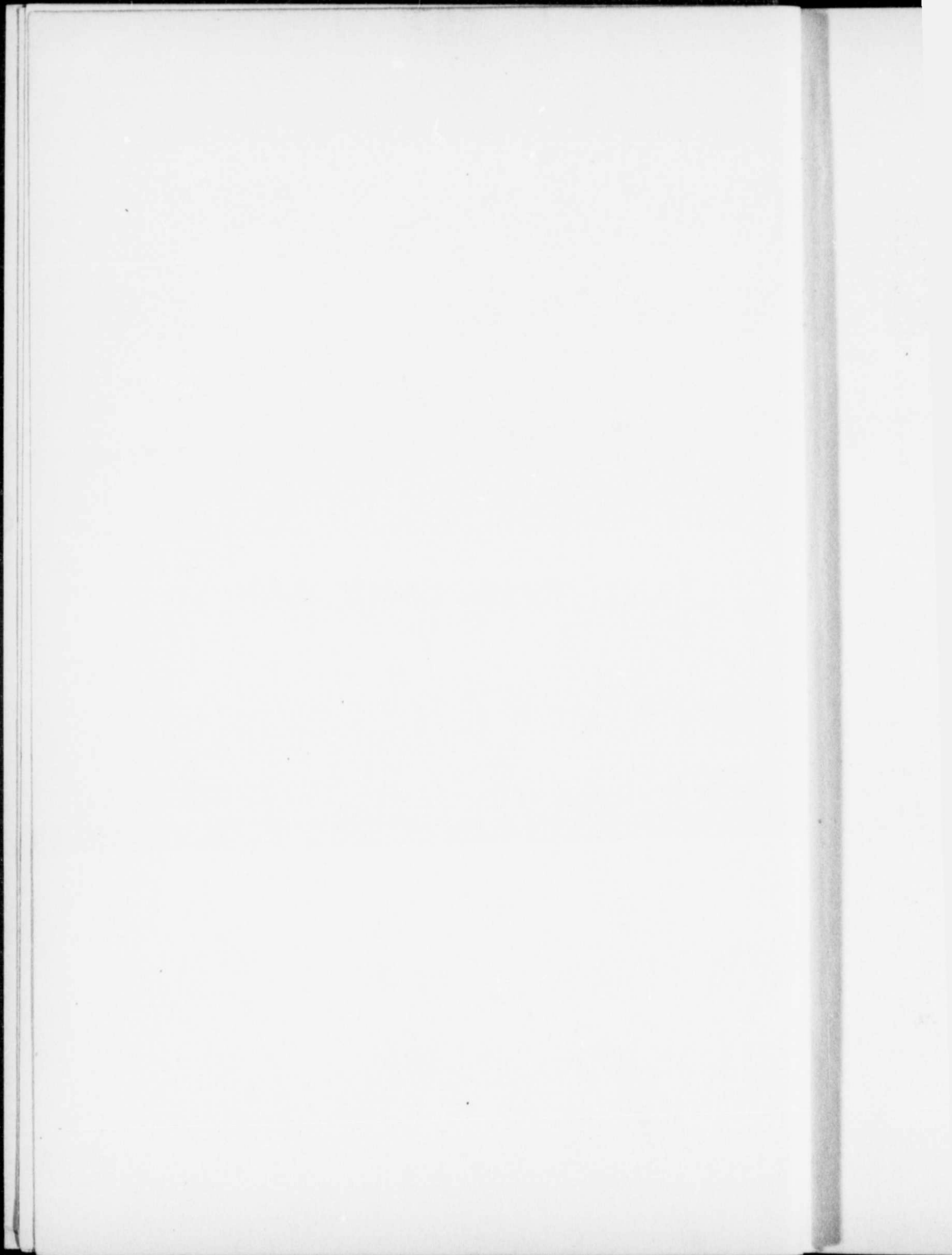
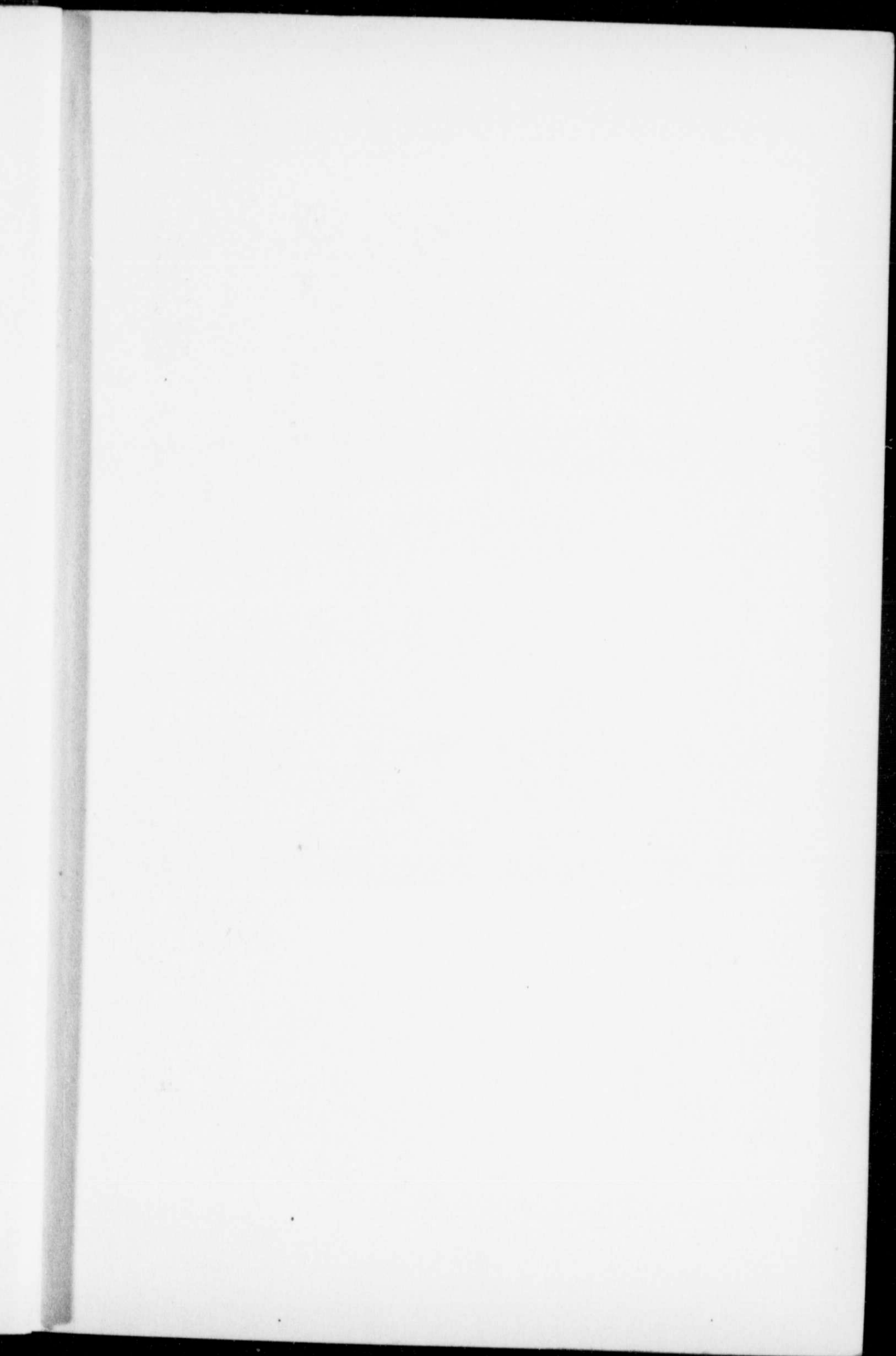
AND THEN CAME JEAN





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A NOVEL

BY

ROBERT ALEXANDER WASON

AUTHOR OF "HAPPY HAWKINS,"
"FRIAR TUCK," ETC.

With a frontispiece by Philip L. Hale.

TORONTO, CANADA
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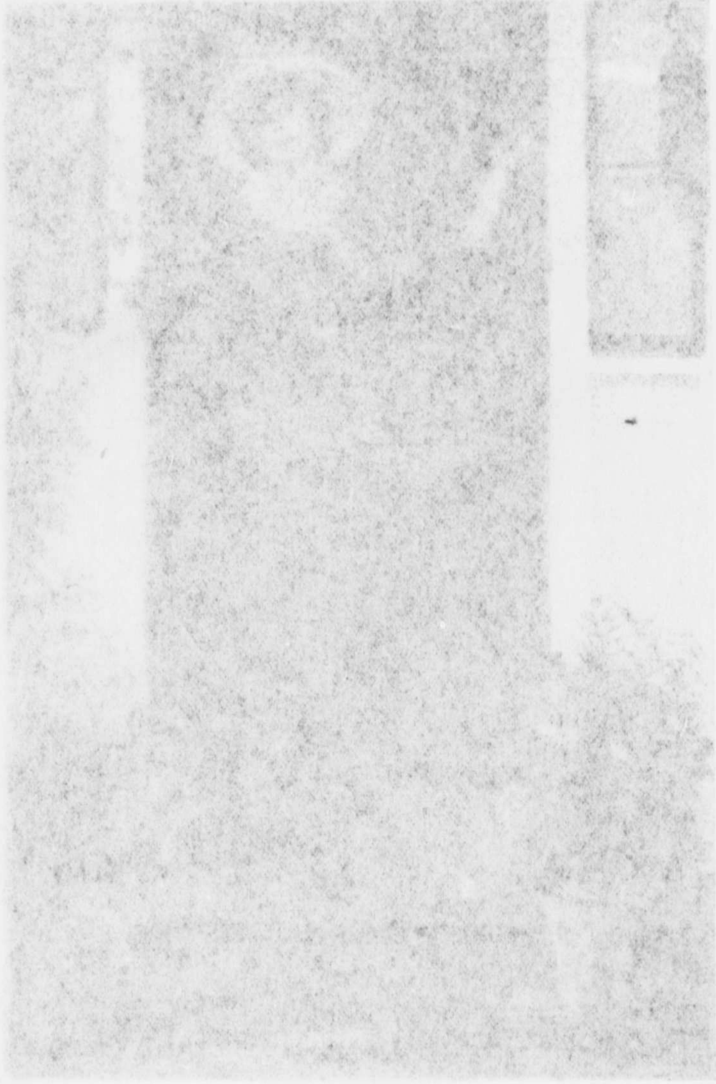

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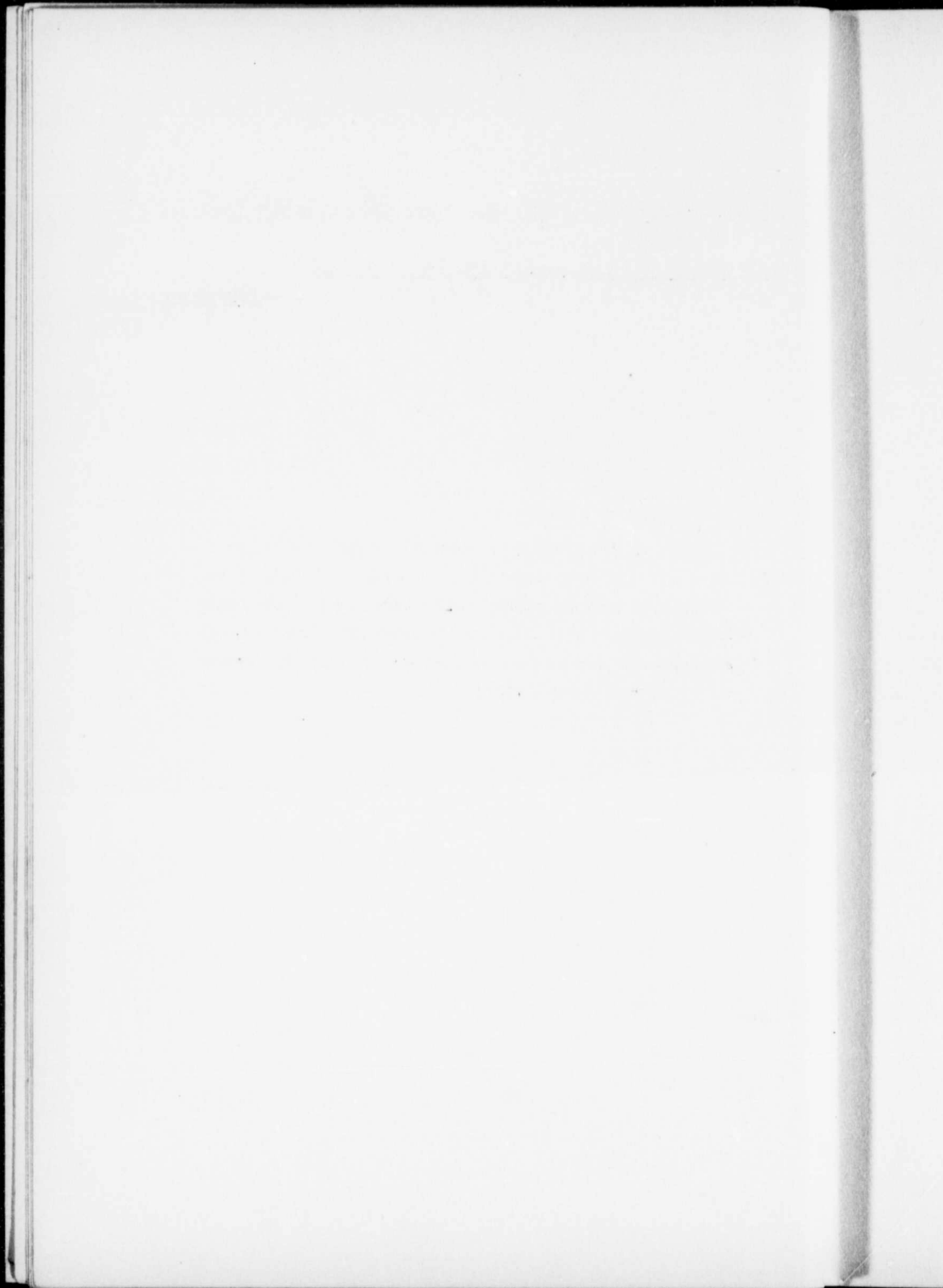
Love taught him shame; and shame with love at
strife,
Soon taught the sweet civilities of life.

—DRYDEN

N. B. A prose preface for those who prefer to "Fletcherize" even their very light reading will be found at the rear of this volume. It may be advantageously read whenever the reader becomes disgusted with one of the characters in the book,—or with even greater profit when provoked by an obstinate and unreasonable relative during the closed season.

R. A. W.



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AND THEN CAME JEAN

CHAPTER ONE

THE TROTWOODS lived in Benlo, and Benlo was a one-railroad town of from twenty-five hundred to five thousand inhabitants, according to the temperament, civic pride and morality of the citizen giving the testimony. Benlo was comfortably situated in the Wabash Valley, and kept step with itself in a fine disregard of the tune which the band of Progress was playing at the head of the column. Several of Benlo's citizens were wealthy and contented with things as they were, more of its citizens had retired upon a meager competency and were hopeful of things as they were, most of its citizens were still struggling in a perfunctory way and slightly disgusted with things as they were, while a tiny fraction had basked for so long in the irresponsibility of hopeless poverty that they were as entirely callous to things as they were as were the things that were.

Hiram Trotwood, Henry's respected sire, owned a general store which had flourished during the golden age of the Erie Canal, and which he still conducted along lines which had been invented and put into practice during that strenuous period. He was a substantial citizen, and the interpretation of this elastic term was, in Benlo, that while he lived in town he was also the owner of a fat farm.

As one approached the Trotwood home one noticed that the snow had been very imperfectly and erratically shovelled from the sidewalk, but very generously trampled throughout the yard; and, to the close observer, this combination immediately suggested the presence of boys.

One boy might have made decent paths and afterward used them to walk upon; but with two boys each could charge the other with all deficiencies until the issue was so clouded that sentence would be indefinitely suspended for fear that the innocent might be punished and the guilty escape. There were two boys, Pikeman aged fourteen and William aged twelve.

The remaining members of Mr. Trotwood's household were Mrs. Trotwood, Elizabeth, the eighteen-year-old daughter, and Grandma, who is placed last because she was usually the last one to go to bed, and also because she was invariably the one who had the last word. She was eighty-five years old; but she knew gossip which antedated her many, many years, and it was always a diplomatic error to incur her enmity.

None of the Trotwoods was ill, but all of them, with the exception of Grandma, were health-faddists, a cult which is increasing at a pace totally unwarranted by our death rate. As they gathered about their evening meal a stranger would not have hesitated in pronouncing them robust; nay more, if he had but seen the evening meal and known the number expected to partake of it, he would have affirmed them to be gifted far above the average in appetite, digestion, and assimilation; although it is possible that the unusual variety might have influenced his judgment in this direction, for the Trotwood fads shot forth at a tangent, and no two of them ran parallel. To quench the thirst of this family of six and Gertrude the hired help, it was necessary to provide coffee, tea, milk, cider, chocolate, cocoa, and plain water.

Grandma was not a faddist, nor was she in sympathy with fads. With a simplicity common to primitive characters, she maintained that merely because eating and drinking whatever she liked whenever she wanted it had agreed with her throughout a period of eighty-five years, this was the

logical plan for all to follow, and as for herself, she firmly intended to continue it during the remainder of her days in spite of all the new-fangled theories in creation. She was the one who drank coffee, and Pikey was the one who drank plain water. Mr. Trotwood drank cider to prevent rheumatism; he had nothing to cure, and so he ate and drank to prevent afflictions.

It was a real pleasure to hear them eat. Pikey's temporary fad was the eating of raw food. On the theory that life could only be fed with life, he ate raw eggs, turnips, cabbage, nuts, celery, fruit, and similar animal foods; and they seemed to agree with him as perfectly as Bud's diet which demanded that everything must be burned to a crisp. "Bud" was William's real name as decided by a referendum vote of all his associates, and it was especially pleasant to hear Bud eat toast while Pikey ate carrots; but Bud was absent this evening.

This was not noticed until Mr. Trotwood in his carving reached the charred portion of the steak. "Where is Bud?" he asked. No one knew, but Mrs. Trotwood prevented worry by suggesting that he had probably gone home to stay all night with one of his friends, this form of hospitality enjoying considerable vogue in Benlo.

The family's conversation during meals consisted largely in adverse criticism of one another's methods for prolonging life and the uttering of dire prophecies as to the inevitable results upon various organs and functions. Grandma ate cheese, butter, pastry, and rare meat with a zest which would have gratified an ostrich, but which greatly shocked Elizabeth, who was inclined to be dainty in her eating. Once during each meal, Grandma would throw herself back in her chair, bestow upon her table-fellows a sweeping glare, and remark scornfully, "Calves' liver and hogs' bacon I'm fond of an' they always agree with me; but I must say it sickens me to have human vitals served up

at all my meals!" Grandma took advantage of the privilege of age and expressed herself without fear or favor.

She was a professing Christian but a practical materialist, and when her progressive descendants crowded her with theories, her invariable retort was to challenge them to engage in some specified athletic competition; but this was palpably unfair as she had broken her wrist the winter before, due to slippery footing when she attempted to beat Bud's record at the high kick, and since then Mr. Trotwood had issued an edict against any of the children striving against her in strenuous sports. Grandma boasted that she was of the pioneer stock which had driven out the Indians and turned the wilderness into a garden on a diet of side-meat and cornmeal, and she regarded the degeneracy of moderns as being largely due to breakfast foods.

After supper they gathered in the sitting room, Mr. Trotwood with a long pipe and the daily paper, which one of the weeklies had launched several years previous in a moment of reckless ambition, and afterward, during a lucid interval, sold to an aspiring young man of the name of Harkins. Mrs. Trotwood engaged herself with needle-work of a utilitarian nature and Elizabeth with needlework of a vastly different character. Pikey gave his attention to the repairing of a damaged sled and sawed and hammered with avidity, while Grandma rocked in a loose-jointed hickory chair placed upon a squeaking board, and sang "In the Sweet Bye and Bye," with a fervor which proved that her lungs were still intact and responsive. Mr. Trotwood sent up clouds of smoke and calmly read his paper without noting any disturbing elements in his surroundings.

Once he paused in his reading and said impatiently, "If this paper don't stop deceivin' folks with its patent medicine advertisements, I'm going to stop taking it."

"If folks wasn't easy deceived in patent medicine adver-

tisements, everybody'd stop taking it," responded Grandma. "The' ought to be a law against makin' patent medicine; it's nothin' but a mess of sickening poison. What patent medicine have you been takin', Hiram Trotwood, and what ails you, anyway?"

"I haven't been taking any," replied Mr. Trotwood. "What I mean is this: A headline here says, 'Man's life saved from a horrible death'; and when I read it I found out it was nothing but an advertisement for Doem's Kidney Pills. I've read that same advertisement under a different heading every night since this infernal paper was started — and I'm getting sick of it!"

"Well, I've done the same thing," admitted Grandma, "and it's an outrage. I'd be willing to venture that the paper is paid to put that advertisement in, just that way in order to fool people into reading it; but as for me, I'd rather starve to death than take one of those pills."

Mr. Trotwood resumed his reading and after he had perused every item he cast the paper to the floor with the same remark he had bestowed upon each of its predecessors: "Well, that is the thinnest thing I ever wasted my time on. If I had a ten-year-old boy who couldn't get out a better paper than that, I wouldn't waste school books on him!"

"Father," said Mrs. Trotwood, who had been sitting idle for a few minutes with an anxious expression on her face, "I'm worried about Henry."

"I don't doubt it," replied Mr. Trotwood; "you've been worried about some one or other ever since I've known you, and ninety-nine times out of a hundred there was not the slightest grounds for it."

"It seems terrible to me that he is not coming home for Christmas."

"Well, I wish the boy could come home for Christmas as much as you do; but I must say that it pleases me to

have him write that he is glued so tight to business that he hasn't heard yet who won the baseball pennant. What has worried me most about Henry was that he has always been so busy with nonsense that I was beginning to fear he never would settle down."

"It is very cold in Detroit, is it not?"

"I understand it is still habitable," replied Mr. Trotwood with fine sarcasm.

"He has been away from home nearly a year, now," remarked Mrs. Trotwood.

"A year, a year!" exclaimed Grandma. "Well, if that isn't exactly like nowadays. Why, Henry is a man grown, twenty-five years old, with a regular college education, and if he hasn't enough gumption to get under the covers in cold weather, he deserves to freeze solid."

"I fear he's working too hard," said Mrs. Trotwood with a sigh.

"Working too hard, ho, ho!" cackled Grandma. "I would just like to have a picture of Henry Hamilton working too hard at honest work. Last time he was home he was more boyful than Bud who is even a worse pest than Pikey. None of your boys even know what work is, Ellen Trotwood; so don't you worry."

"It is getting bitter cold even here," continued Mrs. Trotwood, "and Detroit is ever so much farther north."

"Detroit is in the peach belt," said Grandma with complacent inaccuracy. "And I hope that a grown grandson of mine can winter through in any climate that a peach tree can."

Mrs. Trotwood sighed as her husband arose and stepped out on the porch. He soon returned bearing a stick from which dangled six thermometers whose individual estimates varied from ten below to ten above. "I brought home six so as to make sure of getting a good one," he explained as he examined the registers of the different instruments.

Selecting the radical thermometer which expressed the most pessimistic opinion of the temperature, he exclaimed, "You are the boy for me! I haven't any use for a mincing, hide-bound 'fraid-cat of a thermometer. I want one with nerve enough to say it's cold when it is cold. I'll hang you outside and take the rest back in the morning."

"We ought to have one for this room," said Mrs. Trotwood. "It seems to me that it is getting chilly in here."

"That's because you take baths," replied her husband. "Bathing reduces the vitality — it can't help it. If you would just rub yourself with a coarse towel you would not be chilly half the time — but there is no use talking to you. You nearly always have it too hot in this house, and I think it will be a good thing to have a thermometer here to prove it to you. He selected the one which had declared it to be ten above outdoors, and hung it upon a nail above the hot air register. After which he again hung his own choice on the porch and put the remaining four in his hat so as not to forget them the following morning.

"This room is getting cold," said Mrs. Trotwood presently.

"Simply because the door was opened," stated Mr. Trotwood. "However, fresh air is full of oxygen and warms much more quickly than the lifeless air of a close room."

"If you'd rock like I do, instead of sitting bent over," instructed Grandma, "it would swish your blood around like a churn and keep you heated up; but I've told you this for the last twenty-seven years, and yet you won't try it."

"Well, I, too, think it is chilly," said Elizabeth.

"Well, I don't," said Pikey.

"That's because you've been exercising," pointed out his mother.

"Humph, you call that exercising?" demanded Grandma, who having stopped her tune to enjoy the controversy

was determined to make it worth her while. "When I was a young woman we wouldn't let an infant out of its cradle until it could do more work in a day than that boy can."

"It must have been fun to live when you were a young woman!" retorted Pikey, striking his sled a resounding whack with the hammer to indicate his contempt of primitive times.

"Well, it was fun, you young whippersnapper!" cried Grandma, her eyes snapping. "We had log rollings, corn huskings, turkey shoots, maple-sugar boilings, dances, wrestling matches —— "

Grandma's power as an advocate of the good old times had not been hidden under a bushel, and before her eulogistic sketch was well started Elizabeth crossed the room to the new thermometer. "Huh, this thing does not work at all," she remarked contemptuously.

Mr. Trotwood inspected the thermometer and then felt of the register. "No wonder it don't work," he said. "There is no heat coming up. Seems to me that some of you could see that a decent fire was kept in the furnace. Pikey, how does it happen that the fire has got low?"

"This is Bud's day to tend to it," replied Pikey mechanically.

"I'm getting sick of this," said Mr. Trotwood. "No matter what goes wrong in this house, the guilty party never shows up until it is all settled and forgotten about."

Mr. Trotwood banged the door after him and descended to the cellar. He called up from this level that the fire was entirely out, and that he would build one himself to prove how simple the proceeding was when properly attended to. He made a prodigious noise in breaking up boards for kindling and commenting upon the cerebral deficiencies of his family. After that he returned, glowing with heat

and complacency, and announced that the mercury was now scheduled to shoot up like a rocket.

This was the first furnace which had been brought to Benlo, and it had all the ailments common to its species, chief of which was the diabolical faculty of starting off with treacherous docility, and then going out again with absolutely no provocation. During the ensuing half hour different members of the family paraded pompously to the cellar, called up derisive adverse criticism of those who had gone before, raised a convincing smoke and racket, and returned with an air of conscious victory. All of those who started fires were, each in his turn, warmed, invigorated, and entirely satisfied; but none of the fires continued to exist much longer than it took their authors to climb the cellar stairs, and the mercury continued to huddle for warmth at the bottom of its little tube in the thermometer.

Finally Grandma snapped her fingers, said, " In my day, we could set fire to the standing forest with less fuss than this," and bustled from the room, slamming the door after her. She made more racket, more smoke, and more comment than had any of the others, but her fire took hold, and she came back with a few opening remarks concerning the superiority of open fireplaces to furnaces. Unfortunately, she struck a chair rocker with her ankle, and this produced a distinguished verbal digression, during which she blamed all of her living descendants and most of her deceased ancestors for the troubles which afflicted her.

As this was a favorite topic, her son had no hope of being entertained with novelty, and so picked up an almanac for the next year which had that day been thrown at the door, and was soon deep in its perusal. " Well, now that's reasonable!" he exclaimed presently, slapping his knee with his palm.

" Of course it's reasonable," repeated Grandma, thinking that her own current remark was being endorsed. " If

a child is taught in its infancy to do some little task, when it grows up —— "

"I meant that what I just read was reasonable," interrupted Mr. Trotwood. "Here's a scientist who says that the cause for so much appendicitis nowadays is that we formerly went on all fours —— "

"Yes, when we crept," interrupted Grandma, who still resented the lack of attention which her discourse had received.

"It don't mean when we crept; it means that at one time the entire human race went on all fours."

"There isn't a word of truth in it," said Grandma indignantly. "I've lived in this world eighty-five years now, and I've never heard of any grown people going on all fours unless they were crippled. Enoch Stebbins' eldest boy had spinal complaint from the year of his birth and they had to wheel him about in a cart; but he died before he was thirty, and for all I know it was appendicitis he died of — though I must say I don't believe folks had such foolish diseases those days."

"This don't mean just a short time ago, this means ages and ages ago, before ever this continent was discovered. This scientist says that when man first started to walk erect on his hind legs he used a new set of muscles which have not yet got accustomed to it. He says if we would go on our hands and knees a while each day it would strengthen these muscles."

This was a happy idea and for five minutes pandemonium reigned, as each expressed his private opinion in a tumultuous chorus. Grandma's high voice finally asserted itself: "I tell you there isn't a word of truth in that. My great-grandfather was a shoemaker in Germany, and he made shoes for feet, not for hands and knees. It's just some foolishness to sell a new kind of patent medicine."

"You don't understand, mother," said Mr. Trotwood.

"This scientist doesn't mean only a few hundred years ago; he means away back thousands of years ago when evolution was first started. It is perfectly reasonable and I intend to try it myself. It's worth while to take a little exercise like this if it will stave off the appendicitis."

"Well," said Mrs. Trotwood loftily, "if my ancestors from Adam down haven't been able to get their muscles used to walking on their hind legs, I don't intend to bother myself about it."

This drew approving laughter from every one except Mr. Trotwood, who looked at them scornfully while he took off his smoking jacket and proceeded to crawl about on his hands and knees. He was one of those well-rounded men who do not require padding to play Santa Claus, and his performance was greeted with uproarious applause, advice, and laughter, until his mother, feeling that his conduct was a reproach to herself, ordered him to desist. In her eyes, obedience to parents continued permanently, without modification by any statute of limitation.

Mr. Trotwood resumed the perpendicular attitude affected by his more recent ancestors and wiped the perspiration from his brow. "It's as plain as a moon if you just study it a moment," he said staunchly, but without reproach. "Take a suitcase and put a few shoes and things into it, and they rest quietly where you put them; but if you stand the suitcase on end, all the shoes and things slip into a corner and crowd each other. This is exactly the way it is with the different organs in the abdominal cavity——"

"Hiram Trotwood!" cried Grandma sharply. "Hiram Trotwood, don't you dare to say such blasphemous things. When you say that you are made in the image of a suitcase, you commit a deep sin. If your abdominal cavity feels as though it was full of shoes and things you ought to take a thorough course of boneset tea."

"Pshaw, Grandma," replied Mr. Trotwood, "I only

used a suitcase as an illustration. I'd rather crawl on my hands and knees the rest of my life than to take another course of boneset tea."

"That's the way with you young snips," retorted Grandma severely. "Always flauntin' in the face of Providence. I've been improvin' on my boneset tea for sixty years; and now I can make a patient sweat blood if I give it full strength."

"That's some stunt, too," commented Pikey impartially. He had completed his repairs on the sled and was now disposed to enter more fully into the social activities of the family. "If you'd eat your food raw and natural like I do, you wouldn't feel full of shoes and things, nor you wouldn't want to sweat blood out of people, either."

"I didn't say I felt full of shoes and things!" thundered Mr. Trotwood. "I simply tried to make a simple truth plain to your still more simple minds; but you took it sideways — the way you generally take things."

"Don't get excited, Hiram," admonished Grandma, holding up her right hand palm out while her face assumed a virtuously shocked expression. "If you would just take a half dozen of my rhubarb and jalap pills, and then a complete course of boneset tea, there wouldn't be a mite more discomfort in your abdominal cavity than there is in that idiotic suitcase you're everlastingly talking about."

Mr. Trotwood's temperature was rising rapidly and the remark which was incubating in his mind would not have been entirely free of irritation; but at this juncture, Bud burst into the room dragging a brindle bull pup.

CHAPTER TWO

BUD alone, in his present state of excitement, would have been sufficient to derail almost any train of thought; and supplemented as he was by the very material presence of a brindle bull pup of ample proportions, he found not the slightest difficulty in wedging his way to the center of the stage.

The pup had reached the size but not the dignity of maturity, being just at the stage when his biting impulse was at its zenith, but prior to that period when experience had taught the advisability of using discrimination in the matter of yielding to this impulse. The pup was full of good nature and tried to express this by smiling openly, wagging his stumpy tail, and not complaining when Bud stepped upon his foot, while simultaneously endeavoring to close the door and examine the faces of his family. The Trotwood family was seldom of a single opinion upon any subject, and naturally their verdict upon the bull pup's good nature was not unanimous. It must be confessed that, to a stranger, the purpose of the brindle pup's smile was foiled by the ostentatious display of ivory which it exposed.

"Bud," cried his mother in alarm, "what are you doing with that dog? He looks positively ferocious!"

"Don't bring him in here, Bud," begged Elizabeth, "he's a perfect fright!"

"Humph," scoffed Grandma, "when I was a girl, I had a dog 'at could eat that one."

"Yes you did," retorted Bud, correctly selecting Grandma's criticism as being the most expert and likewise the

most offensive. "There wasn't any such dogs as this in the country when you were a girl. You probably had an old hound."

"Hound?" cried Grandma in a tone of complete repudiation, "Hound! He was a mastiff as big as that." She held out her hand to indicate what would have been a very respectable stature for a highland pony, and then added with convincing dignity, "What he lived on was wolves and bears."

"Well, I'll bet he didn't live long," snapped Bud.

"Where did you get him, Bud?" asked Mr. Trotwood, who was fond of dogs.

"Billy Spencer gave him to me," replied Bud with enthusiasm as he caught the note of genuine interest in his father's voice. "He's a peach, ain't he? Bill's ma wouldn't let him keep him for fear he might eat the baby; but he's as gentle as a kitten. Look here."

In order to prove his new pet's trustworthiness, Bud seized the pup by the neck, shook him to and fro, jostled him up and down, and bumped him into the furniture. The pup was but a little more than a year old, and was embarrassingly conscious of his unsophistication. He considered this treatment peculiar, but had small faith in his own judgment and was therefore uncertain as to the exact response which polite society required. He succeeded in maintaining a reserved, if not even a disinterested mien; but the strain caused him to loll out his pink tongue and pant.

When Bud tired of matching his own limited strength against the concentrated bulk of the dog, his father said, kindly but with perceptible disappointment, "That pup is no good, Bud; it has no spirit. When a bulldog has no spirit it is the most useless dog on earth. I like a good bulldog better than any other kind of a dog; but one which will stand such a jostling as that —— "

"That's 'cause I'm his master," interrupted Bud hotly. "I know he has spirit — that's what kept me so late. Dorkins's cat was on the porch and when they opened the door to let the cat in, he chased it upstairs and into the back room. Grandma Dorkins was in the upstairs hall and she thought he was mad, so she slammed the door and locked it. I begged 'em to let me have him but she got hysterical and sent for the marshal to have him shot. Then I sneaked around and climbed the trellis to the kitchen roof. It was so slick I could hardly get up to the window, but when I got it open I found the cat hid back in a bureau drawer with Robin Hood — that's what I'm going to call him — wedging his head in after her — that's how his nose got scratched.

"He never minded getting scratched a bit but went on tearing the stuff out of the drawer just the same as if the cat was a rag doll. When I finally dragged him away and got him out the window, we slid down the roof and off into a snowdrift; and he lit underneath, but he never squealed once. Then he ran back to Billy Spencer's and we had a hard time catching him. You bet he's got spirit."

"Oh, any kind of a dog will chase a cat, Bud," rejoined Mr. Trotwood, skilfully ignoring the portions of the report not relevant to the subject under discussion; "but a good bulldog ought to fight anything — a bear or a lion or a man."

"My mastiff would," interposed Grandma.

"So'll Robin Hood as soon as he gets a chance," said Bud stoutly.

"We'll see about that," said Mr. Trotwood, his eyes brightening at the idea which had just occurred to him. "Take him out to the dining room, and when I give the word send him in. We'll soon see how much spirit he has."

Mr. Trotwood was fond of his children and entered as much as possible into their lives in the true spirit of com-

radeship. He did not wish them to become mere puppets; he wanted them to develop character, initiative, and individuality of their own, and therefore encouraged them in forming their own opinions and defending them with independence. There was every reason to believe that his plan was meeting with a fair degree of success.

As soon as Bud had closed the door after himself and the brindle pup, Mr. Trotwood entered the holy of holies. Each home of any pretention in Benlo had one of these, although, owing to an increasing lack of reverence for tradition among the younger generation, many of these hitherto sacred chambers were being desecrated by frequent use. Grandma's influence had, however, succeeded in preserving the Trotwood parlor inviolate against the inroads of modernism, and it remained in its splendid isolation, furnished with hard, forbidding, highly polished accoutrements, aired once a week, cleaned twice a year, and held in reserve for possible weddings and inevitable funerals. The children held it lightly, in secret, but dared not openly ignore the edict of their imperial grandparent.

A huge rug made of a polar bear hide with head and paws still attached adorned the floor of this stately room, and getting down on his hands and knees Mr. Trotwood drew the skin over his shoulders, and coming to the door made a general request that Bud and his probationary pet be notified of his readiness.

"For pity's sake, Hiram," begged Mrs. Trotwood, "come out of that room and close the door. It is like an icehouse."

"Father, you look perfectly ridiculous!" said Elizabeth.

"Let's see what the dog will do," cackled Grandma in pleased anticipation. "Bud, bring in your yellow cur and let's see how much spunk he's got."

Bud and the dog entered the sitting room, and Bud closed the door after him. For a moment the pup did

not notice the menacing beast looming up in the doorway with the dark parlor as a background, and this pause was taken advantage of by the ladies.

"You're getting white hairs all over the carpet," said Mrs. Trotwood, "but if it benefits your appendicitis any, I suppose we ought to be thankful."

"Father," said Elizabeth with a reproach which was really dramatic, "I should think a man of your age would be ashamed to play about on the floor with a strange dog. Supposing any of the neighbors should see you!"

Grandma laughed shrilly and then remarked cheerfully: "It would be a good joke if the pup turned out to have enough grit to give you a good pinching."

"Sic him!" said Bud, giving the pup a push. Bud took the test seriously and filial respect was temporarily a matter of no moment.

The pup bounded forward with alacrity, thinking that his new home was threatened by a cat invasion; but paused with a jerk when he saw the gleaming teeth, the glittering glass eyes, and the size of the paws with their equipment of polished claws. His nose had been scratched by many cats, but this was no time to desert discretion for valor. The bristles rose along his back and he lowered his head and sniffed apprehensively.

Mr. Trotwood gave a low, deep, and terrible growl, at the same time taking a step forward with his right hand. The pup backed into a corner, and rims of white showed about the pupils of his eyes. We are all liable to lose our heads at success, and Mr. Trotwood was, in this instance, especially so. As the pup backed into the corner he shuffled awkwardly after him, uttering frightful roars. This would have been the time to stop and collect the laurels, but Mr. Trotwood was seldom content with half-way measures, and pressed the poor canine close.

For a moment the pup wavered between the melting

which would have left him a cur the remainder of his days, and the hardening which would stamp him a bulldog both in substance and in spirit. It was by a hair's breadth, but the pup hardened. The red came into his eyes, his lips curled into a death-grin, and with the throaty, guttural growl of puppydom merging into doghood, he dove for the throat of his terrible enemy. It was a heroic moment in the life of the pup; and, lest this account be considered prejudiced we hasten to add that it was also a critical moment in the life of Mr. Trotwood.

Mr. Trotwood, not being able to see the mobile features of his victim, had no hint of the introspective cataclysm which had just taken place behind this frank and open countenance. He was convinced that the bull pup had raised the yellow flag of fear, and in order to make the rout complete, he was stamping with his hands, waving the bear-head to and fro upon his own, and giving a vocal bombilation which would have caused a riot on the Ark. There was much wholesome simplicity in Mr. Trotwood's make-up, and therefore he was enjoying his vindication whole-heartedly at the very moment that, as frequently happens, the unexpected became identified as the inevitable.

When the doughty Robin Hood dove for the bear's throat he found it absent; but even his worst enemy concedes that a bulldog is not fickle. When he chooses a plan, or anything else so far as that goes, he sticks to it tenaciously, and with admirable singleness of purpose. Robin Hood continued in the direction he had selected at a high rate of speed. The first thing which met his teeth was Mr. Trotwood's expansive vest; and he closed his teeth, his eyes, and the cells of his brain susceptible to importunity, at the same instant. There was no reason back of this, it was an act of pure instinct, and therefore there was no hesitating weakness displayed.

One second sufficed to convince Mr. Trotwood that he had grossly erred in judging his son's pet to be devoid of courage; and like the upright man that he was, he lost no time in making a vigorous and vociferous acknowledgment. He rolled on his back, kicked with his feet, and pounded with his hands while his fervid utterances were not forced to maneuver according to the manual of articulation but gushed forth in the lawless abandon of incoherency. Mrs. Trotwood and Elizabeth threw dignity to the winds and climbed upon the sofa, while Bud, yielding to the sway of hysterical reaction, clapped his hands and shouted reckless encouragement to the champion who bore his colors.

"Shut up your infernal noise!" roared Mr. Trotwood during a lucid interval. "He's got hold of me! Pull him off — confound him! He's tearing my flesh!"

Bud seized the pup by the hind legs; but the pup had been badly scared and the still small voice of instinct bade him hang on blindly and let the enemy do the worrying. Grandma had been holding her sides with laughter and gasping joyously whenever she could command sufficient breath, "Well, *this* reminds me of old times"; but she never believed in carrying a joke too far and when she perceived that the situation demanded a master mind, she hurried into the kitchen and promptly returned with a kettle of boiling water.

"Hot water's the only thing to break a bulldog's grip," she cackled as she poured the steaming liquid on the dog's nose. No more than her son did Grandma favor half-way measures, and as Robin Hood let go with a snort Mr. Trotwood set up a howl so fraught with emotion that it made his previous efforts sound like an argument before the Supreme Court: "Ouch, ouch! Stop it, stop it, stop it! Ow-wow! I'd rather be eaten than boiled."

He fled from the room and rolled in a snowdrift, his

boisterous complaints gradually dying away to guttural mutterings. When he returned he dashed through the sitting room and on into the kitchen. On his next appearance he bore a poker in his right hand and the symbols of wrath upon his brow. He found Bud sitting upon the bearskin and patting the bull pup, who was panting blissfully. The pup was still uncertain as to the exact nature of his recent adventure but was sure that his own conduct had been heroic, and therefore he accepted his master's appreciation in the spirit in which it was offered.

"What are you going to do with that poker?" asked Bud, covering his pet for protection.

"I'm going to whale that dog," answered his father sternly.

"Hiram Trotwood, you put down that poker," ordered Grandma; "I'm ashamed of you. A nice example of fair play you're setting. That dog acted in self-defence — and I'd have done the same thing if I'd been him."

"Well, I guess you're right," admitted Mr. Trotwood, his second thought cooling his mental fever as effectually as the snowdrift had cooled his physical substance, "though it does seem to me that you might show a little sympathy when a strange dog tries to gnaw his way to my vitals."

"Well," rejoined Grandma reprovingly, "you've been whining all the evening because your vitals felt like a lot of old shoes jostled into one corner of a suitcase, and yet you refused to take a proper course of herbs. This is no more than a just punishment for you; and I guess you're not hurt much."

"He didn't break through the skin," admitted Mr. Trotwood, soaring to that lofty altitude of impartial justice which held his children's respect in spite of an occasional impulsive indiscretion; "but he made an ugly bruise, and I'm wet through. You can keep the pup, Bud. He has

good stuff in him and will be worth the training. Now, I'm going to bed."

"Don't forget to rub some black salve on that bruise," cautioned Grandma, whose scorn of hypochondria was only equaled by her solicitude for genuine afflictions; "and if you'll just be sensible and begin a course of pills and boneset tea this very night, I'll guarantee that in a week's time your stomach won't feel as though it was full of old shoes."

Mr. Trotwood only sighed: he knew his mother and he was already prepared to meet with resignation her new mission of substituting boneset tea for old shoes as the decoration of his interior. As it was now ten o'clock, Mrs. Trotwood, Bud, and the bull pup adjourned to the kitchen; Mrs. Trotwood to see that preparation had been made for the buckwheat cakes, two kinds of muffins, corn bread, white bread, and brown bread, which were invariably included in the Trotwood breakfast; Bud and Robin Hood to appropriate such incidental nourishment as would insure their continued existence until this substantial meal was celebrated. Mrs. Trotwood cheerfully hummed the sad tune of a dismal hymn as she bustled about, and had no idea that her lot was not a happy one.

As soon as Grandma's attention was attracted to the two remaining children, she stiffened in her chair and observed with personal directness, "Elizabeth, you should help your mother and learn something useful. Pikey, you should go to bed."

"I know how to cook," replied Elizabeth without interest.

"And I know how to go to bed," added Pikey.

"Yes," retorted Grandma, "but you never do cook, and you never do go to bed unless you're made to. When I was your age I worked during the day and slept during the night."

"That's all there was to do," remarked Pikey, keeping

a watchful eye upon his grandmother in case the need should arise for a prompt change of base. As Grandma made no overt move, he added, "Horses and mules still work during the day and sleep during the night; but modern —— "

Mr. Trotwood had stood the poker in the corner, and Grandma made for it, her eyes snapping. Pikey nearly reached the door in time to escape, but not quite; and with his heartfelt, "Ouch!" ringing pleasantly in her ears, Grandma turned an inquiring glare upon Elizabeth.

"I am going to bed in a minute," replied Elizabeth in answer to the glare.

"Then keep your eyes on the clock," commanded Grandma sternly. "A thing I won't overlook is untruthfulness."

Elizabeth stamped resentfully upstairs just as her mother returned to the room. "Aren't you sleepy yet, Grandma?" asked Mrs. Trotwood kindly.

"Nope," returned the old lady, folding her hands peacefully in her lap while a far-away look came to her eyes, "It sort o' soothes me to sit a spell in the evening after the house has got quiet. I like to call up pictures of the good old times; but you are all so full of the foolish goings-on of the present, that late at night is about the only chance I get."

"Well, good night, Grandma," said Mrs. Trotwood, a deep twinkle in her gentle eyes.

"Good night," returned Grandma, as she rocked to and fro with her fingers interlaced and her thumbs twirling. Mrs. Trotwood paused at the turn of the stairs to take one more look at the active little figure which always faced the world so bravely, and the look was full of tenderness. The hands which now hid the handle of the poker with ostentatious craft, had smoothed her own moments of pain by giving her the strength, the courage, and the hope which words cannot utter but which spring from heart

to heart in the grip that grows stronger as the need becomes greater. Mrs. Trotwood had a sense of quiet humor to leaven her stock of homely wisdom, and therefore she was the balance wheel in a family which could not long have run without one.

CHAPTER THREE

THE family pendulum swings in alternate generations; the indulged child becoming the firm parent with dutiful children, the dutiful child in due time becoming the obedient parent with a progeny of individualists entirely immune to parental idiosyncrasies. Grandma, possessed of restless initiative and a strongly executive mind, had found no difficulty in training either her parents or her children; but the pendulum had swung back, and in her grandchildren she found foemen worthy of her steel.

She now continued to rock with that rejuvenating earnestness known only to those who have learned the art in a homemade hickory rocker. With each backward movement her feet left the floor, returning to it once more on the forward sweep with a pat which chimed in rythmically with, " There is a Fountain " which she hummed with contented unction. As soon as quiet settled upon the floor above, she paused, placed one hand behind her ear and listened intently. She was a short, lean, little lady with black eyes, white hair, and quick movements; she wore a cap, a black gown, and a wide, white fichu about her neck; and as she held one hand to her ear, putting her entire attention upon listening, she looked like an independent sparrow perched on a winter's bough watching some generous householder throwing out crumbs to the robins — and whimsically amused at the robins' chances for coming into possession of them.

" Whe-ew!" she breathed with a sigh of relief. " It does seem as if it got harder for me to set an example for

those children every day of my life. Here it is nearly eleven o'clock."

She tiptoed to the kitchen to see that the door was securely locked against the two boys, who had lately been sleeping in a plastered room in the barn. When she returned she moved a chair over to the bookcase, and unconsciously humming a wicked dance tune which she had picked up from Henry Ham during his Christmas vacation of the previous year, she climbed on the chair and took down a large willow work basket. After placing this upon the center table she opened it and took out a disreputable cob pipe and a sack of strong tobacco. A warm flush came to her face as she filled the pipe, stuffing the ammunition in tightly with her thumb; and as she placed the stem in the side of her mouth where her four remaining teeth were placed in an opposition which afforded her constant gratitude, a roguish smile played about her lips and her eyes danced merrily.

"Ahhhhah," murmured Grandma opening her lips to let the first puff flow forth in leisurely bliss; "I don't blame the men for wanting to keep this to themselves! Ahhhahh."

She took a tattered "nickel library" from the work basket and once more seating herself in the rocker, took off her steel-rimmed spectacles and polished them carefully. "Now then," she said aloud, as she held the thriller at the most comfortable angle, "we'll see if that gump has sense enough to escape."

For ten minutes she read rapidly, and then having finished the story and carefully noted the name and number of the volume in which the hero would next prove the uselessness of common sense in a private detective, she laid it upon the table with a sigh.

"I honestly believe that Bud is sticking to his bargain — the little scamp!" she ejaculated. "I haven't been able to find a single library amongst his stuff since he agreed

to quit reading them. I thought that would just make him read them all the more. I declare I don't see what I'm going to do about it! It would cause a scandal for me to buy one of the silly things, and yet I'll take sick if I don't learn how this Terrible Tom finally turns out. In some ways he reminds me of Henry Ham."

She leaned back in the rocker, crossed one knee over the other, and smoked ecstatically, making caustic remarks from time to time upon such of her acquaintances, past and present, as she deemed worthy of criticism. She gestured occasionally, but as she named no names her conversation was one degree worse than telephonic; "A slim, weak-chinned chap like him had no business trying to teach the Possum Run School — it's a wonder he wasn't killed!" "Course, I believe in bein' easy-going with a bride, but when Betty Singleton left salt out of the mush five days in succession, I, for one, say that Dan did right in throwing the whole pot and boilin' out the window." "If Tige was only here, I'd mighty soon show that young scamp whether it was a hound dog I had." "If Elder Penthorpe had only kept from lettin' the Injuns see he was afraid of 'em, they wouldn't have hurt a hair of his head. Still as it turned out, I won't say but what it was the work of Providence." And so on, with no discernable thread, but with each remark sent out with such a vim and zest that it was quite plain that instead of indulging in a placid monologue, the old lady was thoroughly enjoying the ebb and flow of a congenial gathering.

Suddenly she sat up with a snap, for she had heard the sound of a foot being drawn across the scraper, and before she had time to collect herself, a key was thrust into the lock. "Land sake!" she exclaimed, springing to her feet, sweeping the tobacco and nickel library into the work basket, and trying to hide the cob pipe, still lighted, in the fold

of her skirt. "Who is that?" she demanded as she faced the door, her eyes wide and full of indignant inquiry.

The door opened and Henry Hamilton Trotwood entered. "What are you doing here?" asked the old lady sternly.

"Hush," whispered the youth, raising a hand mysteriously, "I came here to steal the organ. Do not, oh, do not say it has been thrown into the woodshed!"

A smile jostled the stern lines of Grandma's face slightly, for this was her favorite chick; but she did not intend to be lenient toward one who had surprised her in mischief — and the bowl of the pipe was getting warm in her hand. "I thought you were too busy to stop," she said.

"Well, I thought so, too; but my friends petitioned the mayor and he finally agreed to run the town without me while I came down here and straightened the kinks out of my family. What's the matter with your arm?"

"I've got the rheumatism."

"Why, you poor old girl!" Henry Ham crossed the room and, taking the little lady in his arms, kissed her. Still holding her in his arms he drew back his head and eyed her accusingly. "You won't need the services of a beauty doctor for several decades yet," he said; "but I should strongly advise you to consult a chimney-sweep."

"I've been having the toothache, Henry," said Grandma, trying to look depressed.

"Which tooth?" questioned Henry Ham, holding his head severely erect to imply that he would brook no further subterfuge.

Grandma pushed him away with her left hand and cried, "Let go of me, you impertinent young cub — my pipe's burning my hand! There isn't a thing the matter with my teeth, and it was wicked of me to say I had the toothache."

Henry released her and they grinned into each other's eyes, Henry shaking his head solemnly. "My child,"

he said sadly, " are you not aware that in addition to making you smell like a heap of burning rubber, smoking a pipe will shorten your days?"

" Yes, I am aware that smoking will shorten my days — and that is why I smoke," replied Grandma with spirit. " The longest, draggiest days I pass are those when I'm pestered by a lot of primmy prudes and don't get a chance to smoke."

" Ah, my poor wandering child," droned Henry Ham, affecting the nasal twang of a respected clergyman who had once brought woe upon his own head by presuming that Grandma was not competent to cater to the needs of her own soul, " you are deluding yourself with vain visions; but when you are cut down in the pride of your youth, you will remember that I have warned you."

" That's it — that's exactly the way they croak at ya!" exclaimed Grandma, seating herself on the edge of the hickory rocker and preparing to drop her fair share into the conversational pot which her favorite grandson had just hung above the fire of conviviality. " Week before last I attended the funeral of Samuel Hutchins, and the Baptist preacher stood up there with tears in his eyes and drooled and slavered away about what a pattern of virtue Samuel had always been. Now I've known Sam Hutchins ever since he got old enough to keep milk on his stomach; but I sat as silent and meek as though I hadn't one idea in my head until the preacher began to expound about how steadfast Samuel had always been in walking with the Lord and never taking one drink of liquor nor one whiff o' tobacco. Well, I even stood for this but when the preacher leaned forward, rolled up his eyes, and said solemnly, ' The fact that this good man lived to be seventy-six years old proves conclusively that the Lord loves them who despise rum and tobacco' — why then, I got up and marched out, and I tramped my feet down pretty heavy, too.

"Seventy-six years old! Why, my mother smoked until she was ninety-three and my father smoked all his life. Another thing is, that old Sammy Hutchins was caught stealing wood when most of our men-folks were off to the war, and I reckon such conduct as that wouldn't cause the Lord to spare him much longer than if he'd smoked a quiet pipe now and again, while turning his thoughts toward spiritual subjects. I don't uphold smoking in children and every time I catch Pikey or Bud with any tobacco I take it away from them and box their ears soundly. I didn't begin to smoke until after my youngest child was weaned, and even now I only smoke once in a while. Furthermore, I don't care a corn kernel if it does shorten my life — I'd rather enjoy myself thoroughly for a few years than to go on dragging out an existence long after there's the slightest excuse for it.

"About a month ago Mrs. Tarzell came to call on me wearing a silk waist, a foolish bonnet with imitation flowers on it, and low shoes — actually low shoes in November — and after she had told me about her son's being divorced and how glad they all were, and then full details of the operations herself and her cousin and her daughter and her niece had been undergoing during the last few years, she actually had the audacity to mention in a general way that she considered it was indecent for women to smoke.

"Now her being my caller kept me in leash pretty completely; but I did straighten up in my chair and remark that all old ladies in these parts smoked when I was a girl, although some of them was considered respectable. 'One thing anyway,' I said, 'when we got married we expected to stay married for life and to have children, and when we died, we died all at one time and in one place. Nowadays when you want to bury a person complete you have to go from one hospital to another collecting tonsils, appendicitics, and various other organs, until, upon my word,

there's more of the body taken out of alcohol than out of the deathbed.' I'm always careful not to say mean things to people just to tantalize 'em; but I must confess that it irritates me to have a lot of idle women spend their time in wearing new-fangled clothes and running down the good old days."

