

MILES WALLINGFORD

BY JAMES FENNIMORE COOPER

CHAPTER II.—CONTINUED.

"Which was to say that she left the child in a basket on a tombstone in a marble-worker's yard in the town—in the yard of a man whose name was Danfoe?" I said as rapidly as I could speak.

"She did, indeed! I thought it is a marvel to me that a stranger should know this. What will be God's pleasure next?"

Marble granted. He hid his face in his hands, while the poor woman looked from one of us to the other, in bewildered expectation of what was to follow. I could not leave her long in that state, but, preparing her for what was to follow, by little and little I gave her to understand that the man she saw before her was her son. After half a century of separation, the mother and child had thus been reunited together by the agency of an inscrutable Providence! The reader will readily anticipate the character of the explanations that succeeded. Of the truth of the circumstances there could not be a shadow of doubt, when everything was related and compared. Mrs. Wetmore had ascertained from her faithful nurse the history of her child as far as the almshouse, but thirty years had left a gap in the information she had received, and it was impossible for her to obtain the name under which he had left that institution. The Revolution was just over when she made her application, and it was thought that some of the books had been taken away by a refugee. Still, there were a plenty of persons to supply traditions and conjectures, and so anxious were she and her husband to trace these groundless reports to their confirmation or refutation, that much money and time were thrown away in the fruitless attempts. At length one of the old attendants of the children's department was discovered, who professed to know the whole history of the child brought from the stone-cutters' yard. This woman doubtless was honest, but her memory had deceived her. She said that the boy had been called Stone, instead of Marble, a mistake that was natural enough in itself, but which was probably owing to fact. Another child of the first name had really left the institution a few months before Mrs. Wetmore took his leave. This Aaron Stone had been traced, first, as an apprentice to a tradesman, thence into a regiment of foot in a British army, and thence, as a private, to the evacuation, November 25th, 1783.

The Wetmores feared they were now on the track of their child. He was traced down to a certain extent within a twelvemonth of that of the search, and was probably to be found in England, still wearing the livery of the king. After a long consultation between the disconsolate parents, it was determined that George Wetmore should sail for England in the hope of recovering their son. But by this time, money was scarce. These worthy people were enabled to live in comfort on their little farm, but they were not rich in cash. All the loose ends of the search, and the money had been expended, and even a small debt had been contracted to enable them to proceed as far as they had. No alternative remained but to mortgage their home. This was done with great reluctance, but was not a parent do for his child? A country lawyer, of the name of Van Tassel, was ready enough to advance \$5000 on a place that was worth quite \$3000 dollars. This man was a set of cormorants that are so much worse than their town counterparts, because their victims are usually objects of real, and not speculative distress, and as ignorant and unpracticed as they are necessary. It is wonderful with what far-sighted patience one of these wretches will bide his time, in order to effect a favorite acquisition. Mrs. Wetmore's little farm was very desirable in addition to its intrinsic reasons, and for years nothing could be kinder and more neighborly than his indulgence. Interest was allowed to accumulate, until the whole debt amounted to the sum of \$10,000. In the meantime the father went to England, found the soldier after much trouble and expense, ascertained that Stone knew his parents, one of whom had died in the almshouse, and spent all his money.

Years of debt and anxiety succeeded until the father sunk under his misfortunes. An only daughter also died, leaving Kitty a legacy to her widowed mother, the other people having died even before her birth. This was Katherine Van Dazer, our old hostess, left to struggle on nearly alone, at the decline of life, with a poverty that was daily increasing, years, and this infant granddaughter. Just before her death, however, George Wetmore had succeeded in selling a portion of his farm, that which was least valuable to himself, and with the money he paid off Van Tassel's mortgage. This was his own account of the matter, and he showed to Mrs. Wetmore his receipt, the money having been paid at the county town, where the bond and mortgage could not then be produced. This was shortly before Wetmore's last illness.

Twelvemonth after his death, the widow was advised to demand the bond, and to take the mortgage off record. But the receipt was not to be found. With a woman's ignorance of such matters, the widow left this fact look out; and in the subsequent demand for the release was met with a counter one for evidence of payment. This was the commencement of Van Tassel's hostile attitude; and things had gone as far as a foreclosure and an advertisement for a sale, when the good woman thus opportunely discovered her son!

