that he had really seemed interesting to her.

All the week she had missed only one or two noons or evenings when the men came tramping home from the shops. And she had watched, curious to know what he was like when he was off his guard, when he did not know that she was looking at him. Her feminine habit of arguing everything to herself made her unconsciously consider him off his guard whenever she was out of sight. Every detail was noted in the book with mathematical accuracy. Sometimes he strode homeward with some of the men who had washed their faces just enough to make the workaday dirt a smudge. She had commented on his loud, hearty laugh and on his slapping a man on the back on one occasion with vigorous approbation. And yet there was always a sense of dignity about him; the men

did the talking and he seemed naturally to hold court. One noon he had ridden up with her father, and again it seemed to her that he was holding court and that her father took the place of the workmen. She had not watched that night out of sheer resentment. And then, one day, he had come along just as lame old Widow Ashton was trying to catch a downtown car. He was talking with a number of the men, but he caught sight of the panting old lady, stopped the car, and then carried rather than helped her to the platform. The rather infrequent smile that was tender had played about Clare Hardy's mouth, as she watched him catch up with the men and tramp on as if nothing had happened. Sometimes he was alone, loping along with awkward strides. "He drawls with his tongue and his legs," was the entry in her book. This noon he had passed with the two McNishes, and they were such a jolly trio that she instinctively thought of the immortal Taffy tramping along arm in arm with the Laird and little Billee. Twice he had looked up at her window while she dodged back behind the curtains and held her breath, and last night her father had mentioned his promotion at the shops.

She was wondering vaguely what John Gilbert thought of her father when the whistles blew down by the river. A car went clanging by, and soon the first groups of men came hurrying up the hill. The farther side of West Hill was already lined with new streets and dotted with workmen's trim houses. Fifteen minutes passed and still he did not come. She was beginning to be irritated when, at last, she saw the tall, familiar form far down the street. Beside him was a shorter, broader woman's figure. She

strained her eyes to see who it was. She had never seen him come by before with a woman. Then she discovered that it was his mother. Miss Hardy felt suddenly guilty. As a child she had always liked Mrs. Gilbert, but since she had grown to be a woman she had not thought of calling at the plain little cottage. And as she watched them pass she had another and a different feeling of guilt, and she turned impulsively away from the window.

He was very aggravating, she decided as she dressed for dinner. Why was he such a paragon? He was like one of those god-like heroes of popular novels, whom she liked to read about but whom she considered too impossibly perfect for words. She must discover something bad about him, she argued, or her character study would have no character.

To add to her irritation Mr. Hardy insisted on telling a story about this man Gilbert at the dinner table. It seemed that there was a certain Irishman at the shops, whose steady and efficient life had been jarred out of gear by fragments of socialistic doctrine. He had come to believe that all men who have money ought to divide equally with those who have not. And the quality of his work grew poorer as the quantity of his talk increased. Gilbert had called the man into his office that day, and their conversation, as Mr. Hardy detailed it, was somewhat as follows:

“Michael, I’m going to give you a half-holiday.”

“Thank ye, sorr.”

“You own your house, don’t you, Michael?”

“I do, sorr,” proudly.

“And you have six hundred dollars in the bank?”

"I have, sorr," with some surprise.

"You know Pat Ryan well?"

"That I do. He lives forninst me in Mrs. Flynn's boardin' house. He's woruked beside me fer eight years, sorr, an' he owes me wan hundred dollars, bad cess to him. He drinks too harud, does Pat. His two byes woruk, an' it's all they can do to git along, the t'ree av thim."

"Your daughter Mary is graduating from the High School this week?"

"She is, sorr. She's at the head av the class, God spare her."

"And your two sons are both in school?"

"They are, sorr, an' doin' foine."

"All right, Michael. You'd like to deed over half of your property to Pat, of course. Come here at noon with the papers and I'll be witness for you. That's all, Michael, and good luck to you."

Michael, his eyes blinking, his hands nervously twitching at his cap, goes out. Soon there is a knock at the door. Michael's head is pushed through the narrow opening.

"I'm dommed if I do, sorr," and the door slams behind him.

In this way, according to Mr. Hardy, his new superintendent cured Michael of socialism. He was quickly disgruntled when his daughter did not join him in his noisy laughter. With masculine consistency, therefore, he turned to his wife.

"Women 're never interested in business," he growled, spreading his bread on the tablecloth, with butter from a

bread-and-butter plate. Nothing in the world aggravated Mrs. Hardy so much as to see anyone spread bread on the tablecloth. Her retort, therefore, was quick.

"They are more interested in manners. Can't you see your plate, Mr. Hardy?"

Mr. Hardy cut the bread on the cloth with childish satisfaction.

"I'll eat as I like in my own house," he declared with considerable vigor.

"And I object to watching such vulgarity. Annie, you may serve my dessert in my room." And Mrs. Hardy swept upstairs to enjoy her nesselrode pudding in the cheering and calming company of Marcus Aurelius. As for Mr. Hardy, he literally ploughed through the remainder of the meal, his head lowered and his eyes avoiding his daughter's glances, as if he had been a child shamefully caught in the jam closet. Then he stamped out defiantly, with the evident intention of making noise enough to express all the things he had not said, and went down to the Hampstead Club for the evening.

Ordinarily Clare Hardy would have been neither pained nor amused over the trivial disagreement of her parents. She was too accustomed to it. But to-night she was disturbed, and she dawdled over her coffee, trying to tell herself that it was not in any way her fault and that there was nothing on earth that she could do to put an end to it. And, having definitely accepted in her mind both of these conclusions, she denied them immediately in action by going to her mother's room for the first time in weeks. Mrs. Hardy was so surprised and so delighted inwardly by

this unexpected amiability on the part of her daughter that she treated the girl as if she were a child again, and spent the better part of the following half-hour in serious admonition and advice. By the end of that time Clare's frank sympathies were entirely with her father—and herself; and she returned vigorously to her earlier conclusions about the futility of trying to make husbands and wives compatible. She had just definitely made up her mind that the thing was impossible when she mentioned casually that she was expecting Billy McNish that evening. Impossible? Of course it was. Husbands and wives never agreed. Everyone knew that. There was nothing to do. There was not one of her friends who had married whom she considered really contented. It is curious that nearly all cynics are young.

“He's a very persistent person, isn't he?” Mrs. Hardy leaned forward with the sudden interest of a married woman who scents the possibility of a match. “I like him. I don't know of another young man in town who is always so well groomed. And he is doing very well, I hear. Really, my dear, it is time you were married. After all, there is only one cardinal sin for a woman, Clare, and that is to be unmarried at thirty. And you have only five years of grace left.”

“Time enough to fall in love a dozen times.” Miss Hardy had no intention of discussing at that moment this particular problem with her particular mother. She moved toward the door.

“Love, my dear,” sighed Mrs. Hardy, “is a luxury; marriage is a necessity.”

Now, Clare Hardy had always objected to this point of

view, and she hated the word "necessity" with all her heart.

"I'm never going to be married. I want to be happy," she declared as she left the room. And perhaps, by that hasty remark, she unconsciously denied again the conclusions she had made over her coffee; for Mrs. Hardy sat for a long time soberly repeating the words. Then she sobbed gently in a lace handkerchief. She was a sensitive woman.

When Billy McNish arrived Miss Hardy was at the piano improvising. She nodded when he came into the room, but she went on with her playing. No woman who knew Billy well ever stopped doing anything because he appeared. They treated him with the same *bon camaraderie* they would have shown toward women who were upon the same intimate footing. In a way this might have been considered a compliment. It is certain that Billy in his expansive and delightful egotism so considered it. And he had good reason. Unquestionably there was no man in Hampstead so popular with its feminine population as genial, free-and-easy, roly-poly Billy McNish. And so Miss Hardy continued with her improvising, and Billy leaned at the side of the piano and prepared his very best smile for her when she would look up at him.

"I wish you'd sit down." Miss Hardy was certain that Billy was posing again, and she was determined not to satisfy him by looking at him.

"But I can't see you so well if I do." The beginnings of his smile appeared, for he felt that this was a pleasant remark, and everybody knew that all ladies liked pleasant

remarks. Billy knew it, at any rate, from long experience.

"That's the reason I wish you to sit down," she said, rolling a very volcano of sound in the rumbling bass. Why couldn't Billy do as he was told?

"But I came to see you." Charming Billy! Miss Hardy was on the point of looking up at him. Then her hands crashed off upon a new movement—for Clare Hardy played with much of the firmness and vigor of a man—accelerating with a rapid crescendo to a brilliant climax, irritated music, noisy music. She was expressing her mood. Billy had retired to a chair behind her back. He had discreetly, as he thought, done the thing that would be pleasing to her. The girl's music wandered off into minors of disappointment. Why had he done it? Why did he always give in to her? He should have known that all the time she really longed to look up at him, to admire his pose, to enjoy his smile. Miss Hardy liked Billy greatly, but there was always something a trifle wrong with him. He was very slightly too flexible; that was it, too flexible. If someone could only stiffen him a little he would—but, then, no one could really be aggravated at Billy McNish for two consecutive minutes, and Miss Hardy soon turned from the piano and lectured him sharply because he was obstinate over leaving his place. Then she commanded him to tell her about himself, and Billy, who was willing to be accommodating after two or three introductory remarks to the effect that "there was really nothing to tell," confided in her for the first time his new political ambitions and hopes and fears.

Billy always talked about himself to women with a pro-

found humility which forced the listener to contradict his self-judgments, a method that was exceedingly satisfactory to both. The feminine mind seldom, if ever, dreamt of any insincerity in Billy's remarks. His open-hearted and often well-calculated frankness was disarming. In fact, the only person who ever really discovered Billy was Billy himself in his better moments. "I'm nothing but a confounded play-actor," he would groan in his self-abasement. And, following the custom of the Hampstead ladies, we must contradict him again in his humility. Billy McNish was a great deal more than "a confounded play-actor." He was a generous, fresh-minded, friendly fellow, unusually brilliant over any piece of work that appealed to him, with ideals that he really tried to live up to, and with a realization of his own failings that was almost morbidly keen. And if he liked to have other people's approval expressed in words, he was never in anyone's debt for long. He said more complimentary things about his friends behind their backs than they ever said about him to his face. And he meant what he said, or at least he thought he did at the time—and it is on this, perhaps, that a man like Billy McNish ought to be judged.

It was perfectly natural, therefore, that to-night, as he opened his ambitious heart to Miss Hardy, Billy spoke of Gilbert's promise to help him.

"And Jack's word's as good as his bond," he went on enthusiastically. "He'll work like a trooper. He would anyhow. He's that sort. Wish there were more like him. But there aren't. Never seems to think of himself somehow. Not enough for his own good. Probably

'll never amount to much; too good-hearted and too slow. But he's the sort to hang to."

Clare Hardy never admired Billy so much as when he talked of his men friends. There was to her always something supremely fine, supremely strong about the friendship of a man for a man. It was the one thing that made her sorry that she was a woman.

"Do you see much of him?" Billy put the question casually.

Miss Hardy shook her head. She had not told Billy on Sunday about the incident on the Clear Lake hillside. And somehow she did not like to tell him. She knew that his face would grow sober, for no reason at all, of course, and that now he would wonder why she had not told him when the thing happened. And she had not told him then, because—yes, because—after all, why should she have told him? It was really of no importance.

Meanwhile Billy had plunged into a humorous account of Mr. Jethro's inopportune call at the church supper the night before, and she was soon laughing over his description—for Billy had a gift of droll caricature, and his stories were usually as real as life itself,—and nodding her head approvingly over Gilbert's part in it.

"Why didn't you do it yourself?" she broke in abruptly, to Billy's discomfiture. One reason why Billy McNish liked her more than he liked other girls was that she had this way of asking frankly disconcerting questions. He was not as certain of his masculine superiority with her as he was with the others.

"Well, you see, I shouldn't have known how to do it." It was said with Billy's appealing frankness. "It's not

my line—dealing with that kind of men. It is Jack's. That's why he'll be such a help at the election. And that's why I'll probably never win, never in the world."

And before she knew it Billy was drawing a lugubrious picture of his broken-hearted defeat at the polls, and she was impulsively cheering him and telling him how popular he was, and how certain he was of victory, and many other similar things which Billy liked to hear. Then, when he began to glow once more with self-satisfaction, she assured him that he would never win anything if he kept saying that he wouldn't. And he grew very sober, and told her that she was the only person who really understood him, and that her encouragement was the only thing that he cared a snap of his fingers about, and that if he ever accomplished anything it was because she was his inspiration; that she knew he—— Miss Hardy had heard all this before, but she never had allowed him to finish it except once. It had been very hard for her then, for she liked Billy McNish very much better than any man she knew, and she knew that he was as earnest about it as he could possibly be about anything. Now, therefore, she told him that he must not be idiotic, and asked him if his father was well. Billy despairingly said that he believed Mr. McNish was enjoying his accustomed good health, and they talked about other and less interesting topics until it was time for him to go.

Miss Hardy listened to his melodious whistling as he went down the walk, and her pride was piqued that he did not seem to be really very sad about those interrupted remarks of his. After all, if Billy was only a little less flexible, perhaps——

As she climbed the stairs, her mother called her.

"I see by the paper," Mrs. Hardy informed her with a long face, "that Nelson Strutt sails for Europe to-morrow."

"Well, what of it?"

"Why, he was to come to your party, your Fourth of July party. It is very unfortunate, dear; one of the best families in town. There must be somebody else now, I suppose," added Mrs. Hardy wearily, "and there are so few really nice people to ask."

The Fourth of July party was one of Clare Hardy's original ideas. No one in Hampstead had ever thought of any diversion for the national holiday, beyond the usual firecrackers and torpedoes for the children, and the usual fireworks in the evening, and the usual accidents and doctors' bills. Miss Hardy, therefore, out of her insistent desire for something that was new, had conceived the plan of inviting all of the desirable young people who had passed the firecracker age, and who had not as yet reached the period when a costlier display of rockets and Roman candles than their neighbors could afford satisfied their pride, to help her celebrate the holiday in her own way. The invitations were at that moment in her room, ready to be addressed and posted the next morning.

Miss Hardy thought quickly, and as usual decided out of her impulses.

"I think it might please Dad," she said with a very proper suggestion of doubt in her voice, "if we should invite John Gilbert."

"Why, he's only a workman, my dear," remonstrated Mrs. Hardy.

“But he comes of good family, you know. And I really think it would please Dad.”

“Perhaps so.” Perhaps Mrs Hardy’s tears of earlier in the evening helped her to consider the argument. “And then, too, it will make us seem democratic without——”

“Our really being so.” Clare Hardy finished the sentence with a gentle sarcasm that was lost on her mother.

She herself directed the envelope. Of course it was only for character study.

CHAPTER VII

THE BEGINNINGS OF A CABINET

LIFE had a new zest for Gilbert. He had taken his promotion quietly enough, but he felt an inward exhilaration now as he went about his new work and accepted his new responsibilities. It had affected him as a smile and a nod of approval or a hearty shake of the hand affected him—those little, human things that in some mysterious way make the pilot wheel of life spin more easily, and give the hands of our souls a firmer grip on the spokes. We may scoff at them in our moments of arrogant independence, but they do not come often enough in the lives of most of us, to ever lose their first novelty or power. Outwardly, however, Gilbert did not change, and the men in the shops, who expected to see him assume Simpson's old shell of ostentatious dignity, were disappointed. It is a weak leader who must have the mark of his position pinned upon him to be recognized.

Many of the men quickly caught the new spirit without knowing why or how it came to them. There seemed to be more pleasure in working for a comrade, who wore overalls and who did not mind dirtying his hands, than in slaving for a man who always looked as if he had just come from a bandbox and who spent most of his time in

his office. Of course there were foreigners, newcomers for the most part, whom it was necessary to boss until they learned to understand friendlier treatment; and there were a few men like Jethro, suspicious, jealous, always looking for trouble—a kind of underground vermin that loosens the foundations of many a factory and that, in the end, often brings the entire structure tumbling ruinously upon owners and men alike. It was evident, also, that some of the older men were shaking their heads over the change. Gilbert overheard part of a conversation during the first day of his new responsibilities.

“He won’t be superintendent long if I know anything.” The voice came to him from around the corner in the packing room. “Hardy’ll run the place, and Jack ain’t the kind to knuckle under. Simpson used to tell me how he’d get put behind two or three days on some jobs because ‘the old man’ butted in.”

“Simpson was always complaining about something.”

“That’s because he caught you soldiering.”

“Gilbert, he don’t have much to say.”

“Jack’s deceivin’. He looks like a shamblin’, good-natured colt, but he can kick if anyone tries to ride him.”

Gilbert smiled. He didn’t take any stock in that kind of talk. Why should he? “The old man” never had interfered with him, at least not in any way that affected the work of the shop. He knew factory men’s talk; how they planned out many kinds of incidents that might occur among their “bosses,” but never did. He smiled in his leisurely, good-humored way and went on with his work. But Saturday morning he knocked at Hardy’s door and he was not smiling. “The old man” had countermanded

an order he had given, and the interference meant delay and confusion.

"Guess I've made a mistake, Mr. Hardy," he drawled as the president turned sharply at the interruption.

"What's the matter?"

"I thought you made me superintendent of the shop. Nobody to interfere and all that."

"So I did. What's the row?" Mr. Hardy scented a complaint of insubordination.

"Just a minute." Gilbert picked up the telephone receiver on Mr. Hardy's desk. "Hello, foundry please." There was a pause. "Hello, foundry? This you, Grady? Mr. Hardy misunderstood about those Number 893 patterns. Put the work right through."

He put down the receiver, thanked the astonished president and left the room. Gilbert never knew how dangerously near he was to dismissal in the next few minutes, nor how many times Sam Hardy's finger trembled over the button that rang the superintendent's bell. It was a novel experience for the domineering "old man," but he was having other novel experiences. He had found himself, during the last day or two, worrying for the first time about the future of "his shops." Gilbert's frank talk two days before had left its mark upon Mr. Hardy's mind, a mark that he could not erase, however hard he tried. He felt unconsciously the need of a strong man behind him, and at last he turned, growling to himself, back to his desk and his papers. But of course he held a kind of grudge against his superintendent for it, and that noon Miss Hardy had the satisfaction, although that young woman was not certain that she was entirely

satisfied, of hearing some unvarnished criticism of John Gilbert—cynical remarks about the sort of men who take a mile if you give them an inch, the sort of men that a promotion spoils, and all that kind of thing.

Gilbert went home to find his mother on well-concealed tip-toe about a small envelope which had been left at the door that morning, and she beamed at him like any young girl as she read and re-read the card which it inclosed. To Gilbert the invitation was merely a cordial compliment from Mr. Hardy himself. Perhaps, he thought to himself, he had been a bit hasty that morning. But to her it was something miraculously fine, something that brought with it a flavor of their old prosperous days. She could remember cards, not unlike this one, that she herself had sent from the big house down the street. And while she assured him that they ought to have done it long ago, she was inwardly delighted that they had done it at all. There was, to be sure, a certain fear mixed with her delight. She never for a moment thought of Mr. Hardy. The girl was at the bottom of it, of course. Gilbert noticed that she was looking at him intently, and he heard the tap of her foot on the floor.

"I can't seem to understand that you're really grown up," she remarked with some confusion.

"I'm not." Gilbert smiled, but his mother shook her head soberly.

"Mothers are like that, laddie. They like their boys to be always their boys; and every larger pair of trousers they have to buy brings a lump to their throats. I'll never forget the shock it was to me when I found you wore the same size shirt your father used to wear."

"Growing big isn't growing up, mother."

"True, laddie, true."

Now she smiled back at him, and when he started off after dinner for Kemper's Park to play a game of baseball in the factory league, the idea of it seemed to answer her mood. Playing baseball! He was only a boy after all. What simple little things in us all satisfy and cheer the mothers! How they create splendid illusions about us merely for the sake of deceiving themselves! How they delight in believing us to be what they know in their heart of hearts we are not. And yet, without their illusions and their self-deceptions, what a world of pure contentment and joy would vanish away out of their lives! It was so with Mrs. Gilbert, and if one of the illusions which formed the image of Jack in her heart was shattered, she promptly brushed away the ruins and created another in its place.

Of all the many secret societies that thrived in Hampstead—and there was one for every two score of voters—none was so often mentioned in the *News* and *Register* as the Edward Strutt Council, D. L. O. P. It had been formed when Mr. Strutt was at the height of his glory as Congressman, and he had written a letter from Washington, a letter which hung now in a cheap but gaudy frame on a whitewashed wall of the society's rooms, permitting the council to use his name. The members were, for the greater part, skilled workmen from the mills, and, as far as Strutt Council, D. L. O. P., was concerned, they lived up to the name. They worked. They organized fairs for their general funds; they engineered concerts for their sick and benevolent association; they developed an amateur comic opera company which gave performances at

the Hampstead Opera House to endow a D. L. O. P. bed at the hospital; they paraded in wonderful uniforms on the slightest provocation; and the G. H. T., or Grand High Treasurer, was never forced to face a deficit. They were giving, this very week of Gilbert's promotion, a three nights' bazaar at the large armory on Broad Street, for the benefit of the widows and orphans of deceased members.

It goes without saying that the most important feature of the bazaar was the list of prizes, and, since the numbers were to be drawn on the last night, the people began to pour into the big brick building before the streets outside, filled with the Saturday night crowd, were dark. Of course there were other attractions in the big drill hall. There were the usual booths decorated with the usual gay bunting—pinned up so cleverly that the holes and faded places seldom showed,—behind which stood the usual shop-girls and shop-wives and shop-daughters of the D. L. O. P., selling the usual things, from imitation tortoise-shell combs to imitation ice cream. An orchestra on a temporary stage was making the usual disturbance, or lounging back nonchalantly after an effort, doing their best to look as if they disliked their prominence. Young girls were sifting through the crowd selling "chances" on a sewing-machine, which husbands bought because wives were interested in both the sewing-machine and the "chances." The people from outside kept crowding in, elbowing their way through the tightly packed masses, and there was so much noise that one had to shout to be heard. The thermometer was at eighty and rising every minute, and nearly everyone was having an outrageously good time.

Gilbert leaned against the candy counter near the door

and talked with Gilshannon of the *News*. He liked Gilshannon with his bright, cynical talk and his generous Irish heart that gave the lie to it. Like most reporters Gilshannon had a good supply of gossip at his tongue's end, and, unlike most reporters, he analyzed his gossip; he took it to pieces; and he laughed at it. It was very entertaining. The men of Hampstead liked Gilshannon. He admitted it frankly, and he said that this accounted for his good-natured contempt for people. How could he have any respect for the fools who were not clever enough to see through him; who liked him, in a word? His mind seemed always busy with new theories and sophistries, which often turned upon him, boomerang-like; but few of his friends took them seriously. Certainly he never did. And so, although he scoffed at clothes, he took great care to look well; and, although he declared that good humor was an evidence of weakness, there was no smile in Hampstead more constant than that about his bearded mouth; and, although he often said that a newspaper man was just nobody at all, he swaggered about the streets as if he owned them.

Gilshannon saw her coming, but he did not mention it. He broke off suddenly in the midst of a sentence:

"It's a begging fest," he remarked. "If you stay long in one place you get collared. Your only hope is to keep moving. Nothing to see anyhow except the people. If you get a bunch of people together anywhere, you can charge admission to those that are outside. They like to herd. I'm off. 'Night, Jack."

A moment later Gilbert was confronted by Miss Gerty Smith, all in clinging, flimsy white, a huge wad of her

bright yellow hair built up at the edge of her forehead at almost exactly the tilt of the tip of her upturned nose. Her eyes had the triumphant glint of capture, as she stretched out her exquisitely rounded bare arm and prodded the collection box almost in his face.

"Something for the orphans?"

Her tone was business-like, and Gilbert mechanically put his hand in his pocket.

"Ought to be something big from a man with a big job like yours."

Gilbert dropped back the dime he had chosen and drew forth a quarter instead. He knew that he had come to the bazaar partly to see this girl. He knew that he wished to understand her. There had been a time when he enjoyed watching her physical beauty, her animal gracefulness, although the charm always disappeared when she spoke to him. Now his thought was concentrated on the problem of the shop and her relation to it. But he found himself hesitating, scarcely knowing, now that she had come to him, how to talk to her.

"That's the business," she remarked, as the silver rattled in the box. "Guess you got a raise all right."

He merely shook his head, and she turned away with a half-hidden grimace. She was frankly piqued about this big Mr. Gilbert. Most of the men stared at her with open-eyed admiration, and she liked it. But she did not like the look that she usually saw in his eyes. It seemed to hurt her pride.

"Wait a minute. I want to talk to you."

"Well, you'll have to talk quick. My time's worth about a dollar a minute to the widows and orphans."

"All right," Gilbert drawled. "I'll wait till your time is cheaper."

He settled back against the candy counter, and looked past her toward the platform, where the orchestra had been pushed back from its proud position to make room for the ceremony of drawing the prizes. But her woman's curiosity was aroused, and she stood waiting irresolutely.

"Suppose you like being superintendent?" she remarked tentatively.

"Lots of possible difficulties. Suppose, for example, I had a man under me who stole information about new machines we haven't patented, and sold it to somebody outside."

The crowd had become suddenly quiet and was pressing toward the platform. The luck of the first draw was about to be announced. Miss Gerty Smith paid no attention, however. She was obviously startled and her face was slightly flushed.

"Well, what 'ld you do?" She tried to speak indifferently.

"I don't quite know. That's one of the difficulties."

"Silver water pitcher." The voice of the announcer interrupted them, and the mass about them craned its neck and sharpened its ears and held its breath. "Number 4178. Number 4178 is Joseph Heffler."

An audible sigh came from the crowd, and it was followed quickly by a number of perfectly distinct hisses. At that instant Gilbert, looking up, caught sight of a short man with a young, beardless face and a contrasting shock of prematurely gray hair. The man was almost at the

edge of the crowd, and Gilbert saw the face grow suddenly red and drawn at the hisses. It was an attractive face, and the man's evident suffering seized upon Gilbert's sympathies. The announcement of the second drawing came almost immediately, and the man with the gray hair slipped from his place and started for the door, almost brushing Gilbert as he passed. But a woman's hand stopped him as, his head bent, he hurried by, and Miss Gerty Smith spoke, her hard, sharp voice modulated until it seemed almost kind:

“Good-night, Joe. You won quick.”

The man with the gray hair looked up, smiled and passed out.

Gilbert knew about this Joe Heffler. Gilshannon had been talking about him that very night. Gilshannon had dismissed him from conversation by remarking that “he was no good, no good on earth.” And Heffler's record affirmed Gilshannon's opinion. Heffler had worked at the Hubbard mills once, but he had been caught embezzling the factory funds and had served three years in prison. He had had a hard time finding work after that, but finally he had been given a chance as clerk in the Water Commissioners' office. A few months ago he had lost the place, however, and rumor, always eager to strike a man who is down, said that he had been caught stealing again. But Gilbert's sympathies, when they were fully aroused—and the poignant pain on Heffler's face had aroused them,—always made him impulsive. He forgot Miss Gerty Smith entirely, and, turning on his heel, he followed the man whom Gilshannon had said “was no good” out into the night. The man was standing at the

corner, indecisively looking up and down Main Street, when Gilbert came up behind him.

"My name's John Gilbert, Joe Heffler. Walk a bit with me, will you? It's a fine night."

Without waiting for an answer he linked his arm in Heffler's, and they were tramping up one of the deserted side streets almost before Heffler knew what was happening. They walked for more than an hour, and at the end of that time Joe Heffler, silent and suspicious at first, was talking freely of himself, talking with the eager joy of a man who has been schooled to silence. And Gilbert, listening, realized that there is a harder solitary confinement than that of the prison,—the solitary confinement of the free streets of a free land, with public opinion, its head turned away, passing by on the opposite side.

"It's none of my business, you know," Gilbert interrupted him once. He felt vaguely that he owed the man an apology for merely listening.

"It's anybody's business, sir," said Heffler bitterly.

It was a simple story enough, the old story of taking money that he thought he could replace, money that was needed at the moment to make his ailing mother comfortable. Heffler told it all with an almost frantic frankness. He made no excuses. He laid bare every personal motive. He said that, when he found the stealing easy, he took more than he needed; and he admitted that, if he had not been caught, he would probably have taken even more. He felt that the shame of it had killed his mother, but he did not blame Mr. Hubbard. He blamed himself. And at this juncture of the story Gilbert patted him on the shoulder and gruffly told him to "brace up." Heffler

had little to say about the years in prison or about those that had followed since his release. He had returned to Hampstead with the intention of living down his mistake, and he had found it a hard task. He could not explain why he had lost his place in the Water Commissioners' office. Captain Merrivale, the chairman of the board, had always seemed friendly to him until about a month before he had been dismissed. He had said something at that time against the purchase of some land at the Hampstead reservoir, and Captain Merrivale had been displeased by his remarks; but there were certainly no grounds in that for dismissing him.

Gilbert remembered the Council's authorizing the Water Commissioners to buy the land. He was interested. He asked Heffler to tell him more about it, and Heffler, surprised, told him what little he knew. The land on the north of the reservoir was hilly and high priced; the land on the south and west was level and cheap. For an additional reservoir and canal, the latter seemed better to him; that was all. He knew little about it. The land on the south and west was owned by farmers. The strip on the north, the land that had been purchased by the commissioners, was held by a syndicate, in which, he knew from the records, Mr. Hubbard and ex-Congressman Strutt were interested. There were arguments in favor of selecting this land, of course, and the commissioners undoubtedly knew more about it than he did.

All this Heffler explained indifferently, in jerky, unfinished sentences, and then he lapsed into his usual dull silence. He had lost his interest when he had finished his personal story. Perhaps he was half sorry that he

had talked so freely. He had become so accustomed to distrust and ridicule that he expected it.

It was late when they walked up Main Street, their footsteps echoing along the silent thoroughfare. The stores were dark and the crowds had vanished. But the lights in Mr. Tubb's gaudy ark of a night lunch wagon were still burning, and Gilbert directed Joe Heffler, who seemed to hang back reluctantly, to the narrow steps of the cart. Mr. Lumpkin, protected by a huge white apron, many sizes too large for him, which had belonged to his predecessor in the glories of the lunch-counter, was washing dishes and singing lustily a song which may or may not have been suggested by his occupation:

"It's suited me, this life at sea,
For nigh on twenty——"

"Come in, boys! Howdy, Mr. Gilbert, and you, Joe. Well, well! The Scriptures say that 'the lion an' the lamb shall eat together,' or words to that effect. Been to the bazaar, I presume. What'll you have? Oh, come, Joe, you'd better have something."

But Heffler shook his head doggedly.

"Ain't hungry."

"Your looks belie you, as the Scripture says, or something to that effect." Mr. Peter Lumpkin leaned upon the counter and glared jovially at the obviously embarrassed Heffler. "Come, now, what'll it be, ham, chicken, tongue, all the fifty-seven varieties? It's his treat." Mr. Lumpkin jerked his thumb at Gilbert.

"Of course it's my treat."

"There, what'd I tell you. What'll it be, Joe, coffee,

tea, cocoa, ginger pop—everything that's good to drink—adapted, Mr. Gilbert, as you will observe, from our worthy rival Butterson's well-known advertisement."

Heffler, driven figuratively into a corner, looked appealingly up at Gilbert.

"I'm broke, that's all, if I've got to say it," he said simply. "I bought that bazaar ticket with pretty nearly my last money because somebody asked me, somebody I couldn't refuse. I owe Peter here half a dollar——"

"A falsehood, Mr. Gilbert," broke in Mr. Lumpkin with a thump on the counter that rattled the dishes. "A gross, willful, and wicked falsehood. Our friend here has joined me in certain comforting libations; he has helped me to consume delectable eatables which otherwise were destined for canine jaws, but always at my request, sir, always at my request."

"Well, anyhow," persevered Mr. Heffler, "I don't intend to run in debt. I'll starve first. And I don't want to be under obligations to you, Mr. Gilbert."

"All right," said Gilbert, "I'll deduct it from your first week's pay."

"My what?" Heffler stared at him with wide eyes.

"Your first week's pay at the shop. You're going to begin there Monday, you know."

Heffler looked quickly from Gilbert to Mr. Lumpkin and back. He ran his hand nervously through his thick gray hair. He took a long breath and sat down weakly on one of the revolving stools.

"D'ye mean to say that you're going to trust me?" he said, almost in a whisper. "You, you aren't playing a game on me?"

“Of course I trust you. Of course I’m not——”

But, before Gilbert could finish, Joe Heffler astounded them by burying his head in his arms on the counter, with imminent danger to a plate of ham sandwiches, and sobbing like a child. Mr. Lumpkin, after carefully rescuing the sandwiches, shrugged his shoulders.

“Joe’s mighty precipitate,” he remarked confidentially. “But you’ve done a good thing, Mr. Gilbert. I’ve often said to myself: ‘Peter Lumpkin,’ says I, ‘that Mr. Gilbert is all wool and a yard wide. He may not be very handsome,’ I says, begging your pardon, of course, ‘but handsome is as handsome does,’ as the Scripture says, or words to that effect. Now, I know Joe. He’s slept in this emporium of food and frivolity for the last week, chiefly because Mr. Tubb didn’t know anything about it but mainly because he hadn’t anywhere else to sleep. And I tell you he’s as tender hearted and as well meaning an individual as ever helped to populate the Almighty’s footstool. You’ve done a good thing, and you’ll never have a jot or tittle of regret. I admire you, sir, and if you ever want your shoes blacked, Mr. Peter Lumpkin stands ready to shine them, sir, with the President’s shoe blacking.”

Mr. Lumpkin finished his peroration with a gesture which brought his hand in contact with the coffee boiler, and, since that receptacle was hot, Peter added a few words that seemed, to say the least, incongruous.

“All right, Lumpkin,” laughed Gilbert. “Let me have some coffee.”

They had coffee all ’round, and sandwiches. Heffler ate four silently and followed them with apple pie. While

they were eating the door slid back and let in Jimmy O'Rourke, who immediately filled in at the only vacant seat left at the counter. Then Mr. Lumpkin brought forth a box of cigars, made of "good patriotic Connecticut tobacco," declaring that they at least were his treat; and soon the four were puffing away contentedly and discussing topics along the line of least resistance to Mr. Lumpkin's eloquence. Occasionally Peter would defer some points to Gilbert's judgment and occasionally Jimmy O'Rourke broke in with quotations from newspapers or various local authorities. Heffler sat quiet, his eyes almost constantly on Gilbert.

"Say," remarked Jimmy in a pause, while Mr. Lumpkin was regaining his breath. Jimmy had a way of finding every trivial situation of which he was a part, like something, much more important, that he had read about or heard about. "Dis makes ye tink av de President an' his cabinet, an' de way dey talks things over. De Secrety av Agriculture, he don't have much to say—dat's Heffler. De Secrety of War—dat's me all right," Jimmy doubled up his fists and grinned. "An' Peter sure is Secrety of de Interior."

Gilbert waited a moment, smiling.

"And where do I come in, Jimmy?"

"Say, ye want me to say it, don't ye? Well, you're de main guy."

The bell of the town clock in the Municipal building tolled twelve, and Mr. Lumpkin prepared to close the wagon. Mr. Tubb's scruples would not permit him to make money on Sunday, even in a lunch cart in the early morning. Outside Joe Heffler put his hand on Gilbert's arm.

“I’ll do my best to——”

“Sure,” said Gilbert heartily. But Heffler refused the loan Jack tried to force upon him.

“I’d rather not, if you don’t mind,” he said.

Jimmy O’Rourke went off whistling down the street. He had probably forgotten entirely his comparison of the group in the lunch wagon to a cabinet. He certainly had no notion that it was prophetic. As for Gilbert, he spent all Sunday afternoon tramping about Hampstead reservoir, but if he came to any conclusion he said nothing about it to anyone. In fact Mrs. Gilbert complained that night with some raillery that he was unusually uncommunicative.

CHAPTER VIII

INDEPENDENCE DAY

FOR three or four days it rained almost continuously, and the "Glorious Fourth" dawned, dripping and disheartening. Of course all Hampstead arose early, and of course its youthful patriots managed to express their enthusiasm "between drops," and of course everyone remarked, with various degrees of resignation, that it "always rained on Fourth of July," and of course nobody wasted any time thinking about the significance of the day or about the men of 1776 who, by their act, created a nation as well as a holiday. Few people in Hampstead bothered their minds about the significance of anything. They were too busy, and a holiday was a holiday.

After a dull, leaden afternoon and twilight, night shut in black and menacing and growling with far-off thunder. Lightning soon began to streak across the shroud that hung over the Hampstead hills, and the thunder grew harsh and rapid, as if the elements realized that they had spoiled the town's celebration and were trying to replace it by a display of their own. Then suddenly the down-pour began, straight and steady even in the whirl of the rushing wind that tore through the thick foliage of the

trees. But the closeness and the heat of the day persisted and seemed even to increase.

On the side of West Hill, which stood forth defiantly against the full force of the storm, and down the streets of which the water streamed in miniature rivers, the Hardy house, with its high tower, loomed up into the desolate night like a beacon. Within there was the stir of preparation, and the maids tiptoed here and there and gave and took orders quietly, hushed by the sense of something impending, as if someone was ill upstairs.

Clare Hardy, all in black, except for flashes of red at her throat, at her waist and at the ends of her sleeves, knocked at the door of her mother's room, sometime after eight. Mrs. Hardy responded plaintively. She stood with her back turned to the door.

"I've done it," she said, punctuating the words with jerky little sobs.

"Done what?" Miss Hardy hurried to her solicitously.

"I've wept, my child," moaned her mother. "That means that I simply can't see anyone for half an hour. You know how terribly crying makes one look. And if anyone should notice—it's so vulgar, you know, to show one's feelings."

"But what's the matter?" Clare Hardy dared to lay her hand on her mother's shoulder.

"Don't be sympathetic, child," said Mrs. Hardy, sudden sternness stopping her tears. "It's bad for one's repose. I wanted this to be so successful. It's out of season and we might be criticised. And now there is this wicked rain. I'm afraid the Bassett girls won't come, and I did wish them to see my new vases. And your

father, my dear, something is wrong with him. He was very harsh to-night."

As Miss Hardy went slowly down the stairs, she could hear her father stamping up and down his room with heavy step. She leaned against the balustrade wearily, and for a second she felt utterly discouraged, as if the supports had been suddenly jerked out from under her heart. Then the bell rang, and pressing her lips tightly together, she tried to make them smile as she hurried down to greet the first comers. When the door opened John Gilbert alone strode past the maid, and, seeing Miss Hardy at the foot of the stairs, he crossed the hall, straight to her.

"Miss Hardy," he said, putting out his big hand with an awkward shyness, "I—I'm not late, am I?"

Clare Hardy laughed nervously.

"Oh, no, you're just in time."

"I didn't want to be too early." He was evidently relieved until he looked about him. He saw the maid smiling as she passed him. "I'm not too early, am I?"

Miss Hardy saw the red flush mount in his cheeks, and she was sorry for him.

"The others are late."

Gilbert looked at her ruefully. Then he smiled.

"You're trying to let me down easy. After all there are good things about being first."

His smile was contagious.

"That's a very nice speech, Mr. Gilbert."

"Nice speech?" Gilbert was puzzled. "I didn't mean any nice speech. Oh, I see. You thought I meant because you are here. I might have. But I didn't. I was speaking generally."

It was her turn to be embarrassed.

"If you're always as honest as that I'm afraid the girls won't like you."

Gilbert took a step forward and his eyes, although they smiled down at her, were very searching.

"Won't *you?*"

"I—don't know."

There was a hint of defiance as well as of coquetry in her tone. What right had he to ask such a question, and what right had he to look at her as if he owned her?

"I hope you will," he said gravely, and he left her to put aside his rain-coat and hat.

During the next half hour bedraggled horses, hoof deep in water, dragged dripping carriages to the door; and men and women in brave array, many of whom had mourned deeply the necessity of coming in such a storm, paraded in with protestations of delight. John Gilbert, watching them, felt doubly awkward as he saw that the men were all in evening clothes—evening clothes of great variety, without doubt, for it literally takes decades for Hampstead to wear them out. There were some that clung as tightly as paper to a wall; there were collars that crowded up about the ears; and there were sleeves that kept their wearers busy, all the evening, jogging their cuffs upward by a carefully concealed wrist exercise. But after all they were evening clothes and therefore the badge of propriety, and Gilbert's natural isolation was made almost unbearable by this continuous succession of swallow tails. There is many a hero among men who is more or less of a coward in the face of clothes.

It was a simple affair, this Fourth of July party, and its

very simplicity made it a novelty. There was no set program of things to do. Hampstead usually thought out its social matters as it thought out its business, and it made its functions as formal as old-fashioned business correspondence. It was not that its people preferred to be stiff and uncomfortable. Not at all. They were merely afraid of doing something that might be considered improper. And it was for the same reason that they seldom applauded at theater or concert, and so gave the town a reputation of being "cold." As a matter of fact there is not a warmer-hearted community in the world, when they are certain that it is proper to seem warm-hearted. But Miss Hardy turned the house that night into "Liberty Hall," and assured them that, since it was Independence Day, they should do as they pleased. Of course half of them did and half of them did not, as is usually the custom where the sexes are equally divided; but they all enjoyed it immensely.

They danced in the music-room and down the hall; they played cards in the library; they made speeches and sang songs; they helped themselves from the dining-room table, crowded with good things, between times; the men smoked in the little reception-room; couples retired to the cozy corner or a window seat and pretended to watch the others; and even the servants used the crack in the door of the butler's pantry more freely than usual. Altogether it was a great success. The Misses Bassett rejoiced Mrs. Hardy's heart by going into raptures over the new vases, although, behind her back, they told each other that the things were undoubtedly imitation. And Mr. Hardy enjoyed the impromptu smoking-room.

Billy McNish had assured Miss Hardy that if he was to do as he liked he would, of course, remain at her side throughout the evening, and they spent an hour or more trying to help the people to be independent who were floundering aimlessly about because no one had built a groove for them to run in. But the time came when the girl chose a seat on the secluded stairs, and told Mr. McNish that from that moment she was going to do as she pleased—which meant, of course, that he was to do as she pleased. She commanded him to search for other sources of attraction for himself. Incidentally he was to find John Gilbert and to direct him in some surreptitious way down the hall and past the stairway. Billy himself, she explained guilelessly, had urged her to know Mr. Gilbert better. More than this, Mr. Gilbert was probably having a very dull evening—since there were few people there whom he knew intimately,—and it was her duty as a hostess to be pleasant to him. And Billy, after some delay and clearly out of pity for his friend, did as he was told.

When he had gone Miss Hardy, with two or three deft touches, straightened some unruly crinkles in her skirt and sighed for a looking-glass. Then she leaned back against the balustrade in absolute abandon, with her left arm hanging loosely along the rail, and hummed the little lilt of a French song just loudly enough to attract the attention of anyone passing by, who had any curiosity. She was certain that John Gilbert had at least enough curiosity for that. A moment later he turned as he crossed below her, and saw the figure, almost elf-like as it huddled on the stairway, the mischievous black eyes and

the tantalizing smile about half-closed lips. He stood for a second as if undecided, and the song broke off.

"Won't you sit down?" she asked.

He responded with a naïve shyness which, it seemed to her, made his awkwardness singularly graceful. He sat down opposite her on the stair below, with his hands clasped over one knee and with the other long leg sprawled at full length. He looked across at her, his irregular features distorted into a frank smile.

"This is mighty good of you," he said simply.

Subterfuge and generalship suddenly vanished from Clare Hardy's mind.

"Nonsense. I asked Billy to send you this way. I wanted to know you better."

"And I want to know you," he answered with boyish eagerness. "Do you know, Miss Hardy, this is the first bit of frankness I've met to-night."

"Of course," she said with sudden cynicism. "Most people are so commonplace that they're deadily dull even when they are insincere. What would they be if they told the truth? How have you been celebrating to-day?"

"Fussing with a lot of machines at the shop." He grinned good-humoredly over his holiday.

Miss Hardy's eyebrows wrinkled slightly.

"Isn't that a mistake?"

"You mean that it seems selfish to keep working all the time. Perhaps; but there are a lot of men I know, who are really unselfish, but who have to live selfish lives."

"Oh, I didn't mean that. I meant that it's a mistake to give up everything else, the finer things, you know, books and pictures and people."

Gilbert nodded gravely.

"Yes," he said, "it's a mistake. It's a mistake for me to be built like a derrick, but I can't help it. It's a mistake to want food and a place to sleep. It's a mistake to be poor. Sometimes, when I'm tired, that seems to me the biggest mistake of all. But it isn't. There are lots of worse things."

"I don't think I should mind being poor," said Miss Hardy dreamily.

"Being poor is all right if you can forget it."

"Of course, you never get discouraged, you men who have things to do, things that make you forget."

"Don't I? Why, some nights, I come home feeling like a limp dishrag inside."

"Inside but not outside," she suggested.

"Well, 'outside' wouldn't do. Somebody might take you at your face value, and wipe dishes with you."

Clare Hardy laughed.

"Tell me about that man you hired who was a thief. I think Dad didn't altogether like it. What made you do it?"

"It was sheer impulse, Miss Hardy. Perhaps a grown man wouldn't 've done it." He smiled over at her boyishly. Then he told her Heffler's story, mentioning himself only when it was necessary to show Heffler's sensitiveness about obligations. When he told her of the man's emotion at being trusted there were tears in her eyes, and she stopped him suddenly.

"Do you believe in being impulsive?" she asked.

"Sometimes; why?"

"Because I impulsively want to shake hands with you."

He caught her hand eagerly, but with a gentle reverence that made something in her heart catch and stop for a second before going on.

"This is your impulse shaking hands with my impulse," he explained beamingly. "For if I'd allowed myself to reason about it I probably shouldn't have done it."

"Of course you won't give him a chance to steal again?" Miss Hardy, her face slightly flushed, was looking down into the hall. She wondered if anyone had seen them.

"He is handling a good deal of money. He's assisting the paymaster."

She turned to him quickly.

"Really? Isn't that risky?"

"I told him I trusted him, didn't I? I'd be a slushy sort of a man if I told him that and then didn't trust him. Of course, there are the usual checks on him, but that's all. He's all right, Joe Heffler is, and he's going to have a chance to prove it to everybody."

Gilbert brought a doubled fist down hard upon his knee, and looked across at the girl so fiercely that she laughed and he laughed with her.

"I suppose that's the reason the men like you, because you're so honest."

"That's the reason why I like the men," he answered quickly, "because they're 'on the level' with me."

Miss Hardy stared thoughtfully past him for a moment.

"It's a real man's work in the world," she said slowly. "It's fine to do things."

"The only trouble is you only want to do other things—bigger things."

"I've always said," nodded Miss Hardy recklessly, "that when my ship came in I was going to find the best man in the world, and we'd buy a house in Venice. There shouldn't be anything in that house I didn't like, and we'd live there three months in a year and travel the other nine. And when we were tired of that we'd do something else. But the ship isn't even in sight, and I mope around here doing nothing, calling on people who don't want to see me and receiving people I don't want to see."

She flushed under the quizzical look of his eyes.

"Well, what do you think of it?" she asked.

"I think it's tommyrot, and so do you."

"It's *me*," she insisted.

"It isn't any more you than a whirling dervish is an angel."

There were sounds of stamping feet on the porch and the bell rang vigorously. Miss Hardy, thankful for the interruption, started up with quick energy and stumbled over Gilbert's foot. Undoubtedly she would have fallen if he had not caught her arm firmly.

"I always stumble at nothing," she cried petulantly, as she regained her balance.

"Thank you," was the smiling answer. Their eyes met and Miss Hardy's embarrassment vanished into good humor. She hurried down to the door, and a second later she beckoned to Gilbert. He noticed her perplexed look as he passed her. And the look grew more perplexed when, instead of stopping at the door, he went outside with a muffled exclamation and almost closed it behind him. She picked up a book from the hall table and

opened it, but she listened to the sounds of subdued conversation outside. When Gilbert returned she dropped the book and met him inquiringly.

"Is anything wrong?" she asked. She saw that his face was set and frowning. There was a woman's tender anxiety in her eyes that gripped Gilbert's heart strangely as he looked down into them.

"Oh, no, but I want to see your father, and then I'm afraid I'll have to go."

Reproach replaced anxiety in her look as she turned away. She found Mr. Hardy quickly, but when they reached the hallway Gilbert was already pacing the floor anxiously, his rain-coat and overshoes on and his slouch hat in his hand.

"I'm sorry I've got to go, Mr. Hardy," he said. Then he hesitated as he glanced from father to daughter and back again. "Is there any directors' meeting to-morrow?" he asked.

Hardy shook his head. "Not till September," he said. The wind slammed a shutter in the next room and he started violently. He looked very old and haggard to Gilbert that night. His eyes had a kind of nervous, hunted look, and the wrinkles about them seemed deeper than usual. Gilbert felt the impulse strongly to tell "the old man" why he was leaving, but he remembered the vigorous command he had been given about not talking of "things that weren't any of his business." So he said good-night with awkward gratitude, and hurried out just as Mrs. Hardy and Billy McNish came in from the library.

"Mr. Gilbert had to go early, mother," said the girl, slipping her hand in Mrs. Hardy's arm. "He asked me

to say good-night to you for him," she added unhesitatingly, although Gilbert in his hurry had forgotten to say anything of the sort. Mr. Hardy turned to Billy McNish.

"I didn't know Jack went in much for politics," he remarked.

"I don't think he does." Billy spoke indifferently.

"I hope not," said Hardy wearily, as he started up the stairs, "for a man can't be my superintendent and Mayor at the same time, and I'd hate to lose him."

Billy's attitude changed amazingly to one of acute interest, and Miss Hardy stopped at the music-room door.

"What do you mean?" asked Billy.

"I hear that Moriarty and some of the rest have been sounding men at the shops about it, that's all."

The old man laboriously continued on his way up the stairs. He was tired of the confusion and the noise and the merriment. He wanted to think and smoke. He had been worried all day about those notes he had sold in New York. In a week or two they would come due. Large orders he had been confident of taking had gone to the Westbury concern. Small, unexpected repairs had eaten in on the money he had laid aside. Business was slacking up for the usual summer's dullness with its high expenses and its small income. And there were these rumors about large purchases of Hardy stock, rumors that were all the more worrisome because of their mystery and uncertainty. Of course, he did not take them very seriously. Brett and Merrivale had always been friendly to him. He had elected the Mayor a director in return for a small "ground floor" allotment in the Street Railway Company, and Merrivale had "let him in on" some real-

estate deals in exchange for a Hardy directorship. Undoubtedly it was all right. But to-night all these things were crowding in upon him. They irritated him, and he shook his head, bulldog like, as if to drive them away. But they did not frighten him. Never for a moment did he doubt that, with his shops, he would beat them all back as he had other opposition in other days.

It was long after midnight when the guests began to go. Carriages again rumbled outside in the steady rain that had followed the thunderstorm; doors slammed, echoing noisily in the deserted street; and the stereotyped good-night phrases were said, phrases for all the world like the phrases with which the French close their letters, to the patronizing amusement of our superior American mind. At last Billy McNish alone remained, at Miss Hardy's unspoken request.

"I'm not a bit sleepy or tired," she said. "I'd like to run a mile or two, or play tennis, or dance another hour. Let's go out and get wet."

She returned a moment later, wrapped in her father's gray mackintosh, which hung in folds about her, and with an old cap perched at a rakish angle on the side of her head.