"Well, Grandma," said Henry heartily, "I'm glad you smoke if you get any fun out of it; but I must say that you've been pretty sly about it."

"That was because I had to set an example to you children," said the old lady, wagging her forefinger and smiling confidentially; "but I am mighty glad that you've caught me at it, at last. Now, I can go up to your room and smoke during the day without getting chilled to the bone while airing the room afterward." She paused and laughed to herself before resuming, "Don't you dare to tell the *rest* of them; but I have been smoking in the parlor for years — in the parlor — he, he, he! I would wait until they had gone to bed and then I would slip in and read and smoke until my nerves were quiet enough to give me a good night's sleep — and I'm not one mite ashamed of it, understand, although I felt that it would have been wrong to set a bad example to growing children.

"I've had lots of fun about that parlor, I certainly have. There is no heat turned on there and so I had to wear my beaver shawl, my knitted hood, and arctics, and sometimes I have laughed out loud to think of what a queer figure I would cut if any one was to pop in on me. After I got through smoking I would open two windows so the room would air and trot off to bed; but tonight your father had a dog fight and got white hairs off the polar bear rug so that your mother will have to clean up the entire house tomorrow, and I'll have to set up until I can air the sitting room — because your father smokes such a mild tobacco that it doesn't even leave a decent fragrance."

"What brand do you smoke, Grandma?" asked Henry Ham innocently.

"What do you want to know for?"

"Why, some of your conversationings seem a trifle jumbled — that about father having a dog fight with the polar bear rug, for instance — and if your brand suits me, and you have no serious objection to a gentleman smoking in your presence, I am disposed to ask you for the loan of a pipeful."

"It seems kind of wicked for me to give tobacco to one of my own grandsons," mused the old lady doubtfully.

"Yes, so it does," chimed in Henry in the same tone; "but then he has his growth, and the habit, and if he smokes, he'll take the blame for the condition of the room and I won't have to sit up while it is airing."

Grandma looked at him with her brows drawn down for a moment; then her face relaxed in a good-fellowship smile, and she proffered her sack of tobacco. "It's pretty stout for a young chick," she cautioned, "but I guess one pipeful won't hurt you much at this time o' night. What are you doing here, anyway?"

Henry Ham filled his deeply polished briar with skilled fingers and took his first puff with such unreserved appreciation that Grandma grinned in sympathy. Then he took his pipe from his mouth, looked her squarely in the eyes, and said, "To tell you the truth, Grandma, and speaking as one man to another, I have returned more like the prodigal son than the conquering hero. I have recently enlisted in the great army of the unemployed."

"I thought you had such a fine job. I thought that your work was of such importance that you could not afford to take a vacation."

"After I graduated I took a position in the legal department of the Heathcote Real Estate Company, and I thought I was in the groove; but instead, I was only in the rut."

"Don't use slang," said Grandma. "It is more bother than a foreign language and I won't stand for it. Every time you came home from college I picked up a lot of what Elizabeth calls idiums — because they're invented by idiots, I suppose — but now whenever you have anything to tell me, I want you to tell it in simple, ordinary, decent language."

"Well, this legal department busied itself in drawing up leases, deeds, and other forms, and my work was collecting rents and instalment payments at twelve dollars a week, with about as much chance to rise as a mule in quicksand. I had a good many friends in Detroit, and I kept gaining laps on my income until we were no longer in the same race; so I took a bug's advice and got into the game on my own hook. What I have left is the hook and three hundred dollars of debt. How has the governor's business been?"

"Oh, he's complaining about the same as usual, so I suppose it's been pretty good. He'd like to have you go into the store with him."

"He always was a plunger on optimism," said Henry gloomily; "but you know as well as I do that when I used to work in the store on Saturdays it always took me the entire next week to get in shape again. I'd dry up and blow away if I went into the store."

"What do you intend to do — just visit?" asked Grandma sharply.

"I want to go West; there's plenty of opportunity in the West."

"For those who are willing to work," added Grandma. "You talk as though you were still a child — most of you young folks expect to be fed by your parents when you ought to be parents, yourselves. What you should do is to get married and be a man. Two can live as cheaply as one."

"Well, not in a city, Grandma," replied Henry Ham with the complacent arrogance of one correcting the misconceptions of a child. "In Old Testament times when people lived on the ground, and the good wife ran the dairy, the poultry yard, the garden, the spinning mill, the woolen factory, the cannery, and all similar industries, a man who desired comfort simply had to have a wife; but this is a new era, Grandma dear, a brand new era. Nowadays, Gladys expects to continue taking music lessons until called to superintend a menage, and all the machinery that Gladys will run is a high-power automobile."

"Well, it's the truth!" agreed Grandma, bobbing her head in disgust. "You youngsters clamor for all the good things in life, except the best things of all — responsibilities. Look at yourself, Henry Ham — here you are a grown man of twenty-five with a college education, and what is your business in life? You have come home to see if the governor — as you impudently call him — is prosperous enough to pay your debts and give you another start in life.

"You prate a lot about modern education nowadays, but I tell you that something is wrong when men and women have to be dandled on their parents' laps and fed out of spoons. We didn't fear to take chances when I was a girl, because we knew if we married a creature in men's clothes, we were marrying a man; but no girl wants to marry a stripling who isn't properly weaned yet, and that is why she turns her eyes to the men who have already done things. The great trouble is, that the men who are able to do things, generally do the things they shouldn't do — as any one knows who reads the papers.

"A girl is foolish to marry a man who has already made himself — what she wants to do is to join hands with a young fellow who has grit, and then help him pull up the grade. When a girl marries a self-made man, she is just

like a horse being led behind a top buggy, and you know how much more the horse that is led frets than the horse that is helping to pull. What she wants to do for her own peace of mind is to get into the harness and make half of a regular team — that's what marriage is, and girls are no more to blame for present nonsense than the boys are. I was married when I was nineteen; but, my land, I was so choicey that folks said if I didn't make up my mind pretty soon I'd be an old maid yet.

"I wish you could have seen your grandfather when I married him — though, come to think of it, that's a foolish wish. He was just your age and just about your size; but, goodness me, he could have put one hand on the top of your head, and the other on the soles of your feet, and shut you up like an accordium. I don't suppose I'd have married your grandfather at all, if he hadn't taught the Possum Run School that winter. He wasn't a regular school teacher; but the word got out that no teacher could handle that school, so he let his clearing go that season and took the place himself. For the first week he tried precept and example, and pandemonium was perfect quiet compared to the uproar at Possum Run; but after school was over on the second Monday, he locked the door and made the scholars a little speech.

"He said he didn't wish to disturb their studies by resorting to discipline during school hours, but he really felt that they were in need of a little discipline, and he intended to serve it out as they needed it every evening after school. Law me, it was comical!

"Stand up once, Henry. Well, you're about as tall as he was, but you haven't any joints, your wrist looks like it was made out of cake frosting while his was like a hickory ax helve with an oil polish on it. The bullies all began to snicker after he'd made this speech, and he asked them if they preferred to fight him one at a time.

"I remember as well as if it was yesterday, that Ike Hargrave got up and said he was willing to begin the discipline and he reckoned that one time would be all that was necessary. Your grandfather was like a wildcat — he fought quick and he fought hard, and yet he seemed to be enjoying every minute of it. After he'd curled up Ike Hargrave in a corner, he suggested that two of them take the discipline together next time; and he finished the two as easy as he had Ike. Then he looked over the school and it was mighty quiet. He smiled down at them and said that he didn't want to detain them any longer than was necessary, and so he'd just take on the rest of 'em in a bunch.

"Well, all of us girls giggled and I made up my mind that I'd marry him if I had to tear the hair out of every girl's head in Haddem County. The rest of the boys, little ones and all, rose up and started for him; but they were whipped already, and he just turned it into a joke. He dodged here and there, knocked their heads together, tripped them up, hit them in the chest instead of the face, and acted for all the world like a terrier dog in a flock of silly sheep. As soon as he'd worried them down he rapped on the table with his pointer and ordered them back to their seats, and they went like plow horses into their stalls. After this he told them that he didn't want to tire them out so they wouldn't enjoy doing their evening chores, as he considered evening chores to be about the best thing possible for growing children; so he would put off the rest of the discipline until the following afternoon.

"I wish you might have seen their faces when he called them growing children! They were accustomed to look at themselves as being regular bad men, and they sat there with their black eyes and bloody noses looking so petered out and sheepish that he had to bite his lip to keep from laughing. As the scholars filed out, I kept my eyes on the

floor until just as I passed him and then I lifted them to his and smiled into his face — and I've been a woman ever since. It's a splendid thing to be a real woman, Henry — but what in the world was it that I started to make plain to you when you set me off to talking about old times?"

"You started in to prove that the girls and boys of today are no account as compared to the boys and girls of your day," said Henry, looking into his grandmother's bright eyes with a fine light in his own, "and you have done it."

"Ah well," murmured the old lady, with a satisfied smile, "different times have different needs, and you have real stuff in you, Henry, if you'd only go ahead on your own hook instead of wanting to hold your papa's hand every time you have to cross a foot log; although I will say this for you, it's more your parents' fault than your own. You have no idea how I have to fight your mother and father all the time when I try to put a little gumption into Elizabeth, Pikey, and Bud. No girl feels like doing housework when her own family calls her Elizabeth; but every time I call her Eliza — which is my own name and I'm proud of it — it starts a general quarrel. Now, tell me all you've been up to in the city to get three hundred dollars in debt on a salary of twelve dollars a week. You must have had a good time."

They sat for a long time smoking and chatting. The old lady would cackle with laughter at some of the incidents, then frown fiercely and scold Henry Ham for being irreverent. At other times she would interrupt to tell him that one of his pranks reminded her of something she herself had done, heard of, or seen; and they enjoyed their clandestine frolic with the deep satisfaction which is frequently vouchsafed the rebel as compensation for his lost respectability.

After having satisfied her curiosity, Grandma proceeded to supply her grandson with those supremely interesting local items which editorial diplomacy had censored from the newspapers, and this was a field where the old lady's remarkable vigor showed to its best advantage. After having displayed a marvelous knowledge of the private affairs of her fellow townsmen, she shook her head philosophically and said in a tone of such apparently sincere regret that it was almost convincing even to her listener, "This is the worst town for gossip I ever heard of, and it keeps getting worse. Honestly, Henry Ham, I had to give up keeping a cat, because every time I put her out of doors at night I worried myself sick, for fear she'd lose her reputation. It is positively shocking to think that some of the things whispered about in this town can be true, and yet I know they are true; and not only that — I know things myself which haven't got out yet."

Grandma settled back in her rocker with a deeply satisfied air of triumphant reserve, and Henry Ham inquired about the household.

"Oh, they are all complaining about as healthy as usual," replied the old lady, sitting erect once more with new interest. "To tell you the truth, Henry Ham, this family gets on my nerves. Your father, my own youngest son, sat here in this very room and complained the entire blessed evening because his stomach felt as though it was full of old shoes; and yet I saw him with my own eyes eat a meal which would have weighted down a wood chopper — and then refuse pointblank to take a course of pills and boneset tea. The children bob up with a new food mania about once each week; and while your poor mother doesn't complain much, I often catch her with a patient look on her face which convinces me that she is deluding herself with secret worries."

"Well, Grandma," said Henry, "I think it's about time we went to bed."

"Don't you dare to look at the clock," cautioned the old lady. "I have found that when I sit up late it doesn't hurt me a mite unless I know how late it is. If I just go to bed humming a little tune under my breath, I wake up as fresh as a daisy next morning; but if I know the time before I turn in, my conscience stays awake all night and scolds me for being a dissipator and all next day I drag around as beat out as a hound who's been stealing off at night to run foxes on his own hook. Don't forget this, Henry, and it will be of use to you — if you ever develop enough ambition to find yourself without time enough to do all you want to do in a single day."

"I've got ambition enough," protested Henry. "The only thing I lack is to have it focused on a decent opportunity. I collected bills for Heathcote which weren't worth the paper they were written on, but I didn't get any laurel wreaths for doing it."

"Humph," ejaculated Grandma," you must have been with them fully six months, and of course it fretted you to think that they wouldn't go down on their knees and beg you to be an equal partner. Still, I'm in a good humor tonight, Henry Ham; and I'm going to own up that I've watched you pretty close. You do things better in your own way than you do in any other body's way; so that I don't intend to lose heart about you as long as you leave me a shred to cling to. Now come downstairs with me and I'll show you how to fix the fire for the night."

"For the morning, you mean!" cried the indignant prodigal. "What's the reason I have to fix the furnace on my first night home?"

"Poor, poor child," murmured Grandma in mock sympathy. "The reason you have to fix the fire is because it was Bud's turn and his head was so full of bulldog that

there wasn't room for anything else. I am the only one who ever canes these boys, and I haven't caned Bud for a month. He needs tuning up. But to be honest with you, Henry Ham, I'd rather have one open fireplace than a whole cellarful of furnaces."

"Why is that?"

"I'll tell you why, quick enough. To put ashes in, that's why. Every little while I get absent-minded and dump my pipe down the register, and all the ashes come up with the heat, and I have to stay awake and dust the whole house before I go to bed. Now, come along and quit grumbling."

They had real, old-fashioned fun fixing the fire together, and when they returned, Grandma looked fondly at the boy for a full minute while he returned her gaze with steady eyes. "Now that you've found out how wicked I am," she said with twinkling eyes, "you'll be a great comfort to me."

"Yes," responded Henry, his face beaming with the warmly human rays which emanate from a fellowship in harmless mischief, "and now that I have confided my troubles to you, you will have to stand shoulder to shoulder and be my regular pal."

"There's my hand on it, Henry Ham," said the old lady, thrusting out a lean, wrinkled, jointy little hand which closed upon that of the boy in the grip that passes all understanding. "You are an awful talker, Henry Ham, but I do believe that if something ever trips you into the midst of things, you'll give an account of yourself which won't make me ashamed of you."

"That's exactly what I feel myself; but nothing ever happens here to get in the midst of."

"Oh, pshaw, opportunity is just like a can full of diamonds, and the stupids go shuffling along and stubbing their toes on the can year after year until the right man

comes along with his can opener and then the stupids set up a wail about not having any opportunity. A body wouldn't think that splitting rails would teach a raw backwoodsman how to prevent other men from splitting up this country, but that was the story of Abe Lincoln, and he didn't trapse all over the land hunting for opportunity, either."

"All right," said Henry thoughtfully, "I'm not as conceited as I was six months ago, and I'm willing to compromise with the governor — but I jest can't live in the store."

Grandma placed her hands on the boy's trim shoulders and looked up into his eyes while her own grew a little wistful. "Oh, if you only knew what your youth was worth," she said softly, and then added still more softly, "Sometimes you remind me a lot of your grandfather."

"And sometimes," replied Henry Ham, quick to catch the tenderness hiding back in the old lady's bright eyes, "I think I have quite a trace of my grandmother in me."

He stooped and kissed her and after she had returned the kiss heartily, she boxed his ears. "Now, run along to bed," she said gruffly, "and if you're not up in time for breakfast, you can expect me with a glass of cold water."

CHAPTER FOUR

All healthy young men are ambitious; but not all of them are ambitious in the right direction. Some young men conceal their ambition from fear of the ridicule which awaits failure but, just as certainly as the adult tomcat sharpens his claws, curls back his lips to insure a full biting capacity, and hies forth in search of trouble, the young man whose shoulders hang at right angles with his spinal column nurses within his bosom an ambition to seize the metaphorical ball of venture and plunge with it between the goal posts of glory — and he is not averse to having the grandstand and bleachers packed while he is thus engaged.

In spite of his debonair badinage with Grandma, Henry Ham dreaded the morrow and the copious explanations which would then be required. He had gone to the city to meet the enemy, and both the city and the enemy were still flourishing while he himself was back once more in the little town hoping for assistance in getting a new start. It was gloom. He half hated the small town for the name it had given him. Henry Ham was occasionally rendered Henry the Ham, and as he had discovered that "Ham" stood for a type of low class actor which it had been hinted he somewhat resembled, the name on most lips was an affront to him.

"I shall live it down!" he had once exclaimed with fitting gesture, "I shall live it down by raising it up and writing it upon the zenith of triumph."

But as he said this while quite alone, it had nothing

whatever to do with any suggestiveness the name might have been supposed to carry. The fact was, that none of his fellow citizens felt that the name disgraced the youth, although a few of them suspected that he subtracted honor from the name. In small towns nicknames are generally bestowed early in life with familiar kindliness, and they usually remain as long as their wearer, in utter disregard of his wishes in the matter.

He reflected bitterly upon the probable consistency of his name while his feet were warming; but he was weary and the sweet, clean air, the homely odors, the peaceful quiet, and the sane youth of him had their way, and he slept either like a top or a log — both of these dissimilar items being notorious sleepers, yet neither having established an official record in open competition, to settle the matter for those who wish to be accurate in comparison. At any rate, his sleep was deep and unbroken until Grandma arrived with her glass of cold water and aroused him according to the ritual prescribed by tradition.

By the time Henry Ham reached the dining room the family was deeply engrossed in discussing the subjects, physical and metaphysical, which were placed before them. He paused at the door wistfully; once he, too, had been lighthearted and free from care; while now — he heaved a deep sigh at the dreary vista his future presented, set his lips, opened the door, and entered the room.

"Henry!" exclaimed Mrs. Trotwood, rushing forward to throw her arms about his neck.

"Why, Henry, my boy!" cried Mr. Trotwood, upsetting his chair in his eagerness to greet his eldest.

"Well, Henry, when did you arrive?" asked Elizabeth, rising with studied ease and holding out a limp hand at the level of her shoulder. "That's a swagger tie you're wearing."

"Put her there, Henry Ham!" yelled Bud, trustfully

extending a chapped hand. "I'll bet you can't squeeze it hard enough to make me squeal this time."

"Go on, Henry Ham," encouraged Pikey, reaching up a fraternal hand to his brother's shoulder, "crack his bones for him. They're nothing but chalk."

Ah, this was home indeed; but the kind words and the still kindlier affection which beamed from the eyes looking into his were but as the soft feathers which guide the poisoned arrow to its mark. Each member of the family had trusted him in his own way — and he had not been true to this trust.

For the next ten minutes the family kettle boiled over with jubilant incoherency — "How did you happen to get away?" "How long are you going to stay?" "Pikey, let Henry have your place and set yourself another." "Found it pretty cold riding on the train, didn't you?" "Gertrude, you have to mix some more batter, Henry has come home." "How is business in Detroit, Henry?" "It seems to me that you have been getting thin, Henry. I know you have been working too hard," "That's real country sausage, Henry; so you needn't be afraid of it."

And so the questions and comments showered upon the head of the prodigal, who ate his breakfast as bravely as he could, a smile upon his lips, a stone in his heart.

After breakfast, Elizabeth betook herself to the serious matters of the senior year, the boys cut their chores to the very verge of acceptance and "bounced" a convenient bobsled bound schoolward, while the remainder of the family gathered in the sitting room to do further homage to the Prodigal Son. Mr. Trotwood took a cigar from his pocket and raised it toward his lips, then he glanced at his son and paused. It was a solemn moment. Half doubtfully he took another cigar from his pocket and ranged it beside its fellow in his hand. "Do you smoke, Henry?" he asked, holding out this nicely garnished member.

The youth had smoked in his own home before, but never before had this practice received favorable recognition, and a lump came into his throat as he reflected that it was because he was supposed to be doing a man's work that he was receiving the official initiation into manhood's privileges. "Yes, sir," he replied huskily, taking one of the cigars; and never before had his voice been so full of filial respect, and never before had it been so full of honest humility. Mrs. Trotwood felt the dramatic tenseness of the situation, and her kind eyes filled with tears.

"Well," said Grandma, with probably only a slight degree of ulterior selfishness, "I am glad to see that you have at last noticed that the boy is old enough to smoke in the house. From now on he is entitled to be treated like a man."

Mr. Trotwood's expression was a pledge that he would not attempt to shirk any responsibilities which were justly his, as he arose and with perceptible deference asked, "Would you care to walk down to the store, Henry?"

It was a fine, bright, invigorating day, and Henry replied with alacrity that he would. Putting on hats and coats the two set off together while Grandma and Mrs. Trotwood watched them from the window.

"Isn't he tall and strong!" remarked Mrs. Trotwood.

"Well," responded Grandma critically, "for these times, he doesn't do so bad."

Indeed, with his tall, trim figure and clean-cut features, the youth seemed designed to satisfy the pride of any natural father; but fathers have different standards than school-girls, and Henry Ham was keenly aware of his position as he walked gallantly up the street.

He had never regarded his father as a successful man until this morning; but now as he walked with the gloom of his own failure upon him, he reflected upon the comfortable home this father had provided, the opportunities he

had given his children, the firm grasp he had upon the future, and the respect which he commanded in the community. From out the shadow of his own failure, he was able to view his father's position in an entirely new light, and the glamor of pretense fell from him and left him very much a small boy again.

It is too bad that lessons cannot be soundly driven home at just the right time, for this was about as far towards humility as Henry Ham's pendulum could swing; and when it started to swing in the opposite direction it was quite likely to go entirely beyond self-confidence and stick fast in the notch of conceit; where it usually remained until it was jarred loose by his bumping his nose into some securely anchored obstacle.

For the first block he contented himself with answering his father's questions with perfunctory listlessness — then he blurted the details of his Waterloo, and breathed a deep sigh of relief. Mr. Trotwood grunted in several keys, starting in frank surprise and settling through disappointment to the old, familiar I-told-you-so — which was a distinct loss of time and also of position, for, with his sigh of relief, Henry Ham's pendulum had started to swing. He was not much afraid of the world, and now that he had thrown his reputation into voluntary bankruptcy, he was ready to start all over again with a fair capital of optimism which he had immediately borrowed from the youth which surged within him.

"Wasn't as smart as you thought, huh?" taunted Mr. Trotwood. "Well, I didn't think you would be."

"I'm glad of that," rejoined the youth in soft, even tones; "I feared you might be disappointed."

Penitence usually responds to sympathy, but a taunt invariably touches the electric button of defiance; and parents would profit greatly by bearing in mind that their children, also, are human beings and, therefore, subject

to all the laws which govern humanity. Mr. Trotwood, unfortunately, failed to realize this, and felt privileged to draw upon his children's respect at any time, whether or not he had done anything to earn this respect. He now turned his head and examined his son, whose bright, clear, wide-open eyes were looking straight forward from a head which was carried high and tilted slightly backward. "Humph," said Mr. Trotwood. "What do you expect to do now?"

"I'd like to have you lend me enough to pay my debts and take me out West."

"Then, after a time, you'd like to have me send you enough to pay your new debts and bring you back home again. The West is no better than right here — it is the man himself who counts. Why don't you come into the store with me?"

"Couldn't stand the routine — don't like it — never did."

"It's work you don't like; but you'll find work the same wherever you go and whatever you do."

"Daniel Webster didn't find legal work the same as farm work."

"No, and I suppose that George Washington found farm work a little slow in comparison with whipping England and being President; but, so far as I've heard, you are neither Daniel Webster nor George Washington."

"Still," said Henry Ham with quite a spread of dignity, "I am a lawyer, and I intend to get some good out of my education."

"Humph," replied Mr. Trotwood, as they emerged upon the business square of Benlo.

If a city boy wishes an illumination in honor of his return, he must have achieved some degree of fame during the interval of his absence; but all a town boy needs to do in order to have the old familiar faces light up at sight of him — is to return. All the lesser clerks were busy cleaning the

walks in front of their respective places of business, many of the proprietors were out enjoying the sunshine after the storm, and they were all glad to welcome Henry Ham, whose fur was lying smooth and comfortable by the time he reached his father's store.

"What particular part of the West seems most in need of you?" asked Mr. Trotwood, seating himself at his desk before the morning's mail, while Henry glanced about the store with its heterogeneous offerings of drygoods, hardware and groceries — and saw no place where his soul could find repose.

"Oh, it doesn't make much difference," replied Henry Ham impartially, glad to have this matter ended so easily.

"That settles it!" said Mr. Trotwood, pounding the desk with his fist. "It took you over a year to decide whether you wanted to be a lawyer or a civil engineer, and I'll never again back you up on a new project until you have all the details figured out."

"I don't have to start this afternoon," said Henry Ham.

"No, nor any afternoon. What I want you to do is to come into this store with me where you belong."

"I don't want to be obstinate, father; but I simply can't do it — and that settles it."

Mr. Trotwood was sure that it did, and so he read his mail, without in the least knowing what it contained when he was through. A father meets and copes successfully with strange men of many types, but he never feels quite at home when he first struggles face to face with the new man in his boy.

"Henry," he said calmly, after he had bunched the mail in a disorganized heap, "if you insist upon being a lawyer, why not start in right here in Benlo? Your board will cost you nothing, and I think I can get you in with Judge Hooker. He is a finished lawyer and his experience will do you far more good than any practice you might pick

up on your own hook in some wild and woolly Western town. He is a good friend of mine, and if you say the word, I'll go right up and speak to him."

"I don't like to start in here," said Henry Ham slowly. "This is a dead town and no one is taken seriously here until he begins to totter with old age. The men of wealth never do anything but sit on top of their safes and fish for the small fry of certain profits. They never improve or reach out, and landing a mortgage is regarded as the acme of enterprise. I want action."

"You got it in Detroit, didn't you?"

It is brutal to strike a hopeful youth with his own failure; but then a prostrate youth should learn to be conservative in his hopefulness. "Yes, I got it in Detroit," admitted Henry Ham; "but I think I'll recover."

"If all of us old fellows are dead ones," said Mr. Trotwood with complacent humility, "I should think this would be just the opening for a brilliant young fellow like you."

"Oh, I could dig up the plans for new life here," said Henry Ham; "but who could I interest to carry them out?"

"Well," said Mr. Trotwood cautiously, "I'll tell you. I have very good credit — in a small way — and I'll agree to back you up whenever you can show to me that you have worked out a sure scheme. Judge Hooker has considerable means, and if you make a good impression on him, he will join me, and we can do quite a little between us — probably fully as much as any stranger you might meet in the West. You can't expect, Henry, to have any one in the world take you at your own valuation until you have done a little something to inspire confidence."

"Well," said Henry Ham after a thoughtful pause, "I'm willing to give Benlo a year's trial."

"In the name of Benlo, I thank you," said Mr. Trotwood grinning; "and now I'll go right up and have a talk with Judge Hooker."

"No," said Henry Ham, "you do not want the place, I want it; and I'll apply in person."

"That may be the best way," conceded Mr. Trotwood. "Go ahead and good luck to you. If you get the place, I'll agree to make them think at home that you are doing it for my sake and against your best judgment, and you won't feel any loss of pride."

"That's square of you, governor," said Henry Ham, and after shaking hands with his father, he left the store with another sigh of relief.

CHAPTER FIVE

JUDGE HOOKER was a picturesque bachelor of the old school. He had been a colonel during the Civil War, the circuit judge for two terms, and a respected citizen at all times. This was the more remarkable from the fact that the habits of the Judge were not in accord with Benlo's highest and narrowest ideals.

The Judge was an atheist, a man who drank without secrecy, and one who boasted openly of his prowess at poker; but he was honest. No one had ever surprised him in the midst of a mean or underhanded act, for the very good reason that he had never been guilty of one. He dispensed charity as he drank and played poker -- for the pleasure it afforded him; and he had once threatened physical chastisement of an imported revivalist for stating openly in a largely attended meeting that the Judge was a Christian without knowing it.

He resented being accused of ignorance concerning his own self-consciousness, and he also honestly resented having the credit given to Christianity for the softer emanations of his deep and rich humanity. He hated hypocrisy so intensely that he lost no opportunity to advertise his own chosen sins, and was occasionally pained at his failure to shock good people and shake their trust in him. His reverence for woman was only equaled by his love of clean youth, and at the age of seventy-five he was still romantic enough to read "The Idylls of the King" at least once each year.

He lived two blocks from the public square in a brick house, his small, oblong office being in the same yard

but flush with the street. Mrs. O'Fallon was his housekeeper; she had been in his employ for thirty years, regarded him as a remarkable young man of genius, scolded him, indulged him, gave away his clothing or forced him to economize on his table as she saw fit, and, in spite of violent yearly protests, forced him to keep Lent for the good of his soul, and thus rejuvenated his body without the slightest strain upon his will power.

Henry Ham had ample time to consider the Judge's character as he walked through the crisp sunshine to the Judge's office door. He opened the latter without hesitation and entered the little office whose dusty litter was sacred, even to the broom of Mrs. O'Fallon. The door leading to the back room was open, and he could see the Judge sitting behind a big desk with an open book before him. The Judge was a tall, portly man with close-cropped, silvery moustache, flowing silvery hair, high forehead, and keen, bright eyes behind his gold-rimmed glasses. He wore a Prince Albert coat, a white vest with never more than the two lower buttons fastened. A pearl button fastened his high, straight, splitfront collar, and there was no tie to conceal it, the shirt bosom was fastened with three black studs of curious design — and this was the Judge, winter and summer, year after year.

Hubert, one of Benlo's most prominent defectives, was the Judge's trusted janitor, and he was sitting on a box back of the coal stove in the outer office, his head leaning against the wall, his mouth open, and his beloved mouth organ in his hand. Hubert knew everybody in the community, knew each one not superficially but thoroughly, and judged them according to the treatment each meted out to himself. He rather approved of Henry Ham, and so he greeted him with a cheerful leer and called out, " Hello, Henry Ham, when did you get back?"

Henry dropped a glance in Hubert's direction, and re-

plied, "Hello, Hubert, I see you still have your mouth organ."

"Want to hear me play?" asked Hubert hopefully.

"Hubert," called the Judge, "I told you an hour ago to go in and stir up the furnace and not come back here again until this fire needed tending. Now, I don't intend to tell you again."

"I'll play for you some other time," said Hubert, rising regretfully. "I got to go and stir up the furnace now; but I'll play for you some time, all right, all right, all right."

After he had left through the side door, whistling a sad tune, the Judge cleared his throat and said, "Uh, step in here, young man."

The Judge had the habit of clearing his throat before a remark as though the opening guttural were a local chairman introducing the speaker of the evening, and as Henry Ham approached he sat stiffly back in his chair, his head a little to one side and his brows crowding down against his glasses. He presented a complacent and rather formidable appearance.

"Good morning, Judge Hooker," said Henry Ham.

"Uh, good morning," returned the Judge, accenting the good as though directly endorsing some doubtful sentiment. "Seems to me that I recognize your face, but I can't place your name at this present."

"Henry Trotwood," replied Henry Ham, "son of Hiram Trotwood."

"Oh, yes, yes, yes, um-hum, certainly, certainly, certainly. Take a seat. Fine day, isn't it? Well — what trouble have you got yourself into?"

"I am not in any serious trouble just now," replied Henry Ham with a smile; "but I may be about to plunge into some. I came to see if you could find a place for me in your office."

"Ah-hah," said the Judge, "so you're able to think before speaking, huh? It's a good sign, a good sign, and rare — believe me, young man — rare. Well, to be brief,

I am not at present in need of a partner — if that is what you mean."

Henry Ham smiled again. "No," he replied, "I was graduated from the law school at Ann Arbor, have fooled away six months as a bill collector under false pretences, and am now desirous of getting a little practical training in general law. I am willing to do a lot of routine work for this privilege."

"Uh, 'pon my soul I like the way you talk," said the Judge, removing his glasses with an eloquent gesture, and gazing approvingly at the boy. "I have tried a good many young lawyers in here; but most of them felt that they came to teach me, and it was unpleasant, most unpleasant. What are your habits?"

"Well, I was rather popular at college, and I am now three hundred dollars in debt," replied Henry Ham impulsively.

A slow smile crept to the Judge's patrician face and finally broke into a dry chuckle. "Ha, ha, I wish you might have heard the declaration of virtue your predecessor issued. It was a finished production, but he was a — well, he's absent, and so we'll let him go. Now I'll tell you what I'll do — do you expect to live at home, or board?"

"I expect to live at home."

"Very good, excellent; I shall expect you to keep things in order about the office, do a large amount of routine work, take only such cases as I shall turn over to you, and get along on ten dollars a week. Until further notice I shall give you ten dollars a week; but there is to be no time limit upon our association. Either one is free to discontinue upon a week's notice."

"When shall I begin?"

"You're here now, why don't you begin now?"

"I haven't unpacked yet," replied Henry Ham thoughtfully. "I think I should prefer to begin tomorrow."

"That's right," replied the Judge. "Always think before you speak. If you do this you're likely to choke off a lot of foolishness, and also to keep your word. You are the first boy to whom I ever offered wages from the start."

"I don't care much for wages," replied Henry dryly, "and hope I shall not draw them long."

"Ummmm; well, that's right, too — but I hope you'll earn them as long as you do draw them. I think we'll get along. When you get into trouble, consult me first. I have had a lot of experience."

"*When* I get into trouble?" repeated Henry Ham with a grin.

"Perhaps if I had had less experience, I should have said, if you get into trouble. My youthful troubles were black and gloomy at the time; but this is a just world, and now they make up some of my brightest memories. We'll get along — good morning."

After Henry Ham had told his father of the terms upon which Judge Hooker had taken him, Mr. Trotwood was so full of enthusiastic gratification that he wrote Henry Ham a check for three hundred dollars at once; and then they walked home together through the melting snow.

"I never saw the weather change as it has today," said Mr. Trotwood, unbuttoning his overcoat. "First thing you know this snow'll be gone and then they'll stop buying winter stuff, and we'll have to fiddle along with it until way into spring — same as usual. Oh, well, everything comes out right, one way or another."

As this was the philosophy of the entire Trotwood family, Henry Ham had nothing to say.

CHAPTER SIX

SOCIETY in Benlo depended largely upon feminine initiative; it was the little girls who gave the children's parties, the larger girls who got up the picnics and dancing classes, and the ladies who belonged to the various card, reading, and sewing clubs. The male contingent yielded with more or less grace to the resultant drains upon their sociability; but fashionable functions were a very minor and incidental portion of their lives. When two young folks reached the early age at which their parents had married, they were paired off at the slightest excuse and henceforth their love affair was taken for granted. Matrimony frequently resulted from these affairs, but it was by no means inevitable.

From eighteen to twenty-five the youth who did not have a best girl was regarded with open suspicion; but after this the bachelors became more independent, and the girls, of slightly less, though corresponding age, became more discriminating; so that in spite of the best efforts of an interested and eager community, there were occasional rebellions against the friendly volunteer matchmaking which was perennially pursued as a pleasing and patriotic pastime.

With the unanimous consent of Benlo's citizenship, Henry Ham and Clara Waldron were keeping company. Clara was the spritely niece of Darius Waldron, a man of substance and of quiet, not to say stealthy ways. Darius lent money with a woebegone expression as though spending his last cent for a ticket to the poor farm — but he never lost anything. He knew everybody's ancestors for three

generations, and the best farms formed the habit of trickling into his possession apparently through no fault of his own. He was discreet, so utterly discreet that he seldom ventured to smile and his facial expression was sactimonious like that of the fox who expressed an opinion that the grapes were sour, but in spite of this climbed upon the shoulders of a friend, ate the grapes greedily — and then swore by his beard that his suspicion had been correct.

Although the town had no inkling of it, Henry Ham and Clara had parted in anger and they had parted forever; but this was a small matter. They often parted that way; but they were fond of each other's company and did not permit the little ripples which fleck the course of true love to interfere seriously with the progress of the light canoe in which they skimmed o'er it. A fellow had to like Clara because she was so full of enthusiasms. She used exclamations, accents, and emphases until, as Henry Ham, himself, once remarked, "she nailed the loud pedal to the floor and played with her feet"; but for all that he enjoyed it, and in addition to elecutionary fervor she had a perfect complexion, bright eyes, wavy hair, mischievous impulses, and sound health.

By the time his unpacking was finished Henry Ham was quite in the mood to call upon Clara Waldron, and he was in the habit of enjoying his moods at the prime of their freshness; so he put on his light overcoat, took a yellow walking stick in his hand and started up the road to the Hill, which was the obvious name of the suburb where Clara lived with her mother, who kept house for Darius. Clara did not approve of Darius, Darius did not approve of Clara; but as each approved of himself they got along fairly well together.

Just before Henry Ham reached her front door, Clara came out of it and, as was usual after a quarrel, they met each other with broad smiles of welcome and outstretched

hands. "Hello, Clara! Gee, I'm glad to see you," called Henry Ham.

"Well, *Henry Ham*! When *did* you get back?" returned Clara.

"Early this morning. Where you going?"

"Oh, to the post office," she replied with a becoming blush and an insinuating toss of her head. It was not considered good form in Benlo for the principles to waste any time in openly mourning a broken love affair.

"Fine," replied Henry Ham, heartily. "It's a little sloppy under foot, but the air is fine and it is starting to freeze again."

"Why didn't you bring a cutter?" asked Clara. "Walking's a bother."

"Never thought of it," replied Henry. "I will the next time I can get an afternoon off."

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed Clara. "I never knew *you* when you didn't have seven afternoons off each week."

There was a slight sting to this remark; for Henry Ham was openly criticised for being inclined toward idleness, and therefore away from matrimony, and many of those whc enjoyed his society felt it their duty to arouse his ambition. In some instances they were dutiful to such an extent that Henry Ham was decidedly irritated.

He made no reply either to Clara's remark or to her laughter, and presently she asked, "How long are you going to stay? You graduated last spring, did you not?"

"I did, and have since been connected with the Heathcote Real Estate Company of Detroit; but I have decided to locate right here in Benlo with Judge Hooker."

"Henry Ham —" exclaimed Clara — "you certainly do not mean that you are going to attempt to practice law *here* at *home* where everbody knows you?"

"That is exactly what I intend to do," replied Henry Ham with dignity.

"Well, you *are* a hero!"

This being another remark which did not win a reply, Clara branched into the mutually interesting gossip which had transpired since her companion's departure, and they were on very good terms again by the time they reached the post office. She received two letters of small moment, and one addressed in a masculine hand which gave her such evident satisfaction that even Henry Ham felt pleased. He was not one to claim especial privileges, all he asked was a fair field, no favors, and a rival or so to give added interest.

"Let's walk up by the high school," he suggested. One of their most successful reconciliations had taken place in this neighborhood, and he was beginning to feel sentimental.

"All right," agreed Clara; "but I do wish you had brought a cutter along. Walking is a decided bore."

"One thing I like about you, Clara," said Henry Ham as they left the post office, "and that is that you never make a mysterious secret about your wants and desires. Now I am perfectly positive that you feel like taking a ride in a cutter — but I think walking will do you more good."

He still had the check for three hundred dollars in his pocket and good credit at the livery stable; but his stock of cash was less than his stock of independence, and this, perhaps, indicates with fair accuracy the fervor of the sentimental feelings which were stirring within him.

They turned to the left at the first corner and after going a block, came to Dr. Sheldon's horse and cutter hitched in front of his office. "Henry Ham," said Clara with a sigh, "why *didn't* you have a cutter out this afternoon?"

Henry Ham stopped and put his arms akimbo. "You poor child, you!" he said, gazing sympathetically at Clara, "Here, get into this one."

"Do you mean it?" asked Clara, her eyes dancing.

For answer, Henry Ham waved his hand eloquently toward the cutter, and Clara jumped in without further hesitation. Deftly untying the horse, and throwing his blanket into the cutter, Henry Ham leaped in beside Clara and they drove up the street and out on the smooth pike, leaving care behind them and entering anew into an old, familiar delight in mutual mischief.

Clara liked a youth who did nervy things once in a while; Henry Ham was fond of a girl who was willing to yield to the spirit of a little spontaneous fun. He seldom yearned for the company of a girl who felt it her duty to treat him with motherly solicitude. Furthermore, a great load of care had that day been lifted from his young shoulders, and in the reaction he found boyish irresponsibility to be quite refreshing. She boxed his ears in response to his single kiss, and they had a merry ride.

It was Clara who suggested that they had better return. Twilight was already falling and she was aware that her Uncle Darius did not approve of either Henry Ham or his ways, so she felt it would be best to return home before extensive explanations would be required. "Won't you come over and have supper with us?" she asked as soon as they were safely turned about. The young men of Benlo seldom accepted invitations to meals, and she knew that Henry Ham was no more in favor of her Uncle Darius than her Uncle Darius was in favor of Henry Ham; but she could not know that life in a city had put an edge on the youth, and so was a little surprised when he accepted without a moment's hesitation. As this was also in the nature of an adventure her embryonic chagrin soon gave way to amusement, and she giggled musically.

"You are the only girl I ever knew who had a license to giggle," commented Henry Ham with discrimination.

"I have frequently been told I was the only girl," re-

sponded Clara. She had made a number of skilful remarks which should have led to questions concerning her letter, but he had ignored them with equal skill, and each was at the advantage of thoroughly knowing the other's tactics.

Henry Ham refused to drive her home and she refused to get out in front of the Doctor's office; so he let her out half a block away and drove up to the Doctor's hitching post with a fine display of aplomb. He had just finished tying the horse and was starting to adjust the blanket when Dr. Sheldon rushed forth, red with rage.

He was a plump, smooth-faced, little man, and the redness of rage did not become him. "What do you mean by takingmy rig?" he demanded. "I have had three calls since you've been away, and two of them are serious ——"

"I presume you mean that if you do not hurry, they will recover before you arrive," interrupted Henry Ham, who lacked that worldly wisdom which teaches the advisability of pouring oil upon troubled waters.

"Never you mind what I mean — you mind your own business. Now I'll have to be out in the dark. You never were any good. You've been idle all your life and that's why you're always into mischief. What right had you to take my horse?"

"Have you got the nerve to stand there and say that you made three sick people wait simply because your own rig was not at the door?" asked Henry Ham in indignant surprise.

"What else could I do?" shouted the Doctor.

"There is a livery stable next door to your unsanitary office — as you have perhaps noticed — and if any of these people are really in a serious condition, you ought to be tried for malpractice."

"And you ought to be arrested for horse stealing. Why didn't you get a livery rig?"

"Why didn't you get livery horses last spring when the roads were so bad? You went out to our farm and got two horses and used them three weeks before we knew a thing of it."

"Your father told me fifteen years ago to do that whenever I wanted to. I knew that he had no use for the horses at that time."

"What a coincidence!" exclaimed Henry Ham with sarcasm. "I had a dream last summer in which your grandfather returned, patted me kindly on the head, and told me to use your old plug whenever I found him idle. I haven't had your rig for more than an hour or so; but when I took it, it was from urgent necessity; so if you feel like charging me for a whole day, just send in your bill and I'll pay it."

"I don't want pay for it — I'm not running a livery stable. What I want ——"

"I know what you want," interrupted Henry Ham, holding up his hand, palm outward, in what he had been instructed was the "regal gesture of pacification"; "you want to stand out here in the cold and quarrel, simply because you have a quarrelsome nature; but I refuse to gratify it. I have apologized for any inconvenience I may have caused you, I have explained that it was a matter of necessity, and I have offered to pay you the damage. Further than this I cannot go with dignity; but in the future I shall be associated with Judge Hooker, at whose office you can find me whenever you decide what reparation you expect me to make for this small favor, to which previous favors to yourself most certainly entitled me. Good evening."

Doctor Sheldon lacked the advantage of fluency in handling the forms of logic, and he stood in a daze until Henry Ham had walked stiffly around the corner. Here the youth broke into silent laughter and, joining Clara, he took her

hand, crooked his elbow under hers and they danced what they called the silly schottische to the next corner. His busy day of varied activities had put him in fine fettle, which his tiff with the Doctor had brought to a focus, and he kept Clara laughing all the way home.

Uncle Darius was there and his little, beady eyes twinkled ominously as he gave Henry Ham a limp, fishlike hand in welcome. Clara's mother was more effusive, but she was a rather colorless woman and offered no explanation of Clara's spriteliness.

"Home for the holidays?" asked Uncle Darius.

"Home for work," replied Henry Ham.

"Work?" repeated Uncle Darius with that frank skepticism, seen at its best only in small towns. "Well! What kind of work you going to do?"

"In the future I shall be associated with Judge Hooker," replied Henry Ham with simple dignity.

"He's had Daffy Hubert doing his chores for several years," mused Uncle Darius with bland artlessness. "I wonder what Hubert will do now?"

"He will continue to do the chores — if his work suits me," replied Henry Ham, flushing very much against his will. "I expect to labor in a slightly different field."

"Are you all through your schoolin'?" asked Uncle Darius, who, never having had a large amount of book education, did not consider it essential.

"I graduated last spring," said Henry Ham.

"You always were pretty apt at dodging toil," said Uncle Darius kindly; "but now I suppose you'll be able to dodge it in three different languages. Aren't none of you boys going in the store with your father?"

"I can't answer for the other two boys," replied Henry Ham, feeling that he was going to pay a very high price for his coming meal.

"Your father has a good business and a farm," volun-

teered Uncle Darius, who managed to glean a fair amount of enjoyment from life, without basely striving for popularity. "If I was him, I'd have my sons take hold and keep the property in the family — instead of squandering it away as you'll most likely do. Young folks nowadays seem to think it a disgrace to do anything useful. Clara is just beginning to learn how to set a table. It wasn't that way when I was young."

"You see," said Henry Ham slowly, struggling to get his second wind, "most of us learn by observation; and when a certain course brings an untoward result, we try to choose some other course. Perhaps if constant drudgery did not usually result in narrow-mindedness, we should be more willing to engage in dismal routine."

Uncle Darius closed his right eye to a narrow crack and opened his left until the white showed in a bewildering ring, which was an indication that he suspected some one was throwing at him. "I'll bet you know a lot of pieces to speak," he said with a smile.

It is not unlikely that this conversation would have climbed the rails and run into the ditch, if Clara had not returned at this juncture with the announcement that supper was ready. Uncle Darius regarded his meals as the instruments by which he maintained his physical vigor, and his conversation during them was seldom general in its character. In fact, it consisted chiefly in adversely criticizing the viands offered and the methods used in preparing them. His housekeeper was on a strict allowance, and imported food products seldom appeared upon his table. When Henry Ham took his second helping of butter, he found the closely estimating eyes of Uncle Darius fixed upon him and, in pure bravado, took an extra large helping. He was honestly hungry after his drive in the open, and it afforded him keen enjoyment to encourage his appetite to the full.

As Uncle Darius showed no intention of deserting his own fireside that evening, Henry Ham and Clara made a call upon Lucy Stillwell, and when he finally bade Clara farewell at the gate, in accordance with the Benlo custom, Henry Ham felt that he had indeed returned to his native heath, and that it was a fairly pleasant locality, in spite of its leaning toward dullness.

Clara, on the other hand, was incensed with him for not having once broached the subject of her letter. She was not one to have things taken for granted, and was determined to give Henry Ham a good lesson at the first opportunity.

When he reached home, he found Grandma keeping watch, and they lighted their pipes together, while he gave an account of his day. She cackled with zest at Doctor Sheldon's rage, and then scolded Henry Ham for daring to do such an impolite act; but when he commented upon Uncle Darius, she joined him without reservation, and provided him with several choice bits of history which did not reflect favorably upon that gentleman's sweetness of disposition. "Folks all say that you'll never amount to much, Henry Ham," she said innocently, "and that marrying Clara is about the best you can do; but I don't know — old Darius Waldron's money would hang around my neck like a millstone."

"I seem to have a fine reputation here in Benlo," said Henry Ham, as though catching glimpses of a new light.

"Well," said Grandma honestly, "I'm rather disposed to believe that you've earned whatever reputation you've got."

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE association of an elderly man of youthful heart with a young man of keen intellect is a very agreeable one. The heart of Judge Hooker was young and the intellect of Henry Ham was both keen and active, albeit rather inclined to the erratic and the impulsive. There is generally more or less rivalry between men of the same age, but this is seldom present when one is much older than the other; and in the present case, Henry Ham drew freely upon the ripe wisdom and experience of Judge Hooker, and the Judge loved to revive his own youth by calling forth the glowing youth of the boy.

There were certain Benlo citizens in good standing who occasionally referred to Henry Ham as a "Smart Alec," and, strange as it may seem, for the very reason that Judge Hooker found a quiet amusement in drawing him out. Henry Ham had strong opinions upon every topic which came up in the course of a conversation, and he delivered these opinions with a pedantic condescension which frequently aroused ire, when this same opinion modestly put forth would have been accorded a courteous reception even if it had failed to win concurrence; but the Judge had himself broken many a youthful lance upon ancient tradition and respectable convention, and now that age had taught him the wisdom of diplomacy, he greatly enjoyed seeing his young assistant jousting in the same lists.

Most venturesome men unconsciously train after the manner of Antæus, accepting a knockdown gracefully in the knowledge that they will arise with greatly increased

strength; and so the Judge, who had graduated from this school, encouraged Henry Ham in taking the course. He introduced the youth to an entirely new world of ideas, Draper's "Intellectual Development of Europe," Volney's "Ruins of Empire," Voltaire, Ingersoll, and other iconoclastic works which fired the boy's imagination and aroused his thirst for controversy. The Judge, whose religious temperament predetermined him a bigot whatever trend his belief might take, estimated his fellows to a nicety, and therefore accurately gauged Henry Ham.

There is no zealot like a brand new proselyte, and with all the unfounded enthusiasm of a fox terrier, Henry Ham worried the Puritans of Benlo whom the Judge selected as his victims. Because of his good deeds and seasoned worth, they were willing to forgive the Judge more often than he was willing to ask forgiveness; but they regarded Henry Ham as a conceited marplot and sincerely regretted that the thistle-like formation of his tongue prevented their sitting upon him as severely as his case demanded. The Civil War and the Tariff were the questions which Benlo felt itself best qualified to discuss, and the introduction of topics unrelated to these two was a breach of etiquette.

Darius Waldron was the most liberal contributor of the Methodist denomination in Benlo, and a man who never used profanity or strong drink. Judge Hooker had spoiled many a clever little plan devised by Darius and there was a decided lack of mutual admiration between them. One morning in January, Darius called to see if he could not affect a favorable settlement of an uncollectible claim he had against an estate which was in Judge Hooker's hands. As soon as Judge Hooker was satisfied that the claim was really uncollectible, he dismissed it with a wave of the hand, and with apparent unsophistication led Darius into a discussion of that part of the Scriptures which forbids lending upon interest.

Henry Ham was able to hold his attention to his own work for perhaps two minutes; and then, as the Judge appeared to be getting the worst of the argument, he couched his youthful lance and charged to the rescue — after which the Judge settled back in his chair, clasped his fingers across the comfortable bilge of his vest, and closed his eyes with an air of patient content.

When the Judge engaged in serious argument, he used every available weapon, but for the sole purpose of convincing either his opponent or his audience; while Henry Ham's notion of debate was to wound the feelings of the opposition as deeply and as frequently as possible, and therefore he dealt copiously in personalities impertinent to the subject involved. Before this particular argument was finished Henry Ham was endeavoring to prove that Attilla the Hun was far more decent than Darius Waldron, and that the heart of Darius Waldron had ossified while his brain had turned to turpentine. These unusual phenomena of physical degeneration would not have phased a man of broader type, but they outraged Darius to such an extent that he shook his fist in the flushed face of his youthful adversary and denied him the future freedom of the Waldron home — after which he departed.

"Are you in the habit of enjoying Mr. Waldron's hospitality?" asked the Judge innocently.

"Oh, I sometimes call on his niece," replied Henry Ham, with affected unconcern.

"Too bad, too bad," commiserated the Judge, "I am truly sorry. Are you seriously interested in Miss Waldron?"

"Oh no, but we've gone together a good while — off and on."

"Ummmm," murmured the Judge. "Well, probably she won't take sides with her uncle. Girls generally do not side with their elders against the young men of their choice."

"I don't think I am the young man of her choice," said Henry Ham frankly; "she gets two letters a week from a fellow in Chicago."

"The Lord deliver all my kind who bear the brunt of woman's mind," murmured the Judge. "Still, at your age, a man out of love is a fish out of water."

"I don't think I'm in love," protested Henry Ham; "and to prove it, I do not intend to call upon Clara until I get a special invitation."

"Take no vow to which your heart does not consent," warned the Judge.

"My heart is my servant, not my master," quoth Henry Ham, without noting the amused twinkle in the eyes of the Judge.

"How old did you say you were?" asked Judge Hooker, without the slightest external evidence of banter.

"Twenty-five," responded Henry Ham, as though acknowledging a well-merited honor.

"Have you ever noticed," asked Judge Hooker, discreetly changing the subject, "whether a man's vanity suffered more when his actions or when his beliefs were questioned?"

"It depends upon the man," answered Henry Ham after a prolonged cogitation.

"Excellent!" responded the Judge. "Some day you will handle a jury in a way to reflect credit upon me. Well, to be concrete, would a decent respect for diplomacy prompt you to call your friend Darius Waldron a thief, or imply that his creed was not orthodox?"

"To impute flaws in his doctrine would be far more certain to arouse his venom," replied Henry Ham; "but why should any one take the trouble to be diplomatic with an old fossil like Darius, anyway?"

"Why, indeed," said the Judge, and then they settled to the work in hand.

Clara Waldron had faith in herself, and was therefore accustomed to disciplining her swains. She was affronted at the independence of Henry Ham and especially at his not taking more interest in her Chicago correspondent, and so she was very cool when next she met Henry. He thought that she had taken sides with Darius, and therefore he tossed his head as high as possible, drew in his chin with a jerk, and mentally resolved that she would have to cultivate her taste before finding favor in his eyes. It is a fine thing to be young with all the world to choose from.

Whenever a break occurs in the close association of two young people, each determines that the other shall know that he does not care, and so each with fine simplicity completely changes his previous course as much as possible.

The skating was good and Henry Ham had received many invitations from his younger brothers to join them in the pastime; but had smiled with the indulgence maturity feels for the follies of youth and had comported himself with the dignity consistent with his position. Now, however, he resolved to go in for physical exercise as a relaxation from the severe mental strain of his profession. He used these very terms in making the resolution, and they brought no ripple of amusement to his face.

The old clan spirit still alive within us is the cause of many of our actions. It displays itself in a wild enthusiasm for very ordinary political candidates, in the taking of sides upon a polar controversy, in the patriotic loyalty shown by the great mass for a government which makes very few provisions for its comfort or well being, but the clan spirit is seen at its best in the unreciprocated homage which boys pay to their eldest brother, especially after he has proven his worth by a temporary existence away from the family fold.

Pikey and Bud had assured their associates that Henry Ham could "lick" any man in town and was prepared to

do it at the slightest excuse, and now they longed for an opportunity to exhibit him to the admiring public which they had prepared.

As Henry Ham walked home about four of the afternoon in which Clara had treated him coolly, he came upon a group of boys pelting Jefferson Jackson Johnson with snowballs. Jefferson was Benlo's premier defective and a popular object of the raiding spirit inherent in the boys of the town. It is quite likely that his triple header cognomen composed of the names of three Presidents had proved too much for him; but at any rate, he had not been able to keep on the rails of normal development.

He was a strongly built man with a nervous affliction which contracted the muscles of his limbs during moments of excitement. When calm he could walk quite freely with a slightly swinging gait, but when aroused by unmerited abuse he would be thrown into a peculiar twist while his rearward foot beat a tattoo upon the pavement. When he attempted to throw a stone the chances were as seven to three that his right arm would cramp above his shoulder and force him to use his left hand to pull it down and disengage the stone.