CHAPTER III

"I charge you by the laws Whom you are a well-deserving pillar. Proceed to judgment; by my son I swear."

"There is no power in the tongue of man To alter me: I stay here on my bond."

It is not easy to describe the immediate

remained on the mind of either, after the facts were explained, of the reality of the relationship; for that was so simply proved, as to place the circumstantial evidence beyond all dispute. Mrs. Wetmore thought of her lost son as of an innocent, smiling baby, and here she found him a red-faced, hard-featured, weather-baten tar, already verging toward age, and a man of manners that were rough, if not rude. She could not at first possess any knowledge of the better points in his character, and was compelled to receive this boon from Providence as it was offered. Nevertheless, a mother's love is not easily dissatisfied, or smothered; and ere I left the house, I could see the old woman's eyes fixed on Marble with an expression of interest and tenderness they had not manifested previously to the revelations.

As for the mate himself, now that the fondest wish of his life was gratified, he was taken so much by surprise that he appeared to think something was wanting. He found his mother the reputable widow of a reputable man, of a class in life quite equal to his own, living on a property that was small, certainly, and involved, but property that had been long in her family. The truth was, Marble felt so much at this unlooked-for appeal to his gentler feelings, that one of his stern nature did not know how to answer it on the emergency, and the obstinacy of his temperament rather induced him to resist, than to yield to such unwonted sentiments. I could see he was satisfied with his mother, while he was scarcely satisfied with himself, and with a view to place both parties in truer positions, I desired Moses to walk down and look at the mate, while I remained alone with his new-found parent. This was not done, however, until all the explanations had been made, and the mother had both blessed and wept over her child. It was done, indeed, principally to relieve Marble from the oppression of feeling created by this very scene.

As soon as I was alone with Mrs. Wetmore, I explained to her my own connection with Marble, and gave her a sort of apologetic account of his life and character, keeping down the weak points and dwelling on the strong. I set her at ease, and, at once, on the subject of the farm, for, should the worst happen, her son had double the amount of money that would be necessary to discharge the mortgage.

"The debt was incurred, my dear Mrs. Wetmore, in his behalf; and he will be happy to discharge it on the spot. I would advise you to pay the money at once. Should the receipt ever be found, this Van Tassel will be obliged to refund; for though the law is on my side, it will not wink at one so atrocious as this, provided you can satisfy it with proof. I shall leave Moses—"

"His name is Oloffe, or Oliver," interrupted him after my own father, and had him duly christened, before he was entrusted to the nurse, in the hope it might soften his grandfather's heart, when he came to know of my marriage, as Dan Dazer Wetmore is his real name.

I smiled to think of Marble's sailing under such an appellation, and was about to suggest a compromise, when the subject of our discourse returned. The man had regained his composure during the half hour he had been absent; and I saw by the kind glance he threw on his mother, whose look answered his own more naturally than I could have hoped, that things were getting right; and by way of removing the awkwardness of excessive sensibility, I pursued the discourse.

"We were talking of your true name, Moses, as you came in," said, "I will never do for you to hail by one name, while your mother hails by another. You'll have to out-drift from Moses Marble altogether."

"If I do, may I be—"

"Hush, hush! you presence you stand. I hope my son will soon learn that he is always in the presence of his God," observed the mother, plaintively.

"Ah, ay, that's all right, mother, and you shall do with me just what I please in any of them matters; but as for not being Moses Marble, you might as well ask me not to be myself. I should be another man, to change my name. A fellow might as well go without a name; and I don't like to part with it. No, no; had it come to pass, now that my parents had been a king and a queen, and that I was to succeed King on the throne, I should resign as King Moses Marble, or not resign at all."

"You'll think better of this, and take out a new register under your lawful designation."

"I'll tell you what I'll do, mother, and I'll satisfy all parties. I'll bend on the old name to the new one, and sail under both."

"I care not how you are called, my son, so long as no one has need to blush for the name you bear. This gentleman tells me you are an honest and true-hearted man; and these are blessings for which I shall never cease to thank God."

"Miles has been singing my praises, has he?" I said, eagerly, "you had need look out for Miles' tongue. Nature intended him for a lawyer, and it's mere accident his being a sailor, though a capital one he is. But what may be my name, according to law?"