"No umbrella," she commanded, the witchery of her smile just showing itself to Billy above the turned-up collar of the mackintosh. She made him secrete in his pockets a few huge, left-over firecrackers, and then she led him out into the night. Once off the steps she darted away from him, and, when he caught her at the gate, she laughed till she cried because he slipped and went down upon his knee in a puddle. She suggested stealing some

flowers from the McNish garden, and then gave it up because he told her to help herself. She rated him for being sober and solemn, and, to please her, of course, he assumed a priestly air and sang mock Gregorians until she begged him to stop. They held a council of war, and decided unanimously that the firecrackers would create more amusing havoc under crusty Mr. Butterson's window than elsewhere. And so they crossed the street, whispering and giggling like two small children, to the gaunt white frame house in which Mr. Butterson lived and, at the moment, slept.

It had taken Colonel Mead nearly two hours to decide to see Jack that night. According to his custom he had tramped down to the post-office just as the storm was beginning. Nothing ever stopped the Colonel from carrying out the regular routine of his simple life, and getting the mail at night was as necessary to him now as roll-call had been years before. When he had read his letters at home he sat down without taking off the long rubber boots which he wore in spite of conventions, and he fingered thoughtfully the little enclosure, signed by Robert Brett, that called him to a special meeting of the board of directors of Hardy & Son the next morning at eleven o'clock. Then he threw it into the waste-basket and picked up a book, but he forgot to take off his boots. After a time he put the book down and rescued the paper from the basket. Then he repeated the entire operation and finally, swearing under his breath, he stamped out into the night and up the street to Gilbert's house. When he found that Gilbert was at Mr. Hardy's he hesitated

again, and argued that Jack's absence was providence telling him to let the thing alone; but nevertheless his rheumatic legs seemed to carry him naturally to the Hardy house.

"If the old man knew anything about the meeting he'd 've signed the call himself," Gilbert said, as they talked on the porch. "He likes to sign everything. Something's in the wind, something, perhaps, to get him out of the way. More likely it's something to get the directors down on him, so that the other crowd can get control in the Fall."

"I ain't much on the ways o' doin' civilized business," interrupted the Colonel. "D'ye mean they're goin' to hang the old man up now, thinkin' mebbe he'll be dead enough to cut down by September?"

"Something like that." Gilbert was thinking rapidly. "Perhaps it's a scheme to make the stock cheap. Lord, it might be anything. Only one thing dead sure and that is, it's a snap meeting. It's up to us to see that every director is there. That's what they won't expect."

"Up to us?" flared the Colonel. "I ain't heard thet Hardy's sent out fer any relief party. Let him do his own fightin'. Ye kin probly git more rations from the other side anyhow."

Gilbert shook his head and turned to go in.

"I'll find out whether the old man knows about it," he said.

"I'll git the horse," returned the Colonel, tacking quickly before Gilbert's decision. "We'll hev to go to Tareville an' it ain't good walkin'."

"Oh, I'll get along all right, Colonel. It's too nasty a night for you to be out. You ought to be in bed now."

“Too nasty a night?” the Colonel grunted angrily. “Ought to be in bed, hed I? That’s what the doctor sed to me down in New Erleens. I certainly wuz totterin’ around like a sick steer and ez white ez I wuz when I struck gold. ‘Ye’ve got Yella Jack,’ he says. ‘Ye’re a liar,’ sez I, an’ I goes over to a saloon, and the bartender is so scared of me that he’s going to hev me pitched out—only he doesn’t, seein’ I git the drop on him. I drinks a whole quart of whiskey raw, and goes to bed with my shoes on. There isn’t any undertaker a workin’ over me the next mornin’, tho’ I’ll allow so much bad whiskey leaves me high an’ dry an’ gaspin’. Now you git yer feet movin’ or I’ll be here ’fore ye’re ready,” and the grizzled old man stamped off down the steps.

When he drove up, some fifteen minutes later, he found Gilbert waiting for him, and together they went in to see Mr. McNish. They had scarcely stated their errand when McNish broke in with genial abruptness.

“I’m a good deal in the position of Tom Dalton down at Spottsylvania,” he said. “Tom was sent out as a spy, and he was chumming up with a parcel of Johnnies at a rebel outpost when his own regiment surrounded them and took them prisoners. They were all marched to the rear an’ examined, Tom, dressed in faded butternut, with the rest. When they came to examine ’em and got to Tom, he remarked, ‘Ye needn’t waste any time on me. I’m a sergeant in A Company.’ Said afterwards that he’d never been a rebel prisoner before, and that it was a great deal more fun than being a Yankee spy. So,” continued the kindly gentleman, “you needn’t waste any time on me.”

They soon found that they needed every minute Mr. McNish had saved for them. One man they pursued to the Hampstead Club, and dragged him from a game of whist to make him reluctantly promise attendance at the next morning's meeting. They spent the better part of half an hour, arguing another into postponing until afternoon a trip out of town. They broke into a patriotic meeting at the Hampstead Y. M. C. A. to find a third, and were forced to wait until, covered with glory and perspiration, he finished amid great applause his remarks and his gestures concerning "The Flag We Love." Of course, after this applause he agreed readily. Then they started for Tareville. The others were only too certain to be present.

It was five miles to Tareville, five long miles, over roads thick with sticky red mud, with the rain beating steadily in their faces and trickling down into every tiny opening in their covering.

"Better jog along rapid," the Colonel said, giving the horse the rein when they had passed the last groups of houses. "I'd rather ask a favor of a man that hedn't hed his dinner than of a man I'd woke up in the middle of the night."

Jack nodded, and then started to a sitting posture, as the Colonel emitted a loud whoop that carried far out into the wet darkness. Then, as the carriage careened and swayed down the roadway, a dim light ahead turned quickly to the left. A minute later they whirled past a team pulled up by the roadside, and saw, in a flash, the white, frightened face of the driver. The Colonel laughed boisterously. On they went, each gripping the buggy

and watching the road ahead, where the lantern, hung beneath, threw its flickering light among weird shadows that played about the horse's beating hoofs. Other teams turned out at the Colonel's piercing call, and the panting livery horse ruled the road for perhaps the first time in its humdrum life.

The house of the Tareville director was dark when they reached it, but he appeared in dressing-gown and slippers, in answer to their repeated ringing. And partly because, as he explained, he was an old friend of Sam Hardy's father, and, perhaps, partly because he was in a hurry to be back in bed, he assured them quickly that he would come to Hampstead for the meeting.

They jogged slowly homeward, the Colonel scrooged down in the seat, trying to keep dry. Gilbert sat straight, peering thoughtfully into the darkness.

"Unless they've got something big up their sleeve, we can hold them; if the old man don't get somebody mad."

"Hardy's like a renegade cayuse," growled the Colonel. "Ye can't lead him ner drive him. Ye've got to git on his back and lick him into the trail."

"You've got to handle the meeting," remarked Gilbert.

The Colonel only swore viciously for an answer, and Jack was satisfied. As they neared Hampstead the horse pricked up its ears at the familiar surroundings and broke into a steady trot. Down West Hill they rumbled, when suddenly two figures started out of nowhere, it seemed, into the road directly before them. With a hoarse shout of warning Gilbert caught the reins from the Colonel's hands and lay back against the seat, his feet braced, pulling with all the strength of his big body.

Other cries answered his, spontaneous cries of warning and fear. In the sudden struggle to get out of the way Billy McNish slipped in the wet street, and by a last effort threw Clare Hardy aside. The horse slid along on his haunches, pawing the air with his forelegs directly over Billy's prostrate form. Then there was a quick flash of gray beneath the pawing beast, and Billy was dragged clear. He was scarcely out of danger when there came the report of a bursting firecracker from Mr. Butterson's front lawn, and the horse danced nervously away to the right at the pull of the rein. The girl laughed hysterically in the sudden silence.

"Them fools hurt?" queried the Colonel to Gilbert, who had leaped out and caught the horse's head.

"No, I guess not." Gilbert was facing Miss Hardy, her mackintosh smirched with mud, and Billy, dripping with dirty water—a strange pair in the light from the arc-lamp on the corner. "I'm sorry," he said. Then he laughed and they laughed with him, shamefacedly, like two culprits who have unexpectedly been caught.

"My fault, old man," said Billy, with a little tremble in his voice, "but Clare pulled me out."

"The bravest thing I ever saw done, Miss Hardy." Gilbert was quickly serious, but Miss Hardy merely laughed again hysterically.

When the two men reached the Colonel's gate, the old veteran, when he had stiffly stepped to the ground, leaned over the muddy wheel to say good-night.

"I want to give you a bit o' worldly advice, Jack," he remarked. "Things go by opposites in this world. Ef ye do things fer other people ye'll respect yerself, but ef

ye do things fer yerself other people 'll respect you. Ye've got to take yer choice. It's a sure thing 'at Hardy won't thank ye fer anything ye do fer him."

Mrs. Gilbert was waiting for him when Jack reached home. He could not remember a time when, as a boy or man, he had ever come back at any hour without finding her ready to greet him. This time she was eager to know about the evening at the Hardys', and, for the first time in his life, he consciously deceived her. The mud on his clothes was from some passing team; nearly everyone had stayed late; and he hastened on guiltily to describe the women's gowns—with masculine crudeness—and events that had not occurred and the friendliness of everybody, which he had not experienced.

"And Miss Hardy?" questioned Mrs. Gilbert insinuatingly, when she was satisfied.

"Ask Billy McNish." Gilbert smiled, but not in his heart.

At about the same time Miss Hardy, in a trailing kimono, was lounging in a huge Morris chair in the tower of the Hardy house. "The bravest thing I ever saw done." The words were echoing insistently, proudly in her mind. And when she fell asleep, half an hour later, they were still dinning dully in her ears.

CHAPTER IX

THE COLONEL MAKES A SPEECH

THE rain stopped toward daybreak, and when Gilbert left the house and joined the long lines of men who filed down to the silent factories, the sun was glinting brightly on the wet, turned leaves that shadowed the walks. Most of the men slouched along lazily, under the spell of the hot, enervating morning, but when Hardy & Son's seven o'clock whistle blew, the mill awoke like a great monster of power, and shook itself, and breathed forth streams of black smoke, and growled and hummed and snarled as the men, grouped in their accustomed places, forced its thousand tentacles to pierce and bruise and shape and polish the hard metal. Activity took the place of laziness, although it was hotter in the shop than in the sun outdoors; and the workers forgot temporarily the sick wives and children at home, the unpaid bills, bickering friends and sullen enemies, in the steady pulse-beat of the machinery, the drive of an all-engrossing task. None of them except Gilbert, pacing the various rooms trying to keep his eye from the clock and his mind from wondering what would happen at eleven in Hardy's office, dreamed that there was a shadow hanging over the restless, pulsing mills. And if they had known they would not have cared unless they had feared that it might affect them. A regular job and regular pay; these were their

only interests in the shops. They hated Hardy because he constantly menaced these interests. Their lives were in grooves that ran from their homes to their machines and back, and they had banded together to make these grooves solid and immovable.

Gilbert, in dirty overalls, went from room to room, talking with superintendents and foremen. Everywhere he seemed to see this morning, as never before, the need of new machines, traces of expensive waste, evidences of lack of interest. He went out into the yard, and saw men toiling above him, across bridges between buildings, with loads which should have been ferried across on automatic travelers. Then his thoughts, attracted as if by a magnet, swung back to the meeting and to the uncertain future.

"What are you doing, Jack?" growled Mr. Hardy, coming suddenly upon him.

"I'm thinking," said Gilbert simply, as he turned with a smile.

"Well, I don't pay you to think," said the old man crossly, as he turned on his heel. Some workmen nearby overheard and laughed covertly. Gilbert's hands clenched and then relaxed. Then he walked on toward the building opposite. And he was still there when, an hour later, he was summoned to the president's office.

Mr. Hardy was on his way back to his office when he spoke to Gilbert. He passed Miss Gerty Smith coming through his own door with a sheaf of papers in her hand. Reaching his desk, he found an unopened letter which had evidently been mislaid from the morning's mail. He tore it open and read a duplicate of the call for a directors' meeting which the Colonel had received the night before.

Then he took his glasses from the desk where he had left them and re-read it. Then he looked at the clock. It was after a quarter of eleven. Two things came to his mind: the rumors of Hubbard and the stock, and John Gilbert's question as he left the house on the previous night. His hand reached out to ring a bell for Jack, but it wavered and stopped. He went to the front window and looked out. When he came back to the desk, his coarse lower jaw protruded defiantly and his face was purple with anger. He took a stiff drink of whiskey from the bottle in the desk drawer, and lit a long black cigar. Then he swung his seat about so as to face the door and waited. For nearly ten minutes he sat there, tense and motionless as a great beast at bay faces an expected attack. Mr. McNish was the first to meet his burning eyes, and, being a man of peace, McNish sat down by the farther window. To him and to the rest as they came Hardy merely jerked his head roughly for a greeting, but he straightened and grew more rigid when, last of all, Mr. Brett and Mr. Merrivale came in together. Hardy might have protested against the snap meeting, but the thought never entered his mind.

"Come to order," he snapped. "Somebody state the business."

Captain Merrivale arose in the uncomfortable silence that followed. He had been manifestly surprised that the entire board was present.

"I am gratified," he said with oratorical emphasis, "that every director of the concern is here, for I have a matter of grave importance to bring before this meeting. Very recently," he went on after a deliberate pause, "I

learned with surprise that notes of this concern amounting to upwards of fifty thousand dollars had been sold in New York. They were signed by the president, but have certainly never been authorized by this board. I think the matter demands explanation." Captain Merrivale did not look at Mr. Hardy when he sat down. He stared instead, with an assumed air of nonchalance, at the ceiling. There was a full moment of silence. Then Sam Hardy's voice, loud and hard, broke it:

"There ain't any explanations. I've made this shop and, by God, I'll run this shop without any interference from you or anybody else," and he shook his finger menacingly at Merrivale. "If this board wants another president," he went on, glaring at the others, "I'll get out, but while I'm here I don't want any special directors' meetings nor any questions asked."

Once before at a directors' meeting he had said almost the same thing, and at that time they had bowed before his anger and begged for pardon and declared that it was all a misunderstanding. But now they were silent, all except Mayor Brett, who sat motionless by the office table.

"Suppose," he said in his hard, even voice, "suppose we consider seriously Mr. Hardy's last suggestion."

There was triumph in Merrivale's eyes, for Hardy was playing directly into their hands. Sam Hardy leaned forward, brutal with anger, the veins standing out in his neck like whipcords, his fists clenched and hard as flint, when the Colonel broke the tension with an explosive chuckle.

"This ain't a directors' meetin'," he said. "This is a cock-fight. 'Let us hev peace,' ez Grant used to say, at

least long enough fer the rest o' us to find out exactly what the skirmish is about. How long," he continued, turning to Merrivale, "hev ye known about them notes? Ye said 'very recently.' How long?"

Merrivale shifted nervously in his chair, but Mayor Brett eyed the Colonel impassively.

"*I've* only known it a—a few days." The slight emphasis upon the personal pronoun was Merrivale's sop to his Sunday conscience. The Colonel was quick to use it, however.

"But somebody else hes, eh, Mr. Merrivale? Now I've alluz played the game plumb open, no cards up m' sleeve, an' I'll bet ye an' give ye odds thet Mr. Alonzo Hubbard hez known about it fer a good deal more'n a few days."

Mayor Brett came to Merrivale's rescue.

"We aren't here to bet, Colonel Mead. We're here to talk business."

The Mayor's seeming indifference to the opinions of others, his short, curt remarks, and his general attitude of aloofness were the secrets of his power. Hampstead people looked up to him chiefly because he looked down upon them. There was a hardness about him, moreover, and a steely gleam in his little beady eyes that made weak men fear him. He was one of those men, who, when you pass them on the streets, make you instinctively feel in your pocket for your purse, to be certain that it is still there.

"Just ez you say," continued the Colonel, satisfied that his guess was correct and that his point had been made with the independent directors. "It alluz makes me peevish to win on a dead sure thing. When did you call this meetin', Mr. Secretary?"

"Yesterday," was Brett's laconic answer.

"When did you get yer notice?" The Colonel turned to Sam Hardy.

"About fifteen minutes ago," snarled the old man.

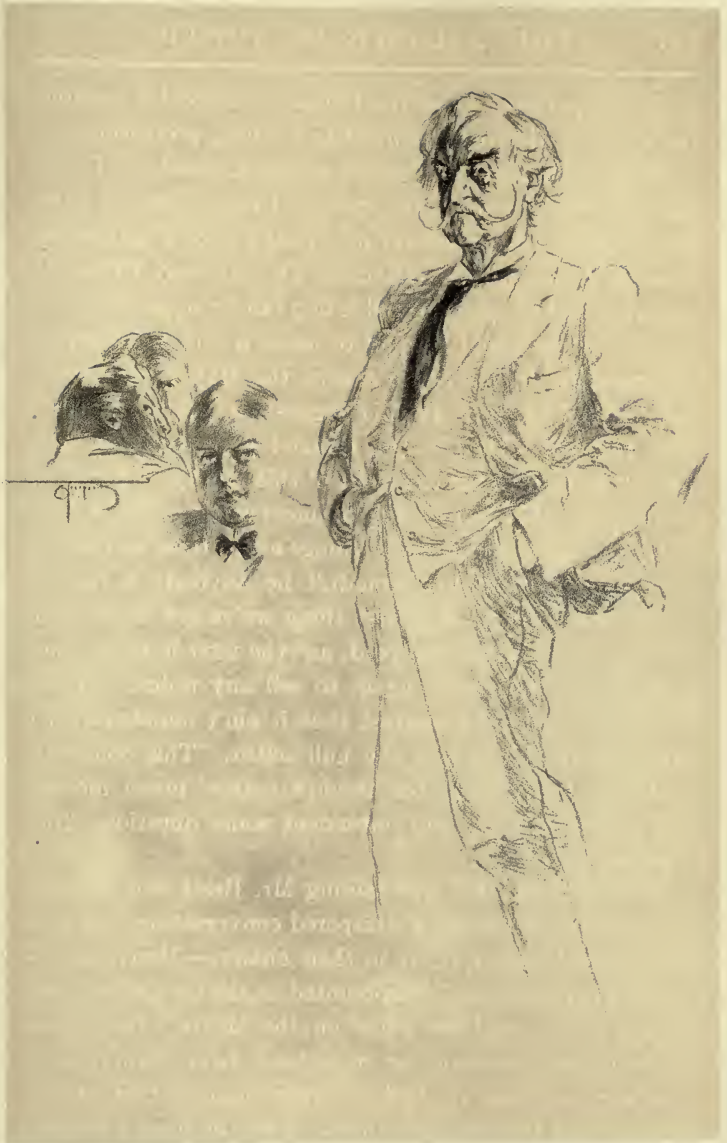
"Huh," ejaculated the Colonel, with another chuckle. "Thet's a good deal like shootin' a man an' then announcin' of his legal execution to him afterwards. Now, ef ye'll allow me, I think I kin elucydate to the gentlemen of the board of directors"—and the Colonel could not restrain from emphasizing the word "gentlemen"—"the case as it appears to me. I'll tell ye, *detailed*, a story that mebbe won't assay first class as to truth, but which, fer illustrative perposes, is better'n a circus-poster—the which, I reckon, is what ye'd name a par'ble. Thar wuz once a man out in the cattle country thet hed a big ranch, an' enemies ez thick ez bunch grass. He wuz ez pig-headed ez 'n obstinate woman, an' ef anyone set foot within a mile of him, he went out of his way to tread on the toes o' thet foot. His neighbors they appreciated his ranch, but they 'lowed thet he'd be a more useful citizen in some higher er lower territory. Thar wuz threats around about hangin' him, and he heard 'em. An', bein' a fool ez well ez a brave man, he put a rope 'round his neck an' went ridin' round his ranch, boastful ez ever. Well, 'twasn't long 'fore his neighbors got hold o' the end o' thet rope. An' when they strung him up they all wuz ez innocent ez hull families unborn. They'd found him with the rope 'round his neck, they sed. Now, whether he wuz cut down in time er not, I ain't decided. Ye kin finish the story in yer own way."

A puzzled, amused interest was evident on the faces of

most of the directors as the Colonel finished his parable, but Captain Merrivale jumped to his feet, protesting.

"I ain't through yet," went on the Colonel. "This is the first reel speech I ever made. I've prepared it careful an' I calc'late to deliver it. Thar's a lot o' unhealthy personal feelin' in this business. Th' only way I know to git rid o' bad blood is to spill it in a fair fight, an' I reckon the rest of us here'd be glad to make a ring an' cheer ye on impartial." Everyone except the Mayor and Merrivale smiled broadly at this suggestion. Even Hardy's face relaxed. "But"—the Colonel grew suddenly serious—"we're here fer the good o' this fact'ry. I say, of course, thet this note-selling business wuz a mistake, but, ef we wuz all chucked out o' things every time we made a mistake, I reckon thar wouldn't be anybody a holdin' down steady jobs. The first thing we've got to do is to see that these notes are paid, an' the next is to see thet it ain't ever necessary again to sell any notes. We've been takin' so little interest that it ain't onnatural thet Hardy here thinks he's the hull outfit. This concern's makin' a lot o' stuff, but it ain't makin' much money. I'd like to ask yer sup'rintendent some questions 'fore I go on."

While the Colonel was talking Mr. Brett and Captain Merrivale were having a whispered conversation, but now they leaned back quickly in their chairs,—Merrivale obviously surprised and disappointed at the turn affairs had taken, and a sardonic smile on the Mayor's face alone showing any emotion he may have felt. Sam Hardy hesitated a moment, looking questioningly first at the Colonel and then at the others. Then he leaned over to



“The Colonel makes a speech.”



his desk, rang the bell for Gilbert, and sat rigid once more, his arms folded.

The room was silent when Gilbert entered. It is doubtful if any two men anticipated exactly the same result from his coming.

"This is the Board of Directors, Jack," said Hardy without looking at him. "They want to ask you some questions."

The Colonel nodded to him with a whimsical smile.

"We want to know," he said, "ef somethin' can't be done to make goods cheaper?"

Grouped about the table and by the window, the eight men waited expectantly to hear what the big workman in overalls, his hands black with grease, would say, while Hardy, in his official isolation, stared aimlessly at the floor. Gilbert looked across at the president doubtfully. He could not understand how it had happened that he was summoned or why Mr. Hardy sat silent; but he caught the Colonel's anxious nod.

"Yes," he said quickly. "I have plans for that, which have been shown to Mr. Hardy and put aside temporarily on account of—of the expense, I think."

"Trot 'em out." The Colonel was ruling the meeting with a high hand, and he was enjoying it hugely. Many of the other directors seemed to be enjoying it also, and the atmosphere of the room had lost its tenseness. The meeting was a novelty to them all, for previous Hardy directors' meetings had been formal, cut-and-dried affairs with nothing gained or lost by either attendance or absence.

When Gilbert returned with his precious papers they

listened to him steadily for more than twenty minutes, as he described the factory's needs and outlined his plans. His face was flushed and he talked with the assurance of achievement, readily and vividly. He went into almost exhaustive detail about the saving of each proposed machine, about the ways in which waste might be utilized, about the patents he wished to apply for whenever his plans were worked out, about the men and their relations to the problem; and they listened, many of them as much interested in the man as they were in his schemes for the mills. Sam Hardy, however, alternately watched the Colonel and Gilbert, and his face grew grim, hard, malevolent; so obviously so, indeed, that it attracted the beady eyes of the Mayor, who suddenly awoke from his passivity, in the middle of Gilbert's explanations, long enough to whisper to Captain Merrivale. The Captain, who had been fidgeting in his chair, turned quickly and looked at Mr. Hardy. His expression grew more alert; he smiled and nodded.

"What 'll the hull thing cost?" asked the Colonel while Gilbert folded up his papers.

"Between fifty and seventy-five thousand dollars, I should say, but it can be done, of course, gradually."

Two or three other questions were asked and answered. Then Gilbert hurried back to his office with the papers, and from there out into the shop for the last few minutes of a waning morning. He was absent-minded over his work, however, for he was wondering how it had all come about and what it might mean to him and to Hardy & Son.

Meanwhile Sam Hardy was speaking, the moment the

door slammed behind Gilbert. He looked combatively directly at the Colonel.

"I'm pretty sure I can take up those notes all right. Knew I could from the start. And these plans of my superintendent, I can look after them, too. I intended to, anyhow, those of them that are any good, whenever I can get to it."

The Colonel rose to his feet once more and his eyes met Hardy's fighting gaze steadily.

"Thar's a surplus, so I've been told—I naturally wouldn't know anything about it, bein' only a humble director in Hardy & Son," he interjected sarcastically—"a surplus of more'n two hundred thousand dollars. I therefore move ye, Mister President, that this board of directors hereby appropriate the sum of fifty thousand dollars o' that surplus toward the takin' up of these notes. I also move ye that Mister John Gilbert be to-day elected General Manager of this concern, and that fifty thousand dollars be appropriated fer the carryin' on o' his plans fer puttin' Hardy & Son on hand-shakin' terms with dividends an' prosperity."

Sam Hardy shook his head angrily when the Colonel sat down.

"That surplus mustn't be touched," he shouted. "It isn't needed. Nobody with any pride in this company would suggest such a thing."

Colonel Mead, meanwhile, was being advised by Mr. McNish to put his motions separately. This he immediately did, and they were carried, one after another, with only the director from Tareville voting in opposition. Mayor Brett and Merrivale both voted "aye," and the

Colonel realized that they were taking the only way left to them of weakening Sam Hardy. He only shrugged his shoulders, however, and when the meeting adjourned—just as the whistle blew for the noon hour—he hurried out with Mr. McNish to look for Gilbert.

The door closed behind the last of the directors, the man from Tareville, who alone stopped to add a genial word to the president. Sam Hardy again sat alone at his desk. He felt suddenly faint and, rising, he stumbled across to the window and feverishly breathed in deep gulps of air. From the window he could see the irregular line of dirty brick buildings, his shops that he had almost lost, and the men hustling out in noisy crowds. Sharp pains shot through the back of his head, and his body felt like an empty shell through which some heavy weight was pushing down, down, down, as if to crush out breath and life. For a moment he stood staring. Then he caught himself with quick tension, and, going over to the desk, he poured out with trembling hands a long drink of whiskey. Slowly his unstrung nerves steadied themselves with the stimulant. He thought more clearly. They had tried to take his shops away from him. Brett and Merrivale had turned on him, and perhaps Hubbard was behind them. They had taken half of his surplus, the surplus that had always been his pride. They had openly insulted him. And Jack Gilbert had known all about it beforehand. Jack Gilbert had engineered the whole thing to gain credit for himself and disgrace for him. He might have expected it, Hardy told himself bitterly. He closed down his desk and started out toward home. Outside, he looked back at the silent shops, which lay, instinct with

power, resting in the summer sun; and the old lines of indomitable, stubborn will settled about his mouth and chin.

“Mr. Hardy,” called Gilbert’s voice from behind him.

The old man turned with a snarl. Gilbert had left the Colonel and Mr. McNish and was crossing the street to join him.

“I won’t talk to ye,” bellowed Mr. Hardy. “I always thought you threw a straight ball, but now—I’ll get on to your curves, damn you.” He stamped off up the street. Gilbert returned to his friends, but he did not join in their laughter. His first flash of anger at “the old man’s” unfairness gave way quickly, however, to a smile. Hardy’s remark brought back to his mind the half humorous, half pathetic picture of “the old man” standing in the rickety grandstand at Kemper’s Park, waving his umbrella frantically as the winning runs were scored in a game between the nines of Hardy & Son and Hubbard & Wells.

“He’ll be all right,” he said, “when he understands. Of course, I appreciate you’re doing it, Colonel, and I’m glad you did it, but I’m sorry you had to antagonize him.”

“Can’t reason with a man like Hardy,” muttered the Colonel, “by slapping his face soft-like. Ye hev to black his eyes and bust his nose ’fore he begins to think.”

“You’d better get proxies out for the regular stockholders’ meeting in a hurry,—to-night,” went on Gilbert. “The other bunch will get ahead of us if you don’t. Hardy won’t think it’s necessary yet. It’ll be too late by the time we get ‘the old man’ to see things right.”

“Suppose,” ventured Mr. McNish anxiously, “suppose he don’t ever see things right?”

Gilbert's face was troubled as he stared at the thick-set figure far ahead on the other side of the street, but his voice was quiet and determined.

"We'll have to fight him for his own sake, that's all," he said.

CHAPTER X

A THREE-CORNERED FIGHT

NOTHING was sacred in Hampstead, except business. Moriarty once remarked with more truth than good grammar: "If my Katie goes out in the backyard to hang up a close-line, sure 'tis all over the neighborhood in foive minutes." And "all over the neighborhood" meant all over the town, for Hampstead was in its growing-up period of a town's life, the period of asking persistent questions, of hearing things not intended for its ears, and of telling all that it heard and much more than it knew. Its house-cats often seemed wistful over their dumbness. But business was comparatively sacred. The Hardy & Son directors' meeting, therefore, brought before the townspeople merely the personal fact that John Gilbert had been made the general manager of the factory, and they bowed to him in the street more respectfully and remembered that they had always thought him a promising young man.

Gilbert himself was too busy, however, to notice their new attitude or to care what they thought. All summer long he actually lived at the shops. On the afternoon of the directors' meeting he had ordered some of the simple automatic machines he had planned, from large machine shops in Hampstead and Westbury. He enlarged his own machine room, and set the men there at work under his

own supervision on three more intricate machines. On some inventions he applied for patents, but others he incorporated into the machines, trusting more to the privacy of his shop than to the publicity of the patent office. He turned the force of men—many of them day laborers—who were usually laid off in the summer, to the work of installing the automatic traveler and the waste-utilizing devices he bought or built. Others found themselves dragged away from their regular work to move machinery and shafting; a bookkeeper helped build a new shute; and two or three idle shipping clerks cleaned up and sorted scrap that had accumulated in valuable proportions in unexpected hidden corners. Violence was done daily to union rules and union precedent. Jethro and Tom Grady and a few others grumbled about it, but their grumbling was drowned in the noisy whirl of the work.

Of course, there were many of the men who dragged themselves along in the old way, hearing only the whistle calling them to work or sending them home again; but the majority of them fell into step behind Gilbert as he marched steadily and untiringly forward. Carpenters hurried in and out, and an occasional electrician or mason. Everything seemed a rushing, aimless hurly-burly, but always Gilbert or one of the foremen brought order out of the chaos. He camped at the shop every noon, eating his lunch with anyone and everyone, taking them into his confidence as far as he could, urging them on, thanking them, filling them full of his own enthusiasm and determination. At night he was often at the shops, conducting a kind of impromptu night school among certain groups of younger men who were learning their trades.

And, all the time, the big mill was in some way disgorging daily, goods enough to meet the relaxed summer demand.

Day by day Gilbert realized more fully the immensity of the work he had planned, and day by day he enjoyed more every detail of it. This was what he had been unconsciously seeking, a chance to grapple with a great task and to manufacture an achievement, huge, iron-framed and pulsing with power. And often, late at night, he lay in his bed, staring into the darkness, and smiling over the work of the day that had gone and of the day to come.

Long before the summer was over he had reason to be thankful for his big awkward body and its capacity for enduring fatigue, and for his slow, steady mind which a hundred worries seldom put off the straight track to the ends he sought. Of course, there were many worries;—the greatest of them the coming stockholders' meeting, which hung menacing above his highest hopes like a Damocles' sword, and Sam Hardy's sustained antagonism. Hardy seldom left the office now, and when he did appear in the shops he ostentatiously ignored his superintendent. He snubbed Gilbert so openly when Jack, in his direct way, tried to tell him the plain truth about the directors' meeting, that Gilbert's pride made him give it up hopelessly. After a long talk with Gilbert, genial Mr. McNish went to see "the old man," but he came away so bubbling over with anger as to be almost incoherent, declaring that he had forever "washed his hands of Sam Hardy." Then Gilbert tried Billy as a last resort. Billy listened to all that Gilbert told him with an air of judicial aloofness, that would have been amusing if it had not been so unlike him. He said only that he doubted his own influence with Mr.

Hardy in the matter, but he was so obviously indifferent and he watched Gilbert in such a carefully prepared, heavy-lidded, speculative way, that at last Jack broke out with:

"Honest, Billy, anybody 'ld think you believed as Hardy does."

"I'm not quite sure, you know, what I do believe," was Billy's hesitating answer.

Gilbert, entirely concentrated in the factory problems, and without a thought of politics in his mind, stared, frankly astonished at his friend. Then he rose and picked up his hat.

"All right, Billy," he said, and turned to go.

"There's something I should like to say," said Billy, rising also and assuming a melodramatic pose.

"Don't say it, Billy. We both might be sorry."

That Billy should doubt his motives hurt Gilbert more than the failure of his last attempt to reconcile "the old man." If an old friend like Billy questioned his good faith, what must be her attitude toward him? He gave up his work that night to make his delayed "party call" at the Hardys'. It was a bold experiment, but he had made up his mind to know what to expect from her. He had other feelings about it, also, but he did not permit himself to analyze them. He came away from the door of the Hardy house, with his lips pursed in a forced smile. He had heard her voice while the maid was telling him that she was not at home. Well, that was done with, at any rate. Done with! He knew suddenly that if it was true, if "that *was* done with," the whole achievement, that he was building by day and lying awake nights to plan,

would ring hollow. He knew suddenly that, without her to share it with him, success was only black failure, gilded perhaps but black underneath. He knew suddenly that he loved her, and the knowledge shook him strangely. He walked for hours that night, and when he came back his shoulders were squared and his head was held high and there was a new light in his eyes.

Proxies to represent the stockholders at the September meeting had been sent out immediately, as Gilbert suggested. The Colonel had growled about it testily, as usual, but, as usual, also, he made sure that it was done thoroughly. And in spite of his periodical outbreaks against Gilbert and himself for trying to help Sam Hardy, Colonel Mead was as keenly interested in the struggle for the proxies as even John Gilbert himself, and more confident of success.

"I declar," said the Colonel, a grim smile lighting his grizzled face, one night when Gilbert was with him, "I wouldn't know ye to what ye wuz a year ago. Then ye wuz jest sloppin' around in the slough o' despond, an' not carin' much whether ye got out er not; an' now look at ye! Ye got blood in yer eyes, an' ye walk on yer heels an' generally look ez ef life wuz an eternal picnic, with lobster salad an' ice cream fer every meal."

"I wonder what's got into Billy McNish," said Gilbert musingly.

Billy was not a favorite with the Colonel. The veteran pulled frowningly at his pipe.

"Women are cur'us critters," he remarked with seeming irrelevance. "One reason why men like 'em, I reckon, is because they're irritatin' kind o' puzzles, like 'Pigs in the

Clover.' Ye corral one part o' ther characters and think ye've got it hobbled so it can't git away. Then ye start to drive in another, an', 'fore ye know it, out jumps the first one an' ye've got to start all over again. An' ef ye ever do git 'em all corraled at once, why ye lose all int'rest in the game. They's only one thing sure about 'em, an' that is thet ye can't be sure o' anything about 'em. I've alluz figgered thet a woman's mind ain't gray matter. It's a bunch o' rainbows with colors that run. They're made to think crisscross. An' so's Billy," added the Colonel reflectively, coming suddenly back to the subject of conversation. "Billy, he's half a 'Pigs in Clover' game hisself. Don't ye worry about him. Why, ye never kin tell, fer five conseq-u-tive minutes, whar Billy stands on anything, ner why he's thar, ner how he got thar, ner when he's goin' to vamoose to somewhars else."

Womenkind were the Colonel's aversion and diversion. He never was more unhappy than when he was in a company of women, and he never was happier than when he was discoursing wisely and from a distance upon their failings. But his remarks about Billy were unsatisfactory to Gilbert, and the conversation turned abruptly to Sam Hardy and to the shops.

"We've got to make 'the old man' understand, somehow," said Gilbert. "Have you ever thought that he might go so far as to join up with Hubbard, for a consideration, of course?"

"Ez to makin' him understand," replied the Colonel, "ye might jest ez well try to make a steer thet's bein' branded understand Christianity. But he won't tie up with them. It's a three-cornered fight, with us standin'

ready to act ez his reinforcements, ef he says the right word."

"Of course, Colonel, we stick to Hardy to the finish, whether he says the right word or not."

The Colonel smiled quizzically.

"It's funny, ain't it?" he remarked, blowing a big cloud of smoke toward the ceiling. "Ef ye knock a man down he'll love ye like a brother, but ef ye do him an almighty good turn he'll alluz be waitin' jest around the corner with a knife up his sleeve."

"By the way," asked Gilbert, "have you got Tubb's proxy yet?"

Mr. Tubb had a considerable holding in Hardy stock.

"Says he's goin' to let me know next week."

As the days went by and proxies came in to the Colonel and Mr. McNish, the excitement of the two men grew in ways to match their temperaments. The Colonel, with buoyant confidence, was always counting the total number of shares of stock for which they held proxies, and cautious Mr. McNish was always adding up the larger number that someone else controlled.

They had, as a matter of fact, great reason for encouragement, for their early start had helped them even more than Gilbert had hoped. By the first of August they had, including the support quietly gained from Hampstead men, more than a quarter of the voting power in their hands. The Colonel sent out a second batch of letters, and Mr. McNish wagged his head doubtfully about the remaining shares necessary for control. He knew that they would come in more slowly, if at all. Gilbert's younger eye, however, noticed one day that from groups

of stockholders in Albany, Pittsfield and Springfield, where the elder Mr. Hardy had sold, through friends, considerable quantities of stock in the early, growing years of the concern, only three or four proxies had arrived. He urged the Colonel to spend a week visiting the three cities and personally seeing these men, but Colonel Mead had his heart set on a month at the Sound shore, and "pooh-poohed" the idea. Mr. McNish was too busy to give up the time. So the Colonel went away for his vacation, leaving Gilbert to watch the mails closely for returns from the three cities and to grow more certain, as the weeks passed, that his intuition was correct.

Strangely enough Gilbert had come to depend upon Joe Heffler. Every night when the whistle blew, the gray-haired young fellow, with an anxious, almost pleading face, came to him.

"Is there anything I can do for you, sir?" was the monotonous question.

Gilbert found that Heffler seemed disappointed when he shook his head and said that there was "nothing at all." And he soon began finding things for Heffler to do, little things which were done eagerly and thoroughly. Sometimes Heffler spent entire evenings at the shops, helping Gilbert with anything he had in hand, and always he asked for more to do, seemingly unsatisfied unless every leisure moment was spent in Gilbert's service. But he retained his silence and his sensitive aloofness.

"Joe," said Gilbert one night, in response to the usual question, "I'm going to ask you to do a mighty delicate thing, or perhaps a mighty indelicate thing. You do it or not, as you like."

"Yes, sir." Heffler's gaze was directed at Gilbert's chin. He seldom more than flashed for a second a straight-in-the-eye glance. It was one of the marks that the prison shame had left upon him.

"You know Miss Gerty Smith."

Heffler started suddenly, and looked away as he nodded.

"Well, frankly, I don't trust her. I think Mr. Brett has got her wound about his little finger. I believe she's telling him everything about us that he can't find out himself. I've made a rule that none of the stenographers can come out into the shops, but she comes, with Mr. Hardy's permission, when I'm not around, and she watches the work and talks with the men. Now I'd like you to keep your eye on her and try to find out for sure what she's up to. 'Tisn't a nice job, but it's necessary, and you can get Jimmy O'Rourke to help you at the other end. Jimmy's put me wise to a lot of things already."

Heffler took off his cap and ran his fingers nervously through his thick gray hair.

"What'd you do to her if you caught her?" he asked hesitatingly.

"I don't know." Gilbert's curiosity was aroused. Heffler had never questioned anything he had said before. "I'd probably"—he went on slowly—"probably give her a chance to tell what she knows and then—I don't know. You can't be rough on a woman, you know."

Heffler nodded and there was a long pause.

"I'll do it," Heffler said slowly, "if there won't anything wrong come to her. She's a—a kind of a friend of mine."

Gilbert's hand settled heavily on Joe Heffler's shoulder.

"Don't think any more about it, Joe," he said. "I didn't know."

Heffler was silent for a moment or two.

"I told Peter the other day," he said at last, with an obvious eagerness to regain any confidence he might have lost, "to keep his ears open about all those men and to let you know anything he heard. He said he would."

"Good." Gilbert's tone was hearty. "You're a mighty big help to me, Joe. Don't know how I ever got along without you."

Heffler's pale face flushed with pleasure, but that was his only answer.

Two or three days later, while Gilbert was in the machine room assembling one of the new machines, word came to him that there was someone waiting to see him in his office.

"Have him see Billings, or Walters, or Moines. I'm too busy," he told the boy.

"Tried that. Won't see anyone but you, sir."

"What's his name?" said Jack, impatiently looking up from the work.

"Lumpkin."

Gilbert called the room boss to take hold of the work, and hurried across to his office. There, indeed, was Mr. Lumpkin, clean shaven, well brushed, and resplendent in a new tie of bird's-egg blue against a background of yellow shirt.

"Well, bless my soul," he exclaimed in his big, hearty voice as he stared at Gilbert's overalls and grimy face and hands. "I'd hardly know you, Mister Gilbert. Still, a little dirt don't hurt anybody, as the Scripture says, or

words to that effect. 'Show me a man,' I often says to myself, 'show me a man who's afraid to soil his hands with the earth from which he was made and to which he shall return,' I says, 'and I'll show you a man without grit, grip er gumption——'"

Gilbert interrupted him at this juncture.

"What's up, Lumpkin? I'm rushed to death this morning."

"Now, isn't that curious?" Mr. Lumpkin wiped his brow with a red bandanna and beamed at the big man. "That's just what I was saying to myself as I walked down the street. I said to myself, 'Peter,' I says, 'you're going to see a business man,' I says, 'and you've got to be business-like. You've got to come straight to the point, Peter. You've got to introduce your facts in logical succession so that your meaning will be apparent to the most unintelligent listener.' Beg your pardon, sir; of course not referring to you. And it was just at that moment that I caught sight of 'Old Glory,' floating on the summer air above these mighty mills of modern progress. That sight thrilled me to the core, sir, and I says to myself, 'Peter,' says I, 'it's a glorious thought, a thought winged with hope, yes sir, winged with hope for future generations, that the humble toilers of our land day after day labor under the shadow of that fadeless, star-spangled banner.'"

Gilbert sat down at his desk, a smile of surrender about his mouth, and offered Mr. Lumpkin a cigar.

"And now what's the news, Lumpkin?" he asked, while the night-lunch man bit off the end of the cigar.

"I was just coming to that." Mr. Lumpkin was busy

with a match now. When the cigar was alight he leaned forward and, after looking cautiously about, went on in a loud whisper, "It may not be of the greatest importance, sir, but the Honorable Mr. Strutt's gone out of town."

"I saw that in the paper last night," returned Gilbert quickly. "Gone to Marblehead."

Mr. Lumpkin nodded, and, after another hasty glance about the room, he whispered:

"You're right, sir, always right. That's precisely and completely what the papers said. But the Honorable Mr. Strutt's son did me the honor last night of patronizing the viands which I prepare for the public, to the extent of a chicken sandwich and a bottle of ginger pop. And incidentally, quite by the way, you understand, he remarked to one of his friends that his father, the Honorable Mr. Strutt, left last night for Albany, Pittsfield, Springfield *and* Marblehead."

Gilbert jumped to his feet. Before Mr. Lumpkin could continue, he was at the telephone calling one of his assistants. He must go out of town immediately, Mr. Lumpkin heard him say, for two or three days. Then followed a number of rapid orders for the work to be done while he was away. Hanging up the receiver, he rang for a messenger. Then he sat down again and wrote an even half dozen telegrams, finishing them just as the boy arrived. Then he turned to the lunch-cart man.

"Excuse me, Lumpkin. This is important. Great hurry. Bully good of you."

Mr. Lumpkin rose; his chest with the bird's-egg blue tie puffed forth with pride and joy.

"That, sir," he said, "warms the cockles of my heart."

It was such a trifle, you see, that I wasn't going to bother you at first, and then I says to myself, 'Peter,' I says, 'Joe said anything about those four men and the——'

"Thanks, thanks," broke in Gilbert impatiently, as he hurried Peter out. "I'll see you when I come back."

Gilbert took the noon train for Pittsfield. He had wired to all the stockholders in Albany as well as to the Colonel. The Albany people would keep Mr. Strutt busy all day, and the telegrams would at least make them slower to decide. The longer they delayed the lawyer in Albany the better start Gilbert would have in Pittsfield and Springfield. It was the Honorable Mr. Strutt's first open activity, but Gilbert had been watching him, convinced that sooner or later the clever, pompous little lawyer would take a hand, and no uncertain hand, in the struggle. He was the legal representative of all the Hubbard interests. His appearance had alone been needed to assure Gilbert and the Colonel that, behind the stock buying and the snap meeting of directors, was the hidden quiet direction of Alonzo Hubbard and the hoard of Hubbard dollars. Gilbert wondered, as he sat in the train, whether any more stock was changing hands. Hardy stock was cheap, but it seemed to him, as he tried to put himself in the opposition's place, that with control gained at the September meeting they could make it cheaper. That was a bridge, at any rate, to which, as far as he had heard, he had not come. Down in his heart, however, he felt that, if Hubbard started seriously to buy a majority of the stock, it would make a bridge that neither he nor any of those associated with him could cross.

There were only three stockholders in Pittsfield, and,

late that night, Gilbert boarded a train for Springfield with two proxies in his pocket. The third man was out of town and Gilbert had no time to wait for him. Strutt would be there in the morning. Incidentally Jack had learned a new phase of the Hubbard campaign. He had in his pocket a typewritten, confidential circular. The statements of this circular, accompanied by figures, and figures which he knew to be comparatively accurate, were strong enough to convince almost any outside stockholder that Hardy & Son was on the verge of ruin. The man who had given it to Gilbert had said frankly that he had lost all hope of his stock ever again having any value. Gilbert was already framing in his mind an answering statement, which he determined should go to all the stockholders as quickly after his return to Hampstead as press could print it. But he scarcely hoped that it would counteract the first effect of the other circular. He felt his own ignorance and lack of skill against so versatile and perfectly trained an opposition. And he went to bed that night, tired and discouraged.

There were seven men to see in Springfield, and one held a larger amount of stock than the other six. When, after waiting an hour in an outer office, Gilbert finally met this man, it was only to learn that the proxy had been signed and sent to Mr. Brett that very morning. The man was positive that it had been sent, but he gave Gilbert permission to search the general mail-bag, on the chance that the letter might still be in the office. And, after sorting and re-sorting hundreds of letters, Jack, with a thrill of triumph, brought forth a blue envelope with the familiar address. A new proxy was made out, and Gilbert, heed-

less of luncheon, went out to find the remaining six. He made another discovery that afternoon. One proxy had been sent to "the president." Evidently Mr. Hardy was fighting alone. Gilbert pitied the obstinate "old man," as he thought of the lonely struggle.

When he reached the Springfield station, nearly a half hour before his train to Hampstead was due, he had three new proxies in his pocket. The other two, he knew now, had already gone to the other side. The drizzling rain, through which he had been plodding all day, still fell from the lead-colored twilight sky. The air in the waiting-room was close and hot, and he strolled up and down on the covered platform. Weary as he was from unaccustomed travel and irregular hours, there was real exhilaration in his heart and in his smiling eyes and even in his long jerky steps as he tramped up and down. An east-bound train rattled in and unloaded groups of passengers, but he scarcely noticed it. Reaching the end of the platform, he wheeled to continue his monotonous walk, when he found himself suddenly face to face with the Honorable Mr. Strutt, hurrying, bag in hand, toward the street exit. For a moment the two stared at each other with unconcealed surprise. Then Gilbert smiled and nodded gravely and started to pass the ex-Congressman. Mr. Strutt put down his bag and turned.

"Gilbert," he called.

Jack faced him and waited quietly.

"Nasty day," volunteered Mr. Strutt, bowing pleasantly and rubbing his hands together—"washing his hands with invisible soap and water," as Billy described it.

Gilbert assented. Mr. Strutt drew a cigar case from

his pocket and, opening it, offered it to Gilbert, who completed the dumb show by displaying the half-smoked cigar in his hand.

"Up here on business?" queried Mr. Strutt in his most suave and genial manner. Gilbert's drawling answer was concise:

"I came to get exactly what you're after, and I've got it. Did my telegrams block you at Albany?"

Mr. Strutt smiled deprecatingly at his frankness.

"Not entirely, but I'll admit they hurt me. In fact, I'll admit that you've beaten me all along the line." Mr. Strutt's tone suggested that he was conferring a great favor on his young friend by the admission.

"That's good hearing," Gilbert responded heartily.

"Gilbert," continued Mr. Strutt, after a short pause during which the lawyer shifted his weight from one foot to the other, giving his small body a swinging pendulum movement, "I'm delighted to have found you here. I've wanted to talk to you. I should like to say—if I can say it without being misunderstood—that I have conceived an admiration for you. You may not realize it—young men of ability seldom do,—but you have been attracting attention."

Mr. Strutt ceased his swinging and watched the big, irregular face. He scowled slightly when Gilbert did not take advantage of the pause to thank him for his good opinion. Any gentleman or any man of tact could not have done less, it seemed to the punctilious lawyer.

"You have even interested so keen a judge of character as Mr. Alonzo Hubbard," went on Mr. Strutt. "Quite confidentially, of course, he remarked to me the other

day that he needed a man like you at exactly double the salary you are receiving at present. He even mentioned your name. He wants a man to correlate and manage all his mills. It's a big job, but you can have it by a word."

"Double the salary." The idea dazed Gilbert for a moment. With that he could pay off all the remaining debts in a year and a half. He could make everything easier for his mother. Mr. Strutt saw his momentary advantage.

"I think something might be arranged also," he added smoothly, "about some stock, and perhaps an official position of some sort—say, assistant secretary or a directorship. You can see that Mr. Hubbard fully realizes your value and is ready to pay for it. He seems to have taken a great liking to you."

Double the salary; an infinitely surer position; a larger, more important, work to do! Each of these attracted John Gilbert. He owed no loyalty to Sam Hardy now. The Colonel, if he were there, would undoubtedly tell him to take the offer. He wavered and Mr. Strutt, watching silently the signs of the inward struggle, smiled and rubbed his hands together softly and said to himself that a young man can almost always be trapped by an appeal to his ambition. At last Gilbert, with a long breath that was almost a sigh, looked squarely down into Mr. Strutt's eyes.

"I don't care to consider your suggestion," he said shortly, and started to turn away. Mr. Strutt's open surprise and disappointment made him forget his craftiness and his carefully chosen words.

"Look here, Gilbert," he said hurriedly. "It's a cer-

tainty for an uncertainty. You're fighting us now. For the life of me I can't see why. Hardy's against us both. That means you can't get control without us." A sharp exclamation from Gilbert checked him for a moment. "I supposed you knew that. I'm talking frankly. I don't want to see you make the mistake of your life. And I'll tell you another thing. If we don't control that meeting we'll win afterwards."

Gilbert understood it all suddenly. He was a conceited fool not to have seen it in the beginning, he said to himself. They didn't want him. They merely wanted to put him out of their way. And by that, they showed openly that he *was* in their way, that they were feeling his opposition.

"Go ahead and win," he said slowly, "if you can."

"That means that you——"

"I'm going to do all I can to stop you."

Mr. Strutt picked up his bag.

"I'll hold the offer open for a week," he remarked conciliatingly.

"You needn't. I don't want it."

Mr. Strutt stared after him as he walked slowly away, and the face of the Honorable ex-Congressman dropped its genial mask. The look of it for that second promised no good to the broad-shouldered young man strolling unconcernedly down the platform. Mr. Strutt was accustomed to having his way. He was decidedly unused to being treated cavalierly by a young upstart whom circumstances had forced him to approach. And Mr. Strutt's enmity was not a thing to be scorned.