Doubtless because he furnished them no amusement when calm, the boys never lost an opportunity to arouse the ape and tiger still lurking within his otherwise harmless disposition. Sometimes he caught them and punished them severely, but this possibility merely added zest to the situation and prevented its palling upon the interest of the boys.

He did not admire the system in vogue at the County Poor Farm and therefore he refused to live there. After several attempts to coerce him, Benlo finally resigned itself to his perennial residence at the jail where he reigned in a neutral tolerance of the sheriffs who came and went upon the shifting political waves, while he went on forever.

Because it was the custom of the locality to honor individuality, by the bestowal of a distinguishing title, Jefferson Jackson Johnson had long enjoyed the title of " Stringhalt " and answered to it promptly and without resentment.

As Henry Ham approached the group which was circling about Jefferson like dogs about a bear, he was amused to see one of the boys slip upon the icy sidewalk and fall into Jefferson's power. Jefferson had been pestered for some time and he handled the boy with justifiable severity, while the captive's supporters gathered closer and increased their attack. Henry Ham thought it a good joke until he drew close enough to identify his brother Bud, and then he felt a distinct doubt as to Jefferson's capacity for the administering of discipline, even when the need of discipline was beyond dispute.

As an adult, Henry Ham had treated Jefferson with humorous condescension; but through a slight straining of his recollection he could recall the days of his own irresponsible past when he, even himself, had experienced a sub-human pleasure in tormenting this same victim; and so he called out, " Here, Jeff, you'll have to cut that out."

At the words, spoken in the calm of authority, the entire group ceased its varied activities and turned inquiring eyes upon the speaker.

" Now, you kids clear out for home," said Henry Ham; " and I'll take charge of this young scamp, myself, Jeff."

Jefferson gave Bud's arm a final wrench and rose to his feet. " I d-d-don't want to hurt 'em," he explained; " but I'm goin' t-tut-tear 'em apart if they don't leave me alone."

" I don't blame you for feeling that way about it, Jeff," said Henry Ham judiciously; " but tearing apart is no longer fashionable, and is liable to get you into trouble. Now Bud, I want you to understand that if I ever catch

you teasing Stringhalt again, I'll tan your hide for you. Go on home."

Was Bud downcast and depressed? He was not; he was elated at the assured power of his brother, and his vanity bulged at the thought that this power had been shown to an advantage before an audience composed of his youthful friends. In his secret heart he longed for a situation which would involve Henry Ham in actual combat, but failing in this he gloated over the dynamic qualities of his chief's authority. The minor fact of his own conduct having come under the ban did not in the least dim the glory of the situation, and so he followed at the heels of his brother while his facial expression adjusted itself to the chastened exultation shown by a bull terrier who has been scolded for having bitten beautiful and distinctive designs upon his dearest enemy.

"Say, Henry Ham," he called out when they were nearly home, "I'll dare you to go skating tomorrow."

"Humph," returned Henry Ham.

"What's the matter, 'fraid your ankles are weak?"

"No, I'm not afraid that my ankles are weak; but you kids skate on the ice when it is thawing and cut it all up. When I skate I want decent ice to skate on."

"I know where there's some dandy ice," said Bud who considered that his suggestion had been received in a fair and courteous manner.

"You'll have to show me," scoffed Henry Ham.

"If you've got the nerve to come along tomorrow evening, I'll cross my heart to find you some slick ice without a mark on it."

"Whereabouts?"

"Well, you just come along and I'll show you!"

"I haven't much faith in you, Bud," said Henry Ham candidly. "Every time I have come home on a vacation

for the last five years you have enticed me on some highly recommended expedition which has failed to pan out. I trust you as I would a circus poster."

"I've got some straps for your ankle — if that's what you're 'fraid of," rejoined Bud.

"I rather think that after you have played as much ice polo as I have, you will outgrow your fear of weak ankles," responded the elder brother in his most elder-brotherly manner.

"Well, if you used to play ice polo, why are you so 'fraid to skate on slick ice?"

"I'm not afraid to skate on slick ice, I want to skate on slick ice; but I don't believe there is any slick ice, and if there was any, I don't believe that you would find it out until every one else had."

"Is that so — is that so? All right, all right. The next time you want me to put something over for you, I'll just remember that I'm the slowest guy there is and that you won't have any kick coming if I get everything mixed."

At the subtle threat, Henry Ham recalled several delicate missions which Bud had brought to a successful issue, and he immediately took the uncertain future into consideration and admitted that Bud was entitled to the courtesies of at least a third-rate power. "Bud, you mean all right but your standards are too low," he said with almost no condescension. "You took me quail-hunting and were satisfied when we got one rabbit between us, you took me clear out to Hampton's Cave to kill rattlesnakes, failed to find even a garter snake, and then induced me to eat roasted muscles, you took me frogging, got lost in the horse weeds, and I got into mud up to my waist pulling you out of the canal, you —— "

"You don't have to go, you confounded dude!" flared

Bud. "You just go on loafing around the stove until your muscles turn to fat and then some Johnny'll knock your block off — and I'll be glad of it."

"Now listen, Bud," said Henry Ham patronizingly, "I'll go skating with you tomorrow afternoon on the condition that, if you fail to find slick ice, every time I ask you who is a bluffer — no matter where we are or who is around — you will answer at once, 'I am.' Do you agree to this?"

"Yes, I agree to it — but you don't have to go skating to please me. I can have more fun alone and — "

"Don't try to crawfish," taunted the elder brother.

"Just you wait till I do," said Bud.

"What did he say to ya?" asked Pikey at the first opportunity.

"He said for me not to take anything off of Stringhalt, and that if Stringhalt ever laid the weight of his finger on me he'd punch his face for him," replied Bud calmly.

"Shoot! I thought he was giving you a trimming," said Pikey with frank disappointment.

CHAPTER EIGHT

It did not thaw the next day although the sun shone brightly, and at three o'clock Henry Ham had finished a fair day's work and therefore joined Bud without feeling any twinges of conscience. All that day Bud had tried to provide for Pikey's absence by treating him with an irritating disdain. It was a Saturday and after their chores were done Bud had refused to go skating, which aroused Pikey's suspicions and kept him in close proximity to Bud so that they could exchange insults with zest and persistency.

At a quarter of three Bud left the house with a parcel rolled in newspaper under his arm.

"Where you goin'?" asked Pikey.

"Ask your grandmother," responded Bud, in a fine compromise between the genteel and the noncommittal. Pikey stood in the doorway, analyzing, reflecting, and listening for the still, small voice of instinct. It is very difficult to circumvent a boy, and before Bud had gone a square Pikey had hung the strap containing his own skates around his neck and under his coat. He now stalked Bud to the door of Judge Hooker's office, and, from a safe ambush, watched him lead Henry Ham in the direction of Beaver Creek. "Smart Alec!" muttered Pikey under his breath.

When Henry Ham reached the Bend, he perceived a collection of boys of all ages engaged in a game of shinny upon ice which was very rough and cut into ridges.

"Do you call that slick ice?" he demanded of Bud.

"You just follow me and you'll find the slick ice, all right," responded Bud with confidence.

They put on their skates without noticing that their brother Pikeman had slipped in behind a clump of willows for the same purpose. When they started to skirt the shinny players they bumped into Pikey quite by accident and, strange to say, he was in a peculiarly affable temper and immediately offered to join them. Bud had counted upon conducting the expedition personally, and was disposed to receive Pikey's overtures with contempt; but Henry Ham was feeling the sweetness of the outdoor air and was therefore disposed to be social. "Come along, Pikey," he called good-humoredly. "Bud is going to take me to slick ice."

"You'll have to go a good way after slick ice," rejoined Pikey; "but if you'll just follow me, I'll show you where it is."

Beaver Creek was a fair-sized stream, fed by numerous springs, and flowing between cliffs standing a mile or so apart and marking its ancient boundaries when it had assisted in disposing of the waters which succeeded the ice age. It caromed from cliff to cliff in ripples and pools, in placid good nature for the most part; but once or twice a year the memory of its traditional grandeur would stir anew and it would indulge in a spree of "high waters."

Although here and there a field of rich bottom land nestled in a curve of the creek, for the most part its shifting bed was sand or pebbles intermingled with scraggly willows and sycamore clumps. Benlo's suburb, logically called the Hill, was a continuation of the cliff on the right of Beaver Creek as one ascended the stream; and a mile and a half above the town was the lower end of the Swan's Neck, where the creek described an irregular horseshoe in a little over a mile of flowing, during which it made a forty-foot drop through babbling rapids.

There were only three small pools between the Bend and the Swan's Neck and each was as badly cut up as the Bend. First Bud and then Pikey took the lead, and generally the leader was replaced because he had fallen through ice under-cut by the swift water beneath. Several times they all had to walk about open spaces of running water, and after a time Henry Ham began to experience an impatience which found expression in broad and heavy sarcasm.

"How far is it to the fountainhead of this creek, Bud?" he asked as he walked on his skates through a thicket of willows.

"How do I know?" returned Bud after having had the ice break under him for the third time as the result of an unsuccessful attempt to skate along its edge.

"Pikey," said Henry Ham, "will you kindly tell me why you opine that the ice at the source of this interesting stream will be smooth?"

"Aw go on, we're not going to the source," replied Pikey. "We're only going up a short way to get where the kids haven't cut it up."

"If your ankles are getting weak, why don't you put straps on 'em?" asked Bud scornfully.

Henry Ham was experiencing such a decided sense of weariness that his very vanity impelled him to follow his brothers. Walking over the ground while wearing skates is fatiguing even for a boy, and Henry Ham, who had formerly been athletic, had enough honest humility to take shame unto himself for not being able to rival his younger brothers whose muscles were in that state of wiry perfection which proves how much Nature loves an outdoor boy, so he set his teeth and followed after.

When they reached the base of the Swan's Neck, however, Henry Ham struck his colors. "You immoral heathen!" he exclaimed. "This blooming creek gets worse the

farther you go, and I intend to take my skates off and walk back."

"Take 'em off," said Bud, seating himself on a stone and proceeding to remove his own, "and Pikey and I'll make a litter and carry you."

"Gee, you're soft!" said Pikey, also taking off his skates and looking at Henry Ham with cheerful pity.

"Now listen to me," said Bud rising to his feet, "all we have to do is to climb that slope yonder, and if the ice isn't slick there, I agree to drink this bloomin' crick dry."

"Well, I'll go that much farther," said Henry Ham; "but I warn you right now that if the ice isn't slick I am going to stick you headfirst into the first hole we come to, and give you a chance to do that drinking stunt."

The boys raced up the slope and Henry Ham followed with more decorum. Pikey reached the top first and beckoned to Henry Ham to hasten. "What did I tell you?" he called with enthusiasm. "I told you that if you would follow me you'd find slick ice, and here it is."

"That's the way you always do!" cried Bud with righteous indignation. "You tag along until my plan works out and then you try to steal the credit for it."

At the head of the rapids which marked the beginning of the Swan's Neck there was a pool of quiet water nearly a mile long and the ice which covered it was unmarked and smooth enough to make the boys regret that they had dulled their skates by walking over the rocks and gravel around the open water below.

"Now," said Henry Ham, responding to the fresh ozone which had cleansed his lungs and to the youthful emotion which leaped forth to greet the smooth stretch of ice, "I shall show you kids some of the finer points of skating."

Henry Ham cut fancy figures which awakened admiration and emulation in his brothers and then beat them in a fair race to the farther end; but after this he found himself

tired and while they indulged in tag, races, and two-handed shinny, he seated himself on the south bank and rested.

The thankful blood which surged through his veins convinced him that he had done right in dropping Clara and taking up physical exercise, and he sat and wove a series of pleasant dreams in which he shone as a combination of Hercules and Apollo in a world which knew not woman. He doubled up his biceps and examined them; and while he acknowledged a slight shrinkage, he took satisfaction in the volume and toughness which remained as a foundation.

The human mind resembles a gasoline motor in the delight it takes in running and the very small interest it feels concerning the end toward which its energy is directed. Henry Ham sat very comfortably on a fallen log while his mind fabricated gymnasium appliances, stadiums composed of eager faces rising tier above tier, trophies of gold, of silver, and of precious stones, and himself, just himself, putting the light of enthusiasm into these tense faces and then accepting the trophies with dignified humility.

An imagination which has to build stone by stone is not much of a temptation; but one which, without pause or effort, spreads a dramatic situation upon a gorgeous setting and diplomatically makes Mr. Ego the deserving hero, is quite likely to enter into bothersome competition with the sterner side of life.

Henry Ham, in his automatic imagination, having just finished a rigorous course of training, had entered an Olympiad as the Great Unknown. After having won several important events for the glory of his country he was now overtaking one rival after another in the Marathon when he heard a slight noise upon the sloping bank above him. So real was his vision that he half resented the interruption; but his curiosity in the realities of life was healthy, and thinking the noise was caused by one of the small wild creatures, he stealthily turned his glance upward.

About forty feet above him at the mouth of a steep gully, he saw the face of a girl, between two small evergreens. The face was of that rich, deep coloring which is possible only when the pigments are furnished by quick, red blood, and the painting is done by Nature herself in wind and rain and sunshine. The dark eyes were fastened upon him with such a frank and unwavering interest, and yet with such an aloofness that Henry Ham felt very much like a caged tiger before a gaping crowd.

The girl was wearing a fur cap and her brown hair, short, thick, and luxuriant, rippled about her face and shoulders bewitchingly; so that in spite of a growing embarassment, Henry Ham, the misogynist, felt a glow of admiration stir within him; yet never in his life had he felt so ill at ease. He knew not whether to assume the deportment expected of an exhibition or to raise his hat and bow politely; and this was the more remarkable because he had enjoyed a wide and varied experience with girls. If this particular girl had evinced any of the conventional demonstrations, he would have been at his ease at once; but she showed neither shyness nor coquetry, and Henry Ham, a male human being in his twenty-fifth year, found himself blushing before the gaze of a beautiful girl several years younger.

How long this curious situation might have continued it is impossible to say, but a muttered guttural higher up in the twilight of the gully caused him to raise his eyes and this time they met the small, beady ones of a gigantic negro. The negro was of ebon blackness, he wore a fur cap similar to that of the girl, and his gaze while equally free and steady was more personal, and even slightly menacing. Henry Ham felt that circumstances were taking entirely too many unwarranted liberties with him and he arose to his feet to assert himself. At this the brows of the girl were drawn a shade lower over her dark eyes

and she seemed to pull herself together with the tensing of a wild thing poising for flight.

Henry Ham had just taken a deep breath as preparation for seizing the horns of his dilemma, when the girl, in response to a low call from the negro, turned and scurried up the gully as sure-footed as a squirrel. A collie dog, which Henry Ham had not seen before, ran at her heels and as she passed the negro without a word he turned and followed her as unquestioningly as had the dog.

"Well, who could have expected to find Diana in Haddem County!" exclaimed Henry Ham, removing his hat and bowing low toward the gully.

"Ya crazy with the heat?" asked the voice of Bud from the ice behind him.

"You'd better rub some snow on your head," advised Pikey.

"I knew you'd play out if you tried to take any exercise after loafing so long," said Bud.

"Now, that will suffice," said Henry Ham who, just at that moment, preferred the voices of memory to those of his brothers. "Are you fellows going to skate home? It is getting dark."

"What are you going to do?" asked Bud.

"I am going to walk home, and I have many things to think of; so that conversation will be entirely superfluous."

"Well, when I get so I bow to trees, I'll want some one along to take care of me," responded Pikey.

"You walk ahead, Henry," said Bud with mock reassurance, and "we'll follow after and see that you don't get into any trouble."

"All right," agreed Henry Ham, who was aware that a compromise was the best he could expect after having aroused his brothers' resentment; "but if you intend to babble, keep far enough behind not to disturb me."

"Good evening, trees," said Pikey, taking off his hat and bowing to the bushes which lined the banks.

"You will have to excuse us, trees," said Bud, taking his cue from Pikey, "but we are compelled to leave you. We shall bring Henry Ham to call upon you again, some day."

The younger brothers felt quite justified in retaliating Henry Ham's failure to appreciate their good services in his behalf that afternoon, and therefore there was no division between them. They were allies, staunch and harmonious, and throughout the homeward walk each played into the hands of the other in order to intensify the ridiculousness of the ceremony in which they had surprised Henry Ham at the mouth of the gully. Pure democracy which so skilfully eludes the professional politicians may be found at home wherever brothers are collected together. Democracy does not preclude government; it merely insists that government shall continue only so long as it wins the approval of the governed. The younger brothers permitted tyranny in their elder so long as he carried it off with a noble highhandedness; but when he tripped into the ridiculous his administration was temporarily over, and they enjoyed the walk home more than he did.

"Now listen to me, kids," Henry Ham finally said; "you know that the governor said that you couldn't take Robin Hood with you until he was taught to mind; and I give you fair warning that if you don't go straight down Main Street on your way home, I'll quit teaching him."

"I can teach him as well as you can," said Bud, but there was a lack of confidence in his tone. He well knew that it was not an elder-brotherly custom to return good for evil and that there were many crises in his own affairs when the support of this particular elder brother would be most acceptable; so while still continuing the verbal forms of

rebellion, the boys allowed Henry Ham to turn to the right at the first cross street while they held a straight course down Main.

"I'll bet your furnace fire has gone out," said Pikey gloating openly.

"None of your business if it has," rejoined Bud.

The joint war was over, the allies were individual states again, and Henry Ham was free to force from his memory the data which would establish the girl's identity.

"That negro is certainly old Chet who used to sell truck to the groceries," remarked Henry Ham unto himself; "but she can't possibly be that homely little Morgan girl."

He stepped into the Judge's office and found the Judge seated near the fire smoking a cigar and chatting with Hubert. For the most part, the adults of Benlo treated its defectives like younger brothers, the distinctly younger brothers of a large family.

A younger brother is supposed to be a humanoid, without sentiment, pride, dignity, or sensitiveness. His private affairs are discussed as freely as are those of the domestic animals and food, raiment, and shelter are regarded as the unabridged list of his desires. The well-established fact that younger brothers have added most to the world's history is not due to any inherent superiority but to the terrific struggle necessary to the expression of their own individuality and the tempering of character which results from this fiery ordeal.

Judge Hooker found much amusement in engaging his janitor in a discussion of topics far above his ken, and Hubert was never so elevated as when giving his opinion upon matters of which he could not possibly be informed. His theology, if not unique, was at least startlingly heterodox and lurid to a degree. His face would light with celestial beauty when he would describe his own, private hell, the

denisons thereof, and the torments which they were enjoying, or would enjoy as soon as death had prepared them for initiation.

Into the midst of this quiet scene burst Henry Ham and without apology he asked, "What became of that Morgan girl who lived on the cliff above the Swan's Neck, Judge?"

"Humph!" responded the Judge, his face sobering slightly. "I'm sure I don't know; but if I were your age, I wouldn't go to a man of seventy-five to get information about a young girl."

"Well, you know something about everything, Judge," said Henry Ham insidiously, "and I want you to recall everything you know about the Morgan girl. Good night."

CHAPTER NINE

THE pursuit of knowledge, like the pursuit of happiness, is gloriously worth while; but absolute knowledge, knowledge which comprehends the beginning, the end, and the purpose, is so stupifyingly awful that its contemplation fills one with dread; and yet it is to be sincerely hoped that, if the Primal Force be of self-conscious intelligence, it also have a keen sense of humor. The endless variety of comedy which the human race expresses incidentally is of so much higher and finer quality than that which it fabricates on purpose, that it would be a shame if there were no audience capable of appreciating it.

Before Henry Ham had gone skating he had solemnly snapped his fingers at society, had pooh-poohed card parties, had fudged picnics, had bahed dances, had, in fact, marshalled the feminine sex in one vast group before him; and, with that greatness of soul consistent with his years, had signalled this important division of the race to the background, to assure its non-interference with the brilliancy of his own career.

He had returned from skating filled with a burning desire for knowledge of a certain girl by the name of Morgan whom he could best recall as a skinny little creature who lived in a dingy brick house in the midst of quite edible fruit, which was conserved to her uses through the surveillance of a gigantic negro.

When he reached home he found the family at supper and took his place without explanation or apology. His preoccupation was so pronounced that the older members respected it; but Pikey and Bud merely exploited it. "Good

evening, trees," said Pikey, bowing politely. "I'm pleased to meet you, trees," added Bud, also bowing. "What pleasant weather we are having, bushes," continued Pikey. "May I engage the pleasure of your company for the next skate, Miss Evergreen Tree?" pleaded Bud with oily suavity.

"You boys go to the woodshed where you'll find society to suit you," said Grandma sternly. She saw that Henry Ham had in some way rendered himself liable to sarcasm from his younger brothers, and decided that if they were suppressed she would be able to get the entire truth a little later, which might not be possible if Henry Ham were forced to cause a scene by disciplining the boys at table. From this point the meal progressed in its usual free-for-all manner; and at its conclusion, Henry Ham sauntered up to the office hoping that he might gain some information of the Morgan girl in addition to a little diversion.

Neither Henry Ham nor Judge Hooker is presented as an example worthy of emulation and therefore no attempt is made to endow them with extraneous virtues. Each is a free moral agent, if any human agent is either free or moral, and therefore they can themselves attend to whatever slings or arrows are directed toward their particular seas of trouble.

Judge Hooker honestly regarded draw poker as a gentlemanly accomplishment, as a dependable test of finished character, and as a good discipline for character in the course of formation. Therefore, he played poker with men of his own age as a social expression, and, almost as a matter of duty, devoted Saturday nights to instructing Henry Ham and two of his friends in the tactics and ethics of this American game. They played with a low limit but they played for keeps, and while the amount of money which changed hands was small, the boys unconsciously gleaned from the Judge many fine distinctions, many broadening opinions, and many of those small, cosmopolitan traits of

manly gentleness which they could not otherwise have acquired in Benlo.

The Judge hated the narrow wickedness of the typical small town, and as much as he could by precept and example he shielded the boys from it. The two young men who enjoyed with Henry Ham the privileges of the Judge's hospitality were John Harkins, editor of the *Benlo Daily Citizen*, and William Wilson, a young physician hopefully striving to wedge his medical education into the unhygienic traditions of the countryside. Because his late father had unfortunately chosen the same profession, William was doomed to be called "the young Doctor," until he became senile, this being an unbreakable custom.

Henry Ham was not able to pick up any information concerning the elf-like girl who had that afternoon peered at him from between the two small evergreens; but when he started home a little before eleven he was two dollars and seventeen cents winner, and felt that his evening had brought him peace and refreshment. When he entered the sitting room he found Grandma waiting for him with considerable impatience.

"Where do you spend your evenings, Henry Ham?" she asked sharply.

"Wherever my fancy takes me," replied Henry Ham, who had determined that a clear and distinct line must be drawn between himself as a practicing attorney and his younger brothers still "creeping like snails unwillingly to school."

The old lady's eyes snapped. "Well," she exclaimed, "if I was your father and you were still living off my bounty, your fancy would bring you home at nine o'clock and you'd give a report as to where you'd been wasting your time."

"If you were my father and insisted upon such a programme, I should not be living on your bounty," replied Henry Ham evenly.

For a moment they eyed each other without flinching and then both broke into smiles. "I guess if you had been in much mischief," said Grandma wisely, "you couldn't look me so straight in the eyes. Anyhow we have agreed to be pals, and if your father is willing to let you grow wild like a weed, I'll not think evil of you until I have some grounds to."

"And now let's light our pipes," said Henry Ham.

"Henry Ham, you already smell like a smoke house, and too much smoking is not good for anybody," said Grandma, and then added thoughtfully, "still, I'll have to set up a while longer waiting for the tank to catch up a little on the hot water. That imp of a Pikey let the tank run cold so that Bud would have to take a cold bath. What kind of a fix did those two scamps get you into this after noon, Henry?"

"Oh, they made me walk about two miles over stones and slush to get a little patch of slick ice."

"Did you say the ice was slick, Henry?"

"Yes, the stretch at the top of the Swan's Neck was slick," answered Henry Ham absent-mindedly.

"There is nothing about you which reminds me of that ice, Henry Ham," said the old lady dryly. "I've been watchin' young folks ever since I gave up being one myself, and I'll wager a mince pie against a green gourd that you had girl thoughts on your mind when you came in to dinner. There, I've said it myself! The third meal in the day is supper and that is all there is to it; but I seem to catch foolish notions from you children, lately, to such an extent that I hope none of you pick up a contagious disease. Who is the girl, Henry? Now, remember we're pals and make a clean breast of it."

"Grandma," said Henry Ham, trying to appear frank, confidential, and disinterested at the same time, "whatever

became of that homely little Morgan girl who lived on the cliff above the Swan's Neck?"

"Hum-m-m," mused the old lady. "'Good evening, trees,' 'Pleased to meet you, trees,' 'May I engage the pleasure of your company for the next skate, Miss Evergreen Tree?'" she quoted from the supper table's conversation. "I've been trying my best to make sense out of that all the evening, but I couldn't do it and I don't see any sense in it now. That homely little Morgan girl, hu? Do you mean to tell me, Henry Ham, that you have let Clara Waldron and old Darius's money slip through your fingers?"

"I never had them in my fingers, and I don't want them," replied Henry Ham with decision.

"Well," rejoined Grandma, shaking her head, "Darius Waldron certainly has bad blood, but from all I can hear, that Morgan blood is worse. Now the Hendersons were just as good people as ever settled in this State, and when their only daughter went to Peru, South America, to be a missionary, we all said it was a lucky day for Peru. That was back in seventy-nine — no, it was in eighty. Let me see, oh yes, now I remember, it was in eighty-one. Yes, it was in eighteen eighty-one that Mary Henderson left for Peru. I made her a housewife to take with her and lined it with part of the blue silk dress your great Uncle Ezra sent me from San Francisco.

"You see, Mary Henderson was an orphan ——"

"That is all very interesting, Grandma," interrupted Henry Ham; "but why the deuce do you choose this particular time to unfold the romantic history of Mary Henderson?"

"Didn't you ask me about that Morgan girl?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm telling you about her. When Mary Henderson left for Peru, South America, we all gave her some

useful article as a token of our affections. She was given seventeen pairs of knitted slippers with fleece soles, and they do tell that Peru lies in a tropical temperature. I never cared much for that blue silk as a dress, although I wore it off and on for a spell of fifteen years. Still it made a lovely lining for a housewife, and Mary Henderson told me that she prized it above anything else she received.

"She was an orphan, as I tried to tell you a few minutes ago, and lived with her grandparents. They died about the middle of August eighteen seventy-eight, and I remember saying at their funeral — they died on the same day less than forty minutes apart — well, I recall as if it was yesterday, saying at their funeral to Mrs. Kettridge who sat next to me, that November was a test month, and March was a hard season for anybody to live through; but for the life of me I couldn't see any excuse for dying in August. Mrs. Kettridge drew a long face and says, 'The call of the Lord is as strong in August as it is in March.' 'Yes,' I says, 'but it isn't so general.'"

The old lady's face broke into ripples of merriment, and Henry Ham heaved a deep sigh, which was in reality a silent prayer for patience.

"Well, after her grandparents' death Mary Henderson found that she was their sole heir, and that there wasn't much left but debts. Abel Henderson had once been well fixed but his son John, Mary's father, got kicked in the back by a horse and it left him weakly; so that things got into a mess and most of the old man's savings were spent in doctor's bills. Mary was just the nicest girl you could imagine, but she was unpractical. She used to paint things on canvas, and make sketches on tree funguses, and she was the most musical one in our parts; but she'd rather sit out in the woods making an image of a tree than to win a prize at butter making.

"There must have been four hundred acres in the Hender-

son farm, but only about fifty were level enough to work at a profit, the fences were rotten, the buildings were rickety, the place was overrun with weeds, and sweating beneath a blanket mortgage held by Darius Waldron. Mary set more store by the broken land than she did by the level, because it ran a higher average to scenery; but she really did try to work the place in a childish sort of a way. She set it out with fruit, and tried to borrow enough on the improvement to pay interest on the mortgage and keep life in her until the fruit started cropping. Poor child — the only show she had was poultry, and the varmints and the pip and the roup and all the other feathered afflictions settled down on her; so she sold the place, paid her debts and went to be a missionary in Peru, South America.

"Two years later, back she came with this man Morgan for a husband. He was one of these granite men, his hair was iron gray, his features were hard, and his skin was tanned the color of old copper, but he bought the old Henderson place and put up the brick house. After he had the house built he had several carloads of things shipped here and one barrel broke open and it was full of human skulls. He never made friends with any one here and when he wanted any work done he sent to some other place for workmen. He brought the two most hideous negroes with him I ever set eyes on, and folks say they were real Zulus and couldn't speak a word of English. He never stuck a plow in the ground as long as he lived on the place, but he had plenty of cash to pay his way and no one tried to tell him more than once how to run his own business.

"At first Mary tried to neighbor with us a little but she soon dropped it. She said Morgan was a great scientist and that he was exploring in Peru when she met him; but she wouldn't give out much information about him so the folks who had always been kind to her got offended and dropped her. She didn't even go to church, and when she lost her first child every one said it was a judgment on her.

" The girl was born in eighty-five, and Mary died soon after this. That man, Morgan, didn't have a preaching funeral, and he wouldn't even let folks view the remains — although the undertaker said she had the most expensive casket he had ever sold and made a beautiful corpse.

" Mrs. Kettridge and I went out and offered to take care of the child; but Morgan said his nigger woman would look after it, and when he needed assistance he would advertise for it. I told him that what he needed was the grace of God; and he drilled his eyes into me the farthest that any human ever was able to, and said that if he really needed the grace of God he would continue to mind his own business until God saw fit to send it to him and that he would be obliged if we would notify the rest of the busy-bodies. He spoke calm and even, and made me feel like a little child.

" Well, the girl lived and when she was about three years old, Morgan's son Richard by a former wife arrived. He was tall and slender with big, dark eyes and he seemed shy and retiring. He lived to himself the same as the rest of them and never made friends with a single person. People used to see him tramping through the woods with a collie dog, and something wrapped up under his arm, but he would only bow as he passed and never came into town. The negro, old Chet, did all the errands, and pretended he didn't understand any question he didn't care to answer. Once a gang of young fellows decided to hold him up and make him answer, but he nearly killed two of them and after that he wasn't much bothered.

" Old Morgan used to buy all the dogs he could, and he raised white rabbits and Guinea pigs, and folks used to wonder what he did with 'em; but it all came out when he was murdered in ninety-two; it all came out at the trial. You were visiting your Uncle Ben that summer, but you were twelve years old and you certainly must remember

it. Judge Hooker defended Richard, if you can call it a defense when the culprit refuses to speak a word.

"Old Chet was the only witness of any importance and he and Richard never liked each other, so there's no knowing how much truth there was in his testimony. It seems that what Morgan wanted with the dogs and the rabbits and the Guinea pigs was to cut them up to see how they worked. He used to take out parts of their brains and put them in upside down and write down notes about the antics they cut up. He forced Richard to help him, and even made him get educated for this purpose, although the boy wanted to be a poet or something.

"Well, he ran out of dogs this time and sneaked in Richard's collie — you know how much store a friendless young fellow sets by a dog. He had the dog strapped to the table and part of his brain removed when Richard caught him at it. He used to do his butchering in that stone house south of the negroes' quarters, and it was just a little after midnight when old Chet heard them quarreling. When he rushed in he saw Richard standing over his father with a club in his hand, and the old man was lying on the floor with his skull cracked. He had a knife in his hand and had given Richard a cut on the neck. Old Chet didn't know there was any law but Morgan's word and he made for the boy to kill him; but he didn't have anything but his bare hands and Richard got the best of him.

"Richard notified the undertaker to bury his father quietly — a hankering for private funerals seemed to run in that family — but the undertaker got nervous and notified the coroner and he put the case before the prosecutor and he had Richard arrested for murder. Richard refused to speak a single word after he was arrested, and Judge Hooker was appointed to defend him. The prosecutor saw he couldn't hang Richard on the kind of evidence he had; so he smoothed it down to manslaughter and they

sent him up on what is called an indeterminate sentence. I'm not sure what happened to him; but there was a report that he caught the consumption in prison and was pardoned so he could die outside, which seems to be a pretty tolerable common practice, although it does seem to me that it would be more merciful to hang 'em in the first place.

"Old Chet raises truck and peddles it and that is the way the Morgan girl has been supported. Until you mentioned her this evening, I had plumb forgot that she was still alive. It's curious the way things turn out; these Morgans tried to live shut away from every one else and yet their affairs have been more talked about than any one else's who ever lived in Haddem County; but now when that girl probably needs care and attention, she is plumb forgot. What did you want to know about her for?"

"I saw her this afternoon," replied Henry Ham.

"Do you mean to sit there and tell me that you have been skating with that girl?" demanded Grandma.

"I haven't been skating with her and I haven't spoken to her; but I did see her and she aroused my curiosity."

"What did those boys mean at the supper table when they said, 'May I engage the pleasure of your company for the next skate, Miss Evergreen Tree?'"

"I refuse to be held responsible for what those young scamps say," answered Henry Ham.

"You know what they meant all the same," said the clever old lady.

"Well, if you must have the truth, after she had disappeared into the woods I took off my hat and bowed, and the kids caught me at it and thought I was crazy."

"And they were more than half right. Is she good looking?"

"I don't know that she is good looking, but she is interesting; she is not at all like other girls, she seems like a wild creature, and she isn't at all bad looking."

The old lady sat and scrutinized him for a full minute, and he returned her gaze without flinching. "Henry Ham," she said solemnly, "you are free now to choose your path. Don't for pity's sake be a fool. There is a fool streak in every family, but you can plow it out if you take it in time. Your greatuncle Ezra made himself a fool over a girl, your Uncle Ezra, my eldest son, made himself a fool over another, and now you are standing right on the slippery edge of a worse folly than either of theirs. Just supposing you'd fall in love with this girl — young men always do fall in love with wild girls who are different from other girls!

"Her father spent his time chopping up live animals to see how they worked — and he never even voted. Some say he was Scotch, some say English, and some say Irish; but anyway he lived for nearly ten years right here in Indiana and never said one word about the tariff and never once offered to vote, and wouldn't hold a funeral over his dead wife nor let Christian white women tend his orphaned baby; so that all the bringing up she has had was given her by Zulus who can't talk good English. For all you know she eats raw flesh, and I want you to promise me never to lay eyes on her again."

"I can't promise that," laughed Henry Ham, "because I don't intend to live in a cave and there is no knowing when I may chance upon her; but I don't think there is much danger of my falling in love with her; at least until after I speak to her."

"Well, will you tell me as soon as you first speak to her?"

"Yes; but now I'm dead tired and I'm going to bed."

"Henry Ham," said Grandma, putting her hands on his shoulders, "don't let your mind dwell on this girl."

"If you will just find me the kind of a girl you used to be, Grandma," said Henry Ham, kissing her, "why, I'll marry her and let the rest go hang."

CHAPTER TEN

THE thaw which set in the next morning and continued for a week removed any temptation Henry Ham might have felt to expose himself to a chance meeting with the girl of the woods, and yet his interest in her did not diminish. The human race has undoubtedly made a considerable intellectual development since discovering the advantages of roller and lever; but it still avails itself less of its reasoning powers in the moments of conquest than in the hours of repentance.

Henry Ham had a decent pride, in addition to his vanity and did not relish the thought of an entanglement with an independent young lady who had received her manners and morals from a pair of indulgent Zulus; but the dark eyes continued to gaze into his from a setting of wavy hair, and the notion of a safe and fleeting acquaintance was alluring. The presence of old Chet removed the project from the field of commonplace flirtation and raised it to that of real adventure and, moreover, in the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love — and remains there until spring comes again.

But love in a young man is merely a constant current and may be overcome by countless other forces. Most normal young men will cease drifting loveward long enough to witness a hanging, a prize fight, or a train wreck. In fact, a normal young man is attracted by the unusual even when it comes in a morbid guise, and, moreover, a normal young man has at all times a surplus of energy which is rigorously reserved from the calls of his daily toil so that when an opportunity presents itself for an amuse-

ment which entails a considerable amount of activity, a normal young man is able to embrace this opportunity with a zest and earnestness which surprises those who have known him only upon the treadmill of his regular vocation.

On the following Saturday night the three young men again gathered in the outer office of Judge Hooker for the worthy purpose of testing their luck. In conducting a motor boat about a rock-bound coast it is wise to test the amount of gasoline from time to time, and in sailing the sea of life, where so many failures and successes depend upon chance, it is equally wise to test the luck occasionally.

Judge Hooker received them with dignified hospitality and offered them whiskey, which they accepted with thanks. "I have found," said the Judge, as usual, "that if a man intends to drink, it is best to drink good whiskey — in moderation. Whiskey should never be a crutch; but I hold that as a light walking stick, it adds a touch to the *tout ensemble* of a gentlemen. If whiskey is poured gently upon water it floats in beautiful, oily circles, and thus it should float in a man's disposition. When it turns his eyes red, when it makes his hands tremble, when it renders him quarrelsome and brutal, it does not signify that all whiskey is poison to all men; but only that some men have not that self-control which entitles them to select their own instruments of enjoyment. I advise you never to drink alone until after you are forty, and never to compete at a drinking bout until after you are one hundred; and now permit me to drink to your good health and good fortune."

The Judge did not play poker with that external indifference and internal craving, typical of many poker players and of cats incidentally reposing near the doorway of some innocent mouse. When he lost he snapped his fingers, exclaimed, "O sugar," and frequently went into long ex-

planations of his motive in playing a particular hand a certain way; when he won, he rejoiced openly like a boy, so that even the losers could share in his joy; but at all times he was willing to delay the game in order to exploit some interesting topic of conversation.

During the course of the evening young Doctor Wilson mentioned the fact that Jefferson Jackson Johnson, vulgarly known as Stringhalt, was in all probability upon his deathbed.

" I wonder if his wings will hitch when he gets to be an angel," was Henry Ham's pert comment.

" I'll have to give him a good write-up," said Editor Harkins.

" Do you know," remarked the Judge, leaning back in his chair, " it generally strikes me as miraculous that there are so few defects in a machine as complicated as is the human body, while at other times I am shocked at the enormously greater proportion of defectives found in the human than in any other species. How do you account for this, Doctor?"

" In the first place," said young Doctor Wilson, " the human body is not so much a machine as it is an aggregation of chemical processes, and in the second, the defective offspring of the lower species never reach maturity, and thus these species only breed from virile individuals. An epileptic wolf could never survive his first winter, while an epileptic man may achieve a very marked success."

" True, true," admitted the Judge. " Julius Cæsar, Mohammed, and Napoleon were all epileptics, and certainly these were men of might. Just what was the affliction with which Johnson has suffered most of his life?"

" I wish I knew," answered Doctor Wilson with earnest humility. " While diseases of the nervous system are divided into functional and organic, there is really no such thing as functional disease. As long as there is no organic derangement, a nerve must function perfectly to the end;

but frequently the lesion causing the disease is quite remote from the symptoms, which may be the result of reflex action. Out of one hundred seventy-six nervous diseases only sixty-five are even fairly well understood. I have tried to get Doctor Sheldon, the County physician, to hold an autopsy; but he is an old fossil, and refuses to listen to it."

"Fossilization of its chosen agents is one of the most expensive handicaps under which the race suffers," said the Judge ponderously. "It has often occurred to me that instead of hanging our criminals, they should be used for experimentation."

"It strikes me that our prisons are brutal enough as it is, without turning them into shambles," said the Editor.

"Judge," said Henry Ham disinterestedly, "whatever became of that Richard Morgan who was sent up for killing his father?"

"He contracted tuberculosis and was pardoned. That's the last I ever heard of him," replied the Judge in a tone which delicately implied that the topic was distasteful to him.

"There you are," said the Editor. "You send a man up, give him an incurable disease, and turn him adrift. We are all liable to become criminals under certain conditions, and I don't crave vivisection until we have achieved a much higher degree of humanity."

"Tuberculosis is not incurable," said Doctor Wilson.

"Then why was not this man cured by the State, instead of being turned out to die?" demanded the Editor.

As Doctor Wilson had no reply to this, Judge Hooker, with an eloquent wave of his slender hand, said, "Fossilization."

"I'd give a lot to hold an autopsy on Stringhalt," said Doctor Wilson wistfully.

"Why don't you hold one then?" suggested the Editor. Editor Harkins took himself seriously, and in spite of the

fact that the press which printed the *Benlo Daily Citizen* was run by hand, he thought as much as possible in the units of metropolitan journalism. " If you hold an autopsy, I'll attend and assist, and if you discover anything I'll interview you and write it up in the *Daily*. Maybe you can start a controversy with Chubby Sheldon and that will liven things up and give you some legitimate advertising."

" No, Stringhalt's a County charge and a post mortem can't be held without Sheldon's permission," rejoined Wilson. " Come on, let's finish this hand and then it will be time to go."

Editor Harkins was the moderate winner that evening and was elated accordingly. He spoke with an added assurance, gave his opinions as generously and with as much satisfaction as though seated upon the peak of self-madeism, and yet there was no bitterness in the hearts of those who had contributed to his spiritual glow.

" Gentlemen," said the Judge, " I think a little nightcap would be in order. During a long life I have observed that a modest sip of bottled sunshine does much to heighten the joy, to lighten the sorrow, to brighten today without dimming tomorrow. I drink to your repose."

After cheery but still slightly formal farewells, the three young men filed out into the night. The Judge held the door open until they were well on their way, and then he sat in a comfortable chair with his feet on the fender of the coal stove. " They are good boys," he mused aloud, " they are good boys, and I would cut off my right hand rather than do them harm — but I rather doubt if their mothers would approve of my example.

" There are two theories of life: one is, to lighten the load, the other is, to strengthen the bearer. Mothers always cleave to the first, but my experience is that the second is the safer. This miserable little town of Benlo reeks with temptation, but I think that my boys will be

gentlemen and escape its brutalizing influence. They delight in conviviality but abhor the stupor of intoxication; they follow the trail of a game like hounds on the scent; but they do not pin their souls to the stakes as the pot hunters do. I wish that all men could play poker as gently as these boys do and yet with equal zest. It would mean a better world."

Out on the street, young Doctor Wilson was enlarging upon the rare opportunity offered by an exploration of the interior of Stringhalt's discarded body. Henry Ham could not entirely sympathize with this project, whose allurement was strictly professional; but he was restless, nervous, irresponsible. He was full of that eager yearning for mischief and adventure which obsesses a healthy young chap whose impulse to love has been deflected from its proper channel, and he finally said, "Well, if I had such a longing to investigate Stringhalt's abnormal complications, I should do so."

"What steps would you take?" asked Wilson.

"I'd wait until he was buried and then go and get him," replied Henry Ham.

"What kind of a place would you have to have in which to hold the autopsy?" asked Editor Harkins.

"Most any place would do, provided it was strictly private," replied Wilson.

"You can have my workshop," volunteered Harkins. "I have fitted up that little stone shed as a carpenter shop and make chairs, desks, and tables for recreation. It is on the edge of town, folks are used to seeing a light at all hours, no one ever intrudes, and I'd like to attend an autopsy, just for the novelty of the thing."

"How could we get the body there?" asked Wilson, who had more caution than his fellows.

"Get Denny McGuire to haul it," suggested Henry Ham. "He moved most of the bodies from the old cemetery

when they opened the new one, he has no respect for the law, and he is a man whose price is within reason."

"What is the law on this subject, Henry?" asked Doctor Wilson.

"I am not sure and therefore I refuse to commit myself," replied Henry Ham discreetly; "but I will give you a few pointers on the law. The quality of mercy may, as Bill says, fall like the gentle dew from heaven; but the law does not behave in this slip-shod and haphazard manner. It falls more like water out of a nozzle in the hands of a skillful fireman. Mercy is so inexpensive that no human being need be deprived of its occasional use; but the law grinds only when gold raises the steam. Now when contemplating a doubtful act, it is wise to consider who is likely to spend money to punish you even though you break the law. In this case, Chubby Sheldon is about the only man in the place who would be spider enough to deprive a young physician of a great opportunity. I believe that if we let this corpulent survival of prehistoric ignorance frighten us off by his fat little shadow, we have degenerated into a trio of Flossy-boys — wherefore I move you, Mr. Chairman, that we recover for our own uses the body of Stringhalt as soon as it is good form to speak of him as the late Mr. Johnson."

Henry Ham expected at some vague but crucial moment in the misty future to be suddenly called from his inconspicuous concealment in the mob, to the very center of the stage, where he would sway the multitude by the magic of his eloquence; and therefore he kept his eloquence in good order by exercising it whenever occasion offered. For the most part he did this with a tinge of burlesque, so that even his closest friends would be unprepared for the shock of his serious onslaught when the crisis at last arrived.

This unfounded conviction that he was doomed to be a leader of men also prompted Henry Ham to take part

in mischievous adventures of which he did not entirely approve. He wanted the feel of leadership, without greatly caring in what direction he was leading; which is a curious condition but not entirely without precedent — even among those who have received a dignified embalming in the discriminating pages of history. Furthermore, when two or more boys are gathered together the mob spirit is in their midst and they will collectively undertake many projects from which they individually shrink.

"I'm in for it!" exclaimed Editor Harkins. "It is a duty we owe humanity — and it would also be a pleasant break in the monotony."

"Who'll see Denny McGuire?" asked Henry Ham, who had also the true leader's aversion to minor details.

"Why not you — it's your scheme?" quoth Editor Harkins, who had for some time resented the trust which a community places in an editor's capacity for attending to these above-mentioned minor details.

"I have no objection to undertaking the amount of toil involved in seeing Denny McGuire;" replied Henry Ham, "but I sincerely believe that I would be the poorest possible ambassador. Four or five years ago a bunch of us drove down to Humpy Armstrong's — on the Athens road, you know — to eat a possum dinner. Just as we were ready to leave, Denny McGuire drove up with a hackful of sports and they all dismounted to get their storage batteries charged, although from the way they were singing this did not seem to be absolutely necessary. When we started along we found the roadside lined with telephone poles for the line from Athens to Brookville. The holes were already dug for the first of them, so we did not move any poles until after we had passed the holes. Then for five miles, to where the road branched, we jumped out and swung the small ends of the poles around until they lay straight across the road.

"When Denny came along he found it a nuisance: his passengers were loaded to the guards by this time, and some were sleepy and some were quarrelsome. He drove squarely over the first two poles, moved the next two around by himself — they were light poles — and he then drew up to the roadside and said he would camp right there until he had help. It started to sleet and his passengers got clamorous. Finally after they'd argued and fought for a couple of hours they sobered up enough to get reasonable; so they swung the poles off the road again; but they didn't get in until after daylight, and they were in a bad humor. They did not find out who had taken the trouble to place the poles across the road for two years; but ever since then Denny McGuire has been suspicious of me — so that I think it would be best if one of you would see him and not even mention my name in the matter. You can mention Judge Hooker if you want to. They all think the Judge's backbone is made of absolute rectitude and an incidental implication that he was behind this movement would convince Denny quicker than mere money would — although it will take plenty of that, twenty-five bucks at least."

"I'll give fifteen, myself," said Doctor Wilson.

"I'll go half the balance," said Editor Harkins.

"I'll stick up the rest," said Henry Ham, "but we don't even know for sure that Stringhalt is going to cash in just yet; so I can't see any good reason for standing here on the corner and freezing ourselves. It seems to me that the best plan would be for Doc to notify you as soon as he finds out that Stringhalt has discarded his body. Then you find out about the arrangements and as soon as he is planted have Denny McGuire ready to transplant him before the earth hardens. If Denny gets chesty, just drop a little hint that you'll have to have a little talk with the fish warden. Denny, Micky Donovan, and Nate Shipley

would rather break seven or eight new laws than go to trial for those they have already broken, and if you are going to hit a mule always hit him on a tender spot. What do you say to this plan?"

A certain amount of advantage usually lies with the one who has taken the trouble to outline a plan; and as neither the Doctor nor the Editor had a better one to offer, they accepted Henry Ham's with fair grace, and then hastened homeward stamping their feet to drive out the chill.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

It is a fine thing for a youth to take risks — so that when he reaches genuine maturity he can be discreet without fearing the reproach of cowardice. The man who was a timorous youth is quite likely to take silly chances and to even taunt the reformed risker who expresses a desire for caution; but after the brake jams, the harness breaks, or the boat upsets, the reformed risker emerges from his lethargy and saves the life of the silly chancer with a certain curious, cynical, deep-rooted satisfaction. Many a man who objects strenuously to having his raiment unnecessarily wetted is willing to swim ashore with a passenger when the need arises.

Henry Ham had always taken risks but was beginning to reach the period when he would demand a fair bargain. In this case, his confidence arose largely from the nervous stimulation caused by the peculiar face which had looked at him from the gully immediately after he had declared his independence of Clara Waldron, but it was bolstered and braced by the frank apprehension of Doctor Wilson and the fact that he had thrust the minor details upon Editor Harkins. Henry Ham had a busy imagination and a cultivated taste for practical jokes, so that it invariably pleased him to devise a plan which made others work.

Early next morning Doctor Wilson called upon Henry Ham and the expression of his face denoted worry. "What is it?" asked Henry Ham.

"He is dead," replied Wilson solemnly.

"Good," cried Henry Ham. "Have you told Harkins?"

"No, and I'm not going to," said Wilson. "I lay awake

half the night thinking this over, and I can't afford to get mixed up in a scandal. I am just beginning to get a practice and — well, you know how this town is."

"No, on the contrary no one knows what Benlo will do under any hypothetical circumstances. With Harkins back of you I have no doubt that if this got out we could turn it to your credit. I would write a series of articles and I think I could get Judge Hooker to sign some of them. He has so much faith in me that I don't mind telling you in confidence that I am doing two-thirds of all the work done in that office."

"Well, I don't intend to take the risk," said Wilson decisively.

"Let's go and see Harkins," said Henry Ham.

Editor Harkins was not at home and so they hurried up town in search of him. They found him in the sanctum busily writing. "Come in and sit down," he cried heartily. "This is my busy day. Stringhalt has passed to that bourne, etc., and I have seen Denny McGuire and he was sober and took the job for twenty-five, he to furnish everything and deliver the body to my workshop about eleven P.M. Then I saw old Bill Stedders and he gave me quite a story about Stringhalt. Do you know, he was a fine chap until he was twenty-two, then he got hit in the head with a beam and that was what put the kink in him."

"I knew it," said Doctor Wilson with enthusiasm. "Doctor Sheldon said that he had the full history of the case and that it started with brain fever, but it did not present any of the usual complications of brain fever. You see —— "

"What arrangements did you make with Denny for putting the body back?" asked Henry Ham.

"I didn't make any," replied Harkins. "How did I know how much of it Doc would need or how long he would want to keep it?"

"You'll have to tell him that you've changed your mind," said Wilson. "The more I think of it, the more foolish it seems for me to take the risk."

Editor Harkins stared at the young Doctor. "Cold feet?" he asked tauntingly.

"Well, cold feet, if you want to call it that. I am just building up a practice and I can't afford to risk a scandal."

"What do you know about that!" exclaimed Harkins, as he fixed a gaze of disgusted amazement upon Henry Ham. "Here we agreed to a certain plan and now that I have risked my reputation by carrying out my part, the very one for whose sake we were doing it comes blandly forth and asks to be excused. Rats!"

"If I were you," said Henry Ham gravely, "I would let him take whatever steps he wanted to take to stop it. Otherwise when Denny delivered the package to your workshop, I would forward it to Doctor Wilson and let him dispose of it as he saw fit. You have no use for it, I have no use for it, but only last night he was eager for it."

"What makes you want to crawfish, Wilson?" asked Harkins. "What made you lose your interest in this case?"

"I haven't lost my interest in the case," protested Wilson, "but I'd be in a nice position if the impression got out that I was so eager to experiment that I did not care what I did with the poor. Much of my practice lies with the poor and it is essential that I keep their confidence."

"You take the wrong view," said Henry Ham kindly. "Nobody wants an amateur poking about in his body, but if he is sure that his works are not going to be tangled up he goes under the ether with a sweet smile of confidence. Be game — that's what you need."

"All right," said Wilson. "You furnish the cadaver, and I'll perform the autopsy."

"That's the stuff!" cried Harkins. "And now clear out of here so that I can get my story going. I was in a

fine mood for genuine pathos when you butted in. Do you know that it was really tough luck if Stringhalt was forced to go through life with tangled nerves when a small operation might have straightened him out? They bury him this afternoon, Denny will watch the place and will get him to my workshop at eleven tonight; so be sure to be on time."

That was a long afternoon for young Doctor Wilson; but Henry Ham made it a point to follow the funeral without appearing to do so, and to note carefully the spot which had been selected for Stringhalt's last resting place. He was pleased to see Denny McGuire and Micky Donovan among the small group of idlers who stood at the grave.

Shortly after supper that evening Henry Ham put on a slouch hat and a rough coat and sallied forth without ostentation. He was something of a specialist in the quality of suspense; and greatly preferred attending the object of suspense personally, to awaiting its indefinite arrival. Therefore he had notified his colleagues that he would oversee the job from a safe distance.

It was not a dark night and he felt keenly alive as he patroled the neighborhood of Denny McGuire's abode. About nine o'clock Micky Donovan arrived, and after warming himself at the stove, adjourned with Denny to the barn, where they adjusted their nerves with the contents of a bottle, before harnessing Denny's faithful horse.

Denny McGuire was a small, lean Irishman who took no steps to disguise his racial characteristics. He wore beneath his chin a fringe of red whiskers which almost vindicated the comic papers, he devoted the intellectual side of his nature to politics, and whenever it was possible he took contracts.

Micky Donovan was of another type, but not less pronounced. His face was of the nut cracker pattern and of so rugged a build that it appeared to have been hammered

by hand from a nugget of copper. His cheek bones were high, his jaws came out from his ears to a square angle and then bunched forward in a chin which complacently seemed to invite straight-from-the-shoulder blows. He was not tall but was very broad, even to his brogue. No one ever thought of fighting him fair and his head was neatly finished in a pleasing mosaic of scars. His face was clean-shaven, his hair was close-cropped, and though he apparently sold his vote whenever he had a chance, he invariably cast a straight "Dimmycratic" ballot from principle.

Henry Ham was surprised to see them start forth in a light open buggy, usually called a road wagon; but as they started at a brisk trot he had to hurry along a short cut in order to beat them to the cemetery. Selecting shelter behind a small evergreen about forty yards from the grave, he thanked his luck that there was no snow upon the ground and settled himself just as Denny and Micky arrived. The night was clear and he could make out their forms distinctly in the starlight and also overhear their profound conversation.

"D'ya know," asked Donovan, pausing to apply to his palms that comforting moisture which a thoughtful Nature has so lavishly provided for those who scratch the rough surface of her hide, "thot Oi'm sthrongly moinded to rayform me ways iv arnin' a livelihood?"

"In the past, Donovan," rejoined Denny frankly, "all your ither rayforms iv this character have merely meant thot ya've give up iverything thot raysimbles wark until fer the loife iv me Oi can't see where ya git yer grub — which Oi have always regarded as the most important item in annybody's livelihood."

"Niver was a toime yet Oi didn't have enough grub and to spare; but the owlder Oi become the less Oi loike to bother the did — especially afther noight."

"Noight an' day is all the same to thim," said McGuire reverently.