"Oloffe Van Dazer Wetmore Moses Marble, according to your own expedient of sailing under all your titles. You can ring the changes, however, and call yourself Moses Oloffe Marble Van Dazer Wetmore, if you like the better."

Moses laughed, and as I saw that both he and his new-found mother were in a fit state to be left together, and that the son now wanted but an hour or two of setting, I rose to take my leave.

"You will remain with your mother tonight, Mr. Marble," I observed, "I will keep the sleep at an anchor until I can see you in the morning, when we will settle the future a little more deliberately."

"I should not like to lose my son so soon after finding him," the old woman anxiously remarked.

"No fear of me, mother—I berth under your roof to-night, and so many more in the bargain, that you'll be glad enough

I then left the house, followed by Marble, toward the boat. As we reached the little piece of bottom-land, I heard a sort of suppressed sob from the mate, and, turning round, was surprised to see the tears running down his sun-burned cheeks. His wrought-up feelings had at last obtained the mastery; and this rude, but honest creature had fairly given in, under the excitement of the strange admixture of joy, wonder, shame, and natural emotion. I took his hand, gave it a hearty squeeze, but said nothing; though I stopped, unwilling to go nearer to Neb until my companion had regained his composure. This he did, sufficiently to speak, in the course of a minute or two.

"It's all like a dream to me, Miles," Moses at length muttered, "more out of nature like, than setting up for a hermit."

"You'll soon get accustomed to the change, Marble; then everything will seem in the ordinary way, and natural."

"To think of my being a son, and having a real, living mother!"

"You must have known that you had parents once, though you are fortunate in finding one of them alive at your time of life."

"And she an honest woman! A mother the President of the United States, or the first commodore in the navy needn't be ashamed of!"

"All that is fortunate, certainly; especially the first."

"She's a bloody good-looking old woman in the bargain. I'll have her dressed up and carry her down to town, the first opportunity."

"What would you give an old woman that trouble for? You'll think better of these matters, in the long run."

"Better! Yes, I'll take her to Philadelphia, and perhaps to Baltimore. There's the gardens, and the theatres, and museums, and lots of things that I dare say the dear old soul never laid eyes on."

"I'm mistaken in your mother, if she would not prefer a church to all of them put together."

"Well, there's churches in all of them towns. Put it on a religious footing, if you will, and I ought to take my mother there, as possible down to York. She's old, you see, and cannot live forever, just to oblige me; and here she has been tied down to one church all her days, giving her no choice nor opportunity. I dare say, a variety is just as agreeable in religion, as in anything else."

"You are nearer right there, Moses, than you think yourself, possibly. But we can talk of all these things to-morrow. A good night's rest will give us cooler heads in the morning."

"I shall not sleep a wink for thinking of it. No, no; I'll make the old lady pack up before breakfast, and we'll sail in the afternoon. I'll take her about the house, and she'll have a comfortable time while she's in her cabin. She has as good state-rooms as a yacht."

There were no liners in those days; but a ship with two cabins was a miracle of convenience. I had a variety of rooms, and a ship with hardly suit a mother."

"How can any of us know that till we try? If I could see the old block, they'll like to see her like rum and water. If I'm to go out in the ship, I'm far from certain I'll not take the old woman to sea with me."

"You'll probably remain at home, now that you have a home, and a mother, and other duties to attend to. I and my concerns will be but secondary objects with you hereafter, Mr. Dazer."

"Wetmore be d—d! I dye mean, Miles, that I'm to give up my calling, and take to my mother's heels?"

"You wished to be a hermit once, and found it a little too solitary; had you a companion or two, you would have been satisfied you said. Well, here is everything you can wish; a mother, a sister, a house, a farm, barns, out-houses, garden, and orchard; and, seated on that porch, you can smoke cigars, take your grog, look at the craft going up and down the Hudson—"

"Nothing but so many bloody alopees," growled the mate. "Such in-and-out-for-and-atters that their beams won't stay gnyed out, even after you've been at the pains to use a sawer."

"Well, a slope is a pleasant object to a sailor, when he can get a better, better. There is this Mr. Van Tassel to settle with—you may have a ten years' lawsuit on your hands, to amuse you."

"I'll make short work with that scamp, when I fall in with him to-morrow night. I'll make him a messenger sent by the mother tells me he lives hard by, and can be seen at any moment, in a quarter of an hour. I'll pay him a visit this very night."