As the train hurried down along the river bank Gilbert

scoffed at himself for his first hesitation. He realized, however, that his own weakness, curiously enough, had done him a service. He had learned that the Hubbard forces controlled enough stock already to win if they, by any chance, obtained Sam Hardy's help. He knew, also, that it was to be a fight to the finish with them. He knew how hopelessly the odds were against him in that fight. He felt something of that relentless hand that was behind it all, always hidden but always directing, the hand of that silent Mr. Hubbard, whom few knew and whom everyone respected. Then, as he stared into the growing darkness beyond the dirty car windows, he saw the hundreds of men toiling through the rattle and smoke and grime of the Hardy mills, and admitted to himself shamefacedly that he and another man had been bartering over their future and Sam Hardy's, the grim, intolerant "old man" whom he was trying to save. Then the picture vanished before a tall, slender, girlish figure. And he loathed himself for his indecision and his selfishness, and told her so humbly a dozen times as he lay back wearily on the cushioned seat.

Gilbert thought that his mother knew almost nothing of the real struggle at the shops. He was certain that he had never told her. He did not realize that, with a woman's strategy, she had drawn from him, little by little, many fragments of information which she had later pieced together carefully until she understood the meaning of each one and of the whole. Sometimes he had seen a look of shrewd satisfaction about her mouth, and he had suddenly remembered that he had been led into an admission he had not intended to make. But these were little things, and

he had been amused at her curiosity. Her first question, therefore, when he reached home that night, made him regard her with frank amazement. It was about the proxies.

"How do you know anything about that?" he asked almost sharply. His mother laughed.

"You told me near a month ago, but you did not know it. You'll find out in time, laddie, that it's better to tell a Scotch woman everything than to let her guess. She'll know less in the end."

"There isn't anything for you to worry about."

"Worry?" Mrs. Gilbert jerked her head back proudly. "And why should I worry, with you straight and strong like that? No, no. Have your fling. It's a good one, and a right one, and like you. I pray the good Lord every night that I mayn't be too proud of you."

"Don't talk like that, mother."

"I'll talk as I please."

They were both laughing when the Colonel arrived, growling about his interrupted vacation but eager to hear the news. And Mrs. Gilbert left the two men to talk business. It was after midnight when the Colonel left.

"Did you land Tubb?" asked Gilbert at the door.

"Saw him to-day. He's backin' and fillin' a hull lot. Reckon he smells oats in the other direction. Says he'll tell me certain, Saturday. He's one o' those men thet wants ye to like him more'n most anybody else, but is alluz afraid thet the other feller'll dislike him if ye do. He shakes hands an' tells stories an' agrees with ye till ye want to fight. But he ain't got a good healthy 'yes' er 'no' in his constitution."

CHAPTER XI

AN UNEXPECTED CONFERENCE

UNCERTAINTY and delay worried Billy McNish. When he could act on impulse he was more often right than wrong. Given an unexpected case at the last moment, and he would stir the most indifferent judge and jury with brilliant pleading. Called upon for impromptu remarks at a dinner, he would make the happiest, wittiest speech of the evening. He might have been a hero in any sudden moment of danger, if there were people nearby to watch the deed. He might have led any spectacular, forlorn hope the fates flung in his way. But waiting weakened his decision. He brooded and grew suspicious and changed his mind a dozen times in an hour. An intricate, long-drawn-out case at law would be begun with optimistic enthusiasm, only to be ended in pessimistic, half-hearted endeavor. A carefully prepared speech usually made his days and nights immediately preceding the event a torment of foreboding misery. He would be utterly dissatisfied with it long before it was delivered. And if a thing had to be reasoned out, he invariably looked at it from so many different angles that the longer he thought about it the more confused he became.

When he had asked Clare Hardy to marry him, nearly a year before, he had almost taken her by storm. But since

he had found that his love-making must become a long, arduous campaign he had lost much of his dash, much of his insistence, much of his confidence. Then he had thought only of his love for her. Now he planned speeches that he never made to her, and stratagems that he never used. He swore roundly that he would not see her for a fortnight. He would pique her curiosity. And then, somehow, he forgot about it and called three times a week as usual, and saw her on all the intermediate days. He told himself that she was a flirt and then dangled, temporarily content, at the end of her string. And now, after a year, she seemed as desirable and as far away from him as ever.

His new political ambitions had a similar history. He had opened the subject to Mr. Moriarty with perfect assurance that the little Irishman would share his enthusiasm. He had not for a moment dreamed that Moriarty would be blind to this opportunity of overcoming the usually small Republican majority. Billy knew his own popularity, and he threw himself into his preliminary personal canvass eagerly. At night he often lay for hours, picturing to himself the night of the caucus, the crowded room, the absurd dignity of the chairman, the good-humored shouts of the mass, and then his unanimous nomination and the burst of applause as he took the stage. And he saw himself, handsome, graceful, holding the audience in the spell of his oratory, and heard his own thrilling words, and applauded as he fell off to sleep. At other times it was the night of his election, and the entire town came to serenade him, and again he spoke, this time a simple, modest speech of gratitude and with a

deep sense of his high responsibilities; and the men shook hands with him afterwards and called him the next governor. But now these visions had become old and dim, and he lay awake thinking and doubting, for over them hung the awkward shadow of John Gilbert, his friend.

When he had first heard that Gilbert was a candidate he had impulsively disbelieved it, but the more he thought about it and brooded over it the more doubtful and suspicious he became. Similarly when Mr. Hardy told him of Gilbert's disloyalty at the shops, he shook his head vigorously and declared that it was incredible. He knew Sam Hardy's temper. He knew that Sam Hardy was unwell, that he was in just the condition to magnify a mole hill into a mountain. That very night he had dined at the Hardys', and "the old man," nervously complaining of dizziness, had left the table in the middle of dinner, much to Mrs. Hardy's openly expressed irritation. And yet, as the days and weeks followed, he moodily argued himself into Mr. Hardy's point of view. Perhaps, after all, as "the old man" had said, "Jack was ambitious enough to do anything or anybody."

During the last two weeks of August Hampstead toiled on, gasping and sweating in the grip of the "dog days," which hung invisible weights on hurrying feet, and made brains run slow and tempers fast. One stifling night, a week or ten days after Gilbert's flying trip to Pittsfield and Springfield, Billy McNish sat smoking on the veranda steps of the big house. At dinner an impulse had come to him to see Jack and "have it out," but unfortunately the combined restfulness of a good dinner and a good cigar made him delay, and delay made him hesitate. He

would be showing his hand, he argued, if Gilbert was really working against him. He recalled that they had not seen each other in nearly a month. Impulse told him that Gilbert was very busy and that his own attitude, the last time they had met, had not been particularly inviting. As he thought, however, he felt that Jack had purposely slighted him. It was scarcely up to him to make any overtures.

The moon already threw a broad pathway of light before him, when he rose dejectedly and walked around to Mr. Hardy's front door. No, Miss Hardy had gone out, the maid said, and would not be back until late in the evening. Of course she was out. It was just his luck. Billy stood for a moment hesitatingly at the gate and then, still undecided, he walked on up the hill. Perhaps something would turn up. Perhaps Jack would come out and they might meet naturally. When in doubt Billy had a way of leaving things to chance. As he came to the little house which the Gilberts occupied, he saw that the door was open, and he stopped short as he recognized the huge figure lounging, his hands in his pockets, against the door jamb. Two other men stood in the shadow, beyond the edge of the light thrown by the lamp within. Almost upon the moment that Billy stopped, he heard familiar explosive laughter; the big figure straightened, turned its back and went in, and the two men came down the path talking rapidly. Billy, not caring to meet them, passed the gate quickly, his face averted. Then he walked slowly as he heard the voice of Mr. Moriarty.

“’Tis a sure thing Brett’ll run agin, and runnin’ annywan but Jawn Gilbert against him ’ld be like trottin’

Flanagan's mule against Major Delmar wid a windshield."

"Y'ain't goin' to run anybody else," answered Colonel Mead, "so don't disturb the mule."

They turned down the street, and Billy started impetuously after them. He stopped by the gate. There was nothing that he could say to them. He looked down over the terraced roofs of the houses below him. The town lay resting from its day's work, glorified in the mellow radiance of the moon. A wave of self-pity swept over him. He was not to be even the candidate for mayor. What a failure he was, after all! He wondered what Clare Hardy would think. No woman could care for a failure, he told himself bitterly. Success was what counted, never mind what it cost. A new plan came to him. He would be chivalrous. He would withdraw without a word of complaint. He would show her the difference between an unselfish chap, who was willing to sacrifice for his friend, and the friend, who thought only of personal, selfish reward. But, as he walked down the street, his old ambition returned, and he declared to himself melodramatically that he would fight to the last ditch, if he had only one vote at the caucus, and that vote his own. He knew as he said it that he did not mean it. Poor Billy! He could not have told anyone what he really meant that night. He had never in his life sunk so deep into the mire of complete despair.

Gilbert had asked Mr. Moriarty and the Colonel to dinner that night. The shops were rounding themselves into shape. The new rooms were almost completed and a number of the new machines were already installed.

He had accomplished as much as he had expected in the time. The work was more than half done, and the remainder would come along more easily. The first great rush was over. Hardy & Son was ready to meet the competition of the Fall trade. They had new improvements on the lines of goods which the Westbury concern made, and they were able now to manufacture them more cheaply, he felt certain, than their rivals. He was giving more of his time, therefore, to the fight for the stock. The meeting and the crisis were only a fortnight away. Mr. Moriarty still held some Hardy stock, he understood,—stock that dated back to Moriarty's period of service as superintendent of the growing mills. And that was the reason that the little Irishman and the Colonel dined with the Gilberts that night.

It was not until the three men were sitting in the little library after dinner, with cigars and the Colonel's pipe alight, that Gilbert came to the point.

"Moriarty," he said bluntly, "we want the vote of your Hardy stock at the annual meeting. You don't like Sam Hardy and I can't blame you, but we want to vote your stock for him—for the good of the shops."

Mr. Moriarty nodded reflectively, and deflected his cigar from its acute angle, at which the lighted end had been threateningly close to his left eye.

"'Twas a dirrty trick he done." Then the thin, smooth-shaven lips wrinkled in a smile. "But 'tis the chip on his shoulder that makes me mad. 'Tis always there and I always want to knock it off."

"Oh, I'll admit that Hardy looks at life as a long bridge over a chasm. He thinks there's room for only one on

that bridge, and to get across he's got to knock everybody else off. But that isn't the point. We want to vote your stock for the good of your stock and of everybody's else stock."

Mr. Moriarty rubbed his chin thoughtfully during a long pause. Moriarty had been accused of many things but never, even by his bitterest opponents, of uttering an ill-considered word.

"There seems to be somethin' doin' wid Hardy stock," he remarked with an air of solemn conviction.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, Oi said Oi'd not talk about it and Oi'll not," Moriarty hesitated impressively, "but Oi'll tell ye confidentially, because y'are who y'are, that Oi sold my stock a week ago to His Honor the Mayor. 'Twas not much I got, but 'twas more than Oi expected."

"Sold it?" ejaculated the Colonel and Gilbert in unison.

"If that's what ye had me up here for," went on Mr. Moriarty with deliberate emphasis, "ye lose. 'Tis good money against expectations, and expectations don't buy potatoes or coal. But ye needn't worry about that. Ye needn't worry at all." Mr. Moriarty leaned forward and lowered his voice with the awe he felt for his own news. "For ye're goin' to be His Honor the Mayor yerself in October. And that," he added, with an almost defiant triumph, "is what Oi had mesilf up here for."

Gilbert laughed in spite of himself.

"Don't scare me to death, Moriarty. What's the joke?"

"'Tis no joke." The Irishman's tone was resentful.

"'Tain't possible," cried the Colonel, who in his excite-

ment had risen and stood facing Mr. Moriarty, "thet the folks o' this town actooly want a man with red blood in him an' muscles in his brains, fer mayor."

"They want *him* all right," answered Moriarty, jerking his thumb toward Gilbert, "but they don't know it and Oi do." He thumped his breast vigorously with his second finger.

"But kin ye round 'em up to nominate him?"

"Oi hov the caucus in here." The Irishman stuck his stubby forefinger in his vest pocket.

"What hev ye got in th'other pocket?" the Colonel asked without a smile. "Ef it's the election we'll consider the proposition. I alluz thought caucuses an' elections was almighty triflin' things, but I didn't expect to find 'em travelin' round in the pockets of a red-headed, pug-nosed Irishman like you, Moriarty."

Gilbert broke in before Moriarty could retort.

"You seem to have me nominated and elected between you," he drawled. "This whole thing's nonsense. First, because I haven't time; second, because Billy McNish is a better man for it than I am and Billy wants it. I don't know any more about politics than the Colonel does. And the Colonel's clean forgotten that he's usually a Republican and we're Democrats."

"Reckon I kin hold in my patriotic principles till after you're elected," muttered the Colonel.

With that, Mr. Moriarty began to talk. It was not easy, flowing, high-sounding talk. Nobody ever heard Moriarty make a speech. He said that he didn't know how, and that he'd never found need of it in his business. No, it was jerky short-arm talk, that gradually grew stag-

gering in its accumulation of terse arguments. He had past elections at his tongue's end. He had the results of a quiet, indefinite canvass he had made, written out for them to read. He had hypothetical figures for the vote of every ward, and proved circumstantially that they would become facts on election day. He had the rest of the ticket up for inspection down to the smallest councilman.

"Ye're young," he added, beating each point home with his fist on his knee. "That's what they want these days. Ye're honest. Iverywan knows that. Ye're a good union man—the fact'ry men loike that; and a good baseball player—and that don't hurt ye a bit." Gilbert laughed outright at this, but the Irishman shook his finger at him warningly. "That's all right. There's manny a man been ilited to higher office for less than pitchin' a good game o' ball. Nobody's got it in for ye. The oulder men that remimber the Doctor—God rest his soul—will vote for ye, Raypublicans and Dimmycrats. There now. 'Tis the duty av anny man to run if he's wanted. And ye're wanted."

Politics were primitively patriotic to Moriarty. He worked hard for the good of his ticket. He bossed his caucuses with an iron hand, partly because the people trusted him and partly because there was no one else willing to give up so much time to it. And Moriarty's Hibernian soul loved the power of it. That was his only reward. He seldom won anything except an extra councilman this year or an extra alderman next. The Republicans had controlled the town for years. He honestly believed that he could elect John Gilbert mayor.

But Gilbert did not argue with him, and Gilbert seemed to hang tightly to his first excuses: lack of time and the candidacy of Alderman McNish. Mr. Moriarty, therefore, shrewdly dropped the discussion and started for home. At the door he stopped for a last word:

"Think it over, Jack," he said. "Think it over, me boy. Oi won't ask ye for a decision to-night. 'Tis too sudden, but 'tis worth considerin'. The honor av it is somethin' and the opporchunity is somethin'. Oi think ye'll go far—farther perhaps than Oi think."

The Colonel interrupted him, laying his hand on Moriarty's shoulder.

"His hair may look like a prairie sunset," he said, winking at Gilbert, "an' his nose mayn't be much to get a hold of, but he ain't tongue-tied. Pardner," he went on, turning to the gaping little Irishman, "I thought I'd heard folks 'at could shoot off their mouth, but you're the only real, genuwine, fourteen-carat, honest an' no imitation, A1 word slinger I ever met."

Gilbert laughed heartily, and they said good-night.

For many minutes after they had gone he stood alone in the front hallway, leaning against the balustrade. He could be nominated for mayor, and Moriarty believed that he could be elected. Mayor of Hampstead! The whole thing seemed absurd. He, John Gilbert, who only six months before had been pushed into the Common Council to fill a vacancy. Moriarty had been working over this for weeks, perhaps months, and he had heard no word of it. He seemed to remember something that had been said one day at the shop. He had thought it a joke, of course. Moriarty was disappointed. Moriarty had called

it a duty. Perhaps it was a duty. Could he do it? Could he swing his work at Hardy & Son's and do the mayor's work at the same time? Perhaps. No, he was not clever enough to handle Council meetings or to make speeches. It was not his kind of work. But the campaign part of it appealed to him. He had some ideas about that campaign, ideas of which he had said nothing to anybody, chaotic, unformed ideas, but ideas that interested him greatly because they made him angry whenever he thought of them. He had had no time to work them out, but he meant to, and to finish, before election day. He shook his head wearily. Before election day! There was so much to do between now and election day.

Then there was Billy,—he went on with his thinking. Billy had been mightily unfair to him, but down underneath Billy was all right and a good friend. Billy wanted to be nominated. Gilbert went back to that Decoration Day meeting at Billy's office. "I believe I promised in a sort of way to help him," he said to himself as he prodded his memory. But Moriarty evidently thought Billy could not be elected.

Then he thought of Clare Hardy. He had not seen her since the night of the Fourth of July. He had tried only the once, when she had made it obvious to him that she did not care to see him. He had done his best to force her out of his mind. He had built what seemed to him an invulnerable armor against her out of his great task at the mills, out of the din of its busy rooms and the calls of his assistants, out of his fight, with the Colonel, for stock enough to hold the factories safe at the coming meeting. But still she came back to him, and the big,

toiling man was heartsick for a glimpse of her. He knew he must wait, wait until she understood his side, wait until she knew that he had been square and straight through it all, and then—he must wait after that forever. There again entered Billy McNish. Billy loved her and she, it seemed, loved him. Gilbert called to his mother that he was going for a walk. He picked up his hat and went out into the silent, radiant night.

At the gate he looked down over the scene which had attracted Billy only a few minutes before. He saw at the right the high, grimy smokestack of Hardy & Son standing forth defiantly in the weird moonlight. At the left were the lower, more modern and more compact chimneys of the Hubbard mills. They seemed to him like sentinels of the opposing forces which lay bivouacked for the night in the city below. He walked slowly down the street, past the old house, and the Hardys' and the Colonel's. People passed him and spoke to him, but he answered mechanically, scarcely heeding. Directly before him at the corner of a side street, an old elm tree threw its gaunt shadow across the path. A gnarled branch far above looked, in its shadow, like a roughly carved hand pointing up the short street. It caught his interest and he looked up. The street was familiar to him, chiefly because the third house at the left was the Methodist parsonage. Gilbert sometimes stopped there to play with the minister's small son,—an imaginative youngster who liked more attention than his father and mother were able to give him,—or to puzzle himself with the contrasts between Mrs. Brice's forced gayety and the preacher's forced solemnity. Impulsively he turned into the street now.

He would follow the shadowy signboard. Perhaps at least it would lead him away from himself.

The maid at the parsonage liked Gilbert, and, perhaps because she liked him and perhaps because she was very stupid, she merely told him that Master Harry was in the sitting-room, and then left him to his own devices. Gilbert walked to the sitting-room door, and opened it suddenly to surprise the boy. But he stopped in the doorway, still fumbling over the knob awkwardly, his face reddening fiercely. It was he, not the boy, who was surprised.

The gas was not lit, but the light from the great lamp on the table spread its yellow circle over a collection of blocks, grouped in squares and rectangles, and badly maimed tin soldiers and dolls and various odds and ends of a small boy's playthings. At the edge of this motley array sat young Harry, listening with a child's absorbed interest to Clare Hardy, who lay in utter abandon upon the floor beside him. Miss Hardy looked up as the door opened, and sat straight with a rapid movement that disarranged some of the carefully placed blocks.

"Oh, Auntie Clare, you knocked the walls down," cried the boy, rushing to the rescue and still too much engrossed to notice the interruption. The Brices had followed the fashion, and had made Master Harry the nephew of all their friends. Then, instinctively feeling the silence, he turned and saw Gilbert.

"Hello, Uncle Jack," he called gravely, as he continued to rearrange the blocks. "We're playin' fact'ry."

"Mrs. Brice had to go out to-night," Miss Hardy explained, "and she let me come down to look after the boy. Won't you come in?"

"If I may."

"Of course. Mr. Gilbert knows a great deal more about factories than I do, Harry. He can show us all about it."

"Do you, Uncle Jack?" asked the boy doubtfully.

Gilbert stepped carefully over the "fact'ry" they had built, and sat down upon the floor beside them.

"More than I sometimes wish I did," he said.

He turned and looked steadily at Miss Hardy. His face was still flushed with embarrassment. Then he stretched out his big hand toward her above the boy's head.

"I'm mightily glad to see you," he said frankly. "I've been wanting to for a long time."

There was an appeal in his voice and in his eyes that could scarcely be refused. Miss Hardy gave him her hand quickly and nodded.

"Tell Mr. Gilbert about the factory and the office, Harry."

"He isn't Mr. Gilbert. He's Uncle Jack," the boy remarked reprovingly. Then, with boyish pride, he explained the pile of blocks, his keen, interested little mind running so far ahead of his tongue that his speech slipped and stumbled in its haste to catch up. They were soon smiling confidentially behind his back at his half knowledge and his quaint phrases. Gilbert threw himself whole-heartedly into the child's play, while Miss Hardy leaned back against a chair, and watched him and listened critically to his patient answers to the boy's reiterated questions.

"An' is there a fire in it?" They had reached the foundry.

“A very big fire.”

“Hot enough to burn 'em?”

“Oh, yes.”

“Seven times seven?” The boy's religious training had taught him that this was the last extremity of heat.

“Pretty nearly,” laughed Gilbert. “But this ought to be so, and that this way.” He deftly changed the position of some of the blocks and of the tin soldiers that served as workmen. Harry Brice looked up inquiringly at Miss Hardy.

“Mr. Gilbert knows how to remodel other people's factories.” Miss Hardy was half sorry she had said it when she saw the sudden soberness of Gilbert's face. But she noticed that he went on with his changes.

“You know all about it,” he said quietly.

“I know one side of it. He's very angry.”

“He has misunderstood.”

“I thought so.”

“Really?” His homely face lit up with a gleam of frank joy as he turned to her.

“Well, I thought,” she said quickly, frightened at her own definiteness, “that you couldn't be as bad as——”

Harry had been staring up at them, uncomprehending and with growing restlessness.

“Why do the men get all black?” he broke in impatiently.

“From the machines.”

“Well, I shan't have any nasty machines in my fact'ry.”

“How will it all end?” asked Miss Hardy.

“Hard to tell. All right, I guess.” There was much more confidence in Gilbert's words than he really felt.

"He isn't quite himself." Miss Hardy spoke hurriedly, as if she felt guilty at talking of her father. "He's discouraged and he isn't well. He said to-night that Mr. Brett wants to see him to-morrow, and that he thought he'd sell out if he got a chance. I don't believe he really will," she added, startled by the fierce look of Gilbert's face.

"You mustn't let him," he said almost roughly. "Give up after all these years? Give up to a pack of sneak thieves? Give up with success just ahead of him? We're working for him. You must know that. We'd be working with him, if he'd let us. If he'll just hang on we'll re-elect him president, and, if he'll help us, we'll save the shop. He holds the balance of power for the meeting now."

Gilbert's eyes were black with sudden anger, and his whole figure was tense with emotion. He explained rapidly the situation in regard to the stock, making it simple by homely illustrations.

"I guess you've forgotten me," remarked the boy plaintively.

"I guess we have," laughed Gilbert with sudden relaxation. "What do you want to know now?"

The boy looked from one to the other with a new interest.

"That's just the way Uncle Charles talks to Aunt Mary," he said, reasoning rapidly, "when he gets mad at her. Now if you're Uncle Jack and she's Auntie Clare, why don't you live in a big house by yourselves the way they do?"

There was a terrifying pause for a long fraction of a

minute. Then Miss Hardy jumped up, with her back turned toward Gilbert.

"It's half-past nine. What would your mother say, Harry? She'd never let me come again when she went away, and we'd never play factory again."

Gilbert laughed in spite of himself as she stopped for breath.

"And before I go, young man," he said, "I'll 'up in the air' you three times—for punishment." He almost said "for reward."

Before the boy could object he was seized and hurled vigorously toward the ceiling, to descend in Jack's strong arms. Three, four, five times the operation was repeated, while Miss Hardy's cheeks cooled as she bent to pick up the toys. But there must be an ending of even "up in the airs," and, with young Harry clasping his leg and begging for more, Gilbert turned to say good-night to Miss Hardy. Their eyes met and there was real comradeship in the glance.

"I'm depending on you," he said.

"I'll do my best."

"Then you believe in me?"

"I—I think I do. I think I have all the time."

"That's better than all the rest."

She was very quiet as she undressed the boy and heard his prayers and tucked him in, so quiet that he had an opportunity to remember the unanswered question. As he lay in bed, decidedly awake, he asked it again.

"Why?" he reiterated.

Miss Hardy turned out the lights.

“You’re a funny boy,” she said. Then she leaned over him and, putting her arms about him, she half lifted him up and kissed him. “You’re a funny boy,” she said again.

“Now,” he remarked with masculine severity, “you’ve got to tuck me in again.”

CHAPTER XII

LATER IN THE EVENING

MR. HARDY passed the street that led to the parsonage only a few moments after Gilbert turned into it that night. If Jack had continued his way toward Main Street they probably would have met. The old man trudged up the hill, grunting gruffly to those who spoke to him, staring at the sidewalk, which sometimes seemed to rise up in billows beneath his feet. He passed unheeding through the beauty of the night, stiffening his will against a constant feeling of dizziness, conscious only of a numb, wracking ache at the back of his head and of a packet of papers in his coat pocket, which he covered carefully with his rigid right arm. He breathed a sigh of relief as he reached the house and snapped his key in the lock. He was glad to be at home again. Mrs. Hardy, upstairs in her room, heard his step on the porch and, getting up, she quietly locked her door and switched off the electricity. Then she sat nervously listening to the stamp of his feet as he passed through the hall, and, when the door of his room slammed shut with a noise that echoed through the house, she shuddered and, turning on the light, continued with her book.

In his room Mr. Hardy took the papers from his pocket and carefully laid them on the table. Then, although the white lace curtains bellied in from the breeze at an open window, he took off his coat. He felt suffocated and

oppressed. Sitting down at the table, he separated the precious papers carefully into two piles. He knew the contents of every one of them, but he unfolded each one in turn and read it from beginning to end. As he replaced each paper he noted down some figures, using, after his usual custom, half of a canceled envelope. When he was done with them he added the figures carefully twice. Then he leaned back and stared vacantly at the window. He had known the result approximately before he took the papers from the safe, but it was hard for Sam Hardy to convince himself of defeat. That was what these thin piles seemed to mean to him now, defeat; utter, hopeless defeat. In one pile were his own stock certificates, which he handled carefully, almost tenderly, as if he thought they might crumble at his touch. In the other pile were proxies and letters in reply to his requests, sent out frantically a week or ten days after the snap directors' meeting. His delay in sending them—which proved that Gilbert had been right in his judgment of "the old man"—had been one reason for the thinness of the pile, but a greater reason lay in Sam Hardy's unpopularity. He had made few friends among his stockholders. Few of those who knew him could tolerate his up-and-down domineering way. Decreasing dividends as well had caused stockholders to lose faith in him. "Hardy is a has-been," many of them said. They even forgot that he was still a good salesman. But his old power, his old fighting grit, was not dead. As he sat, leaning back, his set face was still uncompromising and the sturdy figure did not droop.

"It's the last ditch," he muttered, "the last ditch."

The sound of his own voice seemed to startle him. "I'm all in," he went on, "all in. Nothing but a miracle can save me now. They've got me between 'em. If I fight one, the other wins. People I meet seem to know it. 'That's Sam Hardy,' they seem to say. 'Big man once, but down and out.'"

He rose and, going over to the tall pier-glass, he eyed himself closely. He gained confidence and wheeled defiantly, as if to face an invisible visitor with whom he had been talking.

"No," he growled. "I won't give it up. They're my shops, I tell you. They're part of me, bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. They're mine, every stick and stone of 'em."

He cursed roundly and tramped up and down the room, attempting to force his exhausted mind upon the problem which he had tried a hundred times to solve in the last few days. He had asked no one for advice about it. Indeed he had mentioned it only to Billy McNish, his lawyer, the director from Tareville and a few local stockholders. He had always directed his fights alone, and now he stood, half crazed with the worry and the humiliation of it, facing this utter ruin alone.

He stopped at the table and lit a cigar. Then he began to describe the situation to himself. His mind blurred badly and he talked on. The spoken words seemed to straighten out the tangle of too many thoughts.

"If Jack Gilbert gets control, he'll put me out. That's what he's been working for from the start. And I made him; made him from a green hand to superintendent. Now he thinks he knows more about the shops than I do,

and I made them as well as him. He's changing 'em now so I hardly know 'em, and I can't stop him. He went over me—over me, Sam Hardy, who ran the place before he was born. No man ever did it before. Guess I'm getting old. The men ain't afraid of me as they were. They snickered, some of 'em, when I slipped in the yard yesterday."

He beat his fist with sudden anger upon the table.

"There'll be a way out of it yet," he said. "I'll make 'em bow down and say their prayers to the machines yet."

He was silent for a minute or two, the former vacant stare in his eyes. Then he sat down and leaned forward, his chin on his hands, his elbows on the table.

"Brett wants to talk, does he? Probably wants to smooth me down and find out something. Brett's a sneak, but he's got Hubbard back of him. Perhaps—perhaps he's ready to force me out now. No, the meeting's only a little more'n a week away. He'll wait. But if he'd buy me out—put up the cash,—then I could get away and I'd have something to show for it. Nobody could laugh at me then." For a moment he sat dejectedly. Then he shook himself and stretched out his hands to grip the two ends of the table before him.

"What 're you thinking of?" he whispered. "You never was a quitter, Sam Hardy, and you ain't one now. There'll be a way out yet. And the shops, I'd burn 'em before I'd let that crowd get 'em."

A thousand invisible wires seemed to be pulling him down, and he thought he could hear the steady beat of his aching head. He picked the half-smoked cigar from his mouth and flung it through the open window.

"It doesn't taste good," he explained to himself. "Nothing tastes good or smells good or feels good. Wish I knew how much stock Gilbert's got, and Brett. Wish I'd sent out for proxies sooner. Might 've known they'd get ahead of me. Wish I knew what they'll do when they get control. Perhaps Gilbert's hand in glove with Brett all the time. No," he muttered, "no, there'll be a way out yet."

He sat in this position for some minutes, his tired brain refusing to work consecutively. It was probably his weariness, as well as his isolation and his friendlessness and his obstinate self-will, that kept him from understanding the real situation. If he could have known, as he sat there, that Mr. Hubbard's first move to own Hardy & Son had been made a year before, when he maneuvered to get Mr. Brett and Mr. Merrivale upon the Hardy board of directors; that he had followed this by picking up gradually any stock that he could buy at a sufficiently low price; that he had tried to get rid of Mr. Hardy over the matter of the notes by a snap directors' meeting, so that he could depress at will the price of stock, and that Gilbert and Colonel Mead alone had blocked the success of the plan; that he had been doing his best to gain control of the annual meeting with exactly the same purpose, and that again Gilbert was blocking his way; that now, with the unexpected success of Gilbert's reorganization of Hardy methods of production, Mr. Hubbard was realizing that he must buy control of the works now or never, except at an increasing cost, and was scheming and working to that end;—if Sam Hardy could have known all that and could have believed it he could have slept well that night,

and he could have faced the morrow with confidence. But the hard-bound rules of his life and character would not allow him to know or to believe anything of the kind. The disturbing human factor, the human weakness, entered, as it often does, to switch many a right cause off upon a siding, while a wrong cause thunders past it and ahead of it on the main line to success.

"Nobody cares," he muttered, his lips twitching nervously. "Most of 'em will be glad to see me go down. Moriarty, he'll be glad, and Simpson, and the hands. Nobody'll care. And what'll I do? Everything I've got is in the shop. I'll be a beggar, a nobody, a thing to be laughed at and joked about." He pressed his head with his hands as if to steady his thoughts. "No," he whimpered, trying to shut his teeth, "no, there'll be a way out yet, Sam Hardy. There'll be a way out yet."

He was still sitting there when Clare Hardy knocked at the door, and came in hesitatingly at his gruff summons.

"I saw the light as I came up the street," she said. "I thought I'd look in on you, and find out how you are feeling."

He had risen laboriously as she entered and stood facing her. Clare Hardy saw the weary look in his eyes and the unaccustomed whiteness of his flabby cheeks. A sudden wave of pity went over her and, before he could stop her, she went to him and put her arms about his neck and kissed him. To her surprise he caught her to him and held her close. And so they stood for a full minute. For the first time in his long life of devotion to business, Sam Hardy confessed that he needed someone's affection and

support; and in that moment his feeling of hopeless loneliness left him.

"You're a good girl," he said, patting her back awkwardly in embarrassment. There was a suggestion of tears in his eyes and in hers. She squared him off with her hands on his shoulders, and peered at him so closely that he grew uncomfortable under her scrutiny.

"You're worried and tired," she said. "You ought to go away and rest. You haven't been away all summer."

Mr. Hardy shook his head and tried to smile.

"Not very tired," he replied hurriedly. "Not very tired. I can't quit now. In a week or two p'raps I'll quit." He paused for a few seconds. "What 'd you do," he went on, "if I should lose all I've got? What 'd you do and what d'ye think your mother 'd-do?"

"Do?" cried the girl. "Do? Why, I've got Hardy blood in me."

The old man stiffened proudly.

"Do?" Miss Hardy continued. "We'd form a partnership and begin all over again. I almost wish you would lose it, every penny of it. Perhaps, then, I'd amount to something and not mope around the house and read silly books. But you aren't going to lose it. Now sit down and tell me all about it."

She pointed imperiously to the chair he had vacated, and seated herself at the other side of the table. Brightened momentarily by her infectious confidence he sat down as she bade him. As he looked at the papers, however, still evenly piled with business-like neatness, the gloom returned and he shook his head again.

"No," he said wearily, "you wouldn't understand."

"You're not a bit flattering." The girl toyed flippantly with a paper cutter. "You think I don't understand anything about business. Now listen. You said to-night that that unpleasant Mr. Brett wanted to see you. I've been thinking about that. How much stock of your own and of other people's have you?"

He looked dully at the added figures on the paper.

"Only about twenty-four per cent. of the total," he said with slow precision.

"Well," Miss Hardy spoke rapidly, as if she feared that she would forget what she had prepared to say. "I look at it in this way. Mr. Brett and the rest of them have enough to win with yours. They probably wouldn't come to you unless they had. And they haven't enough to win without you, or they certainly wouldn't come to you. Is that clear?"

"Yes," nodded Mr. Hardy, "that's clear unless—well, go on."

"Well, if you've got twenty-four per cent.—that's what you said, isn't it? Yes, well, if you've got twenty-four per cent. and they've got enough to win with you but not enough to win without you, then Mr. Gilbert and Colonel Mead can't have enough to win without you either. And you hold the balance of power."

The girl had remembered it and she smiled triumphantly to herself. Mr. Hardy, puzzled over the rapid statement of what sounded like some algebraic problem, coughed to hide his perplexity. He repeated the words to himself, and gradually light dawned upon him. He jumped to his feet and began pacing to and fro excitedly.

"You may be right," he said, and his voice trembled

as he spoke. "That accounts p'raps for Mr. McNish coming to me for Gilbert, too. They're in the same fix. They're each holding the other one from getting at me. Gilbert may have enough by now, though——"

"He hasn't," cried Miss Hardy. "That is, I'm sure he hasn't."

She herself was trembling, as she watched suspicion and doubt and belief struggle for control of his mind.

"I believe you're right," said Mr. Hardy slowly. "I've said there'd be a way out. I'll boss that meeting yet"—his eyes gleamed at the thought—"unless they should join up."

Miss Hardy leaned forward. Her woman's sense had made her expect this difficulty. Her knowledge of tactics, if not of actual business, was keen enough.

"Don't you think that Mr. Brett or Mr. Hubbard or whoever was doing it would have tried that first?" she asked. "Wouldn't they leave you as a last resort?"

"You've got a good head." Sam Hardy looked down at his daughter admiringly. "Guess I'd better let you do my thinking for me after this: I'm played out. But"—his brow creased again—"I don't understand Jack Gilbert's game."

"Perhaps," remarked Miss Hardy tentatively, as if the idea had just occurred to her, "perhaps he's working for you all the time."

Sam Hardy frowned and grunted with disgust.

"That's the first fool thing you've said," he growled. "That's the woman of it. I tell you, men don't do things for other men. They work for Number One. He went over me nearly two months ago, for Number One. And

he's playing some game now, for Number One. I made him and he's turned on me. I'll do him if I can and he'll do me if he can. So get that out of your head quick."

Miss Hardy did not dare press the point. Instead she changed the subject.

"I'd suggest," she said, as if the matter of John Gilbert's intentions had not been mentioned, "that you have Billy McNish see Mr. Brett for you to-morrow, that you let me take care of your papers and not leave them in your safe at the shop where somebody might get them, and that you go away for a week's rest early in the morning."

She arose while she was talking and went across to him, and she put one hand on his shoulder caressingly as she stood by his side. He looked at her doubtfully, but there was an alertness in his whole attitude that had not been there a half hour before.

"I can't go away," he said, and there was something very much like apology in his tone. "I've got to stay and see it through. Your idea about McNish is all right. I'd rather do it myself, but I guess your way's better. I'll have him find out how things stand, too. Of course, you take the papers along. Put 'em in that strong box there and keep 'em safe. I'm glad to get rid of 'em."

Clare Hardy followed his pointing finger and brought the dusty box from the shelf of the open closet. She had deposited the papers within and locked it, and was putting it under her arm, when she felt her father's hands on her shoulders. Before she knew it he had kissed her. He turned away almost shamefacedly.

"You *have* got Hardy blood in you," he said in a muffled voice. "And you've got a good head, too."

"I got it from you," she retorted as she reached the door.

"Perhaps that's where mine's gone to," he answered with an attempt to be jocular, as she bade him good-night.

Clare Hardy sped along the hallway and up into her tower room, never stopping until the box was deposited carefully underneath her bed, and the door closed and locked.

"I've done it," she repeated breathlessly. It seemed days since she had left the parsonage, and years since Mrs. Brice had left her in charge of the boy. She glowed with achievement, and she was certain that she was right. Clare Hardy had never distrusted Gilbert, even when her father in his first rage had exploded with his whole biased story, that noon after the Fourth of July party. Honesty, she had told herself in her moments of character study, was the only thing that redeemed his homely face and his slouching, awkward figure and his manners, which were unconventional, to say the least. He was honest and strong. She stood ready, she had told herself, to doubt him on any other score. She had refused to see him, because her father had declared that Gilbert "should never set his foot in the house again." And perhaps because of the prohibition she had wished, far more than ever before, to see him and to talk with him and to make certain of her reading of him.

The two months had brought to her new sensations and new responsibilities. Her father's evident illness, and her mother's irritability, which increased in ratio with Mr. Hardy's worry; the possibility, at which her

father had hinted now and then in his moments of depression, that they might find themselves suddenly poor; all these things had made the girl feel that she must not only brighten Mr. Hardy and soothe her mother, but that she must accomplish something herself as well. For some weeks she had been giving much of her time to the direction of the housework, checking servants' extravagances, planning simpler meals, managing the cleaning, and generally putting an end to the former expensive, slipshod régime. She had made many mistakes but, on the whole, she had found more enjoyment in it than in her old irresponsible life. She had needed something to do, she said to herself. If this was not the height of her ambition, at least it was something done; a beginning, perhaps, for something else that would be more to her liking. And now, she felt, she had helped her father at a crisis.

She wondered suddenly why she trusted John Gilbert so completely. There was something else about him, she knew to-night. He had a way of making other people, herself included, do what he wished them to do, and she was not certain that she liked it as applied to herself. As she turned out her light she heard the echo of heavy footsteps on the sidewalk of the silent street. Peering out of the window, she saw the unmistakable giant figure of the man she was thinking about, under the electric light at the corner. Impulsively she wished to throw up the sash and to call to him that everything was all right. Instead she stood still, the night breeze blowing in upon her, until he had disappeared up the street in the darkness. Then, with a little sigh, she went to bed.

The Colonel had parted with Mr. Moriarty at his own gate. They had planned between them John Gilbert's entire campaign for mayor, on the way down the street.

"Oi'd loike to have him goin' so fast from the start that he kud walk up the stretch," Moriarty remarked just before they said good-night, "but 'twill be close anny way ye luk at it. They've got the money, but he's a gentleman as well as a workingman, and he ought to win." Mr. Moriarty retained, unconsciously, something of the old country's class distinctions.

"Jack's a real man, every inch of him," replied the Colonel, "and," he added whimsically, "thar's a good many inches."

When he had lighted his lamp the Colonel tried to read the evening paper. All the headlines, however, seemed to spell alike to him that night. "John Gilbert Elected Mayor." The mere thought of it thrilled his loyal old soul. During his varied life in the West as soldier, pony-express rider and miner, he had been for a year the sheriff of a small, but decidedly energetic, mining town, and he had as great a respect for office as he professed to have lack of respect for most officials. He pondered over Mr. Moriarty's plans, and gradually he fitted himself into each one until he had laid out more work for himself than he could have done in six months. When at last he looked at the clock he found that it was long past his usual bedtime. He was beginning his preparations for closing up and going to bed, when Gilbert surprised him at the door.

"You look like the Statue of Liberty, Colonel," Gilbert remarked as the veteran appeared with lamp upraised. "I just dropped in to tell you about this political business.

I'm not going to run. That's settled. I wanted to get it off my mind."

"Why, you're all elected, boy. Got it all worked out in my mind," declared the Colonel.

"Can't help it, Colonel. Sorry, but I'm out of it. Tell Moriarty so if you see him."

Colonel Mead groaned. The headlines were fading away, and all his evening's dreams and plans were crumbling.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Well, I'm going to vote for Billy McNish."

The Colonel made a wry face as if he had taken bitter medicine.

"Billy McNish," he repeated sarcastically, "thet dresses like one o' these advert-ise-ments of Noo York tailors. Billy McNish! Did I ever tell ye about the note he wrote me—note, not a letter, d'ye hear? Billy, he couldn't write a hull letter without changin' his mind 'fore he finished it. It wuz about that little proceedin' Fourth o' July night. It wuz so slushy thet it's a wonder it didn't soak through the envelope, an' it wuz addressed to Ralph Mead, Esquire—Esquire, do ye savvey?"

"Oh, that's all part of Billy's artistic temperament," laughed Gilbert.

"Artistic temp'rament?" sneered the Colonel. "Lord, I hev *that* ev'ry mornin' in bed. When a woman hes a boy, thet's so lazy an' shiftless an' gen'rally good fer nothin' thet thar ain't ord'nary words fit to describe it, she alluz says he's got 'artistic temp'rament.'"

"Billy's all right, Colonel."

"Yes, Billy's all right—fer decorative perposes. I tell

ye, Jack, feather-bed livin' makes feather-bed men. Ye can't get around it."

"I've got another bit of news for you." Gilbert rescued Billy's character from the Colonel's relentless dissection by changing the subject. "'The old man's' thinking seriously of going over to the other side. I heard it straight to-night."

Colonel Mead drew in his breath in a long whistle.

"That means hitchin' up and puttin' for shelter," he remarked.

"No, I think I've stopped him. Never mind how."

"Have, eh?" mused the Colonel. "Well, you be keerful. Ridin' somebody else's hoss too far hez got many a man strung up fer stealin' of it. Didn't think it o' Hardy, though. Thought he had too much sand."

"They wouldn't be after him unless they were a bit desperate. There's no love lost, you know," said Gilbert.

"That man Hubbard!" The Colonel forgot the lamp in his emphatic conviction, and the light was blown out by the unexpected gesture. The Colonel soberly examined it before he went on. "That man Hubbard," he began again, "is the kind of man thet 'd make friends with his dead mother-in-law, ef he thought he could jump a claim in hell by a-doin' of it. But I ain't thinkin' o' him nor o' Sam Hardy. I'm thinkin' of you. Thar's two games I ain't got any use for—give-away in checkers an' that fool game o' hearts. They're too benevolent. They make ye think o' some texts in the Bible. 'He that loses most wins,' an' 'Make yerself poor an' ye shall be rich,' an' such like. Seems like, when ye read 'em, thet it's only a step from paradox to paradise. An' it's my observation

thet a man thet plays good give-away never plays good checkers. I want you to play checkers and run fer mayor."

"I won't give away anything that belongs to me," Gilbert broke in to stop the Colonel's flow of words. "I haven't got time to be mayor, and I haven't the brains to be mayor, and I've promised Billy McNish I'd work for him."

"Well," sighed the Colonel, "ef ye promised I suppose that's the end of it."

"Say, Colonel, how about Tubb?" asked Gilbert, stopping half way down the walk after they had said good-night.

"Oh, he's still Tubb, Lord help him! Still got his straw up to see which way the wind blows, and still got his ear to the ground. Ez far ez I kin make out, wind's kinder variable, and he ain't heard nothin' loud an' clear."

"He's up to you, Colonel." The gate slammed and Gilbert swung off down the street. Colonel Mead turned into the house once more, but he was not thinking of Mr. Tubb.

"Thar's one satisfaction," he remarked to himself with a grin, "I ain't promised nobody."

CHAPTER XIII

MISS HARDY GOES CALLING

WHEN Clare Hardy awoke the next morning at the servant's sharp rap at her door, she curled up sleepily for a moment, the thought that the maid was in a bad humor alone crossing her drowsiness. She could always read vindictiveness or buoyant spirits or respectable timidity in these morning knocks. Then she noticed, with some interest, that the breeze that sifted through the curtains was cool and that a long ray of sunshine lay along the edge of the bed. She leaned forward and thrust her bare, slender fore-arm into the sun's mild warmth, and watched the yellow radiance flicker there as the wind-blown curtains played in and out of the light's pathway. Then suddenly she uttered a low cry and, darting forth from the covers, she leaned and drew from beneath the bed's edge the rectangular, black strong-box. She opened it nervously, and, finding its contents untouched, she locked it again with a quick little gasp of relief. Then she took it into her arms and held it close and sat thinking. All the brightness of the morning seemed to concentrate in her eyes and to be reflected in the smile about her mouth. What a fresh, fine world it was, to be sure, and how good it was to be living in it! When she arose and moved about the

room as she dressed, her step seemed to have lost its old lightness. It was alert and confident. She was no longer that Clare Hardy who had lived indolently, aimlessly, constantly dissatisfied, the threads of her character lying loose, unwoven. Something or somebody had caught up the straying strands and was weaving them strongly together. She threw aside the curtains and looked out at the bright new world. Then, smiling, she went downstairs.

It was a silent breakfast, with Mrs. Hardy's chair vacant as usual and "the old man" busy with the morning *Register* as he gulped his coffee rapidly. Sam Hardy had come to look upon meals, and upon breakfast in particular, as necessary evils to be finished as quickly as possible. They delayed business. He devoured his food between news paragraphs, and then, shoving back his chair with a business-like scraping, he hurried out into the hall. Miss Hardy created an innovation by rising and following him.

"I hope you have a good day, partner," she said. "Is there anything I can do?"

For answer he turned back from the door and, putting his arms about her awkwardly, he kissed her.

"Guess not, thank ye," he said shortly, to hide his embarrassment at the unusual proceeding. "Take good care of mother." Then he turned and hurried out, for it had occurred to them both that this was the old formula he had used when she was much younger, words which he had not spoken in years.

"Why don't you go out for a walk, the day's so fine?" Clare asked her mother later, as Mrs. Hardy, in a flowing

morning gown, sat eating her breakfast daintily in her rooms upstairs.

"The sun is too bright, my dear," she said, looking toward her window and shaking her head. "There is nothing more hideous than freckles for a woman of my age, and I always freckle terribly. Did your father say anything about our going away somewhere this Fall?"

Miss Hardy said that he had not.

"I suppose not," went on Mrs. Hardy with a sigh of irritation. "But we really must do it. People are talking, I know, because we have been in town all summer. Someone said to me the other day that it was a blessing, for those who haven't the money to go away, that the summer on the whole had not been severe. We must go to some unusual place next month.

Clare Hardy judiciously picked up the tray of dishes.

"Let Mary take them, child," commanded Mrs. Hardy.

"Mary is busy. I'll take them," the girl said decisively. "And I think we oughtn't to bother father about going away just now. He's too worried about his business."

Mrs. Hardy looked up in surprise.

"He is always worried about his business," she said quickly

"But this is different," Miss Hardy asserted from the doorway. "He has told me all about it. We ought to help him."

Mrs. Hardy sat still in her chair for a long time. Down underneath the outer artificial shell which she had been taught to wear from childhood, Mrs. Hardy was a good woman with a kind heart. He, her husband, had told

Clare, her daughter, all about his business. He had not told her. She remembered that at first, years ago, he had tried to tell her. She had made him understand then that she did not care to know about it all, that she had her duties just as he had his, and that the less each troubled the other with his or her difficulties the easier it would be for both of them. That feeling had been the result of her training. Now, after nearly thirty years, she suddenly wondered if she had not been wrong; if, after all, she did not wish to hear of his work and his plans and his worries. A feeling almost of jealousy of her own daughter flashed through her heart, and showed her, quivering there, her old-time love for him, a love she had always felt although she had hidden any expression of it. She had believed that weakness of this sort, excusable enough in the young, should be covered up by those who realize the serious conventions of life. Could it be, she asked herself, that the misunderstanding, that made a gulf between them, was in part her fault? She tried to read and she could not. "We ought to help him," she repeated, and it seemed to her that Clare, her daughter, was sitting in judgment upon her. Could it be possible that the factory, which had yielded them money uncomplainingly for so long a time, was in any real danger? A half hour later, more shaken than she would have cared to admit, she braved the sun to walk down to the center of town. She could not stay still in that house another moment, she said to herself. It may be added, however, that she wore a heavy black veil.

When Clare Hardy had given the machinery of the day's housework sufficient impetus so that it could not run

down until nightfall, she turned toward the high terraced garden next door. She had been going there often all summer, assured of her welcome by Mr. McNish whenever she saw him. The break in the hedge had never been filled, although the green from each side made the passway narrow, and through it she went, hatless, the sleeves of her shirtwaist rolled up to the elbow and her short skirt swinging free from the twigs and grasses of the path. Slowly she walked past the gardens of the terraces, and on to the little summer-house that still stood in the clump of woods behind them. Here she curled herself up on the broad seat and, half turning, rested her arms on the railing and her face upon her arms. And so she sat for some time. A squirrel ran up the sod directly before her and sat back upon his haunches sociably. Birds perched nearby on the railing and looked at her inquisitively, their heads tilted to one side. But she paid no attention to them. At last Mr. McNish's kindly voice recalled her to the present. She had been living in the past and in futures of her own planning.

"May I come in?" he asked, as he reached the steps.

"May I stay?" she asked in reply, using his inflection.

Mr. McNish smiled and bowed in his courtly way, and sat down opposite her.

"You like the place, eh?" he said.

"Yes," she said simply, turning toward him. Mr. McNish was a man to invite simplicity. "It's like a colony of very old friends. The flowers all nod to me in the gardens, and this spot seems to me like a protecting pair of arms, always open to me. It's strange, isn't it, what a shelter one's memories make for one?"

"Memories?" He was obviously amused. "Memories for a child like you? You ought to be thinking about prophecies. Leave the memories for old fossils like me."

"Do you know," Miss Hardy went on confidentially, "I think I like it best out here when it's raining. The trees drip all about one and the roof hums with the beat of the drops, and all the time one sits here dry and comfortable. It's being out in the rain without getting wet, don't you see?"

Mr. McNish nodded gravely.

"Same sensation you have in a bomb-proof with the shells bursting all 'round," he said.

"Billy doesn't come out here very often, does he?" asked the girl, after a long pause. The utter quiet and contentment of the place made the talking desultory.

"No," said Mr. McNish, "he doesn't. Young blood, you know; a thousand things to do at once; a thousand ambitions to be satisfied. By and by he'll find out that there's more music in a robin's chirp than there is in the shouts of a mob. Sometime a cluster of flowers or a tree in blossom will be prettier to him than his name in print. Sometime he may learn a lot of things like that. I hope he'll have the luck not to find 'em out too late."