"Yis, but it ain't all the same to me. Oi have deeper thoughts at noight. Now whin Stringhalt was alive an' botherin' about on the shtreet bummin' tobaccer an' gettin' in ivery one's way it used to amuse me to see the kids hagglin' him; but now that he's stretched out in his lang slape, it makes no difference to me that he had no sowl to be saved; I hate to be stirrin' him up, fer all the warld as though he was a Christian the same as us."

"Donovan, the bisht thing is to go on wid yer diggin'. Theology's not fer the loikes iv you to be studyin' over. I knew an owld maid once which wint insane from ponderin' over what St. Paul said about thim who married did well, but thim who married not did bether. If ya'd do yer own duty as the praste tills ya to, and lave sich questions to him, you'd save up enough to have masses said to the rist iv yer sowl after you were through wid this loife."

"There ya go!" cried Donovan, straightening again. "That's a chairful thought to fling at a man engaged in this sort iv wark. Do ya suppose, now, thot a man's appetites stick along wid his memory to hilp plague him? Oi'm as dhry as a bone this minute and if Oi was did, I'd wear mesilf to a shred thryin' to bust out for wan lasht dhrink."

"Here," said McGuire, offering a bottle, "Oi'd sooner have ya be wastin' me licker than me toime, and you're beginnin' to give me the creeps wid your doleful whinin'."

As soon as they reached the rough box, Henry Ham stole softly away, so as to reach the outskirts of Benlo at about the same time as they would.

He forgot to allow for the expert training of the experienced "lifters" and therefore walked at such a leisurely pace that he heard the somniferous rhythm of Denny McGuire's "Potato-masher" before he had reached the shack of Nate

Shipley. Possibly from a whimsical sense of the fitness of things, but more likely because it was the most convenient of his three horses, Denny had chosen for his present purpose an equine afflicted with such a pronounced case of stringhalt that an appreciative public had given it the title of "Potato-masher," and there was a distinction to its tread which rendered mistake impossible.

Hastily dropping in the dry ditch at the side of the road, Henry Ham lay face down with collar and hat hiding the white of his skin, and waited until the equipage had passed him. After they had passed he saw that Denny had planned to escape notice by placing a slouch hat upon the body and seating it upright on the seat between himself and Micky Donovan, and he chuckled softly to himself as he hurried carefully after them. To his surprise they drove under Nate Shipley's wagon-shed and stopped beside Nate Shipley's wagon.

The wagon-shed was formed by extending the roof of a small barn, variously used as woodshed, warehouse, and workshop. Mr. Shipley did not own a horse but, most of his affairs being of a strictly private nature, he found it convenient to own a conveyance exactly suited to his needs and to hire a horse when motive power was required.

When Henry Ham drew close he heard the mellow voice of Micky Donovan inquire, "Phat'll we do wid him?"

"We'll lave him phere he is, ya gump. He can't git into anny mischief."

"I have me doots," returned Micky skeptically. "This is a bad business all around."

"Then you stay here wid 'im," said Denny impatiently. "Oi'm as dhry as the sowl iv a Turk."

Denny wrapped the lines around the whipstock and, closely followed by the grumbling Micky, strode to Nate Shipley's cabin where he knocked upon the door.

Nate Shipley was a tall, lean individual with straggly

whiskers and bright eyes over which the lids were usually half drawn to give the appearance of dullness. In case of war Nate would have enlisted and also would have covered himself with glory but his patriotism did not respond to the piping times of peace. With gentle persistence he broke the game laws, the fish laws, the excise laws and all other laws which were left carelessly about, preferring to fight with a knife for weapon though he did not disdain a chair, piece of crock or similar instrument which would promptly alter the outline of a fellow citizen.

He frankly and heartily hated the inhabitants of Tennessee and would go any reasonable distance to pick a fight with one who admitted himself to be a Tennesseean. He grew his own tobacco and he made his own whiskey, composed of alcohol, prune juice and three sly winks — at least this was the extent of Nate's confidence when his most trusted admirer begged him for the recipe for this delectable beverage which was cheap and strong and easy to swallow. During his early teens Henry Ham had, in the presence of Nathan Shipley, whipped a boy from Tennessee who had ducked him while swimming, and in recognition of this feat Nate had taken Henry Ham upon several of his least illegal excursions and at all times expressed good will toward him.

Nate's shack stood just outside of Benlo's tax line upon a sparsely settled road, and Henry Ham, muttering the fervent hope that Nate's dog would not be on duty, crept softly to the window. Nate's windows were at all times eye-proof, but Henry Ham could hear the mellow voice of Denny McGuire explaining that he and Micky had just come a long walk and that Micky had a misery in his stomach which nothing but a sup of Nate's liquor would ease. Nate explained that he was just on the point of leaving to attend to a small bit of business but would remain long enough to save the life of Micky Donovan.

Henry Ham stood beneath the window until he heard

Nate Shipley start a story which dealt with a former fishing adventure of the trio, and as it promised to be long and foreign to the business in which he was at present most concerned, he returned to the wagon-shed. He stopped a few feet from the road wagon and scrutinized the vague outline of its silent occupant. He had always supposed that rigor mortis set in immediately after death and continued until the body wasted away, and he was surprised to see this body bent into a natural, though awkward, sitting posture.

As he gazed he shuddered and drew back a few steps. Then he forced himself to think of the form before him not as a human being but merely as a temporary collection of chemicals which had in the past assumed countless forms and would in the future assume countless others. There was nothing morbid in Henry Ham's nature, or at least, no more of the morbid than was healthily necessary to one of his varied tastes; and presently the ancient but unreasonable repulsion, so frequently felt in the presence of death, left him and he began to chafe at the delay.

Suddenly he began to chuckle and as he started back toward the house his merriment increased. "It would be idiotic to take the risk," he exclaimed, "but I'd give a hat if I could do it!"

He stood in the shadow watching the house, and as he stood his desire increased. Here was a unique situation, he could never hope for a repetition of such fortuitous circumstances, and he was himself in just the reckless humor for an adventure which would scatter its radiance like an explosion among fireworks.

"I'll do it!" he cried striking his left palm with his fist.

He returned to the wagon-shed where the patient Potato-masher was standing with head and one hip sunk in that enviable resignation which eventually comes to all horses whose business compels them frequently to serve by noc-

turnal waiting. Henry Ham placed his hand upon the horse's shoulder and as the frosty chill of the outer hair gave way to the heat from within, he felt a comfortable sense of companionship.

"Hard lines, old fellow, to stick around in the cold this way," he murmured gently to the animal; "but you seem to take it well. I wouldn't admit it to one of my own species, but I don't mind tipping you off that I very much dislike doing what I hope I am about to do. This is a golden opportunity, and I'll hate myself ever after if I let it slip."

Setting his teeth the youth climbed to Nate's wagon and found that it contained some old carpet. He reached out in the gloom and touched the form upon the seat of the road wagon alongside — and shuddered. This irritated him and he clenched his fists and stepped across to the road wagon with his left foot, his right remaining in Nate's wagon. The springs of the former creaked slightly, the Potato-masher stirred, and heaved a comprehensive sigh.

At the sound Henry Ham sprang back to Nate's wagon, and as he did so something brushed across his face. He struck out blindly in the dark with hysterical swiftness, hitting a rope and causing a slight rattle. Instantly he recalled that Nate had a block and tackle slung from the roof in order to unload his wagon or to remove its bed when he hauled the saplings which constituted his winter's supply of wood. With a guttural ejaculation of disgust at his own nervousness, he leaped to the ground and hurried around the shed.

It seemed to him that he must have been alone for hours; but when he regained his post beneath the window, Nate had just arrived at that point of his story where he had stolen the fish warden's clothes, and Henry Ham, who had heard the story before, knew that there was at least twenty minutes more of it, and that there was little likelihood of either Denny McGuire or Micky Donovan foregoing the

liquid refreshment which would be their just due as enthusiastic listeners; so he started slowly for the shed.

The will is developed by doing whatever desire insists upon, in spite of disagreeable details, just as certainly as it develops by thwarting illicit desire when virtue is in command. The will is unmoral; its functions are purely executive; but a strong executive is absolutely essential to a strong character. It frequently happens that men of parts are weak and without influence because they have never undergone the boyish adventures which toughen and temper the fibres of the will. This also explains why the incorrigible "bad boy" frequently evolves into the strong man upon whom others lean. A common mistake is to judge an action merely as an action, instead of with reference to its effect upon the character of the actor.

Henry Ham was going through a period of reconstruction. One of his natural attributes was a certain feline daintiness, an abhorrence of anything repulsive or gruesome; and as it is not always possible to avoid a duty involving the repulsive and the gruesome, this daintiness was something of a defect. Death is always abhorrent to untested, and therefore complacent and contemptuous life; but life can never become calm and placid until it has clasped hands with death. He only can live well who does not fear to die.

Henry Ham, however, was not philosophizing; his primitive soul was living exclusively in its own present, and cared absolutely nothing for future effects. The youth paused at the corner of the shed and pondered. He was his own audience and his own judge. For the nonce he was autocratic ruler of his entire world, and this was quite different from the pranks in which he had been one of many.

Suddenly he chuckled. His imagination had presented himself once more in the star role which had earlier appealed

to him, and in the meantime his will had hardened to the consistency necessary to carry out the plan.

"I'll do it, if it's the last thing I ever do do," he muttered and hurried into the wagon-shed where he climbed into Nate's wagon again.

Quickly untangling the tackle, he passed the loop under the arms of Stringhalt and secured it in the hook of the block. He then returned to Nate's wagon, raised the body by means of the tackle, and gently lowered it into the bed of the wagon where he covered it nervously with carpet, drew a deep breath, fixed the tackle as he had found it, and pulling his hat over his eyes took the place in the road wagon and assumed the posture of its recent occupant.

He sat perfectly still for one long minute, and then he climbed down and once more reconnoitered. He had barely turned the corner of the shed, however, before Nate's door opened and his guests stepped out.

Mr. McGuire stumbled and nearly fell. "What's the matter?" drawled Nate in a tone of innocent surprise.

"It's dark as the divil, comin' out iv the loight that way," explained Denny heavily.

"Shall I get you a lantern?" asked Nate.

"Niver moind the lantern," replied Denny hastily. "All the more Oi'm askin' iv yez tonight, is to kape that dawg in the house until we get a good start."

At this juncture Henry Ham hastened to take his place in the road wagon, while Denny and Micky pretended to start homeward. Henry Ham was soon fidgetting, but he had not long to wait before the untrustworthy agents appeared, Denny whistling a mournful tune under his breath and Micky grumbling audibly at the cruel fate which took him away from Nate's cheer and out into the gloomy dark.

"Will, he's here yit, annyhow," said McGuire as he untied the patient horse.

"Yes, and I wish he was where we got him from," growled Donovan. "Bad cess to sich wark as this! No good'll come of it, Dinny McGuire. Mark what Oi till ya."

"Aw, it's manny a lang day since you've had the chance to make foive dallars an a single noight, Micky me bye; so ya'd bether jist brace up and take a chairful view of things," said Denny, clambering with slight unsteadiness to the seat. His capacity for store whiskey had never been sounded, but there was penetrative quality to Nate's distillation which threatened the balancing nerves even of Denny McGuire.

"It *is* manny a lang day since Oi had sich a chance," acknowledged Micky, pausing midway of his ascent to make an eloquent gesture. "As you say, it is manny a lang day since Oi had sich a chance; but thrue as Oi'm standin' here, it'll be manny a langer wan before Oi take sich anither wan."

Neither Denny nor Micky was intoxicated, but the mild, commercial whiskey had put them into a neutral condition, and Nate's contribution had elevated them to that stage wherein the most simple things take on a dignity which entitles them to ceremony. They had lost all antipathy to the task in hand and expected to devote the balance of their drive to an enjoyable discussion wherein each would criticize the other freely.

"A person wad think to hear ya talk, Micky," said McGuire as he shook the lines, "that ye had niver been in a graveyard before."

"If ye were bether able to think, ya'd be bether able to pass judgment upon me remarks," replied Micky. "I have dug manny a grave to put paple in, but niver before did Oi dig wan to take paple out at this toime o' night. What did pore owld Stringhalt iver do to you that ya couldn't lit him have a quoiet rist?"

"Oi'm not takin' him out to spite him;" rejoined McGuire

indignantly, "neyther am Oi takin' him out to give him wan more boogy ride. Oi'm takin' him where Oi'm takin' him, because it pays me to take him there."

"Yis," responded Micky, "it does pay you — it pays you purty will — but me who does a full two-thirds of the wark and runs an aqual half o' the risk, ownly git wan-fourth as much as you. That's a foine way to devide the graft, ain't it?"

"See here, Donovan," said McGuire, straightening loftily in his seat and sticking his jaw forth, "didn't Oi take the conthract for this jawb, and ain't Oi providin' the harse and booggy?"

This was an argument no countryman of his could ignore, so Micky settled down in his collar grumbling to himself in a hoarse undertone. Presently he aroused himself enough to ask, "What did he die of, Dinny?"

"Nobody · knows," replied McGuire with almost professional lucidity. "Oi've heard siven or a dozen raisins, but Oi have wan of me own which suits me bether nor anny iv thim. Ya know how he used to ketch whiniver he got excited, ya remimber how his hand used to hook up in a twist at the side of his hid, and his fut used to bate a tattoo on the sidewalk? Will, the raisin for that was that he had a chunk o' somethin' floatin' in his blood and whin that chunk would get into wan of his valves it would choke it up so that his whole works would stop until he jarred this chunk loose be tappin' wid his fut. Finally this chunk got stuck in a valve so tight he couldn't jar it loose, and thin, naturally enough — will, ye see a man is jist loike an engine."

"Pore filler," murmured Donovan, "he had throuble enough whin he was livin' and Oi say he should have been allowed to rist in pace."

"Phat are ya thryin' to do — put the sin aff yer own sowl onto mine?" demanded McGuire. "You're not as innocent

as a young dove, Micky Donovan. Oi warned ya phat the jawb was before ya took it. Now shut up!"

The horse plodded phlegmatically along the rough road, thumping out the time with his afflicted hind leg, and doubtless sending up a silent amen to the maledictions which Denny from time to time laid upon the bumps. Denny had chosen this road because it would bring him to his destination without taking him through town, but it was an ill-bred, surly road and did not welcome travel. Henry Ham had been thoroughly enjoying the conversation and had the desirable trait of dropping future responsibilities so that he could enjoy present bounties unhampered.

He held himself loosely but at every irregularity in the roadway bumped heavily against Micky Donovan. At first Micky straightened him gently, almost reverently; but he had forgotten his gloves at Nate's and wished to keep his hands in his pockets for warmth; so that finally he lost patience and hurled the loose-jointed passenger against Denny with considerable force.

Denny gave a gasp, a jump, and a deep-rooted imprecation. "Phat's the mather wid yez, Donovan?" he exclaimed. "It takes all my attintion to conthrol the harse, and if ye can't attind to the carpse, ya moight as will git out and walk."

"Will, why don't he bump over again' you part o' the toime?" demanded Donovan. "You're gittin' more out o' this thin Oi am."

"How do Oi know why he don't do what he don't do — yer crazy!" returned McGuire candidly. "You tind to yer own business and lit him alone."

At the next bump, Henry Ham fairly lunged into Micky who put his hand against the unruly passenger's neck as he prepared to thrust him back. With a throaty gurgle, he jerked back the hand as though it had been scorched, and half rose from his seat.

"Phat in the hill is the mather wid you, Donovan?" cried McGuire nervously.

Leaning craftily in front of Henry Ham and holding his hand to his lips, Micky Donovan whispered with the utmost secrecy, "Dinny, Dinny, he's still warum."

"Go wan!" scoffed McGuire, edging away from Henry Ham, however. "How could he be warum afther bein' under ground tin hours. You've got the 'tremins!"

"Fale ov him!" whispered Micky hoarsely. "Fale under his collar."

Denny drew off his left glove and furtively felt of Henry Ham's neck. "Micky," he whispered in turn, "it's thrue fer ya; he is still warum. How the divil could he git warum on sich a night as this?"

Henry Ham's voice had been trained and it also had tricks of its own. He now expelled most of the air from his lungs, cramped his right hand above his shoulder with fingers spread in the distortion characteristic of his prototype, and, speaking slowly yet distinctly, said in a sepulchral monotone, "After you have been twenty hours in hell, you will be warm, too."

With a smothered screech Denny McGuire dove from the right side of the road wagon and scuttled off into the darkness. With a similar ejaculation and a similar impulsiveness, Micky Donovan leaped from the left side and rushed after Denny, making queer, whimpering noises as he ran. Henry Ham wrapped the lines about the tattered whip and deserted the road wagon from the rear while the unimaginative horse, left to his own devices, continued his stolid plodding in the direction of his comfortable stable.

When Henry Ham considered himself the hero of what he was pleased to term a center shot, he indulged in silent laughter which found its chief outlet in a rapidly vibrating diaphragm. He was now satisfied with himself — completely satisfied. For years he had been trying to stage

a practical joke which would measure up to the ideals of his artistic temperament, and it must be confessed that several times during his college days he had brought matters to an almost satisfactory complication, but there had always been some flaw, while now — at the thought of Micky Donovan's rock-bound face and the queer, throaty whimpers he had given as he ran up the road after the fleeing Denny, he hugged himself without reservation and launched his vision into that future when he would provide entertainment for a choice company by skilfully narrating this evening's adventures.

He seated himself on a clump of long, dry grass to enjoy more thoroughly the effect of this vision, and to marshal the details so that they would parade to the best advantage. Henry Ham possessed that rare privilege of living one moment at a time, and therefore the mental agony which young Doctor Wilson might at that moment be suffering did not intrude to disturb him. Beyond question, conscience does at times make cowards of us all; but close observation rather strengthens the opinion that expediency causes more perturbation than conscience. It suddenly occurred to Henry Ham that one small incidental to his evening's diversion had not been perfectly disposed of. This temporarily forgotten item was that collection of chemicals which made up the body of the late Stringhalt, and at the thought Henry Ham's expression underwent a sudden change.

As young Doctor Wilson had sagely suggested, one could not walk about with a human cadaver in his pocket without feeling self-conscious, and Henry Ham ran his fingers through his hair in deep thought. His practical joke had indeed scattered radiance like a fountain, even as he had wished; but now he must shoulder the responsibility as well as the glory. He saw at a glance that his allies would display an excusable hesitation in assisting him from the mire into

which he had leaped with such spontaneous gaiety, and his brow contracted as he pictured the activities with which the hard-fisted Celts would be most likely to demonstrate their resentment should they discover himself to be the cause of their fright. He began to feel a little irritated with Stringhalt.

Still, the stars were swinging along on their separate paths and he saw that he must prepare with promptness a convincing alibi or else remove the need for one. Henry Ham had honor. Honor, like the mariner's compass, seldom points to the absolute north; but for all that when the consistent variations are thoroughly understood, honor is found to be of incalculable importance in steering across the open spaces of life. Henry Ham would direct a practical joke at his best friend, but if the results were of a serious nature he would voluntarily assume that minimum of responsibility which would free this same friend from the entanglement. He saw clearly enough that the surest way to shield Wilson and Harkins was to extirpate himself from the difficulty so skilfully that no clew would be left; and he also saw with equal clearness that this would be a task worthy of his steel.

CHAPTER TWELVE

NATE SHIPLEY's dog was an individual and a character, eminently adapted to Nate Shipley's needs. His name was Pluto and in his humble way he strove to live up to this name in the ordering of his own affairs; but when it came to the affairs of Nate Shipley the dog was the embodiment of love, faith, and obedience.

Pluto conceded Nate to be the supreme potentate of his small world and there was nothing more to be said on that subject. He never barked when Nate was at home, he never fought when Nate was along unless Nate gave the word; but when made commander of the post, Pluto assumed a portentous gravity and yearned solemnly for some opportunity which would permit him to vindicate the trust which the wonderful Nate had placed in him.

He suggested the bulldog type and possessed those bulldog traits which provide such comfortable support in moments of danger, but he was taller and heavier than the bulldog of the bench show and was of that sterner stuff which leads to combat rather than camera posing. He made friends with no one but Nate, although he maintained a neutral unconcern toward those to whom Nate extended his peculiar hospitality.

Henry Ham was aware of Pluto's firmness, and when he arose from the dry clump of grass and started to retrace his steps, Pluto was uppermost in his considerations. The night was brisk and clear and the veins of the youth were running full of life and energy, so that the suggestion of fear offered by an encounter with the dog was just that additional zest necessary to elevate Henry Ham to his

highest potency. The occult produces a terror which is a panic and a blight, but there is a distinct and ecstatic pleasure in the fear arising from known causes, which keys up nerves and muscles, brightens the eye, and puts an edge upon the wit.

One reason for the body's responding so slowly to enlightenment is, that it is ever hungering for the old thrills which compensated for the hardships of prehistoric times. The blood memories cry out for these thrills and are responsible for our speed mania, and also for most of those crimes which do not spring from economic inequalities. When we recognize this we will remodel our penitentiaries into hospitals, and will feel no more hatred for those who have arrested development of the mind than for those who have arrested development of the body.

The law offered no play for the primitive emotions of Henry Ham and for some time he had been accumulating a longing for purely physical sensations. Science has magnified our powers in every direction except to offer an acceptable substitute for that dearest of all thrills, the justifiable matching of one's own life against the life of another. Teasing a trust, snuffing a senator, or bucking a judge off the bench are sports quite worth while; but how pale and wan they become when compared with the privileges enjoyed by our early ancestors. Stealing forth in the twilight through a jungle filled with dinosaurians to filch a few broilers from a pterodactyl roost must have made a man's nerves bulge out with a grand assortment of thrills. The early ancestor who, in bulk, compared with his intended prey much as the bait in the trap compares with the rat, would be armed with a stone in one hand and a club in the other, and no Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Dumb Animals lurked in the background to soften his purpose toward the coveted fauna. It was in this school that our bodies first learned to discriminate

between sensations of a high voltage and those incapable of stimulating the circulation to an enjoyable speed.

These were the sober thoughts which might have stalked through the mind of Henry Ham if he had not been thoroughly engrossed with the mood in which Pluto was most likely to receive him. To be perfectly frank, Henry Ham was perplexed. He did not know how to recover the body, nor how to dispose of it after he had recovered it; and he knew that Pluto would be immune to either threat or bribe. The youth had faith in himself, however, and so he did not falter. Often before had some totally unexpected scheme appeared at the last moment to save him, and now he was introspectively watching for that rift in his mental clouds which would betoken the dawn of a brilliant idea.

This mental standing upon tiptoe to peer over an immovable obstacle is sadly wearing, and Henry Ham was so intent upon it that his physical eyes proved him false and he suddenly became aware that he was walking directly toward a white horse which was now only a few yards from him. He hastily stepped to the side of the road and crouched in the shadow; but straightened immediately at the sound of a deep and menacing growl.

"What's the matter with ya, boy?" demanded Nate Shipley's voice. "You've been actin' foolish all this evenin'."

Pluto had planted himself directly in front of Henry Ham, and he did not shift his gaze from the youth's throat when he again uttered his deep growl. It had a new note in it now, and Nate stopped his horse and dismounted. He walked slowly to where Henry Ham was standing silent. The chief cause of the youth's silence was the fact that the white horse was hitched to the wagon in which he had recently deposited the object of his perplexity — and he knew not whether Nate had already discovered it.

"Call off your infernal dog, Nate," he said as calmly as possible.

"Seems like I know that voice," returned Nate; "but seems like it don't belong here at this time o' night. Is that you, Henry Ham?"

"Of course it is. Call off your dog."

"What on earth you doin' out here at this time o' night?" persisted Mr. Shipley, who was a free soul and not to be lightly stirred from a chosen line of inquiry — or anything else which took his fancy.

"Do you want that dog shot?" demanded Henry Ham.

"Nope. Got anything to shoot him with?"

"Not now," admitted the youth.

"Ah wish" — when ready to take a decided and inflexible stand upon any question Nate Shipley had the curious custom of drawling his words with a distinctly Southern accent — "Ah wish ya wouldn't speak that way in front of my dawg, Henry Ham. You're like to take away his nerve. Where were ya goin' when we interrupted ya?"

"I was goin' home. Where do you suppose I'd be going this time o' night?"

"Wu-ell, ta tell ya the truth, Henry Ham, I'm out so much o' nights attendin' to my business, and I see so many o' you young fellers scoutin' about, that I've clean give up wastin' my time in supposin' about 'em any more. If they go on by me why I just let 'em go; but if they get into an argument with Pluto why I generally ask 'em a few questions and if they're in a hurry they generally answers 'em. Where were you comin' from when we met ya?"

Henry Ham secretly rejoiced at this parley, as it was giving him ample time to get control of himself. He knew dogs and he knew Nate, and he therefore knew that there was no danger of the dog attacking him unless he first attacked Nate, which he felt sure he would not do.

"All right, Nate," he said with easy defiance, "if you think it is going to improve your private business to interfere with mine, go ahead. I have nothing else to do tonight except watch you try to pry into my affairs."

Nate chuckled, snapped his fingers to Pluto, and rejoined, "Ya always were a curious chap, Henry Ham. Nine out o' ten o' the young fellers I pick up this a-way are mighty glad of a chance to brag about what they been up to; but I don't like you none the less for bein' close mouthed. Want to take a ride?"

"Where are you going?"

"Well, I'm goin' yon side the Tippecanoe after some hogmeat I traded for. We'll get back along about ten in the mornin' and this is a rare night for ridin'. Come along and I'll tell you how to find your way in the dark, how to slip through a thicket without makin' any noise, and a lot of other little quirks you might find handy."

"You think I'm not game for such a ride; but I'm going to fool ya. Hop in."

Nate Shipley was rarely surprised and so with another of his guttural chuckles he took his place upon the seat and the youth clambered up beside him and tucked the heavy robe about his limbs.

"That's a genuine buffalo robe you're warmin' under," remarked Nate, "and I got hold of it for seven dollars. Sometimes it seems to me that I'm wickeder when I traffic in the open than when I just nachely pirate; cause then I throw myself open to legal handlin' while in the first place the' ain't any come back."

It was not a cold night and the jolting of the wagon kept Henry Ham warm beneath the buffalo robe; but his mind was too busy upon its own problem to provide the resiliency necessary to brisk conversation and after a time Nate said, "What's the matter with you tonight? You're worse company 'n the old white horse."

"To tell you the truth, Nate, I'm so everlasting sleepy I can't keep the stars from blurring together. If you had another robe I'd curl up in the bed of the wagon and sleep until sun-up."

"Just my luck! When I do get a chance at a little company, why I pick up a sleeper. Well, I don't want to be cruel to ya. There's some pieces o' carpet in the bed which I 'lowed to throw over the pork, and if you want to try takin' a snooze, you're perfectly welcome to help yourself."

Henry Ham yawned with convincing weariness but it was well for him that the darkness prevented Nate from seeing his eyes. He drowsily swung about on the seat and felt cautiously for a footing. He was a natural actor, which explains many of his actions which would otherwise appear inconsistent. It was very rarely that he permitted anything to interfere with a situation which would give him the center of the stage. He preferred to be wrong alone than right with the majority; but as the majority is never right this preference worked to his advantage.

He felt about with his foot, then with his hand. "Who is that in the bed of the wagon?" he whispered dramatically, after he had arisen and placed his lips close to Mr. Shipley's ear.

"Nobody but you, far as I know," replied Nate, lightly.

"All right," returned Henry Ham. "I'm not trying to pry into your affairs; so if you'll just slow down I think I'll get out and walk back."

"Is there really somebody there?" asked Nate.

Part of the pleasure in Nate Shipley's mode of life lay in the fact that at any moment his role was liable to be changed from that of hunter to that of hunted, and therefore his senses, like the claws of the restful but ready feline, were kept in a state of enjoyable sharpness. In an instant he was prepared for whatever was to happen.

"There is really some one there," replied Henry Ham, "and I want to get out and start back."

"Whoa. What do you want to get out and walk for?"

"Because there is something wrong with this man and I don't want to get mixed up in it."

"What's wrong with him?"

"I don't know, unless he's been drinking too much of your whiskey. At any rate, I shook him by the shoulder and he didn't make a sound — and I don't want to get mixed up in it."

"I more 'n half believe you're stringin' me," said Nate, whirling about on the seat and stepping into the bed of the wagon, "but I'll have a look, anyway."

He shook the form vigorously and then felt of the face. "Well, I'll be garnswazzled!" he ejaculated, starting back. "He's dead," he whispered hoarsely. "Henry Ham, he's dead."

"That's what I was afraid of," replied Henry Ham, "and that is why I did not want to be mixed up in it."

"Well, but who in thunder is he?" asked the perplexed Mr. Shipley.

"I don't know and I don't want to know," replied the youth, starting to climb down.

"You stay right here till we find out who it is," ordered Nate. "Pluto — tend to your knittin'."

"Now look here, Nate," warned Henry Ham, stepping back into the wagon as the vigilant Pluto stepped from beneath it, "if you force me to know about this, I'll have to appear against you as a witness, and I don't want to do it."

"Hang it all, I want you for a witness. I'm no more to blame 'n this 'n you are, and you've got to stand your half."

"Very well, if you wish your affairs aired in court, I have nothing more to say."

"Darnation!" muttered Nate fervently. "I wish the' wasn't any law." Mr. Shipley's industries overlapped the law in so many different directions that even the chance allusion to a court vexed him.

"The best thing is just to let me slip away and forget ever having met you tonight, and then you can settle it in your own way."

"Nope; I never hunt trouble but when trouble backs me into a corner I allus look it square between the eyes."

"Then remember this: don't tell me when you've been drunk or who you've been fighting with lately, because whatever you tell me now will have to come out at the trial."

"Confound it, I haven't been under the influence for three months, and I haven't had a real fight since away back in the spring. This is tough luck! I'm goin' to see who he is, anyhow."

Nate struck a match. "Don't light a match!" whispered Henry Ham dramatically.

Nate gave a start and the light went out. "Don't be a fool!" he cried. "The' can't anybody see a light here, and if they did they'd think I was lightin' a pipe."

"All right, go as far as you like; but I don't intend to look."

"You're enough to make a wolf nervous," muttered Nate, as he lighted another match, shielding it carefully with his hand.

"Who do you think it is?" he whispered after the match had burned out.

"I have no idea and I don't want to know."

"It's nobody else but old Stringhalt."

"Stringhalt? Great Scott, Nate, what grudge could you have felt against that poor creature?"

"I didn't hold any grudge again' him! I didn't do it, I tell ya. What would I want to harm that poor old relic

for? Why, time and again I've driven the kids away from teasin' him. Look here, Henry Ham" — making the sign solemnly upon his chest — "I'm crossin' my heart. Honest to God I never actually murdered a single, solitary man in my whole life."

"Well, getting him drunk and letting him freeze to death in your wagon amounts to the same thing — under the law."

"I never gave him a drink in his life."

"Then how did he get in your wagon? Remember I found you driving him along the road after midnight, and that is circumstantial evidence which you will have to explain to a jury."

"Can't you talk about anything else but law and court and jury! I've told you a dozen times that I don't know a thing about it."

"I know you have, and I wish I could believe it; but it's a pretty stiff story. Now make out your full case, and let's see how it would sound. Where did you start from, who was with you — You've dragged me into this, and now the best you can do is to put your case in my hands."

"Well, the wagon was under my shed this afternoon when I put the carpet in the bed, and that was all there was in it. Then I got the old white — it belongs to Tommy Johnson — and I harnessed and fed him before dark expectin' to start out about ten and deliver some stuff I had orders for; but a couple o' friends dropped in —— "

"Ah! ha, a couple of friends dropped in? Go on."

"They were perfectly sober and all we did was to sit and gossip a while. When they left I hooked up the white, started out, and met you. That's all there is to it."

"Did you examine the wagon before you hitched the horse to it?"

"No, I didn't. I never need a light to hitch by."

"Pluto makes a pretty good watchdog, don't he?"

"I'd stake my life on him."

"Well, Nate, you've always been a good friend of mine; but I can't take your case. I know I could never make a jury believe it. You'll have to get another lawyer."

"Aw, don't drag a lot of lawyers into this," said Nate disconsolately. "If you once put a lawyer on any trail at all he'll flush up all the game in the woods, and I don't want 'em to be botherin' with my business."

"Well, what do you intend to do about it? If you can get out of this, all right; but I don't see how."

Nate seated himself on the edge of the wagon bed and stroked his chin. Suddenly the legal fog which had been settling about him lifted before the rays of his rising memory. "How could I have killed him?" he demanded triumphantly. "He died a natural death in the county jail and was buried in the potter's field this afternoon. I saw 'em passin' right by my door."

"Now say, Nate," scoffed Henry Ham, "that's making it a little too strong. A fellow sometimes gets out of jail, or the pen, or even an insane asylum; but once they get him cooped up in the potter's field, he generally stays put."

"I tell you I saw Dykeman haul him out there," insisted Nate petulantly.

"Then how on earth did he get into your wagon?"

Nate pondered. "Pluto acts strange all the evenin'," he said slowly, "and when I start out on this road he gets fast on you headin' towards my place, you discover what's in the bed of my wagon and try to shift the blame on to me. It strikes me, Henry Ham, that circumstantial evidence has you pinched a leetle tighter 'n it has me."

"Oh, if that is the way you feel about it, all right," said Henry Ham with dignity. "I have always been friendly toward you, Nate, and was willing to do all I could to get you out of a scrape; but if you are under no apprehension on your own account, I am certainly under none on mine.

I went out in the country Saturday evening, and, while it might cause me a little joshing if the boys knew where I was, it would certainly be no trouble for me to prove an alibi up to eleven o'clock tonight. The best thing to do is to drive at once to Judge Hooker's, with whom I am at present associated, and he will tell us exactly how to place the matter before the authorities in order to assure a thorough investigation."

"Now you've got a judge and the authorities into it! Ain't the' some way we can settle it by ourselves?"

"That may be all right from your standpoint, but my position is slightly different. You seem disposed to try to put the blame on me, and I cannot afford to take any chances. Come on, let's start."

Nate sighed. "I don't want to put the blame on to you," he said contritely; "but can't you think up some way to get me out of this without botherin' with the confounded law?"

The heart of Henry Ham gave a sigh of relief and began to soar, as he saw that his own responsibility had at last been assumed by another. He frequently found difficulty in solving his own problems but could always solve those of another.

"I don't know about this, Nate," he said cautiously. "You see it's this way, if I help you, that makes me, under the law, an accessory to the felony —— "

"Hang it all, Henry Ham, nobody cares anything about Stringhalt, anyhow."

"You have not observed closely," returned the youth loftily; "the poor, the crippled, and the outcast are only nuisances as long as they are alive; but dying is an adventure which makes heroes of the meanest of us, and the very ones who did the least for Stringhalt when alive would make the most fuss about your taking liberties with him after he was dead."

"That's true enough, I'll have to own up to that. It's no use tryin' to row upstream again' prejudice. There's where you had me a while back. You're just as much in this as I am; but nobody would believe it of you, while they'd think it perfectly natural in me."

"That's the situation, Nate, and you might as well face it. I run no risk in this matter, while you do. You wouldn't run any risk for me, and yet you are asking me to run one for you."

"Just you try me once, Henry Ham, just you try me once," said Nate earnestly. "I sometimes sidestep the law a little; but I allus pay my just debts and I pay 'em full and plenty. I'm as innocent in this matter as an unborn dove; but there's a bunch of white-livered hypocrites in this county who are just achin' for a chance to get me, and I got to be careful."

Henry Ham had weirdly accurate intuition regarding human nature and he knew it would weaken his position to appear entirely disinterested. "The chances are that I'd be mighty glad of your help one of these days, Nate," he said slowly, and then added, "if I felt sure I could trust you."

"You know you can trust me, Henry Ham," said Nate, with a dignity which was as real as it was simple. "You have known me a long time and you know that I'm square with my friends no matter what happens."

"I'll do it," cried Henry Ham regally, holding out his hand in the darkness and meeting Nate's in a hearty grip, "I'll risk my reputation and help you out of this; but I don't want you to hang back should I ever call on you. Now, if what you say is true, and Stringhalt really was buried this afternoon, then some of those you claim have it in for you, must have dug him up and put him in your wagon in order to have you railroaded. They will probably

have the sheriff down by daylight, so the thing for you to do is to hustle. Can you dig fast?"

"Can I? Gee, I've dug out foxes before they even knew I was in their neighborhood. You bet I can dig fast."

"Then turn around and we'll go back after your shovel."

"Why turn around? We pass plenty of thickets on the way to where I'm goin'."

"We'll have to put him back exactly where they got him from. Did you notice the spot?"

"Yes, but wouldn't they most likely be watchin' for us there?"

"Hummmm?" mused Henry Ham.

"Pshaw," said Nate, "that'll be all right. Pluto, listen to me, pup; I want you to keep your earflaps lifted and your nose close to the ground. Do you understand? I reckon we'll get warnin' in plenty o' time, now."

The rest was so simple that Henry Ham, who was merely an honorary spectator, felt sleepy before it was completed. When they parted at the spot where the main road branched, Nate said gravely, "Now, I know that if a single soul had been watchin' us that dawg would have give warnin'; so it's just between you and me; and from this time on, I come at your call the same as Pluto comes at mine, and I won't ask any more questions about what the job is than he would. You needn't to worry that if I should get hooked I'd squeal on you. Good night, Henry Ham."

"Good night, Nate. I think I can trust you all right; but I doubt if Pluto is any more friendly than he was before."

"Pluto," said Nate, taking the dog's head between his hands. "From this time on Henry Ham Trotwood is as free with all my gear and riggin' as I am myself; so don't you ever so much as draw down your brows at him again. Now, you shake hands with him, free and friendly."

The dog offered a rough paw, and Nate continued, "Take a good sniff of him there, you Pluto. I don't ever want

you to come humblin' around me tryin' to make out that you mistook this gentleman for some one else. You'd better make sure of him now while you've got a good chance, 'cause I certainly will land heavy on you if you ever speak a harsh word to him again."

A chance remark of some time earlier suddenly occurred to Henry Ham and he said, "Nate, I'm curious to see if you really would trust me as much as I have trusted you. Who was it that you intended to deliver that stuff to to-night, and what was the stuff?"

"Pshaw, Henry Ham, what for you want to try me on sich a little gal's test as that? Why, that ain't nothin'. I was goin' to deliver a gallon of my whiskey up to old Chet, yon side o' the Swan's Neck."

"Old Chet!" exclaimed the youth.

"Sure he's one o' my best customers. He ain't no regular nigger, he's a full-blood Zulu — but he can talk English as good as you or me, though he don't let on to. I've bought pelts and sold whiskey to him for a good many years, and he's the trustwo'thiest man I know of anywhere — allus exceptin' present company, of course."

"Nate," said Henry Ham with a sincerity not to be found in his words, "I'm mighty glad we met tonight, and I'll never doubt you again. Good night, Nate. Good night, Pluto."

With a hearty handshake to the one and a pat to the other, the youth started homeward. He was in high fettle and at times his stride became a strut, which provokes the thought — at what period of its earthly career is the ego to be rigidly judged from the standpoint of absolute right. The pendulum of desire is constantly swinging from good to evil, while the inertia of inherited traits, and retrospective education act as drags so that the general average of the average man is singularly respectable.

As Henry Ham looked back upon his night's experiences

his eyes grew bright, his breathing became deep and refreshing, his face broke into a pleased smile and that inner personality of which we are all conscious as our most appreciative audience, was forced to regard his outer, active personality as a hero, and hence it was that he strutted through the chilly darkness with a beaming countenance and a body warmed by the glow of self-satisfaction.

Our judgment of others generally fails because we forget that a man sins in one state of mind and repents in another and that these states of mind are not interchangeable; so that the best a mortal can do is to cultivate habits of decency as a stockade to repel the inevitable onslaught of his soul's stealthy enemies. And whatever is true of sin and virtue is equally true of folly and wisdom, for they are brothers under the skin.

Henry Ham felt a keen admiration for the sturdy simplicity of Nate Shipley's honest outlawry and determined to deal fairly with his friendship; but at the thought of how nicely Nate had played into his hand, he hugged himself heartily and, being quite alone, chuckled audibly.

The first real discord came with a ray of light slipping through a small hole in one of the sitting room shades. Instantly young Doctor Wilson's trepidation of the previous forenoon flashed upon him and he surmised that his ill-treated allies had become nervous with suspense and had transferred this nervousness to his own family. A more careful consideration would have forced him to admit their right to a modicum of irritation; but at this juncture he was only moved to mutter disparaging comments upon their intelligence and gameness. However, Henry Ham's attitude toward a prescribed pill was to swallow it promptly and make wry faces afterward, so he cautiously opened the front door and even more cautiously closed it after him.

The only occupant of the room was his grandmother, who was asleep in her old hickory rocker, the filled but

unlighted cob pipe on the table beside her, and a wistful expression on her sweet old face. The wrinkles had sagged a little during the relaxation of slumber, and she looked older than when awake; yet still her face was placid beneath the reign of a courage which asked no questions of the future but calmly awaited each event as it charged down upon her.

A small smudge upon her right hand showed that she had bestowed upon the furnace that night attention which Bud had neglected, and the expedient mind of Henry Ham immediately decided to slip past her and pretend that he had returned and retired while she had been thus engaged. His sentimentality suffered a sharp pang at this disloyal thought; but sentimentality is a spongy tissue which frequently absorbs worthy notions before they can penetrate deeply enough to become active incentives.

He paused when he reached her chair and the face which leaned over her grey head was tender and the eyes were moist with love. She was his pal and he honored her, but he had not yet learned to go naked and unashamed, so he let his great chance for a beautiful communion go, and kissed her forehead so gently as not to disturb her.

"I trust you, my boy, I trust you," she murmured in her sleep, and softened and abashed he tiptoed across the room and up the stairs, leaving the little old lady asleep in her chair; but which one of her many boys she meant, or whether she was really left alone, none of us can tell.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A MAN in the fruit, or some similar industry which presents a fair opportunity for observing boys while engaged in plotting, raiding, or gloating over their spoils, is quite likely to regard them as alien creatures entirely content with supplying the demands of their voracious appetites, and guided by consciences which would scarcely be adequate to solve the problems of a crustacean; but this is not entirely true.

It is no easy thing to be a boy. A boy has to conduct himself according to a code which was put into force many ages before the twilight dawn of civilization; and he also has to circumvent the accredited agencies of this same civilization. He is sure to receive pitiless punishment if he does not come up to the standard of his fellows; while, owing to the less acute senses of his adult overseers, he stands a fair chance of escape when he merely breaks their laws and conventions.

The baby arrives in the same world which awaited his earliest ancestors and it is still as full of monsters and superstitions for him as it was for them. All the ages of his youth are spent in attempting to grow out of superstition and into science, and this requires such a granite stamina that most of us never do achieve it.

A young man in his hours of activity generally enjoys the poise of maturity; but frequently in his periods of reaction he lapses back to the monstrous chaos of childhood, where he must walk through the gloom alone because none other can appreciate his condition or helpfully sympathize with him. Henry Ham was heavy with sleep

when he finally stretched out in bed, and it would be a hard heart indeed which would have denied him the boon of repose; but to his surprise and horror the spirit of Stringhalt came out of the murk to taunt and reproach him. He had been upon fair terms with Stringhalt during life, and alone in the darkness afterward he had been upon terms of even greater familiarity; but then the heat of adventure had burned within him while now the chill of reaction had come to lower his vitality, and free the imps which emanate from nerves kept for a long period at an unaccustomed tension.

He tossed and twisted, he called philosophy, courage, common sense, and even prayer to his aid; but there at the foot of his bed stood Stringhalt, his fingers hooked into a threatening clutch, his lips distorted by an accusing leer, and in his cavernous eyes burned the misty, sulphurous gleam of baleful reproach.

Henry Ham knew he was not there, and said so, both under his breath and under the bed clothes. He even made the affirmation aloud with measured distinctness; but all the time he *was* there, and the inner Henry Ham whispered insistently that he was there, and that while the covers shielded him he was preparing to spring — and it was all real and very terrible.

Henry Ham was of a nervous temperament, although he did not himself suspect it and would have denied it vehemently had he been so accused. During periods of excitement he drew upon his nervous force without stint, and when his account was overdrawn he continued to draw until his credit also was used up. When this condition was reached, cautious old banker Nature took measures to relax him whether he would or no, and Henry Ham was forced to undergo a short period of blind panic which no one else ever suspected, and which he talked himself into, doubting as soon as his depression was passed

and he had a comfortable fund of nervous force to draw on again.

During these periods of involuntary bankruptcy his imagination supplied enough fears for a regiment of cowards; but Henry Ham despised a coward above all other creatures, and would have chosen death rather than to show by a single quiver that fear was gnawing at his heart. Even thus queerly are we formed, and even thus do we live always alone, each in his little shell.

After a time he slipped from feverish semi-wakefulness into a succession of ghastly dreams wherein the unsocial spirit of Stringhalt drove him in a chariot of fire on a sight-seeing tour of the infernal regions; and the visions there encountered convinced him that the late Dante Alighieri was a conscienceless optimist whose work as a realistic reporter was utterly untrustworthy.

Here were no jovial poets gamboling on the green with beauteous, carefree maidens; but instead he saw on every hand hideous faces distorted by the horrid gloating of perverted triumph, heard no music but the moans, the shrieks, and the groans of despair, breathed nothing but the stifling fumes of brimstone and sulphur; until at last his auto-intoxication burned itself out and just as the red winter sun cast its first dull streak upon the eastern sky he sank into a trance-like slumber in which his grandmother found him.

The twilight chill had awakened her and she had crept upstairs to his room to see if she could there find any clew to his unprecedented absence, and when she heard his slow, heavy breathing she paused in the center of the room and like all strong and sincere natures began to examine herself for errors before attempting to fasten them upon another.

"I must be getting to be a doddering old idiot," she ejaculated under her breath. "There I've been sitting

up the entire night waiting for him, and yet here he is sleeping like a baby before my very eyes."

She leaned cautiously over him and peered into his face, sniffing keenly a time or two. "He hasn't been smoking for some time, and he hasn't been drinking at all. I'll bet my independent spirit that the poor boy came in when I had the stand lamp down in the cellar, and thought I had gone to bed and deserted him. Well, you poor boy, I'm glad you've had a good night's rest, anyway; and it will be a long time before your stupid old pal thinks ill of you again."

Lightly kissing him on the forehead, and greatly comforted in spite of her self-condemnation, the old lady tiptoed out of the room and stole down the hall to scold Elizabeth for lying abed so late.

The face value of a ton of luck is quoted at only one pound of pluck, but a close observation of man in his least suspicious moments leads us to believe that if luck were actually subject to put, call, and the other phenomena of exchange, it would spend most of its time aviating in a rarified and exclusive altitude, very, very much above par.

Narrowing our considerations of the exchange ratios of luck and pluck to Henry Ham, we are inclined to the theory that it would require at least a ton of luck to extricate him from the scrapes into which his pound of pluck delighted to thrust him. His escapade of the preceding night had put in jeopardy his friendship, reputation, and physical body, and yet he awakened after a short sleep in a very happy frame of mind.

So deep had been the stupor which had succeeded his feverish agitation, that for a moment after waking he did not move. He found himself in that rare condition of delicious repose which almost approaches a spiritual state. He was thoroughly conscious of a body which had been well exercised, completely relaxed, and thoroughly rested,

and he lay for several minutes giving himself up to the enjoyment of this body which had recently been given such free and varied expression. Presently he noticed that there was not the faintest speck of cloud floating across the sky of his brain; so he drew a deep mental breath, marshalled the captives of his latest foray, and planned a new campaign.

He saw that in Nate Shipley, with his craft, his daring, and his knowledge of old Chet, he had acquired a valuable ally, he saw that if he dealt discreetly with young Doctor Wilson and Editor Harkins, he would be able to hold them in reserve until he needed them, and he saw that by the use of a sufficiently delicate discrimination, he could both escape personal violence himself, and retain a pretty power over Denny McGuire and Micky Donovan.

He had no idea how he could pull all these wires to his own advantage; but it pleased him to think that they were in his grasp; so he dressed in a cheerful frame of mind and permitted his imagination to picture various ways in which he would form a romantic acquaintance with the Morgan girl. Even in his imagination he could not decide how far this acquaintance should go; but he still felt her eyes gazing into his, and he knew that he would never be satisfied until he had touched her hand, heard her voice, and sounded the depths of her nature.

He paused in the delicate task of arranging his hair to just the desired carelessness, and smiled at himself in response to the preposterous notion that he might end by falling in love with her. It was curiosity he felt and nothing more; curiosity as to her woodsy opinions of the great outer world of which he complacently regarded himself as an active factor, curiosity as to her isolated mode of life, curiosity as to what she would really think of him and what means she would take to hide or express it. Yes, it was curiosity and nothing more.

Across the breakfast table he shot Grandma one reproachful glance to ascertain his standing in that quarter, and when she replied with a look of frank repentance, he knew that all was well, and immediately turned his thoughts upon the attitude he would assume toward young Doctor Wilson and Editor Harkins. He waited after the meal long enough to give Grandma kindly forgiveness for not being on hand to welcome him, accepted her contrite explanation as being a good joke on them both, and walked up town whistling a merry tune. It was a good little world and he quite approved of it.

Neither Doctor Wilson nor Editor Harkins were in so pleasant a frame of mind that morning as was Henry Ham. They had waited in the workshop until three o'clock and at that depressing hour their suspense had thrown subterfuge to the winds and issued an ultimatum. Suspense is seldom fatal, for the simple reason that after it has stretched its torturing course from fear to fear it finally arrives at desperation, desperation compels action, and action produces positive results. Any result is better than suspense.

Leaving a light and a note in the workshop for Henry Ham, they had gone together to the abode of Denny McGuire, and after discreetly tapping on the kitchen window had brought Denny to the door. He was pallid and sober, and he was supported by Micky Donovan in similar condition. Micky had refused to go home before daybreak, and Denny had rejoiced in his company. They had opened a fresh bottle but had found little pleasure in it.

"What's the matter?" asked Editor Harkins.

"Hush, don't spake so loud," cautioned Denny in a whisper. "Divil a bit do we know what's the mather."

"Well, what happened?" asked Harkins.

"Hu-hum, that's it, what happened?" responded McGuire mysteriously.

"Well, what did happen?" insisted the Editor.

"Donovan, you till him," ordered McGuire. "Oi don't aven loike to think iv it."

"Till him yoursilf," said Donovan.

"Didn't you get the body?" asked Doctor Wilson.

"For a while it looked as though we did," replied McGuire slowly, "but Oi dunno."

"What do you mean, man?" cried Harkins impatiently. "Surely you know whether or not you got the body."

"We got somethin' all roight, all roight," replied McGuire, nodding his head ominously; "but phat it was, upon me sowl Oi don't know."

"Now here," said Harkins sternly, "there is no use standing here in the cold talking nonsense. Tell us in as few words as possible just what happened. Remember that this is a serious matter."

"Sarious mather is it, huh?" said McGuire, looking scornfully at the Editor. "Much you know about it! It's aisy enough to sit comfortably waiting be a warum fire in a loighted room, and then to say it's a sarious mather; but that ain't goin' through wid it out in the dark — is it, Donovan?"

"Humph!" ejaculated Donovan nasally. "It's far from it, McGuire, far from it."

"I want to know what happened, and I want to know now," said Harkins, raising his voice.

"Hush, man, hush!" said Denny, putting his hand on the Editor's shoulder. "Come into the kitchen and Oi'll till yez — but, on me sowl, Oi hate to spake iv it."

"We had no throuble at all, at all, in gittin' him," continued Denny as soon as they were seated about the kitchen stove. "The sile hadn't aven sittled yit, an' we slipped him out iv his box an' sat him up on the sate iv the booggy fer all the warld loike a gintlemin iv leisure. Thin we put the dirt back in the grave and smoothed it nately over the top before we started to drive back. Iverything wint

all roight until we turned aff on the soide road, and then he began to lurch back an' forth on the sate; and we —— "

"Who began to lurch?" asked Doctor Wilson.

"The carpse began to lurch," insisted McGuire.

"Go on!" scoffed Harkins. "What are you trying to give us?"

"Oi'm givin' yez the salemn truth," protested Denny. "He began to lurch an' push an' shove around in his sate fer all the warld as though he was havin' a fit."

"Nonsense!" said Harkins.

"It sometimes happens that rigor mortis lasts but a very short time in the case of one who has been long afflicted, and it was nothing but the rough road which caused him to lurch about," said young Doctor Wilson patronizingly.

"Oh, is that all?" said McGuire sarcastically. "Will, Oi haven't anny idy phat rigor martus is, but Oi don't belave it had annything at all to do wid this particular case. Oi was busy conthrolin' the harse, but Micky Donovan grabbed howld iv the carpse and did his bist to hold him quoit — and Micky's not narely so frail as he looks."

"'Phat's the matter wid yez?'" I asked iv the carpse. "'It's woild fer a dhrink I am,' he made answer in a voice loike a goint bullfrog, sick wid the roup and croaken up out iv an empty cistern — and thin Oi started to turn the harse around.

"'Phere are ya goin'?' asked the carpse.

"'Oi'm goin' to put yez back phere Oi got yez from, and thin wash me hands iv the whole affair,'" sez Oi, and wid that he grabbed the loins out iv me hands.

"'Man,' sez he, 'fer the last twinty hours Oi've been in hill, and the juice is all fried out iv me. Now, Oi'm goin' to have a dhrink if Oi have to bust all the laws iv nature,' and wid that he flung Micky out the lift soide iv the booggy, me out the roight soide, an' standin' straight up, he struck the harse a blow wid the phip. There was a flash iv blue

loightnin' which blinded me eyes and the nixt Oi knew Oi was staggerin' up the strate to me own home."

"Great Scott, McGuire," scoffed Harkins, "you're not trying to put that stuff over as the truth, I hope."

"Listen to me," rejoined McGuire, with overwhelming solemnity, "ivery ward Oi've told yez is as thrue as the Diclaration of Indypendence. The harse didn't rach home till an hour afther we did, and he was all in a muck iv sweat. Oi didn't dare touch him fer fear Oi'd be struck be loightnin'; so if yez doubt one ward Oi've towld yez, ye can go out to the stable and see him standin' there wid yer own eyes — the harness still on him."

"Were you along, Donovan?" asked Harkins of that individual.

"Oi was, bad cess to the luck that took me," replied Donovan in a tone of deep and sincere regret.

"Well, you tell us exactly what happened and don't let anything that Denny said influence you."

"Oi'm a Christian mon," said Donovan and then he paused to give this thought ample time to make a deep impression, "Oi'm the feyther iv a family" — another portentous pause — "and Oi've been a lifelong Dimmycrat. Phat Oi say to yez now Oi say as though gaspin' out me last brith on me own dith bid, and Oi call on the saints above to bear witness on me. Denny McGuire towld it to yez jist as it happened wid but a few ixceptions — and the poor divil was too bad scared to take notice iv thim. Ivery event happened jist as he towld it up to the time Oi got disgusted wid the way the carpse kipt thryin' to crowd me out iv the carriage, and began to handle him a moite rough. McGuire may have jumped, an' Oi think he did; but Oi was throwed, an' Oi was throwed be a rid divil wid horns. Roight alongside McGuire Oi landed, and Oi could hear the rustling iv bat wings all about us. 'Cross

yer fingers, Denny,' Oi whispered, 'Cross yer fingers.' So we both crossed our fingers, and that's what saved us."