This declaration came me to pause. I knew Marble too well not to foresee trouble if he were left to himself in a matter of this nature, and thought it might be well to inquire further into the affair. Sailors do everything off-hand, but Mrs. Wetmore telling me that her son's statement was true, on my going back to the house to question her in the matter, and offering us the use of an old-fashioned one horse chaise, at the time I was getting ready to go in, in quest of Kitty, I availed myself of the opportunity, took the printed advertisement of the sale to read as we went along, obtained our directions, and Marble and I went in quest of the sailor.

There would be sufficient time for all our purposes. It is true that the horse, like the house, its owner, the laborer, the chaise, and all we had yet seen about Willow Cove, as we had heard the place was called, was old; but he was the more safe and sure. The road led up the ascent by a ravine, through which it wound its way very prettily; the laborer walking by our side to point out the route, after we should reach the elevation of the country that stretched inland.

The view from the height, as it might be termed in reference to the river, though it was merely on the level of the whole region in that portion of the State was both extensive and pretty. Willow Grove, as Marble called his mother's place three or four times, while our horse was working his way up the ascent looked more inviting than ever, with its

cottage, all enshrouded behind the sheltering cover of the river heights. Inland, we saw a hundred farms, groves without number, distant roads, a hamlet within a mile of us, an old-fashioned extinguisher-looking church-spire, and various houses of wood painted white, with here and there a piece of rustic antiquity in brick, or stone, washed with lime, and some livelier paint; for the Dutch of New York had brought the habits of Holland with them, delighting in colors. This relief may be desirable in a part of the world where the eternal green of the meadows in a manner fatigues the eyes; but certainly the gray of nature has no just competitor in the tints of the more artificial portions of the ordinary landscape. White may make a scene look gay; but it can never lend it dignity, or the solemn hues that so often render the loveliness of a view impressive, as well as sweet. When this glaring color reaches the fences, it gives the prettiest landscape the air of a bleaching yard, or of a great laundry, with the clothes hung out to dry.

The guide pointed out to us the house of Van Tassel, and Marble and I had shouldered Kitty, who was to be brought home by us on our return. Understanding the course and distance, we put to sea without any misgivings. The horse was no flyer, and Marble and I had plenty of leisure to arrange preliminaries before reaching the door to which we were bound. After some consultation, and a good deal of discussion, I succeeded in persuading my companion to let me go, and he agreed to proceed by flogging the attorney—a procedure to which he was strongly inclined. It was settled, however, he was at once to declare himself to be Mrs. Wetmore's son, and to demand his explanations in little character. With this would clearly give him every claim to be heard.

"I know what these usurers, as you call 'em, Miles, must be," said the mate. "They are a sort of inshore pirate-brokers; and the Lord have mercy on the souls of 'em, they'll take you for an occasion to pawn a watch, or a quadrant in my time; and bloody poor prices does a fellow get for his goods and chattels. Yes, yes; I'll let the old gentleman know, at once, I'm Van Dazer Oloffe, or some such bloody thing, and you're welcome to take your pick out of the whole list. I'll answer to either of them aliases."

"This is an extraordinary and unusual gentleman, I scarce know what to make of it. Has this visit any connection with Mrs. Wetmore, or her farm, or the mortgage I have been foreclosing on the last?"

"It is, sir, and I am that Mrs. Wetmore's son—yes, sir, the only child of that dear, good old soul."

"The son of Mrs. Wetmore?" exclaimed Van Tassel, both surprised and uneasy. "I knew there was a son; but I have been always told it was impossible to find him. I see so much resemblance, sir, you, to either George Wetmore or Kitty Van Dazer."

Now this was not altogether true. As for George Wetmore, they who had known him in middle age, afterward declared that Moses did resemble him greatly; and not say I am a lawyer, for that will not be true, and it will also be awkward falling back when the truth comes out.

Marble took the idea, and seemed pleased with it, though he affirmed that there could be no such thing as acting lawyer without lying a little, and that "the truth was too good for one of your kind, and I am a lawyer, and I am, however, by the time we reached the door; and we alighted as well prepared for our task as could be expected."