"You believe in luck then?" queried Miss Hardy.

"With a boy like Billy," nodded Mr. McNish soberly. "What most people call luck is only a matter of knowing what you want and getting it. But Billy's different."

"Yes," assented Miss Hardy, "Billy is different from almost anybody I've ever met."

"Billy isn't sure of what he wants and he don't know

how to get it," Mr. McNish went on. "He goes out and looks for four-leaf clovers. You know what I mean. A man like that may not find one until he's pretty old, and then it's likely to be withered. I don't want Billy to be like that."

Mr. McNish drummed uneasily upon the floor of the summer-house with his cane, and Miss Hardy sat silent, not knowing what to say.

"Strange I should talk to you about him," he said. Then he added with a twinkle in his eye, "And yet I don't know that it's so strange either."

"It's very interesting—and—nice of you," Miss Hardy answered non-committally, a bright flush creeping into her cheeks. Billy's father looked across at her and changed the subject hurriedly.

"Speaking of the garden and this place," he said, "I always feel like a visitor myself, as if I didn't really belong here. Every time I come out here I feel as if I ought to go and ask Mrs. Gilbert, or be a trespasser."

"I hardly know what she's like now." Miss Hardy looked dreamily past him. "She used to be very kind to me, long ago."

"She's kind to everybody," declared Mr. McNish. "She's a wonderful woman. I can't tell you about her. You'd have to know her to understand."

"I'm going to," said Miss Hardy deliberately. "What do you think of John Gilbert?" she added after a pause.

Mr. McNish looked at her questioningly for a moment. "You've probably heard things about him," he said.

Miss Hardy assented, and waited with a well-feigned air of indifference.

“Well.” The elder McNish could be sententious on occasion. “I don’t think anything about him. I know. I’ve known that boy ever since he was in kilts, and his heart’s as straight and as big as his body. He’s not very handsome and he’s not over-quick, but he’s got a backbone that ’d make most others seem like water reeds to an oak tree. He’s as stubborn as a regiment of army mules; he’s as gritty as General Grant ever was; and he’s as kind as his mother. There’s just one word that describes him. He’s inevitable. That’s it—inevitable. You mark my words.”

Having delivered himself, Mr. McNish snapped the lid of his watch vigorously and added that he must go down to the store. An hour in the morning and two in the afternoon satisfied him now for his day’s work. He had worked eighteen hours a day often enough in the past, he declared, to keep his average good for the rest of his life.

“This is your back yard,” he said with his usual courtesy. “Come often.”

“I’ll ask Mrs. Gilbert if I may,” she laughed.

“Do,” he said, “do. I wish you would.”

Long after the fine old gentleman had gone Clare sat repeating his words over and over to herself. “Inevitable,” she repeated, “inevitable.” There was something almost menacing about the word.

After a quiet luncheon, to which Mr. Hardy did not return, Clare dressed to go out. She wore a simple, blue, tailor-made suit, but anyone who had seen her stand long moments before the glass would have known that she was unusually anxious to look well that afternoon. As she was crossing the threshold she remembered suddenly

that the meeting with Mr. Brett, which they had talked of the night before, came at four o'clock. She must make the papers safe beyond any chance of her father's changing his mind. Returning, she took them from the strong-box, and, putting it in plain sight on the closet shelf, she placed the papers with feminine caution in a wicker case, under a layer of handkerchiefs. Then, laughing to herself at her stratagem, she hurried out.

Mrs. Gilbert was upstairs in her little sewing-room when the bell rang.

"And who might that be?" she said to herself, as she tore off her apron and went slowly down the front stairway, smoothing away unruly wrinkles from her dress. She started when she saw the vision in blue, and threw her shoulders back primly.

"I came to see you, Mrs. Gilbert," said Clare Hardy, stretching forth her ungloved hand, "if you're not too busy and if I'm not in the way."

Mrs. Gilbert relaxed and caught the hand with her own.

"Come in," she said heartily. "Come right in."

She started to lead the way into the tiny parlor that faced the street, but Miss Hardy hesitated.

"You came from upstairs, Mrs. Gilbert. You were doing something. Let me go up with you and talk while you work, or—let me help you."

"All right," Mrs. Gilbert said readily enough. Then, like any young girl, she gathered her skirts together that she might run up the stairs. "I was just doing a bit of sewing, and it's as gay to have company in one room as another."

When they were comfortably seated in the bare room

above, Mrs. Gilbert smiled at Miss Hardy over a needle she was threading.

"I used to say, Miss Hardy," she said, "that no woman would ever see anything here but the parlor and the dining-room. They have some of the old things, and I wasn't so ashamed of them. I think you are the first to get up the stairs. It was false pride, I know, and I was a very prideful woman. I've laughed about it many times. But somehow you can't laugh away your weaknesses and you wouldn't if you could, I think. They're the marks that make you feel at home with yourself."

"But sometimes they aren't part of you, at all," said Clare quickly. "They're just outside conventions. I came here to make a confession, and you've made one first to make it easier for me. I ought to have come here a hundred times. I wanted to come, too, and I never have, just because others didn't. It's as if I'd rented my existence from other people, and lived according to their rules. I'm more ashamed than I can say and I'm sorry to have lost you all this time. I hope you'll forgive me."

No one could have helped forgiving the girl with that frank appeal in her eyes and with the utter humility of her words. Least of all could Mrs. Gilbert, who leaned forward and patted Miss Hardy's hand affectionately.

"You spoke it very nicely, dearie," she said, with a motherly tenderness that suddenly filled a place in the girl's heart which she had not realized was empty. "I know how it's been. I'd likely have done the same in your place. I've never really laid it against you, although I'll own I've missed you."

"Sometimes it seems to me," Miss Hardy said impul-

sively, "that we're all a lot of frauds. I was thinking to-day that if we should be poor, my friends would probably turn their backs on me—all my own sort of people, I mean."

"The friends your money buys, your lack of it sells," answered Mrs. Gilbert. Then, catching herself, she went on hurriedly, "But there are excuses for them. They can do things you can't do, and you soon drift apart. And as for your own sort of people, I find that almost anybody can be my sort of people if I give them a chance."

Clare Hardy knew that this gentle-voiced woman was the moving force of the women's work at her church, and that she was active in many of the organized benevolences of the town. She knew that Mrs. Gilbert must have denied herself constantly during all those years of Jack's schooling, and that, always since, mother and son had struggled along on absurdly small means. She had had what Miss Hardy considered a hard life, for the last twenty years, and yet she seemed to the girl little older for the years or for the toil. There was an atmosphere of complete contentment about her and about the humble little house, that astonished and charmed the girl.

"I was in the old garden this morning," she said at last. "Mr. McNish told me I should ask your permission to go there. Perhaps that's one reason I came to-day."

Mrs. Gilbert laughed happily.

"He said that, did he? He's a good man, is Donald McNish. He's tried to have me come over to see it but, somehow, I haven't the courage. How does it look?"

"Just the same. You'd scarcely notice a change."

"Well," sighed Mrs. Gilbert with evident pride, "he

couldn't have made it prettier than it was. Those were bonny days, bonny days." She stared, unseeing, at the work lying idle in her hands. Then she picked it up with new energy. "But so are these," she added.

Miss Hardy sat silent for so long a time after this that Mrs. Gilbert became curious.

"What are you thinking about so long?" she asked.

"I was wondering," said the girl frankly, "if I could ever learn your secret for keeping happy."

"Why, I've no secret at all." Mrs. Gilbert was slightly embarrassed by this sudden personal turn of the conversation, but she liked it. She hesitated a moment. Then she stiffened herself proudly. "It's a Mackenzie trait to forget defeats and remember victories," she said. "It's a Mackenzie trait to think well of yourself and of your neighbors, and not to waste your time and patience mourning over all your failings and gloating over everybody's else. It's a Mackenzie trait to have work enough to do to keep you company. It's a Mackenzie trait to have a good strong lad who'll think of you a year before he'll think of himself. And it's a Mackenzie trait to shift all your burdens to the Almighty shoulders that are always waiting to bear them. There"—she stopped and smiled across at the girl,—“you'll be thinking I'm a boastful and preachy woman, but it's often and often, I'll tell you, that I'm a bad Mackenzie.”

"Blood tells," mused Miss Hardy.

"Oh, aye, blood tells, but you don't always listen to it, more shame to you."

Miss Hardy nodded thoughtfully. Then, remembering

suddenly her real errand, she tried to turn the conversation to John Gilbert. She expected to mention it casually, as if it were a natural part of the talk. But always Mrs. Gilbert outmaneuvered her. The mere suggestion of his name set his mother gossiping of anything and everything else. At last Miss Hardy arose to go.

"I wish you'd tell Mr. Gilbert," she said desperately, "that the matter he was interested in is all right."

Mrs. Gilbert showed none of the surprise she felt.

"He'll be very glad to hear it," she said gravely. She had no intention of letting the girl think that there was anything about Jack that his mother did not know.

"I'll look for you often," she said at the door. "I was saying to John the other night, that all my friends were growing so old that I'd have to find somebody beside him of my own age to talk to."

There was no sign of guile in her eyes as they searched Clare Hardy's face, but, when the girl had gone, Mrs. Gilbert neglected to go back to her work. She sat wondering what there was between her son and this girl, where they had met and why he had told her nothing about it. She determined to find out everything when he came home. Perhaps she did and perhaps she did not. A mother's knowledge is the only bottomless pool that has never been fathomed.

They had an almost inconceivably enjoyable dinner that night at the Hardys', without an unpleasant word or a jarring incident. In the hallway, afterwards, Sam Hardy took the girl to one side.

"You were dead right," he said. "I'll own that meeting

with twenty-four per cent. of the stock. I'll show 'em yet whether Sam Hardy——”

Mrs. Hardy had stopped indecisively at the bottom of the stairs, but now she came swiftly to them.

“Samuel,” she said with set lips, “I wish you to tell me all about it.”

Mr. Hardy looked from one to the other in open amazement.

“All right,” he said at last. “Come in here.”

He led the way into the library, and Clare Hardy slipped away up the stairs, leaving them together. What a fine, fresh world it was, full of things worth doing to do, and things worth thinking about to think about, and, she added to herself, people worth knowing to know.

CHAPTER XIV

THE COLONEL LOSES HIS TEMPER

HAMPSTEAD was an old-fashioned town politically. Only comparatively few, men who had offices, men who had ambitions and men who had time for everything except work, attended the ordinary nominating caucus of either party. The rest of the male population accepted the nominations and voted on strict party lines. Business men occasionally remarked, when the assessor's notice came to them, that "taxes were mighty high and city improvements mighty small," but they were too busy to do more than talk. No one had ever hinted that the city money might have been spent dishonestly or even unwisely. No one had ever thought much about it. When the citizens of Hampstead read reports of corruption in the large city governments of other sections of the country, they smiled at each other with smug satisfaction. Nothing like that could ever happen in Hampstead, they were sure.

The *News* and the *Morning Register*, during the week preceding the rival caucuses, stated daily that "the political situation remained unchanged." The *Register*, owned and controlled by ex-Congressman Strutt, said: "The Hon. Mr. Brett will be nominated again for mayor without a dissenting voice. Our opponents will probably run somebody against him, but Mr. Brett's magnificent record

will make the election a walk-over." The *News, Independent*, said: "The Hon. Mr. Moriarty, speaking of the coming caucus on Thursday night, stated that the race was still open. Those most prominently mentioned as candidates for mayor have been Captain McNish, the young and popular attorney, and Judge Morrison. Either of these two men will make it interesting for the Hon. Mr. Brett, who will of course be renominated. Some time ago there was some talk of running Mr. John Gilbert, the new manager of Hardy & Son, against Mr. Brett, but nothing has been heard of it recently." Hampstead read these reports and remarked casually that "they" were thinking of running young McNish for mayor, although it could not have told and did not greatly care who "they" were; and mouthed the titles with very undemocratic satisfaction, without noticing that Judge Morrison had not been a judge for nearly fifteen years, that Billy McNish had never been more than lieutenant, or asking why Mr. Brett and Mr. Moriarty had been dignified with an Honorable. On election day Hampstead would vote if it had the time, but it was much too busy to think about it beforehand. On the whole, Hampstead would have called it a dull week, filled to the full with the usual, unexciting, money-making, living-earning routine.

Meanwhile a small minority of men were unusually active. Colonel Mead's behavior was extraordinary. Often when they were together during that week, pulling their final drag-net for Hardy stock proxies, Gilbert noticed that the Colonel seemed absent-minded, almost indifferent, that he chuckled merrily to himself when nothing in their conversation warranted merriment, and

that he had mysterious engagements "down town,"—extraordinary proceedings for the Colonel, whose time was usually limitless and entirely at Jack's command. Of course Gilbert did not understand until afterwards. There was only one man in Hampstead who completely understood, and that was Mr. Moriarty.

Moriarty had conducted conspiracies before and he liked them. He admitted to himself, however, that this one was different. Usually his plotting concerned men who were yearning for any or every office in sight. It was the first time in his political career that Mr. Moriarty was planning to nominate an unwilling candidate. In spite of his enthusiasm for Gilbert, Moriarty probably would have hesitated to take such a step if he had not been persistently urged on by Colonel Mead. As it was, the little Irishman was silently putting all his wires in working order, and he was keeping Gilbert's name away from the newspapers and from the loose tongue of "common talk." The Colonel was to arrange that Gilbert should not attend the caucus, and both of them were to see him afterwards and convince him that, once nominated, he would be a traitor to his party if he refused to make the campaign. Colonel Mead was certain that Jack's scruples about his promise to Billy McNish had decided him against permitting his name to be used, and the veteran reasoned that these scruples would be satisfied if the nomination came unsought and in the face of a definite refusal.

Mr. Strutt and Captain Merrivale and Mr. Brett met in secret conferences often during the week. It was said, also, that the quiet Mr. Hubbard was seen coming from

Mr. Strutt's offices on a day when the three were closeted together there. Perhaps they were arranging Mr. Brett's campaign, for they were the leaders of his party; or perhaps they talked of the situation at Hardy & Son's and the annual meeting which was set for the Saturday between the two political caucuses; or perhaps Mr. Hubbard's visit was merely over legal matters, and the meeting of the four men only a pleasant chance. Nobody except the four of them knew, and nobody paid any attention to it except Jimmy O'Rourke, who happened to have an errand in the block which contained Mr. Strutt's offices. Jimmy's presence, unfortunately, was noticed by Mr. Hubbard, and that afternoon the boy was summarily dismissed from the employ of the Hubbard mills. He was out of work only a few hours, however, for he found a place immediately at Hardy & Son's.

Sam Hardy seemed to be busy also. He spent two or three evenings in Tareville with the director whom the Colonel and Gilbert had awakened on Fourth of July night. Billy McNish was rushing feverishly from friend to friend for support. A strange man with a clean-shaven face, who said little, who swaggered with self-satisfaction and who wore a diamond shirt stud, came to Hampstead one night. He was driven directly to Mr. Hubbard's house, and he returned in time to catch the eleven o'clock train for New York. No one would have known of his visit if the hackman had not been talkative that night, as he sat munching a sandwich at Mr. Lumpkin's night-lunch counter. It was not such a dull week in Hampstead after all.

On Thursday afternoon Billy McNish sat alone in his

law office. Through the window he was watching a group of boys playing about the edge of the fountain in the square. From the next room came the steady click-click of his stenographer's typewriter. Billy knew that he was certain to be beaten at the caucus that night. He knew that Moriarty was against him and for somebody else. John Gilbert, Billy felt certain. But, strangely enough, Billy was less discontented than he had been at any time since his first proposal to the Irishman on Decoration Day. It was over now. He had done the best he could. At least he had been a gentleman, he said to himself. The Republicans had had an inkling of Moriarty's plan and had offered Billy inducements to bolt with his following to Mr. Brett's support, and Billy had refused point blank. When he had met Mr. Brett for Mr. Hardy, the Mayor had hinted at very definite personal gain for Lawyer McNish, if Mr. Hardy could be influenced to vote his stock with Mr. Brett at the annual meeting, and Billy had brought the conference to a close with an abruptness that evidently amazed the banker. Billy had seen Clare Hardy coming from the Gilbert house late one afternoon, and he had not followed his first jealous impulse to mention the fact casually to Mr. Hardy. No, he had played fair from the start, he told himself. And it was true. If Billy found part of his contentment in enlarging to himself his own goodness, and in considering himself a kind of martyr to his own honesty, he should not be blamed for it. It was part of his temperament.

The door opened and Mr. Moriarty came in. He walked directly to the desk and extended his hand with the utmost friendliness. Billy shook it heartily. He had

nothing against the little Irishman, he told himself in a kind of ecstasy of chivalry. He had nothing against anybody. He would be known as "a good loser." He almost believed in the part as he played it.

"Oi've just been hearin'," began Mr. Moriarty, "that ye'd likely work against us if ye ain't nominated to-night. I want to tell the man that told me so, that he's a liar. Faith, he's bigger than Oi am an' Oi want moral support."

Billy laughed.

"Go ahead, Moriarty," he said. "You've got it."

The Irishman took two cigars from his bulging vest pocket, one short, shapeless and black; the other long, shapely and brown. With something like a sigh, he handed the short one to Billy and stuck the long cigar in his own mouth. But he did not light it. A moment later he absent-mindedly replaced it in his pocket.

"Have one of mine," suggested Billy, "and tell me about it."

"About the se-gar?" asked Mr. Moriarty, rubbing his chin reflectively to hide his embarrassment. "That's politics. 'Tis my only graft. For a month before eliction I swear off buyin' se-gars. Ivery man that wants anything is suddenly as generous as if he was the happy father av a hundred brand-new babies, an' I was the only wan congratlatin' him. But there's a difference. Take them two se-gars. Old Prifesser Gunter comes up to me an' he's a real gentleman, the Prifesser. An' he says, 'Good-mornin', Mr. Moriarty,' an' he slips the nice little black wan into me fist. The Prifesser's a Republican, but he loikes friends. Some of his own party, Brett an' that

crowd, are down on him; he's been runnin' the school so long. Then bym-bye up comes Martin Jethro, that wants to stay in the Council. He slaps me on the back. 'Hello, Mike!' he says. 'Have wan o' my se-gars.' An' I takes the long brown wan, while he tells me how much it didn't cost."

"But what are you keeping it for?" asked Billy.

"If we're beaten I might want to commit suicide," said Mr. Moriarty soberly.

Billy smiled and waited.

"Oi'll tell ye something on the Q. T." Mr. Moriarty chose his words slowly and carefully. "Oi think—av coorse Oi dinnaw—but Oi think that the caucus 'll nomy-nate Jack Gilbert to-night. Oi want you to withdraw an' make it a sure thing. Some av thim are wantin' the old Judge an' not a young man at all."

"No," said Billy, with that air of complete decision which few but indecisive men ever attain, "I won't withdraw and I won't bolt. That 'll have to do."

"An' ye'll stick to that?" Moriarty asked doubtfully.

"Of course I'll stick to it," retorted Billy, irritably, who, like many other people, was most sensitive at the weakest spot in his character.

Moriarty nodded with conciliatory approval.

"Good luck to ye," he added as he left the room.

Billy arose and stretched his short fat arms and yawned. It was John Gilbert then. He shrugged his shoulders and fumbled aimlessly with the papers on his desk. There was nothing much to do at the office, nothing that he couldn't let go until to-morrow. He had not seen Clare Hardy in four days. He had not wished to see her,

strangely enough, while there was still a fragment of hope. Now that defeat was certain he wished to see her more, it seemed to him, than he had ever wished to see her in his life. He told himself that he ought to wait until to-morrow, when the thing was done with and when he could dismiss it all as ancient history. But he wanted to see her now, to tell her all about it and to have her sympathy. Billy was one of those men who double a woman's burden without measurably lightening their own.

He left the office in charge of his stenographer and climbed West Hill, preparing upon his face a look of martyred melancholy lighted by a sad smile. As he neared the corner below the Hardy house, he saw the familiar slender figure emerge from the gateway and turn up the hill ahead of him. He walked faster and whistled a trio of notes they had used for years as a signal. At the sound she turned and, seeing him, she waved and came swiftly back. They met at the gate. Billy protested violently that she must not delay her calls for him. Miss Hardy declared that she was tempted to take him at his word after the way in which he had neglected her. Then, entirely satisfied, they turned leisurely up the walk and found comfortably unconventional seats on the veranda steps.

"Oh, you're always busy," Miss Hardy asserted. "Whenever men haven't a shred of decent excuse, they always say they've been busy. But what makes you look so downhearted?"

"I don't and I'm not," Billy replied, using the sad smile and looking more downhearted than ever.

"You look as if you'd lost your last friend," said the girl.

"No, I think I have one left." Billy smiled at her mournfully.

Miss Hardy looked at him intently, obviously perplexed. Then, as she thought, she changed the subject.

"Let me see," she said, "it's to-night you're to be nominated for mayor. I suppose you've a speech all prepared."

Billy laughed bitterly. Of course she thought that. Everybody thought that. That was the worst of Moriarty's silence.

"I wish I might hear it," she rattled on, mistaking his laughter for good humor. "Can't you smuggle me in somehow?"

Since they had met at the gate Billy had changed his mind about telling her. A man was a cad, he told himself, who went around tattling his troubles. But this was too much for him.

"The joke is," he remarked, trying suddenly to be jovial, "that they're going to nominate Jack Gilbert."

Miss Hardy started in her surprise.

"That's—impossible," she said hesitatingly.

No, he assured her, it was true. Then, little by little, he told her the whole story from the first mention of Gilbert's political ambitions on Fourth of July night. He told her what he had heard Colonel Mead and Mr. Moriarty say outside the Gilbert house a week or so before, and what Mr. Moriarty had been doing in his silent campaign, and, last of all, what Moriarty had told him that very afternoon. Miss Hardy listened breathlessly, trying to understand.

"It doesn't matter much, of course," Billy concluded, in the tone of one who is trying to be brave under difficult circumstances. "Jack would make a good mayor, I guess."

"It's a shame, Billy. I'm terribly sorry." Miss Hardy spoke with impulsive sympathy. "I thought you said that he promised to help you."

"He did, but of course neither of us had an idea then that he was a possibility." Billy's defense of Gilbert did not seem very convincing.

Miss Hardy sat thinking for a few seconds.

"Have you said anything to him about it?" she asked eagerly.

"I should think not," said Billy, throwing his head back with an independence he did not feel. "I'm not begging my way."

"And he hasn't said a word to you?" asked the girl.

"No. You see, the last time we talked we didn't quite agree about some things, and I suppose that's made him feel different. I don't really know what to think."

"That's no excuse for him," said Miss Hardy, and then she was silent.

"But I don't want you to waste your time hearing about my troubles," insisted Billy frankly, satisfied now that all his troubles had been told. "I was just on the way to the house anyhow. You go on and make your calls."

After Miss Hardy had spent some minutes saying all the cheering things she could think of, she acquiesced and they went out together. When he left her at the gate of the big house, Billy walked vaingloriously straight and

whistled buoyantly and hoped that she might turn and admire his courage. He knew that he was posing and he cursed himself for it, but he did not stop his whistling or his strutting or his hoping that she would notice. But Clare Hardy did not turn. She was hurrying along toward Mrs. Gilbert's with the "inevitable" ringing in her ears. Yes, he would win. He always won, and for the moment she hated him for it. But this was winning unfairly. If John Gilbert deliberately went back on his word to a friend for the sake of selfish gain, the entire superstructure of the man toppled. She had granted him honesty and strength, but this was not honest. It was not like the man as she thought of him. If he was dishonest in this, might he not be dishonest in that miserable, puzzling struggle at the shops? Perhaps she had been wrong in advising her father. Perhaps what Gilbert had told her at the parsonage was untrue, a part of a trick by which he alone would gain. If he took this nomination she could never trust him, she told herself, or her own judgment again. Another man might do a dozen worse things and still be attractive, but with John Gilbert she felt that strong truth was the foundation of everything. That gone, there was nothing left but sordid ruin. There must be some mistake, she tried to convince herself, some misunderstanding. So much depended upon him. To Clare Hardy anything unsettled was unbearable. And she stood at last at Mrs. Gilbert's door, with the conviction that she must do something quickly, that she must learn certainly that John Gilbert was or was not what she had thought him.

When Gilbert said good-night to the watchman at

Hardy's that night and walked home, he confessed to himself that he was tired. Even his great frame and steady nerves were beginning to feel the strain of double responsibility and worry. His head was full of shop odds and ends as he sat down at the supper table. Mrs. Gilbert watched him solicitously. She noticed every wrinkle that creased his forehead where his bushy eyebrows met, and every line about his mouth. Suddenly she gave a little cry—such as memory, when it jumps suddenly out of the dark, startles from elderly people—and hurried into the sitting-room. She came back with an envelope in her hand. Gilbert took it wonderingly. When he had read the little note it inclosed, he pushed back his chair and, asking her to keep the rest of the supper standing for a few moments, he took his hat and strode out and down the street. He turned in at the big house, and, asking permission of the obviously surprised Mr. McNish, he went directly through the house and out into the garden.

The great hydrangea bushes that lined the first terrace were loaded with bending bloom, and welcomed him back into the wonderland of his boyhood. Great bunches of purple grapes hung temptingly from trellises like those he had climbed. In the long beds of green, occasional blossoms still remained to conjure up sweet memories for him with their odors. Over at the left was the evergreen tree from which he had fallen, and Jerry the gardener had lectured him about the limb he had broken from the tree, before either of them knew whether the boy's limbs were broken or not. But now the grown-up boy scarcely more than noticed any of these things. He pushed on by the

straight pathway over terrace after terrace, past the old apple tree hanging fresh-cheeked pippins within his reach, on toward the little clump of trees beyond, his heart beating fast although he had not hurried.

She rose to meet him, her gray dress showing against the dusk of the trees. It was hard for her to begin, but he had been summoned and he waited for her.

"I didn't know where else to see you," she said.

Her face in the half darkness was very serious, and her eyes seemed to search his intently.

"There couldn't be a better place," was all he said. He felt instinctively that something was wrong, that she was troubled. Perhaps he might help her. He waited eagerly to hear, knowing in his heart that whatever she asked he would do.

"I won't keep you long." Miss Hardy was trying a new beginning. "I don't want to make you late."

"Late? What for? I don't care if I am, but what for?"

"Why, the caucus, of course." Clare Hardy's eyes did not leave his face. If she expected to see shame and embarrassment she was disappointed. Instead he smiled good-humoredly.

"That is to-night, isn't it," he said. "I'd clean forgotten it. I'm not going."

"Forgotten?" asked the girl with growing excitement. "Not going?"

"No. The Colonel—Colonel Mead, you know—made me promise to be at home to-night. He's coming up. I'm not much on politics anyhow. Suppose I ought to have gone."

“But”—the words stumbled in their haste to be said—
“but—you’re a candidate, aren’t you?”

Gilbert shook his head gravely. He was becoming decidedly puzzled at her insistent questions.

“They talked of it a little—not much. But I couldn’t.”

“Why?” Miss Hardy waited breathlessly.

“Oh, a good many reasons. I didn’t have the time. I don’t know the game. I’d be a lovely mayor, wouldn’t I, fresh from overalls and machines? Then there was a bigger reason than all the rest, a personal reason that——”

“You’d promised Billy,” broke in Clare Hardy triumphantly.

Gilbert stared at her incredulously.

“How did you know that?” he asked. “What’s up anyhow?”

“Billy told me,” cried the girl and then, her tongue loosened, she told him all she knew.

“He was too proud, don’t you see?” she added at the end. “He wouldn’t tell you and so I’ve done it for him.”

Gilbert had listened, his face growing more stern. They were going to nominate him against his will. They wanted him enough for that. The old struggle came back to him, but he silenced it quickly. That was settled. He had learned something else, harder to bear than any little sacrifice of place or power. She was doing this for Billy. It was Billy’s success she wished, not his nor anybody else’s. Of course it was. He had known it all the time, but he knew now that he had refused to think about it, that he had tried not to believe it. He looked at his watch in the dim light as she finished.

“I’m obliged to you, Miss Hardy,” he said a little

wearily. "I guess I'd better go to that meeting after all. As you said, I might be late. Good-night."

"What are you going to do?" asked the girl.

He turned where the path led back into the garden.

"Just make it right," he said simply, and he was soon lost in the growing darkness. Clare Hardy went into the summer-house and threw herself upon the long seat. It was all "right" now. He could be depended upon. That was far more important, it seemed to her now, than being mayor or "bossing" a shop. She wondered what he would do. Perhaps Billy would be nominated, after all. She clapped her hands together at the thought. She decided that she was growing to be a great diplomatic success. But—Gilbert looked tired, she suddenly remembered.

The hall was crowded. The benches overflowed into the aisles and the aisles into the hallway, in choppy waves of noisy humanity, surging, jeering, scuffling its feet, pounding its hands, shouting jokes at nearby neighbors, howling for action. Even when the meeting was called to order there were familiar cries and good-natured epithets hurled at the committee chairman, from the swaying mass below him. There was more quiet later, when the venerable judge, who had once been mayor of Hampstead, made his short speech as chairman of the meeting. When the cheers that followed his words had ceased to echo, whispers ran along the crushing lines and men who had been joking with each other before, became humorously stern-faced and antagonistic. At the rear the little Irishman, who had early packed the best seats

with the men he could depend upon, and who knew exactly how every individual except a few would vote, stood silently chewing a cigar. Each of the three nominations for mayor was followed by applause. Moriarty smiled. Then the crowd relaxed to cast the first ballot.

In the noise and confusion no one heard the slight commotion at the rear. No one, not even Mr. Moriarty, chewing his cigar happily and talking quietly with Colonel Mead, saw the broad, erect figure push its way forward until it was half way to the platform. Suddenly Mr. Moriarty started and pointed. The Colonel began immediate pursuit, wrathfully hurling himself through the crowd which, because it understood only its own discomfort, swore at him and tried to stop him. But Moriarty, hesitating only a second, bent over to the man next to him. A second later there rose a straggling cheer for John Gilbert, which grew in volume until good-humored bedlam reigned, and nervous men covered their ears with their hands. Gilbert, turning upon them from the front, raised his hand for silence. For an instant the noise diminished and then, supported from the rear, it increased once more. Gilbert shrugged his shoulders and sat down upon the low stage, noting quickly, as he waited, that those who were shouting for him looked like a large majority over those who sat silent.

His appearance was an equal surprise to all, but everyone believed that it was part of Moriarty's plan to sweep the caucus without a chance of failure. The hoarse cries that the little leader had started had settled back into a regular, tireless rhythm accompanied with the stamping of feet, when the Colonel at last reached Gilbert's side. The

men in all parts of the hall craned their necks to watch the conference, and the cheering diminished. Then it suddenly stopped short. Gilbert had risen to his feet, his great body looming high above the Colonel and his hand on the old veteran's shoulder. For a moment he hesitated, as if the words were slowly forming themselves into line, and when he spoke he drawled even more than usual.

"I've just found out what was going on," he said, after bowing to the chairman. "I'd like to ask the man who suggested me to withdraw my name, for I won't take the nomination if I get it." At this point Colonel Mead, whose face was red with suppressed anger and disappointment, tried to interrupt, but Gilbert paid no attention to him. "I told my friends that long ago, and I thought it was all settled. I told them, too, that I thought the man to be named was Alderman McNish." There was a short, sharp burst of enthusiasm from the left. "I'm going to cast a ballot for him now, and if he's nominated I'm going to work for him. I guess that's all."

The crowd alternately cheered and stared. It wasn't much of a speech, someone said afterwards, but if Gilbert had recited the alphabet he couldn't have made more of a sensation.

As soon as he had finished Gilbert turned to the Colonel and, slipping his arm through his friend's, he tried to lead him back toward the rear of the hall. But Colonel Mead was not made of the stuff that gives up readily, and he was angry. His heart had been set on the success of this plan. To have it thwarted at the last moment by the man for whom he had labored, made him lose control of

himself. He cast off Gilbert's arm and turned again toward the swaying, hooting, cheering crowd. But Mr. Moriarty was ahead of him. Mr. Moriarty always thought first of the party and of his power over it. Gilbert's speech had suddenly made his supporters, who had been eternally solid for him, unsettled and malleable. Anything might happen unless a firm hand caught them in time. Almost before the shouting of Billy's friends had ceased, the man who had nominated Gilbert had withdrawn his name and seconded that of Alderman McNish. Then a miniature pandemonium arose, and it was this that the Colonel faced as he vainly tried to get the chairman's attention. Someone pulled him into a seat at last, and there, cursing the chairman, the meeting, and most of all, John Gilbert, he heard the vote announced which overwhelmingly nominated Billy on the first ballot.

"They know the game," remarked Moriarty, pointing to the crowd about Billy McNish as the meeting adjourned, to Colonel Mead, who was passing. "If ye want anything out of a new-laid, successful politician, ye want to get after it quick. He'll give 'em the whole town now he's so happy. Hard luck, sir, wasn't it? How'd he get the tip?"

The Colonel shook his head like an angry dog and growled.

Billy and Gilbert met near the doorway some minutes later, the one flushed with unexpected triumph, the other tired-looking but smiling.

"Let's get something to eat; I'm hungry," drawled Jack wearily after the two had shaken hands, but Billy hesitated a moment. He craved even more congratula-

tion. As he looked around, the Colonel appeared beside them.

“Get out o’ my way, John Gilbert,” cried the veteran, suddenly enraged at seeing the two together. “I’m through with you. God curse me if I ever lift a finger for you again.”

Gilbert’s face turned white, and his eyes burned black with such fierce anger that the Colonel flinched unconsciously. Then Jack turned on his heel and walked away, Billy following.

The Colonel shivered as if cold water had been dashed upon him. He was suddenly sobered. He looked after Jack for a moment, and then he hurried out and up the street.

“I’m an old fool,” he repeated pitifully to himself. “An old fool.”

CHAPTER XV

THE SUMMONS

IT was Saturday morning at Hardy & Son's. Outside in the street an occasional covered team dashed through the beating rain. Infrequent solitary pedestrians hurried by, gripping umbrellas that quivered and rattled in the wind. At the corner entrance under the half shelter of the doorway, a stray dog crept wet and shivering. Within toiled the vast, reorganized machine, throbbing, grinding, shrieking, whirring, humming. Scattered through it was the usual human chaos of square-jawed determination, low-browed ignorance, scowling passion, timid subservience, stolid indifference and alert ambition. The mills seemed cheerier to-day on account of the rain outside, and the clock ran slower because work ended at noon. These things alone seemed to make the day different from other days, until Gilbert brought a group of men into the shops—outside men who wore good clothes and who suggested the annual meeting to some of the older workmen. The group passed rapidly on, listening to the big superintendent's explanations of the changes that had been made, to his short orders to the men, and to his ready answers to sharp questions put by members of the party. And often, the great creature of men and machines, which seemed to purr contentedly about the little cluster of stockholders,

seemed suddenly to crouch behind them when their backs were turned, and to snarl with sneers and covert hatred. In a few moments, however, they were forgotten, and the clock ran slower and slower toward the anticipated half-holiday.

Gilbert left the party of visitors at the door which led into the offices, and returned with a sigh of relief to the shops. He had done all that he could do. The issue remained with Sam Hardy. Jack had given the Colonel a proxy for his stock along with the others. He was certain that his own appearance at the meeting would only aggravate Mr. Hardy's feeling against them all. To the stockholders, moreover, the Colonel and Mr. McNish represented their side of the struggle. Except for Jack's hasty trip to Pittsfield and Springfield, he had been a silent partner in the movement. He felt, too, that he could not add anything to the Colonel's fighting grit and ready, picturesque speech, or to the elder McNish's diplomacy. After all, the result depended upon Sam Hardy, and "the old man" seemed to be obdurate. Billy McNish, flushed with his success and eager to make amends, had gone confidently to Mr. Hardy the day before. He had returned utterly disconsolate. "The old man" had evidently been drinking, Billy said. He had talked wildly. He had seemed hopelessly suspicious of everybody. He had even suggested that Billy had turned against him. Billy's elevator-like spirits had descended to the deepest sub-cellar of depression. And the outcome of the meeting, with all that it meant to Hardy & Son, remained a mystery.

As Gilbert tramped down the long lines of men and

machinery, they seemed to him a kind of supporting phalanx of power. These were the evidences of the work he had begun, and the foundation of his hopes. The men were beginning to believe in him, to believe in his ability to do things, and to believe that he meant well by them. He meant that they should share in the success, if success came. But there was no time now for day dreaming. From a dozen different corners the work was calling him. It was not until nearly an hour later that he went reluctantly up to his little office to dictate some letters. And always that momentous meeting, silent behind closed doors, seemed to threaten him and his work and his hopes.

No one but Sam Hardy himself knew how he suffered during that week. When his momentary exultation over Clare's discovery had passed, his old weakness returned. Each day that brought the meeting nearer seemed to tighten the strain. Often, dizzy, tottering, he caught the back of a chair or the edge of a table and held himself upright, his teeth clenched, breathing rapidly, his brain in a whirling agony. At night he lay awake, until it seemed to him that he must cry out with terror at something, he knew not what, that threatened him out of the dark. He tried in vain to steady himself, to think and to plan, and he beat his head with his hands in wild hopelessness. Even if he could hold the balance of power at the meeting he could see nothing beyond it except ruin. And yet, with the meeting as a goal, he braced himself and beat back his weakness and hysteria with something of his old dogged determination.

As he faced them, that Saturday morning, his cheeks

were bloodless and flabby, and his body sagged shakily, held up only by the tense support of his will. But his brain seemed to be cleared for action, and his eyes were unnaturally bright, as they flashed a last glance about the room before calling the meeting to order.

No such gathering of Hardy & Son's stockholders had been known in years. Usually Mr. Hardy himself had controlled the stock at each meeting. Usually he had accepted his own report and had elected a board of directors of his own choosing. Usually this board of directors at a subsequent meeting had elected the officers whom Mr. Hardy suggested. Usually the meeting had been a formal farce, but to-day it looked more like melodrama, as Billy McNish remarked to a stockholder from Albany, who had come to Hampstead to add his strength to the Colonel's side. There were between twenty and thirty men in the room, divided naturally, by the long director's table, into two factions. There was the Colonel, of course, leaning on one side of the table, grumbling loudly to two or three Hampstead men about the way in which Jack Gilbert had upset his plans at the Thursday night caucus. The Colonel had manufactured humor out of his own irritation, and even joked with Billy and the elder McNish about it.

"Thar wuz Moriarty an' me," he remarked, as if he had entirely forgotten Hardy & Son's crisis, "thinkin' we wuz pullin' wires, an' all the time we wuz buttin' a stone wall like a pair o' fool goats. An' now Moriarty sez I can't talk about his red hair again, 'cause he sez I got redder-headed thet night than he's ever been in his life."

Across the table, the opposing group surrounding Mr.

Brett and Captain Merrivale opened to greet ex-Congressman Strutt, who shook hands twice around with everybody and smiled his customary smile and repeated remarks about the weather. Sam Hardy's eyes narrowed and his jaw set angrily, as he watched the ex-Congressman, whom he had once counted among his friends, join the men who were trying to take his shops from him. Alone by the window, still independent and undecided, Mr. Tubb, who had refused to join either party for fear of alienating his patrons in the other, sat combing his thin beard with his fingers and wrinkling his thin, sallow face as he eyed his double-chinned, side-whiskered, prosperous rival, Mr. Butterson of the Universal Emporium. Mr. Tubb had never heard that Mr. Butterson held stock in Hardy & Son, and he was evidently aggrieved at the discovery. Certainly Mr. Butterson, fat and sober and blinking as usual, was there, sitting beside the director from Tareville, suggestively near the president's desk. Others seemed to be interested, for a number of men in both groups about the director's table whispered and looked and nodded in the direction of the silent, solitary pair.

The meeting came to order long enough for Mr. Brett, in his capacity as the secretary of the company, to begin making record of the stock represented. Then the talking began again, subdued now and more desultory.

"That paper's no good, Colonel Mead," remarked Mr. Brett, tossing one of the Colonel's proxies back to him without looking up.

"What's the matter with it, except that it's made out to me?" asked the Colonel in the silence that followed.

Mr. Brett smiled satirically as he picked out a sheet from one of the piles before him.

"Only this," he said, referring to the paper in his hand. "Since the gentleman gave you the proxy he has sold his stock to Captain Merrivale."

The Colonel thumbed his useless proxy for a few seconds. Then he turned suddenly upon Merrivale who sat self-consciously tilting back in a chair.

"How much did yer friend Mr. Hubbard pay fer thet stock?" he asked.

Captain Merrivale's face flushed red, and he started to protest angrily. The Colonel interrupted him.

"That's all right, Captain Merrivale," he remarked soothingly. "I jest natch'rally wanted to see the flush o' shame. Ye kin alluz tell a steer by the owner's brand onto it."

Captain Merrivale leaped, blustering, to his feet, but Mr. Hardy rapped for order.

"Sit down," he growled. "No personalities. I'm running this meeting."

It was the Colonel's frank declaration of war. Mr. Hardy saw the danger he had emphasized. The director from Tareville leaned over to whisper to Mr. Butterson, who inclined his head and sighed noisily, as if the burden he was carrying was too heavy for mortal man to bear. Each statement of similar transfers—and there were three or four more recorded before Mr. Brett had finished—Mr. Butterson greeted with a similar sigh, which he followed with a complacent look that seemed to say that he, at least, was doing his full duty in the face of overwhelming odds. Mr. Tubb, meanwhile, seemed wholly

fascinated by his rival's solemn face, until he learned that Mr. Butterson possessed only one share of stock. Then he smiled for the first time since the entrance of the proprietor of the Universal Emporium, a smile that broadened slowly and ended in a triumphant little cackle of laughter. Mr. Tubb was, however, the only man in the room who smiled at Mr. Butterson's solitary share of stock. Indeed Mr. Butterson had become the sphinx of the occasion, although his two hundred and fifty pounds and his bland, ministerial air were far from being sphinx-like. Billy McNish, describing the cash groceryman, had once said that Mrs. Butterson probably rocked the baby to sleep by placing it in Butterson's arms, and reading him jokes to make him shake with laughter.

There followed a number of laconic reports prepared rather for form than for information. Nobody seemed to listen to them and they were accepted readily. Everyone was eager to reach the election of directors. Then, of course, the real struggle would begin and the real strength of each party would be tested. During the reports Colonel Mead slipped a folded piece of paper into Mr. McNish's hand. The elder McNish smoothed it out carefully, compared the figures it contained with those he had himself noted down, and nodded. The Colonel's notes when deciphered read:

Hardy	5,528
Hubbard	9,910
McNish and Mead	8,842
Tareville	325
Butterson	1
Tubb	200
Not represented	194
	25,000

Other pencils were working out the same result across the table, and the director from Tareville whispered once more to Mr. Butterson, whose gravity seemed strangely undisturbed by the fact that Mr. Tubb held one hundred and ninety-nine shares of stock more than he did.

When Mr. Hardy declared the meeting open for the election of directors, the Colonel was on his feet immediately to move Mr. Hardy's re-election by acclamation. Mr. Brett was only slightly behind him. He seconded the motion. Sam Hardy smiled grimly, and the Colonel cursed under his breath. Mr. Brett's ferret eyes watched the Colonel's obvious irritation, but his face was stolid. The motion would have passed unanimously if Mr. Tubb had not been too engrossed in Mr. Butterson's unexpected presence and extraordinary behavior, to listen. The only fact which Mr. Tubb realized was that his rival voted in favor of the motion. He, therefore, declared shrilly for the negative, to the confusion of Mr. Hardy and the amusement of the others. The diversion occasioned by Mr. Tubb was only momentary. He changed his vote quickly with a stumbling apology, and the Colonel once more took the floor, although the Honorable Mr. Strutt made frantic efforts to gain the president's attention.

"Mister President," remarked the Colonel, "I ain't much of a business man. New-fangled business, ez fer ez I've seen it, is a joodicious combination of a soft smile an' a sandbag. I reckon I wuz made a director in this concern 'cause ye thought I likely wouldn't do harm."

"We're greatly interested, of course, in our friend's personal confession, and in the results of his observation,"

broke in Mr. Strutt, rubbing his hands together ingratiatingly, "but really, Mr. President, it isn't electing directors."

The Colonel chuckled.

"Been expectin' that. Thet's whar the sandbag begins to come in," he retorted.

"Come to the point," growled Mr. Hardy.

Colonel Mead hesitated perceptibly. Being hurried and being flurried usually rhymed in his temperament.

"I help to represent more'n a third o' the stock at this meetin'," he went on slowly. "I'm goin' to state here an' now what thet stock stands fer."

"But, Mr. President," Mr. Strutt interrupted again, "all this takes time. Can't our friend explain, by the way in which he votes, what his stock stands for, as he puts it?"

"It don't stand fer you, Mister Strutt." The Colonel was beginning to lose his temper. "It don't stand fer the soft smile ner the sandbag. It ain't tryin' to control the company nor to own it. It stands fer the management as now constitooted. It stands fer the president an' fer the gen'ral manager. It stands fer the profits they're likely goin' to give us durin' the next year. An' it don't stand fer the interference of an outside manufacturer, who don't like our competition, through his hired men."

Mr. Hardy hunched back in his chair nervously, as he met the Colonel's keen glance. He looked across at the director from Tareville, as if to ask an opinion. Mr. Strutt, however, recalled his attention to the meeting.

"Our friend seems to have so misunderstood our in-

tentions," the lawyer began glibly, "and to have so misrepresented them, unintentionally no doubt, that I am forced to answer him for my friends here and myself. To use his reiterated phrase;—and we have enjoyed his oratory greatly. He has a real gift, a gift that we ought to hear in its expression more often, I'm sure. To use his phrase—and I'm sure no better one could be invented—we stand for exactly the things he stands for with one slight exception. We all know Mr. Hardy," Mr. Strutt bowed to the president. "We all trust his long experience and his tried abilities, but—and here is the exception—we know much less of the new general manager. He may be a valuable young man inside the shops. About that Mr. Hardy undoubtedly knows more than we do. But we cannot approve of the way in which he has forced himself upon the company, nor do we like the presumptuous way in which he has undoubtedly attempted to gain control of the stock at this meeting. This has been done, of course, through *his* agents," Mr. Strutt nodded to the Colonel, "and perhaps without their knowledge of his real intentions. We can scarcely be blamed for attempting to protect our large holdings in this company from this inexperienced young man with large ambitions."

Mr. Strutt sat down amid murmurs of applause from his side of the long table. Mr. Hardy stared dully, first at the lawyer and then at Colonel Mead. He seemed confused. Mr. Strutt's remarks had undoubtedly renewed his suspicions of John Gilbert. They had undoubtedly opened also the old wound to his pride, which the Colonel in his blunt way had tried to heal.

"That's why you're buyin' up Hardy stock, I suppose," suggested the Colonel sarcastically.

"If we are buying up Hardy stock"—returned Mr. Strutt in his most genial manner,—“and probably our omniscient friend knows more about it than we do. If, as I say, we are buying Hardy stock, it is obviously because we have inexhaustible faith in the future of the company under Mr. Hardy's management.”

Mr. Hardy rapped for order.

"Proceed to election of other directors," he said, gripping the arms of his chair as if to brace himself against all arguments. "Divided meeting. Elect 'em one by one."

The Colonel shrugged his shoulders, and Mr. Strutt smiled pleasantly at Captain Merrivale, and Mr. Tubb muttered to himself that "Strutt 'd got 'em again." As the voting progressed Mr. Hardy's body seemed more tensely upright, and his mouth smiled with a set smile. He was proceeding exactly as he had planned beforehand, and he was controlling the meeting. He elected Mr. Brett and Captain Merrivale and Mr. Strutt by counting his votes with theirs against the Colonel. He elected the Colonel and Mr. McNish by turning his votes to them against the others.

"I propose the name o' John Gilbert," declared the Colonel, with a menacing gesture toward Mr. Strutt, "an' I want to say that he didn't know I wuz goin' to do it. He ain't lookin' fer it. He's a stockholder an' he ought to be a director. The man thet's fightin' hardest fer the concern sure ought to hev ez much show ez them thet 're fightin' against it."

Mr. Hardy shook his head impatiently. It was not in his plan. Gilbert was rejected, but Billy McNish was elected a director readily, when the Colonel suggested his name immediately afterward. Three from each side had been chosen beside Mr. Hardy; seven in all out of the nine. Then there ensued ten minutes of unsuccessful balloting. Every proposal from either side of the table was defeated with steady precision, until both parties had exhausted their lists of candidates. There was an interval of hesitant silence. Mr. Strutt, with an alert, suggestive look, caught the Colonel's eye, but the veteran's grizzled face turned away contemptuously. It was Sam Hardy's moment of moments.

"Suggest Mr. Higgins of Tareville," he said hoarsely. All eyes turned toward the silent pair who sat near Mr. Hardy's desk. Mr. McNish whispered to the Colonel, who answered with a wry face and a nod. Mr. Higgins was elected.

"Suggest Mr. Butterson," added Mr. Hardy. This, then, was the meaning of the grocer's one share of stock. Mr. Hardy had transferred it to him so that he might become the ninth director. Mr. Butterson smiled placidly at the contending groups when his election was announced, but not so Mr. Tubb. Mr. Tubb's sensitive, poetic soul was deeply wounded at this unexpected victory of his rival. The fore legs of his tilting chair slammed resentfully upon the floor, and Mr. Tubb, muttering angrily, flung himself out of the room, in the midst of the surprised laughter of everyone except sober Mr. Butterson. And before the laughter had entirely died away, the stockholders' meeting was adjourned.

Slowly, to the noisy accompaniment of the stamping on of overshoes and the grating of moving chairs and the hum of small talk, the crowd thinned down until only the nine remained, the new directorate. The Colonel had sauntered across to the window, and, leaning on the chair which Mr. Tubb had vacated, he looked out at the rain and the leaden sky. Mr. Strutt, watching him, rose and started across the room to join him. He had scarcely left his place, however, when he was halted by a hoarse, unnatural voice.

“Come to order.”

It was Mr. Hardy. He had not moved from his former position, but he was manifestly excited. Feverish red spots glowed in his sallow cheeks, and now he threw back his shoulders with a jerky gesture.

“Suggest for officers, ensuing year,” he went on, forcing his old arrogance into the words. “President and Treasurer, Hardy; Vice-President, Butterson; Secretary, Higgins of Tareville.”

The room, except for Mr. Hardy’s raucous breathing, became suddenly silent. Mr. Brett, the former secretary, smiled sneeringly at Captain Merrivale, who fidgeted with a pencil in his fingers. Mr. Strutt, who had sunk back into his chair, still watched the Colonel. Only Billy McNish, with his almost feminine sixth sense, noticed the terrible tenseness of that stocky body in the president’s chair, or felt something clutch at his heart with a warning of impending tragedy.

The Colonel turned back from the window and faced Mr. Hardy.

“Sam Hardy,” he said, bitter anger and disappoint-

ment emphasizing each word, "ef thet's what ye want, I move ye hev it. An' then I want to remark thet ye make me think a hull lot of a boy I saw playin' shinny last winter. He had his eyes on the ball, thet boy did, an' thet wuz all he thought about. When he got it he was so plumb crazy thet he took it a-kitin' toward his own goal. Th' others on his side, they yelled continuous to stop him, but he wouldn't pay any attention to 'em. He jest natch'rally lost the game fer them an' fer himself. Thet's what I reckon you've done, an' I want to say thet I wouldn't vote fer you fer janitor o' this shop ef it wuzn't fer Jack Gilbert."