"Aw, rats!" exclaimed Harkins, "your story is worse than McGuire's."

"If yez don't belave Oi was throwed," said Donovan with the utmost magnanimity, as he turned his back to them, "look at me coat phere it was split up the back. When a mon has towld the simple truth, he can't add nawthin' to it to make it anny stronger — so yez can both go to hill as soon as ya loike."

The incidents of Donovan's narration were not convincing; but the friendly tone of voice in which he had begun it, and the defiant and resentful tone with which he had responded to their expressions of skepticism, convinced Harkins and Wilson that no matter what had really happened, Donovan himself believed what he was telling — and this was not comforting.

Both Harkins and Wilson were in the materialism of youth, and neither had any faith in red devils with horns; but the fact that the potential object of their anatomical research had escaped and was still at large was a personal matter and one subject to complications of a most calamitous character. They stared at each other, and they questioned their two agents; but they found it impossible to bring about any revision of the important details.

McGuire denied the appearance of a red devil, but admitted that Donovan had advised him to cross his fingers; Donovan expressed a doubt that McGuire had exchanged so many remarks with the corpse as he claimed; but both agreed that the late lamented Stringhalt had demanded drink and had then become violent; after which they had surrendered their equipage to him and the equipage had later returned with the lines wrapped around the whipstock

and no passenger visible to mortal eye — and if any doubters cared to investigate, the horse was still standing out by the stable waiting to be unhitched.

They went out to the road wagon, Harkins and Wilson eager and unafraid, McGuire and Donovan cautious and expectant. They felt of the shovels, they examined the horse, and Harkins and Wilson were convinced that part of their contract had been carried out, and McGuire and Donovan were convinced that whatever spell had been laid upon their outfit was removed; whereupon they unhitched the horse and permitted him to enter his stall and partake of the heat and provender there awaiting him. Then the four returned and, seating themselves about the fire, fell into the silence of deep thought.

This silence was broken by the entrance of Mrs. McGuire, who was a lady of weight. Her form was heavy, her voice was heavy, her jaw was heavy, and the arm which ruled her husband and their joint progeny was heavy, yet it was not slow. During proper hours she was a heavy sleeper; but Monday morning being fraught with copious activities of a renovating character, she had awakened for the purpose of arousing her spouse to build a fire in the kitchen stove.

Finding him absent and remembering that he had been called from home on the preceding night, she had arisen, thrown on a loose wrapper, and come to the kitchen in person.

When she beheld the four men seated silently around the cozy fire, she drew herself up on the threshold, placed her fists upon her hips, and with a depth of comprehensive inquiry, pronounced the word, "We-i-ell?" in three syllables.

"Oi have already started the foire, Agnes," replied Denny.

"Is this all the hilp ya had?" asked Mrs. McGuire sarcastically.

"These are jist a few frinds who dropped in to call," explained Denny.

Mrs. McGuire surveyed the group with interest. "Are ya ixpictin' anny more?" she asked.

"Iv coorse Oi'm not," replied McGuire with that gentle sincerity which only comes after a naturally convivial spirit has survived the discipline of early matrimony. "We were all cold whin we got back, and so Oi invited thim in to warum a bit. Now, run back to bid loike a good gurl and Oi'll put on the biler."

"Oi know 'em both," said Mrs. McGuire, pointing a finger first at Harkins and then at Wilson. "Oi know 'em all three — but thin, Donovan don't count prisint or absint, wan way or the ither. That wan is the iditor iv the payper, the *Binlo Daily Citizen*. Iviry toime me brother Dan gits arristed fer whippin' the marshal he puts it in his snippy little newspaper — but iv course he's wilcome to drop in here in the dark iv the marnin' to warum himsilf. Whin me an' you took that thrip to Indynaplus and stayed the bisht part iv a wake, niver a ward iv it was printed in his nasty shate; but whin me sister Kate's oldest bye got into a bit iv throuble clear up at Chicago, there it was, twice as bad as the thruth, square at the top of the first column on the front page iv the *Binlo Daily Citizen* — but iv course he's wilcome to come into me kitchen and warum.

"And there beside him sits young Docther Wilson — young Docther Wilson — Docther Wilson who makes a spiciality of gerums. Whin little Pathrick had a shmall touch iv faver here a month or so ago, who came in to tind him? Who, indade, but young Docther Wilson? 'Phat ails the choild?' sez Oi. 'Gerums,' sez he. 'Is it annything loike the masels?' sez Oi, fer the choild was a bit flushed in his face. 'No,' sez he, lookin' as woise as a fat owl, 'gerums is shmall organizers, little boogs, loike.' 'Phere did he ketch 'em?' sez Oi. 'Crawlin' around on the kitchen flure,' sez he. And me moppin' the flure ivery wake iv me loife! 'Show me wan,' sez Oi. 'Show me wan

iv thim gerums on airy flure iv mine and Oi'll ate it before yer very eyes.' Flies there might be in the summertoime, or ants; but gerums — niver.

"'Moppin' the flure would do no good,' sez he, 'the dawg might bring in gerums on his fate tin minutes afther you'd got through moppin'.' 'If the dawg would come in here before me flure was stone dry, Oi'd bate the hide aff him,' sez Oi. 'Furthermore,' sez Oi, 'the dawg has niver had a faver in his whole loife. If he has gerums on his fate, why don't he have a faver all the toime? Sure niver a day goes by that he don't lick his own fate, and the baby's too. And look at that baby,' sez Oi, pointin' to little Pathrick, 'sure he's only tin months owld and he weighs twinty-three pounds, and ates mate and potaties. Take yer gerumless society babies an' some iv thim can't aven crape whin they're a year owld, and they're pale an puny, an' don't weigh the half iv him. Go wan about yer business,' sez Oi, 'Oi'll have nawthin' more to do wid ya'; so he took up his hat and lift and Oi dandled the choild face down on me knee a bit, thumped him a whoile on the back, let him have a good cry to loosen him up, nursed him all he'd howld, gave him a crust iv brid to comfort him, and he fell aslape in tin minutes and hasn't had a sick spill since.

"That's the way young Docther Wilson imposes on the poor; but iv course he's wilcome to come prowlin' around here at midnoight to sit warumin' his shins at me foire until day breaks. Put on that biler, Denny McGuire; and Donovan, yer a married mon, home is the place fer sich as you — Good marnin' to ya."

Under the circumstances, Editor Harkins and Doctor Wilson saw no reason for prolonging their visit; and so, with as natural an assumption of ease as possible, they expressed their appreciation of the hospitality they had enjoyed, and followed Micky Donovan into the frosty air.

"Donovan," said Harkins earnestly, after they had arrived in silence at the corner from which their homing paths diverged, "can't you think of any possible manner that you could have lost the body in a perfectly natural way?"

"Listen to me," replied Donovan fretfully. "Losin' the body wasn't altogether unnatural and might be explained aisy enough; but understand that Oi was as calm as a crock iv butther before the carpse began shovin' again' me and then Oi was ownly a bit vexed and irritated; but whin the carpse ris up and sez in a dape, hollow vice loike the low note on a harse-fiddle, that he's goin' to have a dhrink if he has to turn Binlo into a cinder whoile he's gittin' it — why that puts a stop to your perfectly natural nonsense, and that's all there is to it."

"What'll you take to go along with us and show us the exact spot where this happened?" asked Harkins.

"Are aither iv yez married?" asked Mr. Donovan.

"No," replied the two young men in unison.

"Will," said Mr. Donovan in his most ceremonious manner, "thin there's no way to make it clear to ya; but Oi'm a married man, and not only that — Oi'm married to the sister iv Agnes McGuire. Good marnin'."

The two young men stood upon the corner watching Mr. Donovan hurrying home through the gloom, which was rendered all the more lonely from his sincere doubt that he was, or ever again would be entirely alone; and the two young men sighed as they turned cheerless expressions of inquiry upon each other's faces. Each shook his head, and they turned and walked up town along the deserted sidewalk dimly lighted by lone, lorn coal oil lamps of antiquated pattern which stood far apart in misanthropic isolation.

"Do you know," said Editor Harkins, after he had remarked tersely upon the discomforts of stumbling into

a hole in the crossing, "I am going to start a crusade for improving this obsolete old village. Why, towns of half our size have electric lights, pavements, telephones — good heavens, man, our last mayor was defeated for re-election because he shut the geese off the streets! I don't like to knock my own town; but I do hate to see a town putrify before it gets ripe!"

"I wish," rejoined young Doctor Wilson wistfully, "that this town would look as good to me tomorrow night as it did a week ago."

"Oh, bosh! I doubt if much fuss is made over what was really an earnest effort to improve the entire race — even if it does get out. Anyway, I shall start such a furore for improvement in the *Citizen* that every other sensation will soon sink into oblivion. Judge Hooker talks improvement now and again, and every so often Henry Ham spouts a lot of flowery stuff on the subject; but I intend to hammer away at this one topic until Benlo either starts to crawl up the rugged hill of progress, or breaks her heart with shame."

"By the way," said young Doctor Wilson, a clear note of surging hope in his tone, "Henry Ham may have brought the body to your workshop himself. Let's hustle up there."

They walked briskly to the workshop and after they had surveyed its undisturbed interior, Editor Harkins said deprecatingly, "You can't trust anything any more; here the lamp is smoking and the fire has gone out without permission."

"He hasn't been here," said Doctor Wilson sadly. "What shall we do now?"

"Go to bed," said Harkins.

"The worst thing we could do," said Wilson. "If any suspicion is aroused, our being in bed would direct it to us at once. It is nearly dawn, now."

"Then come along down to the Sanctum, and I'll give

you an outline of my campaign for a bigger, brighter, better Benlo until we can force our way into a restaurant and get a little lunch."

"All right," agreed Wilson with a sigh.

Thus it was that Editor Harkins was seated with his feet on the table, a cob pipe in his mouth, and a dozen almost plausible plans in his head, while young Doctor Wilson sat gazing dolefully out of the window and wondering at what moment the blow would fall, when the debonair Henry Ham marched by whistling his tune of self-satisfaction. The doctor pounded on the window and the editor rushed to the door and ordered him in. "Well?" they both exclaimed as soon as Henry Ham had entered.

"It's all right, it's all right, now; but believe me, boys, that was a close call," replied Henry, seating himself.

"What happened?" asked Doctor Wilson.

Henry Ham sat in deep thought without replying until Editor Harkins cried, "What are you waiting for — an ax to break it gently?"

"Now, fellows," said Henry Ham, "I can't tell you what happened because it would force me to give the name of a perfectly innocent party, and you could not help but give him a look of inquiry the next time you passed him. This would arouse his suspicions, and I tremble at the result. Denny and Micky got the body all right, and started here with it; but they left the rig a moment to get a little drink, and — Do either of you know an elderly man who is a somnambulist, a sleep walker?"

Harkins shook his head, while Wilson claimed to know three.

"It may have been one of the three, and it may not," said Henry Ham; "but don't you ever try to guess which one it was or you'll show it in your face, and he is positively liable to go insane or commit suicide. I don't even dare to tell you any more of the details, except that he removed

the corpse and took his place. Of course I don't know what happened while he was in the road wagon."

"But what became of the body?" demanded Wilson.

"I kept watch over it, trying to think up a plan for disposing of it — But no, really I dare not even hint at the rest."

"Confound you," cried Harkins, "we're not children to blab everything we know! Why I know scandals about most of the people in town, but I keep 'em under my hat. Tell us what happened to the body."

"Well," said Henry Ham slowly, "the somnambulist presently drove back alone and loaded the body into the buggy. He was starting to drive up town when I — Fellows, I hate to recall the effect it had on him when I woke him up. I thought he'd kill himself right there; but I soothed him, helped him bury the body in its old grave, drove him home, swore to keep his secret, and then turned McGuire's Potato-masher adrift. How much did you pay McGuire?"

"I paid him five dollars on account," said Harkins.

"I'll pay it out of my own pocket," said Henry Ham, offering a bill.

"No," cried young Doctor Wilson fervently, "I'll pay it, I insist upon paying it, and, Henry Ham, I want you to know that I am under obligations to you for the rest of my life."

As Doctor Wilson had an independent income aside from his practice, the young men finally compromised by letting him reimburse Editor Harkins.

"By George," exclaimed Harkins after deep thought, "that tale is harder to believe than McGuire's was!"

"No," said Doctor Wilson reassuringly, "somnambulists have done some of the most remarkable feats possible. This may seem preposterous to one unfamiliar with this affection; but to me it is merely an endorsement of other well-established cases. Take, for instance —— "

Doctor Wilson, in the freedom of relief, proceeded to give instances of the wonderful dexterity displayed by somnambulists who, in their waking hours, were totally incapable of duplicating their performances.

"Well," interrupted Harkins after a time, "Benlo may be a safe place for a somnambulist to venture forth after dark; but I am going to preach improvement until even wide-awake, normal beings may walk the streets after sundown without breaking their legs. First, we need decent street lamps. Next we need —"

"I'm with you in this, Harkins," interrupted Henry Ham ten minutes later. "You can count on me, and also I venture to say, on Judge Hooker; but just at present I must return to my daily treadmill and grind out a lot of dreary forms. Last night was a soul-tester; but still it helped to vary the monotony. So long."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The wind does not blow where it listeth any more than a passenger train does. It would be most humiliating if the wind were given such freedom of choice while a young man was forced to obey the laws of heat, gravity, and attraction. Henry Ham was attracted by the girl above the Swan's Neck, he felt deeply the gravity of office routine and he warmed and expanded at the memories of the stirring night he had spent in affecting a compromise between the quick and the dead.

His comfortable conscience did not reproach him as being guilty of the slightest impropriety upon this occasion, and he looked back upon it and frankly longed for another opportunity to be taken out of himself by a series of consequences which would waft him over a sea of suspense to a haven of satisfaction. He spent but little time in introspection, and therefore was not familiar with his own attitude toward many phases of life, most of his viewpoints being instinctive. Without being aware of it, he loosely regarded morality as having somewhat the nature of a boiler, truth as comparing prettily with steam, and justifiable falsehood as being the safety valve. His character was nicely suggested by the fact that he admitted, as freely to others as to himself, that there was such a thing as justifiable falsehood; and there he experienced no pain at having been forced to deflect slightly from actual facts in bringing the details of the previous night's adventure to a pleasant climax.

Editor Harkins' enthusiasm over the crusade he was about to start for Benlo's uplift interested Henry Ham's

imagination and also hampered his clerical work. He had no real civic pride, but the thought of local activity appealed to him, and he reviewed the substantial men of the town for material assets upon which to base a hope. Finding but little, he turned to his work in desperation, and by three o'clock of the afternoon, feeling that he had contributed as much to his employer's welfare as could be expected, he took hat and coat, and started forth to walk the restlessness out of his system.

It was a clear, dry day, brisk and tingling, and he walked up the Marndale Pike until he reached a lane leading off to the bottom land between the two ends of the horseshoe curve known as the Swan's Neck. From the high ground down which the path led, he noticed how close together these two points were, and also that the creek at the upper point was at least forty feet higher than at the lower. It suddenly struck him that by cutting a gash through the narrow wall of stone, which forced the change of course at the upper curve, and damming the old channel, a straight, swift current of water would result which would develop an enormous amount of cheap water power. He sat down on a stone and spent a very pleasant ten minutes in manufacturing little stories of the prominent roles he would assume if he were able to develop and control this power; and was so taken with his own action as an industrial hero that he resolved to post himself upon water power and then organize a company. He did not like details and wanted the company to attend to them while he prepared himself to fill the prominent roles.

Presently, finding that heating a thoroughly chilled stone was slow work, he sauntered on down the path looking to right and left with quite an air of ownership. Rounding the cliff head, he noticed a small cabin nestling close against its face and recalled that a curious character by the name of Fleet Hayes had lived there during his boyhood. In

view of the fact that the Morgan girl lived less than a half mile from this cabin and the water power possibility lay at its very door, Henry Ham decided that he could not better employ himself than in forming an acquaintance with Mr. Hayes.

He vainly sought to recall some polite attention he had paid to Mr. Hayes; but as the attentions of the boyish gang of which he had been an honored member had consisted chiefly in teasing Mr. Hayes until he chased them, and in then begging him from points of vantage to inform them why he was called "Fleet," Henry Ham determined to ignore the past completely and trust to his present charms in the launching of a new acquaintance.

The cabin was a homemade affair demonstrating several unaffiliated schools of architecture. The original room was of rough logs, the first addition was of shingles, and the second was of concrete. The third was a lean-to of rough slabs, and the entity was a sacrifice to individuality rather than art. As Henry Ham drew near to the cabin, cudgeling his brains for an opening remark which would appear natural, attractive, and provocative of genial conversation, Fleet Hayes stepped from the door of the log section, and called, "Caroline, Caroline, come on in here, or I won't feed you a bite."

Fleet Hayes was a dry, wizened little man with a complexion like mission leather, and bright little eyes. He wore a flannel shirt and blue overalls and seemed to be suffering from the heat.

"Good afternoon," said Henry Ham.

Mr. Hayes looked up at the sky, sniffed the wind, returned his gaze to the youth, and responded without enthusiasm, "Oh, it'll do, I reckon. Seen anything of my mule?"

"No, I haven't," replied Henry Ham politely. "Have you lost her?"

Mr. Hayes turned a glance of amused surprise upon

Henry Ham, and replied with a chuckle. "Lost her? Well, I'd just like to see you lose that mule. She's run away forty-six times since I've owned her, and every time she's come straight home without knockin' a splinter off the hub of airy wheel. She's playful, that's all; but if she don't line up here shortly, she don't get nairy bite tonight, nairy a single bite."

"Is there anything the matter with her?" asked Henry Ham with genuine interest.

"The matter with her is, she's spoilt, plumb spoilt. Been humored too much. She was only a weanlin' when I got her and she ain't got no more self-control than an only child. She'll stand for hours, restin' first on one hip and then on the other; and all in the world she ever thinks of is some new way to amuse herself. Do you know, that mule is twenty-nine year old, but she don't act a day over ten. Caroline, Caroline"— lifting his voice to a husky call — "you stop your nonsense, now, and come on in here."

"A mule is a treacherous beast, isn't it?" asked Henry Ham.

"Man is the only treacherous beast the' is," replied Fleet Hayes candidly. "I've had doin's with most all the animals the' is, and man is the only one that'll bite the hand which feeds him. At least," he continued thoughtfully, "no other animal will bite the hand which feeds him, unless that hand is pokin' around where it hasn't no business to be. When animals is engaged in the raisin' of a family, they put their whole mind on it, and, naturally, they don't encourage no liberties at this period."

"That seems odd," was the only comment which occurred to Henry Ham, but he made it with such a winning smile that its scope was greatly magnified.

"I've got a hen I call Salina, and she's the vainest thing ya ever saw; but you can't flatter that hen when she's

settin'. For the general run she'll sit on my lap hours at a time havin' her head scratched and she'll chirp about it like a sleepy sparrow; but when Salina's settin', why that's all the' is to life as far as she's concerned, and she'll peck my hand every time I try to stroke her. I've tried it fifty times, but she'll allus peck it, hard as ever she can."

"She must be an original hen. What breed is she?"

"That's more'n I know. I don't even know what breed of man I am exactly, myself, so I don't get snobbish with the animals I associate with.

"Caroline, Caroline. I'm goin' to bust you over the head as soon as you do come home, and you don't get one bite. Mark my word on't; you don't get one single bite. Fact of the matter is," whispered Fleet Hayes confidentially, "that mule is right close here somewhere, hidin' in a clump o' bushes and like as not laughin' softly to herself. She eats twigs an' dry leaves and what-not, during the winter, and sometimes she stays out all night just for the joke of making me worried."

"You seem fond of animals," suggested Henry Ham.

"A man has to be fond of something," replied Fleet Hayes grimly, "and I've had a heap of experience with boys. Once in a while a man outgrows bein' a boy, but for the most part it keeps on croppin' out in him, so I don't trust 'em much. My coon is more respectable than airy boy the' ever was in the whole world."

"Coon!" repeated Henry Ham, molding his face into an expression of keen interest, as though of all living creatures, coons were most dear to him. "Do you own a coon?"

"Nobody ever owned a coon," replied Fleet Hayes scornfully. "Coons is free critters and can't be owned no more than children can. There's a coon named George, and me and him live together; but I don't own him."

"Could I see him?" asked Henry Ham.

Fleet Hayes looked at Henry Ham with raised eyebrows,

then he drew them down cunningly, and said, "Say, have you got any books to sell?"

Henry Ham returned the glance with frank amusement. "No," he replied with a laugh, "I have nothing to sell and nothing to buy. I just got disgusted with town and town people, and came out to the woods to freshen up."

"Do you smoke a pipe?"

"I do," replied Henry Ham, producing his polished bulldog.

"Do you own a dog?"

"Well, I'm teaching a bull pup manners," replied Henry Ham; "but I can't say I own him. He is just one of the family and I fear my younger brothers will spoil him."

"He, he, ha!" laughed Fleet Hayes. "I thought I'd fool you into sayin' that you owned a dog; and then I was goin' to say that no slave owner could set foot into my home; but I've took a sort of curiosity toward you, and if you'll be pleased to step in and smoke a pipe, why I'll be pleased to sit across from you and smoke another. Caroline, Caroline — I'll give you just one more chance and then I'll lock up your shed and shoot salt into you if you try to break it down. She did that once, the hussy! Come in, come in, and make yourself at home."

Henry Ham followed his host into the log section, and found it homey and clean. A cheerful fire was snapping in the open fireplace, and a solemn cat of immense size and tawny color was dozing at one side of the hearth.

"Where's the coon?" asked Henry Ham.

"Just sit down and make yourself at home," advised Fleet Hayes. "George knows 'at you're here and he's studyin' your face to see whether it suits him or no. If he decides he wants to make up to you, why he will; if not, he don't have to. He's a free critter, George is."

"Try some of my tobacco?" asked Henry Ham, proffering his sack.

"Well, that's a good joke!" chuckled Fleet Hayes. "Boy, it's been as many as forty year since I've insulted my nose by burnin' store tobacco under it. When I want to burn up weeds I go off to one side and build a fire, but when I want to enjoy a smoke, why, I fill my pipe with long green, and then I know I'm smokin' tobacco. Have a try at mine. It'll like enough set your head to spinnin'; but what's the use of smokin' if you can't feel it a bit?"

Henry Ham heard a slight noise, and, looking up toward the peak of the roof, saw two bright little eyes glancing at him from a box fastened there. The wise little face seemed studying him intently, and so he dropped his eyes to the canvas sack of long green held out by Fleet Hayes, and stuffed his pipe from its contents.

"I observe," said Fleet Hayes," that you know somethin' about animals. Most greenies would have cooed up to George until he would have gone back to bed plumb disgusted, and that would be the end of him for this day. Now, if you'll just pay no heed to him, he'll keep on tryin' to attract your attention until he'll climb clear up into your lap and nibble at your nose. Don't be scared of him, he's got manners."

"George seems a funny name for a coon," remarked Henry Ham.

"I heard tell once of a grown man who had the name of Theophilus, and since then no names have seemed funny to me," replied Fleet Hayes. "Do you set much store by ancestors?"

"I should hate to have had criminal or insane ancestors," replied Henry Ham.

"Well, you probably did have them," remarked Fleet Hayes candidly, "most of us did; but what I mean was, do you take much joy in tracin' your line back to the nobility?"

"As far as I know, my line don't lead in that direction," replied Henry Ham frankly.

"You surprise me," said Fleet Hayes with twinkling eyes; "I more'n half guessed you off as bein' one of these Daughters of the American Revolution sort. The's a lot o' folks nowadays who take so much comfort in what a grand lot of ancestors they've had that they don't qualify to be ancestors themselves. I don't care a mite about my own ancestors — though I did have some tol'able prancy ones. That coon, there, is named after George Hayes who settled at Windsor, Connecticut, in sixteen-eighty, and was descended from some of the most prominent Scottish Chiefs — and between you and me, most of the prominent Scottish Chiefs were criminals tried and true. Me and Rutherford B were blood kin, though not on speakin' terms; which I regard as bein' satisfactory all around — neither of us bein' in a position to get much entertainment out of visitin' the other, though I admit to feelin' a bit pouched out durin' the time that Rutherford B was President. Don't jump when he touches you."

This latter remark had no connection with those immediately preceding. The raccoon had scampered down the runway, pausing occasionally to chirp and chatter at Henry Ham, and now had come to the back of his chair. He tapped on the chair sharply and then dodged back. Repeating this several times and getting no attention, he sprang into Henry Ham's lap and looked into his face with comical bravado. "What beautiful fur he has," said Henry Ham to Fleet Hayes, who was regarding his favorite's antics with pride and pleasure.

"It'd be better 'n it is, if he'd sleep outdoors," replied Mr. Hayes; "but that coon is more set in his ways than Caroline is."

The mention of this name prompted Fleet Hayes to rush

to the door and call lustily, " Caroline, Caroline; if I start after you with my gad, I'll stripe you up 'till you look like a zebra — you sassy minx."

" George is the playfullest coon I was ever acquainted with," said Fleet Hayes with a chuckle, as he returned to his seat by the fire. " There isn't a mite of real harm in him; but I've had to war with him consid'able to keep him from pesterin' the poultry out o' their senses. I don't mind him toyin' around with the poultry some in cold weather cause it keeps 'em from gettin' too fat; but when he sits down with his back eased up again' a corner and starts in to pluck one complete, why, I slips up and gives him a bat on the ear — and then him and me have to war it out between ourselves."

" Do you keep many chickens?" asked Henry Ham.

" Nope, only a few for company," replied Fleet Hayes. " I don't care much for eggs as food; but I'll bet as much as the law allows that I've got the best henhouse the' is in this united country. Did you notice that lean-to attachment I've added on the north side?" Henry Ham nodded. " Well, that lean-to is my henhouse, and if ya'll step into this here shingle attachment, I'll show you how I gather eggs."

With frank satisfaction, Fleet Hayes led the way into the shingle addition of his original home, and as Henry Ham followed he noticed that the room was filled with tools, boards, rubbish, sweet-scented shavings, ill-smelling glue, and divers and sundry articles hanging from the ceiling, standing in corners, and littering bench and floor. Fleet Hayes paused just inside the room and said solemnly, " Now this is my workshop; but the' ain't one person in a hundred who knows 'at I ever do work, so I don't want you to streak down to Benlo and make a scandal out of it. Who are you, anyway?"

" I am Henry Ham Trotwood," admitted the guest,

his face unconsciously breaking into delicate lines of curiosity as to what effect this admission would have.

"Pshaw," replied Fleet Hayes candidly, "I thought you were plumb a stranger. So you're just nothin' at all but a growed-up Benlo boy. Say, did you and me ever come together — honest, now?"

"Well," returned Henry Ham, with reddening face, "I do recall one incident when the other boys ran under a tree while I was in the branches, and I dropped a noose over you as you ran underneath — but you caught me before I was able to get away, and larruped me soundly."

"I remember that boy well, though I would never have recognized you as him," said Fleet Hayes seriously. "First that boy got square with me, and then I got even with that boy. The time I got between him and his clothes and chased him clear to the outskirts in a state of nature, I counted as puttin' me several laps ahead, and if he hadn't 'a locked himself in that barn, I'd have drove him clear to the Court House; but that boy got even with me, he certainly did. The time he drained the water off the cliff into my chimney made me in mind of the Ark during a storm. I had at that time a pair of coons and four young ones, a couple o' cats, the cutest little red fox you ever laid eyes on — Lionel was his name and he'd allus wink his eyes when you spoke it at him. Then the' was a bunch of little fellers, squirrels, rabbits, and so forth and so on. Well, we were all sittin' around the hearth this night with just enough fire to make a cheery light, when it began to rain. We were eatin' nuts an' things, and enjoyin' as peaceful an evenin' as ever I put in when the rain began to come down in bucketfuls.

"Now, at first nothin' occurred to even put me in suspicion; but all of a sudden it seemed as though Beaver Crick herself had chose to come down my chimney. He, he, ha — by gum, it was funny! That is, to look back on.

All of them animals concluded that I was the point of safety, and when the fire splashed out in a burst of steam, they all jumped into my lap and began to claw for places to hang on. It was as dark as the liver of Pharaoh's mummy, the water was surgin' out across my ankles like a flood, and — Well, you can't form no idee of how nervous a feller gits when a chimney that has been drawin' like a mortgage for fifteen years suddenly begins to spout water like a mill race — to say nothin' of him bein' cluttered up with hysterical animals at the time. My clothes were torn to shreds by the time I found a match, and the water was knee deep. Boy, you certainly did score on me that time. If the latch hadn't busted off my door I reckon we'd all have drowned."

"What makes you think it was I?" asked Henry Ham.

"In the first place," replied Fleet Hayes with an air of deep erudition, "I had already had consid'able dealin's with you. You didn't have a whit more devilment than the other boys — that bein' impossible — but you had more original and irritatin' ways of gittin' rid of your devilment; although I didn't have to rely on what I guessed about ya, I proved it out.

"I went up to the top o' the cliff next mornin' at five o'clock and saw how you had built your double dam so that no water would trickle into my chimney until a good head of it had gathered, and I must say 'at the way you run that stove pipe out with the elbow pointin' straight down was ingenious enough to tickle me, het up as I was. I knew 'at you'd sneak up there to see how it had worked, and I thought I'd catch you at it by climbin' a far tree; but you had picked out that very same tree to spy from and I mighty near got you when you started to climb up. You saw me too quick and got away though. That was the last chance I've had at you until now; and I really suppose I ought to get square with you yet; but truth to

tell, boy, you furnished me lots of amusement thinkin' over the campaigns we used to have, and I don't bear you no more ill will than I bear General Wheeler who bothered me a heap when I was soldierin'. So put it there."

With his whole heart, Henry Ham shook hands, and faith in his own luck was greatly strengthened. "That's mighty square in you," he said; "and I'll promise not to play any more pranks on you."

"Let me tell you somethin'," said Fleet Hayes with a dry, wise smile, "a man don't lie, a man rears straight up on his hind legs and he's so full of self-esteem that it strains his neck to bow polite to them in authority. The' ain't no feller's opinion on earth he values so much as his own, so he just naturally can't lie; while a boy — he, he, ha! Well, you see a boy is surrounded by a lot of fool rules and a lot of sensible rules and a lot of wild nature that belongs to him and a lot of tame property that he'd like to enjoy the fruits of, and he has a spirit of mischief in him as big as a woodchuck; so he breaks rules as offhand as an elephant rippin' through the snares on a rabbit-run, and when he's finally netted up, he has to be his own lawyer, and not havin' the kind of testimony which would be popular with them who's tryin' him, he puts over the best grade of fiction he can devise — and he's so rejoiced to escape that there isn't any room left in his heart for repentance. Now, I don't know nothin' personal about you, but I have studied a heap of faces in my time, and I wouldn't be a mite surprised if the' was consid'able boy left in you yet."

"There may be some foundation for what you say," admitted Henry Ham; "but still I think you can trust me."

"Well, I shall trust ya — but I'll keep both eyes on ya, too," chuckled the lean little man. "Keepin' a boy straight is entirely too much work for one conscience. But what was it I came in here to show ya? It's been so long since

I've loosened up to talk right out freely with a human being that my tongue whirls along like a windmill."

"You were going to show me how you gathered eggs," replied Henry Ham.

"So I was, so I was. You see those little slidin' doors, there — Well, all I have to do is to wait until a hen cackles and open one of those doors and get an egg. No danger of my eggs freezin', you bet."

"Do you sell your eggs to a grocer, or deliver them to private houses?" asked Henry Ham.

"I deliver 'em to myself," replied Fleet Hayes with dignity. "What me and the animals can't eat, I chop up and feed back to the hens. I was top sergeant of Troop A, First Indiana Cavalry, and while I may take up quarters at the Soldier's Home when I get too bad company for a coon to live with winters, I'll vote the Democrat ticket before ever I'll peddle eggs."

Henry Ham felt guilty of a serious impropriety, and Mr. Hayes, rendered adept in the reading of faces through long association with the quiet folk, quickly came to his rescue with the remark, "There isn't any eggs on tap now, but I'll see if I can't entice Salina in here to make your acquaintance. She's the only hen I allow to play around inside the house, but she's six years old and knows how to behave herself like a lady. Salina," opening one of the small doors and calling sharply — "Salina, come on in here and meet Henry Ham Trotwood."

A gawky young rooster hopped into the nest and peered through the opening, chuck-chucking softly to himself with a great assumption of wisdom and caution.

"Get down out of that nest, Tecumseh!" ordered Fleet Hayes sternly. "It'll be two years yet before I'll trust you in the house, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself to get into a hen's nest. Get down out of it now, and let Salina come through."

The rooster cocked his head far over to one side with

a series of indignant jerks, but did not leave the nest until Mr. Hayes reached in and boxed him lightly on the head. As soon as Tecumseh had left the nest with a shrill squawk of protest, a small brown hen hopped into it, clucking importantly, and after thrusting her head through the opening waited a full minute to be sufficiently coaxed. After having had her head scratched she hopped into the room and gazed intently at the coon, who had slipped quietly in and was now standing with his front paws on a stool, and a smile not entirely above suspicion upon his sly face.

"George," said Mr. Hayes, "you go into the other room and mind your own business. Come here, Salina. If that coon ever pulls another feather out of you, I'll give you his hide for a foot warmer."

The little brown hen walked trustfully up to the man, lifting her feet daintily, and Fleet Hayes squatted on one knee in the shavings and smoothed her feathers gently. "You wouldn't think she'd peck me when she was settin', would ya?" he asked, glancing up at Henry Ham. "But she's drew blood on me as many as fifty times, to say the least. I finally gave up tryin' to break her of it, as it was about the only symptom of ill-humor she ever showed."

"How do you pick out names for your pets?" asked Henry Ham.

"I don't pick 'em out, they pick 'em out themselves. I say over a list of names and they pick out the one 'at suits 'em best. That tortoise-shell cat dozin' in there by the fire chose out the name of Marion. It's a he cat, and I'm not sure for certain whether or not Marion is a he name, though I have heard it give both ways. Anyhow, that was the only name that cat would prick up his ears at, so I gave it to him and it has suited him ever since. You can go on back now, if you want to, Salina."

After the hen had considered this proposition for some time she decided to act upon it and retired with graceful deliberation.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

"This here is my workshop," said Fleet Hayes, waving his hand at the litter. "You wouldn't think now, to look at me, that I was an inventor, would ya? But so it is. I can build a better violin than any of the old fellows, and I can age it a century a week. Idle violins don't age any more than wine in bottles, though the folks who play violins don't know this any more than the folks who drink wine. Wood is a wonderful material — except when it's used to make a head of.

"I've got a piece o' straight grain standin' over there in the corner which was a sway brace in the covered bridge at Hufty's Mills for sixty-one years, and I'll bet my future chances that she's got more real melody in her than airy concert fiddle on the stage today. I'm goin' to work her into a 'cello soon as ever I feel in the mood for it. I can place the sound in a fiddle so it won't clog up a little room like this, and yet'll spread out over an open lot like the call of a four-pound bullfrog; but do you know, I can't fiddle out a tune to save my life.

"I do it all by angle mathematics which I worked out, myself. I've got one fiddle with four thousand pieces of wood in it — eighty-seven varieties. I value it at two thousand dollars." He paused, fixed a keen gaze upon his guest, and then whispered confidentially, "Don't you ever breathe a word about it; but while this fiddle is worth even more 'n this as a piece of art, and while it has a better tone 'n airy a store fiddle in the world — it ain't got that low, murmurin' undertone I smuggle into my sixty-five piecers. Stradivarius thought he had solved the bridge,

but I've beat him at it. He just struck the relation of bridge to sounding post by accident, while I've worked it out by angles, and I've got an oil varnish that beats the old Cremonas. All the fiddles made today except mine are finished with spirit varnish, and the more they age the worse they get. Gee, this is a foolish world."

"Do you sell many violins?" asked Henry Ham.

"Sell, sell, sell," exclaimed Fleet Hayes excitedly. "All folks think of nowadays is how things sell. I took pity on a young feller eight or ten years ago who could play real music on a fiddle 'at didn't have no more tone than a rough box, and I let him try one of my fiddles to see if he could appreciate it, meaning to let him have it for just enough to make sure he'd treat it right. Well sir, he was so used to the howls and squeals of the thing he'd been accustomed to sawin' on, that he declared the' wasn't any carryin' power to my fiddle; and I lost my humor and beat him over the head with it. It was shell thin in three places — secret places, put in by angles — and of course, it broke. Then I rushed for my ax meanin' to destroy the fool entirely; but he escaped and since then I haven't offered any fiddles for sale."

"What sense is there in making wonderful fiddles if no one ever plays on them?" demanded Henry Ham, scarcely knowing whether to think the old man a trifle crazed or to believe that he stood in the presence of a genius.

"I sometimes think that same thought, myself," returned Fleet Hayes sadly; "but once I met a young man who could play on a fiddle and who could tell the heart tones of one the minute he heard it. He heard me sounding out the tones of my pet fiddle one evenin' when he was a full half-mile away from me, and he came tearin' down the bank across the crick, there, and rushed up to me with his face all pale. 'Where did you get it?' he gasped, just like that. Never said, 'Howja do,' or 'good evenin',' — just, 'Where

did you get it?' and that moment I knew he was one of 'em, so I asked him to play on the fiddle and as soon as he began he forgot all about me.

"For some time he used to come over every evenin' to play for me; until I saw that he had the true gift. Then I gave him that fiddle, free gratis. It was made of a plank I got out of the choir loft when the old Methodist meetin' house was torn down, and it was seasoned like a piece o' glass and as full o' tone as the wind sighin' over a knothole. He used to roam about the woods with it wrapped in a cloth under his arm, and he'd play it to his collie dog when he thought no human was around. I used to steal after him to listen and he could make it sob and cry and chirp like a bird and babble like a brook, and I could hardly wait until he cut loose and went out into the world with it.

"I'm not vain, boy, the way a man is vain about his big doin's. Time was when I was vain about a couple o' tricks I turned durin' war days; but about my fiddles I'm proud, proud like a true mother is about the son she's brought into the world right, and then trained up to do big deeds without cuttin' up a fuss about 'em. Let me show you what I test with."

The little man hopped nimbly about picking out certain thin wine glasses from a wall cupboard and setting them side by side on a shelf. Then he rosined a bow and taking a violin he tuned it carefully. As he played certain notes, one glass after another would vibrate perceptibly, and Henry Ham was filled with astonishment to which he gave free expression without, however, receiving any notice from the thoroughly engrossed little man, who soon took up another fiddle, and one of a duller and more ancient appearance. To the notes of this one the glasses responded with more strength, even giving forth at times a low humming sound. Then he unlocked a narrow receptacle and took forth a fiddle wrapped in silk. There was no gloss to its

finish and a short time before the boy would have thought it of small worth; but now he watched intently as the old man tuned it.

"Now," said Fleet Hayes, an expression of confident triumph in his eyes, "I'll let you hear a fiddle."

As he sounded the notes this time the glasses rattled on the shelf and gave forth fine, clear tones as though the bow had been drawn across themselves instead of the violin strings. The old man struck chords and discords at random until the row of glasses sounded like an Æolian harp.

"That," said Fleet Hayes dramatically, as he folded up the fiddle again and prepared to return it to its place, "is just such another fiddle as I gave that boy long ago; and if he had gone out into the world with it, the doors of the world would have opened wide to receive him, cold and stupid as the world is — but it wasn't so to be."

"What happened?" asked Henry Ham, thrilling with curious expectancy.

"That boy had a father," replied Fleet Hayes, making the statement as though its striking uniqueness would remove the necessity of further explanation. "I don't know whether the father was crazy or just a devil; but he took that fiddle away from that boy — and he broke it up. He broke up that fiddle, and I'm pretty near certain that he also broke up that boy at the same time. Anyway, he never was the same again, and the' was a look in his eyes that used to give me a stretchin' of the heart. He came over to me and sobbed and cried until I felt like doin' a little private murderin' on my own hook. It seems that he had been gettin' a musical education in Paris, France, when his father had ordered him to cut out music entirely and go to Germany to study medicine. The boy hated all sorts of doctor work; but the old man was a tyrant for true, and he had his way."

"What was the boy's name?" asked Henry Ham in a

low tone, as he followed his queer host back to the fireplace in the log section.

"Richard Morgan — and his father was a real devil!" replied Fleet Hayes soberly. "He was a big, hard man with muscles like a buck and chin like a snowplow, and I took a likin' to him when he first moved out here. He bought this land I'm on now, though it was some kind of a loose survey and no one ever had straightened it out, it not bein' of any account. I've tried to raise a patch of corn on it for the Lord only knows how many years, but I do it more to keep Caroline from gettin' prideful than for any good it does. It's gravel subsoil with sand toppin', and teazle burrs is about the only tribute it's willin' to pay to the vegetable kingdom.

"Old man Henderson had never even looked at it when he owned the place, and Morgan never did either; but he was friendly enough to me when I called to see about it, and we came to an arrangement without bother. He wasn't a bad neighbor for a year or so. Course he was so absent-minded that he'd sometimes bump into trees, and he never came over to see me or listened to half I said when I went to see him; but take him all around and he was just about the kind of a neighbor I was anxious for, durin' the first few years. Then he began to get savage. Have you took notice that there ain't nairy dog livin' with me?"

"Yes," replied Henry Ham, "and it has struck me as peculiar."

"It is peculiar," agreed Fleet Hayes, and then lowering his voice to a whisper he continued, "Morgan killed my dog; I couldn't prove it on him or I — well, I wouldn't have let past favors stop me from measurin' out his dose for him; but sure as you're alive, Morgan killed my dog and his Zulu et it. I can show you a gully back of his place across the crick, there, where there's as many as a

thousand skeletons buried. A thousand I said, and a thousand I meant, but of course they ain't all dog skeletons. He slew a lot o' rabbits and guinea pigs, too; but I just know he killed my dog, and I hope he went to hell for it! I tried my best to get on the jury when they tried his son for murderin' him. The jury'd 'a' been out yet, or that boy would have gone free, sure as you're a foot high."

"Oh, I suppose you would be just like the rest — say what you'd do on a jury, evidence or no evidence — but after you'd been sworn, I'm pretty sure that the social responsibility inherent to civilization would compel you to be governed by the facts and by the law," orated Henry Ham in his best professional tone.

"What line o' work is your regular business?" asked Fleet Hayes curiously.

"The law," replied Henry Ham, rolling the broad "a" over his tongue as though taking a vocal exercise. "I am at present associated with Judge Hooker."

"I'll go in and congratulate him, first chance I get," said Fleet Hayes, with a gravity so intense that Henry Ham could only feel uncomfortably suspicious. "Look here, young man," continued Mr. Hayes with a complete change of voice, "I put up five years of my life in forfeit for this Union — and I reckon that sort of excuses me from orderin' myself lowly and reverently before every little fool law you stay-at-homes wrote into the law books while us men were off fightin'. If I'd 'a' been on that jury, that boy would have gone free; and not only that — he would have been commended for displayin' heroic conduct under tryin' circumstances.

"The one who would have been punished is the Zulu — damned dog eater — and he'd have been hung — this bein' the silly limit put on what can be meted out to a regular devil no matter what he's done, or why, or how. They sent that poor boy to prison, sad eyes and all, shut him

up in a stinkin' hole in a stone wall, away from the sunshine and the cleansin' breezes, until his lungs got full o' poison — and then, and then they turned him out to die in some hedge corner."

Emotional fire was burning within the dry, leathery little man, and for the moment there was no hint of comedy in his appearance. "That last fiddle I sounded for ya this afternoon belongs to that boy, wherever he is; and I believe he's still alive. I shot up to Michigan City like a bolt o' lightnin', soon as ever I got word that thet boy was to be freed; but the news about it was give out mighty stingy and by the time I got there all trail of him had disappeared. If he had stole ten cents to buy him a piece o' pie and a cup o' coffee, all the long-nosed detectives in the country would 'a' been bayin' after him; but when it was only a little old man wantin' to find him to soothe him back to health, why they were so infernal busy they could hardly take their black cigars out o' their mouths long enough to tell me they didn't know nothin' about nothin' — which I might have guessed just from squintin' at 'em.

"I've took a fancy to you, boy, and I've talked out more to you this afternoon than I have to airy other human for about twice the length o' your life; so you may know I'm not goin' to say what I am a-goin' to say just to rile you up on account of you're bein' a pup lawyer; but by the soul of my soul, I wouldn't give the darnedest little damn the' is if we'd lose all the laws ever was framed up and be forced to fall back on simple human justice.

"Laws are mostly for the purpose of makin' simple-minded folks submit to bein' took advantage of, which they wouldn't in nowise stand for if it wasn't for the law; and which they wouldn't stand for anyway if they knew what manner of men it was who made the laws, and what other manner of men it was who gave orders to have the

laws made. I have a lot o' time to think things over the way I live, and whenever I hear of any one gettin' meshed up in the law, I sez to myself, 'Now who benefits by such a law?' Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, it's that darned old Darius Waldron who benefits, while some poor, honest, hard-working man loses the little farm he's put in a life of toil to win.

"A while back you quoted a piece about my sociable responsibilities compelling me to be governed by facts and laws, and it sounded mighty fine; but it reminded me of when I was a boy. When I was a little shaver we had a streak of luck once and my mother made a puddin' called Charlotte Ruching, and it made my mouth water every time I thought about it. A short time after that I went to visit my grandmother, who was in comfortable circumstances that winter and I mentioned the fact that I allowed the angels must live on Charlotte Ruching. My grandmother thought this such a clever notion that she fed me on Charlotte Ruching for three days; and by that time my mouth was glued up and stuffy, my head felt full of cobwebs, and my stomach was wailin' for corn bread and sow belly. High soundin' pieces is like Charlotte Ruching — they tickle the palate once in a long while, but the' ain't no nourishment in 'em."

"It is necessary to have laws," affirmed Henry Ham with dignity. "Laws defend the weak by putting a limit to the activities of the strong."

"Charlotte Ruching," murmured Fleet Hayes, and Henry Ham felt his color rising.

"Morgan left other heirs beside the boy, did he not?" he asked, changing the conversation as gracefully as a mountaineer would guide a dory off the rocks with an umbrella.

"Oh, he did leave a female child," replied Fleet Hayes unconcernedly; "but as far as heirin' went, the' wasn't

much left to squabble over; though Morgan had always spent money as free as if his pocket was a gold mine. The Zulus have made 'em a livin' out of garden sass and fruit, while the girl has roamed through the woods, goin' to the same school the young squirrels attend, and graduatin' with the highest honors in michief and impertinence. As many as a hundred times I've been busyin' my hands with some sort of nonsense while my head was tryin' to figure out a contrivance, which is my way of thinkin', when I'd chance to glance up and find that young snip's eyes on me and her face all wrinkled into a grin. I don't mind the squirrels sneakin' up on me and makin' fun o' my ways; but it does rile me up to have humans watch me unbeknownst."

"Haven't you ever spoken to her?" asked Henry Ham.

"I have that," replied Fleet Hayes decisively. "I have spoken gentle to her and I have railed at her like a canal-boater; but upon my word I don't believe she talks English. She talks to the Zulu sometimes in jargon, and she can make all the beast noises like enough to fool even me; but when I've spoke to her she has just stared back at me the same as the squirrels do, and her collie shows his teeth whenever a body starts to draw too close to her."

"You thought so much of her brother, I should think you would be interested in her," suggested Henry Ham.

"She's not like her brother. He had soft, deep eyes like a doe's, and they'd cloud up and look hurt at the least sign of disfavor; but the girl's eyes could drill holes in a stone and she just grinned at me the day I pretended I was going to heave a rock at her. He liked to roam about in the woods, but was allus slow and quiet, while she races along like a scared fox, jumping logs, swinging up into the boughs of trees — Why, I'm certain sure I saw her slip into the deep hole for a swim one night without a stitch of clothes on. I wouldn't have guessed who it was if she

hadn't had the collie along. But what can you expect of a girl who never had any trainin' except from a pair of Zulus and a kennel of collie dogs? She never takes but one dog with her, but she allus has a parcel of 'em guardin' around the brick house, and these dogs are brought up to look down scornful at the Zulus, while her own favorite dog won't even take food from 'em. The girl can shoot some, too, though I have to admit she don't do much huntin'."

Henry Ham sat silently gazing into the fire, from the glowing depths of which the girl's dark eyes seemed peering at him with frank curiosity; while his consciousness dwelt upon the two perplexities which, like lusty twins, were constantly adding strength to strength. The one was an eager, reckless desire to form the girl's acquaintance, the other was a dread lest this acquaintance with one so wild and free should lead to an embarassing entanglement. Thus it is that the mill of youth grinds stone against stone until the rough grain of incident becomes the fine flour of experience, and though hearts may ache and hearts may break, the mill must have its grist.

"Thank you," returned Henry Ham, suddenly recollecting himself. "Thank you for one of the dandiest afternoons I ever put in. I had no idea it was dark, and now I'll have to hurry home."

"Have a bite with me?" invited Mr. Hayes.

"Some other time I'd be glad to, but not tonight. Good bye; good bye, George, and Marion, and all of you."

"Say," called Fleet Hayes after him, "if you see Caroline out there I wish you'd heave a rock at her. Good night."

"Good night, I will," answered Henry Ham, but as he walked briskly through the winter twilight his keen eyes turned from side to side in search of quite a different form.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THOSE who read metropolitan newspapers perfectly understand that they have no voice in the morals or manners thereof — aside from the collective power they exert upon the management by way of the advertising potentate complaining of the circulation manager — but in a small town all the *bona fide* subscribers and the members of that wider, stricter, and more demonstrative circle which relies for its daily news upon the splendid restraint of long-suffering neighbors, is each a separate and individual censor who seeks to limit the freedom of the press to the distribution of only such news as is pleasant to himself, his relatives, and his friends.

Editor Harkins of the *Citizen* had bought that paper of the *Weekly Republican* when it had a circulation of one hundred seventy-nine, had sat up nights with it, had walked the floor with it, had laid it face down across his knees and patted it softly on the back, had rubbed its swollen gums, and now that it was beginning to sit up and take notice with a circulation of five hundred forty-three, two suits for libel, one for damage, and one for assault and battery, Editor Harkins hung a grim, cynical, optimistic, distinctively editorial smile upon his wide mouth. He had two good suits of clothes, his machinery all paid for, and dependable credit; so that he longed for a factional fight of proportions ample enough to awaken a desire for his paper to the farthest limits of Haddem County.

"Hey, you," he called to Henry Ham next morning, as that worthy sauntered by in the general direction of his daily toil, "come in here."

There was nothing of the plow horse in Henry Ham's nature, and therefore he was at all times willing to step aside from his allotted furrow for any purpose whatever, or even in response to a whim, if no purpose could be drafted into service. "What do you want?" he asked.

"Never ask general questions of an editor," returned Harkins. "What I want from you is a corking article on improvement; one that will arouse the entire county, one that will awaken controversy and slumbering prejudices, one that will pierce so deep and sting so hot that the retail cupidity of Benlo's barnacles will tremble lest easy money flow into foreign coffers in wholesale quantities. Take a *nom de plume* and fire a hot shot, I'll balance editorially and throw the columns of the *Citizen* open for replies. If no one replies, answer yourself over another *nom de plume* and get sarcastically personal. There's a scum forming over this town which shuts out the sun, stifles ambition, and fastens upon the youthful generation a heritage of insurmountable stagnation — and the *Citizen* is going to blast a hole in that scum if it has to break every bone in the back of its engine."

"What have you been reading?" asked Henry Ham quietly.

"Everything available upon the spirit of progress; but each time that I have tried to editorialize, I have had to take such a stand that the *Citizen* would be committed before I had a chance to take the public pulse. At the beginning, the *Citizen* must be the medium only and not the leader."

"Who is the engine this week?" asked Henry Ham, who had good-naturedly turned the hand press upon several occasions while the over-worked editor had scoured the streets in search of an able-bodied man dissatisfied with the restrictions of unemployment.

"Bill Stedders is the engine this week, and I have reasons

for believing that the arrangement will be permanent. Bill has agreed to draw no wages for three weeks and to give me a month's notice before quitting. I shall encourage whatever tendencies toward luxury he possesses, and have already prevailed upon him to give up sleeping over the court house furnace and to engage board with Mrs. Schmidt. Bill Stedders is a wonderful man — he has both the information and the initiative of an encyclopædia. Also, like an encyclopædia, he can neither read nor write; but I intend to pan him for weekly reminiscences, and introduce a new column headed: Little Visits with Father Time. Go on now, and write your article, and you had better write your reply at once because the natives are slow to respond, and I don't want progress delayed any more than is necessary."

As Henry Ham had been building a power dam at the Swan's Neck until he had fallen asleep the night before, and as this task had given him ample imaginary opportunity for cultivating the acquaintance of Fleet Hayes and forming one with the Morgan girl, he was full to overflowing with brilliant suggestions for improvement; but, unfortunately, Judge Hooker was that morning desirous of ascertaining the exact decisions upon a number of complications in connection with an estate he was settling, and as Judge Hooker was not in the mood for reading, Henry Ham was forced to assume the yoke, and stick to a peculiarly dry and dusty furrow until noon.

However, the water rights of an abandoned mill was the basis of most of these complications, and so Henry Ham found much to interest him. He took but a short time for lunch, and returning to the office he had the pleasure of passing Darius Waldron and staring at him with irritating contempt. This put him in a good frame for writing a spicy article upon the widespread benefits of improvement, and the deep-rooted human obstacles in its path. Although

naming no names, he described Darius in bold phrases as being a type of the man who fattened upon a community with the unreciprocal lust of a woodtick attaching himself to the ear of a rabbit, and then he scored the rabbit for its stupidity in submitting to the operation, and signed the name of John Proctor as being both solid and dignified.

It was an article which slid smoothly in spite of its numerous thorns, and Henry Ham felt vastly cheered when he delivered it to Harkins and watched the editorial tide roll pleasantly upward in his face as he read it.

Mrs. O'Fallon had given the Judge a hearty luncheon that day, and he took a nap afterward in consequence, so that Henry Ham found time to dash off two replies, one from the standpoint of the woodtick, written in the style of righteous indignation replete with platitudinous cant, and signed Good Citizen, and the other from the standpoint of the rabbit, apologetic, humble to a disgusting degree, and painstakingly explanatory, through a series of Old Testament quotations, to the effect that the end and purpose of all communities was to provide a rich field of exploitation for whatsoever species of parasite was most available. This was signed, Contented Toiler.

Henry Ham was in such a good humor after having finished the replies to his own article, which was already being embalmed in printer's ink, that he excused himself from any more drudgery for that day, and taking an encyclopædia, seated himself in the easiest chair and proceeded to study water power. Judge Hooker found him engrossed in this interesting topic on his return; and before he had time to inquire into Henry Ham's reasons for deserting the flat and unlovely details of legal routine, Henry Ham poured upon him a torrent of information regarding the power of water, the resistance of cement, the modern facility for transmitting one form of energy into another, and the comfortable profits resulting therefrom.

"This is all very interesting," said Judge Hooker at his first opportunity; "but why is it especially germane to the present hour and company?"