There was nothing about the residence of Squire Van Tassel to denote the grasping, money-loving, and certain negligence of the exterior might be supposed to betray the abode of such a man. His friends wished to ascribe to an indifference to appearance; but the multitude of money-bags, and the secret of the disdain of appearances that is so generally to be met with in this description of persons. Beyond the dwelling of Van Tassel was not to be distinguished the least trace of the country. Our application for admission was favorably received, and, in a minute, we were shown into the attorney's office.

"Squire Van Tassel, as this man was introduced, eyed us keenly as we entered, no doubt with a view to ascertain if we were borrowers. I might possibly have passed for one of that character, for I aimed at looking serious and thoughtful; but I would not have been so much mistaken for one who came on such an errand. He looked more like a messenger sent by the Father of Sin, to demand the payment of a certain bond that had been signed in blood, and of which we had no recollection. I had a good deal to give the skirt of his coat a pull, in order to recall him to our agreement, else I do think the first salutation received by the attorney, would have been a broadside in anything but words. The hint succeeded, and Marble permitted our host to open the communications.

"Squire Van Tassel had a very miserly exterior. He even looked ill fed; though doubtless this appearance was more a consequence of habit of body, than of short-feeding. He wore spectacles with black rims, and had the common practice of looking over them at objects at a distance, which gave him an air still more watchful than that which he had when he looked at his statue was small, and his years about sixty, an age when the accumulation of money begins to bring as much pain as pleasure; for it is a period of life when men cannot fail to see the termination of their earthly schemes. Of all the passions, however, avarice, is notoriously the one that the latest loosens its hold on the human heart."

"Your servant, gentlemen," commenced the attorney, in a manner that civil enough; "your servant, I beg you to help yourselves to chairs." We all three took seats, at this invitation. "A pleasant evening," eying us still more keenly over his glasses, "and weather that is good for the crops. If the weather continues much longer in Europe, another look over the glasses, we shall sell all the substance out of our lands, in order to read the illegitimate wheat. I begin to look on real estate security as considerably less valuable than it was

and as daily growing less and less so."

"Ay, you may say that," Marble bluntly answered; "particularly the farms of widows and orphans."

The "Squire" was a little startled at this unexpected reply. He looked intently at each of us again, over the spectacles; and then asked, in a manner divided between courtesy and authority—

"May I inquire your names, and the object of this visit?"

"Sartain," said Marble. "That's reasonable, and your right. We are not ashamed of our names, nor of our errand. As for the last, Mr. Van Tassel, you'll know it sooner than you wish to know it; but, to begin at the right end, this gentleman with me is Mr. Miles Wallingford, a particular friend of old Mrs. Wetmore, who lives a bit down the road yonder, at a farm called Willow Grove; and my friend, and I've great pleasure in making you acquainted with him."

answered Van Tassel, taking another look, while at the same time he glanced his eye at an alphabetical list of the attorneys and counselors to see what place he occupied among them. "Very happy to meet the gentlemen, who have quite lately commenced practice, I should think, by his age, and my not remembering the name."

"There must be a beginning to all things, Mr. Van Tassel, I replied to all calmness that I could see the old usurer did not like."

"Very true, sir, and I hope your future success will be in proportion to the lateness of your appearance at the bar. Your companion has much more the air of a sailor than of a lawyer."

This was true enough, there being no mistaking Marble's character, though I had put on a body-coat to come ashore in. "I presume he is not in the practice."

"That remains to be seen, sir," answered Marble. "Having told you my friend's name, Mr. Van Tassel, I will now tell you my own. I am called Moses Marble Wetmore Van Dazer Oloffe, sir, or some such bloody thing, and you're welcome to take your pick out of the whole list. I'll answer to either of them aliases."

"This is an extraordinary and unusual gentleman, I scarce know what to make of it. Has this visit any connection with Mrs. Wetmore, or her farm, or the mortgage I have been foreclosing on the last?"

"It is, sir, and I am that Mrs. Wetmore's son—yes, sir, the only child of that dear, good old soul."

"The son of Mrs. Wetmore?" exclaimed Van Tassel, both surprised and uneasy. "I knew there was a son; but I have been always told it was impossible to find him. I see so much resemblance, sir, you, to either George Wetmore or Kitty Van Dazer."