Mr. Hardy put the motion mechanically, his wide-open eyes glaring at the Colonel. There was a pause after the vote was taken. They waited so long a time that Billy and Mr. McNish both moved uneasily in their seats. Mr. Hardy still sat, staring vacantly at the window. Then suddenly he swayed against his desk and slowly pitched forward headlong upon the floor. The weakened cords of "the old man's" life, pulled tight for the crisis, had loosened, perhaps broken, with reaction. For a second or two the men before him sat motionless. Then, Billy McNish in the lead, they hurried to him. But John Gilbert was ahead of them. He had opened the door from the hall, and, seeing the prostrate form at first glance, he had rushed to "the old man's" side. Strangely enough Mr. Hardy had fallen against the button that rang the superintendent's bell, sounding a summons at last for the man who had fought for him and whom he had fought.

It was nearly noon when Gilbert returned to the shops. The Colonel was with him, but Billy had remained at the

stricken Hardy house. Billy had seemed to know instantly what to do, and both Jack and the Colonel had felt that they were in the way. At the office door they passed ex-Congressman Strutt and Mr. Brett, and they found the director from Tareville and Mr. Butterson waiting for them. It seemed that the Honorable ex-Congressman had been arguing with the two new officials of Hardy & Son. "Couldn't even wait till they knew whether 'the old man' had passed in his checks or not," as the Colonel expressed it. The director from Tareville had told Mr. Strutt that he, as secretary, would call no meetings of the directors while Mr. Hardy was living, until Mr. Hardy was able to ask him to do so. He proceeded now to assure the Colonel of the same decision, and Mr. Butterson nodded his head in solemn approval. As to the shops, they were temporarily in the hands of the general manager. Mr. Hardy had always ruled his office with such a complete one-man power that there was no one to take his place, but undoubtedly some of his clerks and assistants could help Mr. Gilbert with any puzzling problems, and he, Mr. Higgins, would come from Tareville every day or so while Mr. Hardy was absent.

When they had gone Gilbert led the Colonel into his little office.

"Couldn't 've tangled it up worse, could he?" he said, as they sat down.

The Colonel shook his head mournfully.

"Thet man Strutt's the devil," remarked the Colonel, after a long pause. "He kin paint white black till ye're color blind. He kin sling soft soap till ye're smothered. He kin pull the wool over yer eyes till ye bleat like a

lamb o' his own flock. He kin lie so thet it sounds truer than all four gospels. I tell ye, boy, a man with a gift o' gab like that ought to be sent to jail fer a year every time he opens his mouth. But he's slick, Strutt is, an' the great American beatitude is, 'Blessed are the slick, for they shall inherit the earth.'"

"They'll be buying up stock now," Gilbert said slowly. "We've got to stop 'em somehow."

"Stop 'em!" retorted the Colonel. "Ye can't stop 'em. They've got the money. Why, Hubbard is money. I reckon even his bones jingle when he walks. I'll bet he owns the biggest half of the stock he voted to-day. You calc'late how long it 'll take him to git the rest, an' twenty-five hundred odd shares more, into his corral, when he's got nice, fat pasturage an' we ain't got a blade o' grass, an' I'll tell ye how long it 'll be before you ain't got any job an' our stock ain't wuth two cents on a dollar. 'Course, McNish an' I could put up some money to fight 'em, but it 'ld take hundreds o' thousands, an' they've got the start. We'd likely be ruined along with the concern."

"Oh, that's out of the question, of course," said Gilbert quickly. "Perhaps the whole thing's been a mistake," he went on musingly, "or perhaps we've made a mess of it somewhere. And 'the old man' stuck to his guns. I thought he'd come around. I thought he'd see. That's where I miscalculated. Confound it, Colonel, it's brutal to think of his losing the shops now. He's getting old and he's in bad shape. It 'ld kill him, or near it. Colonel, we've got to stop 'em."

The Colonel only wrinkled his forehead into a perplexed frown for answer.

"I've been wondering for a week or two," Gilbert went on, "why they're spending so much good time and money on this thing. There's something back of it we don't understand. Why should they——"

"Look here," broke in the Colonel. "Ef ye start that, ye're on the way to the daffy-house. Why, every year a dozen er more collidge prifessers blow their brains out, 'cause they can't savvey the reasons fer the effervescence of the perpendicular of the why. A teacher-man turned up in camp down in Arizona one day. Tenderfoot? He wuz the tenderest, gentlest thing ye ever see; one of the kind thet smiles benevolently, while the women smooth him and stroke him and say what a fine, big, intelligent one he is. Well, he got talkin', an' I stood it all right till he sed thet I wasn't real; sed I was only an idea. That made me mad, an' I decided to impress thet important idea on him instanter. And when I got throo with him I reckon he had mainly one thought left in his head, an' thet was me." The Colonel smiled grimly at the memory. "But I didn't git over him fer a week. I'd say to myself, 'Why is thet tamarack tree yander?' Then I'd answer, 'Becuz the idiot ridin' by in the trail never has.' An' when I finally did git sobered from thet reasonin' jag I swore off hard. I tell ye, boy, don't git the habit o' tryin' to lasso why a thing is, 'cause, if ye do, what it is an' where it is 'll sure git away from ye."

"There's one satisfaction. We've cost 'em some money and, Colonel, we'll cost 'em more before we get through. It isn't done with yet, by a long shot." The whistle blew, and Gilbert arose and went to his little window. "I can trust the men," he went on, as he watched

them hurry out into the rain. "They're with me, anyhow."

"Don't ye ride too fer on *thet* hoss," retorted the pessimistic Colonel. "Thar ain't a man in the shop thet's with ye ten dollars' wuth. Thar ain't an Irishman in the place thet wouldn't curse ye fer a drink o' whiskey, ner a Dago thet wouldn't knife ye fer a nickel."

"Go home and take a tonic, Colonel." Gilbert spoke without turning. "You need to brace up. And say, Colonel," he added with a rueful smile, as the veteran rose to go, "save some for me."

As Gilbert sat down alone it seemed to him that he could feel Mr. Hubbard's long fingers closing remorselessly about him, and about that mammoth being of men and machines which Sam Hardy had given the best part of his life to build, and which he himself had recreated. He remembered a remark of the Colonel's made only two or three days before. "We've got the principle," the veteran had remarked, "but they've got the principal, which latter is the only spellin' recognized in America." There was a knock at the door, and Joe Heffler stood on the threshold.

"Anything I can do for you, sir?" he asked, fingering his hat nervously.

"Guess not, Joe, thanks."

Heffler hesitated for a moment.

"Could I have two or three moments of your time, sir?"

"Come in, Joe. Sit down. What's the matter?" Gilbert pushed a chair across to him and leaned back, his hands caught behind his large head with its unruly mat

of hair. Heffler sat down on the edge of the chair as if to assure Gilbert that he did not intend to bother him long, and leaned forward on the handle of his umbrella.

"I don't quite know how to begin, sir," Heffler cleared his throat. "It's about Miss—Miss Gerty Smith."

"But I thought we agreed that you weren't to have anything to do with that." Gilbert allowed his office chair to settle back to its normal position, in his frank surprise and interest. Heffler did not seem to notice the interruption. He went on as if he wished to finish a disagreeable duty.

"I've taken a room on the same floor as hers and her sister's, in that brick block on Broad Street. You're right, sir. She's been telling Mr. Brett—about things here." Heffler stopped, and his hands worked convulsively about the umbrella handle. "He's a—a scoundrel, sir, an infernal scoundrel. But,"—Heffler looked up with sudden appeal in his eyes,—“I don't want you to put her out.”

"All right, Joe, whatever you say goes."

"You won't put her out, then?" asked Heffler, almost in a whisper.

"Not unless you say the word. To tell the truth, Joe, I'd pretty nearly forgotten her. She can't hurt us much now, I guess."

Heffler did not understand the irony of Gilbert's tone. He understood only that the big superintendent would not discharge the girl.

"Thank you, sir," he said. Then he hesitated again, and ran his fingers nervously through his gray hair. "She's something of a friend of mine. She's been tied up

to—to him for going on a year now. I want to get her rid of him if I can.”

Gilbert nodded sympathetically

“He’s boasted to her,” went on Heffler, “that he and the rest of them, sir, would own this shop within three weeks from to-day. I told her they wouldn’t.”

Gilbert leaned back in his chair again, wearily this time. He had partly forgotten his discouragement in his interest in Heffler’s story.

“Three weeks,” he repeated. “That’s pretty quick.”

“He’s told her something about how that Street Railway Bill was passed, too. I don’t know much about it. I suppose you aren’t interested in that, are you?”

Gilbert stared thoughtfully straight into Heffler’s eyes.

“Yes,” he said quietly. “I am interested.”

“And she knows something about that reservoir business,” Heffler went on, shifting his gaze to the window. “You know, the thing I spoke of to them before they got rid of me. She says that he—he is a mighty clever man.”

Gilbert arose and walked slowly across the room and back.

“She’s right, Joe,” he said at last. “He’s too clever for me. His whole crowd is too clever for me. Perhaps they’ll be too clever for themselves. That’s the only way we slow coaches get a chance.”

Heffler had risen with Jack, and was moving now toward the door.

“If you’re interested,” he suggested, without meeting Gilbert’s eyes, “I’ll find out all I can about those things.”

Gilbert shook his head slowly.

"No, Joe. I don't want you to do that sort of thing for me. She's your friend, you know."

Joe Heffler stood still, looking at the floor for a moment. Then he nodded and went out.

Gilbert cleared up his desk and plodded out into the steady downpour of rain. The dreary day seemed to fit his mood. He was tired, discouraged, temporarily beaten. Billy came out of the Hardy house as he tramped up West Hill, and they walked together the few steps to the McNish gateway.

"Brain fever," Billy said laconically.

"Hard luck," was Gilbert's short reply. "Very serious?"

"Rather."

Gilbert walked on silently. He was thinking of the girl in the house Billy had left.

Mrs. Gilbert watched her son furtively all that long afternoon and evening, as he sat working at the desk in the little library or tramping back and forth restlessly. Gradually, by unsuspecting answers to cunning questions, she learned much that was troubling him. But she said nothing about it until they were locking up the house for the night.

"Laddie." She was looking up at him as he towered above her. "There's a word I mind my own mother used to say when things went as they shouldn't. 'We've aye been provided for, and aye will we yet.' I heard her say it often."

He realized then that she knew, and that she was worried for him.

"Of course, mither," he said, trying to seem indifferent.

An hour later, as he lay asleep, his great body sprawled across his bed upstairs, she tiptoed in and looked down at him, as he lay there in the moonlight that shone through the open window.

“My little lad,” she whispered to herself, and there were tears in her eyes; “my little lad.”

CHAPTER XVI

THE APPEARANCE OF MR. CONLIN

GILBERT started and looked wonderingly at one of his draughtsmen, who stood staring in turn, his brow creased with silent astonishment. They had been bending over some penciled sketches of machinery which Gilbert had brought with him that Monday morning, when the bell from Mr. Hardy's room sounded. There was something uncanny about it that startled both men.

"Wire crossed, probably."

"Or the boy dusting."

Together they leaned again over the littered desk, when, short and sharp, once more came the summons, emphasized now irritably.

"If I didn't know it couldn't be, I'd say it was him."

"I'll go and see what's up. Only a minute. Wait here."

Gilbert threw open the door of the president's office, and then stood transfixed with surprise. The office chair whirled around as the door opened, and in it sat the trim, rigid figure of a girl, whose face had a forced sternness that threatened to break instantly into spontaneous and tantalizing smiles.

"You are very slow, Mr. Gilbert," said the low, musical

voice. "Close the door, please. I wish to speak to you."

Gilbert closed the door obediently and faced her, suppressed humor showing in his eyes and about his mouth.

She looked away quickly, biting her lips.

"Did the—the molasses come for the foundry?" she asked. Then in spite of herself she lost control and leaned back, quivering with silent laughter. Gilbert's smile broadened.

"I didn't know we were out of molasses, Miss Hardy," he drawled.

"Didn't you?" she said in a shocked tone. "Why, I supposed you knew everything—that is, about shops. I didn't, of course, but I remembered father told us you used molasses in the foundry. It seemed odd, of course, and it was the only thing I could think of at the moment. You shouldn't make me laugh, sir. It spoils my dignity."

By this time Gilbert was leaning, with his arms upon the desk-top, looking down at her.

"How is your father?" he asked.

Her face sobered instantly.

"He's very ill. The doctors can't tell yet."

"Why are you here?" he asked in his old, imperative way that made her defiant for the moment.

"Partly to tell you that," she said hesitatingly.

He waited in alert silence.

"Partly the old story of Mohammed and the mountain. You *are* a mountain," she added, eyeing humorously his big, lumbering figure.

Again his eye caught hers and she moved restlessly.

“Partly to see anything in his mail that——” Then she hesitated again. She glanced up at him, a rich red coloring her olive cheeks.

“No, it isn’t that at all,” she went on hurriedly. “I can’t be of any use up at the house. They won’t let me go near him, and mother would rather be alone. I know some of the things that happened Saturday. I know that you’re trying to save him and that you’re in trouble about it. Billy told me. I thought, perhaps, I might help—a little—somewhere. It’s a woman’s part to do that.”

As she watched him, she saw that he smiled steadily at her.

“You’ve begun already,” he said quietly.

They sat down at the table which had separated the contending parties at the meeting.

“Now tell me all about it,” she commanded.

“Somehow,” he said slowly, “I think you’ll understand. Most women wouldn’t, I’m afraid.”

Then, leaning his elbows on the table, he started at the very beginning with the first intimation he had had of Mr. Hubbard’s intentions. And, as he talked, he seemed to grow more and more interested in the story. This first unburdening of it all upon other shoulders seemed to free his own of some of their load. Once or twice he stopped, as if some new clue or an idea toward the solution of some difficulty had occurred to him. His wits sharpened under the friction of her questions. He forgot where they were. He forgot the man waiting idly in his office. He forgot temporarily who she was, and talked as if she were a business associate. And she,

realizing it, listened eagerly that she might understand and be worthy of his confidence.

"In six months we'd have the shops so promising that none would care to sell stock. They'd all want to buy. But six months is a long time."

Clare stared at the table thoughtfully. Then she smiled.

"If I were only in a story book," she said, looking up at him, "I would sacrifice myself, and marry a man with money, and turn it all over to you."

"Money wouldn't help now, I'm afraid," he said, his mind concentrated on business. "They've too big a start."

"What will you do?"

"Something will happen." Gilbert's face glowed with new confidence. "Something must happen now."

At that moment, as if in answer to his remark, something did happen. The door opened and a man entered, unannounced. He was short, with a figure like a carelessly rolled wad, over which hung a frock coat that looked as if it had never met a tailor's iron since it was made. A diamond shirt stud sparkled in the opening of his tan-colored waistcoat, and he wore russet shoes. A cigar was stuck in his narrow mouth; his hair was black and greasy; and a large, flat nose squatted in the middle of his full, clean-shaven face. Gilbert noticed all these things after he had glanced at the visitor's bright, shifty eyes.

The man looked from one to the other with an ill-bred, knowing smile.

"Mr. Gilbert?" he asked, in a tone which was on the

border line between deference and arrogance. Receiving an affirmative nod for an answer, he came forward with a card in his outstretched hand. As Gilbert glanced at it he perceptibly stiffened.

"Well, Mr. Conlin?" he asked.

"D'ye want me to talk before the lady?" The visitor jerked his thumb toward Miss Hardy.

"Of course," said Gilbert, not looking at Clare Hardy, who had pushed her chair back, and who was watching the two men with frank curiosity.

"All right." But the man shifted his feet uneasily. "This shop ain't payin' its men enough," he began, plunging his hands deep into his trousers pockets and jerking his head back defiantly. "It keeps men after hours. It puts men off their regular jobs and onto others. It discharges them when it takes the notion or when a new automatic machine crowds 'em out. All but about a hundred o' yer men are union men, and the union's decided, through me, to get these things adjusted. You're a union man yerself, Mister Gilbert. Ye know me and ye know the union rules."

"Yes, I know you. You're the worst thing I know about the union," drawled Gilbert, a dangerous smile on his lips. "If the men have any definite grievance I'll fix it if I can. But I don't believe they have one, and, what's more, I don't believe you can make them think they have one. If you haven't anything else to say— Good-morning, Conlin."

Gilbert turned once more to Miss Hardy, whose look was unfortunately one of open amusement. Conlin saw the look and felt the contemptuousness of Gilbert's speech.

"I'll have something more to say, Mister Gilbert, and soon, too," he said. Then he turned and strutted out, his anger swelling him up like a turkey cock.

Clare Hardy watched him out of sight, her body swaying unconsciously with his, her face wrinkled with repressed laughter.

"Isn't he absurd? What will he do?" she asked.

Gilbert was staring past her at the blank side wall.

"Oh, he'll probably excommunicate me from the union," he said. "And he'll try to call a strike, which 'll be the last blow to our opposition."

The last words came more slowly, as if the speaker was thinking of something else. His face took on the dreamy look she had noticed before, when he was thinking deeply. Then she saw light suddenly flash in his eyes. He jumped to his feet and paced up and down before her.

"That's it," he said over and over to himself, paying no attention to her. "That's it."

It was very trying to Clare Hardy's woman's curiosity, this oracular, indefinite statement.

"What's it?" she asked.

Gilbert started, called to himself once more, and flung himself, boyishly enthusiastic, into the chair.

"The first ray of light I've had in weeks," he cried. Then, as he saw the alert surprise and sympathy on the face opposite him—the face, near now, that, far away and indistinct, had gone with him throughout the struggle—he stopped suddenly and leaned toward her. "And you brought it to me."

Her face flushed suddenly, but it grew sober and disappointed as he went on.

"Will you come again to-morrow? I want to think about it, and the shop's a-calling me now."

Their eyes met for a short second.

"I'll do whatever you say," she said.

Gilbert turned quickly and pushed one of the buttons that studded the president's desk.

"Send Jimmy O'Rourke here," he told the boy who answered. Miss Hardy waited, curiously, near the door that led down to the street, but Gilbert seemed to have forgotten her.

"Jimmy," he said, when the boy appeared, "did you see the man who was here a few minutes ago?"

"De guy wid the sparkler? Yessir."

"See Peter and get hold of that hackman he told us about. Find out if this is the man. Then keep your eye on him until I tell you to quit. His name is Conlin."

"All right, sir." Jimmy slammed the door behind him, as if to signify immediate action. And Gilbert turned awkwardly to Miss Hardy.

"It sounds very thrilling," was all she said as she turned to go.

When he had relieved the draughtsman, who was still waiting in his office, Gilbert walked through the shops with an elation he could scarcely have analyzed. All the straggling, disorganized forces of him seemed to marshal themselves into line, and the gentle voice of command that ordered them now was her voice. As he opened the first door, however, and the choppy waves of metallic sound broke over him from the grimy, seething sea of activity within, he put her out of his mind. An hour later, in the foundry, he came suddenly upon Mr. Conlin

gesticulating and talking to a knot of workmen. As Gilbert appeared they separated quickly, as if impulsively ashamed. Then they stood by, interested in the contest between the two men. Gilbert quietly ordered them back to work, and they went, hesitatingly looking at Conlin for other orders.

"I'll give you just one minute to get out of here, and I warn you not to come back," he said to the agitator.

Conlin squared off, his arms akimbo, defiantly. The minute passed quickly and the two men still faced each other. Gilbert snapped his watch-case and seized the agitator unexpectedly, by the collar with one hand and with the other by the trousers, where the tight frock-coat sprung open at the rear. Conlin struggled ostentatiously as he was marched roughly out of the door, through the yard and out of the gate, which the gateman opened for them wonderingly. Gilbert released him, turned without a word, and the gate clanged behind him. Conlin smiled malevolently and walked off, lighting a cigar. He was a martyr now. That would help him more than hours of his clever talk. Meanwhile Gilbert, in the mills once more, sensed the first organized opposition he had felt in the shops since he had become superintendent, and he began to distrust his hold on the men. In an hour the insidious poison of the walking delegate's tongue had undermined much of his work of many months, until he felt it tumbling about him in ruin. And when the machinists came back to work in the afternoon—the most skilled, most intelligent workmen in the building—he saw them talking together, some excitedly, others more calmly, shaking their heads. All

day the spirit of insurrection grew throughout the mills, that, Saturday, had been contented in their compact organization under his leadership. Uneasiness was everywhere, meeting him in covert glances; antagonism, growing and bitter; and the work became shiftless, half-hearted. Only a few bent stolidly over their machines, listening to the whirring, grating message of progress and peace, while in the rooms where cheap day labor was employed, his appearance was the signal for sudden foreboding silence, that would break into a babel of many tongues and passions when he had gone. They were not union men, but they scented trouble, and they liked it. When the whistle blew Gilbert watched them hurry out in long, straggling lines, and with heavy heart he noticed the absurd but menacing figure of Conlin sauntering down to meet them. As he turned from the window, he saw a familiar figure at the door, and smiled a weary welcome to it.

“Is there anything I can do for you, sir?”

It was Heffler, with his usual good-night.

“Nothing, thank you, Joe.”

But the man came forward, handed him a paper, and, touching his hat, went out and down the stairs. On the paper were noted the time and place of three union meetings to be held that night.

Gilbert threaded his way through the motley crowd that was hurrying homeward; old men hobbling along, backs bent, as if by the weight of the empty dinner-pails; younger men elbowing their way forward in noisy, good-humored groups; boys, their faces daubed and their arms swinging with the swagger of their bodies, furtively

glancing from right to left to see if everyone realized that they were men and worked in the shops; tired-looking women gossiping, in voices which were made to be heard above the crash of machinery, about the clothes of a large, puffing woman whom a conductor and the inspector were helping into a trolley car; clerks, flowers faded in the buttonholes of their stylishly cut clothes—which often made whole groups look like ill-assorted twins and triplets, because Brown the clothier had sold forty suits of the same material for ten dollars each—but jaunty still, as they smirked smugly at pretty typewriter girls, who giggled and simpered and wriggled forward laboriously, their skirts bound and held tightly about them; an occasional lawyer, gesticulating as he talked; a doctor, his arms folded pompously over a broad, white waistcoat, one foot on the step of his carriage waiting for the other, as he gave his opinions on the weather with the same patronizing certainty he used when diagnosing diseases; all turned toward home, the peaceful place where they ate and slept and had arguments, usually gentle, and made resolutions, usually good; where they had occasional lapses into youthful sentiment which they hid carefully, and so made more delightful the place of which they said unconsciously but whole-heartedly, “God bless it.”

“Good people; good, funny people,” said Gilbert to himself, as now and then he answered noisy greetings and waves of the hand.

“Sorry ye wouldn’t let us put ye up for mayor,” shouted Mr. Tubb, the groceryman, who was always ready to express various political opinions to his cus-

tomers—various in that they invariably coincided with those of the man he was serving. Once, it was said, two of his best patrons, of opposite political faith, entering the store together, had purposely caught him off his guard. And, after sputtering and growing very red, and brushing imaginary dust from his long apron, he had suddenly heard an inaudible call from the rear of the store and had rushed off and hidden in his little partitioned office. There he had remained all day, peering through the glass window, and trying to figure out how he could prove that both parties were right without showing that both were also wrong.

“It was over-confidence for you to think of it,” drawled Gilbert. “Who are you going to put up to-night, Tubb?”

The groceryman bent over an empty barrel to hide his embarrassment.

“Well,” he called defiantly after the tall man, “I’d rather have you than either of ’em.”

Gilbert found Mr. Butterson in front of his Universal Emporium, studying with obvious approval and pride the big, newly decorated windows of his three adjoining stores. Mr. Butterson was ready to start homeward, and together they walked up West Hill, talking earnestly. Gilbert turned in at the gate of the old house. He had promised to dine with Billy that night.

The elder McNish occupied the greater part of the dinner hour with comments on the roominess of the big house, and the littleness and loneliness of two mere men who attempted to occupy it. After dinner he went upstairs, and the two younger men, smoking, drifted naturally to the broad veranda and the cool dusk of the approaching

night. Billy was very talkative and Gilbert listened silently.

"Glad you're living, eh Billy?" he remarked at last.

"Rather," grinned Billy. For a time he sat looking thoughtfully across the well-groomed lawn, and he smiled as he thought. "I'm a funny mess, Jack, inside. Why am I glad I'm living? I'll tell you. For four days I've been going around with my chest out, and everybody patting my back to keep it there. Every little while I go out on the street so as to see people point at me and hear them say, 'That's Captain McNish, who's up for mayor.' In the office I keep the window up, and I sit beside it all the time so that people can see me. I know it's idiotic, but I can't help it. I like it and I want more. It's like a man with a fever who wants water. He's ready to drown in it. That's what I enlisted for, time of the war, so's to wear the uniform and strut around. I didn't want to fight, Lord no; I just wanted to come home and show my shoulder straps. Asinine, isn't it? And do you know what I've thought about most since the caucus? The election? No. The great things to do for the city? No. The campaign? No. I've been thinking how bully it 'll be if I can go down to New Haven next Commencement, and show the people I know down there and the fellows that come back the Mayor of Hampstead. And I'm thirty-two years old, Jack Gilbert, think of that." He hesitated, a look half wistful, half humorous, on his face. "But I can't help it. It was born in me like a drunkard's thirst."

"I guess we're all a good deal like that," drawled Gilbert, smiling affectionately at his friend. "Every

time we hear a band play we'd like to think it's for us."

"Oh, yes; you and the rest can take a drink of approval now and then and it won't hurt you, but I've got to be on a continuous spree or be unhappy. By the way," he turned suddenly on Gilbert, "you haven't told me why you happened to descend on that meeting the way you did."

It was Gilbert's turn to look off toward the lawn and the hedge beyond.

"I came directly from Miss Hardy," he said. "She told me and asked me to fix it up."

"She did that!" cried Billy with sudden enthusiasm. Then he caught a glimpse of Gilbert's face and stopped short, for it had a hard look of repressed pain. "Well, you certainly did the business, you sober old fossil," he added in the lightest tone he could muster, "but it was a mistake. You're worth ten of me."

"Rot, Billy. You're talking through the same hat you were when you said you weren't thinking about the great things you had to do for the city. You've the biggest chance in years right there."

"Jack," said Billy suddenly, "I wish you could run my campaign. I don't know what to do, and Moriarty 'll grind it out in the same old way. I've got to get some grip in it or it 'll be a flat failure."

"I'll do what I can, Billy, but I'm likely to be kept mighty busy. I've a strike on my hands. That's the latest."

"A strike at the shops?"

Jack nodded. "There's a fat and oily person named

Conlin, who's come all the way from New Haven to tell the men that they don't know their own business. He may get 'em out. They'll float out on the streams of his oratory. But they won't stay out long and he won't stay in town long unless I'm mistaken."

There was a fierce light in Gilbert's eye that Billy had never seen before, and a solid, dangerous look about his jaw, although his mouth was smiling. Shortly they started down town together and parted at the corner by the bank, where Billy turned to the left, bound for the little Hampstead Club building where he expected to hear, in congenial surroundings, of the opposing caucus.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"To attend three union meetings, and to try to prove to the men that New Haven can't get along without Conlin any longer, that the state metropolis is in dreary desolation and that it's their duty as citizens to buy him a return ticket."

"Isn't it dangerous?" said Billy doubtfully. "They might do anything."

Gilbert shook his head smilingly.

"It's a pretty good world," he said. "There aren't half as many people who want to shoot you and sandbag you as the newspapers try to make you think there are."

It was a duel that night between Mr. Conlin and Jack Gilbert. When the portly Irishman reached the hotel victorious, some time after midnight, he was wiping the perspiration from his face. He looked around furtively, as if he still feared the presence of the big man, who had trailed him from meeting to meeting and who had made him use every trick, every argument, every threat

he knew to win a half-reluctant vote from the men. Then he shook his head as he looked back at the short struggle. He had thought before the first—machinist's—meeting that he was certain of a unanimous following. The hot-heads, whose work had been arranged beforehand, had been arguing with the doubtful ones before the meeting began, when suddenly the big-bodied superintendent had entered and had instantly coalesced the opposition. It wasn't so much what he said, Conlin agreed, for he talked simply and straight from the shoulder, nor was it the way he said it, for the man was no speaker. It was the man himself, fearless, powerful, earnest, honest, that had forced Conlin to rally every faculty to stave off defeat.

Gilbert had laid great emphasis on his own personal relations with the men. They knew, he said, that he would do the square thing by them if they did the square thing by him. After Conlin, in a burst of his best rhetoric, had denounced capital and had told the men the old story of their woes, the large young man had asked calmly, with a smile of ridicule that made the Irishman double his fists till the nails bit into the flesh, what all that had to do with this particular case. His fists doubled again now as he remembered how he, Conlin, had forced them into line one after another, by threats and cajoling; as he remembered the bitter insults that Jethro and Grady and others of his aids had helped him to heap upon the young man, who stood smiling good-humoredly at them, breaking the force of their blows with quiet sarcasm or ridiculing silence; and as he remembered how, when the vote was taken and when the

strike was affirmed and when Gilbert had been expelled from the union for disloyalty, the young man had turned on his heel and walked out, leaving a few jeering and the rest shaken. The other two meetings had been easier, for the news of the first victory had given his workers heart and had placed Gilbert, the outsider, on the defensive. But now, as Conlin sat in his room, staring at a picture of Lincoln that was hung by chance in the midst of a background of forget-me-not wall paper, two or three sentences rang in his ears:

“I’m as good a union man as any of you, and the worst of us is better than this man who tells you to strike. For we’re honest and he isn’t.”

“Whether you follow the crack of his whip or not, I’ll show you the kind of man he is before I’m done with him.”

Mr. Conlin’s fingers trembled slightly as he lit a cigar. For a moment he was sorry he had left New Haven. He was a trifle afraid of the big young man. Then he thought of the reward that would be his if he won, and, like the hen and many men, he began to count the eggs of his hopes as if they were already hatched.

Meanwhile Gilbert was across the square, sitting, his long legs crossed, in the box-like car of Mr. Tubb’s night-lunch wagon, and talking with Mr. Peter Lumpkin.

CHAPTER XVII

TO DRIVE DULL CARE AWAY

ALTHOUGH it was long after midnight when Gilbert finally went upstairs to bed, he was up at an earlier hour than usual in the morning. His mother, working in the kitchen, heard him out in the narrow garden at the back. He was muttering away, in his unmusical bass, one of Mrs. Gilbert's old songs. Now and then she caught a word or two, emphasized as he bent over the rows of red salvia that ran along the edge of the garden.

“There ne'er was a flower in garden or bower
Like auld Joe Nicolson's bonnie Nannie.”

Mrs. Gilbert smiled as she hummed the words with him, and beat out with her foot the time of the simple tune. Then she stopped suddenly, wondering. She couldn't remember ever hearing him sing that kind of a song before. Usually it was “Down Among the Dead Men,” or “It's Always Fair Weather,” or something equally mannish. What possessed the lad to be singing a sentimental love ballad? Her face grew grave with motherly intuition.

When Gilbert passed the Hardy house on his way to the shop, he guiltily hid as much as he could of a large

bunch of salvia behind his burly form. At the office he tried to keep the flowers out of the office boys' sight. As he arranged the red blossoms on "the old man's" open desk he swore to himself that he was a sentimental fool—and glad of it. Then he went to the window to see if she was coming, although it was not yet eight o'clock and he did not expect her until nine.

What did he care what happened to the noisy, sordid machine that called to him raspingly, or for the misled, grimy men who changed from friends to foes in a day, or for the stubborn political fight just ahead? She was coming out of the dahlias and the chrysanthemums of the old garden. Coming with the ineffably tender look in her dark eyes (he wondered if he could meet their glance without crying out). Coming with the old tantalizing sweet smile on her lips that curled like the heart of a rose out of the more faintly colored outer petals (he wondered if he could see that smile without telling her how he loved it). Coming with the dark, wavy hair whose perfume went to his head as he thought of it (he wondered if he could keep his big, ugly hands from smoothing the hair and holding the dear head so that it could never escape him). Coming to-day, coming now, perhaps coming to-morrow and afterwards for a time. Then she would go away (he wondered if he could ever let her go, for somehow everything seemed suddenly hollow and empty at the thought of it). Yes, she would go but she would leave something, a rose or a song or a look, that could not be forgotten. But he would not think of that. She was coming, coming to him. And what was he except that he loved her?

The old shadow returned. He, with no graces, no learning, no anything; he, a failure in the only struggle he had ever made; he was playing the mad fool merely because she was so prodigal of her sweetness that she had let him breathe it for a few happy moments. Never mind. She was coming. There was Billy, of course. She really loved Billy. But Billy couldn't have her to-day, and she couldn't stop him from loving her to-day or any other day. Why think of it? She must be on her way by now. He was sure that he could sing splendidly, that he could be a poet or a painter or any of the wonderful, impossible things that he used to dream of as a boy. Now she must be turning the corner. A light step came dancing up the stairs outside. She was here.

When she entered he was gazing out of the window, singing to himself with monstrous indifference. But he could not have said what words he was singing or indeed that he was singing at all. He was listening to the sound of her footsteps and trying to be very calm. She came directly to him and rested her hand lightly for a mere second upon his arm; and, during that second, he knew how sad everybody else in the world must be in comparison with him. He seemed so close to her that he held his breath, so that it might not check the tingling passion that ran through him.

"You're not a bit disheartened." It was her voice.

Unconsciously he heaved a deep sigh. The hand had dropped from his arm.

"Oh, you've come," he said solemnly, but with humorously evident insincerity. He felt somehow that he

ought to look at her, but when he turned he stared past her at the opposite wall.

"Disheartened? What about?" he asked. He only knew that she was there beside him, and that she was wearing black and red as she had on the night of the Fourth of July. His view toward the wall included her slender, tapering arm.

"That's like you. Just as if you hadn't a trouble in the world." The arm disappeared suddenly and, like a magnet, it drew him.

"I haven't. They all went when you came," he declared fervently. He had followed her to the desk where she bent over the red flowers.

"Pretty speech and pretty flowers," she cried, glancing back at him, her black eyes dancing; and he suddenly felt giddy and exhilarated, as if he had been lifted to some great height where the air was light and the sun was shining very brightly.

"We have a very susceptible office boy," he drawled, scarcely knowing what he said. "He fell in love with you at first sight months ago, and has been languishing ever since in bitter and hopeless despair. Not wishing to break his young and tender heart, I allowed him to decorate your desk."

"An office boy?" She leaned forward in the swinging chair and forced him to look at her. "Did he say anything about me?"

"Oh, yes," he went on desperately. "He's wonderful with adjectives. He said that—that you were very beautiful, you know, and—that you were almighty kind to everybody, and that——"

There was a slight hesitant pause.

"Wonderful office boy," said Miss Hardy, flushing. "I'd like to know him. I'd like to hear him say other things like that."

There was a knock at the door, and Jimmy O'Rourke hurled himself into the room with his customary haste. He stopped short when he saw the girl.

"Man to see ye, sir." The boy looked from Gilbert to Miss Hardy and grinned knowingly.

"Come here, Jimmy," said Gilbert severely. The boy came closer and, looking up at the manager, he was amazed to see the big man's right eye wink ostentatiously at him.

"Where did you get these flowers you brought for Miss Hardy?" Gilbert's eye did not leave the boy's face. Jimmy tentatively patted one worn shoe with the other and screwed his lips in thought.

"I stole 'em," he said at last, but his freckled face showed no trace of shame.

"You've always liked Miss Hardy very much, haven't you, Jimmy?" the stern voice went on. Jimmy flushed uneasily. He didn't consider it manly to express his affections, and to be forced to express those he had never carefully considered seemed childish. He glanced shyly at Miss Hardy.

"Yessir," he said decisively.

"You don't remember anything you've said about her except that she was a—beautiful and—a—kind, do you?" Gilbert was keeping a sober face with difficulty. Jimmy looked up under his eyebrows, his mouth open in wonder.



“I stole 'e..t,’ he said at last.”



"No, sir," he said truthfully enough.

Clare Hardy smiled and held out her hand to the boy.

"Thank you for the flowers," she said. "I like you, too."

Jimmy took the hand hesitatingly, grinned sheepishly and then, to Miss Hardy's merriment and Gilbert's confusion, he turned his head and winked twice at the general manager. Gilbert caught him by the shoulders.

"Did he tell you his name?" he asked shortly.

For a second Jimmy thought it was another of the series of questions. Then he remembered.

"It's him, Conlin," he said in an almost sepulchral whisper.

"Tell him I don't care to see him." Gilbert led the boy to the door. When it had closed and they were alone again, he moved quickly toward the window, his hand smoothing his chin, and looked out. Clare Hardy, her lips twitching, toyed with a paper cutter on the desk. He turned after a minute and her eyes were raised to meet his. Then they laughed.

"Jimmy is certainly wonderful with adjectives," she said. But the mention of Conlin had cast a shadow upon them.

"You haven't told me what you did last night," she said, suddenly sober.

"There isn't much to tell. Conlin proved to the men that I was the most dangerous thief and murderer at large. They sputtered and called names and shook their fists and generally enjoyed themselves."

"But what did they do?"

"They——" Gilbert stopped suddenly and listened.

The multifarious noise of machinery had grown fainter. They heard the squeaking, dying wail of the shafting after the power is taken away. The pulsing beat of hammers stopped short. From outside came a straggling shout as of boys when school is out. "That's what they did," Gilbert said significantly.

Instantly all was hubbub in the outer office. Chairs scraped, windows were thrown up, and a confusion of many voices hummed incessantly.

"Let me go with you," she cried as he started toward the door. He smiled and shook his head.

"I'll be back in a minute."

Miss Hardy went to the window and looked out at the yard. A phalanx of grimy men and boys with dinner pails were hurrying by, some capering and hooting, some swaggering self-consciously as if on parade, some talking and gesticulating, some plodding along stolidly. She saw them all, following the lead of those in front, look at the awkward giant, his head bared and the wind ruffling his thick hair, who had at the moment appeared from the door beneath her. She watched him as he passed them, waving his hand to them and calling a few by name.

"You're going the wrong way, boys," she heard him call, and, following his gaze, she saw some of the men nod their heads anxiously, and stop to look after him until they were carried on by the rush from behind them. But she shuddered slightly and her face flushed with anger as she saw many sneer and heard derisive shouts, and as she saw a few swarthy-faced men, when he had passed and could not see them, turn and shake

their fists at his back. And behind them all, like a shepherd driving his sheep, came Conlin, grinning malignantly at Gilbert, who ignored him. She turned from him in disgust, and watched the tall man meet a little group that remained as if undecided what to do, and then she saw them follow the others more slowly and reluctantly. Soon they were all gone and he, with a short, white-haired man, had disappeared in the building beyond.

She waited an almost interminable time, as it seemed to her. Then, impatience and curiosity overcoming her, she turned the handle of the door and looked cautiously into the outer office. It was empty. Evidently he had told them to go, along with the others. The silence was sepulchral after all the clamor. She started when a door slammed somewhere below. She was suddenly very lonesome and she wished that he would hurry. Then her eye caught sight of his name in small black letters on a door beyond, and, alert with surreptitious discovery, she tiptoed across the desolate office and entered his little room.

With a throb of delight she shut the door behind her. The flat-topped desk was piled high with papers in wire baskets, and at the back against the wall was a thick roll of blue prints. An inkwell, a case of penholders and a corn-cob pipe lay, like straggling islands, upon the blue of the broad blotter, leather encased. A plain filing case stood in one corner, and in another was a pile of what looked like junk to Miss Hardy, stray machine parts and tools thrown together there until he could find the time to deal with them. Directly before the

little window, and just far enough away for a pair of very long legs to reach, was an old racked armchair. Miss Hardy crossed the room and sat down in it. She looked at the distance to the window sill and shook her head with twinkling eyes. On the walls were two large maps of the world traced with broad, colored lines, a tinted picture of a steamship and a large calendar, with an old man fishing above the lines of figures.

Two months before, Miss Hardy would have felt that this simple, unordered office was offensively plain, offensively careless, offensively lacking in any indication of taste. She would have criticised it, and the man who occupied it, unmercifully. This morning she noticed merely that its eastern window made the room warm and friendly, and she said to herself that everything in the place suggested a strong man.

She returned to the desk. It was here that he had worked during these last disquieting, discouraging months. She curled herself up in the swinging chair, and, tilting backward, she rested one flushed cheek against the chair back. Then, suddenly remembering that he might come at any moment and find her there, she slipped from the chair and stood facing the door, expecting him, woman-like, as soon as the thought entered her head. She would never have forgiven herself if he had caught her in his room and in his chair, but in her heart she wished him to know that she had been there. She caught up one of his blunt stub pens and impulsively scratched a single line across the blue blotter, a line that had recurred to her whenever she had thought of him during the last few weeks. Then she tiptoed out,

closing the door quietly behind her, and hurried across to the president's office. When he returned he found her sitting where he had left her, thumbing the leaves of a business directory.

"I guess we'll go home now," he said.

She liked his saying that. Together they went down the creaking stairs, and at his suggestion she laughingly turned the lock in the outer door. A small boy, playing a harmonica, stopped and eyed them curiously as they turned away, the tall, broad-shouldered man and the radiant girl. A few minutes later the boy seated himself on the steps they had left and, evidently inspired by the silent mills behind him, he played "Every Day'll be Sunday By and By," with reckless regard for everything except rhythm, which he beat with one foot as he played.

Gilbert spent the afternoon alone at the shop. Much of the time he was at his desk, his big body sprawled in the swinging chair, his thick hair tousled, and a dreamy, far-away look in his gray eyes, that made his homely face with its broad-bridged nose and its heavy protruding jaw seem incongruously boyish. In moments of sudden energy he scratched or erased rough notes on a yellow pad before him, until the paper looked, as he remarked to himself, like a Chinese laundry ticket. When the growing darkness at last broke in upon his reverie he tore the sheet from the pad and stowed it away carefully in an inner pocket, although every letter and figure upon it was clear in his mind. Then he took the blotter from its case and, wrapping it, as most men wrap parcels, into an ugly but unnecessarily solid bundle,

he let himself out into the night, the paper about the old blue blotter crackling under his arm.

He was late in reaching the big house that night, and conversation, with the little group of men who were awaiting him, halted temporarily after they had commented upon every phase of September weather for all the years they could remember. Gilshannon of the *News* was there. Billy had found him searching for Gilbert and had brought him in to wait with the others.

The pause in the talk was only momentary. To argue is as necessary to a New Englander as to eat and to sleep. By nature he rejoices in the opposite side of every question, and he prefers broad, general questions of which he knows only what the daily paper tells him. If he is alone he will argue with himself, and often he will prove to himself that he is wrong and that the argument by which he proves it is faulty. When these men found that they differed on the labor question, naturally uppermost in their minds at the moment, they glared at each other pleasantly. They dabbled at it as a cat will dab at a choice morsel, and played with it, and finally jumped at it eagerly.

It was the one question about which the kindly Mr. McNish could be angry, and he therefore rejoiced in it and sat forward on the edge of his chair, his shoulders straight, his gray beard sticking out almost horizontally from his set chin. Colonel Mead leaned back philosophically in a broad Morris chair, but his hand that lay on the chair arm was doubled up. On the broad lounge opposite sat Billy McNish and Gilshannon, the latter, as usual, eager to talk.

"That's just it," he said, eyeing Mr. McNish aggressively. "Who's to say what pay the workingmen are worth? The man that hires them? Nonsense. You know as well as I do that he'll hire them as cheaply as he can, and never pay them any more than he can help. He'll squeeze the life blood out of them, and when they're dry he'll turn them out, old and without a penny, for they've never had more than a scrimping, living wage."

"What's yer scheme, then?" asked the Colonel sarcastically. "Turn over to the rabble the shops you've put yer money and brains into? That 'd be like openin' the gates of a stockade and tyin' yer hands when ye see the Injuns comin'!"

"Who's the rabble?" asked Gilshannon, rejoicing in this turn of the argument. "A number of men combine a lot of money and build a factory. What per cent. do they want for it? Four, five, six? Not at all. They want ten, fifteen, twenty per cent., every penny they can screw out of it. That's business. Now the laboring men combine a lot of labor. What wages do they want? Two dollars a day? No, three or four or five dollars, as much as they can get. That's business. It's a fight between the two, that's all. The owners cleverly circumvent laws or have new ones made to get their ends. The ignorant workingmen sometimes take the franker way—the only way they know—of breaking the laws. It's intelligent selfishness and brutality versus ignorant selfishness and brutality."

Mr. McNish arose and strode up and down to calm himself.

"We're all going to the merry bow-wows," remarked Billy disconsolately, as he winked at the Colonel.

"Do you believe in the Bible, Mr. Gilshannon?" Mr. McNish asked solemnly as he sat down again.

"I can't say that I do." The young man shook the ashes from his cigarette nonchalantly. "It always has seemed to me that ever since Columbus proved that the world was round, Heaven has been flat."

"Anyone would know you're a Harvard man," Billy said in a tone of feigned awe.

Gilshannon nodded.

"And anyone would know you're not," he retorted.

"Why?"

"Because you haven't expressed a single vigorous opinion."

Billy smiled with appreciation. He took the cigarette Gilshannon offered him, after patting congratulations on the reporter's back.

"But what's yer scheme," the Colonel asked, "or doesn't yer contract call for buildin' anythin' after ye tear it all down?"

"Give them all an equal chance," said Gilshannon readily, "educate them and——"

"Educate them?" cried Mr. McNish, breaking out suddenly. "Yes, we pay taxes and educate their sons so that they'll shake their fists under the noses of our own boys. I tell you, Mr. Gilshannon, there'll always be 'hewers of wood and drawers of water'; there'll always be class distinction. Education don't change a man's blood nor his heart. And I'll tell you another thing: a mob is a mob. That's no theory nor a sentence full

of long words. I helped to meet one of the worst mobs this country ever saw and I know what I'm talking about. While they were killing defenseless women and children in the Draft Riots of '63, there were a lot of men like you who stood around and talked—copper-heads we called 'em. The police tried their clubs and the militia shot over the heads of the mob. It only made 'em worse. Then we came up, a handful of us, just from fighting an army we were proud even to run away from. It wasn't any holiday or tin-soldier racket for us. When they saw us coming they laughed, and when our colonel told 'em to disperse they laughed, but after one volley of the kind the Johnnies had been standing against for three years, they didn't laugh. We broke that riot because we shot to kill. And I tell you, many a time, to-day, when I walk along the streets of this town, which is better than most, I feel an itch for the old gun. Bayonet and bullet, I tell you," added the thoroughly angered Mr. McNish. "That's the only way to handle a mob, and the politicians are afraid to use it."

Mr. McNish mopped his brow with a handkerchief.

"Do you believe in the Bible, sir?" asked Gilshannon sternly, but his eyes were twinkling.

"I do," said Mr. McNish solemnly. "It was a mob that killed Him, and Pilate was afraid."

Gilshannon moved uneasily at the answer. Billy excused himself and went out into the broad hallway. A few moments later the Colonel, who, as if in envy of Mr. McNish's story, had begun one of his own, was interrupted by a heavy stamping of feet on the veranda, and by the appearance of Gilbert, Billy hanging to his arm.

"I've been telling Jack about the 'terrible mob' and 'intelligent selfishness and brutality,'" remarked Billy sweetly.

Gilbert lit one of Mr. McNish's cigars and sank into a large easy chair with a deep sigh of content. Then he smiled.

"Have you mentioned Hardy & Son to-night?" he asked.

Mr. McNish looked guilty and shamefaced; Gilshannon stared at the big fellow quizzically; and the Colonel shook his head. Gilbert laughed aloud.

"At three union meetings last night they scarcely spoke of it. The talk was capital in general versus labor in general, and it roiled them so much that they struck." They laughed with him now, all except Gilshannon.

"But I take it we've got enough to tackle in what the *News* would call 'the concrete situation.' Did you want to see me, Gil?" Jack added, turning to the reporter.

"The *News* wants your opinion of the strike," Gilshannon said simply.

"My opinion?" Gilbert laughed. "Nothing to say, Gil, for publication." And all of Gilshannon's plausible reasoning did not change his decision.

"No, Gil," he said. "There's a lot I'll say to you privately, but not one word to the *News*."

The reporter rose and picked up his hat.

"I'll move on then," he said. "I'd like to hear what you've got to say, but I'd better not. It might appear in the paper accidentally."

When the door had closed behind him Gilbert turned abruptly to Billy.

"I'll take on your campaign," he said, "if you still want me to."

The Colonel interrupted before Billy had an opportunity to answer.

"But ye can't do it, boy, with all this other thing on yer shoulders."

"That's what I said to Moriarty once when he was superintendent down at Hardy's," was Jack's reply. "It was about a machine. It don't pay, Moriarty said then, for a Yankee to say that a thing can't be done. The first thing he knows along comes some other fool Yankee and does it. Now, I've been puzzled about a good many things for the last six months, and all the time I've felt that there was one man back of them all. He never appears, and we're apt to forget about him, but he's there all the time, getting what he wants. He's the man Billy's really got to fight to be elected mayor, and he's the man we've got to fight to save Hardy & Son. I propose that we join forces and go after him together. We've been fighting Brett and Merrivale and Strutt and some others down at the shop. And Billy is going to work against the whole Republican party at the polls. We're banging away all over the place with shot-guns, and we aren't hitting much of anything. Let's pool our issues, buy a rifle, and aim it straight at Alonzo Hubbard."

Mr. McNish shook his head slowly. Mr. Hubbard was one of the most highly respected citizens of Hampstead. He was a leader, morally, socially, and financially. The idea of conducting a campaign against him seemed absurd. Mr. McNish wondered if the worry had not unset-

tled Gilbert's judgment. Billy stared at the floor to avoid Jack's glance.

"Sounds all right," the Colonel remarked doubtfully. "But 'tain't possible. Thar ain't time anyhow." The Colonel had entirely lost faith since the strike had been added to their troubles.

As they might have known, if they had thought, Gilbert was only made more stubborn by their opposition.

"I think there is," he said decisively, "although I wish it was a month instead of two weeks to election. You see, he's made one big mistake. He's back of one thing too many for his own good."

The trio looked up with frank inquiry on their faces.

"He wanted to make Hardy stock cheap so that he could buy it for a mere song," Gilbert went on, "and he hired a mighty poor man named Conlin to do it for him."

"Not the strike," cried Billy.

"You don't mean to say that Mr. Hubbard——" started Mr. McNish.

"Good Lord," ejaculated the Colonel, "kin ye prove it? Do ye know it?"

Gilbert smiled. He was enjoying their surprise. But he grew sober after a minute.

"Yes," he said quietly. "I can prove it and we'll have more evidence later. But we've got to be quiet about it. The biggest card in Mr. Hubbard's hand is that he keeps his mouth shut. We're going to play his own card at him till we know where we stand. He's making another mistake that he mustn't realize till the last minute. He hasn't had the Street Railway Company build that short

Broad Street line yet. That's due to be done three days after election. If it isn't done at that time the Council can withdraw the franchise. Of course he thinks he's going to own the new Council. Perhaps he will. And of course we want him to think he will."

"But," interjected Mr. McNish doubtfully, "the Council wouldn't take away the franchise without a good reason, would it, even if the franchise was a little one-sided?"

Gilbert smoked rapidly for a few seconds as if he needed time to arrange his words. He was talking more volubly to-night than usual, and his tongue seemed to weary of the unaccustomed exercise.

"It wasn't straight," he said slowly, "the way they passed it. It seemed strange at the time, but they have a majority of one in the Council and we let it go as a straight party vote. It wasn't. I put the thing up to Butterson hard yesterday, and he told me that he and somebody else on their side voted against it, but promised them to vote for the secret ballot. Two of our men voted for that bill, and I think I know who one of them was. That's one of the things we've got to find out—who the men were and how much they were paid for doing it."

"Paid?" cried Mr. McNish. "You don't believe that Mr. Hubbard would bribe——"

"Probably not directly. I don't know, but I'm pretty sure it was done."