"Because," replied Henry Ham with confidence, "the hour is at hand when Benlo, even Benlo, is about to shake off her lethargy, gird up her loins, and sprint out of the ashes of antiquity and on to the cinder path of modern achievement."

"Is that so?" rejoined Judge Hooker. "I hadn't heard of it."

"This is county seat," affirmed Henry Ham didactically, "and many of its inhabitants have remained seated so long that they have cramped in that position. While other towns are talking through telephones, seeing by electric light, and driving over paved streets, Benlo dodders along with a flock of smoky old coal-oil street-lamps which give so little light that if the entire town were put under a bushel, there would not be enough illumination within the bushel to guide the footsteps of a mole. Do you want to invest some money?"

Judge Hooker made a peculiar noise in his throat as he seated himself and glanced curiously about his office. "It does look a little dingy, and I have no serious objections to Hubert's doing a little painting this spring. It would require but a small sum and —— "

"Hubert is by no means an instrument of progress," stated Henry Ham with finality. "I am willing to bear my inevitable crosses with noble fortitude; but I do not intend to engage in an undignified struggle for crosses which neither belong to nor adorn me. If Hubert attempts to paint this office during my administration, I shall force him to drink his own paint."

"If you are not in favor of having the office painted, to what did you refer when you took the liberty of asking if I had any money to invest?" inquired the puzzled Judge.

Judge Hooker loved the flavor of a highly seasoned speech, and whenever Henry Ham was minded to please him, he took care to dress his remarks with a rich verbal sauce — a task seldom distasteful to him. "I am willing to concede," he said blandly, "that the renovation of this office would be a reformation fittingly symbolical of the municipal regeneration in which I am crudely striving to interest you; but I apprehend that the real investment will be on a much larger scale — several thousand dollars at least."

"Several thousand dollars!" repeated the Judge. "You astonish me."

"You are the first but you will not be the last. If the entire town is not astonished before I am through, I shall be astonished enough for all the rest. To be brief, I have located an investment which, if properly handled, will pay handsome dividends, and incidentally send Benlo up the ladder of progress like a cat fleeing from a dog. This is the crucial moment, the whole county is talking improvement; and if Benlo does not take the lead, Marndale will — remember the chair factory. If Marndale again gets into action first, she will also take the Court House away from us, and the streets of Benlo will be for rent as garden plots."

"Marndale has been after the Court House twenty years, but we've beaten her every time."

"Checked, not beaten her. She has gone right along, she has twice our population, twice the number of railroads, and, last and best, twice the number of live, hustling men. Now, if she improves, the county will —— "

"You say the entire county is talking improvement?" interrupted the Judge. "It's strange I've heard nothing of it."

"All the more reason for you to be prompt, now. I cannot afford to be explicit at this present, for a hint would risk everything; and even in giving this hint I urge you to

guard it carefully. Water power, enormous water power, cheap water power, resulting in cheap electrical power, lights, telephones, interurban lines, an inrush of factories — why, Judge, I should as soon waste bitter tears over a duck starving to death in a corn bin, as to pass up such a golden opportunity as this. I offer you the first chance, my father second, and we three shall agree upon the other directors of the corporation."

"This is rather sudden," murmured the Judge. "In fact, I was totally unprepared for it. I have some money invested safely, and while it is drawing but a low rate, I should not wish to disturb it to engage in speculation. I am not as well off as many suppose, and it is necessary that I go slow."

"Very good, very good," rejoined Henry Ham with a tinge of condescension. "All I ask you to do is to sound your friends to see if there is not a vague desire for improvement which is gradually coming to a head, and to ascertain all the possibilities of electricity derived from cheap water power. And now I shall hasten to place this matter before my father. Good afternoon, sir."

"Good afternoon," replied Judge Hooker, still a little dazed.

After Henry Ham had dashed from the office, putting on his coat as he walked hurriedly down the street, Judge Hooker seated himself and an expression of self-accusation came to his face. "I have wasted many opportunities," he said aloud, "I have not made as much money as I could and I have spent it like a boy. Most of my prime has been spent in Benlo, but I have not been faithful to her best interests. It is a dead old town, and if the boy has really found an opportunity, I shall assist him as much as possible; but it really is strange that he has perceived this desire for improvement before I was even remotely aware of it. Young blood, young blood!"

In the meantime, Henry Ham had burst upon his father, who was occupied with the obstinacies of a trial balance. For many years Mr. Trotwood had conducted a successful and profitable business without ever taking a trial balance; but the gift of his son Henry on the Christmas preceding the last had been a business periodical which the elder Trotwood had read conscientiously, and to his great discomfort. He had tried to modernize his bookkeeping, and many of his customers had been insulted when he had asked them to close their accounts yearly. He had explained that this was not due to a doubt of their credit; but from a desire to minimize the tedious details of his monthly trial balance, and then only after a prolonged argument in each individual case had he finally succeeded in convincing them that a customer had no right to be offended, merely because a store-keeper saw fit to ascertain his own exact financial standing through a series of complicated mathematical paroxysms.

The business periodical was adorned with complacency as with a garment, and its scorn of those simple-souled and contented merchants who were incapable of dividing their gross incomes into elucidating and illuminating per cents was candid and severe. Mr. Trotwood knew that very few of his fellow merchants had advanced beyond the old single-entry system; but this was no comfort, the business periodical continued to revile all merchants who could not tell at a glance exactly how much they had made more than they had earned, or the reverse; and Mr. Trotwood gritted his teeth and sawed away at his trial balance. He felt that it must have been called a monthly trial balance because it was a trial from the first day of the month to the last.

He had been four cents out on his first balance; but it was a small matter, so he had paid in the four cents from his own pocket and had smiled serenely. After that the

trial balance did queer things to him; sometimes it proved that he had robbed his business of four hundred dollars, or forty dollars, or four cents, and this time it proved that his business owed him four thousand dollars which he could not find, in substance, to save his life.

He had just thrown several pages of painfully made figures into the scrap basket, had thumped the top of his desk savagely, and had muttered with evil and earnest emphasis: "I wish to heaven I didn't even know how to read and write. What do I care whether Cash and Merchandise and Profit and Loss, and all these other idiotic accounts balance or not? I know that I have paid all my debts and have money in the bank, and that's enough. Darn magazines, anyway."

"Governor," cried Henry Ham with beaming face, "the time has arrived. The opportunity is at hand. The coach of fortune waits before your door."

Mr. Trotwood craned his neck and looked streetward, vaguely surmising that some sort of parade was passing his place of business. "I don't see anything," he said with considerable pessimism.

"Listen," said Henry Ham, "when I agreed to enter upon the treadmill of routine work, you said that the very minute that I could show you a golden opportunity you would back me up with capital. The hour is at hand, delay is dangerous, opportunity knocks but once at each man's door, and I, even I, am the fairy of your dreams."

"Henry, stop your nonsense," said Mr. Trotwood irritably. "I have a headache now from toiling over the fool figures in my ledger, and I don't intend to bother myself one second about your fool figures of speech. If you have anything sensible to say, why, say it without wasting any more words. If you haven't anything sensible to say, why, sit down here and do some multiplying for me. Three times this afternoon I have said that twice six was fourteen,

and I wouldn't put another strain on my intellect before supper if that lying trial balance was to speak out and say that the four thousand dollars I can't find was owed to me by Darius Waldron. His account is the only one I haven't been able to get closed. He's paid it down to a balance of fifty cents twice; but he simply refuses to close. Says he's prejudiced against closing a book account, but that if I need any money he will lend it to me at a low rate. Now go ahead."

"I presume that you are aware of the great interest which is being taken in improvement throughout the county?" said Henry Ham quietly.

"Improvement in what?" demanded his father, fearful lest this might imply an increased pressure in his bookkeeping department.

"Improvement in Benlo — pavements, telephones, electric lights, electric power — a general modernizing all along the line."

"I haven't heard a word of this talk, and my experience with modernizing is that it simply means foolish fuss. I don't hanker for any more of it."

"If your civic pride does not impel you to boost your home town, the demands of your business will compel you to fight for the retention of the Court House. If Benlo does not improve, Marndale gets the Court House — remember the chair factory."

Mr. Trotwood looked fixedly at his son. "What does Judge Hooker think of this?" he asked anxiously.

"Judge Hooker has no especial business interests in Benlo," replied Henry Ham with reserve; "his practice is county wide; but his loyalty prompts him to continue in Benlo the few institutions which have permitted Benlo to survive the blood sucking of the narrow-minded leeches who are fastened upon her. I have confided to him the fact that I have located a site for cheap water power and

I now give you an opportunity to come in with us. These are some of the possibilities."

After Henry Ham had enlarged upon the possibilities of cheap electricity, had urged his father to investigate the progressive spirit which was gradually taking shape throughout the county, but warned him against hinting at any personal knowledge of an ideal water power site within available distance, he hurried out of the store, satisfied that in this case, as in all others, a man was sure to hear of the topic in which he was interested, and it was plain from his father's puzzled expression that he was interested in the proposition which had just been left upon his doorstep.

On the street, Henry Ham met his brother Bud with an armful of *Benlo Daily Citizens*. Bud had a bashful expression upon his face and was conducting himself with a reserve and dignity quite foreign to his nature.

"Want to buy a paper?" asked Bud of his brother.

"Why should I want to buy a paper?" demanded Henry Ham crossly.

"I dunno," replied Bud honestly.

"Why are you trying to sell papers?" asked Henry Ham.

"Aw, me and Pikey are going to buy a mule this spring," replied Bud. "We are going to gather bones and old iron during the vacation, and we know where we can buy a mule and a wagon for fifteen dollars. I'm trying to earn some money."

"It is perfectly proper to earn money," said Henry Ham; "but don't you buy any fifteen-dollar mules. If I catch you buying any mules without consulting me, I'll settle down on you with force. But what made you think you could sell papers?"

"Aw, Harkins said everybody would want a paper to-night, and I am to get a cent apiece for all I sell — but I haven't sold a blame one, yet."

"You couldn't sell a mansion in the sky by sneaking

around like a scared cat," said Henry Ham candidly. "You haven't as much life as a soldier's monument — which reminds me that I must advocate one in my next article. You ought to see a city kid sell papers. Why, I've seen boys half the size of you who could sell more papers in an hour than you could carry in a day. What's in this paper?"

"I dunno," replied Bud, ready to throw the entire armful in the ditch.

"Let me see one," said Henry Ham, taking a paper and scanning the front page. "Here you are — 'Benlo's Resurrection,' great article by John Proctor, the sensation of the hour. A new column by Father Time, revealing secrets long forgotten. Only two cents a copy, you'll want a lot of extras to mail to your friends, here ya are, only two cents a copy. That's the way, Bud. A clam can't sell newspapers. Here, I'll buy a copy for luck, and now get noisy."

At first Bud's voice was but a feeble piping; but gradually it gained confidence until, with the intuitive immorality inevitably connected with the vending of newspapers, Bud was gleefully shouting the glad tidings that this particular sheet contained thrilling accounts of the railroad wreck, the murder, and the bank robbery. Bud never expected to sell papers again and so made no attempt to establish a reputation for reliability; but he sold out his entire stock, and then hunting up Pikey, who had gone in the opposite direction, and had used dignified and unprofitable methods, Bud took over his stock and disposed of it also.

Henry Ham hastened homeward through the dark, gleefully anticipating the stir his editorial would soon be making; and as he swiftly turned the corner upon which the brick wall of the jail yard abutted, he nearly collided with a girl hurrying in the opposite direction. She drew back with a gasp. "I beg your pardon," he said politely.

"Henry Ham, is that you?" she returned, and he recognized the voice of Clara Waldron.

"Yep," he replied familiarly. "You should show a light and sound a bell at the rate of speed you travel after dark."

"Mercy, my heart is beating like a trip-hammer — whatever that is," said Clara. "Goodness, Henry Ham, you are enough to frighten one into spasms. I can hardly walk."

"Can't I escort you home?" asked Henry Ham, in the tone of one seeking information.

Clara Waldron did not like the tone; she preferred to have young men do the things she wanted done over her own protests; but she was a diplomatic opportunist and therefore suppressed her pique and answered playfully. "I do not want you as an escort, and you do not want to be one; but just to punish you for rushing into people and scaring them out of their wits, I am going to make you take me home."

"Walking about Benlo after nightfall is like a bicycle trip through the dismal swamp," said Henry Ham as they turned up a side street, with a mutual and perfectly natural agreement to avoid the lights of the business district. "Have you ever noticed, Clara, what a preposterous relic this old burg is?"

Clara was not interested in the subject. "I have distinctly noticed what a preposterous old bear you are," she rejoined. "Where have you been keeping yourself lately?"

Henry Ham pondered over the suggestions awakened by this question, and was entertained by them for several silently unsocial moments. "Oh, I've just been scouting around the edges," he replied with a vagueness quite unsatisfactory to his companion.

"Well, don't blame any one but yourself if you're not asked anywhere any more," warned Clara.

"I won't, upon my word."

"We have been having lots of fun this winter, and you have missed it," said Clara.

"I may have missed it, but I have not mourned it," he replied independently.

"I presume you find us pretty slow — after your giddy city life," said Clara sarcastically.

"Do you want my honest opinion?" asked Henry Ham.

Clara did not want his honest opinion, she wanted his one-time fealty; but she replied with insistence, "Yes, I do."

"Well then, the society people of a small town remind me very much of painted toys," said Henry Ham recklessly. "Toys, you know, are dipped in pots of paint to make them as much alike as possible, and they are quite amusing to the infantile mind; but as the mind becomes more mature it finds an increased delight in seeking the distinctive traits of genuine individuality. Since having investigated, I find that Benlo is full of interesting personalities, and I trust that you will not waste any pity upon my supposed loneliness."

"So I am a painted toy, am I?" asked Clara indignantly.

"Only in so far as you take the silly conventions of village society seriously," replied Henry Ham calmly, but greatly enjoying the artistic finish of the shafts he was shooting. "You see, a foolish thing is only ridiculous after it is seen to be foolish. When it is not seen to be foolish it may be a mandate of fashion, a rule of conduct, or even a religious rite. Knocking out the front teeth is a religious rite in one country, but it strikes me as being ridiculous and I rejoice that I do not live in that country. In some bakeries the bread is kneaded by the bare feet of men, it is handled by hand when wrapped up, it is handled by hand when sliced in the kitchen, and yet if the hand of the hostess — presumably at least as nearly clean as these other hands

and feet — if the hand of the hostess chances to touch this bread by accident after it comes to the table, she apologizes as profusely as though she had stuck an oyster fork in the eye of the guest of honor. This gives you an idea of what I mean; you society people work by exterior strings like jumping-jacks and wear clothing which crudely imitates a fashion selected by some one in Paris, and you criticize all those who live as they please. I like those who live as they please better than those who live by forms; that's all."

"Yes, and it's all nonsense," scoffed Clara. "What on earth would there be to do in Benlo, if it were not for the efforts of a few of us to vary the monotony?"

"The only objection is, that you invariably vary the comfortable monotony by more monotony of a bothersome type. If you would only discuss real, live questions and do real, interesting things, you would vary the monotony even more completely and have something to show for it afterward. We need electric lights in Benlo, telephones, interurban railroads, factories — Why don't you begin to discuss improvement for all you are worth? This would be worth while, think it over."

By the time they reached the gate, Clara had defended Benlo so strenuously that she had used up her entire stock of ammunition, and had become really interested in Henry Ham's arguments, although she took care not to let him see it, and they parted rather coolly.

Nevertheless, Henry Ham once more started homeward in a cheerful frame of mind. He felt that in a natural and unobtrusive way he had taken several steps that afternoon to germinate the seed of improvement which lies dormant in every breast until warmed to life by the strong rays of enthusiasm.

"I believe I would enjoy politics," said Henry Ham to himself, and then after an appreciative self-examination, continued, "and I believe I have the proper mental equipment."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

By the time Henry Ham reached home the final meal of the day was well under way. A stranger entering the house would have been justified in thinking that the riot of noise which emanated from the dining room betokened a sanguinary mêlée; but it only increased Henry Ham's quiet satisfaction, and he hastily threw off his coat and prepared to enter upon still a higher plane of happiness.

"Aw, you couldn't sell eyes to a blind Chinaman," cried Bud, just as his eldest brother closed the door.

"Who wants to be a newsboy, anyway?" rejoined Pikey. "I've got more money saved up now than you have."

"That's cause you never spend a cent until it starts to rust on ya," retorted Bud.

"That'll do," cried Grandma, striking the table with her fork handle. "I want to hear what Henry Ham thinks of this nonsense."

"What nonsense is this?" asked Henry Ham, helping himself liberally.

"This everlasting talk of improving Benlo," replied the old lady. "It seems to me that ever since I moved to this town some one has been screeching about improving it, and land knows, there isn't a street in it you can drive over from one year's end to the other, without running into fresh gravel. I don't see anything the matter with this town — except the numbskulls who live in it. There was an article a column and a half long in the *Citizen* tonight about the substantial citizens of Benlo being woodticks, and the rest of us being rabbits. I'd like to know what that young snip of a Harkins knows, anyway. My husband

lent his grandfather most of the tools he used to farm with up on Possum Run, and now he thinks he can teach us old folks how we ought to live. Woodticks and bunny rabbits!"

"That's all right," volunteered Bud; "he can get out a paper that folks'll pay money for."

"And who's this John Proctor, anyway?" demanded Grandma, ignoring the interruption. "I've lived in these parts all my life, and I've never even heard of him before."

"It was his article that made the papers sell," said Bud. "I sold most of Pikey's papers to people who had bought 'em of me and wanted extra copies of that article."

"Be still," ordered Grandma; "I'm not talking to you. It's getting so nowadays that infants think they can go from the cradle to the legislature in one step. Your grandfather never bothered with politics until he was sixty-eight years old; but when he went to the legislature he got through the best, and mighty near the first, ditch law ever put on the books of this State. There's some sense in a ditch law, cause it increases the producing qualities of land; but there isn't any sense in all the time improving a town. Women like Mrs. Tarzel want to wear velvet slippers and silk stockings all winter, and they're at the bottom of it — mark my words — they're at the bottom of it. They'd have awnings over the sidewalks from one end of town to the other, if you'd let them have their way."

"Still, electric lights would be mighty convenient," said Elizabeth.

"Of course, of course," scoffed Grandma. "You young girls would like to get along without filling lamps, washing dishes, or even cooking victuals; but you don't do anything in your spare time except read novels, and it's just spoiling you."

"At the same time, mother," said Mr. Trotwood, "a town either has to improve or sit back on a log and watch some other town take away its trade and Court House."

"Pshaw," said Grandma. "I can remember when we didn't even have a court house. When they first began to talk about building a brick court house, a lot of the farmers said that if it wasn't for the meanness of the towns there wouldn't be any need of a court house, and as the cost would all fall on them anyway, they didn't propose to help build what would be a temple of vice. The farmers paid for it, though, as usual. The farmers have to pay for everything because everything useful comes out of the land."

"How about sardines?" inquired Bud.

"If you were in reach of me, Bud Trotwood, I'd box your ears. Of course fish do not come out of the land; but they have to come on to the land before they're of any use — which amounts to the same thing. Now the point is this — as long as the farmers pay all the bills it seems to me as though they ought to have part of the say."

"Shoot," said Pikey, "if it wasn't for the town folks making machinery for 'em, the farmers would still be plowing the land with their fingernails! I'm in favor of improvement. If we had a telephone, I wouldn't be sent up town on fifty errands every Saturday."

"You'd have to be civilized before they'd let you talk through a telephone," said Bud, "so I don't see how improvements could interest you. What you ought to be is a farmer, yourself."

Grandma struck the table with her fork handle and sat glowering into the faces of her descendants. As soon as the consequent silence was complete enough to satisfy her she spoke as one having unlimited and undisputed authority. "In the gospel of Matthew it says that perfected praise shall come out of the mouths of babes and sucklings. What is perfected praise out of the mouths of babes and sucklings? Why, it's silence, that's what it is; and if any other kind comes out of the mouths of the babes and sucklings

at this table until I've finished my supper, I'm going to take a babe in one hand and a suckling in the other, and bump their heads together. I asked Henry Ham what he thought of this improvement nonsense, and he hasn't had a chance to put in a word edgewise since. Now, Henry, speak in peace."

"Well, Grandma, there's two sides to all questions," said Henry Ham, cautiously, "and this one isn't any exception. You still like a tallow candle to knit by or to light you to bed, but I notice that you use a lamp to read by, and if we had electric lights you would be the first to discard the lamp, although it is quite likely you would still use the soft light of the candle when a soft light was all you needed. I'm rather in favor of improvement."

"You're all alike, all alike; anything for a change," said Grandma. "When people walked on their own feet they were healthier than they've ever been since and when dark came they were tired enough to go to sleep and not worry about turning night into day. Then they started to travel in oxcarts and there hasn't been a minute's peace since. Next they had to have canal boats, then fast trotting horses, then steam cars and electric railroads. Last summer I counted sixty-one automobiles go by and the papers tell about men trying to fly in the air. Everybody's going crazy!

"What's the good of it all? In my day folks lived on plain cooking. What do they live on now? Patent medicine, pills, and predigested breakfast foods made out of ground cork. When we were content with natural light we had natural eyes to see with; now we have all kinds of artificial light and even the children have to have artificial eyes to see with. I don't call anything an improvement which makes my own body an uncomfortable dwelling place for my soul — and that's all there is to it.

"I intend to write an answer to this John Proctor this

very night and send it to the paper by one of the boys the first thing tomorrow morning; and I'm going to write another letter to this Father Time upstart. I wouldn't be a mite surprised if both of these articles were written by young Harkins, and he's nothing more than a child himself, as I'll take pains to tell him in my letters. If Father Time says another mean thing about one of my friends, I'll tell some things about Editor Harkins's grandfather — and his grandmother, too, if he riles me too much — which will make him sing another tune, I'll venture to say."

After having expressed herself thus, Grandma thrust back her chair and stalked into the sitting room where she seated herself at the table and with face set in lines of grim determination proceeded to write her letters.

"I dropped in to see Judge Hooker this evening, Henry," said Mr. Trotwood quite incidentally, as he tilted back his chair and waited for his son to finish.

"That so?" inquired Henry Ham, in well-simulated surprise.

"Yes, and he thinks well of you, Henry. He says you have considerable capacity."

"I should think he would," agreed Henry Ham complacently. "I do about four-fifths of the office work."

"Now, don't get in too much of a hurry, my boy. The more work you do, the more practice you get, and a lawyer is paid for what he knows, not for what he does. The Judge said he'd be pleased to have us drop in and talk things over with him this evening."

"All right," agreed Henry Ham, "let's go. The Judge knows a good thing when he sees it."

As they walked toward the office, Henry Ham remained silent while his father talked continuously. Mr. Trotwood had regarded himself as being quite in touch with his times and town until his son had burst in upon him that afternoon. This had aroused a doubt which his short interview with

Judge Hooker had fostered, and the excitement caused by the John Proctor article in the *Daily Citizen* had transmuted this doubt into a dynamic impulse. If improvement were inevitable, Mr. Trotwood was willing to be one of its immediate beneficiaries, and he respected his son for having been astute enough to perceive this desire for improvement while it was still in its embryonic stage.

Judge Hooker received them with his customary courtesy, but did not proffer them any stimulants, as Mr. Trotwood's prejudice in favor of total abstinence was well known. Henry Ham was never more at his ease or less talkative. He settled back in his chair with the apparent intention of devoting himself exclusively to the enjoyment of his cigar. When a question was asked him, he answered it offhand and amazed them by his knowledge of mechanics; which was not surprising as neither one had ever given the subject much attention, while only the mussiness of construction had prevented him from choosing civil engineering as his profession.

At the end of an hour they were ready to consider the formation of a company. The two older men were inclined to the smallest possible amount of capital, but Henry Ham refused to take any part unless the company were capitalized at twenty-five thousand dollars which was to be covered by bonds, and seventy-five thousand dollars in stock, he to be given twenty-five thousand of this stock as remuneration for having discovered the site, and Editor Harkins to be given an opportunity to purchase as much as he wished at fifty with ample time to make payments, the remainder to be sold at par in small lots.

The two older men were quite ready to patronize Henry Ham and even to reward him liberally as soon as the project materialized to the extent of paying dividends, but it shocked them to have him sit back in his independence and issue a calm and courteous ultimatum.

"We would have to have an option on the land before I would want to put ten thousand dollars into the scheme," said Judge Hooker, smiling benignly upon Henry Ham.

"Certainly, certainly," agreed Mr. Trotwood. "Henry, you're unreasonable. It would be foolish to plunge into this without taking every precaution."

"I have given you the first opportunity, not merely on account of the gratitude I feel toward you, but even more because of the comfort we should experience in a close business association. There will be no difficulty in getting sufficient capital; so I insist that you are to regard this only in the light of an investment. I value very highly the conservative viewpoint from which you will regard every new move, and my own opinion will be greatly influenced by it; but burrowing to the depths of established routine and then hibernating is not sane conservatism. I can raise far more capital than I am demanding, right here in Benlo, but I am so certain of this plan that I want to keep it a nice, quiet little snap. It will be better to pay five per cent interest on borrowed money than twenty per cent dividends on stock. If you wish to come across for ten thousand each, I think I know where the other five is waiting; and I shall leave you to talk things over while I sound this source. Good night."

Henry Ham had always delighted in floating upon the flood tide of executive power; but always before, his opportunities had been those of a boy. This was a man's opportunity, and he embraced it with a man's strength but also with a fresh and distinctly boyish fervor. It was this boyish gloating over the striking, playing, and landing of a big financial prize that lured our magnates into the game; but, alas, a man soon loses the boy's high standard of sport, and in the end the magnate desires to fish only in an aquarium, and he insists that his government build the aquarium and keep it well stocked.

No fear of this dismal fate haunted Henry Ham, however, as he walked jauntily around to young Doctor Wilson's office, and found him engaged in study.

"How much idle money have you?" asked Henry Ham.

"How much do you want?" asked Doctor Wilson.

"Five thousand dollars."

"Five thousand dollars?"

"If you are in a position to invest five thousand dollars it will probably bring you in enough to spend a few years in the clinics of Europe. I don't suppose they are as good as our own, but it always sounds well to add a few foreign colors to the symbols of our learning. Have you the five thousand available?"

"Oh, I could raise it; but — "

Doctor Wilson was a student, while Henry Ham was a talker, and, when willing to forego the self-satisfaction of picturesque verbosity, a convincing talker. As soon as Henry Ham had convinced Doctor Wilson that it would require exactly five thousand dollars to draw the bolt which kept Opportunity at the wrong side of his door, he changed the subject and a little later drifted homeward.

He met his father at the first corner, and before they had walked and talked together ten seconds, he was aware that his father and Judge Hooker had agreed to raise the twenty thousand, but had also agreed to suppress himself as much as possible.

"Listen, father," said Henry Ham confidentially; "this water power is merely the lever. Now, you must get an option upon the machine shop, the spoke factory, and the creamery. None of these pay at present. Cheap power will make them boom. Also grab up any good factory sites you can think of."

"Henry," said his father soberly, "I don't like this plunging about in things I'm not posted on."

"Fiddle," returned Henry Ham. "A financier don't

have to be posted on details of production. All he needs to know about is profit. I can see a lot of profit to be made here in Benlo if you grab hold in time."

Mr. Trotwood sighed, and, as his brain was weary, his entire future looked like a malignant trial balance, and he hurried to bed to recuperate; while Henry Ham stayed up to felicitate his grandmother upon her letters. They were sharp, candid, and comprehensive. Without naming names she published a discriminating list of those whose excessive business acumen had removed them from Haddem County to the penitentiary, and implied that John Proctor was in a fair way to emulate these shining examples. She dealt even more pointedly with Father Time, and Henry Ham was delighted.

Before falling asleep that night he considered the field carefully and decided that if either of the Benlo weekly papers offered an unpleasant opposition, he would have the corporation purchase it and do the editing himself. Henry Ham had no desire to hitch his wagon to a star; his own imagination propelled him at a speed and altitude quite sufficient to test his powers of equilibrium.

He ground through his routine work the following morning as expeditiously as possible, but several times was tempted to resign. Judge Hooker attempted to draw him into a discussion of the contemplated corporation; but each time Henry Ham refused, on the plea that as he could no longer afford to devote more than his mornings to the law, he must needs hold his nose strictly to the grindstone until after luncheon.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THAT noon, on his way back to the office Henry Ham was dragged into his sanctum by Editor Harkins, who shook hands with him, danced a war dance in front of him, and then with beaming eyes showed him the pile of replies which had come in response to the articles of the evening before.

" Tell me they're dead ones," chortled Harkins, " they're the livest bunch of hornets that ever got stirred up. I had no idea that I could get the pot to boiling inside a week, but by jing, I'll have to run an extra page this afternoon to get in merely the cream. I have a tramp printer setting up this stuff now, and if anybody sells him a drink I intend to shoot up the town."

A knock came at the door and, upon receiving permission, Bill Stedders entered and stood before his chief with a hurt look on his face. Mr. Stedders was a large man of an extremely serious mien and a plumpness which no excess of irregular habits could threaten. His eyes had the peculiar vacancy found in the expression of a salted fish and his cheeks drooped in a perpetual protest against the laws of man and of nature.

" How does it come that I have to turn that press mornings?" he demanded. " You said it wouldn't take me more 'n an hour or two to run off the papers."

" We're having a little temporary increase in the circulation," replied Harkins. " I'll have the tramp printer help you this afternoon."

" I never took a job in my life but what business picked up," said Bill, with mournful gravity. " Some feller's

allus honeyin' up to me and warblin' out about what a snap he has; but just so sure as I take a regular job his business begins to double up. The tramp says he's a printer, not a stationary engine, and he'll see us all damned before he'll turn that press around once. I wish to glory I was a tramp printer."

"Do you know of any one who would help turn it?" asked Editor Harkins.

Bill Stedders shook his head disconsolately. "No," he affirmed without hesitation, "them as are idle at this season either don't want to work or don't have to. They've got all their plans made to hang out until spring by this time. Nope, the's nothin' to it. You've simply got to shet down on this increased circulation gag. I got a weak back, and I purt near done it up yesterday on those extras. I'm willin' to set around tellin' you gossip about the old settlers as long as you keep me in tobacco and beer; but every time I print one paper I got to stoop over and bend back — and it's darn monotonous."

"Oh come, Bill, surely you can think of some man who works hard through the summer, but who has no work to do at this season."

"Ye-es," admitted Mr. Stedders reluctantly, "stone-cutters, plasterers, and sech — but they don't have to work, and if they did they wouldn't do sech kind o' work as this here. A mule wouldn't do it willin'."

Harkins walked to the window and glanced up the street. It was a bright, sunshiny day and a small group of stoically tolerant men were sedately engrossed in the thankless task of reinforcing the side wall of the First National Bank. At irregular intervals one of them would generalize briefly upon the hard times then current, and this would produce a sharp rejoinder calling attention to the profanely more severe hard times put into effect by the next preceding President of the opposite faith. Presidents were invariably

referred to by their front or nicknames to which the qualification "old" was hitched.

As Editor Harkins gazed hopelessly at this group, a stalwart man with a jovial face swung around the corner, presumably on his way to the post office. He "Helloed" the loafers boisterously, slapped them on the shoulders, bantered them, bumped them together, and used them with the free familiarity of a Scotch terrier chancing upon a flock of geese while enjoying a self-voted vacation. The bank corner philosophers grinned self-consciously and slapped the newcomer's wrist in feeble pretence of self-defence.

"There's Dan Sullivan — and he needs work," exclaimed Harkins.

"Aw, he was settin' stone all last season," said Mr. Stedders. "He won't have to work until good weather. He gets six a day."

"He may not need the money," said Editor Harkins, as he watched Dan seize three gentlemen of leisure and whirl them about rapidly, "but he certainly does need the work."

"Naw," said Mr. Stedders, wagging his head comprehensively, "he's only trying to tease that bunch into startin' somethin', so he can handle 'em rough enough to mix in the marshal. He hasn't licked the marshal since he quit work last fall."

"Go, ask him to come over here, Bill," said Harkins.

"That's it, that's allus the way with my jobs," grumbled Mr. Stedders as he prepared to acquiesce. "I hire out for one, special thing, and then, by hek, first thing you know I'm doing it all, from bossin' the help to runnin' errands. I wish to glory I was a tramp printer."

"How can I get that fellow to work, Henry Ham?" asked Harkins. "If he would turn to with a will, it would keep Bill Stedders busy oiling the bearings for him."

Henry Ham closed his eyes, placed the thumb of his right hand upon his right eyebrow, his forefinger in the top center of his forehead, and gently stroked his brow with the middle and third fingers while the little one protruded in a graceful curve as though he were elegantly sipping a cup of tea.

"Listen," he said presently, "I have it." And therewith he unfolded a plan of action for the editor.

When Mr. Stedders arrived at the group he was welcomed heartily by Mr. Sullivan, spun about, pushed into the center of the group, jerked back, told that he was looking fine, asked what he was doing to escape work, and then introduced formally to the individuals of the outdoor cabinet, of which body Mr. Stedders had formerly been a member not only in good standing but of dominating influence.

"Young Harkins'd like to see you over at the office, Dan," said Mr. Stedders.

"Phat does he want with me?" asked Dan.

"Aw, he wants to see you about runnin' a press. It's my job, but I got a weak back and the circulation's about doubled since I took hold of the paper. If you've got the nerve you can hold him up for a stiff price."

"I don't want the job," said Sullivan. "Hey, why don't you crows run a foot race over there and claim this job?"

The philosophers looked into one another's faces but no man spake a word.

Mr. Sullivan placed his hands upon his hips and regarded them with admiration. "Boys," he said suavely, "for ginerosity, politeness, and howldin' back so as to give ithers a chance — yez take the prize away from annything iver I saw. Now don't rush about and get overhated; jist kape cool while I step over and foind out phat this job is loike."

He started jauntily for the *Citizen* office with Bill Stedders shuffling at his side. Midway of the street he paused and

looked at his companion. "Bill," he said, "you remind me of the Hibernian parade last St. Pathrick's Day in Chicago."

"How's that?" asked Mr. Stedders, swelling with pride.

"Because it takes you four hours to pass a given point. I'll just walk ahid and see about this job, and if I don't mate you on me way back — good marnin'."

Dan Sullivan was much younger than his sister Agnes, previously introduced as Mrs. Denny McGuire. He could have talked without a brogue had he wished, but he liked the feel of it on his tongue, and the merrier he grew the more of it he used. He was a giant in size, which was something of an affliction to him, as he greatly enjoyed fighting and was seldom able to let himself out completely for fear of maiming his adversary. He was rawboned, with shoulders which bulged ostentatiously beneath his coat, and he loomed very large in the tiny sanctum. He grinned down at Editor Harkins with half contemptuous condescension. "What do you want with me?" he asked.

"Are you on good terms with the marshal just at present?" asked Harkins.

"No, but he's on good terms with me," replied Dan a little stiffly. "There's one thing I want to call your attention to, Harkins: a bit of fun's all right and I don't care how you write me up; but don't ever mention me gettin' arrested again, or I'll plunge you headfirst in your own inkwell. I never stay in jail more 'n the few minutes it takes me to get bail; but in my last write-up you spoke of me languishin'. If ever I have to languish in that jail over night, it'll be in ruins the nixht marnin'."

"Well, if there is no quarrel between you and the marshal, I think we can arrange a dicker," said Harkins calmly.

"Phat's the marshal got to do wid it?" demanded Dan.

"You see, the *Citizen* has commenced to boom Benlo and all the rich old leeches are opposed to it. Any one

connected with this office is liable to get into some kind of trouble, and so if you were not inclined to run the risk of getting into trouble with Knox, why there is no use in talking about your working here."

Enfield Knox, the marshal, was a short, stout man with a high, piping voice. He was very powerful, but also very awkward and rather lacking in finesse. At the outset of his official career he had made the gross mistake of interfering with innocent fun which had enjoyed traditional privileges since the beginning of Benlo. He endeavored to suppress street singing after ten P.M., he attempted to preserve order in the neighborhood of a home in which a wedding was being celebrated, and he even sought to preserve the integrity of property rights upon the sacred night of Hallowe'en. He was not popular, but he was busy.

"I never resist arrest," affirmed Dan with patriotic pride; "but I do resist any effort to deprive me of free speech. If Enfield only had sense enough to let me say what I want to on my way to jail, he'd have no trouble with me; but every time I make the crowd laugh at him, he wants to hit me with his billy, and then, iv course, I have to bate him up a little. If you can bring him and me togither again, why, I'll take your job widdout askin' phat it is."

Harkins appeared to be in deep thought for nearly a minute. "You see, Dan," he finally said, "if we can put this improvement into force it will make more work here for the next few years than our own men can take care of. Benlo has an ideal location, but a lot of barnacles have clustered on it, and we have to make things hot enough to scorch them off. If we could just get the boys and young men to shouting a town yell on the streets it would help a lot; but this would put the marshal on the warpath, he'd track it to this office, and you'd bear the brunt of it."

"What's the yell?" asked Dan Sullivan.

"Bigger, better, brighter, busier, bullier Benlo — rah,

rah, rah!" cried Harkins with enthusiasm. "Now then, Trotwood, join in."

Editor Harkins rose to his feet, struck palm with fist at each word, and Henry Ham joined in with enthusiasm. At the third rendition, Dan Sullivan added his big voice, and they boomed it out sonorously. "Ha, ha!" chuckled Dan at the finish. "Do you really think, now, that Nubby Knox would try to suppress that yell."

"I'm afraid he would," said Harkins with a sigh.

"He'll have the chance!" cried Dan, his eyes gleaming with mischief. "I'll have the McGuire boys tach the rist iv the kids, I'll make Denny himself march around the square wid me — yes, an' Micky Donovan, too. Faith, I'll aven make thim rummies on the corner shout it. Plinty iv wark here at home would be a foine thing, and I'm wid yez."

"The main thing, though," said Harkins with pretentious conservatism, "is the getting out of the paper. I am running an extra page now of nothing but the improvement stuff, and Bill Stedders' back won't stand it. I suppose you're too soft from loafing for such work?"

Dan Sullivan looked at the speaker quizzically. "Turnin' a crank would tire me moind a hape quicker 'n it would tire me body," he said; "but if ya'll give me fifteen a wake, I'll try it wan wake."

"Nuff said, shake hands on it. Are you ready to begin now?"

"The sooner the better," said Dan. "Lead me to your press and watch me wind it up. Then come up town to-night and listen to the noise. That's the part iv it I'll shine at."

Henry Ham spent the afternoon in cultivating the flame of enthusiasm which was flickering in Judge Hooker's breast. There are two simple ways in which to coax a flame, one is to blow it with a bellows, the other is to provide

a vacuum into which it will rush. Henry Ham chose the latter; he seemed very cold and impartial, offered few suggestions, agreed with most of Judge Hooker's objections, and just as he was ready to leave, incidentally mentioned Darius Waldron as the proper man to take the matter up if he would be willing to apportion the dividends upon a fair basis.

"Wait a second, Henry," called the Judge, coming forward. "Do you intend to mention this subject to Darius Waldron?"

"I find it hard to decide, Judge Hooker," replied Henry Ham thoughtfully. "You see, this is my opportunity, it may be my only opportunity. I should prefer to be associated with yourself and my father; but I regard delay as being extremely dangerous. Good evening."

"He's made up with Clara Waldron again," muttered Judge Hooker as he slammed the office door.

Bud had enjoyed a fine business that afternoon and had called the town yell, which Editor Harkins had printed across the top of the front page, until his voice was hoarse. He overtook Henry Ham and they walked homeward together.

"Too bad about your voice, Bud," said Henry Ham sympathetically. "Still, I doubt if the governor would permit you abroad tonight, anyway."

"What's going on?" asked Bud eagerly.

"Oh, it's liable to end in trouble," replied Henry Ham with that refined exasperation bestowed by elder brothers, in order that after a younger brother's patience has been ground away and he develops a violent temper he may still take his place in heaven among those who have achieved this glory through great tribulations. "I supposed you knew of it or I should not have mentioned it. You had better stay in the house."

Bud tried several unsuccessful methods of gaining this

information, and then left Henry Ham in disgust. Pikey was also uninformed of any especial excitement scheduled to take place that evening, and together they sought Billy Spencer. Billy Spencer's parents were very strict with him, so that it had been necessary for him to develop a superior craftiness in order to enjoy illicit entertainment without undue consequences; but, strangely enough, in this case he was as ignorant as his enquirers. However, he agreed to join them immediately after supper, and therefore accepted, loudly enough to be heard by his mother, an invitation to pass the night with them.

Science has isolated many mysterious rays, but has not yet discovered those occult waves which apprise boys and dogs of an impending tumult. Shortly after supper that night in Benlo, the boys and the dogs assembled upon the streets, exercised themselves in anticipation of the more substantial thrills which awaited them, and fought, barked, and shouted, so that all their members might be in readiness to take an active part.

At nine o'clock Dan Sullivan, supported upon the right by the chin whiskers of Denny McGuire, on the left by the rock-ribbed visage of Micky Donovan, and in the rear by a cohort of boys and dogs recruited by the three McGuire youngsters, appeared upon the public square and proceeded to march defiantly around it. As they marched, their eyes searched eagerly for the concentrated strength of Enfield Knox, the town marshal, and their voices bounded brazenly against the starry welkin as they gave strenuous utterance to the town yell. All local feuds were temporarily dropped and the boys of the hill and of the middle section joined in with those under the McGuire leadership, and helped to swell the volume of din.

At the second circuit of the square, Enfield Knox blocked the path of this devoted band and raised his hand for silence. His signal was mistaken and he was given the town yell

with an added zest. The yell had by this time worn itself into the proper cadence, and each time the "B's" were sounded with a more assured explosion.

"Now listen, all of ya," piped Enfield solemnly, "I don't want to interrupt your fun, but this here is goin' too far."

"Bigger, better, brighter, busier, bullier BENLO — rah, rah, rah!" replied the mob with fervor. Luckily for the progress of the race, all boys are rebels and their delight at this open defiance of the official exponent of law was intoxicating in its completeness.

"If you don't stop this, I'll have to arrest the whole bunch of you," cried the indignant marshal.

"Bigger, better, brighter, etc.," roared the crowd.

"You children go on home where you belong," piped Enfield, making a rush for the boys who had circled around him so as to get the best view and not waste any noise. Bud Trotwood happened to be closest to the officer and would have been caught had he not tripped over Robin Hood, who was standing behind him wagging his tail in approval. In his excitement, Robin Hood gave the marshal a playful pinch upon the left calf and received a kick in return which greatly surprised him.

The dog thought it all a game and was not in the least angry, so he barked and made sportive lunges at the marshal. This was a signal for the other dogs who hung upon the edges of the crowd to bark vociferously and try to wedge themselves toward the interior. Their feet were stepped on and they yelped in good-natured protest. Staid business men hurried forth from small upstairs rooms where they had assembled after the cares of the day to seek the relaxation of the mystic circle, and the stimulating vibrations sent forth with the rattling of tiny disks. Pandemonium had been the purpose of Mr. Sullivan, and he seemed likely to achieve a fair measure of it.

Enfield Knox straightened himself and surveyed the situation frankly. He knew that regardless of size a mob seldom has more than one head. "Dan Sullivan," he said sternly as he took a firm grasp on that gentleman's lapel, "I arrest you in the name of the law."

Dan Sullivan's arms were interlocked with those of Denny McGuire and Micky Donovan, his gaze, fixed calmly upon space, did not encounter any part of Mr. Knox, and his voice led the responsive boom, "Bigger, better, etc.,"

"Come along here, Dan Sullivan."

"Bigger, better, brighter, etc."

"Denny McGuire, and you, Micky Donovan, I appoint you deputies in the name of the great State of Indiana, and order you to help take Dan Sullivan to jail."

"Bigger, better, brighter —— "

Micky Donovan closed his eyes when he shouted and his prominent lineaments assumed the irritating brazenry of a heathen idol. Enfield Knox had tugged valiantly at Sullivan's lapel without effect and he needed a safety valve, so he drew his billy and smote Micky Donovan upon his callous head. The billy being well loaded and the head solid, the thump was clearly heard, and the stiffness oozed from Mr. Donovan's knees and left him supported on Mr. Sullivan's arm. Quite automatically, Dan wheeled to the left and in so doing lifted the comparatively light weight of Denny McGuire from the ground and propelled his head with violence into the protruding face of Enfield Knox. Enfield gave a grunt and the crowd gave the town yell. Before it was finished Enfield had struck Denny McGuire on the head and Denny slipped into the gray fog which usually results from such treatment.

"What do ya mane?" demanded Dan Sullivan, who was now supporting two unconscious allies. "First you appoint these min deputy marshals, and then ya bang 'em over

the hids. You're an outlaw anarchist and not fit to be thrusted wid a club. Git out iv the way."

The crowd fell back and Dan took a step forward, but this destroyed the equilibrium of his friends and they sank to the sidewalk in spite of his support.

"You come with me, Dan Sullivan," said Enfield staunchly.

"I wouldn't thrust me life wid ya," rejoined Dan. "You're a madman. I'll go along on me own two fate; but don't you touch me."

"These others have got to come, too," said Enfield grimly. "They are guilty of resisting an officer of the law."

As Dan strode toward the jail so as to get through the formalities of bail as expeditiously as possible, Enfield clutched Donovan and McGuire by the collars and proceeded to drag them along the sidewalk.

Dan Sullivan turned and gazed at the sight in amazement. "Fer the love iv Hiven," he murmured. "This is more thin anny man could stand. First he appoints thim deputies, thin he knocks thim sinseless, and now he drags thim along loike a pair iv pizened pups. I hate to do it, but it's me duty. Enfield Knox, straighten up till I hit ya."

Enfield dropped his unconscious victims and prepared to defend himself. He had arrested Dan Sullivan many times, but had never grown to feel a fondness for the task. As he raised his fists in defence, Dan swept his long left arm to the right slowly, then brought it up with a swift, backhand slap upon the marshal's cheek. While the cheek was still tingling, Dan swung his right to the hook of the jaw, and Benlo's police force described a simple parabola into the iron fence surrounding the Court House square.

"Boys," said Dan to the three McGuire youngsters, who had watched the proceedings with the Spartan glee

worthy of their clan, "get some water from the well and souse your father and your uncle. Thin till them I have gone on to jail and have 'em fix things for me as soon as possible. Once more, now, let's give the yell — Bigger, better, brighter, busier, bullier Benlo —rah, rah, rah!"

As the noise died away and Dan Sullivan, followed by an admiring throng, proceeded jailward, Henry Ham turned to Editor Harkins, and said, "The boom is under way, and Dan Sullivan is worth his fifteen a week, all right."

"I intend to pay all his fines as a bonus," replied that natural newspaper man.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

EDITOR HARKINS hurried away to write his impressions of the riot while they were still glowing, and Henry Ham and Doctor Wilson followed the crowd. The path of Benlo's marshal wound through an ethical tangle of such extreme intricacy that nothing short of inspiration could guide one aright, and inspiration was seldom available at the salary offered. He was supposed to execute the law without hurting feelings, either physical or mental, to maim none but strangers, to maintain perfect order, to be the butt of local wit, and, above all else, never to whine when he got the worst of a combat.

Marshal Knox philosophically disengaged himself from the iron fence of the courtyard, and hastened to the side of Dan Sullivan, whose passive arm he grasped firmly. As Dan was not resisting arrest, it would have been a breach of official etiquette for Enfield to have retaliated the blow which his prisoner had recently dealt him; so they walked toward the jail side by side, Mr. Sullivan intermittently leading the attendant crowd in the booming bellow of the town call.

Darius Waldron had been down town on a matter of business that evening and now, his heavy night cane thumping along the gravel, he hurried after the crowd, to see what the trouble was. Nate Shipley, with an amused and somewhat cynical grin upon his face, had joined Henry Ham and Doctor Wilson, and as Darius bumped him in hurrying past, he gave nasal vent to an expressive, " Hum!"

Bud Trotwood and Robin Hood were at the rear of the crowd, and as Darius plowed his way into it, he stepped

on the dog's foot, already made tender by many previous accidents of this nature. Robin Hood gave a grunt of protest, to which Darius responded with a hearty kick. The dog had been in a state of excitement all the evening, but had not lost his temper.

"Don't you ever do that again!" cried Bud angrily.

Darius was displeased at the outcome of his business scheme, and the defiance in the upturned face increased his irritation. Taking a step forward he slapped the boy harshly with his open palm — and the bulldog growled. It was a growl of indecision, for he was still but little more than a pup; but as the man glanced down at him he found himself looking into a row of menacing teeth. He raised his cane to frighten the dog, and the dog leaped for his throat. The heavy cane fell with a resounding whack, and with a smothered yelp, Robin Hood settled to the sidewalk just as Henry Ham reached Darius.

"Bud, hold that dog!" ordered Henry Ham, who was in a boiling rage, and whose eyes glared as he turned them on Darius. "Throw down that cane or I'll take it away from you."

Darius was a rugged man and he raised the cane to strike the youth. Instantly, Henry Ham leaped forward, his left hand reaching for the cane, his right fist reaching for the pit of Darius's stomach. Neither was quite successful; the cane hit the youth on the shoulder, the fist hit the man on the chest. But the youth was agile, he grabbed the cane, twisted a leg back of his opponent's knee, placed the base of his right palm beneath Darius's chin, and, with a quick lunge, shoved that gentleman seven points down and relieved him of the responsibility of his heavy cane.

"I'll have your life's blood for this!" cried Darius, coming to a sitting posture and pointing his long finger at the youth. "I'll get you, I'll get you some way — you see if I don't."

"Aw, be still," said Henry Ham, still angry but already

beginning to chafe at the embarassing tangle in which he found himself. "If you were younger, I'd give you what you need with this cane. Now, get up and go on home."

Darius had no false notions of his own popularity, nor was he one to pursue a policy which placed him at a disadvantage. He had confidence in the staying qualities of his hate, and so he slowly arose to his feet, took the cane which Henry Ham held out to him and turned homeward, muttering to himself.

"Your dog's bad hurt," said the soft voice of Nate Shipley, and Henry Ham stooped to examine Robin Hood, whose left foreleg hung limp and useless.

"Poor old pup," he said, stroking the dog's head, and receiving a doleful and worried wag in return. He felt of the battered leg, and the fierceness which had left his face returned with increased fervor. "It's broken, Nate, it's broken!" he cried. "If I'd known that, I'd have pounded old Darius to a jelly, age or no age."

"I wish you'd 'a' killed him," said Bud, with what was very like a sob.

"Bud," said Henry Ham, with unusual tenderness, "you'll have to go home; it's getting late."

"What are you goin' to do?" asked Bud with intuitive suspicion.

"I don't know what we'll have to do, Bud; but we'll do whatever is best for Robin Hood. Now go on home, like a good chap."

Bud would have rebelled against his brother's usual arrogance; but his accurate instinct warned him that the unfamiliar tones in his brother's voice, solemn and sympathetic, came from the hidden depths of his nature, and that these depths were not to be treated lightly; so, choking his sobs back manfully, he turned toward home. Only those in the extreme rear had been aware of the digression which had taken place, and these had left as soon as Darius

had, in order to enjoy the peroration in favor of free speech which invariably ended Dan Sullivan's personally conducted parades to the county jail.

"Will he have to be killed, Nate?"

"Well, I never had much luck gettin' a dog's leg to knit straight. Why don't you ask the Doctor, here?"

"I never have set a dog's leg," volunteered Doctor Wilson, "but I'll do the best I can, if you want to take the risk."

"Dummy John's the feller to do it; but you'd have a hard time roustin' him out this time o' night," said Nate.

"Who is Dummy John?" asked Henry Ham.

"Why he's the old mute who lives right back here in the little brick. He hates the very sight of a human bein'; but he treats all stray dogs as though they were his prodigal sons. He can fix this pup up as good as new."

"Then he'll have to do it," said Henry Ham, in a determined voice.

Speaking to the dog in a low, coaxing voice, Henry Ham slipped his arms beneath the sturdy brindle body, rose to his feet and gently retraced his steps. The disguising cloak of mocking vanity had fallen from him, and with no thought of his appearance he carried the bulldog with sympathetic arms.

The small brick affair in which Dummy John lived was the first structure built of this material in Benlo. It was of one story and one room, and the black walnut woodwork had been wrought by hand. The single door was massive and hung upon great hinges, hand forged at the smithy whose ruins stood near-by. There were three windows, each provided with a heavy, nail-studded shutter which could be drawn shut by a chain running through the framing; and there were still traces of loopholes, now blocked with pieces of wood. Altogether it was distinctive enough to house a character of strength and originality; but as it was suited neither for a modern home nor a modern shop, it

had stood idle for years until Dummy John arrived one night and took possession of it.

Darius Waldron, who owned the building, had hastened down to evict the daring invader of his sacred property; but Dummy John had refused to move and so, after making it plain that he would expect his rent each month in advance, Darius had accepted him as a leaseless tenant, and the commonplace stream of Benlo's gentle activities had rolled on without a ripple.

During the five years of Dummy John's residence, nothing was learned of him except that he kept his word, knew how to doctor plants and animals, and held a mild contempt for the human race. He could not hear but could read the lips; and when an answer was necessary would write it briefly upon a scrap of paper. He never bargained, but accepted coldly whatever was paid him, and paid coldly whatever was charged. He preferred to saw wood, but when his finances required it, would accept almost any temporary employment. At times he had been heard to hum beautiful, sad, purposeless melodies when sawing wood; but could not be induced to give any information except that which was necessary to his work. The stray dogs of the town grew to know him and call upon him for assistance. He fed them when starving, he cured their hurts; but he never adopted one, so that not even through the dependence and trust of a pet was there a rift in the gloom of his loneliness.

His eyes were dark and soft but their gaze seemed fixed upon some distant vision, and never to see the common things close at hand. His long hair and beard were white, white with even a bluish tinge, and soft and fine as silk. He wore a curious tunic of blue denim, loosely belted and reaching nearly to the knees; below this were ready-made trousers of the same material, and his feet were bare except that in very cold weather he wore sandals of his own making,

and shapeless denim mittens on his hands. Never at any time did he wear a hat. There was dignity in his reserve, grace in his every movement, yet did the good people of Benlo experience no difficulty in identifying him as a freak and relegating him to the ranks of their permanent defectives.

He had come shortly before Henry Ham had left for college, and during the vacations the boy had been too full of his own importance to speculate upon the possibility of there being within his own sphere some other individual worthy of consideration. Upon reaching the door, on this occasion, he pounded upon it lustily, shook the huge latch, and then beat upon the shutters.

"The kids pester him so much nights that you'll pretty near have to smoke him out," observed Mr. Shipley.

"See if you can burst the door," suggested Henry Ham, "that mob'll be back soon, and we don't want them hanging around."

"I'm no lawyer, so I don't know what a man's legal rights are; but if a gang was to bust down my door while I was inside, why, I'm kind of inclined to believe that I'd feel sort of resentful. Still, as long as you suggest it, I'll see what I can do."

Grasping the heavy clasp, he pulled it with his right hand and lunged with his left shoulder against the door, shaking the entire house; but producing no other effect. Still, the resultant vibration was more than even a deaf mute could be expected to ignore, and presently a light was struck inside, and the door opened until caught by a chain. Through this opening, Dummy John could be seen wearing a white woolen robe, belted at the waist and reaching to the floor. He held a lighted candle above his head, there was no reproach in his expression; only that puzzled inquiry sometimes seen in the eyes of a brute which cannot understand why it is being ill-treated.