Now this was not altogether true. As for George Wetmore, they who had known him in middle age, afterward declared that Moses did resemble him greatly; and not say I am a lawyer, for that will not be true, and it will also be awkward falling back when the truth comes out.

Marble took the idea, and seemed pleased with it, though he affirmed that there could be no such thing as acting lawyer without lying a little, and that "the truth was too good for one of your kind, and I am a lawyer, and I am, however, by the time we reached the door; and we alighted as well prepared for our task as could be expected."

There was nothing about the residence of Squire Van Tassel to denote the grasping, money-loving, and certain negligence of the exterior might be supposed to betray the abode of such a man. His friends wished to ascribe to an indifference to appearance; but the multitude of money-bags, and the secret of the disdain of appearances that is so generally to be met with in this description of persons. Beyond the dwelling of Van Tassel was not to be distinguished the least trace of the country. Our application for admission was favorably received, and, in a minute, we were shown into the attorney's office.

"Squire Van Tassel, as this man was introduced, eyed us keenly as we entered, no doubt with a view to ascertain if we were borrowers. I might possibly have passed for one of that character, for I aimed at looking serious and thoughtful; but I would not have been so much mistaken for one who came on such an errand. He looked more like a messenger sent by the Father of Sin, to demand the payment of a certain bond that had been signed in blood, and of which we had no recollection. I had a good deal to give the skirt of his coat a pull, in order to recall him to our agreement, else I do think the first salutation received by the attorney, would have been a broadside in anything but words. The hint succeeded, and Marble permitted our host to open the communications.

"Squire Van Tassel had a very miserly exterior. He even looked ill fed; though doubtless this appearance was more a consequence of habit of body, than of short-feeding. He wore spectacles with black rims, and had the common practice of looking over them at objects at a distance, which gave him an air still more watchful than that which he had when he looked at his statue was small, and his years about sixty, an age when the accumulation of money begins to bring as much pain as pleasure; for it is a period of life when men cannot fail to see the termination of their earthly schemes. Of all the passions, however, avarice, is notoriously the one that the latest loosens its hold on the human heart."

"Your servant, gentlemen," commenced the attorney, in a manner that civil enough; "your servant, I beg you to help yourselves to chairs." We all three took seats, at this invitation. "A pleasant evening," eying us still more keenly over his glasses, "and weather that is good for the crops. If the weather continues much longer in Europe, another look over the glasses, we shall sell all the substance out of our lands, in order to read the illegitimate wheat. I begin to look on real estate security as considerably less valuable than it was

and as daily growing less and less so."

"Ay, you may say that," Marble bluntly answered; "particularly the farms of widows and orphans."

The "Squire" was a little startled at this unexpected reply. He looked intently at each of us again, over the spectacles; and then asked, in a manner divided between courtesy and authority—

"May I inquire your names, and the object of this visit?"

"Sartain," said Marble. "That's reasonable, and your right. We are not ashamed of our names, nor of our errand. As for the last, Mr. Van Tassel, you'll know it sooner than you wish to know it; but, to begin at the right end, this gentleman with me is Mr. Miles Wallingford, a particular friend of old Mrs. Wetmore, who lives a bit down the road yonder, at a farm called Willow Grove; and my friend, and I've great pleasure in making you acquainted with him."

answered Van Tassel, taking another look, while at the same time he glanced his eye at an alphabetical list of the attorneys and counselors to see what place he occupied among them. "Very happy to meet the gentlemen, who have quite lately commenced practice, I should think, by his age, and my not remembering the name."

"There must be a beginning to all things, Mr. Van Tassel, I replied to all calmness that I could see the old usurer did not like."

"Very true, sir, and I hope your future success will be in proportion to the lateness of your appearance at the bar. Your companion has much more the air of a sailor than of a lawyer."

This was true enough, there being no mistaking Marble's character, though I had put on a body-coat to come ashore in. "I presume he is not in the practice."

"That remains to be seen, sir," answered Marble. "Having told you my friend's name, Mr. Van Tassel, I will now tell you my own. I am called Moses Marble Wetmore Van Dazer Oloffe, sir, or some such bloody thing, and you're welcome to take your pick out of the whole list. I'll answer to either of them aliases."

"This is an extraordinary and unusual gentleman, I scarce know what to make of it. Has this visit any connection with Mrs. Wetmore, or her farm, or the mortgage I have been foreclosing on the last?"