"I don't believe it," declared Mr. McNish.

The bell rang sharply and a moment later Mr. Peter Lumpkin appeared, resplendent again with his bird's-egg blue cravat, above which beamed his usual expansive smile. Behind him came Joe Heffler, eyes downcast, as

meek and timid as Mr. Lumpkin was proprietary and hearty.

“Bless my soul,” ejaculated Mr. Lumpkin, as he greeted the group with vigorous hand-shaking, a proceeding that was trying to Mr. McNish’s aristocratic soul, “but I am glad to see you all. Mr. Gilbert here comes to me last night and he was sorely troubled, or words to that effect, and he asks me to come to-night. And I says to myself, ‘Peter,’ says I, ‘he’s a jolly good fellow, and what’s more he’s in difficulties, and what’s more he’s bigger than you are. You’d better go and see if you can’t assist him in your simple, modest and unvarnished way.’ So I goes to Mr. Tubb and I tells him that my only son was dying in Tareville,—which was economizing the truth, gentlemen, seeing that your humble servant has never been bound by the holy ties of matrimony—and I asks, would he be willing to oblige me in my affliction by dispensing hot coffee and ham sandwiches to the hungry denizens of this enlightened metropolis for one evening only, event not to be repeated this season. And Mr. Tubb, who is a warm-hearted man, gentlemen, is at present adorned with my best white raiment, fresh from Raymond & Company’s steam laundry, occupying my humble station——”

Gilbert had been talking in an undertone with Heffler, and he now turned to the Colonel with so quick a movement and with so much excitement that Mr. Lumpkin stopped in the middle of his explanation.

“Of course,” Gilbert was saying. “Don’t you remember, Colonel, that night at the church?” He hesitated. “No, you were too far away. But I’ve been a blockhead. It’s Neely, of course it’s Neely.”

"What's Neely?" asked Billy.

"Mr. Junius Brutus Neely, a fine Christian gentleman," remarked Mr. Lumpkin. "A man with a vocabulary second only to Webster himself. Particularly proficient, I've noticed, in words beginning with d—destruction, damnation, downward and so forth and so forth ad libitum——"

"And ad nauseam," suggested Billy.

Gilbert turned to Mr. Lumpkin.

"You know him?" he asked.

"Know him?" returned the night-lunch man. "Know him? As I'd know my own brother, if the fates had not destined me instead to the misfortune of sisters; as I'd know my own deeply lamented father, if he had not been consigned to the dust, a baker's dozen of years ago. Many a time has he partaken of the justly renowned viands cooked, dished and served under my own personal supervision. He has only one fault, gentlemen, and it is a good fault in the world filled with a 'superfluity of naughtiness,' or words to that effect. He always asks after my immortal soul during his first sandwich. If he could only wait till the second, gentlemen, it would be much easier, much easier for me. But we all have our faults and——"

"Lumpkin," Gilbert broke in, with a nod to Joe Heffler, "Joe wants to talk to you privately. Can they use the library, Mr. McNish?"

Mr. McNish assented and, with a courtesy that was exaggerated because it was forced, he showed the two visitors into the room across the broad hallway, and returned, closing the door behind him, disgust evident upon his face.

"They're good fellows and good friends," Gilbert said, meeting Mr. McNish's questioning glance frankly. "But Peter talks too easily to hear all we have to say. He wouldn't mean to repeat a word, but his tongue runs away with him."

"Like most women," remarked the Colonel. "Ye kin trust most every woman's heart but ye can't trust any woman's tongue."

Gilbert took from his pocket the yellow sheet of paper with its hieroglyphics.

"Colonel," he said, "I want you and Mr. McNish to send a notice to all the Hardy stockholders, saying that the strike will not affect the concern. Tell 'em that the stock is worth par and more. Tell 'em you know a ridiculously small price is being offered, and that you want them to let you hear from them before they make any such mistake as to sell out. Tell 'em anything to make 'em hold their stock. Then I want you both to work with Butterson and that man from Tareville—he'll probably be here to-morrow—to get their indirect if not their open support. And, Colonel, I want you to put Mr. Tubb on your conscience. He mustn't sell out to Hubbard."

The Colonel scowled at the grocer's name and opened his mouth to reply. He evidently thought better of it, however, for he merely nodded. Mr. McNish, following the Colonel's lead, bowed a dignified assent.

"Billy," Gilbert went on, "look up the records of that reservoir business. Get a fair valuation on the land they bought. Go to the bottom of the thing."

"All right," Billy said genially. "Shan't I see Moriarty, too?"

"Yes," Jack replied. "I forgot about that. I'll look after the rest, with Joe's help and Lumpkin's and Jimmy's."

"Who's Jimmy?" asked Mr. McNish, in a tone which suggested relief that there was at least one democratic humiliation Gilbert had spared him.

"Jimmy? Why, Jimmy O'Rourke, one of my office boys and a good one, too. I wonder where he is."

Gilbert strode across the hall and asked Mr. Lumpkin and Heffler the question. They had not seen Jimmy, but they returned, Mr. Lumpkin eagerly and Heffler with evident hesitation, to join the group in the parlor.

"You'll do it, Lumpkin?" Gilbert asked, as they crossed the hall.

"Do it?" repeated Mr. Lumpkin. "Why, the minute Joe mentions the matter I says to myself, 'Peter,' says I, 'he wants it done,—meaning you, sir, of course,—and it 'll be a matter of pride——'"

"Good for you," said Jack, as they entered the parlor.

Billy McNish and his father were laughing at the Colonel, who evidently had been talking and who was watching them with an amusing mixture of anxiety and good-humor on his grizzled face.

"Why don't you try something Western on him?" Billy was saying. "Lasso him or hold him up."

The Colonel chuckled as he looked up at Mr. Lumpkin, who stood in forensic attitude, one hand shoved between the buttons of his tight coat, his mild little eyes shifting about the room as if he were looking for an opportunity to speak.

"Mister Lumpkin," remarked the Colonel, "I'm plumb

int'rested in yer Mr. Tubb. Y'ought to know him like you'd know'd George Washington if you'd a ben his sister's husband's brother."

Everybody smiled except the night-lunch man. Mr. Lumpkin noticed neither the allusion nor the smile. There are men who coin phrases for their own use and who wear them out with constant repetition. But Mr. Lumpkin was more altruistic. He gave his phrases freely and they seldom came back to him.

"Mr. Tubb, sir?" he said, clasping his hands complacently upon his waistcoat. "Certainly you must know Mr. Tubb's reputation too well for me——"

"Yes," broke in the Colonel. "Tubb's like a hull lot o' men. Reckon I know his reputation like a brother, but I ain't never shook hands with his character."

"Well, sir," Mr. Lumpkin went on, paying no heed to the Colonel's interruption, "he's a man full of faith, hope an' charity,—these three, or words to that effect,—Mr. Tubb is. Of course, sir, a man of business must consider the piles of shekels, how they grow, or words to that effect. He must watch, with clear and undiminished vision, the machinations of his deadly rival in the grocery trade. He is proud of his position, Mr. Tubb is, as becomes a man who furnishes food to a great community. What would become of this thriving city, I ask you, gentlemen, if, for one short week, its magnificent stores, dedicated to the satisfaction of the inner man, should close their doors? Mr. Tubb feels his power and yet he is humble. He goes to church and mingles his voice with the psalm of praise that rises to the skies and yet——" Mr. Lumpkin paused to glance about the room. Then

he added in a lower voice—"He plays a good game of poker, so good a game indeed that, if he was not my employer and, of course, beyond reproach, I should be tempted, sorely tempted, to ask him forcibly how he arranges to hold four of a kind almost every time he deals." Mr. Lumpkin was indulging in reminiscent chagrin, but now he caught himself. "Not meaning anything against Mr. Tubb, gentlemen. Merely wishing to show you that he is an all-round man, a man of power and yet a man of the people, a man of——"

"Thet's all right, Mister Lumpkin," said the Colonel, pulling his gray mustaches. "Reckon I'd know Tubb's character now, ef I met it loose in the street."

"I think we've had enough business for to-night," Gilbert remarked. "I'm sick of it."

They all agreed with him. No one could have told exactly how it started, but a few minutes later they were gathered about Billy at the piano, while Mr. Lumpkin repeated his first Hampstead success about the romantic couple

"A suckin' cider throo a straw."

When, following that, Mr. Lumpkin, on a hint from Jack, started to bellow "To drive dull care away," in his megaphonic baritone, they all joined in, Mr. McNish enjoying himself most of all, swaying shoulder to shoulder with the night-lunch man, and grumbling away at an improvised and not always harmonious bass. The Colonel, droning along in monotone, stood arm in arm with Gilbert and Joe Heffler, who were trying to second the elder McNish's efforts, while Billy pounded the piano to make

it heard in the din, and added a shrill, jerky tenor during his more leisure moments.

“To drive dull care away.”

Jimmy O'Rourke lounged about the bar of the Hampstead Hotel that night, commenting on the day's baseball scores with Mike the bartender, who whistled between puffs from a long yellow cigar. He was there when Mr. Conlin entered from a door at the back that led to the servants' stairway. Mr. Conlin ordered a drink and added a few personal anecdotes of ball players he had met, while Mike, awed by such intimate knowledge of great men, listened and asked questions very deferentially. Jimmy tried to sell Mr. Conlin one of the papers he had under his arm, and then drifted into an adjoining room. The labor leader finished his drink and, remarking that it was a fine night for a walk, he strutted to the side door and out into a dark alley that led back to a neglected street of workmen's houses. A few seconds later Jimmy returned.

“Say, Mike,” he said, excitedly, to the bartender, “they's a guy in there that says Brennan, you know, av de Chicago's, is a quitter. It ain't so. Brennan's all right. Where's de stranger gone? He knows him.”

The bartender looked up from his paper, eager for an argument, and jerked his thumb toward the side door. Jimmy crossed the room quickly. Once in the alley, however, and the door closed softly behind him, he stopped and listened. In the silence he could hear the quick thud of Conlin's footsteps on the hard soil ahead. He crept close to the brick wall and followed, scarcely

breathing. Out into the side street they went, Conlin walking rapidly, the boy behind him stealing along in the shadows, watching him. Twice Conlin turned suddenly but he saw nothing, for the boy stopped in his tracks. Up West Hill they went. Once Conlin passed under the glare of a lamp at a corner and paused in the half darkness beyond for some minutes. Then he went on, smiling complacently, and, turning to the left, he made a wide detour before starting down toward the south end of town. Once again he stopped, and this time he sat down at the foot of a great elm tree by the walk. The streets were quiet except for the beat of a horse's hoofs at a crossing below, and even that far-away noise soon died away. For some minutes Conlin sat quiet and listened. Then he struck a match, looked at his watch and lit a cigar. He did not notice a form, farther down on the opposite side of the street, obliterate itself against the fence palings.

Conlin was enjoying the night, not because it suggested peace but because it brought to him a sense of stealth and, strange to say, of sentimentality. The two memories that came to him were of a night when a crowd of strikers in New York state set fire to a factory, and the night when he had first kissed Katy Doherty and had immediately carried her off to become Mrs. Conlin. She was dead now, Katy, rest her soul, and his little black eyes grew suddenly moist. He puffed away rapidly on his cigar and was very contented.

He lit another match and looked again at his watch. Then he stumbled to his feet and marched down the hill. A moment later the palings across the way grew ani-

mated, and a figure slouched along silently on the turf by the walk. The electric light at the corner above sputtered and hissed and grew dim, and when it started once more into its full brilliancy it shone only on dark houses and a deserted street.

Conlin's short steps as he went down the hill were so rapid that they approximated a run. He had delayed under the tree on the hill longer than he had intended, and he took a straight course now, never once turning to look back at the street behind him. The arc light that hung at the corner facing Alonzo Hubbard's simple and dignified home was not burning that night, and Conlin smiled as he thought how easily little things of that kind were managed by those who had money and power. He crossed the broad lawn, hid completely in the darkness, and knocked at a side door which opened almost instantly. He whispered his name, and, a second later, the door closed behind him, almost in the face of the boy who had arisen from the sod beside the entrance.

The only brilliantly lighted room evident from the outside was on the other side of the house, and thither Jimmy crept. The shades were pulled down closely, but one moved in the faint breeze, showing that the window was raised. Beneath it in the shadows the boy knelt and listened. At first he heard only the confused noise of voices. For five—ten—fifteen minutes he waited, the dull ache of his strained position adding to his impatience. Then he suddenly grew tense. A voice was speaking noisily just above him, Conlin's voice.

A few minutes later Jimmy O'Rourke slipped away from under the window and almost ran across the dark

lawn to the street. Once upon the sidewalk he walked briskly along and boarded a West Hill car.

The maid interrupted the swinging chorus to say that there was a paper boy at the door who wanted to see Mr. Gilbert. The song stopped suddenly and Jack went out into the hallway. When he returned he had one arm about the shoulders of a freckled-faced, undersized boy whose mouth was twisted in a self-conscious grin.

"Jimmy O'Rourke, the boy detective," laughed Gilbert, by way of introduction.

And so they began the second verse.

"Too much care will turn a young man gray
And too much care will turn an old man to clay.
So we will dance and laugh and sing
And merrily pass the day,
For we count it one of the wisest things
To drive dull care away."

The sedate old house fairly shook with the noise of it, and people passing in the street outside stopped and listened and wondered.

CHAPTER XVIII

A DRIVE TO WESTBURY

HAMPSTEAD people watched the beginning of the strike languidly. It would not last long, everybody said. At first the general feeling, even in the other shops, was rather against the strikers. Hardy men were well paid, according to the Hampstead standard of wages.

Down at the Center, outgoing trolley cars carried leisurely men and their families, all in their Sunday best, to Clear Lake or to other nearby resorts. The fountain in the little square was surrounded by benches, filled with a pipe-smoking, spitting, noisy, profane, dirty, good-natured crowd, content with temporary freedom. Along the edge of Main Street, on the sidewalks in front of the churches, there was strung at any hour of the day a wavering line of men, who listened to their haranguing fellows and nodded apathetically and wiped tobacco juice from their mouths and stared at the passers-by.

Down Railroad Street, near the long blocks which Hardy & Son's shops occupied, men stood alone on corners and sat silently in open windows, watching sharply every avenue which led toward the mills. Every hour or two, night and day, new pickets took their places in ceaseless vigil.

Slowly Hampstead became more interested and more excited as the days went by with no settlement, and as the noise of the political canvass began to be heard. The *News* and the *Register*, both glad of something to relieve the monotony of the daily "Miss Annie O'Flynn is visiting relatives in Albany," and "Miss Mabelle McCartee, daughter of Ex-Alderman McCartee, has returned from Boston," gave large space to their views of the political struggle, and reported verbatim the few speeches that were made. Strangely enough, however, the editorial pages of both papers published daily unusually well-written articles condemning the attitude of Hardy & Son toward its employees. "It is a pity," said the *News* one night, "that Mr. Hardy is ill, for the young man, who is in charge at this critical juncture, has been too recently lifted from the ranks to be properly considerate of the men. Moreover he seems to lack the courage of any definite conviction, and the concern, which, it is said, is not in too strong a condition financially, is losing ground rapidly thereby. It would seem that the directors or the stockholders of Hardy & Son would object to such a fatal policy."

The influence of these editorials grew daily, and the storekeepers, who, aside from Mr. Butterson, the cash grocer, were farther each day from collecting the growing bills of the men, began to center their blame upon John Gilbert. People began asking why this young Gilbert should be allowed to make so much trouble for everybody, and stockholders in Hardy & Son grew more and more worried over the outlook. The men themselves, who had followed Conlin blindly into the strike, read the

editorials and found constantly new grievances, not against Hardy & Son, but against its manager. A number of business men, led by ex-Congressman Strutt, called upon Gilbert one evening and emerged, shaking their heads, some fifteen minutes later. The ex-Congressman wrote a letter to the *Register*, which appeared on the following evening, scoring Gilbert directly and declaring: "Not content with ruining the noted mills of which the town is righteously proud, he is dealing a blow to Hampstead progress that should arouse all citizens against him." The citizens wondered at the Honorable Strutt's vehemence, but they re-read his words and believed them.

This letter of the Honorable Strutt seemed to give the *News*, which could not afford to be left behind by the *Register*, an inspiration for "interviews." The first one was printed on the day following the issue of Mr. Strutt's letter, and it completely convinced many of those who still held wavering allegiance to Gilbert. The letter was a dignified apology from Mayor Brett, formerly secretary of Hardy & Son, for the conditions at the shops. Mr. Brett expressed his sympathy for the workingmen who had made, as it seemed to him, a perfectly reasonable demand; for the other stockholders who, like himself, were helpless, in the face of a majority on the board of directors, to put an end to the ruinously bad management of Mr. Gilbert; and for the town, which must temporarily suffer the consequences of a strike. Elsewhere in the same copy of the *News*, it was stated sorrowfully in large type that Mr. Gilbert was active for the candidacy of Alderman McNish, and the *Register* immediately took this statement and Mr. Brett's manly attitude in the

interview as important reasons for urging the election of Mr. Brett by a large majority. One week before the election, therefore, Mr. Brett seemed certain of the support not only of the self-styled "better people" of both parties, but as well of a good proportion of the labor vote. Meanwhile the group of men about Mr. Alonzo Hubbard were offering Hardy stockholders a very moderate price for their stock.

Only two achievements seemed to mark Gilbert's work during the eight days that had passed. One of these was that he had carted three new automatic machines from the freight yards to the factories in broad daylight, before the eyes of the Union pickets. The other event, which aroused considerable indignation, was reported fully in the papers. One morning, it seemed, he had heard a noise as he sat in the factory office. He had gone out into the mills and had discovered Councilman Martin Jethro, a foreman, who declared afterwards that he had come to get some tools, his own private property. Gilbert had seized Jethro, without waiting for any explanation, and had literally thrown him through the window. Jethro had been cut severely by the glass and had been bruised by the fall, the papers said, but he had refused to make a complaint.

In spite of the increasing agitation of the Hampstead male mind over the strike, the leading women in town had contented themselves with mere personal comment upon Gilbert and Mr. Brett and the others concerned, and with expressions of disgust at the loafers that made it unpleasant to go down-town. On the Tuesday afternoon, however, exactly a week before election day, there

occurred the monthly meeting of the Women's Club. The regular program announced included a paper on "The Philosophy of Robert Browning," presented by Mrs. Bradley-Bassette. Mrs. Bassette's paper quoted thirty-one passages from various authorities on the subject; but—because she did not wish to interfere with the symmetry of her essay by mentioning the quotation marks; and because none of the other ladies had looked up the statements of the authorities on this particular subject; and, most of all, because Mrs. Bassette was a very popular woman, who subscribed generously to the lecture fund and who wore a gown that was worthy of careful inspection—no one noticed how the authorities had been honored.

The other paper was on the "Love Letters of the Brownings" and was the product of Cordelia Snifkins' genius. Cordelia Snifkins was a confessed authoress. She had written literally hundreds of love stories, which, after going the rounds of the few magazines in which Miss Snifkins cared to have the creations of her pen appear, had been tied up carefully in pink ribbon and put away. "Just as Frank Stockton did," the lady herself remarked. "You know, he wrote for years, too, before the editors grew up to him, and afterwards he sold for large prices all the lovely things that he had written and that they had refused." Miss Snifkins was as tall as the proverbial bean-pole and her dresses properly twined upon her. She had a long nose and a sharp voice. She was forty-five years of age and single, although it can be asserted that she was blameless for either of these misfortunes. Miss Snifkins, withal, was the essence of modesty. When

the only story of hers which any publisher had ever accepted appeared in print, Miss Snifkins had done her best to be perfectly natural and unaffected with her former acquaintances. She admitted, however, to a friend, who without a smile suggested to her that it must be a pleasant sensation to be great, that "it did rather uplift one."

Miss Snifkins' eloquent paper completed the prearranged program, but the president had a surprise in store. Remarking in a short speech, obviously unprepared, that the labor question was "timely and opportune," she called for extemporaneous discussion. Mrs. Robert Brett, a pale little woman who was the chairman of the Hampstead Hospital committee, arose and read a short argument on "The Oppression of Honest Labor." The paper was written with surprisingly masculine vigor, and it used, by open suggestion, the Hardy & Son strike as an example to prove its text. No extemporaneous discussion followed. Instead, the women crowded around Mrs. Brett and congratulated her. Suddenly they had attained understanding and convictions concerning labor troubles. Conditions must be reformed and the working people must be helped. Some of the members wished to do something immediately, but there seemed to be nothing they could do at last except to go home, and homeward they journeyed, talking as they went.

The next day's issues of the *News* and the *Register* reported fully Mrs. Brett's remarks, and printed editorials commending them, although there had been no reporters at the meeting. A few of the cynically inclined

members admitted, when they read it, that Mrs. Brett was a "clever advertiser," but nearly all of them quoted, as their own, catch phrases from her paper.

There was everything, in the outward appearance of the situation that Tuesday night, to make Mr. Hubbard and his associates supremely contented. Even two of the leading preachers had played into their hands in their Sunday sermons. And most encouraging of all was the way in which Mr. Conlin had risen to the situation. Once over his initial fear of Gilbert, he played the part of a slandered leader of a righteous cause so perfectly that he had almost come to believe in himself, and strutted about with increasing dignity. He had talked with good effect to business men in Hampstead, some of whom were stockholders in Hardy & Son. He had increased his hold upon the men. Uneasy as certain groups of the strikers had become, there had been no violence to alienate the people's sympathy or to harm the shops. The only act approaching hoodlumism had occurred one morning on Railroad Street, when one of a group in a window sent a stone singing past John Gilbert's head, as the tall man strode by toward the silent mills. Gilbert, as the story went, turned and, taking off his cap, stood looking smilingly about him. Then, singling out the group at the window, he called out good-naturedly something about their marksmanship never winning any cigars, and went on slowly down the street. And, strangely enough, some of the men in the window cheered him and no more stones were thrown.

Only two things worried Mr. Strutt or Mr. Brett: the silence of John Gilbert and the suspicious lack of enthu-

siasm among the supporters of Alderman McNish. They had made Gilbert, as Mr. Brett said, the most unpopular man Hampstead had ever known. But he paid no attention. He had not even made a public statement of his attitude toward the strike. The opposition political campaign had been even less vigorous than usual. The only evidence of activity was the work which Colonel Mead and Mr. McNish were doing in retarding the sale of Hardy stock. Mr. Strutt remarked that they had underestimated their own skill and overestimated John Gilbert's, a solution that was humanly satisfactory.

It was on Wednesday that Gilshannon of the *News*, with an eye to the sensational possibilities for his paper, suggested casually to Mr. Brett that Gilbert might be induced to take part in a joint political debate to be held on the night before election day. Gilshannon argued that ex-Congressman Strutt could easily out-talk him, and that Gilbert's refusal would hurt him more than his acceptance. The challenge was promptly published, and Gilshannon followed it on Thursday afternoon by a call at the Gilbert house.

Thursday afternoon, however, found John Gilbert driving a pounding, slouch-eared livery horse toward Westbury, and by his side, her face pale from confinement indoors and clean cut as a cameo against her waving black hair, sat Clare Hardy. Gilbert had not even seen her in the week that had intervened. Mr. Hardy had grown steadily worse, and the doctor, coming soberly from the sick room on the morning after her last visit to the shops, had permitted her to join the nurse at Mr. Hardy's side. There she had remained almost constantly,

except for a ride or two with Billy in the Hardy automobile.

To Gilbert her absence brought a sudden, blank depression that staggered him. But he worked on doggedly, sending occasional messages to her by his mother. He said to himself that he must put her out of his mind, knowing as he said it that he could not do anything of the kind. He said to himself that Billy was his friend, and then almost hated Billy for his own sacrifice. He told himself that it was all for the best. And yet he realized that, try as he would, he had lost much of his interest in the struggle before him. The double task seemed suddenly hopeless. The taste of the fight had lost its tang, and the blows that were being struck at him daily from behind his back did not stir him. He plodded along without that fire of enthusiasm which, from weaker material, often molds many a mighty power. There were times, however, when a force stronger than his will seemed to draw him toward the Hardy house, and to-day, with a drive to Westbury before him, he had yielded to it. When she joined him he started to take a circuitous course through many side streets to the Westbury road.

"Why are we going this way?" she asked.

"People are known by the company they keep," he said with a smile. "I've a reputation now. The *News* says I'm the most unpopular man in Hampstead. I can't afford to appear in public, driving with an ordinary popular person like you."

For answer she resolutely took the reins from his hands and turned the horse toward the Center.

"You're morbid," was all she said, while he looked on contentedly.

It was strange how different the world looked to Gilbert from that hired buggy with Clare Hardy beside him. The trees at the roadside had put on their autumn colors of dark red and yellow, and rolling fields, their crops already harvested, stretched away green and brown on either side. Occasionally the road led them past straggling frame houses, weary with age, and now and then they caught sight of men like moving dots on the far-away hillsides. The people whom they met, red-cheeked girls and tanned, brawny men, called "good-day" to them, and one tall, gawky fellow, mowing before a dignified old colonial house with broad white pillars, waved a broad-brimmed straw hat as they drove by. Everywhere were simple, sociable people working under a kindly sun on a peaceful land.

"God's country," said Gilbert quietly, scarcely conscious that he was speaking. "This makes you understand why people like to get back to Connecticut. There's a home feeling about it. I have a notion right now that it all belongs to me and I to it. Do you feel that way?"

"I don't believe I ever did until to-day. I'm afraid I never thought much about it. I only began to grow up a month or two ago, you know."

The girl looked dreamily away from him toward the open fields.

"You haven't told me yet why you haven't been to see me," she remarked a little later.

"No," he said gravely, "and I'm not going to."

"You thought I didn't care."

"No."

"You were so busy you forgot all about me."

"No!"

"I wasn't of any use, so you went to see those who were."

"No!!"

"Then why?"

"Did you notice that bird? What was it?"

Miss Hardy hesitated at this rebuff.

"Do you think it was fair," she asked at last, "you in the midst of things and I shut indoors, reading those lies in the papers and listening now and then to Billy's incoherencies?"

At her last words Gilbert glanced at her questioningly and then looked away from her upturned eyes, his pulse beating rapidly.

"There wasn't much to tell," he said lamely.

"Does that excuse you?"

"No."

"I was hurt. I nearly didn't come this afternoon." Clare Hardy had clearly forgotten her minute and hasty preparations for the drive.

"I'm sorry."

"I don't believe it."

"Yes, you do."

It was her turn to look away suddenly at the fields that seemed to move slowly past them.

"What have you done," she asked more quietly, "and what will you do?"

"Everything you've suggested and will suggest," he said, smiling.



“‘You’re morbid,’ was all she said.”



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Miss Hardy wrinkled her forehead into a puzzled little frown.

"Are you making fun of me or don't you want to tell me?" she asked.

"It's true. You've suggested everything to me that we've done. You suggested that Mr. Hubbard was back of the strike."

Miss Hardy started.

"Why, I never even heard of it," she said. "Is he? Oh, no, it's impossible."

"You suggested to me that the biggest reason he wants the shop is that he owns the Westbury mills," Gilbert went on relentlessly.

"But I shouldn't have dreamt what it meant if I had known about it, and I didn't know," gasped the girl.

"Neither did anyone else. I don't know it yet. That's why we're driving to Westbury."

Clare Hardy gave a low cry of pleasure. Then her brows knit suddenly.

"But," she said, "what do you mean by saying that I had anything to do with it?"

"I'll show you. I've a notion that there was dishonesty connected with a grant to the Street Railway Company last spring. I've been trying for a week to find out how to prove it. You suggested a way to me about four miles back, when we weren't talking because the country was so beautiful."

"But—how can you say——"

"Perhaps one reason why I didn't come to see you," Gilbert interrupted, "was that it was hard for me to admit that it was only when you were with me to sug-

gest things that I had any ideas, that I was useless when I was alone."

Miss Hardy stared at the road ahead where, through the trees, the outlying houses of Westbury town could be seen. Gilbert's eyes were fixed on her hand that lay curved with unconscious grace upon her lap. He had never realized before that driving gloves were really beautiful.

"You're trying to make me very proud, Mr. Gilbert."

"My name used to be Jack."

"Mine was Clare then," the girl retorted. Then she laughed gayly. "It always seems funny to hear you say 'Miss Hardy' in that grave voice of yours."

"I'll say Clare like a boy."

"Do you remember, Jack Gilbert," she cried, ignoring his glance, "how you and Billy used to take turns rescuing me from the Indians, and how hurt I was because you both wanted to be the Indian every time? I was actually afraid that sometime both of you would creep upon me at once, and I'd never be rescued."

Gilbert nodded, and they drove on silently.

"It's taken us all a long time to remember it, Clare."

"We've never really forgotten, Jack."

They were in Westbury by this time, bowling along under giant old maples and elms that stretched out, with bowed heads, a trembling benediction over the quiet street. Gilbert pulled in the horse to ask their way of a man passing on a crosswalk.

"Westbury mills? Oh, yes," he said with an English accent. "Ye take the first left—hit's there in the trees yonder—an' then ye keep h'agoin' huntil ye come to a

street to the left. Now ye don't take that street 'cause hit leads hup the 'ill. Ye keep h'agoin' an' ye come to a crossin'. That's where the church is. Then ye keep h'agoin' an' ye take the second right an' keep h'agoin' till ye turn to the left—not the first one 'cause that only goes a little way, but the second one. Then ye keep h'agoin' huntill ye come to the one—two—three," counting on his fingers, "third right, an' then ye'd better hinquire. I've forgotten whether hit's the third or the fourth. There's a shorter way——"

But Gilbert had already thanked him and had spoken to the horse. As soon as they were hidden from the man, Miss Hardy burst into little convulsions of laughter that she punctuated every now and then with:

"Ye keep h'agoin', Jack, ye keep h'agoin'."

Strangely enough, they found the way easily, and Gilbert soon drew rein and sprang from the carriage in front of the newly built office-building of the Westbury mills.

"Shall I come, too?" she asked.

"No. They may not take kindly to me inside, and I'm proud."

For a second he stood smiling at her. He was wondering whimsically whether she would really be there waiting for him when he came out. Then he turned and went slowly up the steps. It was not until he had opened the door and stood in the room, walled in by high counters and wire partitions, that the vision of her in black and white faded from before his mind's eye. And when it disappeared it left him unusually alert and clear-headed.

"Good-afternoon," he said pleasantly, to a boy behind a desk. "Is Mr. Hubbard here?"

"Mr. Hubbard?" asked the boy wonderingly.

"Yes, Mr. Hubbard of Hampstead. I had a notion that he would be here to-day."

"I—I'll ask Mr. Hooker."

The boy vanished behind a door beyond, marked "President," from which he quickly reappeared, followed by a dapper, officious little man with a gray beard, who took short nervous steps and seemed constantly irritated.

"Well, sir?" he asked, frowning up at the big man.

"I wanted to see Mr. Hubbard, Mr. Alonzo Hubbard of Hampstead," drawled Gilbert affably. Mr. Hooker looked him over quizzically.

"Mr. Alonzo Hubbard," he said musingly, never once taking his eyes from his visitor's face. "Yes, I've heard of him. But he isn't here; hasn't been here. Is he—did you mean that you thought he was coming here to-day?"

"I may be mistaken," said Gilbert. "May I use your 'phone?" he asked suddenly. "Perhaps I can get him on the wire."

"Why—certainly." Mr. Hooker stared at him doubtfully. Then he opened a little gateway and added, "Come into my office, sir."

While Gilbert was instructing the local central, Mr. Hooker, although ostentatiously busy with papers on his desk, shifted his eyes often to the open-faced, smiling man opposite him.

"I brought you in here because I thought it might be private business," he remarked, when Gilbert hung up

the receiver and sat waiting for "long distance" to get Hampstead for him.

"I'm obliged to you. It is." Gilbert's eyes looked at him understandingly and continued to smile.

Mr. Hooker seemed relieved.

"My being here——" he started to suggest.

"Oh, not at all."

Mr. Hooker nodded complacently. The bell rang. Gilbert leaned over the 'phone, his eyes upon Mr. Hooker, who had turned and was watching him.

"Hello—no, I want Mr. Alonzo Hubbard. No, nobody else will do."

There was a moment's tense silence, in which a paper on a table by the window fluttered noisily under a paper weight. Gilbert spent the time hoping that the distance would make the answers inaudible except to him.

"Hello, Mr. Hubbard."

"Yes," came a voice so dully that even Gilbert, the receiver close to his ear, could scarcely hear it.

"This is Westbury."

"Yes; who's talking?"

"Mr. Hooker's private office. Doors closed." Gilbert winked deliberately at Mr. Hooker before he went on. "Thought you'd like to know I've one hundred H. and S. Understand?"

"Good. Talk carefully. Whose was it?"

Gilbert pressed the receiver more closely to his ear as if to shut out the sound.

"How many do you lack now?" he asked.

"About fourteen hundred. Whose was it, did you say?" Gilbert hesitated.

"Is the election all right?" he asked desperately.

"Oh, certain. But, Hooker, whose was it?"

"Better not say. I'll write. There was something else, but I can find that out here. Good-by."

Gilbert hung up the receiver quickly and looked at Mr. Hooker. Mr. Hooker smiled jovially at him.

"Everything going well?" he asked.

"Like a summer breeze," drawled his visitor. "It'll be all over in a week."

"What was it you wanted to find out here?"

"I want to glance at the stock book."

Mr. Hooker rang a bell and sent a tall, thin man to the safe.

"Business improving during the righteous Hardy strike?" asked Gilbert with a grin.

Mr. Hooker, now entirely at his ease, said that it was too soon to see any great change. But he chatted proudly of a few large orders that had come in, and, incidentally, of the shrewdness he himself had displayed in obtaining them. Gilbert took the stock book from the hands of the clerk and thumbed it over hurriedly, making memoranda as he went along. Mr. Hooker sat watching him thoughtfully.

"I suppose this is Mr. Merrivale," he said at last.

"No," said Gilbert slowly, making a few last entries in his note book. "You've got me wrong."

He arose and towered over the little president as they shook hands.

"Not Mr. Merrivale!" said Mr. Hooker anxiously. "Why, I thought I knew the others: Mr. Brett and ex-Congressman Strutt, and—who are you, sir?"

Gilbert smiled down at him pleasantly.

"My name is Gilbert, Mr. Hooker," he said. "John Gilbert. I'm manager of Hardy & Son. You may report to Mr. Hubbard that I have one hundred shares of that stock if you think it is wise for you to do so. I think he knows it already. I'm greatly obliged to you for your courtesy, and I'm really sorry I had to take advantage of it. Good-day, sir."

Mr. Hooker, white with anger and fear, stood staring after the big man. He turned then and rang a bell, but the boy who answered it found the president pacing up and down the floor irresolutely. Meanwhile Gilbert had taken his place silently in the carriage outside.

"What happened?" asked Miss Hardy as they drove down the street.

"Oh, I've been telephoning."

"But you're shaking like an ague patient."

"Very likely."

As he told her slowly what he had done, urged on by her persistent questions, a glowing exhilaration swept over him until it reached her also, and they were both laughing and talking excitedly. In their absorption they lost their way in the winding Westbury streets, and a kindly faced notary, at whose house they made inquiries, very naturally insisted on misunderstanding their errand, to her amusement and his embarrassment.

The ride home that afternoon, while the shadows lengthened across the road and the twilight sounds broke the twilight silence, was far too short for them both. Men in heavy wagons, free after the day's toil, greeted them jovially, for their faces were too happy to be passed

in silence. Small boys, driven in rope harness by other small boys, raced with the horse and beat him easily amid loud shouts of triumph from mimic horse and driver. The broad fields smiled at them and the jovial old sun winked from the crest of the western hills.

When they came to where the outlying south end of Hampstead squatted, dull and silent in the growing dusk, he pulled back the horse, eager for home, into a walk. It seemed to him that there could never be an afternoon like this one again. Too rapidly they passed through the Center and too rapidly they toiled up West Hill. The realities of the silent Hardy house, with its curtain-drawn windows, sobered them.

"A wonderful afternoon, Jack." He was helping her from the carriage.

"The most wonderful," he said with conviction.

"It's been like old times."

"We'll have them again, perhaps, the three of us," he said, suddenly remembering Billy.

"Yes," she nodded, "the three of us."

A smile, a firm clasp of the hand, and she was gone.

Gilbert found Gilshannon awaiting him on the steps outside the little house. It was the reporter's third visit during the afternoon.

"Hello, Gil." Gilbert's greeting was hearty. "The *News* found some new reason why I'm the boy curse of this be-u-tiful town, as the ex-Congressman says."

"That new *Register* man's inside waiting for you," Gilshannon said with a wink. "Went right by me in the dark. He's with the Colonel and Billy. You know that Mr. Strutt has challenged you to a wordy duel.

What do you say to it? That's what I'm here to find out."

Gilbert stretched and clasped his big hands behind his neck thoughtfully.

"I'll say this and not a word more, Gil," he said slowly after a moment. "Mr. Strutt is a lawyer and an orator; I'm not. He could convince an audience of what is wrong more easily than I could convince them of what is right. Besides that, Mr. Strutt—and Mr. Brett, too, as far as that goes—are merely the cat's-paws of a much more dangerous power. Concerning that power something may be said later. I shan't answer what you call his challenge. What's the use of talking about such a fool idea as that?"

"Can I say all that?" asked Gilshannon excitedly.

Gilbert hesitated. He stood thinking for so long a time that the reporter turned to look apprehensively at the house.

"Let me see. To-day is Thursday. You'll print it to-morrow," Gilbert said at last. "Yes, you can say that, Gil, and you can say, too, that there'll be a big mass meeting for men at the Opera House Saturday night. We'll send down an ad. to-morrow."

"And the *Register*?" insisted the reporter.

"I'll give you first chance, Gil." Gilbert took two cigars from his pocket and handed one to the reporter. "Now, Gil," he added, "what are you going to do for me?"

Gilshannon took Jack's arm and led him half way down the front walk.

"I've been going to tell you," he whispered, "only you

mustn't tell where you got it. Merrivale bought off the *News*."

"Of course. How much?"

"Three hundred."

"Sure?"

"Well, I ought to know. I did the business."

Gilbert laughed and held out his hand.

"Still playing both sides, Gil?"

"Yes," the reporter grinned, "but I bet ten dollars on Billy to-day at one to ten. Can't afford to lose it. 'Night, Jack."

There was a friendly slap on the back, subdued laughter, and Gilshannon disappeared in the darkness.

When Gilbert and his mother were left alone an hour later, they sat silent for some minutes in the little sitting-room. He was suddenly aware that he had been neglecting her throughout the past week. As he looked at her, rocking gently opposite him, staring thoughtfully at her toil-hardened hands, she seemed to him to have grown old, and he realized that she had been suffering for him.

"What are you thinking, mither?" he asked.

"I'm wondering if it's right, laddie, what you're doing, what you did to-day;—if it's Christian to——"

"They're a pack of scoundrels," said Jack with sudden heat.

Mrs. Gilbert moved uneasily in her chair. When she looked up she had ceased to rock.

"Can you whip them, Jack?" she asked anxiously.

CHAPTER XIX

THE BRICK BLOCK LOSES A TENANT

THAT evening, as the slouching livery horse came leisurely homeward from Westbury, a man and a woman sat on a broad couch in a room of the Broad Street brick block. It was a front room, one flight up, a room of dull colors and shadows in the changing light of the sunset and the afterglow. Even in the dusk, however, it was a room of contrasts. Three cane-seated chairs that suggested a bargain sale were grouped about a green-topped card table. Two large paintings in heavy oak frames were surrounded, on a red burlaped wall, by cheap photogravures and colored pictures cut from magazines. A small, delicately carved table, which indicated both wealth and taste, was surmounted by a few torn paper-covered novels and two photographs in cheap gilt frames. Grotesque weavings of cigarette smoke hung in mid air and curled about the white plaster figure of a saint upon the mantel. It was a room of contrasts. And perhaps the pair on the couch furnished the greatest contrast of all: the short, slender, young-faced man with his ruffled gray hair, and the blonde girl with her full figure, her full, parted lips and her blue eyes, heavy-lidded as they stared dreamily at the curling, shadowy smoke.

"You said that just as if you meant it, Joe," she whispered, moving uneasily in the tight clasp of his arms.

Joe Heffler's left hand caught a stray wisp of yellow hair from her forehead and smoothed it back tenderly.

"Course I meant it," he said.

The woman quivered at the caress. Then she laughed.

"It's a cinch not to have to work," she remarked.

Heffler was silent for a moment. Then he nodded.

"As long as the cash holds out," he said.

"Oh, I guess that 'll be all right." Gerty Smith laughed again until she saw the double shadow upon his face. Then she caught his arm, and, almost before he knew it, she had kissed him and had buried her head against his shoulder.

"I love you, Joe. I love you, do you hear? I love you; I love you; I love you."

Suddenly she slipped from him and threw herself upon one of the small chairs, one arm curled along its curved back.

"It's a dream, you know," she said pitifully, half to herself. "But don't wake me up yet. It's the first time I ever really cared."

Heffler straightened up and ran his fingers nervously through his gray hair.

"Same here," he said.

"It's funny, Joe," she went on dully after a pause. "I've had a bunch of men talk to me about love and all that, but none of 'em talked it the way you do. They said it better, but—well—there's a big difference. Say, you make me feel I've been a downright bad lot."

"Forget it," Heffler returned, with that masculine dominance which some men show only when they are with women. "I'd been in hell or worse if it hadn't been for John Gilbert."

The woman nodded reflectively.

"He did the square thing by you all right," she said.

Heffler's mild face lit up with a strange smile of contentment. But he hesitated. He had come to a crisis, and Heffler shrank from crises. They reminded him of handcuffs and the court. Joe Heffler had felt only two strong passions in his life. One was that mysterious, unreasoning affection for the woman in the chair yonder, and the other was a loyalty to the man who had befriended him, which amounted almost to worship. He knew that the man did not ask any such service of him as he had planned, but he felt that John Gilbert needed it. There was no question in his simple heart of what he himself might lose.

"He's in trouble." Heffler leaned forward earnestly. "Your man Brett and the others are at the bottom of it."

At the name of Brett, Gerty Smith started and rose to her feet.

"Brett?" she said complainingly. "Say, Joe, you've woke me up. He's coming here to-night."

Heffler was beside her in an instant and, catching her arms, he turned her about until her face was toward the failing light.

"I knew it," he said. "I'd 've had the whole town told about it long ago, if it hadn't been for you. What're you going to do about him?"

The woman seemed to be frightened by the question.

"I don't know," she said. "I hate him now. Honest, I do, Joe."

"All right." Heffler fumbled in his pocket and brought forth a wrinkled piece of paper. "I want you to prove it," he went on bluntly. "There are some questions on this. I want the answers."

She looked at him wonderingly, but she took the paper and went to the window, holding the paper to the light. Then she shook her head.

"I don't know any of 'em," she said.

"You don't?" he asked quietly. "Then I want you to find out—to-night."

The last word seemed to flash the reality of it all across the woman's mind.

"I can't do that, Joe," she said slowly.

"Look here." Heffler's voice showed his irritation. "You've been tattling to them about us. All I want you to do is to square the thing with us, and quit even with the game."

"I dasent," she answered. "Haven't got the nerve, Joe."

Heffler waited until the silence became more cruel to her than anything he might have said.

"What 'd he do to me if he caught me?" she asked appealingly. "And, besides, he's paying me for the things I've told him. I've got to live, Joe."

"It's living or loving then," said Heffler laconically. "You can choose between."

Her hands clasped and unclasped nervously over the paper.

"I can't do it, Joe," she said.

"All right. Good-by."

The door closed behind him before she realized that he was going. She did not cry out. She merely sank back miserably upon the couch and buried her head upon her arms. Her whole life ranged itself before her and she cringed away from the vision of it. A sense of her complete degradation came to her. Love taught it with stinging strokes. Gerty Smith had never thought long about anything. She had known only what she saw and what she heard and what she felt. To be admired, to be cared for, to have the things which she saw other women have, these had formed her only goal. Love had been merely a word,—a rather silly word, she had been led to believe. Even now she could not understand it, and she tried to tell herself that she was many kinds of a fool. After a time she lit the light, and went across to look at herself in the glass. She began to rearrange her hair, tossing her head with attempted bravado. But after a moment she turned away.

"Living or loving," she repeated aloud. "Living or loving."

The lights in the Broad Street brick block were extinguished one after another, until only one window, one flight up, in the entire front was marked by a dull glare from behind its heavy curtain. Above, Hampstead was stretching out lazily upon its two hills and going to sleep. A few blocks away Mrs. Brett, letting herself into her empty house after a prolonged hospital committee meeting, was saying to herself that she would be glad when her husband's busy campaign was finished. Broad

Street grew more and more deserted, until the heavy step of the policeman on that beat alone echoed up and down the short thoroughfare.

At the first stroke of midnight from the nearby bell of the old First Church, Mayor Robert Brett started. He was sitting, leaning forward, his elbows on the card table. His cheeks were flushed and he was smoothing his closely cropped mustache nervously. Opposite him was Gerty Smith, one arm leaning languidly across the green cover of the table; the other caught, with seeming carelessness, at one of the pockets beneath. The whiteness of her face seemed almost to spiritualize her large, coarsely pretty features. She, too, heard the bell and she saw dimly the sudden alertness of the man across the table.

"Yes," she cried almost boisterously, "money 'll buy almost anything—almost any——"

The man looked up suddenly. Then he raised himself to his feet and called to her. She did not answer. She hung, a dead weight, on the edge of her chair. He followed the edge of the table to her and shook her shoulders convulsively. Then he stood straight and tried to think. Perhaps she was dead. He had heard of things like that happening. The outwardly impassive Mr. Brett was anything but a brave man at heart. In his uncertainty he wandered toward the door at the back, thinking only of finding help. His eye caught the glint of a polished push button on the wall near the door, and he hurried to it. A push button meant her sister or somebody else, and a general shifting of responsibility from his caving shoulders. With an effort he drove it deep with his thumb. Then he tried to cry out, and he could not in

his terror, for the room was suddenly in total darkness, except for a weird, glimmering reflection from a street lamp below. Frantically he groped for the other button which he knew must be near by, but his trembling hands could not find it.

He stopped at last and tried to remember where the hall door had been before he turned off the lights, but he could not. He could think of only one thing. Somewhere off in the darkness she lay, all in white. The thought terrified him. He called to her again, but no answer came. The window rattled a ghostly tattoo in the night wind. Sweat broke out upon him, and, whimpering with maudlin fear, he instinctively made his way along the wall. The small table fell before him with a resounding crash, and a moment later he stumbled upon the couch. Standing straight once more, he swayed along past the window where the light gave him more courage. He went on, feeling his way before him with one hand, while the other reached its slow path on the burlaped wall. He tried to think where she was, and the uncertainty and the silence frightened him again. He hurried faster now. His right hand shoved a picture from its support, and it came down beside him with a dull thud, the broken glass jingling about his feet. Then he uttered a low, inarticulate cry of joy. The burlap ended and wood took its place, wood that shook under his touch. He groped for the knob, found it, and, throwing the door open, he stumbled across the threshold, slamming the door shut behind him. He stopped short and listened with sudden cunning. Then he found the stairway in the silent darkness, and began the slow and labored descent.

Not fifteen minutes afterwards, Joe Heffler appeared under the dingy street lamp, and crept cautiously up the stairs. He had seen from below that her window was dark. In his own little hall room he lit his light and, with the same match, his pipe. He was in no mood for sleep. Throughout the evening he had been mingling with the strikers in saloons and on the streets. He had come home at last when there was none left to listen to. Now he was putting together, piece by piece, the things he had heard. Suddenly he stopped and listened breathlessly. The faint knock at his door was repeated with nervous insistence.

"Joe," came a weak voice.

He opened the door cautiously, and she, leaning against it, came with it and into his arms. Without a word he supported her, clinging to him, back across the hall and into the still dark room. Steering his way carefully to the couch by the window, he unfastened her arms, which seemed unwilling to let him go. Then he found the button and turned on the lights. He looked about him at the débris of the table and picture, and then at her chalky-white face.

"Rough-house," he remarked good-humoredly.

"I—I fainted, I guess—I fainted," she said with a pitiful smile.

"What was the row?" asked Heffler, still peering about the room with a puzzled grin.

The woman bolstered herself up by her arm and stared at the disorder.

"I dunno, Joe," she said. "He had a good deal to drink. Perhaps he got mad. I dunno," she repeated wearily.

Heffler glanced at the door leading into the next room.

"Where's your sister?" he asked suspiciously. "She must 've heard the noise."

"She ain't there. She's out of town looking for a job. That's what I'll have to do now, I guess."

She raised herself with a sudden jerky movement.

"Oh, Joe!" she cried. "The table. It's there. I did it. The table. Open it up."

Heffler sprang forward and seized the table top.

"This side," she called. "There! In the pocket."

With an exclamation of triumph Heffler held up the wrinkled piece of paper, and studied the notes that were scratched unevenly opposite his questions. He passed two entries with nods as if he had expected the answers. At the third he turned excitedly.

"Our crowd stock. Jethro and Neely two hundred and fifty—four hundred. What's the four hundred?" Heffler's voice was eager.

"Mr. Hubbard was ready to pay that, but they got 'em for two-fifty."

"Mean little shrimps! What does this 'close half' mean at the bottom?"

"He said they'd close half the shops when they got 'em," she answered. "Then he said something or other about Westbury."

"Can't you remember what he said?" he asked roughly. She shook her head.

"No," she said weakly. "I can't."

Heffler sat down with his back to her. He began to write carefully upon the back of an envelope, with a pencil he had found on the floor by the chair. The

woman stared at the outline of him. He had not spoken a tender word to her. He seemed to care nothing for her sacrifice. He had merely used her to get the facts from Mr. Brett. She weakened quickly and, sinking back on the couch, she hid her face from him.

"You're sure that's all?" he asked, as he came to the end.

"Yes," came the low, stifled answer.

He folded up the paper and put it carefully in an inside pocket, as he arose and turned toward her.

"That was a good job," he remarked more to himself than to her. "How d'ye feel?" he asked her hesitatingly.

"Rotten," she said indifferently, turning her head back and facing him. "I'm going to get up in a minute and start packing. I'm going away in the morning. You can run along now, Joe. Good-by, if I don't see you in the morning, and good luck."

Heffler slowly shifted his weight from one foot to the other and smiled cheerfully.

"I'm not going along," he remarked with considerable decision, "and you aren't going to do any packing. I guess you'd better go in the morning, but just now you're going to tell me what to pack and then you're going to sleep. I'll wake you in time to see if it's O. K. Then we'll get a license and get married. You'll go to my aunt's in New Haven and I'll follow you as soon's I can."

Wonderment, doubt, and joy struggled upon Gerty Smith's face as she raised herself quickly on her arm.

"Married?" she cried. "Married, Joe? You marry me? Oh, Joe!" She fell back and, hiding her face in

a cushion, she wept with great convulsive sobs of happiness that shook her entire body.

Heffler ran his hand nervously through his hair. Then he went to her and, sitting beside her, he lifted her until she sat with her head leaning against his shoulder and with her waist held awkwardly in the crook of his arm.

"Shut off yer crying," he said appealingly. "Now we haven't either of us been tin angels, but we're going to be respectable together, see? And we'll make good, you and me. It isn't what you have been that counts, but what y'are and what you're going to be. How old are you?"

"Twenty-eight."

"Well, I'm thirty-four. Just about time to get a second wind. And say, we haven't merely been told that it don't pay to go to the devil. We know. And some time," Heffler's voice grew in fervor, "years from now, we'll come back here to John Gilbert and we'll say to him, 'We're just as square and straight and on the level as you are,' we'll say to him; and when we can tell him that I'll be satisfied. I'd rather have him shake hands with me on earth than go to heaven when I die."