There was not the slightest self-consciousness in the face of Henry Ham, only solicitude for the dog he was bearing in his arms, and this sincerity struck a responsive chord in the aged man. For a moment the veil was lifted from his own dark eyes and he looked out on the boy with something of brotherhood in his glance; and then the veil fell again and he turned his gaze upon the dog.

Making the peculiar nasal whine with which a mother dog coaxes her young, and laying a gentle hand upon the bulldog's rugged head, he turned it toward himself and looked into the dog's eyes. At sight of the nervous pain there, his brows drew together in troubled sympathy, and he examined the broken leg with his strong, slender fingers. Then he unfastened the chain and the three intruders filed in.

The interior of the room was a marvel of neatness; a narrow bunk stood at one end, a round bath in one corner, a small cookstove, a table, a chair, a row of shelving just below the eaves, and a pile of burlap near the stove. A trapdoor had been made in the roof above the bunk and this was now raised to admit a current of air, and the room held none of the rank odors of a room used for both cooking and sleeping.

Dummy John took splints and bandages from the shelf and at a motion from him Henry Ham placed Robin Hood on his right side upon the pile of burlap, held his head and right paw, and Nate Shipley his hind feet and body, while Doctor Wilson held the accessories and watched the operation with critical eyes. As he worked, Dummy John kept murmuring his coaxing whine while his slender fingers reduced the fracture and bound on the splint with a skill that never faltered. When he had finished, he patted the dog's head and gave him a drink of water from a clean pan.

"May he stay here until he recovers?" asked Henry

Ham, lipping the words with exaggerated care. Dummy John nodded his head.

"What do I owe you?" Dummy John held out his hands, palm up.

"He means you're to give him whatever you want to," advised Nate.

"It's worth five dollars, anyway," said Wilson with professional appreciation.

Henry Ham took a bill of this denomination from his pocket and held it forth. Dummy John took it and placed it upon the table but neither his lips nor his eyes gave thanks.

"He never gives thanks, nor kicks for his pay; so he gets mighty little for his work," remarked the observant Mr. Shipley. "That is probably the most money he's had at one time since he's been on earth."

After the door had been closed and locked behind them, the three stood upon the corner for a few moments' conversation. "Curious noise he made while he was workin', wasn't it?" Nate remarked thoughtfully.

"No," replied Doctor Wilson thoughtfully, "deaf mutes usually make some unconscious noise while at work; but, at the same time, I strongly doubt if that man is deaf, dumb, or even old."

"Pshaw," scoffed Henry Ham, "I never saw as white hair in my life, and he couldn't possibly conceal his hearing for five years."

"Hair has turned white in a single night, but the phenomena is not fully understood and his hair is thick, soft, and lustrous. His skin is young, its olive tinge being due to a trace of Spanish or Italian blood in his ancestry, and the eyes also indicate this. I spent some time at the State Asylum for Deaf Mutes, and there is a typical expression about mouth and eyes which I do not find in the face of Dummy John."

"Well I'll be garnswazzled!" exclaimed Nate Shipley

with frank admiration. "I've allus been opposed to colleges from pure prejudice; but hang me if your eyes don't look as sharp as though they'd never seen the inside of a book. I noticed his skin, myself; but it didn't tell me no secret."

"Tell you what you do, Nate, you figure out a plan for proving whether Dummy John is really deaf or not."

"All right, figgerin' out plans is my regular business. Well, I must be joggin' along. Good night, boys."

"Wait, I'll go with you," said Doctor Wilson, and as he joined Nate, Henry Ham started in the opposite direction. As he passed the corner of the building, he saw a dark form stealing away from it with a long board over its shoulder, and halted a moment in indecision. Then his curiosity gained the ascendency and he stepped into the denser shadow. As soon as the silent one saw that he had been discovered, he tossed the board to the ground, and fled. Henry saw that it was a boy and his curiosity and speed increased simultaneously. The boy turned down the alley and ran over a square before he was captured.

"What's your name?" panted Henry Ham.

"Aw, I'm Bud," confessed that individual, disgusted to learn that his brother could still outrun him. "I simply had to see what you were going to do to Robin Hood — and that's all there was to it."

"How did you work it?"

"Climbed on the roof and looked in through the trapdoor. I've wanted to see what he had in that house for a long time."

"Why?" asked the elder brother as they started home, side by side.

"Cause he's a witch, that's what he is. He can charm snakes and put chickens to sleep, and do all sorts of stunts. He's got Robin Hood under a charm, right now. He never moved when you went out the door, and as soon as he'd locked it, Dummy John came back and mumbled something,

and he just licked his hand. I'd give both my little fingers to learn some of his charm words."

"Have you ever heard him say a word?"

"He never says any real words; just mumbles so no one can hear him. Pikey said that if ya could get something away from him without his finding it out, it would give you luck."

"That's all bosh," scoffed Henry Ham. "Bud, I was afraid we might have to kill Robin Hood when his leg was broken, and if ever I hear of your plaguing Dummy John, you'll mighty well regret it; do you understand?"

Bud made no reply, and after walking a few steps, it suddenly struck Henry Ham that this was suspicious. He stopped, grasped his brother's shoulder, and demanded sternly, "Bud, did you take anything tonight?"

Bud kicked the toe of his boot against the sidewalk. "No," he said after a long pause, "nothin' but a piece o' paper."

"Where is it?" After a shaking had been added to the question, Bud fished a small piece of folded paper from his pocket. "Can't I read it?" he asked. "Maybe it's got a charm written on it."

"I've a good notion to march you back there and make you give it to him this very minute" — ominous pause — "but I don't want to bother him any more tonight. I'll take care of it myself, and if I ever hear of you doing another low-down trick like this — Bud, I'm honestly ashamed of you."

"I wish to thunder I'd gone on to hear Dan Sullivan," muttered Bud, and his elder brother realized that this was a confession of penitence and contented himself with haughty silence during the remainder of their walk.

Once in his own room, however, Henry Ham forgot the high morality which had characterized his conversation with Bud, and with considerable interest he unfolded the

paper which had for long remained undisturbed in a pasteboard box on the shelf below the trapdoor. The paper was yellow and dusty, and on it was written in bold, heavy penmanship:

> "No din will rouse the slumberer within his winding
> sheet,
> The heartless man can trust but him who has no heart
> to beat.
> The shroud still hides his taunting leer, his tongue no
> tales will tell,
> He has no breath to hold, and so, he holds his secret
> well."

After reading this silently, he read it aloud, and then having it fixed in his memory, he gave it with dramatic effect, and found it to his liking. Then, having enjoyed the form, he followed his usual custom and considered the substance. "What the thunder can that mean?" he asked himself aloud, after the mysterious verse had repeated itself automatically in his mind. "Evidently this Dummy John regards himself as a dead man with a secret to keep. This is getting interesting."

The youth continued to repeat the verse during his disrobing, and as he stretched out in bed he briefly reviewed the attractions with which Benlo had served him since his return, and breathed a sigh of gratitude — typically human gratitude.

"You're not such a dead little burg, after all, if a fellow just takes you right," he murmured, and softly repeating the verse, he fell into that dreamless sleep which neither money nor a respectable conscience will buy.

CHAPTER TWENTY

The baby's interest in the moon is retained only because the moon itself is not given into the baby's hands. In the excitement of engineering Benlo's boom, Henry Ham had momentarily escaped the tantalizing charm laid upon him by the two dark eyes which had gazed out from between the evergreens; but as soon as the atmosphere became stuffy with talk of improvement, or split into torturing fragments by the bellowing "B's" of the town yell which had caught the fancy of the juvenile contingent, he became bored again and when he awakened from a reverie he was generally shocked to find that his imagination had taken him into some strange adventure with the Morgan girl.

Upon the day following Dan Sullivan's contribution to the boom, the town had buzzed like an angry hive, many siding with the marshal but more with the enthusiasm which had found an innocent expression in the town yell. Judge Hooker and Mr. Hiram Trotwood began to be worried lest this fervor of progress should pass over them to seize the prize of which they were still skeptical, and they bothered Henry Ham considerably. Finally he agreed to incorporate, with the Judge, his father, Harkins, Wilson, and himself as the board of directors, himself to be the General Manager at a salary of ten dollars a week to begin on. Judge Hooker was to be President, Mr. Trotwood, Vice-president, Editor Harkins, Secretary, and Doctor Wilson, Treasurer. These offices were to draw no salary for the first year.

While the President was to take charge of the incorporation, the General Manager was to purchase the site of the

power plant, and the Secretary, in his capacity as editor, was to direct the populace away from this particular locality.

Consulting the records, Henry Ham discovered that there were many loose joints to the titles along Beaver Creek. The portion which had found favor in the eyes of Fleet Hayes was on record as government survey but had never been placed upon the tax duplicate. Henry Ham decided that it would be good business for him to call upon the Morgan girl and see if she still claimed the land, or whether it belonged to its present tenant through adverse possession. This attractive idea came to him upon a great wave of joy; and in spite of the sloppy weather, the General Manager of the Benlo Improvement Company (Inc.) crossed the bridge to the Hill and took the road which followed the outline of the cliff.

Between the houses of the Hill and the brick house in which the girl lived there were only two small frame houses facing each other across the road, and a small private graveyard. In many places the slope from the high land was gradual, but the face of the cliff back of the graveyard was sheer and rugged. The trees within the graveyard were hard maples, but the small evergreens grew so thick around its border as to form a hedge. Many of the graves were walled with brick and covered with flat slabs according to a fashion much in vogue at an earlier day. Henry Ham recalled having visited this graveyard on pleasant Sunday afternoons, and amusing himself by scraping the moss from the faces of the slabs and reading the pathetic vanities there inscribed.

One in particular had attracted him; it stood near the edge of the cliff and was devoted to the memory of Belinda Balwin, who had died a virtuous virgin in the eighty-seventh year of her life, and as he passed the rotting stile he climbed gingerly upon it to note how the narrow home of this seldom

remembered damsel was standing the wear of the years. It always seems to a man of twenty-five that several eons have elapsed since he was twenty, and it frequently shocks him to observe the small changes which have taken place in his boyish haunts.

As he balanced himself upon the top step of the stile and glanced across the little graveyard, he received a shock of quite a different nature. Seated upon the very slab he had in mind was the Morgan girl, one arm thrown carelessly about her collie dog, and her head bent as though in deep thought. The dog fixed his eyes keenly upon Henry Ham but made neither sound nor movement, and the General Manager experienced some perplexity in deciding upon his next step. He had come for the express purpose of interviewing the young lady upon a perfectly legitimate commercial proposition, but he had not expected to find her seated beside a collie dog upon an ancient tomb.

Still, Henry Ham possessed a vanity which forced him to brave not only the dangers without, but the far more formidable fears within, and so, without entirely losing a slightly ridiculous self-consciousness, he walked daintily through the sploshy snow and when he had come to the girl's side made a graceful bow, and said, "I beg your pardon, but is not this Miss Morgan?"

There was no response and when he raised his eyes he found those of the collie scrutinizing him with frank disapproval, while those of the girl were regarding him with that imperious, self-contained, haughty, placid aloofness which is a characteristic of the wise, free animals, but is generally lost by a human after his first year. A baby is able to batten down all his facial expressions and gaze at a philosopher or a clown with as reserved a poise as a scientist would inspect a typhoid germ beneath a microscope; but when an adult attempts this he is forced to strain so many lip muscles that he merely resembles a dyspeptic

pessimist. After noting the two pairs of eyes, Henry Ham was undecided whether to address the girl or the collie.

The wide, dark eyes of the girl continued to rest on him with unblinking, impersonal directness which, however, conveyed the suggestion of a curious compromise between indifference and expectancy, and Henry Ham wondered if by chance she were not a deaf mute. He recalled Dummy John's ability to read the lips, and with a new hope burning in his breast, he spoke again, very slowly and forming his words with exaggerated precision, "Are you Miss Morgan?"

The girl made absolutely no response, the collie grumbled softly in his throat, Henry Ham noticed that the dampness was oozing through his shoes and glancing down, saw that he had been standing in a puddle of water; but he was not chilled. Instead, there was a feeling of warmth in his face not altogether pleasant, and as he moved to a dry elevation he muttered impolitely.

As a last resort, he wrote upon the back of an envelope, "Are you Miss Morgan?" and held it out to the girl. She dropped her eyes to the writing for a second and then raised them to his face once more; but her own expression had changed no more than if it had been cut in stone. On the other hand, the collie was plainly becoming irritated at this persistent stranger, and his eyes narrowed slightly as he fixed them sternly upon Henry Ham and gave utterance to a nasal whine which bordered on a growl.

Henry Ham's impulsiveness had taken him into one situation after another; but he could recall none more provoking or more difficult from which to affect a dignified withdrawal. Two trees, utter strangers to each other, may be planted side by side and grow sweetly without mutual intercourse, but when we rise to the animal kingdom we find that some interchange is necessary if complete comfort is to be preserved; and finally the youth raised his hat, bowed, faced about and started toward the stile

with little tingles across his shoulders denoting where the gaze of the girl and of the collie were resting.

"Flirt?" ejaculated Henry Ham. "One might as soon try to flirt with a head of cabbage!"

He was fully determined that whatever attraction he might have felt for this wild creature was from that instant a thing of the past — and yet something persisted in pulling at his head. For a hundred feet he resisted it successfully, and then he suddenly whirled about. The action was swift and unexpected but the positions of the pair upon the moss-grown slab seemed not to have changed; and yet Henry Ham was certain that he had caught the traces of a vanishing grin — not a girlish smile, but a mischievous, boyish grin, and he ground his teeth together and proceeded toward the stile.

Just before reaching it he glanced to the left and was startled to see the small, beady eyes of old Chet watching him from the fringe of evergreens. For an instant he pondered the advisability of interviewing this member of the perplexing trio, but he already felt like an ambassador to some new planet, and had no heart for probing the depths of this gigantic black, who would undoubtedly prove as unresponsive as the girl and the collie had been; so he crossed the stile and hurried back over the road he had come.

He did not pause at the Hill, although his thoughts turned to the gay sanity of Clara Waldron for a brief and complimentary comparison, nor did he seek the business section of Benlo; but hurried on to the humble home of Nate Shipley. The house had its accustomed shut-up and deserted appearance, but he saw Pluto resting at the door of the woodshed and rightly inferred that Nate was within. He walked confidently around the house and Pluto rose to receive him. The dog preserved a strictly neutral attitude, and the youth decided to do the same.

He saw Nate oiling some traps on the woodshed floor,

and with the dog sniffing inquiringly at his heels, he called out cheerily, "Hello, Nate; what are you up to now?"

"Hel-lo!" cried Nate hospitably, and Henry Ham felt that he had returned to earth and his own species again. "Come on in; I'm just gettin' a few traps in order, so as to have some visible means of support should anybody get inquisitive. What you been up to? Your feet look as though you had been chasin' wild ducks through the Kankakee Swamps."

"Nate," said Henry Ham, resolved to waste no time in subterfuge, "can that Morgan girl hear and speak?"

Nate Shipley looked intently at his questioner, pressed down the ash in his cob pipe, pushed back his hat, and exclaimed, "Well, I'll be garnswazzled! Now, what do you want to know that for?"

Henry Ham seated himself and filled his pipe. "If you haven't anything to swap for my question except another question, why hand my question back, and I'll see if I can't get a better trade for it somewhere else," he said calmly.

Nate chuckled softly to himself. "You allus were an amusin' little cuss," he said admiringly. "I'd give a right smart if I could locate a partner with your make-up. Well then, I'll draw back my question and drop it into my forget pouch, and give you an answer in swap. Yes, she can hear and talk both, and long ago when she was nothin' but a kid, I once heard her swear at old Chet in a way to start a balky mule; but you might as well ask Pluto there to sing, as to try to get talk out of her when she don't feel that a-way. She treats old Chet as though she was the Queen o' Sheby and he was a rubber doormat; but you can't pump two words about her out of him, no matter if you fill him to the ears on my own make o' whiskey.

"Now then, there you are; but I'd like to know what you're blushin' about — though I want you to understand

I ain't askin' ya. I gave you my hand that night, and I didn't whisper nothin' to myself. If you want me to help you war on old Chet an' the collie pack, why, I'm with ya; but I warn you free an' open that it won't be any Sunday School picnic."

It always made Henry Ham furious to blush, as he modestly felt that the freedom and independence of his past activities should have hardened him beyond the weakness of involuntary confession. "I am blushing because I made a fool of myself," he said, rather to slap the blush in the face than to satisfy Nate's curiosity. "After speaking to that girl twice and getting no answer, I wrote my question on a card, and got the same reply. What's the matter with her?"

"She's normal," replied Nate gravely, "that's what's the matter with her. Go out on the bank some day and ask a mushrat a question, and see what answer you get from him. You young fellers have the idea that all you need to do is to smile at a strange girl and get a smile in return — but not from this one, you bet your boots."

"Has she ever spoken to you?" asked Henry Ham.

Nate was not given to blushing, but he had a curious way of twisting up his face before answering a delicate question. "Well, once she did," he replied. "I had a little order for old Chet and I couldn't find him, so I asked her where he was. 'He's mindin' my business,' she snapped back, lookin' clear through me, 'and that's all the business he has to mind. What's your business?'

"Now say, I've been sort o' happy-go-lucky in my doin's and I haven't let nobody draw a line over my back; but I had more of a please-ma'am feelin' in my knees right then than ever I felt before or since. I stuttered and stammered and dug my toe in the ground, and finally I jest nachely switched myself about and fled for home like a pup two jumps ahead of a tin can. She's some gal, believe me!"

"Well, I have to see her on a matter of business. I wonder if she would answer a letter?"

"She wouldn't even get it," grinned Nate. "She never goes to the post office. Old Chet buys her some newspapers and magazines once in a while; but I'm convinced that if an earthquake was to cut her off from the rest of the world, she could do without it as comfortable as Eve did in the Garden of Eden — and you can bet your boots the Old Harry wouldn't flirt around her in the form of a snake without gettin' his head knocked off. She's got a pair of eyes in her head able to snuff the cinder off a taller candle at fifteen paces. The's plenty of other gals hereabouts, so you might jest as well give this one up."

"I tell you it is a matter of business," insisted Henry Ham. "Surely she'd speak to me if I went to her door, wouldn't she?"

"Oh, she might," replied Nate encouragingly. "She might look out the upstairs window and tell you to get on to hell about your business, or somethin' like that; but I don't calculate she's got any real use for ya. Why, old Chet, nor his woman neither, has ever been in the big brick since the old man was murdered. The windows are so dingy you can't see through 'em, and I doubt if a broom straw's been shed out on those floors in the last ten years. She has her meals sent in, and she eats like a couple o' farm hands; but I doubt if she knows as much about housekeepin' as Pluto, there. She's as wild as a hawk, and I'll bet she'd rend and tear like one, if you ruffled her feathers the wrong way. I'm curious about her myself, and I've scouted around there consid'able, but she's a puzzle to me. If you come right out and order me, why I'll help ya to war on her, as I said; but I'll be hanged if I take any love notes to her — if that's what your business is."

Henry Ham pondered rapidly. "Do you suppose we could work a game on her?" he asked. "If I could just

arouse her gratitude it might give me an opening. How would it do for you to grab her in the woods sometime, and for me to rescue her from you?"

Nate stared at his guest for a full minute, and then said gravely, "Sech a project as that ought to be tried out first. I tell you what you do: you get a rat terrier to grab a mother wildcat, and then you rescue the mother wildcat from the rat terrier. If this works out well and wins you the gratitude of the wildcat, why, I'm game to try this scheme on the Morgan girl; but jest as a head theory, it don't sound pleasin' to me. She'd shoot me up for bein' impertinent, and then slit you up like the kiver of a cranberry pie for surprisin' her when she was out o' humor. What are you so everlastin' set on her for?"

"I'm not set on her," replied Henry Ham sternly. "Do you think I'd be likely to fall in love with a half-civilized girl?"

"Well, it's been done before," answered Nate Shipley with a wag of the head. "The's a heap o' coffee-colored coons and half-breed Indians in this country, and I've noticed that little men take an everlastin' delight in riskin' their lives by marryin' big women. The' ain't no gal in these parts can hold a candle to this one for face looks, and when it comes to form and action, why, they show out like wooden cigar signs beside her. You ought to see her playin' with her favorite dog some day when she thinks she's got the whole woods to herself.

"I've watched her for hours and I'll be garnswazzled if the squirrels don't gather around in the trees to learn exercises from her. Course, you wouldn't fall in love with her so long as she won't speak to ya; but if she'd jest smile at you once, jest once the way she smiles at that dog, why, you'd chuck your religion an' your family an' your friends an' your law books into the discard and foller her into the jungle as happy as a toad. I've had experiences

with women fierce enough to turn the hair of a rattlesnake white, but if this gal was to so much as crook her finger at me, I'd swim through a flood o' blood to get her. You wear white collars and white collar manners, and you think white collar thoughts most o' the time; but I've seen you tested, and you're jest as human as I am down under your skin. That's why I allus took to ya."

"You haven't found out anything about Dummy John, yet, have you, Nate?"

"No, I haven't. To tell you the real truth, I've been plumb mired down with business. How's the bull pup gettin' along?"

"Fine. He looks as contented as a sleeping turtle and never tries to get up when I enter; but Dummy John won't let me give him a thing to eat and will only let me see him five minutes a day. I wish you would hurry up and scheme out a plan to test his hearing."

"How much thought have you been giving to old Darius since you pushed him over?"

"Hum, almost none at all."

"Well," drawled Nate, "if you could possibly manage to squeeze enough time to think a few thoughts about Darius, why, I'm sort of inclined to believe that it would pay you. He ain't got no forgetter, Darius ain't, and he's vengeful as a rattler — without givin' warnin' before he strikes, either. Most folks think that stealin' is about the worst Darius would do, but I've caught him at several worse jobs than that and if you ever actually need it to snub him up to the clippin' post, why, I'll lend you the information, though as a rule I'm prejudiced again' actin' like a newspaper. You see my business is like most people's pleasure in that it don't thrive well on advertisin', and I try to fatten my own luck by allus forgettin' what I never should have seen; but once in a while — once in a long, long while — an item persists in stickin' to my memory. If ever you

should think it would benefit the community to give Darius Waldron a white-cappin', why one particuler item will lead my steps in that direction."

Henry Ham gazed into the face of his friend, tanned and seamed with exposure, but with the calm alertness of blue steel, and rejoiced at the prank which had brought them together. "You're all right, Nate," he said, holding out his hand, "and now don't forget that you are to find out what you can about Dummy John, and fix it so I can have an interview with the Morgan girl. Good day."

"Good bye to ya, Henry Ham," said Nate, shaking hands with a grip which gave evidence of his deep-rooted loyalty. "You can count on me doing all I can when the stickin' point comes — and pointin' out all the dangers I smell on the trail to it. Pluto's about made up to ya, why don't you take some notice of him before you leave?"

Henry Ham patted the dog's head and held it for a moment between his hands. "You're a tough old character, Pluto, and there's no denying it; but I like you all the better for it. So long."

The dog gave a couple of reserved wags with his tail, and Henry Ham felt somewhat cheered by even this slight concession, as he splashed homeward through the puddles.

As he closed the outer door, he heard Grandma cackling boisterously and drew up a chair beside her. "What is the excuse for this unseasonable gaiety?" he asked solemnly.

"Yesterday, by chance, Father Time and I both touched up the same incident in the early life of Darius Waldron," replied Grandma, her eyes dancing mischievously. "Father Time just hinted at it in a sore-footed way; but I mentioned a few of the most disgraceful details, and this afternoon Darius comes back just a-foaming at the mouth. He says that when old women are living on somebody else's time, they ought to try to be respectable and not tell false-

hoods, and he says that the editor of the *Daily Citizen* ought to be lynched. He winds up by stating that he don't suppose the Editor will have moral courage enough to print his letter, and the Editor adds a note sayin' that he has moral courage enough to print any letter which isn't profane enough to break the law, and that he also has moral courage enough to be lynched with a smile on his face if it will be of any benefit to the city of Benlo.

"Henry, that young Harkins isn't such a gump as I thought he was. I used to think 'at the *Citizen* had as dusty a flavor as unsalted mush; but I declare I haven't enjoyed myself for years as much as I have since he began to devil the population of Benlo. I know a good one on the Methodist preacher's uncle, but I don't intend to write about it unless the Methodist preacher gives out a sermon condemning young Harkins. Darius says that all the preachers should do this, and he contributes more to the Methodist church than any one else; but I have my suspicions that the preachers will get all their texts out of the Old Testament until this newspaper storm blows over.

"I've noticed pretty close in my day, and preachers have a lot more self-control 'n they used to have in the olden time. Away back in early history, preachers were never content unless they could find a chance to dive headlong into a whirlpool of trouble; but nowadays, they are able to curb themselves back until they can pick the winning side, and then they go aboard on the gangplank with all their bags and baggage, and don't even risk getting their feet wet. Oh well, I don't care. I never want to start any trouble, myself; but then I'm not a preacher, and if any trouble *gets* started in spite of me, why I itch all over until I get into it.

"For the land's sake, child, look at your feet! Why, you're not fit to enter a duck pond. Take off your shoes

this minute and put on dry socks and slippers. What on earth have you been doing?"

"I have been making a graveyard call on a matter of legal business," replied Henry Ham.

"Well, if you don't rub your feet dry as soon as you take your socks off, you won't have to make any more graveyard calls. You'll be right at home there, legal business or no legal business. Run along now."

"I wish I knew who that boy was in love with," mused Grandma as she rocked briskly to and fro. "He is in love with some girl and that's as plain as the Injun sign for rain. Love always affects boys differently, but you can always tell it on 'em as easy as though they had a sign hanging around their necks. Henry is one of those who get ruggeder with love and his appetite holds out wonderful, but he gets more careless with his neckties and collars every day. I have taken ten neckties out of his room now, and he hasn't missed them. When he first came home, he would tear his hair if one of his neckties got turned over when the room was swept. Well, if it's Clara Waldron I don't see how the poor boy's love course is going to run very smooth. He, he, he! It would be a good joke to marry me and Darius Waldron into the same family! I wonder what sort of legal business could take that boy callin' into a graveyard!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

The next afternoon was even more slushy than its predecessor; but Henry Ham had an internal flame which urged him on, and he strode cheerfully out to call upon Fleet Hayes. He found Mr. Hayes in an inventive as well as a social mood, and was welcomed heartily.

"Most everybody else gets as offish as a queen bee when they're inventin'," explained Fleet Hayes, as soon as Henry Ham was comfortably seated in the workshop with his pipe filled from his host's pouch of home-grown tobacco, "but as for me, I am exactly the reverse. I simply have to chatter when I'm inventing, and once in a while a feller gets tired of chatting to the animals and longs for a human who can bounce back a reply now and again. Now, when I want to think, I build little contrapshuns with my hands and I can think just twice as keen; but when I invent, I have to put my mind on what my hands are doin' and then my tongue starts to waggin' on her own hook and I just let notions spill out of the unimportant reservoir of my brain."

"That's a curious condition," said Henry Ham. "Still, most nervous men have to have something for their hands to fidget with when their minds are busy."

"Course they do," agreed Fleet Hayes. "That's the flywheel on their brain engine. You see, memory don't count as an intellectual test. I knew a plumb idjit once who knew the Bible by heart, but he never could learn to tell which property was his and which was mine until I gave him a wallopin' with an ax helve one day, and that fitted him out with genuine moral sense which was a heap

of comfort to me. This happened a good many years before you were born."

"That's curious," said Henry Ham, with the friendly condescension he was prone to use with those he considered his inferiors. "I always regarded the memory as being quite important."

"That's cause you were school taught. Most o' you school taught fellers don't think about things, you try to recollect what some ancient had to say on the subject, which is a help up to a certain point, but after that a clog. Now, the memory is just like a series of rain barrels settin' beneath the eaves and they catch all that drips into 'em. A thrifty man fixes 'em so he can drain 'em off as he needs 'em, a still more sensible man fixes 'em so they'll filter automatic, so he can get clear water when he needs it; but a shiftless man leaves 'em open in the sun so they evaporate and leave nothin' but a lot of dirty settlin's. I don't take much stock in a memory unless it has a lot of other backin'. Thinkin', now, is a regular process like a feller gropin' about in the mud under water huntin' for somethin' which ought to be there and he gets nervous about it, like one o' the first engines which had to start new every time the wheel turned around to where the steam could give it a fresh kick. By puttin' on the flywheel the engine kept whirlin' along without jerkin'; and by havin' some little side issue goin' while he's thinkin' hard, a man's brain runs along steady without jerkin'. I don't take the slightest stock in the fidgets bein' one form of insanity."

"What are you inventing?" asked Henry Ham.

"I had an egg froze the last cold spell," answered Mr. Hayes; "and I'm going to fix up a rigging so that every time a hen leaves her nest it will spring this old alarm clock. It would be easy enough if I only had one hen; but I have to fix it so that I can set it again while some other hen is on some other nest. I don't know what's got into my hens,

but they cackle sometimes when they haven't laid an egg, and they lay eggs sometimes when they don't cackle. Salina's the only one I can trust. If I was minded to rig up a swingin' door for her, I venture to prophesy that she'd be polite enough to come right in and lay her egg in the basket where I store 'em; but I don't choose to encourage too much familiarity with hens."

It amused Henry Ham to watch the clever little man's hands manipulate the fine wires while he talked, and he also enjoyed the curious ideas which flowed forth in a placid and unbroken stream; but he found it impossible to produce any form of conversation. He was at perfect liberty to drop any little chips from his own thought into this stream; but he could not deflect the current, and was forced to wait until Mr. Hayes was satisfied that his alarm would answer his purpose, before he could successfully broach the object of his visit.

As soon as Fleet Hayes lighted a fresh pipe and settled back with a sign of satisfaction, Henry Ham asked abruptly, "Do you own this property?"

Immediately the eyes of his host narrowed suspiciously. "Why do you want to know that?" he asked. "I haven't asked you if you owned the suit of clothes you are wearing."

"No," replied Henry Ham, laughing with friendly frankness, "but then nothing in your line of business would bring up that question, while title to land is supposed to be a matter of record."

"Then why don't you go to the record?" asked Fleet Hayes gruffly.

"I have gone to the record and it is not in your name."

"Whose name is it in?"

"It still appears to be part of the Morgan estate, although I am forced to admit that the title is rather vague."

"It has been in my possession for over thirty years," said Fleet Hayes, "and so it belongs to me. I asked Morgan

how much he would sell it for when he bought the place. He said I could have it so far as he was concerned; but he wouldn't do anything but laugh when I pestered him to sell it to me for a small sum so I could get a deed. I hold it by adverse possession, and that's as good a title as any and I'll go to war before I'll give it up."

"What do you value it at?" asked Henry Ham.

"What do you value your skin at?" returned Fleet Hayes. "This place suits me as well to live in as your skin does you, and I put about the same value on it. Now then, how much do you ask for your skin?"

"I see your point, but the cases are not exactly similar. I could not survive the removal of my skin, and therefore its sale is beyond the question. A piece of real estate, however, is not of vital importance, nor is it a thing to be sentimental about."

"I suppose not — when a feller's young — " replied Fleet Hayes quietly; "but when ya start to age up so you can notice it, why little pleasures and friendships and associations keep a-slippin' away like the leaves fallin' off a tree, until at last a feller finds himself standin' all alone like a gnarled old trunk — and then it is that he begins to feel a mighty close relation with whatever he's rooted in."

In spite of his utilitarian selfishness the youth felt decidedly uncomfortable, as most of us do in the face of militant simplicity; and, his usually ready wit refusing to frame a suitable remark, he remained silent and the little man continued. "I've had my boyhood and my youth, my war time, my love time, and my work time. Young man, I've lived a heap deeper 'n you'd think for, jest to look at me, now; but all this is past. Durin' my early life, I didn't take no more root than the buttonball of a sycamore tree, and I never felt any outrage when a little scuddy o' wind sent me swirlin' along from where I'd lighted; but now

that I have passed through the swellin' growth of gain to the shrinkin' growth of decay — why I'd just about as soon have ya set fire to me as to try to transplant me."

His voice was tense with feeling but had no trace of anger, and in the hush which followed, the soul of Henry Ham opened the door of its private office and admitted a doubt which had heretofore knocked in vain.

He had left college firmly convinced that there was no flaw in the dictum, "He may seize who hath the power and he may hold who can" — meaning, of course, legal power — and his connection with the real estate business had merely strengthened this belief; but the doubt which had just been admitted to the private office of his soul immediately questioned the rectitude of this dictum and added greatly to his discomfort.

He had determined that it was his duty not only to accumulate material wealth, but to impress his own individuality upon each step of this process. It was his duty to be successful according to the world's standards, and it irritated him to think that he was not strong enough to carry out this obvious duty without constantly feeling that in scheming for the possessions of another he was a marplot and a trespasser. Without realizing it, he craved confidence and affection almost as much as he desired admiration and power.

"It's a tough world, Mr. Hayes," he said sympathetically; "but in this case I think that a pleasant compromise can be arranged. You see, we do not want the land on which your house stands, and if you agree to sell us what we want, we shall quiet the title to all this land and then — "

"We, us! Who are you talking about?" asked Fleet Hayes, taking the pipe from his mouth and looking with grim steadiness into the eyes of Henry Ham. Fleet Hayes had once been a sharpshooter, and his eyes were still clear and cold when he narrowed them.

"Well, you see," began Henry Ham, a little lamely, "Judge Hooker and a few more of us — "

"Get out of my workshop, get out of my house, get off of my property!" cried Fleet Hayes, springing to his feet and brandishing his pipe as though it were a weapon. "You're a spy, that's what you are! You come snooping around here meowin' soft and plaintive like a sick kitten, but you're a skunk, that's what you are, and I never want to see your face again."

Strangely enough, this steadied Henry Ham and tempered his purpose. His was not a narrow nature at bottom, and he much preferred an open fight to subterfuge. "I am not a skunk in cat's clothing, Mr. Hayes," he said with some dignity, but more good fellowship, "and I have no desire to wrong you. You have inadvertently stumbled upon a piece of property which would ordinarily be of almost no value; but, owing to a peculiar complication, is now of some importance to a company which is willing to pay you a fair price for it, and to also give you the use of most of it for the rest of your life. There is no use deceiving yourself, Mr. Hayes; the property can be taken away from you whether you wish it or not."

"I know it can, I know it can!" cried Fleet Hayes bitterly. "A feller don't have to wait 'till he's dead before he knocks his head again' the injustice of that 'unto them which have shall be given' theory. I know full as much about the law as ever I want to; but I know one thing which is a heap of comfort to me — the law can take revenge, but the law can't prevent, the law can't prevent. I'm not issuin' no threats, and I own up that I can't prevent my property from fallin' into the hands of the survivors; but whenever a feller feels strong about a thing, the's allus a way to relieve his feelin's; and it's a knowledge o' this that puts the brakes on you law sharks, when nothin' else would.

"If you could just make laws tight enough to hold in

the steam of righteous indignation, by gee, but we would have some laws! But you're not goose-stupid all the time, you remember what happened when the law — the pure and spotless law — said that a slave was not a human but a piece o' property, and so now you feel your way along a little and taper down your laws so they won't work injustice on enough folks at one time to cause a war. Still, the's other ways, and I don't want no more doin's with you. You just get off my place and keep off it as long as it is mine, and when it ceases to be mine — why, I shall have ceased carin' what happens. I'm really disappointed in you. Good bye!"

Henry Ham sat silently smoking his pipe, and Fleet Hayes lighted his own, which had failed to survive the fluency of his gestures. Very few lawyers reach old age without admitting to themselves that law and justice are not invariably synonymous, and the young lawyer in this case was thinking very seriously.

"You are an idealist, Mr. Hayes," he said finally, "and your sentiments are natural and admirable. The law is not infallible; but it is the only raft we have upon which to navigate the troubled waters of clashing desires, and the man who substitutes violence for law is pushing the race back into savagery rather than pulling it up to enlightenment."

"Charlotte Ruching!" ejaculated Fleet Hayes sarcastically. "The law don't get any headache worryin' about enlightenment. What the law fusses about is getting private property away from the little fellows who have made it worth something, into the hands of them who already own more 'n they can use. If a single individual was holdin' some property idle for his own amusement and the law would pry it loose from him and hold it open for the good of the general public, why, I'd be obleeged to own up it was justice, even though I lost a little of my own skin in the transaction,

but that ain't the game. The game is to grab it away from the individual by due process of law, and turn it over to a corporation with the privilege of usin' it as a stomach pump to draw the nourishment right out o' the vitals o' the general public — and I'm opposed to it."

"You have some grounds for this general prejudice, I admit; but in this case you are merely acting like the dog in the manger."

Mr. Hayes regarded the youth with satirical amusement. "You think I'm jest a half-witted simpleton because I live the way I do," he said dryly, "but I live the way I do for no other reason than because it suits me best to live this way, and I'm a free man — which mighty few of you town Johnnies are. Pshaw, you think you're wonderful smart, but I have known for years what a perfect location this was for a water power. I didn't want one here, I didn't want to be pestered by a lot of people quarrelling over it and so I kept still about it. I wanted power myself, cause the' ain't no way to age a violin except mechanically, and I've had to make Caroline work on a treadmill to supply me with the power; but all the time I've wanted to put in a turbine here and run all kinds of devices. I've made a dozen models, and I know exactly how the most power can be got with the least bother. Now, you come snoopin' around and think you can pull the wool over my eyes; but I tell you I've got one good fight in me yet, and I don't ask no better cause than to have my property snatched out from beneath my very nose."

"I suppose there is no way for me to make you believe that I did not come snooping about here to rob you, but the fact is that I had no such intention," said Henry Ham earnestly. "You interested me purely as a human character, and I greatly admire your inventive genius; but the fact remains that human progress cannot be stopped out of deference to the sentiment of any one man, and a water

power must be erected here. I intended to permit you any concession you might ask, because I did not, and do not wish to lose your friendship and confidence; but if you choose war, why, I suppose it will have to be war."

"Darn it!" muttered Fleet Hayes. He rose to his feet, and said "Darn it!" with more emphasis; and then he struck his palm with his fist and put his whole being into the expression. "Darn it! I liked you as a boy, you were such an unusual mean one; and when you came back the other day I was plumb took by ya, and hoped I was going to enjoy a little human friendship again. Now, you come and say that you intend to turn my little world upside down and make me an outcast in my old age, and, boy, I still like ya — but I don't intend to stretch myself into a stepladder for you to use in robbin' me of my own fruit. I don't want to love my enemies and I never did — it's perfect foolishness! I want to hate 'em, I want to hate 'em all the time, and I'm goin' to try my best to do it. Who's in with you besides Judge Hooker?"

"Now, I'm not going to encourage you in your wickedness," said Henry Ham, smiling naturally, for Fleet Hayes had flattered him most acceptably. "You will like all the fellows that I like; and I want you to think this over at your leisure and convince yourself that it is better to deal with friends than with enemies. I am sure that you are still too good a soldier to fight simply for love of fighting, and you know as well as I, that you cannot hold your place when it interferes with a public utility. I intend to part in friendship whether you do or not, and to prove it, I am going to ask you for a sack of this tobacco."

"You're a smart one," returned Fleet Hayes with a slowly widening grin; "you know mighty well that if you force a favor on an independent man you rouse up his ire by puttin' him under obligations against his will; but if you can jest git him to do you a favor, why, he'll adopt you

in his heart and stay awake nights frettin' about your welfare. How much do you need?"

"Enough to last a month," replied Henry Ham.

"I'll fit you out," said Mr. Hayes, filling a paper sack from his store, "and I hope the smokin' of it will take away some of your meanness."

"How much is it?" asked Henry Ham, putting his hand into his pocket.

"There you go," said Mr. Hayes in a tone of disgusted disappointment. "You know it would be again' the law for me to sell it; but you modern folks want to buy everything, from wives to smokin' tobacco. The only thing you can buy from me is something that I offer for sale to whoever has the price of it. This tobacco of mine isn't a nose-insultin' vermifuge like store tobacco. It's a private luxury, and it's not for sale. I gave it to you, and I can't take it back — or hanged if I wouldn't do it!"

"Well," said Henry Ham, slipping the sack under his arm and rising, "you are in such a spiteful temper today that I am going to hustle away before you bite me. I am much obliged to you, until I get a chance to square up some other way. Good day."

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

The boy walked briskly along for a short distance in a cheerful frame of mind, and then the very perplexing obstacle which the peculiar disposition of Fleet Hayes formed to the fulfilment of his schemes, sobered him and he walked slowly and fell into a reverie from which he was aroused by the contact of a pebble upon his stiff hat.

He glanced up at the cliff on his right, but could see no one; and, as the cliff did not overhang to any extent, he could see no way that a pebble could fall upon his hat without considerable assistance. He examined the hat in the hope of finding a clew to the mystery, but, aside from a very perceptible dent in the crown, the hat refused to offer any helpful suggestions. The thought occurred to Henry Ham that if his younger brothers were by any chance on the cliff above him the voluntary tribute of a pebble upon his hat would be an expression entirely consistent with their uncouth conceptions of humor.

While he was debating whether it were better to resume his hat and his dignity, or to make a sudden sally up a convenient gully and surprise whomever had surprised him, another pebble was so skilfully aimed that his hat would have been struck the second time if it had been upon his head instead of in his hand.

It was really a very small pebble but the cliff was fifty feet high and Henry Ham was startled into a distinctly unparliamentary ejaculation. The cliffs on both sides of Beaver Creek were of soft slate and gullies into them were frequent. This particular gully was very untidy from oozy mud, snow water, deposits of rotting leaves, and dangling

roots and vines. Furthermore, the irregular steps were jagged and slippery; but Henry Ham had the advantage of clinging to a purpose once he had a firm hold on it, so he disregarded his raiment utterly and scrambled up the gully with an occasional growl at the difficulties presented, and a semi-occasional threat directed toward the party or parties responsible for this unexpected and undesirable digression.

When he reached the top of the gully, which came out some distance from the face of the cliff, there was no one in sight, and he hurried to the point from which the pebbles must have been tossed. There was long, dead grass here and no imprints, so he made a hasty examination of the small plateau and then hurried to the top of another gully which would lead down to the creek a little farther upstream than the heterogeneous cabin of Fleet Hayes.

Henry Ham was deeply interested by this time and he ran to the opening of this gully at full speed and hurried down it recklessly. Halfway down he came upon footprints, the roughly round ones of a fair-sized dog and long slender ones made by moccasins. He could not recall having noticed it, but was sure that the Morgan girl wore moccasins with the fur outside, and all traces of vexation left his face, at the same instant that his speed increased. He leaped from point to point, and did not even mutter when his feet flew from beneath him and he slid down the last incline. The footprints led upstream and he ran hopefully in the same direction. When at last he reached the upper riffle, he saw that those who had made the footprints had entered the creek, and he paused in disgust. His clothes were already so badly soiled that there was no excuse to be solicitous of them; but he recoiled at the thought of entering the icy water.

He looked at the slope beyond and at its very top he saw a clump of evergreens which made an ideal shelter. The

daylight was beginning to wane, but as he scrutinized this clump closely he was confident that he could detect a face looking out from it and down at him. There had been no footprints of old Chet and the opportunity was one he could not afford to waste, so with a deep breath to stimulate his nerve, Henry Ham stepped into the stream.

It ran swiftly over the rocks and soon came above his knees, but he kept his eyes upon the opening in the clump of evergreens, and at each step was more certain that this was the girl. In order to reserve his eyes for this duty, it was necessary for him to feel his way cautiously with his feet, which was a distinct bother as he was eager to begin the ascent on the other side. He was surprised to see how well his limbs were standing the cold water, and there was a momentary, and quite typical regret that his brother Pikeman could not see this Spartan spectacle.

While his mind was thus divided, his feet grew careless and he slipped from a stone and nearly toppled over. When he recovered himself and looked again at the clump of evergreens, that which he had taken for the fur cap of the girl was no longer visible, and he threw caution to the winds and ran through the remainder of the creek and up the slope beyond.

There was neither snow nor mud on this slope and he could not be sure that she had been in the clump of evergreens, although he was still confident that he had not been mistaken. He rushed into the woods at the top of the slope and scanned them in every direction; the trees were old and stately but the underbrush had not been kept clear and he could not see very far through the cluttered aisles. He hurried along toward the big brick in which the girl lived, but as twilight was falling fast he gave it up, sat on a fallen trunk and considered. He soon found this to be a chilly exercise and with a grumbling commentary

on his luck, he arose and plodded over to the road which at this point was some distance from the edge of the cliff.

He was beginning to be conscious of his disheveled appearance, and content with the darkness which was gathering; but he was sorely disappointed at his failure, and the dreary homeward walk with shoes sloshing at every step was a discouraging prospect.

"That girl has made a fool of me for the last time!" he exclaimed in his heat, as his coat caught on a barb of the fence through which he was crawling. Then, as he reached the road and turned toward Benlo, he added with thoughtful frankness, "Still, I can't lay that on her, as I am a natural born fool of high potentiality, and seem to be getting no better, fast."

This simple confession cheered him by clearing the girl, and he stepped out with a good swing and without once glancing back. As he passed the opening of the lane which led to the old brick he slackened his pace slightly, but soon resumed the brisk pace and even began to softly whistle a sadly sentimental but still comforting tune.

"She's sure a cute one, ain't she?" asked a low voice from the dusk behind him, which he instantly recognized as belonging to Nate Shipley.

Henry Ham was rejoiced at the prospect of company, but slightly abashed to think that his recent activities might have been presented to an audience.

"To whom do you refer?" he asked with reserve.

"Why, to Fleet Hayes's mule, Caroline, of course," replied Nate Shipley with the utmost gravity. "Who else could I be referrin' to?"

"I didn't know," replied Henry Ham uncomfortably.

"I'm not altogether ignorant of the etiquette of high society," said Nate as he fell into step beside the youth, "and it wouldn't become me to make allusion to your havin' pebbles thrown on your head and chasin' a strange girl

through the crick — unless you was to give some hint that such topics would be pleasin' to ya."

Henry Ham glanced at the sober face of his companion, noted that the dignified Pluto was close at heel, that Naet had a game bag at his side and a shotgun across his shoulder, and after a minute's silence, said, "I suppose you saw it all. Where did she go after I slipped in the middle of the creek?"

Nate Shipley chuckled silently for a moment, then became serious, and answered, "Well, she scudded along to a holler trunk which happened to be convenient, and you came and sat on the trunk and cogitated; but I'm sort of inclined to believe that you haven't had much trainin' in the woods, and you didn't fetch out any ideas."

"Where were you?" asked Henry Ham.

"I was off to the right watchin' old Chet who was watchin' you from this side o' the crick. I'm not interferin' in your affairs, Henry Ham; but I would like to be handy when that Zulu thinks it's his duty to handle you a little. Do you wear a weapon?"

"No, and I don't need one."

"Probably not, probably not; but old Chet don't know there is any law except what the girl gives out; and if he was to get the idea that you meant her ill, he'd most likely remove ya."

"Great Scott, I'm not a public target for girls to throw stones at, am I?" cried Henry Ham. "He'd better mind his own business."

"Lookin' after that gal is about the only business he has at this time o' the year, and he don't care what she does to you. All he's waitin' for is for you to do somethin' to her."

"Why do you suppose she threw those pebbles at me?" asked Henry Ham.

"She don't know herself," replied Nate with ancient

wisdom. "She peeked over at you, smiled, drew back, peeked again, picked up the pebble, held it a long time, and then, when a boy-grin came to her face, she flung it — but it wasn't no boy impulse which made her fling it. You can bet your boots on that."

"What did make her throw it?" insisted the boy eagerly.

"Well," replied Nate, shaking his head at the oddities of destiny, "whenever a certain amount o' rain gathers in the clouds, it's bound to fall and we may as well be prepared for it. She has took a fancy to you, but she's man-strange and don't know what the feelin' means. Her face was shinin' like an angel's when you chased her, and she was hopin' you'd catch her; but she was afraid of it, too, and I'll venture to say she was all of a tremble while you were settin' on that log. If you'd take my advice, you'd let her plumb alone.

"She's like a wild animal, and if she once makes up her mind that she wants you for a mate, why she won't have no shame about it. She'll chase you plumb to your home and if you lock the door in her face, she'll set outside and howl. Why, you goose, you; if ever she gets a real hankerin' for you, she'll dog you night and day, and she'd tear the eyes out of any other gal who'd dare to squint at ya. It'll be good fun as long as you're the hunter; but she won't care a bug about the rules of high society, and if ever she turns to hunt you, why — you have my pity."

They walked along in silence and the conflict which had been waging within the boy's heart waxed fiercer than ever. He knew that with all of his physical nature he wanted this girl — to have but not to hold. If only he could keep her all to himself away from his friends and his family, he would be entirely satisfied; but he partially realized her free pride and her tenacity, and shuddered at the possible entanglement which awaited at the end of the path he was eager to travel.

"Boy," said Nate Shipley, stopping and facing him just before they reached the Hill, "I'd give my right hind leg to have her as much interested in me as she is in you; but at the same time I'm advisin' you to let her alone. I'll put a stopper in old Chet without feelin' any qualms; but I don't reckon I'd be able to play very hard again' the girl herself."

"I don't mean her any harm," said Henry Ham seriously. "I don't know her at all, and therefore I can't tell what I feel toward her; but I don't intend to injure her in the least, and I'll never expect you to do a single thing which will be to her disadvantage."

They turned and walked on, and just before they parted, Nate said, "I know that you don't really mean to injure her; but if it's known that you've been chasin' her through the woods, you've injured her already. You ought to make up your mind exactly what you want with her — and then stick to it."

"I'm trying to," said Henry Ham; "but it's not an easy thing to do until I have spoken to her. Good night."

"Good night," said Nate. "You can allus trust me; but don't strain me."

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Henry Ham visited Robin Hood five minutes each evening, and marveled at the dog's patience; but found it impossible to pass the reserve of the silent physician. Each evening Dummy John motioned Henry Ham to the only chair, and then stood erect in his white woolen robe throughout the intruder's call. He reminded the youth of some ancient pagan priest, and as the mysterious verse persisted in repeating itself, the romantic curiosity of Henry Ham was aroused to the highest pitch. Each time he looked at the silent man, the line, " His tongue no tales will tell," seemed spoken audibly.

The youth did his honest best to make some fitting return for what he regarded as a favor not entirely recompensed by the nominal fee; he offered to lend books, or to do any possible act which would be of service; but while at times a tiny gleam in the man's eyes seemed to indicate that the spirit in which the proffers were made was appreciated, they were never accepted.

Finally the day came when Robin Hood was to be released, and that evening Henry Ham arrived in high spirits; but he found Dummy John so dejected that his fine reserve was broken down and the dark, soft eyes, which had hitherto been calm and cool behind their veil, were full of trouble and a vague, impersonal pleading.

For the first time he wrote, although the youth had frequently attempted to contrive this; and when the communication was handed him, Henry Ham scrutinized the penmanship eagerly; but the hand was fine and graceful, and bore no resemblance to that in which the verse was

written. With a sigh of disappointment, he read the following note:

"Darius Waldron was here today to collect his rent. He recognized the dog, and ordered me to move tomorrow. When I first came, he made me sign a contract to move on a day's notice."

And so, instead of being able to return better for good as he had hoped, the youth saw that he had paid his debt in evil, and his heart was very sore. After finishing the comments upon Mr. Waldron's character which the occasion seemed to demand, Henry Ham reversed the paper and wrote, "Do not worry. I shall get you a better place, rent free, and help you to move tomorrow."

Dummy John read the note, and as he raised his eyes and gazed in sad doubt at the bare walls of his room, the youth thought of the remarks Fleet Hayes had made upon the love of the old for the spot in which they had taken root, and, for a moment, book law seemed but a frail protection for the weak.

Dummy John's gaze continued to range about his little castle, resting fondly upon each bit of rude furniture; and then, seating himself mechanically upon the bunk, he let his eyes fall to the floor, and stroked his long white beard with every semblance of perplexity.

Henry Ham studied him intently and was surprised at the great change which one day had brought about; the confidence, calm, and dignity were gone, and in their place was the pathos of second childhood. He wanted to comfort the weary old man, but knew not the way. Finally he crossed the room and touched his shoulder. "I will find you a place," he lipped carefully.

Dummy John fixed his sad eyes upon the steady ones of the boy, and they were full of pleading and moist with the question he sought to ask as he solemnly made the sign of the cross upon his breast. Instantly the youth repeated

the sign with equal solemnity upon his own breast, and said, " I will find the place."

With a smile of hope which came upon the wings of a sigh, the white-haired man bowed his head in thanks, pressed the bulldog's head between his slender hands for a moment, and then opened the door. On its threshold the dog paused and looked quizzically into his face, and Dummy John stooped and caressed his brindle side. This was his usual fee, and this the receipt in full which he cheerfully gave; Henry Ham's five-dollar bill was merely an incidental.

Robin Hood walked stiffly, and the youth had ample time to reflect upon the oath to which he had committed himself. A domicile to exactly suit Dummy John was not easy to find, nor were Henry Ham's resources extensive; but an oath was an oath and in the lexicon of youth which he was then using there was, indeed, no such word as fail, so he shortly gave up the futile consideration of his own resources, and turned to the more elastic ones possessed by his friends. Instantly, the workshop which Editor Harkins had offered for the operation flashed upon him, the clouds lifted, and he began to whistle a merry tune.

Leaving the dog and plenteous instructions with his younger brothers, Henry Ham hastened to the *Citizen* office where he had the good fortune to find Harkins reading a magazine.

" Do you know," said the editor abruptly, " that the man who invented the serial story is even now reading seventy-five of them, printed on asbestos paper and coming out at century intervals without any synopsis?"

" You seem fretful," returned Henry Ham, " what's the matter?"

" I have been saving up back numbers until I could take the whole thing in a capsule, and this morning the unspeakable Bill Stedders used the finishing number to start the

fire with. Is there any fine for killing such a creature?"

"Certainly not, there's a reward — but never mind him; do you use your workshop much, nowadays?"

"What do you think I do," demanded the indignant editor, "work myself night and day in two shifts? I don't get a chance to look into it."

"Don't get chesty," cautioned Henry Ham. "Remember that I am the one who knocked the eye out of your idleness, and as a slight recompense, I want the workshop, rent free."

"'Why don't you speak for yourself, John?'" quoted Harkins. "Wouldn't you also like Bill Stedders as your errand boy? Don't be a piker, spread yourself and soar a bit."

"Darius Waldron has evicted Dummy John, and as I have not yet completed the arrangements for lynching Mr. Waldron, I have promised to get Dummy John a new place. Your workshop is the only place that would just suit him. What kind of a place is your workshop and how long would it take to move your junk out?"

Editor Harkins soberly knocked the ashes from his pipe, extracted his tobacco sack, and asked in a subdued voice, "Do you object to smoking, Mr. Trotwood?" Receiving not only permission but the flattery of imitation, Editor Harkins resumed in an awestruck voice, "All things come 'round to him who hath the nerve. Henry Ham, I'm glad I've hitched my wagon to your star; you are certain to get everything you want.

"The workshop has running water, a cement floor, and the odor of rank tobacco smoke, my works of art can be transferred to the attic in about an hour, and it will be Bill Stedders' penance to perform this office the first thing in the morning; after which I turn the building over to you, with whatsoever coal is left in the scuttle; but not that which still remains in the cellar of the house."