"It is, sir, and I am that Mrs. Wetmore's son—yes, sir, the only child of that dear, good old soul."

"The son of Mrs. Wetmore?" exclaimed Van Tassel, both surprised and uneasy. "I knew there was a son; but I have been always told it was impossible to find him. I see so much resemblance, sir, you, to either George Wetmore or Kitty Van Dazer."

Now this was not altogether true. As for George Wetmore, they who had known him in middle age, afterward declared that Moses did resemble him greatly; and not say I am a lawyer, for that will not be true, and it will also be awkward falling back when the truth comes out.

Marble took the idea, and seemed pleased with it, though he affirmed that there could be no such thing as acting lawyer without lying a little, and that "the truth was too good for one of your kind, and I am a lawyer, and I am, however, by the time we reached the door; and we alighted as well prepared for our task as could be expected."

There was nothing about the residence of Squire Van Tassel to denote the grasping, money-loving, and certain negligence of the exterior might be supposed to betray the abode of such a man. His friends wished to ascribe to an indifference to appearance; but the multitude of money-bags, and the secret of the disdain of appearances that is so generally to be met with in this description of persons. Beyond the dwelling of Van Tassel was not to be distinguished the least trace of the country. Our application for admission was favorably received, and, in a minute, we were shown into the attorney's office.

"Squire Van Tassel, as this man was introduced, eyed us keenly as we entered, no doubt with a view to ascertain if we were borrowers. I might possibly have passed for one of that character, for I aimed at looking serious and thoughtful; but I would not have been so much mistaken for one who came on such an errand. He looked more like a messenger sent by the Father of Sin, to demand the payment of a certain bond that had been signed in blood, and of which we had no recollection. I had a good deal to give the skirt of his coat a pull, in order to recall him to our agreement, else I do think the first salutation received by the attorney, would have been a broadside in anything but words. The hint succeeded, and Marble permitted our host to open the communications.

"Squire Van Tassel had a very miserly exterior. He even looked ill fed; though doubtless this appearance was more a consequence of habit of body, than of short-feeding. He wore spectacles with black rims, and had the common practice of looking over them at objects at a distance, which gave him an air still more watchful than that which he had when he looked at his statue was small, and his years about sixty, an age when the accumulation of money begins to bring as much pain as pleasure; for it is a period of life when men cannot fail to see the termination of their earthly schemes. Of all the passions, however, avarice, is notoriously the one that the latest loosens its hold on the human heart."

"A very idle story, and one you do not suppose the chancellor will believe, confirmed by the hearsay of the party interested in preserving the property. You are aware, sir, that the sale can be stopped only by an injunction from the Court of Chancery."

Now I was certainly no lawyer, but like almost every American, I knew something of that branch of the jurisprudence of the country, which touched my own interests. As a landholder, I had a little knowledge of the law of real estate, and was not absolutely ignorant of the manner in which matters were managed in that most searching of all tribunals, and the Court of Chancery. A lucky thought suggested itself to my mind on the instant, and I made use of it on the spur of the moment.

"It is quite true, sir," I answered, "that any prudent judge might hesitate about entering a decree on authority no better than the oath of a man; but that who had heard her husband say he had paid the money, but you will remember that the party replying has sworn to his answer. All of us might be better satisfied in this affair, were you to make oath that the money was never paid."

This hit, told, and from that moment I did not entertain a doubt that Wetmore had paid the money, and that Van Tassel retained a perfect recollection of the whole matter. This much I could read in the man's altered countenance and averted eye, though my impressions certainly were not proof. If not proof, however, for a court of justice, they served to enlist me earnestly in the pursuit of the matter, into which I entered warmly from that moment. In the meantime I waited for Van Tassel's answer, watching his countenance the while, with a vigilance that I could easily see caused him great embarrassment.

"Kitty Wetmore and I were born neighbors' children," he said, "and this mortgage has given me more trouble than all the rest of my little possessions. That I have been in no hurry to foreclose is plain by the length of time I've suffered to go by without claiming my dues. I could not wait no longer without endangering my rights, as there would be a presumption of payment that would tell harder against me than old Kitty's oath. We are neighbors' children, as I've said, nevertheless, and rather than push matters to extremities I will consent to some sort of a compromise."</