She looked up at him through her tears.

"You're a brick, Joe," she said.

"So're you, little woman." He kissed her twice tenderly. Then he made her lie down and tell him what to do with her things. When he understood he picked her up and staggered, with her in his arms, back through the dark hall. There he bathed her head and opened his own bed invitingly for her. Then he lit his pipe once more, and, whistling merrily, he left her and went to

work in her dismantled room. He was glad, as he looked about him, that they lived only one flight up, with a store beneath them. Joe Heffler could pack like a woman, but the noise he made was that of a man.

He was still there when the sun mingled its first light garishly with that of the street lamps. At seven o'clock he rapped hesitantly at his own door until she answered. Then he went back, leaving the door of her room open. He could hear her moving about. She was humming. It was the "Wedding March," but Heffler did not know it. He only realized that she was happy, and he whistled "Good-morning, Carrie" softly in reply.

"But the pictures, Joe, and the table and——" she started to say as she glanced about the bare room.

"He put up for those. Let him have 'em. We're going to start new."

"But——" she objected, looking about at the only valuable things she had ever owned. Her glance came back to him. She held out her hand.

"You're the right sort, Joe. I don't want 'em."

Joe Heffler soon disappeared into his own room. When he returned he bore a bulky, irregular bundle, which he placed almost tenderly upon her trunk.

"What's that?" she asked.

"Your wedding present," he said shortly. "It's a tilting water pitcher," he added, looking away.

Gerty Smith put both arms about him, locking his own arms to his sides. Her face was very close to his.

"The thing you won that night at the Fair?" she asked.

"The night he gave me a chance." There was a set-

tled look about Heffler's chin, a new look of confidence in his face and manner. "It's better'n a ring for us, Gerty. You're going to take it along. It was the beginning, Gerty, and we aren't ever going back on it, are we?"

She shook her head, and there were tears in her eyes for the second time that day, although Gerty Smith had always believed that tears were something to be despised. She could not speak, but her lips seemed to tell him that everything was all right, eternally all right.

It was ten o'clock when they sat down to a meager breakfast at the railroad-station restaurant. They called it their wedding breakfast, for, after all, she wore a ring on her second finger, a ring that Heffler himself had worn until that morning.

"I'll look after your sister," he said as they hurried to the train.

"And you'll come on soon, Joe?"

"Soon's I can, sure thing."

With new strength he brushed aside the brakeman, to help her up the steps. She nodded a good-by to him from the platform. She wished to wave, but she could not, because she had a bag in one hand, while the other arm was tightly bound about the tilting water pitcher.

CHAPTER XX

THE COLONEL REASONS WITH MR. TUBB

WHEN the woman who did the Colonel's washing and mending came in at his back door that Friday afternoon, she stopped suddenly on the threshold. Her lower jaw dropped until her false teeth slipped, and she was forced to close her mouth quickly to avoid disaster. Her eyes bulged in a frightened stare and the bundle of mending dropped from her hand. There, in the middle of the kitchen, was the Colonel, dressed in flannel shirt, with sleeves half rolled up, and worn buckskins. On his feet were the decorated moccasins that usually hung over the fireplace. About his waist was a cartridge belt and on his head a torn sombrero. His glasses were off and his eyes seemed to have a crazy brightness in them. His hands flourished two rusty cavalry revolvers, and he was swaying back and forth on his rheumatic legs, muttering a strange gibberish of words. When the bundle dropped the Colonel stopped and, seeing her, he chuckled and looked embarrassed.

"It's all right, Mary," he said. "Jest havin' memories. Whatche got in yer pack?"

"Mendin'," said Mary, and then, like a boy who limps when he has a toothache, she tiptoed over to the table and laid the bundle down, never once taking her eyes from the Colonel.

The veteran watched her, partly amused and partly bothered at her discovery.

"Wore some o' these togs fer years, Mary," he said in a sort of shamefaced explanation.

"Ye did, sir," said Mary, curiosity gradually overcoming her fear, "and the pistols, too, sir?"

"We et with 'em out there," said the Colonel solemnly.

"Holy Virgin," said Mary, crossing herself. "And the hoochee-koochee dance, too?" she inquired doubtfully after a moment.

"Regular," said the Colonel without a smile, "after meals."

"It must be a turrible place," said Mary, shaking her head and starting for the door.

"Ye'd better not speak of it, Mary. Folks wouldn't savvey," said the Colonel as he followed her.

"Indade and I won't. Oi like ye too well fer that. But it must be a turrible place," and Mary departed, still shaking her head. And that night she wrote a long letter of solemn warning against the ways of the West, to her brother, who had recently gone to Buffalo.

The Colonel had not felt so much at home in years as he did that afternoon. He hummed old songs in growling monotone. He drew forth an old leather trunk, bound with heavy metal, that had come down the Missouri years before. He remembered how he and his pardner had stood on the dock and argued as to whether or not they would take that particular boat, and how finally they had thrown up a coin to decide it. The coin had turned against their going aboard, but they had been too late to get this trunk off the boat. The boat had

gone down with all on board, some days later. The trunk had been thrown up on the river bank, and, about a year afterwards, he had bought it back for about five times its worth. There was nothing in it now but some soiled and yellow papers and a few trinkets, but to him it stood for nearly twenty years of hardship and adventure. The old trunk was perhaps the last possession he had that he would have parted with.

Next, he gathered up the four corners of a faded table cover, jumbling together in a heap all the decorations and dust that had been littered upon it, and carried the improvised bundle into an adjoining room. Then he returned and pulled the table nearer the wall by the fireplace. Ransacking one of the drawers, he brought forth a worn pack of cards, and spent half an hour doing old tricks with them that he had almost forgotten in the lapse of years. At last he rose and went out into the kitchen to prepare supper. The Colonel preferred "gettin' his own grub" to having any "women folks" around the house. When he tired of his own cooking he tramped down to the Hampstead House, and grumbled at its well-served dinners.

The bell rang three or four times irritatingly, and the Colonel, forgetting his appearance in the excitement of trying to broil a steak and to answer a doorbell at the same time, hobbled, muttering, to the door. The wonderment on Billy McNish's face changed quickly to uncontrolled laughter, and the Colonel, suddenly conscious of the spectacle he was to anyone passing by, caught Billy's shoulder, and fairly dragged the prospective mayor of Hampstead into the vestibule. This done and the

door closed, he turned his back on Billy with pretended anger and returned to the kitchen. Billy followed contritely and seated himself upon the wood-box.

"Couldn't help it, Colonel," he remarked. "You look like a masquerade ball."

The veteran chuckled over the sizzling steak.

"Reckon I might create a sensation ef I went downtown this way. But it might be named 'disturbin' the peace' ef some p'liceman come out of a s'loon by accident an' saw me. Reckon I'd try it ef it wasn't fer the women folks. I'd likely git kissed a dozen times on the way to the post-office. Curious 'bout the way women hitch onto freaks, ain't it? Most of 'em 'll pass a good square man whose head is stuck on straight, an' tie up in bunches 'round some sword-swallowin' hero, er a long-haired, long-eared poet, er a collidge prifesser thet lectures on 'Are We Atoms er Atomizers?' an' gives it up. 'S'pose it's a kind o' prifessional bond o' union. Most women hev got a streak of the bunco steerer in 'em, an' they jest natch'rally join up with those thet 're workin' the same thing as a trade."

Billy changed the subject. He was in no mood for discourses on the Colonel's favorite topic.

"Can you come up to the house to-morrow morning about ten?" he asked.

"Reckon so," responded the Colonel with a half wink, "ef I survive the evenin's performance." He gazed down at his buckskins and waited for Billy to become inquisitive. He had not long to wait.

"What performance?" Billy scrutinized the strange clothes again, and once more he laughed. "What's the

game, Colonel? Who're you going to impress with those?"

Colonel Mead transferred the steak to a waiting platter. When this operation had been accomplished he turned with a sigh of relief and eyed the younger man.

"One Mister Tubb is comin' up this trail to-night," he chuckled. "I've tried ev'ry kind o' Eastern reasonin' with him. I've told him how good he wuz an' how wicked he wuz. I've showed him how dead right he wuz an' how plumb wrong he wuz. I've argyed with him till my tongue's black and blue. I've patted him on the back till my left hand's blistered. An' I've shook hands with him till my right hand smells o' greens an' onions continuous. Now I'm goin' to follow your lead an' reason with him Western. He may buck, but I reckon I'll keep my promise. I told him I thought he'd hev an int'restin' evenin'."

The Colonel chuckled again prophetically. Billy shook with noiseless laughter.

"Jovel!" he cried. "Wish I could be here and see the fun. But I can't. Got to be down-town all evening."

"May want ye in the p'lice court in the mornin'," said the Colonel, leading the way with the steak into the dining-room—Billy following along cheerfully, a dish in each hand. "Better wash up an' hev a bite with me, now ye're here. Mebbe ye won't never hev another chance," the Colonel added with jocular mournfulness. "I'm a des'prite man."

Billy was voluble with regrets. He had dropped in merely to tell the Colonel about the next morning. He had already stayed longer than he had intended to.

The Colonel was a hard man to get away from, Billy said, and he thought he had better hurry along immediately, or he would actually yield to temptation and stay.

The veteran did not go to the door with him. He sat down at the table and began his solitary meal before Billy finished his explanations. When he heard the front door close he shook his head.

"Curious 'bout Billy," he muttered to himself. "He'd be real tol'able ef he didn't hev them soft turns. He's so infernal *nice* t'ev'rybody that ye hev to throw up a cent to make up yer mind whether ye're his best friend or his worst enemy."

It was a few minutes after half-past seven when Mr. Tubb was received in the vestibule, which the Colonel had maliciously left dark. It was not until they entered the sitting-room together, therefore, that the grocer stopped short in his greeting and stared uneasily at the metamorphosed Colonel.

"'Declare!" he ejaculated, rubbing his thin chin with his thumb and first finger. He had even forgotten the clothes he wore. Mr. Tubb's lank figure was attired in the clothes which usually appeared only once a week in his pew at the Baptist church. Mr. Tubb liked to remark that he was fifty or more years young. On Sundays and on special occasions he proved the assertion by his clothes; clothes with broad, padded shoulders and slender waist; clothes that pulled tightly over the perceptible bend in his back and wrinkled across his narrow chest; ready-made clothes, of course, for Mr. Tubb did not believe in wasting his hard-earned and carefully saved money in tailors' bills. He looked uncomfortable

and he felt uncomfortable, but he considered that this was one of the ways by which mankind, on one day of the week, do penance for their sins of the other six days. When it is said, therefore, that Mr. Tubb had forgotten his clothes as he stared at the Colonel, no better description of his complete astonishment is possible.

"Told ye I'd show ye somethin' Western," chuckled the Colonel.

"Where'd ye get 'em?" asked Mr. Tubb slowly.

"Well, the shirt I bought in Albuquerque," said the Colonel reminiscently, motioning the grocer to a chair, "an' the buckskins I took off'n Tony McIntire, the desperado, after said Tony had been scalped by Injuns near Las Vegas. The moccasins b'longed to a Nez Percy buck 'fore he died a vi'lent death by one o' these here pistols. I jest natch'rally found the sombrero in the trail one day."

"Declare!" repeated Mr. Tubb, eyeing the Colonel with a mixture of doubt and admiration. Mr. Tubb had always agreed readily with those doubting Thomases of Hampstead, who declared that Colonel Mead had never been farther west than Chicago in his life; who observed that Colonel Mead's speech was more that of a New Englander than that of a Westerner—which was natural enough if they had remembered that the Colonel had lived more than half of his life in Connecticut; and who said that they had heard that Colonel Mead had bought all of his curios at a side-street store in New York. But, with the Colonel before him and with one of the Colonel's hands resting lightly on the butt of a pistol, Mr. Tubb would have admitted that Buffalo Bill was a Westerner

of comparatively little distinction. Mr. Tubb glanced about the dimly lighted room, and wished from the bottom of his heart that the pistols might be put away in some far-off bureau drawer. Mr. Tubb had a revolver at home, which he kept behind locked doors at night for use in case of burglars. But he never had fired it, and indeed he never had touched the trigger when the thing was loaded. When he moved it he always gripped the last inch of the butt and shut his eyes.

"I can't stay very long," he said, his thumbs and forefinger busy now with his sallow neck. "Got a date with Captain Merrivale at nine-thirty." Mr. Tubb realized immediately that this admission was a mistake, and he hurried on. "I got a good joke on Captain Merrivale the other day," he continued. "You know old Doctor Ferguson that died last week? Well, I was talkin' to Merrivale next day after the Doc. died, and Merrivale he allowed that Ferguson was a good man and that he was mighty surprised to learn that the old feller had nigger blood in him. 'Nigger blood?' says I. 'Can't be,' says I. He picks up the *News*, sober as a jedge, and hands it over to me. 'Read that,' he says. 'Don't it say, clear as print can make it, that the old Doctor was an octogenarian?' 'Course I allowed that it did, and I tried not to laugh 'cause it might 've hurt his feelin's. He's sensitive, Merrivale is. But it was the best joke on Merrivale I've heard in a month o' Sundays."

Mr. Tubb tittered in high falsetto. The Colonel only grunted.

"An' thet's Hampstead's head Water Commiss'ner," he grumbled as he arose and went across to the old trunk.

"Ef y'ain't goin' to patronize my diggin's only till nine-thirty," he said briskly, "we'll proceed instanter."

The grocer was always ready to agree to anything, and never more so than now. The Colonel squatted beside the open trunk, and drew from it various objects, from a handful of broken arrows to a small string of beads. It was not very long before Mr. Tubb had forgotten his uneasiness and was bending forward, his mouth wide open with interest. Each new memento which the Colonel handed him had its story, and the Colonel, who had not rummaged through the old trunk before in years, became so interested himself that he lost track of the time, and forgot that there was any such concern as Hardy & Son or any such undecided, unreasonable person as this Mr. Tubb, who listened and who, now and then, had the temerity to interrupt the flow of reminiscence. The little clock on the mantel, striking nine, brought the Colonel at last to his senses. He had less than a half-hour left in which to reason with Mr. Tubb.

"Talked so much my jaw aches," he remarked, breaking off in the middle of a long yarn. "Reckon y'are plumb petered out. What d'ye say to a little two-handed poker fer a change?"

Mr. Tubb hitched backward in his chair and looked across at the little table and the cards. He had noticed them when he entered the room.

"Well, ye see," he said with apparent hesitation, "I don't play poker."

"Ye don't?" Surprise and scorn were in the Colonel's tone. "Why, I wouldn't 'a' thought thar wuz a man

under the flag thet didn't know the nash'nal game. What 'll we tackle? Old Maid?"

"I mean to say," added Mr. Tubb lamely, "not usually."

The Colonel for answer took a chair by the table and waved his hand toward the chair opposite, next to the wall. Mr. Tubb arose doubtfully.

"I mean I ain't used to playin' for money. I'm a church member, ye know," he remarked, as if in self-defense, as he sat down.

"Ye don't say?" said the Colonel, putting down the cards he had been shuffling. "Well, I reckon I kin find some chips ef I dig deep enough." He started to rise laboriously. Mr. Tubb picked up the cards.

"At least not for high stakes," he added.

"How about penny ante?" suggested the Colonel, sinking back in his chair.

"At least not for more'n a quarter," added Mr. Tubb again, patting the cards affectionately. The Colonel smiled in spite of himself. Mr. Tubb put down the cards and turned cautiously toward the wall behind him.

"Pretty picture," he said apologetically.

The Colonel nodded grimly. "Better'n a mirror, ain't it?"

Mr. Tubb proceeded to look through the cards carefully.

"Interestin' cards," he remarked.

The Colonel nodded again.

"Got 'em from thet forchune teller down New Orleans, the same one I told ye 'bout; Fairy Ellen they called her. Didn't tell ye 'bout how she told Leftenant Wood's forchune, did I?"

Mr. Tubb, engaged in dealing, said that he did not remember the story. The Colonel scrutinized his cards.

"Four," he said laconically. "You see, I'd know'd Fairy Ellen fer years," he went on. "Run acrost her first in San Antonio, and later I'd found her in New Orleans. So, when we landed thar fer a day one Spring, and I'd put Bill Slosson and young Leftenant Wood onto all the trails in town, an' we wuz a-goin' back to the boat, I happened to remember thet I'd plumb fergot Fairy Ellen. We hed jest about time an', bein' the lead mule, I steered 'em down into the picayune back alley whar she did business. It wuz a dirty cabin, and she wuz an old greaser woman with a complexion like a moldy cheese and a figger like a question mark. I never believed in forchune tellin' till I saw her in San Antonio, but she cert'nly marked out my trail fer me, even to the bonanza I struck in Colorado."

"Wish she was here," put in Mr. Tubb, with a rueful attempt to be jocular as the Colonel drew in a little pile of silver. "P'raps she'd tell me what you're goin' to hold next hand."

"Well, as I wuz recallin'," went on the Colonel, dealing, "I took the boys 'round thar, and she took our dollars an' mumbled a lot o' pigeon Spanish. She assayed Slosson's hand all right an' told him a lot o' things he didn't want to know, includin' the fact that he would be killed finally by dark-faced furriners. I've been waitin' fer years a-watchin' Slosson, an' when he wuz ordered to the Phillipians I said it wuz all over. An' it wuz. He wuz shot in the first fight he got into. When she come to the Leftenant——"

Mr. Tubb threw down his cards with obvious irritation.

"Can't you hold anythin' at all but three of a kind?" he asked peevishly.

"Yes," returned the Colonel complacently. "Reckon I kin hold my temper an' my payshunts, friend, winnin' er losin'. But—goin' on with the story, which don't seem to int'rest you none—when she come to the Leftenant she looked fer a minute; then she shook her head. She jest wouldn't tell his, and after we'd argued and threatened and got mad and left, she stood thar and watched us down the street. The other two wuz laughin', but I thought I smelled somethin' int'restin', and I told 'em thet I'd left somethin', I've fergotten now what, and I sneaked back. She wuz standin' right whar we'd left her and——"

The Colonel stopped short and leaned forward, his body suddenly tense. Mr. Tubb finished dealing and eyed his hand with unusual care.

"Well?" he asked nervously, without looking up. "What—what happened then?"

The Colonel settled back in his chair. He did not look at his cards.

"Reckon I'm out o' this hand," he remarked, his eyes still narrowed in scrutiny of the grocer's flushed face. "Let's see," he went on, "I'd just gone back to Fairy Ellen. Well, I says to her: 'Why didn't ye tell his forchune, Fairy?' says I. 'Because,' says she, and her voice sounded like a cowboy's the mornin' after a spree, hard and tired like, 'he ain't got half an hour to live.' I didn't ejaculate a word. I jest worked my legs fer the dock. I got thar jest as Slosson an' the Leftenant

was crossin' the gang-plank. 'Leftenant,' I called out like a fool, and he stopped an' Slosson went on."

The Colonel paused to raise Mr. Tubb beyond the limit of the grocer's cautious willingness to take risks, and immediately drew in a considerable "pot," with a hand composed chiefly of two jacks.

"Then, all of a sudden," he went on mechanically, as if nothing had happened, "a spar got loose up above an' I saw it fall, an' the young feller never know'd what hit him. Old Fairy Ellen wuz right. The minute she told me, I'd know'd thar wuzn't any more chance fer him then thar is fer a man ridin' a buckin' bronco up Marshall Pass."

"Good story," said Mr. Tubb, his mind on the game and far away from Fairy Ellen of New Orleans.

It was astonishing to see how interested Mr. Tubb had become in the turn of the cards, and how grudgingly he brought forth from his trousers pocket at last—when his silver was exhausted—the green roll of bills, and how his thin, sallow cheeks flushed and how his eyes grew feverishly bright, and how strained and tense the silence seemed when the Colonel's story was finished—silence broken only by the steady slap of the cards, the jingle of silver and an occasional grunt of joy or despair from the ecstatic or suffering grocer. The Colonel seemed to be playing carelessly while he was talking, and even in the silence he seemed to watch Mr. Tubb more closely than the cards. But he won almost steadily, and the meager assortment of silver which he had deposited at his left hand grew rapidly with the additions of Mr. Tubb's quarters and half dollars and bank notes.

"Reckon I'm hevin' the luck," he remarked genially, as the half hour was struck by the little clock on the mantel. Mr. Tubb did not seem to hear the clock.

"Three," he said, staring, fascinated, at the cards.

"But it's a long lane without any turnin'," added the Colonel. Again the Colonel won and Mr. Tubb muttered a single word in comment.

"Fer a Baptist," remarked the Colonel reflectively, as Mr. Tubb dealt the cards, "thet might be considered 'strong langwidge.' Two," he added, looking over his hand.

Mr. Tubb slapped the Colonel's two cards on the table with angry force. Then he shifted the cards nervously in his hand.

"I'll take four," he said. He added four cards to his remaining one. Then he looked up and into the mouths of two cavalry pistols.

Mr. Tubb jumped back so suddenly that he nearly upset both the table and himself. He thought he shouted 'Murder!' at the top of his voice, but, as a matter of fact, he merely whispered the word. The pack of cards dropped from his shaking hand and built scattering pyramids of themselves upon the floor. His face lost even its sallow color and he swallowed noisily.

"Let's see them cards," growled the Colonel.

Mr. Tubb hastened to obey. The four cards were aces.

"Ye took 'em from the bottom of the pack. Ye've done it twice afore, only I wuzn't plumb certain 'bout it afore."

The Colonel lowered the pistols to the table.

"Ye're a sweet and lovely church member, ain't ye?"

he went on, looking aggressively at Mr. Tubb, whose thumb and forefinger had returned nervously to his chin. "Lord, won't this make talk fer the good Christian women folks thet trades at yer store! Lord, won't they fight to see which one can tell it first an' which one can tell it worst! An', Lord, won't yer friend Butterson's store look like a tornado'd struck it, after they've sent him all yer orders!"

"Ye wouldn't tell 'em," gasped Mr. Tubb.

"Seems like a powerful pity, don't it?" said the Colonel soberly. "But it sure looks to me like it wuz my public duty. A man thet 'll cheat at cards 'll cheat at groceries. Lord, I wonder what the Baptist church 'll do!"

"If 'twasn't for the pistols," blustered Mr. Tubb, anger momentarily getting the better of his fear, "I'd knock you down."

The Colonel grinned benevolently.

"I've lived years enough in this wicked but cowardly world, m' friend," he remarked, "to know thet a man thet talks 'bout them thet he's knocked down er is goin' to knock down, never has an' never will. Thar's most alluz an 'if' in the way."

"I thought I was playin' with a gentleman," stuttered Mr. Tubb.

"I wuz plumb sure I wuzn't," retorted the Colonel. "So we wuz both right."

"But it 'll ruin me," sobbed Mr. Tubb, giving way to nasal moans.

The Colonel pulled at his mustaches, his hand carefully covering his mouth.

"It sure do look that way," he remarked judicially.

"But don't git lackrimose 'bout it. P'raps I might be reasoned with."

Mr. Tubb looked up with a sudden hopefulness that nearly upset the Colonel.

"What do ye mean?" he asked.

"Well," the Colonel continued. "We might come to a compr'mise. I've been wantin' somethin' o' you fer more'n a month, an' now ye're wantin' somethin' o' me. I'll tell ye. Ef ye'll ferget to see Captain Merrivale to-night, an' ef ye'll come back here inside o' half an hour with yer Hardy stock, to be left in my safe keepin' till I think it's judicious fer ye to hev it again, p'raps I might overcome my scruples 'bout spreadin' this here incident. What d'ye say?"

Mr. Tubb looked at the Colonel through narrowed eyes, and the color returned slowly to his face.

"It was a trick," he declared weakly.

"Yes." The Colonel nodded in the direction of the four aces. "It wuz a dirty, low-down trick an' ye didn't even do it clever."

Mr. Tubb stumbled to his feet and pulled his coat down to its uncomfortably proper position. He realized sadly that he could never wear his best clothes to church again with a devout, religious feeling.

"All right," he said.

"An' this here money," continued the Colonel, pointing to the pile that had accumulated on his side of the table, "I calc'late to give to the mish'nary fund o' the Baptist church, in yer name an' mine, fer the good o' the heathen. An' I want to give ye a bit of advice. Don't ever try that trick again. It ain't easy to lose, but it's a

derned sight more 'Murrigan to lose like a man than to win like a sneak. Reckon I've kept my word," he added as they moved toward the door. "It's been an int'restin' evenin'."

When Mr. Tubb had gone the Colonel snapped the pistols harmlessly three or four times, and smiled to himself.

"Reckon he'll come back," he muttered. He was right. Mr. Tubb had six minutes to spare when he rang the Colonel's doorbell for the second time that night.

The veteran threw the certificates into the old trunk and sat down to read the *News*. Usually he spent the better part of the evening with his paper, but to-night he had almost forgotten it, and he handled it now with apologetic eagerness, as if it were a friend he had ignored. As he turned a flapping page, an advertisement, printed in large type, caught his eye. He uttered an exclamation as he stared at it. Then he held it at various distances, to assure himself that his eyes had not played him a trick. It announced a mass meeting for men at the Hampstead Opera House on the following, Saturday, night. It stated simply that Judge Morrison would preside, and that the speakers would be Mr. McNish, Democratic candidate for mayor, and John Gilbert, general manager of Hardy & Son, whose respective subjects would be, "Why Hampstead Ought to Be a Democratic City"—and "The Strike and Politics." In the news column opposite the advertisement, to which the Colonel's eyes wandered in their amazement, was the short interview with Gilbert, all in capitals and double-ledged. The

Colonel dropped the paper to his side, and brought his right fist down upon the rearranged table, with a force that made the lamp-light jump and flicker weirdly.

"That's business," he muttered. "Reckon he's found out more'n——"

He was interrupted by the violent ringing of his bell and a heavy tattoo of knocks upon the door. He hurried through the vestibule, still clutching the paper in his left hand.

"Jest saw it in the *News*," he declared excitedly, as Gilbert and Billy followed him into the sitting-room.

"They've seen it, too," Billy broke in, eager to tell the news, "and they've probably heard more. They've got a gang of Dagoes and Polocks tearing up Broad Street already. They'll be working there all night."

"We're coming to the finish of our fight, Colonel," Gilbert remarked, "and we're going to win. How about Tubb, Colonel?"

The Colonel grinned reminiscently as they drew up chairs.

"Well," he said. "I separated him from his stock. It's in the trunk yander. An' we're makin' a joint contribution to the Baptist Mish'nary Society. But thar ain't any story, boys. Ye see, I paid him fer the stock by sayin' I'd keep my mouth shet."

Billy frowned at the mystery, but Gilbert merely eyed the Colonel with narrowed, smiling eyes.

"Mr. McNish wants you to help him reason with two or three more to-morrow morning," he drawled, leaning back in his chair until it creaked warningly under his weight. "That's the only loop-hole they've got now—

to get control before to-morrow night. Ten o'clock, wasn't it, Billy?"

Billy nodded.

"No rest fer the wicked an' less fer the pious," grumbled the Colonel. "But what hev ye found out, to make ye so brash about this meetin'?"

Gilbert allowed the chair to settle back and sprawled, his long legs sticking out straight, his hands sunk deep in his pockets.

"We've got Neely's signed statement of that bribing business."

The Colonel whistled.

"How'd ye do it?" he asked with some awe.

"Peter Lumpkin did most of it. I helped some. Neely seems glad to get it off his mind. It's worried him. He's more of a man than I thought he was. Jethro was the other one, of course."

"And we've the signed story of the engineer who made the false report on the reservoir deal," put in Billy.

"Lord!" ejaculated the Colonel, pulling his long mustaches in open wonderment. "An' I didn't know anythin' about it. How'd ye do thet?"

"Joe Heffler, chiefly," said Gilbert slowly. "He knew him. He was clerk in the office for a time, you know. Billy helped a good deal. That's what we've been doing to-night."

"And we know," added Billy, who had been counting on his fingers, "that Conlin and Martin Jethro and Tom Grady were all at Mr. Hubbard's to-night."

"Say," grumbled the Colonel, "did ye hev anybody listenin' to me an' Tubb to-night? Reckon I ought to've

gone 'round the shack careful aforehand. An' who found thet out?"

Gilbert laughed heartily.

"Jimmy O'Rourke drove them there in a hack," he said. "Yes, that's a fact. Jimmy's been driving hack three or four nights now, ever since Conlin got suspicious about walking to see his employers." Gilbert paused. "They're a pretty good crowd, the three of them—my 'cabinet,' as Jimmy calls them," he added. "I tell you, it's great to have friends."

There was something in his tone that made both the Colonel and Billy stir uneasily and look away self-consciously.

"It all depends on to-morrow night now," Gilbert added again. "Think of it, Colonel. We started tilting at windmills, but we were honest about it. And now——" His teeth shut with a sudden click. Then he smiled. "Well, I feel a good deal like that soldier your father tells about, Billy, who was always repeating just before a charge: 'We'll show 'em whether there's a God in Israel or not.' We're going to bring about a new order of things in Hampstead. Lord knows, the town needs it."

"'Course we are," cried the suddenly optimistic Colonel. "Didn't I say so all the time?"

"I don't see yet," objected Billy peevishly, "how we're going to change public opinion in one night."

Gilbert started to answer but the Colonel interrupted him.

"Ef ye cross bridges so many times aforehand," he said crossly, "ye'll sure bust 'em down 'fore ye really

come to 'em. But look here, boy," he went on, looking up at Gilbert, who had stretched himself lazily and risen, and who now stood towering above him, "sit close to-morrow an' keep yer eye peeled constant. I ain't afeard o' threats usually, but thet hoss-thief of a Jethro's sure got it in fer ye, and th'other crowd's goin' to be desp'rite now. It's life an' death with 'em."

Gilbert smiled down into the Colonel's grizzled face and then grew sober as he saw the veteran's earnestness.

"I believe you've caught the disease from Joe," he said. "He talks the same way. The thing's getting on your nerve, Colonel."

But the veteran repeated his warning as he followed the two younger men to the door, and when he returned to the sitting-room, he stared at the little clock and shook his head solemnly.

"Wish it wuz this time to-morrow night," he muttered.

When Gilbert, coming in from the chilly October mist, climbed the steps of the little house porch, he heard the door knob before him rattle. Someone within was trying to open the door, but the glue-like dampness had gripped the wood and held it tightly fastened. He caught the knob quickly and pushed the door, crackling, wide open. Then he leaped forward and picked up Clare Hardy,—who had been tugging at the knob,—from her knees where she had fallen.

"I beg your pardon."

"It's the first time I was ever on my knees to a man."

"And the last."

"You can't tell when there are such masterful men," she laughed as she brushed the dust from her dress.

"You—you were just going home?" he remarked in his embarrassment.

"How hospitable! No, I was just going to stay. I've been waiting for you."

"Oh," he beamed doubtfully. "Where's mother?"

"Upstairs—worrying about you. Do you realize that it's nearly midnight?"

"I believe I do." He was leading the way into the little parlor.

"And that it's improper for me to be here?" she added with a glint of her old tantalizing smile.

"No, I don't realize that."

"Well, it is," she retorted so convincingly that it seemed to him that he was greatly to blame. He made up his mind immediately that propriety was the most senseless, unreasonable thing in the world.

"And I'm going home"—his face grew tragic—"in a few minutes."

They both smiled. Then her face slowly became grave.

"You made me forget." And she hurried into the narrow hallway.

"What made you remember?" he called. He felt instantly that the remark was the height of idiocy. She was very serious as she came back with some papers.

"You told me yesterday there was a deal of some kind that was dishonest, something about that street railway bill. Father was in that, and spoke of it the night it was passed. I was there with him, you know. I've found some papers, correspondence and copies of his letters. I want you to take them."

She did not look at him as she held the papers toward him.

"You'd trust them to me?" he asked in a low voice. He was thinking rapidly, trying to understand.

"You're silly," she said with a nervous laugh. "Of course."

"Thank you," he spoke evenly. "I—we don't need them. I know all about it—enough, that is. We'll elect Billy and save the shops for your father as well without this—this sacrifice of yours—as we could if I read the papers and used them."

She looked up at him so wonderingly, so pleadingly, and she came so near to him that he felt himself tremble with restraint.

"But I want you to read them, Jack."

"It's better not," he said curtly, feeling himself weakening. "Was there anything else on your mind?"

She looked away from him for a moment while he, for something to do, fumbled among the books on the table. Then she turned to him once more, firmly.

"No, there was nothing else. I—I thought this would help you, but you're probably right. No, you needn't come with me. You're tired, and it's such a little way."

He went, nevertheless, guiding her down the walk hidden in the damp, misty darkness.

"Are you really going to speak to-morrow night?"

"It's hard to believe it, isn't it? Billy's going to make the real speech. I wish you could hear him. Old Demosthenes will be jealous in his grave."

"And you?"

"I believe I'm to read a few unpleasant facts. I'd

have stage fright if I tried to talk from memory. I'd get everything hung on the wrong pegs."

He could not see the tenderness in her eyes as she looked up at him.

"It will be hard for them," she said after a moment.

"That's the woman of it," he laughed shortly. "The under dog."

"I was thinking that they'd hate you for it."

"Probably," he said. "But that doesn't count. It's the thing that counts, not me nor them nor anybody else."

At the porch he hesitated, as if there was something he wished to say and could not. He blundered awkwardly, and thanked her three separate times, and said good-night twice, lingeringly. "I'm a fool," he said to himself, as he walked slowly up the hill. "She couldn't take those papers to Billy."

On his own porch again, he waited a moment before going in, staring down at the unnatural glow of light far away at the left. Men were working under torches on Broad Street, working frantically at the eleventh hour to keep the trivial promise the Street Railway Company had made to Hampstead. The light that dribbled through the blinds lit up the irregular features of his massive face, and in the glimmer the face was haggard.

"Lucky Billy," he whispered.

CHAPTER XXI

IN THE OLD GARDEN

MRS. GILBERT, bustling about her little kitchen after the breakfast dishes had been cleared away, stopped occasionally and listened to the heavy tramp of feet overhead. At last she could endure it no longer and, washing the cake-batter from her hands, she toiled her way upstairs.

"Oh, you're here, are you?" she asked innocently.

Upon a table in the little bedroom lay pen and ink-well and paper. Two or three scrawled sheets lay on the floor and Gilbert, his hair tousled, his face wrinkled into a frown, stood looking out of the window. The room was gray with smoke, and the cigar in his fingers was chewed into shreds. He turned and smiled a woe-begone smile in reply.

"Is it all done?" she asked, as if she really thought it was.

"Done?" Gilbert stretched out his long arms and yawned cavernously. "'Tisn't begun. I walk up and down and say sentences just as I want them, and I sit down in front of a piece of paper and I can't say them that way at all. It was funny at first, but the novelty's wearing off."

He shook himself and started again his weary pacing. Mrs. Gilbert stood watching him thoughtfully. Then,

after first going over to the window and opening it to let the cool air rush in, she sat down at the table.

"Now you say it, laddie," she said, "and I'll write it."

Gilbert stared at her for a moment, nodded assent, and a second later the speech was begun.

"I guess," he drawled, when the first paragraph was completed, "the trouble was that I had to keep my fists doubled up to write that speech."

"You aren't actually going to say that, are you?" asked his mother, reading a sentence aloud.

"Of course. It's the truth."

"But—I wish somehow you weren't in it at all, this hating and calling names and hurting people——" She hesitated a moment. Then she added vigorously: "Don't mind me. Women are inconsistent idiots. They love a man that will fight, but they don't want a man they love to fight. Go on."

The weather bureau had prophesied rain and was probably disappointed, but the men of Hampstead, emerging from the dingy, cavernous dampness and lethargy of yesterday into the crisp, clear air, thanked God on their faces if not in their hearts. It was the kind of a day, as Gilshannon remarked, that "made everybody get up on their toes." Gilshannon, as well as the other men on their way to work, read the posters announcing the meeting that night. He also listened attentively to remarks made by those who stopped and examined the broad white sheets, on which the ink was still wet. He noticed, moreover, that at eleven o'clock most of the posters had mysteriously disappeared. The latter fact became evident to him, when, in answer to a call from

one of his friends, he went to the vicinity of the Hardy shops as rapidly as a car would take him.

It was as if the strikers had suddenly been let loose by iron hands which had held them. They were congregated in swaying, restless groups down Railroad Street and around the Hardy corner. The windows of blocks and tenements on either side were filled with more of them. The police station alone, near the Main Street corner, was somnolent in its repose. The crowd had stoned two automobiles and had started a runaway. Mr. McNish had been followed by a snarling, cursing, hooting pack, and, stopping at the police station, had had his anger increased by the nonchalant attitude of the captain in charge. Others had had the same experience during the morning. In fact, the appearance of anyone who had any connection, in the minds of the men, with shop-owners was the signal for organized abuse. When Gilshannon arrived, the groups about the shops were enjoying themselves hurling occasional stones through the office windows, and joking with the leisurely "guardian of the peace" who occasionally told them to move on.

"There," remarked Gilshannon, "we've got down to the genius of a strike, 'an infinite capacity for breaking panes.'"

He passed from group to group, and everywhere he received a noisy welcome. He hurried up stairways where no other outsider was permitted to go. He passed pickets, and his cynical face was his countersign. He interrupted an important meeting, where his sudden appearance stopped Martin Jethro, whose red face ap-

peared occasionally in a revolving windmill of arms, so abruptly that one of Jethro's arms remained outstretched some seconds, before finishing the gesture without words.

"Stop swinging Indian clubs," said Gilshannon. The crowd turned around, angry at the interruption, and then laughed aloud when they saw that it was Gilshannon. They all liked him, and if the *News* printed anything unfavorable to workingmen they were certain he had not written it. Whatever they liked in the paper they were sure came from his pen.

A few moments later he was the center of a large crowd in the street, where he started a discussion to which he listened until he caught sight of Tom Grady talking excitedly to three or four men under a store awning. He drifted over to them, told them a good story and asked no questions. They therefore told him a good many interesting things, and Gilshannon yawned and remarked that, "seeing there was nothing doing, he guessed he'd go back to the office," and loafed down the street, hands in pockets and whistling loudly. At the first store around the corner a large blue bell suggested a telephone; and he went in; matched a dime against a nickel with the clerk to see who should pay for the message; won; and closed the door of the little booth behind him. Gilbert answered the call.

"No, I want to talk with Mrs. Gilbert."

"Isn't that you, Gil?"

"I'm McCarty, the iceman, and I want to talk to——"

"All right."

He told Mrs. Gilbert that he wanted her to keep "the young man" indoors to-day, at least not to let him come

down to the shop; that there was no trouble of any kind and wouldn't be; that it was merely a question of policy, and that he was certain that she alone could keep "the young man" at home. Then he asked for Gilbert and explained to him the situation.

"As far as I can tell Conlin turned them loose this morning. He issued a statement to them not to use violence, but he told Jethro and Grady and the rest to go as far as they liked without burning up the shops. There are perhaps three hundred of 'em lined up around the shops, but there aren't fifty of 'em that have their fighting blood up. They just josh people who go by, and make folks in automobiles duck, and break window glass. Jethro and the others have been letting off their fireworks all morning, but they don't enthuse a bit. But they've got it in for you, and if you turned up down here you'd be a red rag and they'd all get their heads done"—"Yes, I knew you'd be like that. That's why I told your mother to tie a hard knot in her apron strings"—"All right, call me another. I like it."

He hung up the receiver and called up the police station. The chief himself answered:

"Did you know that for two hours a bunch of strikers have been relieving their feelings at the public expense on your street?"—"All right. Just wanted to find out if you knew about it. This is the *News* talking."

Gilshannon went out of the store, whistling, unconsciously picking up, where he had left it, the melody he had dropped. Up on Railroad Street, the police station woke up suddenly and started to arrest two or three men. Some hotheads among the strikers led an attempt to

prevent the arrests, and for an hour the crowd struggled with the police and outwitted them and in the end overcame them. At the twelve o'clock whistle they drifted off to neighboring saloons, leaving a lone prisoner in the jail,—a Jewish boy who worked for Weg, the cheap clothier, and who, passing, had assisted in the stone throwing.

It was nearly four o'clock when Gilbert completed his writing. He tore up the sheets of paper he had wasted, threw out the ashes of four cigars and put on his coat.

"Where are you going?" Mrs. Gilbert asked in surprise.

"Down to Prentice's."

"Then I'm going with you," she said decisively, and went for her hat and jacket. She went with him only as far as the porch, however, and stood there, a moment later, watching him down the sunny, peaceful street; proud of him, fearful for him, and with a jealous sense of defeat in her heart that she scarcely admitted even to herself.

"He's going to see her," she said under her breath, his promises and good-natured threats and ridicule repeating themselves in her ears. "He didn't want me."

The stinging air made the red blood bound through his veins, and he threw back his broad shoulders with a jerk as if to dislodge a burden. Everything was done that could be done. Therefore he would forget the entire matter. All day he had held his thoughts at leash by sheer strength of will. When he had tried to write that morning he had found her face looking up at him from the paper, across at him from the walls, down at him from the ceiling. He could not seem to escape

her. And to-day the tantalizing smile, that he used to doubt and fear, seemed consistently tender. Now he must see her. He had tired of his imagination. He wanted the reality. He hadn't seen her since last night, and that was centuries upon centuries ago. He laughed at himself boyishly as he turned in at her gate.

"She's not in," said the grinning Irish girl. "She's gone out with Mr. McNish."

Gilbert had never before realized how much he disliked grinning Irish girls. He stared at her for a full moment, mumbled a word of thanks and turned away down the long walk. And, as he went, his jaw set determinedly, and his eyes, unseeing, stared at the sidewalk before him. Even people, leaning curiously from a passing car to look at him, reminded him of nothing except his ungainly bulk, which often made him conscious and uncomfortable.

When he had done his errand at the little printery he decided to go down to the shops, and was half way to the corner before he remembered his promise. He stopped to think and, listening, he heard the Fall wind piping in the trees overhead. Its call stirred him. As he walked on he saw, back of the corner in the vacant lot they had used when he was in school, the High School boys practising football. Impulsively he strode across to the swaying lines that faced each other, and the little group which crouched ready for the ball. He heard the loud, high signal, and he saw the crouching backs beat up against the opposing line in vain; and the signal called him as clearly as it called the runner with the ball. The boys cared nothing for Hardy & Son or for politics. They

greeted him with a cheer, for the achievements of the team he had captained and which had won the state championship years before, was a mighty chapter in the school's history. Five minutes later the school team was beginning the best practice game of its season, the practice which, they said afterwards, won the pennant for them, and the dozen or more spectators were shouting for the giant who, forgetful of all else, plunged through its defenses and stopped its rushes and tackled its runners who had evaded the other players of the "scrub." It was beginning to grow dark when he left them, his trousers spotted with grass stains, and one shirt sleeve torn into shreds. They gave their school yell for him vociferously, and he laughed and waved his hand to them and hurried away. His watch told him that it was nearly six o'clock.

Directly before him through the dusk he caught sight of Colonel Mead toiling up the hill as rapidly as stiff, rheumatic legs would carry him. Gilbert hailed him and he stopped with an unmistakable look of relief on his face.

"Lookin' fer you," he said between breaths, as Gilbert joined him. "Been down-town. That Gilshannon writer-man wuz standin'—steps o' the hotel—crowd around—when I went down. Thought he watched me careful. When I came back he steps out with thet way of his, ez ef he was dancin' on a flower bed an' about to ask the Queen o' Sheba to hev a stroll with him. He looks me square in the eye, and he says loud like, 'Mr. Mead, here's that check ye've been wantin'.' Havin' been born day 'fore yestiddy, I savveyed, an' told him

thet I wuz glad to see him leadin' a moral Christian life at last, an' come along. Here's the check. 'Tell J. G. plans being made to do for him at Opera House if he tries to speak.'"

"Good business," cried Gilbert emphatically.

The Colonel stared at him wonderingly.

"That takes the last worry off my head," Gilbert went on. "They haven't control and they can't get it before to-night. We've got 'em on the run, Colonel."

"But, damn it, boy"—the Colonel shook the paper vigorously in Gilbert's face—"how about this here ambush?"

"When is an ambush not an ambush, Colonel? When you know about it before-hand, of course. There won't be any important disturbance at that meeting."

Gilbert's whimsical smile reassured Colonel Mead, though he shook his head doubtfully.

"I'm comin' after ye to-night, boy, in the best carry-all I can get."

Gilbert laughed good-humoredly his thanks for the older man's precaution, as the Colonel left him and started diagonally across the street.

"Colonel," he called, when the veteran was only a dark outline on the other side of the roadway, "come to the Hardys' for me at eight."

The Colonel stopped, hesitated, then waved his hand understandingly and faded into the growing darkness.

Gilbert found his mother nervously pacing the little front porch.

"There've been some men about, laddie," she said, her forehead creased with worry wrinkles, when they

were within. Gilbert caught her chin and, stooping over, he kissed her.

"I thought young women like you rather enjoyed that, mither." And he laughed away her objections.

Supper was leisurely and merry, with Mrs. Gilbert in higher spirits than usual, and her son, being a mere man, watched her admiringly and believed that her cheerfulness was genuine. The meal over, Gilbert, with an awkward affectation of carelessness, closed the door into the hall, and Mrs. Gilbert heard alternately for many minutes the tinkling of the telephone bell and the steady murmur of one-sided conversations. She found him in the parlor sometime afterwards, smoking and reading over his manuscript. Before he had finished it the clock on the mantelpiece chimed the half hour.

"Do I look all right, mither?" he asked, as they stood in the doorway a moment or two later. Mrs. Gilbert's eye wandered proudly over the massive, ungainly figure, which no artificial things such as clothes could ever fit, and the head with its protruding jaw, its shaggy eyebrows, broad-bridged nose and shock of unruly brown hair. She was a fighting mother.

"You look fine, laddie," she said. "I hope you beat them."

She watched him tramp across the short area, where the moonlight through the trees mingled weirdly with the streaming lines of flaring gaslight. A shrill whistle from the darkness beyond made her start suddenly, but she stood for a long time on the brilliant threshold, that he might see her if he chanced to look back. Then she closed the door, and knelt quickly upon the stairs.

Once away from the house Gilbert hurried with long, loping strides. There were only twenty-five short, precious minutes before the Colonel would call for him, twenty-five minutes in which to see her. He tried to comfort himself by calculating that there would be fifteen hundred seconds. Then the thought of her banished everything else from his mind. He saw nothing, heard nothing, forgot everything but her. When he awoke again he found himself at the beginning of her hedge, where the night hung blackest midway between the two corner lamps, the trees obscuring the moon. Beyond was the house, a few dim lights alone showing life. With the goal in sight he hurried the faster, and turned in at the narrow gateway. There he wheeled suddenly at a footstep behind him. But nobody appeared and the noise was not repeated. He went on up the path. The grinning Irish girl once more opened the door and peered out.

"I'll see," she said and shut the door ungraciously. Gilbert smiled and then fidgeted anxiously, watching the street for fear the prompt Colonel would appear to carry him away before he could see her. Under the electric light below he saw occasional dark figures appear and disappear, and a belated grocer's wagon drive by furiously.

"Mr. Gilbert," said the girl, appearing behind him, "they say she's out in the garden next door. Shall I call her or——"

"I'll find her," he laughed boyishly and, taking the three steps in one, he swung around the side of the house toward the gap in the hedge he knew so well. As he straightened up after bending to pass through it, he gave

a quick sigh of delight. Before him stretched the garden of his memories, and across it lay undiscovered paths of moonshine, with twigs and long waving stalks dancing elfin-like at their edges. Far away the pale light lay upon the old apple tree like a saintly halo, and, beyond, reached again the fairyland of shade and shine, ending never, a land of peace, peopled with the fancies of his boyhood, reaching from him to the moon and back. And somewhere, lost in its tangled labyrinths, she awaited him, unknowing. He started forward, his feet tramping the well-remembered ways mechanically. Twice he stopped and listened, thinking that he heard her, and called softly. Hearing no answer, he went on more slowly, feeling the spell of the silence and peace about him.

At last he stopped at the edge of the trees. Beyond was the little clearing and the summer-house, and, his heart told him by its quickening beat, she was there. It was her sanctuary and he hesitated to disturb her. As he stood waiting for a moment in the shadow, he heard the echoing toll of the First Church bell, sounding muffled and mellow in the distance. It was eight o'clock, time for the Colonel, and he had not seen her. He groped his way in among the trees, through which, above, the moon pierced with one broad spot of light directly before the summer-house, and sent stray beams within to play with the dense shadows. "Oh, Clare," he called, coming out into the weird brilliancy. Beyond in the shadow something moved and came toward him. He started toward it. Then, suddenly, he leaped aside into the blackness and, throwing himself erect, braced himself, every sense

alert. For the figure that he saw was that of a crouching man. A footstep crackled at his left, and someone stumbled behind him. The moon disappeared behind a cloud, and the garden of peace vanished.

All day Clare Hardy had felt an indefinable sense of rebuff, in the midst of her admiration for Gilbert's refusal to read the papers she had brought him. When she found that he had come that afternoon while she was out, her first impulse was to go to him. Perhaps there was some new way in which she might help him. But her pride held her back. She had taken the initiative too often already, it told her, and with a sigh of discontent she surrendered temporarily to the conventions her mother worshiped. After a silent dinner with Mrs. Hardy, idleness indoors grew too irksome to be borne, and, throwing a coat over her shoulders, she slipped out and through the gap in the hedge, into Mr. McNish's ever-welcoming garden, to be idle out of doors and alone. She, too, stopped as the calm, moonlit garden unfolded itself before her, but she noticed few of its detailed traceries of beauty. It suggested him and the old days and Billy,—this garden; that was its beauty and its power to her and, strangely enough, tears sprang to her eyes. She was advancing to one of her favorite paths when she heard the front door of the big house close noisily, and Billy's well-known whistle. Impulsively she answered it, and, quickly drying her eyes, she turned back, along the path by the side of the house. At the corner of the porch she met him, and they paced together slowly around to the front walk.

"I'm in a gray-green funk," was Billy's greeting. "I can't remember a thing I want to say to-night. Every few seconds I find myself saying, 'Ladies and Gentlemen,' and the meeting is for men only. It's going to be an awful fizzle."

"Nonsense."

"That's right. Try to brace me up. But I was never like this before. I've been scared, but I never was paralyzed. Why, I couldn't eat any dinner, Clare. That's fair evidence, and, afterwards, I went upstairs and tried to make my speech, and all I could do was to make gestures. It's awful."

Billy's unassumed woe set Clare laughing gayly, for tears and mirth were both near the surface with her that night. He was laughing with her when they heard the eight o'clock bell strike its echoing toll.

"Billy, will you ever grow up?" They were under the big elm near the gate. The moon had gone under a cloud and the lawn was dark. He hesitated.

"Perhaps," he said in a low voice, leaning toward her, suddenly grave.

"It's so silly," she hurried on. "You know you're going to make the greatest speech of your life to-night."

"I might if you'd say one word, just one word, Clare." He caught her hand unawares and she let him hold it.

"Billy," she pleaded, her voice steady, "don't make it hard for me to-night when I want to help you."

"I can't give you up, Clare."

"Yes, you can, Billy, and you must."

"You're certain?"

"Certain."

The door of the house closed quietly, and Mr. McNish came out and toward them.

"I'm sorry." Clare's words came slowly. "I want you to succeed to-night—and always, Billy. You know that."

"It's Jack," Billy whispered.

She turned from him quickly to try to greet Mr. McNish, but before she could speak Billy came to her rescue.

"Clare has been wishing me success, father," he said quietly. Mr. McNish looked from one to the other curiously.

"There ought to be no doubt of the outcome of the meeting, then," he remarked gallantly.

Clare Hardy walked slowly back to the gap in the hedge. The garden had no charm for her. A dull weight of regret pulled at her heart. At the hedge she came suddenly face to face with her maid.

"Colonel Mead is looking fer Mr. Gilbert, ma'am, an' 'tis a hurry he's in, too."

"Mr. Gilbert? Where?"

"Sure, I sint him out after you long ago," and the girl rehearsed the matter in detail. Clare's mind worked quickly.

"All right," she said. "Tell Colonel Mead that Mr. Gilbert will be there immediately."

She did not wait to see the girl turn back with the message. She started down into the garden, calling his name, her heart beating lightly. He had come again then. He was here, in their old garden, searching for her. The world was not such a helter-skelter affair after all. She threaded her way along rapidly, calling and

listening. On through the garden, bright again in the moonlight, she went, her heart growing heavier as no answer came. Perhaps he had come and, not finding her, he had gone again. She pushed her way in among the trees about the summer-house. She stopped short, her heart beating wildly. Then, with a low cry, she threw herself on her knees beside the well-known figure lying in the broad patch of light, and called his name again and again.

The odor of smoke aroused her to the realities of it all, and she turned to see the last sparks die out of a crumpled mass of charred paper on the ground beside him. The sinuous tendrils of smoke curled upward like incense until they reached the edge of the background of moonshine, and then they vanished into the darkness.

Hampstead Opera House had been built three years before by a company organized by ex-Congressman Strutt and a few others. Its common stock had been sold by popular subscription among the citizens, and it was therefore looked upon by them with pride as a municipal achievement. The ex-Congressman, however, looked upon the building very naturally as a personal achievement, since he was president of the company and since he held a majority of the preferred stock upon which alone dividends were paid. Few visitors were allowed to leave Hampstead without admiring the new organ in the Baptist church or the handsome Public Library, but no one escaped until the proud hosts had led the way to the Opera House by night or by day. It was Hampstead's *magnum opus*.

Hampstead Opera House was one of the largest theaters in Connecticut, and never in its short history had it held as large or as vigorous a crowd as this which arose to cheer and to jeer the young candidate for mayor, on that memorable Saturday night. Billy McNish, threading his way among the party leaders and privileged guests on the stage, stopping now and then to shake hands gracefully with one and another, felt a sudden exhilaration sweep through him as he realized that this discordant, deafening noise was raised for him. He reached the front of the stage, bowed with assumed dignity and then gave a natural, boyish wave of the hand, a half salute, that caught the assemblage immediately. Billy sat down, looked squarely at the mass of men he had feared and smiled contentedly.

They packed the little boxes at his left and right, and the green hangings had been drawn aside that all might see. Above in the two galleries a line of arms, many of them in shirt sleeves, dangled in various postures over the showy green papier-maché covering, and above them rose terrace after terrace of bobbing heads. Downstairs in the pit the aisles were obliterated, the standing room at the back was filled, and even in the lobby beyond, as in the foyer above, there was no end visible of the swaying mass.

All day the town had been filled with rumors, many of them wild and improbable, about this meeting. The striking workmen had heard them, and the men at the benches of Hubbard's huge shops, and the toiling gang who were cutting up Broad Street and laying track. The politicians had heard them and the storekeepers

had spread them and the street loafers had enlarged them until all Hampstead was on tiptoe for some mysterious sensation. No wonder the Opera House was crowded, and no wonder the streets outside were jammed with disappointed men and curious women.

Within they were all men. Peering across the lowered footlights Billy recognized many faces, a doctor here, an old mechanic there, lawyers pushing young clerks, a shirt-sleeved hod carrier sitting and a small factory owner standing behind him. There was Mr. Higgins of Tareville crowded up against the complacent Mr. Butter-son, who mopped his red, apoplectic face with a huge handkerchief. Mr. Tubb sat in the center, waving with spasmodic enthusiasm a small American flag, and beyond him, in a new check suit and wearing the inevitable bird's-egg blue necktie, Mr. Lumpkin of the night lunch wagon was evidently amusing those about him with original remarks. Beside him Joe Heffler and Jimmy O'Rourke sat silent. The "cabinet" was still intact. Over at the left Tom Grady sat scowling in the midst of a group that seemed organized, and in which Billy saw men whom he knew were employees of Hardy & Son. Sprinkled here and there, he noticed swarthy foreign faces, and he caught the glow of red handkerchiefs. Above in the second gallery loafers whistled shrilly, and the men in the orchestra worked hard to make "The Star-Spangled Banner" heard above the hum of conversation and the occasional remarks of loud-voiced wits, which followed the din of applause at Billy's entrance.

Turning, Billy found Moriarty's eye upon him questioningly. The little Irishman jerked his finger toward

two empty chairs at the front of the stage. As if in echo, a loud, organized cry came from the left, which caught the attention of everyone in the house, for the orchestra had surrendered temporarily after playing every national air it knew.

“Where is John Gilbert?”

Jeers and cat-calls followed the question.

“Coward.”

“Scared out.”

“Scab.”

Most of the cries came from the left. The rest of the house sat silent, but Billy, looking again at the thousands of faces,—all, it seemed to him, turned in his direction,—felt that a sudden change had been wrought in the assemblage. A moment ago it had seemed good-humored and leisurely. Now it was molded into an alert, grim force, eager for struggle. For a half second he wished that Clare Hardy might have heard his greeting and Gilbert's. Then he straightened quickly in his chair as Judge Morrison, standing by the speaker's low table, addressed the meeting in his deep, orotund voice.

The crowd listened quietly at first, and Billy, with a feeling of relief at being temporarily sheltered from attention, turned now and then to watch anxiously the wings on the other side of the stage. Others behind him, also, were staring in the same direction. Before the Judge had spoken five minutes Moriarty slipped out unnoticed and disappeared through the stage door plainly visible from the stage. Gilshannon, at the reporter's table at the side, caught Billy's eye and shook his head slightly, while the Judge helped himself to the inevitable swallow

of water in the middle of his remarks. The rest of the speech was punctuated with loud cheers and with hoots and wails of derision, for the old Judge made a doleful and pessimistic plea that "an industrial condition, or the support of any man, ought not to influence a loyal party man away from his ticket." He finished with an open apology for John Gilbert's connection with the campaign, and an introduction of Billy McNish, in well-rounded phrases, as "the next mayor of Hampstead." He sat down amid applause that quickly died away in anticipation.

As Billy arose jauntily he was greeted by the reiterated chant from the left.

"Where is John Gilbert?"

This time it was echoed in a disjointed cry from the top gallery, and when that died away, a group of young men at the rear, anxious to have a hand in the fun, reiterated it, emphasizing humorously the second word and pausing an instant after it.

"Where *is* John Gilbert?"

Billy beamed at them genially and waited.

"Can't we have it once more?" he said good-naturedly when they were quiet. Billy's good humor was infectious and the audience smiled.

"And I was taught that it was the women who were inquisitive," he added.

The smile broadened and Billy, watching them, knew that it was time for him to begin.

Never before had Billy so completely held an audience. Throughout the ten minutes that he spoke he did not see an eye turn from him. Every sense made keen with

the exhilaration of it, he listened with them to his speech and applauded it. He watched every movement in the vast mass facing him, read their thoughts intuitively, and felt every wave of emotion that lifted them. When they laughed his whole being shook with delight. Tears came into his eyes when he saw tears glisten in theirs. And when they were silent, more than two thousand, so that he could scarcely hear their repressed breathing, cool thrills ran up and down his back. And yet, in the midst of his triumph, he felt the emptiness of the chairs at his right, and, turning now and then to speak to the boxes, he flashed a glance across the stage at them. And always they were empty.

Suddenly the atmosphere of success changed in the midst of a sentence. His grip on the crowd seemed to relax rapidly. The defection began in the galleries and spread throughout the entire hall. The whispering stir grew louder. Necks were craned. And in the pit many men arose and stared past him. As he finished the sentence a hand caught his arm, and he turned to look into Moriarty's face, pale with excitement. A low murmur ran through the wondering audience, partly of approval at the young candidate's unexpectedly good speech, partly of conjecture as to the cause of the interruption. Billy had turned his back upon them and had followed the little Irishman to the wings, without a word. On the stage nearly everyone was standing, trying to catch a glimpse of the little group by the stage door, but only those near by could see Clare Hardy and Billy meet in the midst of a dozen excited men.

When, a few moments later, Billy reappeared, he was

followed in single file by all of the men who had been in the group in the wings except Mr. McNish, and when they reached the front of the stage they separated slowly into a long line that stretched behind Billy from one side of the stage to the other. The great audience, impressed instantly by the menacing grimness of their faces, leaned forward in expectant silence, while behind them the closely packed mass on the stage arose to see and to listen. Billy in the center, the pivot of the surrounding throng, stood waiting for the scraping of chairs behind him to cease. When at last he spoke, his voice rang clear and defiant, although he paused between words as if for breath.

“If anyone fails to hear a word of what I say now I want him to stop me.” He paused, and for some seconds the throbbing silence of the thousands, tense, awe-inspiring, overpowering, filled the hall. “The bravest man in Hampstead is dead or dying.” Billy’s voice broke, but he went on with an effort. “For months he has been fighting for you and for me the most insidious, the most deadly, the most unscrupulous power in our city, fighting while many of us railed at him and called him coward. At last he uncovered them and to-night he was to have told us for our own protection all he knew. But they, these enemies of his and of ours, knowing that no honest man in Hampstead would walk the same street with them if what John Gilbert knew was told, have added murder to their list of crimes. You asked some time ago where John Gilbert was. I could not tell you then. I can tell you now. He started for this meeting. On the way he was attacked in the dark by a large number

of men, who also destroyed the manuscript of the speech he was to read to us. Men, you have called him a coward. Two of the mob who attacked him were found senseless near him, and there are trails of the blood of others that show how well he defended himself."

The speaker paused again, but from every part of the auditorium came shouts for him to go on.

"The manuscript of his speech was destroyed, but there was another copy about which his enemies did not know. I have it here." Billy lifted a smudged sheaf of papers in his hand. Cheers started on the stage behind him and swept out into the auditorium until the great audience rocked with them, clear, defiant, menacing, the outcry of an American assemblage for fair play. Over at the left Tom Grady sat among the strikers, cowed and silent.

"It was brought to me from the printers, to whom he took it that every home might read his story in plain print." Billy shouted this into the midst of the clamor. Then he arranged the soiled and wrinkled sheets of paper, and half-a-dozen men closed in about him as if in fear of a second attack. The audience quieted quickly before the magic of the manuscript, and Billy realized, for the first time in his legal experience, the existence of a real bar of justice in a republic of many courts of law.

"I come here to-night," the manuscript began, "not as a speaker nor as a politician but as a citizen, to state some unpleasant facts. There is a group of men in this city, wealthy, respected, powerful. I shall name four, Mr. Brett, your mayor, Mr. Merrivale, Mr. Strutt and Mr. Alonzo Hubbard, and the greatest of these is the

last. I shall prove to you that these men are not only bad citizens but dangerous criminals; that for their own ends they have robbed the city and have bribed weaklings; that they have bought and paid for a strike against Hardy & Son, so that they might fleece its stockholders and own it at little cost; that they are conspirators against public and private peace, men who evidently are not graced with a single conscientious scruple."

The stern face of the audience scarcely moved. A quick, convulsive gasp at the naming of Hampstead's leading citizens left mouths agape with amazement. Otherwise the only stir was of heads turned now and then toward neighbors, sober or doubting glances, and then eyes front once more, bent upon the group at the front of the stage, in the midst of which stood the young man who had made them laugh a few minutes ago and who had laughed with them, and in whose hands now the threatening sheets of paper trembled and rattled audibly. Slowly and with the jerky emphasis of hardly restrained anger came concisely the intricate story of the fight for the shops; how the ring had hired Mr. Conlin and two local union men; how the mass of the men had been imposed upon and had gone out; how the ring had then bought the newspapers and had fooled the public as it had fooled the men; and at last how nearly it had come to obtaining the control of the mills. Rapidly the atmosphere in the close hall became electric and foreboding.

"This man, Conlin, your leader, men, is an old criminal. He has been in prison three times to my knowledge. He will get thousands of dollars if this strike is successful.

You know Martin Jethro and Tom Grady as well as I do. They are getting thirty-five dollars a week salary during the strike, and will receive a bonus of one hundred dollars if it is successful. And what do you get? Higher wages? No. A union shop? No. You are out of work while the strike lasts, and if it is successful the doors of part of Hardy & Son are closed against you. You must sell your homes and find work elsewhere. That is your reward."

A low growl of growing anger, like the first muttering of a coming tempest, ran through the audience, beginning at the left. The strikers near his seat reached threatening hands forward for Grady, but he was not there. He had slipped from his seat to the orchestra box, and was even then lying behind a pile of old canvas underneath the stage. As the noise increased Billy raised the manuscript above his head and, as if by magic, the tumult ceased into grim silence. As the reading continued, however, and as they heard the true history of the Street Railway Bill, of the bribery by which it was passed and of the gain that it meant to a few at the expense of the many, red passion flared across the multitude, and thunderous shouts interrupted the speaker again and again with growing rapidity of succession.

The story of the reservoir deal, with the engineer's statement of the amount of money it had put into two or three pockets at the city's expense, heaped up the growing anger until men sat gritting their teeth and clenching their fists and waiting for the speaker to finish. From where Billy stood the strained intensity of the crowd was startling, terrifying.

"I think I have proved what I set out to prove. I ask you this. Will you allow the Hardy shops to be wrecked by these industrial pirates? Will you allow our city government to be merely an open window to these gentlemen thieves? Crime unpunished or unprevented breeds greater crime. If you do not stop them, they of themselves will stop at nothing."

With the coincidence of the last words the tempest broke. The entire mass was on its feet, talking loudly, shouting curses, howling suggestions; organized in its unleashed passion for vengeance, but without a united purpose for obtaining it; a wild chaos of swaying bodies, faces alternately white and red with anger and determination, and glistening with sweat, arms lifted and swinging. "Tar and feather"—"String 'em up"—"Run 'em out." Here and there a few shouted for order and tried to restrain those about them, but without result. In their midst sat a man in a checked suit—crying unashamed like a child, the tears dripping unheeded upon his gorgeous bird's-egg blue necktie. A boy was on his feet, shaking his doubled fists in the air, and a man with gray hair sat, unnaturally pale, staring at the platform. On the stage the group of men in front were talking earnestly. Suddenly the noise lessened and quieted, until even Peter Lumpkin's sobs could be heard in the stillness. Billy had advanced to the footlights and again the magic manuscript was raised above his head.

"Gentlemen, John Gilbert has fought a fair fight. Only those who wish to blacken his name will finish that fight with violence."

Billy paused a second. Then he signaled to the leader of the orchestra and, turning on his heel, he started down through the lane that the people on the stage made for him to the stage door. The orchestra struck up a popular march, and the foreheads of the cornetist and the trombone-player grew red with effort. Slowly the great crowd turned and slowly it filed out. Again there were loud cries and angry threats, but they were fewer and less vigorous. Billy's closing sentence, while it had only strengthened their anger, had brought back suddenly their inbred Connecticut respect for law. Outside many gathered in small groups that grew and melted into one, and at last moved over to the little green, where Judge Morrison and others talked quietly from the dilapidated grandstand. Peter Lumpkin was among the last to leave the hall. For a time he stood on the steps, and now and then he wiped his eyes and breathed deep sighs. Suddenly he was conscious of a figure that crept from the darkened entrance, behind which the noises of closing doors were audible. It stood at last beside him, peering across at the park and at the crowd there that had left the street empty.

"What're they goin' to do now, Lump?" The voice was half fear and half sneer.

The night lunch wagon proprietor dabbed at his eyes carefully and returned his handkerchief to his pocket. Then, without the slightest warning, he sent his doubled fist into the man's face and threw himself upon him. Grady fell back with an oath, slipped, went down, then, pulling himself free, he disappeared in an alley. Mr. Lumpkin picked himself up and stared down at the

ruined clothes. Then he started across to the green, where he told the men on the edge of the crowd that he had "whipped" Tom Grady, and showed his clothes as proof.

All that night the tramp of men was heard in the streets of Hampstead. People indoors heard it and wondered, and, peering out, saw shadowy figures pass silently by. Women,—wives and mothers,—sat up waiting for their men and at last slept restlessly from sheer weariness. Others, less fortunate, cried themselves to sleep with shame at the dishonor which had come to them and to their children, or sat lonely behind drawn shades and heard the sound of many voices outside and the beat of footsteps, at once a guard and a menace. Molly Jethro, sitting dry-eyed beside a cot in jail on Railroad Street where her husband had been brought from Mr. McNish's garden, prayed for John Gilbert and for those who sat wretchedly waiting with drawn faces in the great stone house on the hill.

No one slept on Broad Street that night. Before midnight three or four hundred stern-faced men, with a gray-haired young man in the lead, marched into the thoroughfare. The workmen toiling under the torches looked into their faces and heard their commands and dropped pick and shovel and hammer. The three or four hundred men took their places. A team appeared, loaded with Jimmy O'Rourke's barrels, and soon a great bonfire lit the entire length of street, where mechanics and storekeepers and doctors in their shirt sleeves pulled up ties and rails and filled in, from end to end, the lane which the workmen had made. And all the while Peter Lump-

kin, his shovel beating time, shouted songs in his megaphonic baritone, and the crowd joined in on chorus after chorus. At last Peter started a tune in which nobody joined. He stopped work and everybody listened. He finished it full voice:

“For I count it one of the wisest things
To drive dull care away.”

Then, to the surprise of everyone except Joe Heffler and Jimmy O'Rourke, Mr. Lumpkin sat down on the curbstone and cried again like a child. At dawn there was no trace of the Broad Street extension of the street railway except the uneven ridge that ran through the middle of the street.

The peaceful sunlight of a New England Sunday dawn seemed to rest benignly upon the windows of John Gilbert's boyhood room. Sometime later a girl emerged from the side door, and the sun lighted a wan smile upon her lips as she heard a low, muffled cheer from the groups of men upon the lawn in front. Then she disappeared through a gap in the hedge that led to a silent house beyond.

CHAPTER XXII

THANKSGIVING DAY

JOHAN GILBERT, sitting in an easy chair, started suddenly and leaned forward. The merry ripple of girlish laughter was not repeated, and he sank back disconsolately. It had been like this for weeks. In the first moments of returning consciousness on that Sunday morning that seemed years ago, he thought that he had seen bending over him a woman's face that he knew. It had disappeared and he had tried to live that he might see it again. Later, as the fragments of his broken memory came back to him, they seemed to knit together about a girlish figure sitting beside him in a carriage, or standing before him in a parlor which seemed so familiar that at times he almost knew where it was and then lost it suddenly in a blank of exhaustion. Then, as the whole structure of the past gradually built itself up until he could look at it steadily,—until he knew that it was no longer a mirage, that might tumble into the dark cloud of forgetting which had hovered behind it,—he heard sometimes the beat of a footstep that made his pulse throb faster; he could hear it come to the door and stop, and his mother would tiptoe away from him, and he would hear whispers and then the footstep again, going away, going away until it faded at last into a mere pulse-beat. Only yesterday he had heard a voice that

he was sure was hers—there was no other voice like hers in the world—and he had limped to the window, for it seemed to come from without, and he had stared disappointedly at the empty garden. And now the ripple of her laughter, that broke into a cascade of melody at the end—from below stairs it sounded, and he was forbidden to go down until dinner time. He sighed deeply and listened, for once more it came echoing back to him, dull and muffled now and going away mockingly.

They had told him gradually what had happened after that last shattering blow felled him at the steps of the old summer-house. They had told him how she called Mrs. Ruggles, Mr. McNish's housekeeper, and a nearby doctor; and how, when they followed her to the spot with others to help them, she turned away resolutely and left them; how she brought Mrs. Gilbert and how she drove the automobile at reckless speed to Prentice's printery and from there to the Opera House, in time to make the meeting an even mightier power than he could have made it. They had not told him that, when Mr. McNish brought her up West Hill again that night, she sobbed hysterically against that kindly gentleman's shoulder, repeating again and again—"I didn't want to leave him. I didn't want to leave him. But it's the thing that counts, not him nor me nor anybody else. He said so."

They had told him other things which seemed to interest him less. Martin Jethro had implicated a dozen day laborers at the mills, most of them foreigners only recently come to Hampstead, as those who, with him, had followed Gilbert into the old garden. Conlin had

left town suddenly on that Saturday night, along with four, thoroughly frightened, leading citizens, and the ex-labor leader had never been heard of again. Jethro had declared that Conlin planned the attack upon Gilbert, but, whether or not Mr. Hubbard and the others had been a party to it, only Conlin could tell and Conlin had disappeared. The men had gone back to work at the Hardy shops on Monday and, the following day, Hampstead had elected Billy McNish mayor by the largest majority the town had ever known. The new Common Council had revoked the Street Railway Company's added franchise, on the ground that the promised Broad Street extension had not been completed within the stated time. There had been some talk of lawsuits because of the interference with the building of the line, but it had proved to be nothing but talk. Mr. Hubbard evidently desired peace more than anything else. There were already two serious charges pending against him, and public opinion was with the prosecuting attorney. It was rumored that, after all, the group about Mr. Hubbard had not lost much, aside from their hypothetical profits under the extended franchise. A great railroad company, which had been gradually absorbing electric roads in Connecticut, had bought out the old franchise, and had been granted the additional rights on terms that were fair to the city. Much of this Gilbert had listened to dully, seeming to take it all as a matter of course. He wouldn't appear against Jethro or anybody else if he could help it, he said.

During the last few days, with his returning strength, he had fretted considerably about the shops and par-

ticularly about the stock. He had overheard Mr. McNish say that Mr. Hubbard was back in town again, and his presence seemed to Gilbert like a threat. But neither Mr. McNish nor the Colonel nor Billy would mention business to him except to say soberly, in answer to his repeated questions, that everything was all right, and, jokingly, that they were getting along better without him than they could with him. He tried to believe them, but their assurances satisfied him less daily. The rattle of machinery seemed to call him and the shouts of the men at work, and the four walls of his old room seemed those of a prison. To-day, however, came a partial release, for his head seemed clear and strong and he could manage the foot with a cane. And to-morrow, if the weather was right, he was to be driven to the shops. He wondered suddenly whether, if he asked her, she would sit beside him in the carriage.

Mrs. Gilbert, coming in quietly, found him propped up by his cane against the wood of the side window, below which was the high hedge and, beyond, the silent Hardy house. She smiled to herself as she stood for a few seconds, hesitating to interrupt him. She had seen him at that window many times during the last few days.

"It's a dull day, laddie, outside," she said at last. He turned quickly with a guilty look on his face. "I used to want a cold, crisp day for Thanksgiving," she went on, "but to-day I don't seem to care. There's so much to be thankful for."

Mrs. Gilbert's arms were bared to the elbow, and the neck of her plain gingham gown was loosened. Her

son, looking more closely, saw a fresh red stain on the front of her waist.

"Mither," he said sternly, "you've been cooking."

"Shh," she cautioned, bobbing her head at him and laughing like a girl. "Do you think I could eat a Thanksgiving dinner, here in this house, that some other woman cooked? They were glad to have me there a-helping them until I heard Mr. McNish coming, and then I ran up here. But it's all done and you needn't fear, laddie, about eating any of the food on the table. And now I'll put on a dress that's seeming for the great occasion."

Dinner was a great occasion indeed. They all came upstairs and escorted him down to the table, his mother, Mr. McNish, the Colonel and Billy, and they settled him in his chair and waited upon him until he laughed at them, declaring that they would spoil him.

Mr. McNish's fervent blessing—at the end of which, to Billy's undisguised surprise and delight, the Colonel added an earnest and sonorous "Amen,"—was not for a table empty except of dishes, to which in dignified order would come a slow procession of courses brought by simpering maids. It was not necessary to approach this dinner with strategy, slighting early opportunities and holding reserves for that which was to come, only to be sorry afterwards for an undoubted mistake; or, rushing ahead with dauntless courage, only to find one's forces exhausted just as the dish one desired more than all the rest appeared. The good things were all before them, and a dozen delicious odors lured them on. And such a dinner as it was! There was no tempting soup to take the edge from their appetites or from their anticipation.

The great plates went around, piled high with turkey so tender that it seemed ready to fall apart, and with potatoes and squash from the garden. Then there were steaming onions, and cranberry sauce with just the right amount of sugar to please five varied tastes, and celery, crisp and white, with occasional roots shining like polished ivory; and olives and radishes with a dozen other relishes, and a mountain of smoking, snowy biscuit.

As the meal progressed the Colonel gave vent to his admiration.

"Only recollect one dinner the equal o' this," he remarked, "an' thet was a cup o' hot coffee at Helena, Montana, after I'd liked to starve to death in a blizzard."

"It is a good dinner," Mr. McNish spoke proudly. "To tell the truth I didn't think Mrs. Ruggles had it in her. She seems to have realized the occasion and risen to it."

The Mayor of Hampstead laughed aloud and winked impudently at Mrs. Gilbert. Then he told what he had seen through the kitchen window that morning, while Mr. McNish stared at Mrs. Gilbert with amazement and concern, and she returned the gaze with smiling pride. Mrs. Ruggles indeed!

After a time there was a short pause, filled with long sighs of contentment. Then came thick pumpkin pies, and nuts and oranges, until they all gave it up in despair and drifted, with Gilbert in their midst, across the broad hall into the library. There, when they had seen him reclining comfortably in a broad Morris chair with his back to the doorway, Mrs. Gilbert disappeared and Billy followed her, shortly after cigars had been lit. Once, in

the half-hour that passed quickly, Gilbert lifted himself up to go into the parlor in the front of the house where the piano was, but the Colonel stopped him and began the story of his experiences that had led to that dinner which he considered the best he had ever had. Courtesy alone would have held Gilbert, and soon he had forgotten the piano and was staggering along with the Colonel through the heaping snows of a Montana blizzard. It was a long story and the veteran, looking beyond Gilbert to the door, added many details and side incidents to make it longer.

Afterwards, Billy reappeared with an almost suspicious indifference, and the Colonel turned the conversation to him.

"Glory," he remarked, "is a good deal like women. Ye chase it continuous till ye've lost all yer self-respect, an' when ye catch it y'ain't got any more use fer it."

"More chasing than catching," laughed Billy, who seemed restless and who watched the hallway constantly. "What's this, Colonel, reminiscence?"

Colonel Mead smiled benevolently.

"Lord, no, I'm jest talkin' gen'rilly, like a collidge prifesser. It don't actooly mean anythin'."

"What is a college professor, Colonel, in your philosophy?" asked Billy, eager to keep the conversation going.

"A collidge prifesser," Colonel Mead paused reflectively, "is a tenderfoot, thet spends some o' his valooble time tellin' a bunch o' boys why somethin' ought to be what. He's wasted a number o' years tryin' to guess the answer, an' o' course, they take his word fer it. Ef they don't,

I reckon he makes 'em all sit up nights till they do. Then he puts on his goggles an' he looks at the hull nation, ez ef we all wore caps on the backs of our heads an' went to school in his class. 'The Phillipians ought to be free,' he sez, 'an' we ought to hev free trade an' the labor unions ought to run the country.' An' when some of us don't agree with him, he jest natch'rally puts a black mark down in his book an' sez that the country is goin' to the dogs. Bymby he gits so many the'ries twisted in his mind that he either goes into the daffy house er becomes what they call a Socialist—which is next door with a hole cut in the wall between."

Billy had unaccountably hurried out into the hall in the midst of the Colonel's talk. The mention of "labor unions" was a bugle call to Mr. McNish to mount his hobby horse and fight, but he was interrupted.

"Jack," called Billy from the front door. "Someone here wants to see you."

Mr. McNish broke off short and caught one of Gilbert's arms; the Colonel seized the other and, before he could cry a protest, they were leading him out into the hall, where Billy was awaiting them, and on to the porch, where Gilbert hung back suddenly and looked plaintively from one to the other, gripping their arms convulsively.

"What's this?" he asked, dazed, as they beamed back at him and urged him forward. Then he heard his name called and he heard, as well, a low murmur that grew into the loudest cheers that had ever been heard in Hampstead, and something seized his throat, and he swallowed with difficulty and tried to smile.

It seemed as if the entire town was there. Before him

they filled the broad lawn and walks, and overflowed into the street, choking it so tightly that every stray team that tried to pass was added to the waiting crowd. Half-a-dozen street cars stood in their midst, and groups of the more venturesome had climbed to the roofs, while others helped the road employees stamp resounding strokes upon the car gong, to add to the volume of the cheering. Down the street they reached nearly to the corner. They spread out over the Hardy lawn next door and packed the front porch, while small boys hung upon the slanting porch roof. Others had "shinned" up every pole or post in sight, and clung tightly in vertical lines, waving their caps with conscious pride. When Gilbert appeared the Hampstead City Band, out of sight between the swaying, shouting people and the veranda, struck up "Hail the Conquering Hero Comes," and, as if in answer, from the silent city below came the shriek of the whistle of Hardy & Son. Pandemonium broke loose; arms waved, handkerchiefs fluttered, and little children, perched upon their fathers' shoulders, shook their chubby hands and crowed with joy. Mr. McNish and the Colonel, their faces red with exertion, led the cheering with their free hands, Colonel Mead dancing up and down with such careless vigor that Gilbert instinctively moved away from him to save his sound foot. For many minutes the band blared, the whistle blew, the gongs rang and the hill shook with the steady cheers, and many a sleeve in the mass of Hardy & Son employees, who stood at the front, was brushed shamelessly across wet eyes, while women laughed hysterically in their midst. Billy, standing behind Gilbert, shouted ecstatically with the rest.

At last, when the band had surrendered and the whistle had stopped and the cheers grew hoarse and intermittent, Billy saw Gilshannon looking at him and smiling cynically.

"Great!" he shouted in the newspaper man's ear.

"They're a fickle bunch," answered the reporter. "A little while ago they'd howled him down just as hard. Where will they stand to-morrow? They make me sick."

Gradually the cheering straggled off to the far edges of the crowd, where a few men, discovering at last that they were shouting alone, stopped and flushed and laughed good-naturedly, as they stood on tiptoe and peered at the little group on the veranda far away. There the Colonel was regaining his dignity as rapidly as possible. He was nervously sorting papers and envelopes which he drew from his bulging pocket. This task completed, he conferred with Mr. McNish over Gilbert's shoulder. Then, stepping away from them, he faced Gilbert and began to speak in a voice that was frayed to a mere whisper with shouting. He told Gilbert all that they had been keeping from him during his convalescence; how Hardy & Son had been reorganized; how Mr. Hubbard and his three associates, wishing to make their peace with the people of Hampstead—since each of them had large properties in the city which must be operated—had, after correspondence and conferences, offered their Hardy stock for sale; how the citizens of Hampstead had subscribed for all the stock which the surplus would not buy; how the new stockholders had held a meeting and elected a new board of directors of which he was a member; and how the new directors had elected him secretary and treasurer of the company.

Gilbert threw back his shoulders quickly at the last announcement.

"That's impossible," he said firmly, although his voice trembled. "Mr. Hardy——"

A hand on his arm interrupted him, and he turned to look squarely in the face of Samuel Hardy himself, pale, emaciated, crouched back in an invalid's chair. "The old man" grinned up at him weakly, and their hands met and clasped.

"It's all right, Jack. We had the directors' meeting in my house, and it was unanimous."

The crowd on the lawn had not heard a word, but a deafening din of applause arose as they saw the two men meet, and the people beyond, who could not even see, took up the shout good-humoredly. Gilbert's eyes, glancing beyond Mr. Hardy, saw his mother turn away suddenly as if to hide something of which she was ashamed, and he caught a glimpse beyond her of a mass of waving black hair and black eyes beneath, wet with tears. Then someone came in between and he faced the lawn once more.

Gilshannon, his cynicism changed temporarily to merry egotism,—the simplest transformation for cynics,—appeared on the steps after a conference with the men at the front, and handed Gilbert a heavy seal ring from the men, "a magic ring that gives you power over a thousand men and more, men you're proud to have back of you, sir, and men who're proud you want them." And with the ring in an envelope, was Gilbert's union card. Gilshannon had been editor of the *News* since the day after election, and he was as popular as ever. The people

cheered him lustily as he stepped aside, and his face had lost its cynical smile and beamed with unrestrained pleasure.

Very few heard what Gilbert said in reply, but those who did, understood the earnestness that was behind his few halting words.

“You make me proud,” he said slowly, “and I don’t want to be proud. I only want what I earn, and I haven’t earned all this.” He hesitated. “It’s just as right, I guess, for men to make other people square and honest with them, as it is for them to be square and honest themselves. It’s just as right to make the law respect us as it is to respect the law.” Again he hesitated and cleared his throat. “The thing that has been done has been done. It was worth doing. We’ve got a new government, and a new mayor who’s square.” He caught Billy’s arm and linked his own within it. “We’ve got a new Hardy & Son and we’re all going to be square down there. This union card means a lot to me. And—just because a few men haven’t been on the level isn’t any reason why we should lose faith in each other or the city or the state or the country. It’s just given us a new start, that’s all.”

As he finished and limped, his hands outstretched, into their midst, Billy raised himself upon his toes and shouted: “All for one; one for all.” The men near by took up the cry. It ran down the long lines until the whole army chanted it, and it echoed across the city below to the hills beyond, the shout of the united citizens of Hampstead as it had been that of the Guardsmen of old.

And, curiously enough, the first hands that reached

John Gilbert's were those of two men and a boy, who stood in the front row of the crowd that surged toward him.

"Hurrah!" reiterated Peter Lumpkin, dancing up and down and wiping his eyes with the back of his free hand.

"Ye're de goods," declared Jimmy O'Rourke with dignity.

Joe Heffler said nothing. He gripped the extended hand, and held it until he could pass it on to that of the blonde, smiling girl who had once been Gerty Smith.

The band broke in with "Marching Through Georgia," and the crowds began to disperse, keeping step in spite of themselves to the music. The waiting cars filled rapidly and went clanging noisily down-town; but many people crowded nearer to the veranda, where ever-changing groups surrounded Gilbert and where, on the steps, Mr. McNish, his hat off and his gray hair blowing in the mild breeze, was singing along with hundreds of others the swinging, stirring chorus that his comrades had sung as they marched to the sea forty years before. And many, far down the street, stopped and listened and joined in, in detached groups, or sang it alone under their breath and felt an added lift at their hearts.

About Gilbert they were struggling to reach and shake his hand.

"We'll sind ye to Congress next year," cried little Moriarty, with what the *Register* characterized next day as "Napoleonic calm in the midst of the tempestuous excitement."

"No, you won't," retorted Gilbert. "I'm going to stay right here. It's home and it's good enough for me."

"Mister Gilbert," old Michael was puffing noisily, after having pushed his way to the front, "Oi've gave up socialism. Sure, Oi'm a Gilbertist now."

The band picked up its instruments and scattered down the lawn, happy in its new uniforms and in the awed gaze of the bystanders. Slowly those who remained about Gilbert followed them, Mr. Butterson and Mr. Tubb, the bitter rivals in groceries, going off arm in arm, and Judge Morrison with Mr. Neely, who had come to look upon himself as a hero who had helped the cause by his confession. From far down the street Mr. Lumpkin's megaphonic voice could still be heard chanting the chorus of "Marching Through Georgia."

Gilbert, suddenly realizing that he was tired, found Billy waiting at his elbow.

"I just saw somebody go out into the garden, Jack," he said quietly. "Somebody who planned nearly everything that happened to-day."

The two friends looked at each other steadily.

"I'd go out there," Billy added slowly, with a quaint smile, "if I were you."

Gilbert put his hand on his friend's shoulder and together they went up the steps.

"All right, Billy," was all Gilbert said, but Billy was satisfied.

Within, the Colonel and Mrs. Gilbert, still aglow with the success of their surprise party, weré hushed suddenly as they watched him limp past them. His eyes, fixed straight ahead, did not see them as they sat in the corner.

"And I always thought he had it in him to be a pro-

fessor or a doctor or something like that," said his mother, thoughtfully.

"'Tain't what a man's got in hisself that counts, it's what he gits out o' hisself. Ye see, ma'am, he's got the perseverance of a puppy at a root."

Mrs. Gilbert nodded.

"That's the Scotch in him," she remarked proudly. "'It's well for a Scotchman to be right,' my mother used to say, 'for if he's wrong he's ever and eternally wrong.'"

"Thar's a lot o' things that ain't right in this country," nodded the Colonel soberly, "but it ain't the'ries thet're goin' to make 'em right. It's men with level heads like his, an' level consciences like his. An' one man like him does more good'n the long run, than a dozen the'ries does harm."

She was sitting on the low bench under the old apple tree when she heard the crunch of his cane in the late afternoon silence. She saw him, the next instant, emerge from behind the bushes and come laboriously down the pathway toward her. Pulling her long coat about her, she rose to her feet quickly, suddenly breathless and feeling an instinctive desire to run away. He had seen her, however, and he was hurrying pitifully. A great wave of tenderness swept her heart as she stood still, watching him; him, her great man among men, the master of her world, stumping along with a cane, his clothes hanging loose on the great frame which illness had left gaunt and spare. Instinctively she looked for the scar, and she saw the jagged red line of it across the broad

forehead. She started impetuously to meet him, and then, remembering, she faltered and waited.

"I've found you at last," he cried, coming up before her. She nodded, smiling, for she could think of nothing to say. The bright light in his eyes warned her of impending happiness and she trembled. A sudden ecstasy of fear flashed over her. Always before he had been calm, quiet, a force under strong control. Now he had thrown off his bonds, and she seemed to feel the throb of his unrestrained passion, that, magnet-like, drew her as she never had been drawn before.

"I've found you at last. Where have you been, Clare Hardy? I've caught glimpses of you. I've heard you. I've reached out for you in the dark, but you were never there. Did you think that I could get along without you? I can't. I've tried and I can't. It's too strong for me. No," he cried in quick command, for she turned and hid her face from him.

He caught one of her arms and then, throwing his cane away, the other, and made her face him. "You can't run away again," he said fiercely.

For a second they stood so. Then the old tantalizing smile glinted up at him through tears.

"I don't believe—I want to run away, Jack."

And then the wonderful thing happened. The grizzled old apple tree seemed to wait in awed silence, listening, watching. Then it laughed above them in the breeze, and laughed again for joy of what it had seen and heard. Soon it was quiet again as they moved to the bench, the man leaning on her arm for the support she begged to give.

"Why did you run away at all, Clare?"

"A woman's pride, dear, that's all. I wanted you to come to me—and you came."

"And if I hadn't?"

"But you did."

This was uncontrovertible and he kissed her again tenderly, entirely content.

"Is it all real, Clare? *Is it all real?*"

"I was just wondering myself."

"Do you know, sometimes when I was off my head back there a month ago, before the world began, I'd remember you for a while and then there wouldn't be any you at all. It was awful."

"You'll never forget me again, Jack?"

He drew her to him and they sat, leaning forward, peering together into the glad world.

"And it isn't Billy after all."

"I think it was always you, dear."

"He told me you were here."

"Dear Billy."

"Good old Billy."

"Did you think of me, Jack, to-day, out there? I was very proud and a little afraid. You seemed to belong to all of them and I wanted you all to myself."

"But you planned it all."

"Billy and I."

And suddenly they both saw before them on the shriveled grass the shadows of three children playing, and they were both silent.

"And your father?" he said at last. "What will he say?"

"I wish you could have heard what he said yesterday. I kissed him for it afterwards."

Sometime later she left him to find his cane. When she returned there was a sober look on his face.

He had taken a torn strip of something from his pocket, something blue and worn and soiled.

"Why did you write this, Clare?" he asked. "I carried the whole thing home that night. And then, afterwards, I tore this off and I've carried it ever since."

She took the piece of the old blotter from his hand and read her own words.

"Do you remember, Jack," she said softly, "how you told me once that father held the balance of power? He didn't. You held it all the time, the real balance of power. You held it with me and you——"

She never finished, for his arms were around her, crushing her to him, and his lips pressed tightly upon hers.

"Such power," she whispered when her lips were free, her head sunk upon his shoulder. "Such wonderful,—sweet,—maddening power. Oh, Jack," she sobbed against his coat.

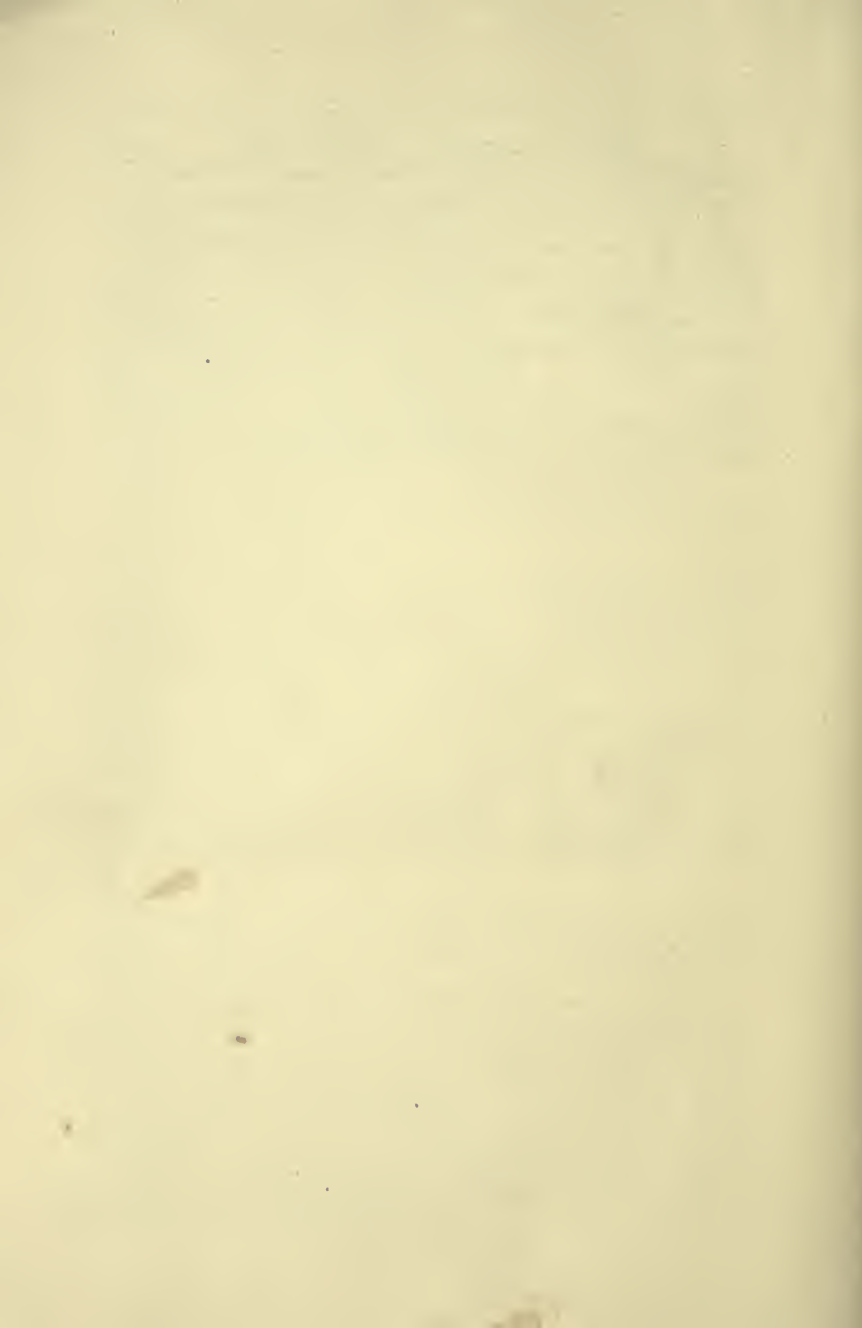
Slowly they walked down the darkening paths, and the dim light dazzled their eyes with its brilliancy and the bare boughs seemed to bloom about them.

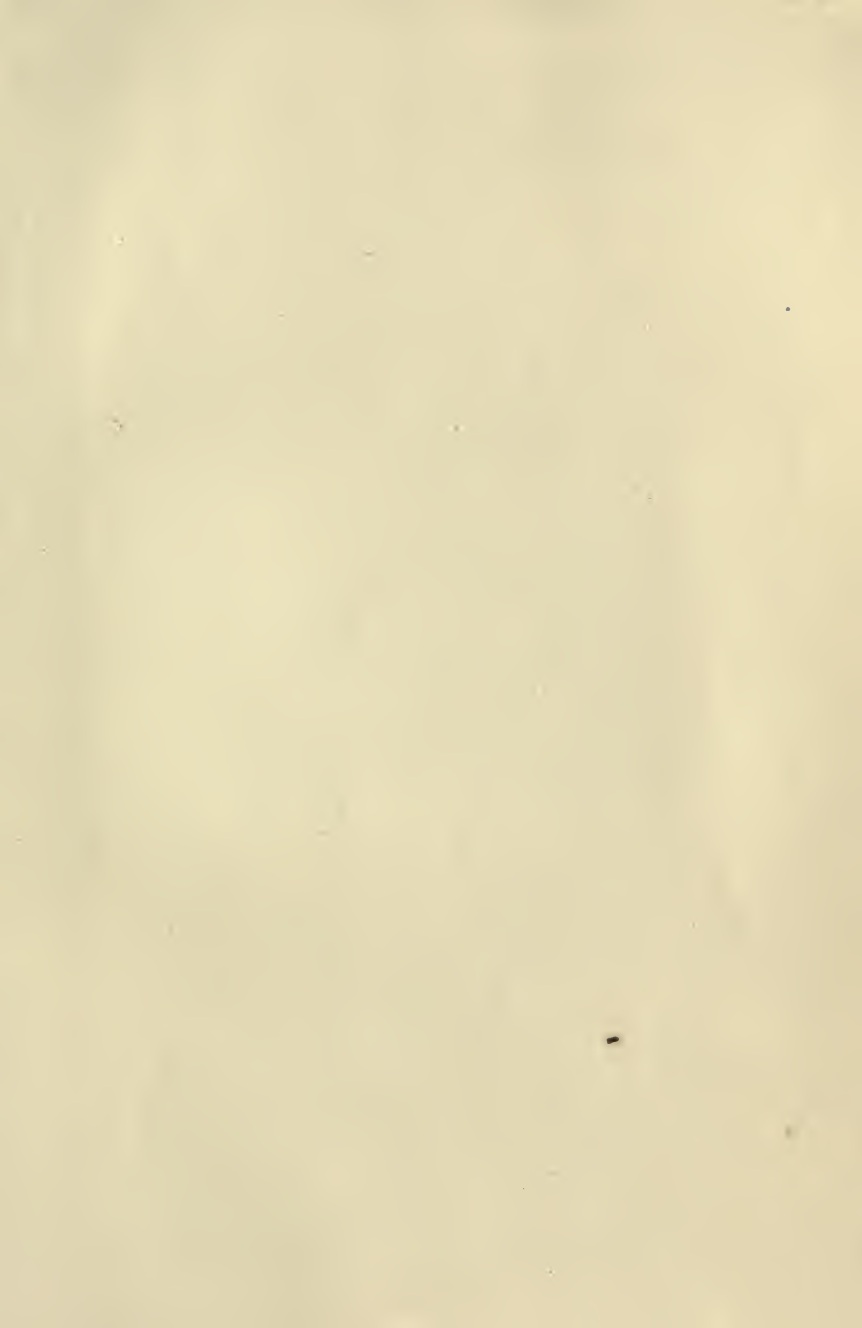
"God's bigger out here," she said reverently, and he remembered, as he looked at the great house where a few lights were already glimmering. And his mother, sitting quietly in the old library with the Colonel and Mr. McNish, remembered too, with that inward peace of those who, believing that all things mean good, see beyond the narrowing years.

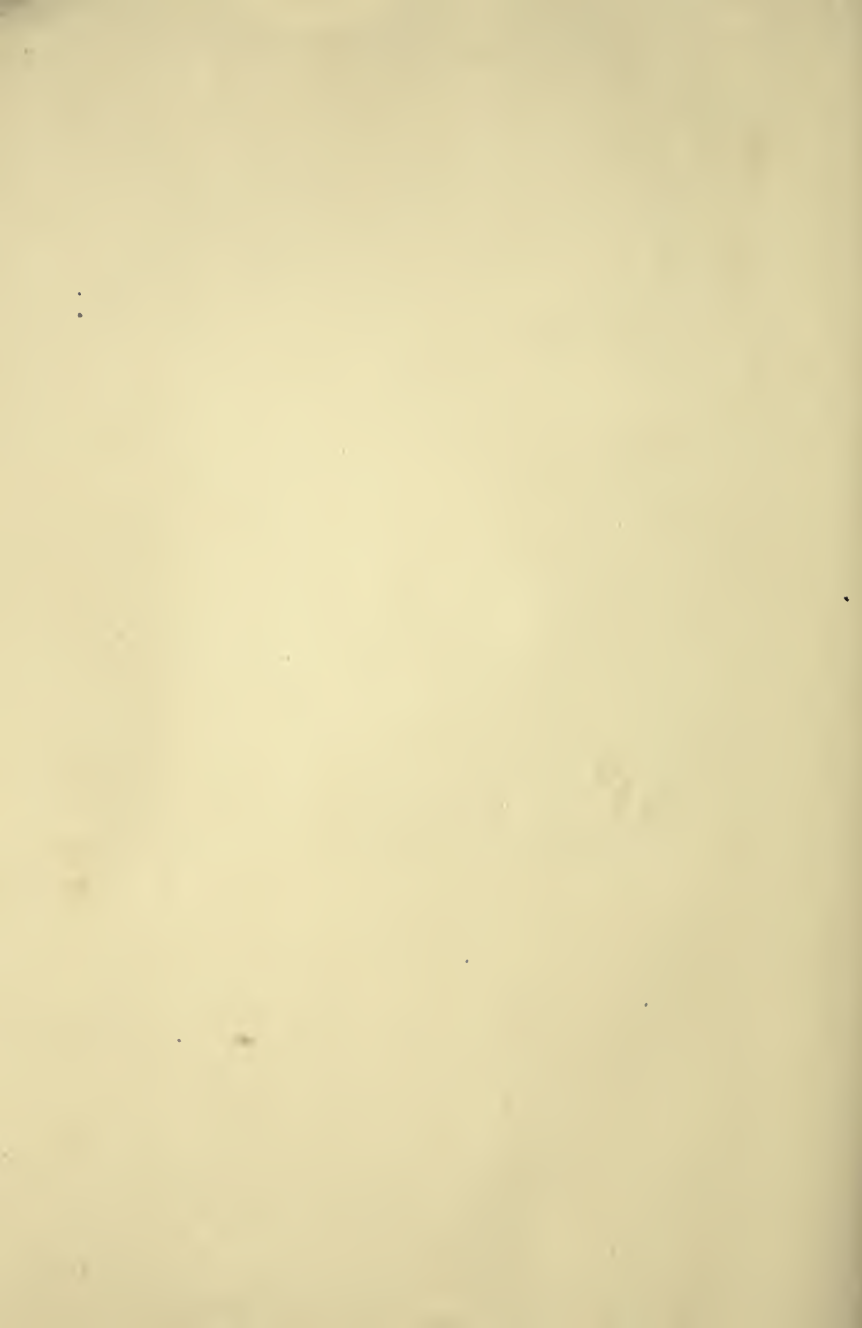
“Where’s Billy?” cried Gilbert, bursting in upon them.

But Billy at that moment stood on the road to Tareville, watching the fading light in the west.

“‘Bless your souls,’ I’ll say to them,” he assured himself, smiling as he meant to smile when he should meet them. “‘I’ll take care of you both.’ Perhaps,” he added, staring down the deserted road, “my confounded trick of play-acting is of some use after all.”







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