"You'll get your reward right here on earth," said Henry Ham with hearty assurance, as he rose to go.

Next day Henry Ham procured a dray and assisted Dummy John to move his few belongings and arrange them in the new home, which was larger than the old and ceiled at the eaves, thus giving an air space made available by several knotholes; but these were not sufficient, so Henry Ham graciously gave permission to cut a trapdoor above the bunk, and to take out the small windows in each gable, placed there for ornamentation. By the time the arrangements were completed, the hunted look had left Dummy John's face, although its traces still remained.

The building stood close to the alley in a thicket of lilac bushes, and was far from the usual haunts of the boys, so that Henry Ham felt confident that it would soon suit its new tenant better than his former residence had, and after making it plain that the place was completely under Dummy John's control, he wished him good night and left.

He had been thrice disappointed that day: first, in hoping that Darius would attempt to make a scene, second, that Dummy John would miss the verse and suggest some solution for it, third, that some innocent package would break and expose contents which would feed his appetite for romanticism to satiety.

Still, he was on excellent terms with himself as he walked home, and he fell to seriously wondering why it was that he treated Dummy John, Nate Shipley, and Fleet Hayes with so much more consideration than his own father and Judge Hooker. He hoped that he respected the latter more than the former, but they invariably seemed to draw forth the supercilious side of his nature, and he was much given to following the line of least resistance. "I give it up," he said, presently. "I am I, they are they, and the needle has no idea why it follows the magnet."

For the past few weeks he had been using every wile to induce Mr. Hayes to change his mind and willingly sell the water power site, but without avail. He well knew the danger of delay, but stubbornly fought any suggestion to seize the place through the right of eminent domain. He felt a genuine friendship and admiration for the little man, and was at times surprised to find his sympathy so distorted that he even hoped the independent squatter would be able to continue in the demonstration of his anachronistic ideal.

Fleet Hayes seemed to have at least eighty per cent of obstinacy in his composition; and while he continued to welcome the youth and to converse freely upon all other subjects he refused to be warmed by the sordid rays of commercialism.

"You get Caroline's consent to this sale, and then come to me!" he exclaimed finally. "You get George's consent, and Salina's, and Tecumseh's, and then I'll be willing to talk business with you, but not until then. Just as soon as they want to be bothered by a lot of fussy men, why I'll not hold out any longer; but I don't calculate that they take any more stock in changes than I do."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

MARCH was a mean and blustery month, but it had its moments of relaxation; and when the afternoons were warm the sap would rise in the veins of Henry Ham and fill him with increased longings. The creek was high and he could not interview Fleet Hayes if he crossed on the bridge and walked up the stream on the side where dwelt his charmer; while if he kept to the side where duty offered a fitting excuse, he ran but slight risk of meeting her. Circumstances seldom daunt a young man, but the inertia of inanimate objects pesters him with restless barbs.

The explosion of a kerosene lamp in the back room of a grocery brought forth the volunteer fire company, and an increased demand for electric lights. There was some dignity in recording that a fire was started through two crossed wires being short-circuited; but there was none in confessing that a lamp had exploded, and civic pride poured into the newly worn channels of the *Benlo Daily Citizen*. The proprietor of the machine shop contributed an article upon the economy of water power, and suggested that it might be possible to harness Beaver Creek.

This sent a cold chill to the directors of the Benlo Improvement Company, and at its next meeting Judge Hooker arose and made a speech. He delivered his address as pompously as though it were the Fourth of July, and made such an impression upon himself that at its close he declared that too much time had already been wasted in toying with the person named Fleet Hayes, and that he would, himself, accompany Henry Ham upon the following day, and settle the matter at once. "If he will be reasonable," said Judge

Hooker, "we shall be lenient; if he continues obstinate, we shall put the machinery of the law into operation and smooth him out as with a steam roller."

"We may," said Henry Ham dryly; "but I doubt it."

"My boy," condescended the Judge, "you have displayed an admirable acumen in the initiation of this venture; but — if you will permit me to suggest it — no amount of precocious perspicacity can quite compete with the riper judgment which years of bitter experience have given to your father and myself."

The eyes of Mr. Trotwood closed dreamily and the expression of proper modesty with which he draped his face was as complacent as that which graces a fresh, sweet roll of golden butter. On the other hand, Henry Ham was so given to wrapping his own thoughts in swaddling clothes that he had lost much of his reverence for the Judge's style. "Very well," he rejoined, waving his hand expansively, "just pack this ripe, if not overripe judgment in cotton, load it upon a dray, and tomorrow we'll go forth and dazzle the simplicity of Fleet Hayes."

Next day after luncheon, Judge Hooker arrayed himself with unusual care. There was very little improvement possible to his ordinary garb, but his Prince Albert coat was brushed until the most apathetic dust atom in existence would have felt uncomfortable at remaining, the white vest was spotless, the gray trousers were so dignified and virtuous that the creases almost crackled when the knees were bent, the shirt bosom was a field of chivalry on which tilted the curious black studs before the pearl collar button which could be no other than the Queen of Beauty. He wore a pair of tan gloves and in his right hand he carried a gold-headed cane polished to dazzling splendor. It was a fair day and he bore his overcoat elegantly folded across his left arm with the silk lining to the fore. His black felt hat was tilted just the tiniest degree to the left,

his head was tilted just this same degree to the right, and the new black ribbon which held his gold-rimmed nose glasses added the last touch to an irreproachable toilet. If any one doubted this, a glance at the Judge's expression dissipated this skepticism as fog before the sun.

"Are you ready, Henry?" asked Judge Hooker blandly.

Henry Ham gazed in frank appreciation. "Judge," he said solemnly, "if Fleet Hayes does not hand over his entire property at sight of you, he is the Rock of Gibraltar in disguise. Is walking consistent with your state, or shall we have a carriage?"

"I need the exercise," said Judge Hooker graciously; "we shall walk."

Arriving at the home of Mr. Hayes, knocking, and being admitted, Henry Ham introduced Judge Hooker with ample formality. "You are a veteran, I understand," said Judge Hooker, shaking hands. "I was Colonel of the —th Indiana."

"I was in the cavalry," said Fleet Hayes. "Take a seat."

Henry Ham was secretly pleased to note the fine reserve which enveloped Mr. Hayes, but he was also anxious to get possession of the power site as soon as possible and did all in his power to make the interview agreeable and productive. Judge Hooker was not deeply interested in the lower orders of creation even after they had been raised to the high privileges of pethood; but he smiled benignly upon George, the coon, who chattered at him from his nest in the roof peak. When, however, Henry Ham suggested an introduction to Salina, whose charms he praised highly, the Judge excused himself, albeit with due politeness.

After they had conversed upon a variety of topics, the Judge, who knew not his host, felt that he had made a sufficient impression, and, turning to Fleet Hayes, said confidentially, "Now, Mr. Hayes, you have a little property

here which is of small value for agricultural purposes, but which can be useful to us in a strictly mechanical way. You are not able to furnish a clear title, you have never paid any taxes, and therefore it seems to me that you are showing very poor business judgment in refusing to make us some kind of an offer. Don't you think so?"

"Well, Judge," replied Fleet Hayes slowly, "now that you mention it, I most distinctly don't think so. I have more money than I need, this place suits me exactly as a home; and if my business judgment was to sic me on to sellin' somethin' I was fond of for somethin' I didn't want, why, I'd go to a dentist and have my business judgment pulled."

"Hu-umm," returned Judge Hocker thoughtfully. "Of course I am ready to admit that from crudely selfish motives you might have some excuse for preserving this locality in its primitive simplicity; but I cannot believe that a man who was willing to risk his life in defense of his country would block the road to progress and development for purely selfish motives."

"Charlotte Ruching," murmured Fleet Hayes softly, and Henry Ham was forced to cough. "Judge," continued Fleet Hayes in a quietly amused voice, "it does very well to feed a large crowd on that kind of dope, because at least nine-tenths of that crowd are scratching their fingernails down to the quick, trying to keep in style; but that's foolish talk to spring on one man who has spent so much time thinkin' for himself and watchin' the happy little animals that he has come to look upon business judgment as two-thirds superstition and one-third insanity. I'll admit that my motives are selfish — selfishness is just as necessary to keep a human from bein' the food product of his fellow cannibals as a shell is to protect a mussel — but from the tone of voice in which you mention selfishness, I presume that you have entirely outgrown it. Is this

project of yours any sort of a secret, or have you taken into your confidence all those who would benefit by the progress and development which I am selfishly blockin'?"

Judge Hooker gazed down at the placid little man through narrowed eyelids, while a slightly puzzled expression hovered about his patrician lips beneath the closely cropped moustache. During his official career, Judge Hooker had grown to look upon contempt of court as being on a par with treason and it had cost him severe pangs to step from the protection of this republican form of *lese majesty* upon retiring to private life.

"Well, hem, hem," began the Judge, "you see all great movements must have a period of private growth; life, eh, like waters gathering in the heart of a mountain before bursting forth for all the thirsty to enjoy; and so it is in this case."

"Very true, Judge," said Fleet Hayes; "but when the mountain has arranged for a spring, it doesn't charge the thirsty anything to drink. Most companies which devote themselves to progress and development aim to make the charges high enough to have a little left over for their own private uses. I rather gathered from my talks with Henry Ham, here, that he was expectin' a little profit in this deal, and I haven't said nothin' to nobody; but if it's only unselfish progress and improvement, why, I don't suppose you'd object to my askin' the advice of a few men who have exercised their business judgment a mite more freely than I have — Darius Waldron, for instance."

The Judge flicked a speck from his sleeve, wiped his glasses, and said ponderously, "I cannot understand you, sir, I cannot understand you. You seem to be absolutely immune to all human arguments."

"Then why don't you try me on animal arguments?" asked Mr. Hayes, with twinkling eyes. "I really have a great respect for animals. You see humans are so set on

being huddled together that it is almost impossible for 'em to be clean. They hide their filth away from the sun and it breeds disease, and then they dose with drugs until it makes me sick to look at 'em. Did you ever stop to think that before the white man came here, every stream in the forest was a cup of purity, and yet not one animal of them all had ever heard of the word sanitary. I really believe, Judge, it would be a good plan to try me on animal arguments."

During the moments that Judge Hooker's confidence in himself had been gently oozing away, George had been yielding to the coaxing of his lively curiosity. He had sidled along to the wall, dropped to the floor, crept to Henry Ham's stool, and standing on his hind legs had clutched the boy's familiar coat with his left paw, while surreptitiously reaching forth his right to investigate the Judge's more brilliant raiment.

Henry Ham had been noting the conversation carefully, and an inspiration had come to him. "Mr. Hayes," he said earnestly, "the Judge has made a success of his life, but mine is all before me. He can afford to view this matter from the standpoint of impersonal progress; but to me it is a great opportunity, and I wish you would give me the right to use this site for a power plant, you to retain such privileges as will secure your continued privacy and comfort."

"Now," said Fleet Hayes, his face beaming, "you are beginning to show animal sense. I allus did like you just because you were some like the animals; you are full of mischief, just like they are, you have to be watched, just like them; but, pshaw, you're as easy to see through as they are, and never an animal yet come to me trustfully without gettin' pretty near all it wanted. I wouldn't be a mite surprised if we could come to a dicker — now that you have come to me with your open-hearted, selfish appetite; for there is nothing which would give me a more selfish pleasure,

than to let you have, freely and fully, just what you most wanted."

At this critical juncture, the business judgment of George, the coon, decided that a location upon the lap of the dignified Judge would suit his present requirements to a nicety, and he promptly leaped thereon. The Judge was startled, lost his presence of mind, and gave the coon a slap which sent him to the floor. He turned upon the Judge with an outraged snarl, and the Judge arose and prepared to defend himself with his cane.

Fleet Hayes stepped forward, picked up the chattering coon in his arms, and stood looking coldly from one visitor to another. "The deal is off for all time," he said with calm finality. "Nobody who won't extend a trifling courtesy to an animal can expect even a pleasant look from me. The deal is closed and in the future my house is also closed against both of you."

"But why me?" asked Henry Ham.

"A man is known by his friends," replied Fleet Hayes with the aloofness of an oracle, "and you brought this one here."

"Very well," said Judge Hooker sternly, "if you choose to stand growling in the path of progress like a wolf, we shall be compelled to drive on over you in the chariot of the law."

"The chariot of the law never stands in front of my door," said Fleet Hayes, "and I would advise you to betake yourselves to where it can be found."

"Good day," said the Judge, arising, jerking his topcoat across his arm in a jumble, and slapping his hat upon his head without thought of its proper angle.

"Good bye," said Henry Ham with real feeling. He patted the still irritable George upon his glossy head, and for a moment the set face of Fleet Hayes relaxed; but the boy left without noting it, and walked hurriedly

toward Benlo without speaking to the angry Judge at his side.

"The man belongs to the Stone Age," growled Judge Hooker. "I would as soon attempt to transact business with a grizzly bear!"

There being no reply to this the Judge thumped along with his cane for some time without speaking. "Why did you not tell me he was sub-human; so that we could seize his place by right of eminent domain, without bothering about his brutish sentimentality?"

This question also failing of reply, the Judge attempted to increase his speed so as to leave Henry Ham behind, but walking had been an important feature of the boy's recent life, and the only result was that the Judge lost his breath as well as his temper. "What is the matter with you?" he demanded panting, as he paused and faced the boy.

"I am disgusted," answered Henry Ham, pronouncing his words with precision.

"You disgusted? You disgusted! What right have you to be disgusted? You were elected General Manager with a salary, and you have not shown yourself competent to manage a setting hen. Are you aware that I have borrowed money at six per cent interest, and your father has mortgaged his farm in order to put up the capital and secure options on the machine shop, the spoke factory, the creamery, and several good factory sites? We have located a churn factory and a thread factory which were looking for locations, and a print shop which will want to move in a short time. We have been energetic; while you — now that you have led us into the ditch, I suppose we shall have to pull you out — and you are disgusted!"

"I am," replied Henry Ham. "Tomorrow the whole town will know of this site and the very first thing tomorrow, you want to start proceedings to seize it."

"Naturally," said Judge Hooker loftily, "I shall prepare this very evening to file condemnation proceedings the first thing in the morning, and therefore I request you to return to the office after supper in order to assist in consulting authorities and performing the necessary clerical work."

"Just so," responded Henry Ham without enthusiasm.

They parted with chilly formality and Henry Ham ate his supper in morose silence.

On his way to the office in the evening, he met Fleet Hayes, and was startled to see him among the haunts of man after the hour of darkness. "Good evening," he said politely.

"Good evening to you, boy," responded Fleet Hayes, a little wistfully. "I suppose that you are on your way to help grease the chariot of the law?"

"Something of that kind," replied Henry Ham with a grin.

"I wish you had stuck to the out and out, animal way," said Fleet Hayes with a shake of his head. "I was just waitin' until you were ready to impose on me the way the animals do. It amuses me to have them impose on me; but I have got my prejudices, and if it comes in my way to wreck the chariot of the law, why I reckon I'm human enough to do it. Good evenin' to you."

"I'm willing to bet you a month's salary that we're whipped," said Henry Ham to Judge Hooker, as they prepared their books. "I saw Fleet Hayes down town."

"You'll see him up a tree, too, the next time you see him," said Judge Hooker grimly.

"Maybe so, but I doubt it," said the boy with a sigh.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

The Board of Directors of the Benlo Improvement Company (Inc.) were in session a few days later, and even the most wayfaring fool of all could have told that they were not assembled together to celebrate with feasting and revelry some signal triumph won through their joint commercial sagacity.

"As I understand it, Mr. General Manager," said Judge Hooker, bowing to Henry Ham with that exaggerated respect which arouses a desire to respond with violence without quite supplying an adequate excuse therefor, "your friend, Mr. F. Hayes, has transferred his equity in this parcel of realty through the conveyance of a quitclaim deed to one Darius Waldron for the sole purpose of erecting a power plant work upon which is to be commenced as soon as the weather permits. Have I stated correctly?"

"Quite," said Henry Ham, bowing.

"This being so, our case falls to the ground of its own weight, and I can see no further need for continuing the Benlo Improvement Company," said Judge Hooker. "I move that the corporation known as the Benlo Improvement Company wind up its small affairs and discontinue."

"I resign the office of General Manager," said Henry Ham, rising. He was pale, but he was also calm. "Being thus no longer an official of the corporation in question, I cannot bind it through any acts of my own; but there is still a possibility that the occasion may arise when a corporation will be a much more convenient instrument than would be a mere collection of individuals, and I therefor ask you most respectfully to continue this corporation

until the erection of the dam upon the power site which I located."

"I see no good in continuing the corporation," said Judge Hooker.

"Henry Ham, have you anything up your sleeve?" asked Editor Harkins.

"I have nothing up my sleeve," replied Henry Ham.

"Your sleeve is more or less like your head," remarked Mr. Trotwood with parental candor.

"Possibly," admitted Henry Ham, who was in a sincerely chastened frame of mind, even though he resented having the blame for Judge Hooker's unsuccessful embassy thrust upon him. "I am not in a position to promise anything; but neither am I ready to throw up my hands. I move we put it to a vote."

"Second the motion," said Editor Harkins.

"You surely cannot mean to tie up the capital while your father and myself continue to pay interest in order to maintain a corporation we have no use for?" cried Judge Hooker. "This is infamous!"

"There is a motion before the board," said Henry Ham.

"Question," said young Doctor Wilson.

In the vote, the three young men stood for a continuance while the two elderly men were opposed. The young men accepted the decision with decent decorum, the elderly men expressed themselves with some heat, even using "confidence game," "bunco men," and similar closely related terms. Then the meeting adjourned.

At its close, Henry Ham also resigned his position with Judge Hooker. "What is the sense in this, Henry?" demanded the Judge. "I have not the slightest complaint to make of your office work — why, boy, I have actually grown to rely upon you. Damn this corporation! Don't be silly, Henry; stay on just as we were, and I shall raise your stipend two dollars and fifty cents a week."

"That is very kind of you, Judge Hooker, and I thoroughly appreciate it; but I intend to open an office of my own."

"Of course, of course," said Judge Hooker sarcastically; "no man with your marvelous ability for business could longer afford to remain in a subordinate position. May I inquire where you intend to open this office?"

"In Editor Harkins's workshop," answered Henry Ham with obvious sincerity. Editor Harkins could not prevent an expression of surprise, this move being presented to him for the first time.

"I believe you mentioned when your colleague, Dummy John, took up his residence there, that this edifice had a cement floor," said the Judge with a return to his more flowing style. "This will be a marked advantage, as the crowd of clients which will immediately flock to you would soon wear away a wooden floor."

"Henry, have you lost your head?" demanded Mr. Trotwood.

"It is of small importance, father, as you have already suggested that it is empty," said Henry Ham gently, and then, turning to Judge Hooker, continued in an even voice, "You know what Emerson has to say about the single man planting himself indomitably upon his instincts and abiding until the huge world come round to him. I intend to put that into practice."

"It's about all the practice you'll have," returned Judge Hooker grimly; "and I venture to prophesy that if you continue to abide upon your instincts in that workshop until the huge world come around to you, you will be an amusing curiosity for the grandchildren of the next generation. I have said all I intend to say, and to show my present condition I am about to take a drink from my own private bottle and not ask any one else to join me."

In shocked surprise Mr. Trotwood, and in sympathetic sorrow the three young men watched Judge Hooker pour

himself a drink with hands which trembled until bottle and glass rattled together like a drum playing "Taps" above the grave of friendship. As the Judge drained his lonely glass in savage bravado, the others filed out into the night.

"Are you going home, Henry?" asked Mr. Trotwood, his usually contented face filled with trouble.

"Not yet," replied Henry Ham. "I have some details to arrange."

As his father stalked off homeward, Henry Ham said, "I am in earnest about that office, and I am in earnest about there being about one chance in a million for us to circumvent Darius Waldron. We must hammer him without mercy in the *Citizen*, we must list every deal in which he has skinned his associates until we make him a hissing and a byword, we must hint at an impending coup until he gets cold feet and is willing to surrender in order to save his reputation. The time for subterfuge is past, and the harder we now fight in the open, the better chance we have of victory. I'll move into that workshop tomorrow. Good night."

"You'll never get a client to come there," protested young Doctor Wilson. "I have been through the opening scenes of a professional career under favorable circumstances, and I know what I'm talking about. If you want to be independent, let me stake you to a decent office uptown until — "

"I don't want clients until this power site is settled, I want a place to hatch plots," said Henry Ham darkly.

"How is the festive Dummy John going to take to this?" asked Editor Harkins skeptically. "The mere fact that I own the equity in his abode has not won me a pleasant look from him. You'll have to disguise yourself as a lame dog."

"I shall throw myself on his mercy as a fellow outcast," replied Henry Ham without hesitation. "I shall agree

not to bother him, and I have no doubt that he will be humanely amenable " — which afterward proved to be the case.

"You're just enough of a dreamer to be lucky, Henry Ham," said Editor Harkins with an eye to his own business, "and I'm still betting on you. In the meantime, I shall expect you to conduct the raid upon the saintly character of friend Waldron. Good night."

During the next week, Henry Ham discovered that Fleet Hayes had sold his place for one hundred dollars; but had also bound Darius Waldron and his heirs forever to leave his home as it then was and to maintain Caroline in idle luxury so long as she lived, under forfeiture of five thousand dollars. Mr. Hayes had then given his poultry to a widow named Hamilton, whose kindness to her own flock had won his approval, upon the stipulation that she was to care for the case in which most of his violins were stored and some of the choicest bits of lumber he had secured for other instruments. After having wound up his Haddem County affairs to his own satisfaction, Fleet Hayes had placed his favorite instrument under his arm, perched the coon upon his shoulder and had set off afoot for the Soldiers' Home at Danville, Illinois. Henry Ham felt that Darius would naturally be remiss in his attentions to Caroline, and hoped this would prove a lever in breaking the contract.

With the aid of Grandma and Bill Stedders, he rolled the stone from the past of Darius Waldron and held it up for all to see. Darius was not an outlaw in any sense of the word; he had found the law quite to his liking and had used it as a convenient wedge to separate the unsophisticated from their assets; but while keeping within the law, he had frequently stepped beyond the pale of decency, and these items made interesting and ominous reading for his fellow citizens.

Strangely enough, Henry Ham's father objected seriously

to this wordy war on Darius. Mr. Trotwood had become nervous, full of worry and premonitions, and begged the boy to let Darius alone; but Henry Ham lightly assured his father that while a sufficiently large number of well-aimed bad eggs might cause a savage bear to hesitate, no amount of courtesy would; and Mr. Trotwood, not being apt at metaphor, could only shake his head ominously and sigh.

One sunny noon in early April, Henry Ham chanced to meet Clara Waldron as he was returning to the unmolested seclusion of his office. A perceptible change had taken place in his appearance of late, and Clara felt called upon to remark it openly. "What are you now, Henry Ham; a hermit?" she asked gaily.

"Only partially," replied Henry Ham. "When greyhounds are to make a high jump in a circus, you know, they first run down an incline. I am now running down the incline."

"You certainly do look run down," agreed Clara wickedly. "If you had not been so smart with Uncle Darius, he would probably not have spoiled your little game."

"From certain reports in the *Citizen*, I am led to believe that the character of Uncle Darius was formed some time ago, and therefore I refuse to be held responsible for it. You had better not waste all your sympathy on me; Uncle Darius will probably need cheering up, himself, before the snow flies again."

"My, but you have grown broody and sullen this last year," said Clara candidly. "Why don't you repent and come back to earth again?"

They had once been very fond of each other, and the old foundations still stood beneath the ruins of their present estrangement. Clara invariably had a stimulating and uplifting effect upon Henry Ham, even when he did not entirely approve of her methods, and for a moment he

caught himself wondering if he had not been utterly foolish in shooting off at his Quixotic tangent. While thinking thus, his eye caught Nate Shipley upon the opposite corner, making mysterious signs which he could in nowise interpret.

Clara's gaze followed his. "Who is your friend?" she asked with that girlish contempt which is pleasing or otherwise according to the hearer's state of mind.

"You will have to excuse me," he said shortly as he raised his hat. "Good-afternoon."

Ignoring the angry glance which Clara darted him, Henry Ham hastened to join Nate. "I hate to disturb ya," said Nate; "but she's sprained her ankle this side the crick, old Chet is busy makin' garden, and if you hustle out there you may get a chance to tote her home — though if I was you, I'd keep away altogether."

"Where is she?" asked Henry Ham.

"Just upstream from old Fleet Hayes's cabin. She slipped down the same gully you chased her down that time. She tried to walk afterward; but I reckon she's give it a wicked sprain, and she's sittin' there on a stone makin' faces like a trapped woodchuck."

Henry Ham immediately ran out Main Street, along the Marndale Pike, and did not slacken his pace until he reached the path leading to the late home of Mr. Hayes. Then he was forced to walk very slowly in order to recover his breath. As he passed the door of that house of curious architecture he noticed idly that smoke was coming from the chimney.

When he reached a point commanding a view upstream from the mouth of the gully, he saw the girl seated upon a stone, and talking with none other than his one-time friend, Fleet Hayes. The little man was issuing imperious commands which the girl was regally refusing to obey.

"What do you intend to do," demanded Mr. Hayes, "sit there on that stone until it grows into a crutch? Your

ankle is swelling worse every minute, and if you try to use it, you'll ruin it forever."

"It is my ankle," replied the girl, "and I wish you would mind your own business."

"You're a spunky little chit, that's what you are," said Fleet Hayes, "and if I was able to, I'd carry you to my house without paying you any more heed than if you were a sick squirrel."

"What is the matter?" asked Henry Ham, keeping his eyes steadfastly upon Mr. Hayes, and speaking quite as a disinterested pedestrian.

"This child has sprained her ankle, and she refuses to go to my house to have it fixed," replied Fleet Hayes tragically.

"Where is your house?" asked Henry Ham, elevating his head a little to one side, and glancing down at Fleet Hayes with irritating condescension.

Mr. Hayes gazed at Henry Ham in surprise, the surprise changed to indignation, and he replied, "You know very well that my house is just downstream."

"I do not know it," said Henry Ham. "I do not know whether the building in which you formerly resided belongs to you, to Darius Waldron, or even, perchance, to the young lady, herself. The title to the piece of property in question is in considerable of a tangle."

"You're nothing but a smart Alec, that's what you are," said Fleet Hayes. "But this girl's ankle is in a terrible state, and if it is not bandaged at once she won't be able to walk for a month."

"Well, if she will consent," said Henry Ham with impersonal calmness, "I am ready to carry her to this house and to defer settlement of its title to some more convenient future."

For the first time since his arrival he glanced at the girl, carefully keeping all personal interest from his expression.

Her dark eyes shifted from Henry Ham to Fleet Hayes suspiciously.

"She does not wish to go, Mr. Hayes," remarked Henry Ham coldly. "What is the use of bothering about her, anyway? She is deaf and dumb, and I doubt if she has as much intelligence as her collie."

Fleet Hayes was standing behind the girl, and during the boy's brutal speech the little man made fearful and mysterious grimaces, and endeavored to stop the unkind remarks by wriggling his fingers.

"What is the matter with you?" asked Henry Ham.

"You have made a mistake; the—eh—young lady can hear and speak as well as any one."

"You certainly must be wrong," said the youth, shaking his head. "I once sought to interview her on a matter of business, and I am sure that she can neither hear, speak, nor read writing. Where is the collie that is usually sent out to take care of her?"

Any one watching the face of the girl would have had no doubt as to her capacity for hearing, interpreting, and feeling. Her eyes blazed, her nostrils dilated, her cheeks flamed, her lips tightened, and her little fists clenched until the knuckles shone white. She was as tense as a couchant panther, but she did not speak.

"She sent the collie back with a piece of her skirt," said Mr. Hayes diplomatically. "She says that this will fetch old Chet. She can talk, all right; but I suppose she's like some of the rest of us — a little choicey as to who she talks with. Child," he continued, turning to the girl and speaking with that exaggerated reproach which flatters the friendly beasts by seeming to admit that in entering domesticity they have not surrendered freedom of choice, "why don't you stop your nonsense, now, and let us tend to you?"

The girl pointed her finger at Henry Ham. "Can he

carry me alone?" she asked, without the faintest trace of a smile.

"Oh, I suppose he might," replied Fleet Hayes; "but you would be a lot more comfortable if we'd both carry you."

"Certainly that would be the sensible way," agreed Henry Ham disdainfully, although his heart was beating triumphantly.

"If he is able to carry me to your hut, why, he can," said the girl. Her voice was low and mellow.

"Put your arms around my neck," said Henry Ham crossly, as he leaned over her. She complied and he placed one arm across her back, the other beneath her knees, and clasped his hands. Had the distance been shorter, he would have chosen another way, but this kept his arms and back straight and he stepped forth blithely, albeit without glancing at the face so close to his or permitting a pleased expression to lighten his own countenance.

Fleet Hayes fluttered close behind and thus they continued until they turned the jutting bulwark of cliff which forced the path to a sharp angle. At this point they came face to face with the collie, and close behind him, old Chet, dripping to the waist and looking worried. At the sight which met him, worry changed to amazement, and amazement to rage. With a guttural growl, he started for Henry Ham, head sunk into shoulders, fingers clutched, eyes glittering, and lips curled back over large, strong teeth. Fleet Hayes lost no time in securing a stone of ample proportions; but before he could throw it the girl raised her hand and spoke rapidly in some throaty, jungle tongue.

The black man paused sullenly, but seemed loath to carry out the order, and the girl spoke again and more harshly. With a muttered, nasal snarl, old Chet stepped to the side of the path, Henry Ham strode past him without a glance, and the negro fell in a short distance behind Fleet Hayes, who still retained his stone, and followed them to the cabin.

Mr. Hayes hurried ahead when they neared the edifice and opened the door. George, the coon, burst hastily forward, frisked about his master, scratched a welcome on Henry Ham's trouser leg, and then noting the presence of the collie fled chattering to his refuge in the peak of the roof. Henry Ham carried his burden into the sleeping chamber of Mr. Hayes and phlegmatically deposited it upon the austere bunk therein. Even then he did not look at her, but turned to Fleet Hayes, and, with a wave of the hand, transferred the responsibility.

"It's been a long spell o' years since I tied up an ankle," explained Mr. Hayes. "Couldn't you do it?"

"Go ahead, go ahead," rejoined Henry Ham, stepping into the sitting room where he found the collie and old Chet standing side by side and wearing similar expressions of doubt and disapproval.

Grumbling to himself, Fleet Hayes assumed the responsibility, prepared bandages and cold water, and then drawing close to Henry Ham whispered, "You got to take off her stocking."

"Pshaw, man, don't be silly," said Henry Ham. "You're old enough to be her grandfather."

"Yes, but I ain't," replied Fleet Hayes. "Hang it all — here I was as calm and contented as a crawfish in his hole until you come along, and since then I've been in one kettle of hot water after another! Anyway, you've got to come in and set by the bed."

"Well, I'll do that," vouchsafed the youth, following Mr. Hayes into the chamber.

There they found that the girl had already removed her moccasin and stocking and the exposed ankle lay upon the couch, swollen and angry. "You got to hold it up while I wrap it," said Mr. Hayes defiantly; so Henry Ham raised the limb gently while Fleet Hayes sopped it with cold water, and then wrapped the wet cloth about it, binding it tightly

with a bandage. He next nailed two boards together at right angles and braced them, tying the longer piece about the limb with the heel resting in the angle, and gently tying the foot to the shorter piece. When this was completed, the girl started to arise, but Mr. Hayes turned to her and said angrily, "Don't you dare to move, don't you dare! I'm not going to have everything spoiled after all my trouble. You lie quiet while I make a stretcher."

The girl sank back on the couch and Henry Ham followed Mr. Hayes into his workshop where a rude litter was made in a few minutes. When they returned, old Chet was standing in the doorway talking to the girl in a low tone, while the collie, following the canine custom of taking possession of all property within sight of his master, had leaped to the narrow couch and was now stretched beside his mistress gently licking her hand.

"We'll lift mattress and all right on to the stretcher," said Fleet Hayes, drafting the services of Henry Ham and old Chet with his eyes. At first the girl demurred, but the instant the eyes of the white men were taken from her face a glint of roguish amusement came to it, and she ordered the collie to descend. As soon as the mattress was placed upon the litter the three men bore it outside, Chet at the head, the two white men at the foot.

"Set it down a minute," ordered the girl. Pointing her finger at Henry Ham and looking at Fleet Hayes, she continued, "Isn't he strong enough to carry it alone?"

Henry Ham regarded the girl with a grin upon his face. "What do I most resemble — a freight car?" he asked.

"I mean, are not you and Chetadag able to carry me without any help from the little man?"

Mr. Hayes swelled until his face was a bright red. "Your impertinence is human," he cried, "but your ingratitude is superhuman! Don't think that I want to help carry you. I don't ever want to be bothered with you again."

"Of course we can carry it," said Henry Ham, laughing at the discomfiture of Mr. Hayes.

"I am very much obliged to you," said the girl to Fleet Hayes, "and I will pay whatever is right; but I do not want you to carry me."

"I'd as soon carry a rattlesnake," replied Fleet Hayes candidly. "Go along, now; and Henry Ham, you bring back that stretcher and mattress just the minute you're through with it. Pay me? The impertinent young snip!"

The girl spoke to the negro, and he took his place at the foot of the litter.

"I am ready," she said in English, and Henry Ham lifted the head of the litter and followed old Chet downstream to the head of the long riffle into which the negro plunged without hesitation.

"I intend to wear a bathing suit from this on!" exclaimed the youth as he stumbled over a stone.

The girl gave an angry direction in the strange tongue, and after that the negro chose his steps more carefully Henry Ham knew that the pain in the sprained ankle must be severe, but there was no trace of it in the girl's face and he was forced to admire her pluck. She had lived like the wild things with none to comfort her bruises, and like them had learned to deflect and ignore the streams of pain which came along sound and normal nerves, tuned to a strenuous life.

After crossing the stream and starting up the slope beyond, Henry Ham raised his end of the litter in order to keep it level, and was startled beyond vocal response when the girl suddenly raised her hands and placing one on each of his cheeks pressed them tightly. Almost automatically he turned his head and kissed the palm of her left hand. His surprise was increased when she returned liberty for liberty, by placing the palm of her right hand to his lips so that it might be kissed also.

At the top of the slope she spoke to the negro, and then ordered Henry Ham to set the litter down. "I am tired of going feet first," she said, and in response to further directions old Chet took the head, but continued to lead, while Henry Ham, bearing the foot, found the eyes of the girl resting upon his own with steady interest.

Truly this was a most romantic situation, and yet the youth was strangely uncomfortable. He had sought the acquaintance of this girl assiduously, but without avail; then he had decided to treat her coolly, to criticize her brazenly, and to show her by every action that she was quite beneath his notice. She had responded to this by selecting him to carry her and by offering her hands for his kisses.

Knowing naught of the ancient sanity of the wild creatures' wooing, he had no clew to her actions, and therefore continued to gaze into her face in bewilderment, while his feet did their best in keeping to the path the huge negro was taking — and it may be said that this was no easy task, for old Chet strode swiftly along and the burden he bore seemed only enough to balance him.

The eyes of the girl were warm and soft, and glistening with that peculiarly vital radiance which caresses the object of its gaze with so perceptible a dalliance that, for the nonce, sight is not merely a variation of, but actually is, touch, itself. The eyes did not waver, there was no confusion in them, there was no shame in them; but there was passion, not conscious passion, yet for all that, passion warm and rich; and as they continued to gaze yearningly, it was as though they had been long athirst, and had at last found springs of living water in the eyes of the youth who leaned above her as he walked. All this the eyes of the youth could see, and much of it he could feel; but in his egoism and his inexperience he could not probe the depths of the girl's gaze to where, in the purple shadows, lurked the

sorrow and the mystery, the joy and the pain, the submission and the triumph of woman's love.

Except in cases almost too rare to be considered, the mind of a boy is not permitted to remain clean. Although it is known beyond question that the complete truth carries with it an antidote for all its poisons, the rule of prudery, which is the curse of boyhood and not infrequently the perversion of manhood, gives only the poisons, and locks up the antidotes until after the mystic ceremony of marriage has instantaneously transmuted the boy into a new and entirely different creature.

Strangely enough, either a colossal stupidity or a lazy self-deception seems to convince parents that a boy's infancy can be prolonged indefinitely; and so the boy, being refused the normal food which his curiosity craves, eats of the forbidden fruit which is offered him by boys slightly older than himself, or by men and women who find a base delight in dragging the innocent into the slime from which they, themselves, have given up all hope of escaping. Blessed is the boy who has the sympathetic counsel of virtue, strength and wisdom as a light to his feet.

But the heart of a boy is not so poorly protected as his mind, and the race is saved because the tough outer layers of the heart shut out the poisons and keep inviolable that faith in the ideal woman which makes a man doubt himself, but never doubt the righteousness of chastity. Often and often a boy loves cleanness even while his malformed code bids him to revel in filth; so that behind the carelessness of a boy's exterior there is frequently raging a civil war, which, like all civil wars, exacts a heavy toll no matter where rests the final victory.

The glow in the girl's eyes as they rested upon his lighted a flame within the breast of Henry Ham, and as he walked through the sweet spring woods he was considering whether or not he dared to feed this flame. Discretion held him

back, family affection and family pride held him back; but Nature herself drove him on, and Nature has a rude way with the laws, the conventions, and the hypocrisies which the children of men in their vanity set up in contradiction to her own edicts. In the end he drew from his eyes the veil which polite society had given them, and returned to the girl a gaze as warm, as steady, and as full of yearning as her own.

When they reached the house a half dozen collie dogs came frisking about the litter, and after having petted and chided them, the girl directed that she be carried to the front porch and there set down.

"Surely you will let us carry you upstairs and fix things comfortable, won't you?" asked Henry Ham in surprise.

"Surely I will not," she replied, kindly but with obvious finality.

"This is perfect nonsense," protested the boy. A boy can honestly wish to avoid temptation; but after he has once accepted it, he strongly resents having it jerked from his hands. In his egoism, Henry Ham had not for one instant taken the girl's resistance into account; he had thought only of himself, and to suddenly tear the egoism from a youth is akin to removing the shell from an oyster.

"No, it is not nonsense," she said steadily, "it is neither whim nor pleasure, it is bitter, bitter duty."

There was a depth to the low voice of the girl which touched the depths of the boy, and at her bidding he set the litter upon the porch and with old Chet withdrew around the corner of the house until the girl called to him. He found her standing in the hall leaning upon the back of a chair, and she spoke to him through the slightly opened door. "I am very much obliged to you," she said in a voice which trembled a little, "and I am very fond of you — but you must never speak to me again. Good bye."

The door was closed in his face and he heard the thumping

of the chair as the girl went her painful way down the empty, echoing hall. She had closed the door slowly, gently, and regretfully; but this had only made it the more impressive, and it had seemed to slam rudely against his very heart and to shut her out of it forever, and to shut within it something very much like sorrow.

He picked up the litter and mattress and put them awkwardly on his shoulder; but for over a minute he remained looking at the door. "You will see me again," he muttered, "you shall see me again."

He passed old Chet still standing behind the corner, and he looked into the scowling face of the black with high disdain, but did not speak to him. Nor did he look back as he bore his clumsy bundle. He walked on through the woods, and so fierce burned the fever within him that he did not choose his steps, and so came to the hollow trunk upon which he had sat while the girl, all unknown to him, was hiding within; and here he tossed his burden from him and, seating himself upon the log, he folded his arms and gazed vacantly into space.

"I am willing to marry her," he said in a low voice after a space of hard thinking. "This is my own life and only I can live it. Realities are likely to be painful; but I choose a life of realities with her, to a life of empty pretense without her."

Even so soon had he fallen into thinking of only himself again. It did not occur to him that this half-wild and totally untrained girl could refuse to marry him, for in spite of his choice of easy-going friends, Henry Ham was an aristocrat at heart, and he felt that in offering marriage he was conveying a distinct honor.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Henry Ham continued to sit upon the log in deep thought until a voice close to his elbow said: "Have you thought it out, yet? I can 't waste much more time on you."

The boy looked up and saw Nate Shipley regarding him whimsically. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"Well," drawled Nate, "I 've warned you often enough that this here girl wasn't the wishy-washy kind you're used to, and that if once she started on your trail, she 'd hunt you down as certain as fate. When she fastened her eyes on you all the time you were helpin' to tote her, and when she reached up and petted your cheeks, it sort o' looked to me as though she had took to your trail. What do you think about it."

"Why do you all the time watch me?" demanded Henry Ham.

"Oh, for several reasons," replied Nate easily. "For one thing, I want to be within shootin' distance when old Chet gets a clutch on your throat, and I want to be within hearin' distance should ever the girl decide 'at she didn't want you foolin' around any longer. I don't intend to spy you so close that I can overhear what you say to her; but, Henry Ham, I have watched that child grow up, and I set more store by her, than by all other girls in this here County. I do n't think you mean her any ill; but you 're pretty coltish, and the 's no knowin' when you 're goin' to begin to kick and bite."

"Not much danger," said Henry Ham gloomily. "She said to-day that she never wanted to see or speak to me again."

"She said that with her lips. With her eyes and her hands she said that she never wanted to be separated from you again. She's honest, but I 'd believe her eyes and her hands before I 'd believe her lips. A woman's lips say what she thinks they ought to say, but her eyes and her touch tells exactly what's in her heart; and I want to know if you 've made up your own mind yet."

"I want to marry her," replied Henry Ham, simply, and Nate shook hands with him solemnly, albeit there was a lonely sorrow in the man's eyes. "Come, now, let's tote this stuff back to little Fleet's cabin," he said shortly.

"When did he come back?" asked Henry Ham.

"Three days ago," replied Nate, "and he 's been fussin' about ever since like a hen-robin buildin' her nest. Curious little man, Fleet."

"He sold the place and went to the Soldiers' Home. I can't see what he came back for."

"Well, if he sold the place, he 's a keen business man," said Nate with a grin; " 'cause he never owned it."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I 'm tryin' to say. Fleet Hayes ain't nothin' but a squatter. He 's not even that, 'cause he 's been payin' rent for that place right along."

"Rent?" asked Henry Ham, eagerly. "What rent, and to whom does he pay it?"

"Well, it 's curious enough rent, all right; but he pays it every year. He 'd been squattin' there for some time when old Morgan bought it. He went over to see about a dicker with Morgan; but Morgan didn't care any more for land than he did for air or water; all he wanted was enough of each for his own use, and he told Fleet Hayes that he couldn't buy the land, but he could rent it for a mess o' fish each year — said this would make the place a foodle fife, or somethin' like that."

"Yes, I know; a fuedal fief is what you mean. Go on."

"The' ain't no goin' on to it. That 's all there is of it, except that Fleet has been paying his rent of a mess o' fish each year ever since. I saw him deliverin' the fish to old Chet, oncet, and I asked Chet about it, and he told me. Fleet Hayes hates to fish about worse 'n anything else, and this has always been a joke to me."

A glint of triumph had come into the eyes of Henry Ham, and he arose and took one end of the litter, while Nate mechanically took the other. Henry Ham had much thinking to do, but Nate was in a talkative mood and quite ignored the unresponsive mood of his companion. "I allus used to suppose that this foodle fife thing was one of old Morgan's jokes," Henry Ham heard him say after a time. "Some thought the old man was too sour to joke; but he used to pass jokes with me when he first came here, though I will admit his face never looked so glum as when he was jokin'. He was a pleasin' sort of man to me at first, and then he began to get freakish. The' must be somethin' in the air about here to make folks freakish. I once counted up as many as thirty-one freaks which I knew of myself, not countin' Fleet Hayes, who is mighty near one if not entire;" but Henry Ham was too busy with his own thoughts to listen.

"Gee, but it tickles me to see you fordin' through this crick every little while," said Nate as he entered the water below the upper riffle. "Time was when you was about the most dudish young feller in this town, but you 're gettin' so you 'll go anywhere a dog would, and you ain't near so chuckle-headed as you used to be, neither."

At the gully in which Jean Morgan had sprained her ankle, Nate set down his end of the litter, and let Henry Ham finish the trip alone.

"You 've been long enough about it," said Fleet Hayes. "Did she have a doctor?"

"No, she did n't, and she won't. What in the world made you come back here from the Soldiers' Home?"

The little man regarded his questioner indignantly. "Do I look like a child?" he demanded. "Do I appear to be in such a state of feeblemindedness that I have to be sent to bed at a certain hour and routed out again at another certain hour? Why I would n't live in such a place if that was the only place the' was to live. It 's not a home at all, it 's an institution. They bossed me around down there the same as if I was a weanlin' orphan, and every little prank that George played to amuse himself with, was treated as though it was treason again' the government. I 've been told a thousand times about what a grand place it was; but it don't suit me — there 's too many rules. I intend to settle right down here again."

"It would n't surprise me much, if Darius Waldron found a way to oust you," said Henry Ham, wagging his head ominously. "Where is Caroline?"

"That shark of a Darius Waldron sent her out to one of his farms, and his tenant beat her. She kicked the back end of his stable into flinders, though; so I 'm not sure that I can bust the contract on that account. Still, I 'm thinkin' about it."

Henry Ham decided not to mention the rent at this time, and after chaffing the little man about having let Darius Waldron pull the wool over his eyes, he walked back to Benlo, deeply engrossed in thought.

Chiefly his thoughts dwelt upon the strange girl blossoming like a beautiful exotic amid the gray gloom of the big brick house; but the hope of yet securing the power-site, and the mystery of Dummy John's haunting verse, also demanded much of his attention. The best part of the youth's nature had governed his attitude toward the silent man with whom he shared the workshop, and there was not the slightest friction between them.

They were seldom together for more than an hour at a time, and then each acted as though he were quite alone.

Henry Ham had installed weights and a horizontal bar at one end of the shop and upon these he had exercised until his muscles had regained their spring and toughness. Even when positive that he would not be interrupted, he never rummaged through the belongings of his fellow lodger. One reason for this delicacy of action was that he had planted pitfalls among his own meager possessions to trap any unwary investigator, and inferred that Dummy John would do the same — the other reasons are not important.

It had been Henry Ham's custom to sell his books during financial stringencies so that he had very few left; which was fortunate as it would have been quite natural for him to have ruined his mental digestion during this period through mechanical reading of predigested thought, in place of which he masticated his own facts, and occasionally was elevated to an altitude wherein he could enjoy some of the effects of rudimentary meditation.

He had returned the verse to the open pasteboard box in which Bud had found it, and which contained in addition only a few magazine pictures of musicians; but so far as he could tell, Dummy John had neither noted its absence nor its return. They made an unusual pair on the evenings that Henry Ham returned after supper, the white-haired man in his priestly robe of white wool, seated silently in a straight-backed chair, placid hands folded in lap and brooding eyes fixed on vacancy; while the youth paced to and fro, gestured freely, struck fist on palm, or threw himself sprawling into a chair there to run fingers through hair, or drum fiercely on the table. It was plain that both were waiting for something to happen, but the waiting of one was like the waiting of a great rock; the other, like the waiting of the restless sea.

The guerilla warfare waged upon Darius Waldron in the *Benlo Daily Citizen* had made the daily walks of Darius much

like running a gauntlet of eyes, and more especially was this true since Henry Ham had devised his famous "Questions to ask Darius Waldron" column. For several weeks there had been five questions of a deeply personal nature in each issue. "Ask Darius Waldron how he got possession of the Widow Milton's farm?" was a fair sample of these questions, and while very few ever went so far as to ask Darius, he read the questions himself, he knew that most of those he passed on the street had read them, and at times he even went so far as to attempt a voluntary vindication of his business methods; which weakness was invariably taken as a confession of sins and a cause for justifiable suspicion.

For two days Henry Ham heroically held himself within the limits of Benlo, and then came a day when it was impossible to ignore the temptations entering the windows of his improvised office, opened to admit a cooling breeze. Birds were twittering near at hand, the scent of new life coming in from the open spaces was strong enough to strike a spark upon even his olfactory nerve, corroded with the rust of civilization though it was; and the spark started his motor into action, and the motor followed the line of least resistance.

As he started down the hill to the bridge, he saw old Chet at the top of the much longer hill on the other side, and hastily made a discrete detour. The negro was driving a white horse of that peaceful and self-respecting demeanor distinctive of white horses who are engrossed in the conservation of a contented old age. The horse was drawing a heavy wagon, and Henry Ham felt that this guaranteed him against interruption for some time.

He hurried along the road and past the house in order to approach it from the woods beyond. He saw the dogs near the negro's quarters, old Chet's wife feeding them from an iron pot. She was a burly woman with even a more ferocious mien than her husband; but the youth felt grateful to her for relieving him from any ostentatious attentions on the part of

the pack, and he lost no time in crossing the yard to the side porch.

The side porch was enclosed in lattice, and he shut and bolted the lattice door; after which he paused for a moment to steady himself. He had almost too much imagination to enjoy an adventure whole-heartedly; he did enjoy the thrills which sent his heart along at a fine rate, but could not forbear the construction of bridges which might later be useful, and the crossing of these one after another was disturbing, as well as a useless waste of energy. The true adventurer must eliminate the chilly law of consequences and, with the concentration of a bull dog, devote himself exclusively to the subject in hand. Still his adventures were seldom so harrowing as his anticipations and so he usually went through them with a growing courage. There was no response to his modest knock, and he knocked again and yet again. Then he bethought him of the sprained ankle demanding absolute quiet, and the probability that the girl was up-stairs. Also he perceived that his knocking had aroused the dogs. He was almost certain that the female Zulu would not be amenable to the finer points of etiquette which deal with the reception to be accorded an unexpected guest, and was beginning to feel a slight embarassment.

Henry Ham, as compensation for his capacity for blundering into perplexing situations, had a tendency to grasp a dilemma firmly by both horns, and to kick it on the nose before it had time to overpower him. He tried the door and found it was unlocked; so he stepped inside and closed it after him, taking the precaution to lock it. It was a gloomy old house and suggested mystery and disaster; and, according to his wont, Henry Ham repented his impulsiveness and steadfastly promised to lead a more cautious life in the future.

He was standing in a narrow hall, which offered not the slightest suggestion, and simply because any action was more comfortable than passive suspense, he stepped softly down

the hall and opened a door. This led into a slightly wider hall which intersected the house, and he walked along it toward the front door. He looked into the rooms on each side as he passed and they resembled a museum, being filled with plaster casts of hideous idols, curious bits of carvings, and in the room which had been intended for a parlor he saw rows of shelves around the walls, and upon these shelves as closely together as they could be packed, grinning human skulls. It was a ghastly sight, and he felt much like Fatima of the indulged curiosity; and secretly hoped that Nate Shipley were within call to take the place of sister Anne and watch for the coming of old Chet, who seemed quite capable of playing with distinction the role of Bluebeard.

Many commanders have achieved fame for advancing when a retreat was impossible; so that the youth was entirely justified in continuing his way to the front stairs. At the foot of these he called: "Miss Morgan; oh, Miss Morgan," very softly; and getting no reply, started up. He had nearly reached the top when the voice of the girl, low but decisive, tersely ordered him to halt. He turned, and glancing upward over his shoulder saw her leaning against the balustrade immediately above the stairs, holding a small rifle in familiar hands.

"What do you want?" she asked coldly.

"I wanted to find out how you were getting along," replied the youth gravely, "How is your ankle?"

"My ankle is doing very well. How did you get in?"

"Through the door opening upon the latticed porch. Have you kept the bandage wet?"

"Chetadag prepared me a dressing of bruised leaves and the swelling is already leaving my ankle," replied the girl. "Do you actually mean that you found the door unlocked?"

"Certainly; and I was very glad of it as your dogs are at this moment assembled at the latticed door, and would doubtless be making a riot if I were still on the porch. You must be very careful not to overdo with your ankle."

"I have been careful. These last two days have seemed like a year. Did you not know that I meant it when I said that you must never speak to me again?"

"Well, I knew that you felt it was your duty not to see me again; but I also knew that you wanted to see me again, and I am determined that you shall see me often."

"My rifle has been pointed at your heart ever since you started to climb these stairs," said the girl very quietly.

"Yes, but you could not pull the trigger."

"Why could not I pull the trigger?

"I don't know; you'll have to answer that, yourself."

They looked into each other's eyes, and try as she would the girl could not keep the warm tenderness from flooding into her own dark ones and driving out the chill defiance which she had sent to guard her outer gates; while to-day there was a new light in the eyes of the boy. He had decided that he loved her enough to marry her, and neither the room full of skulls nor her armed defence could shake his intentions.

"You must leave at once," she said as soon as she could temper her voice to the desired edge.

There could be no doubt that she meant it. "All right," said Henry Ham; "but I do not feel fit to die just yet, and therefore shall be compelled to slay a few of your dogs on my way to the fence."

"You must go to the side door," said the girl after a moment's thought, "and I shall whistle the dogs to the front and give you time to escape."

"That is a good plan," replied Henry Ham, smiling; "but there would be no one left to carry you back upstairs.

The girl was quick to grasp his inference and to smile an acknowledgment of it." "I do love to have you carry me," she admitted with an honest, wholesome sigh, "but I can never let you again. I can go up and down stairs very well." In proof of this she laid the rifle upon a dingy upholstered chair, and taking a rude crutch beneath her left arm and

using the balustrade for a rest, walked to the head of the stairs. She was still wearing the ankle-splint which Fleet Hayes had made, hung from a rope about her neck, and managed to walk without awkwardness.

"Bravo!" cried Henry Ham. "But won't you let me carry you down stairs?"

The girl's face flushed crimson, and then paled. "I must not," she said wistfully. "I must never let you touch me again. Don't ask me, and don't ever try to speak to me again."

There was that in her voice which chastened him, and he turned and walked down the stairs before her without once glancing back. When she reached the foot of the stairs she glanced out of the narrow, dusty window beside the front door.

"You cannot go now," she said, turning to Henry Ham.

An expression of joy came to his face and he took a step toward her, but paused when she added: "Chetadag is just turning into the lane and he would see you."

"That's a stroke of luck," commented the optimistic Henry Ham. "He is not likely to come in here, is he?"

"He never comes in here; but he is working about the yard now, and you will not be able to leave until after dark."

"Well," sighed the youth pretentiously, "we'll have to make the best of it. You have been standing too long, already; take my arm and let me lead you to a seat."

"I can walk alone. There are comfortable chairs in here."

He followed her into a back room on the east, which gave evidences of being her favorite lounging place. It was less untidy than the rest of the house, there were many books scattered about, but around the walls and upon shelves were many curious casts, each of which was numbered. He read the titles of several volumes, and saw that they were heavy works upon scientific subjects.

"Do you read these?" he asked.

"I read everything. You have no idea how strange it is to live as I do. Sometimes it seems that I must be dead and that I am hearing of a strange, distant world in which I have no part. I know everything about the anatomy of man, everything about his psychology, everything about his history; but I know absolutely nothing about even one real live man. You could not show me the tiniest fragment of a woman's bone that I would not know at a glance; but I cannot be absolutely certain as to why I feel so strange whenever you are near me."

"Don't worry," said Henry Ham; "I can teach you all you need to know about that. I think it is quite probable that we two complement each other nicely. You have studied life through a microscope; I, through opera-glasses. It is better so."

"I love to hear you talk," said the girl ingenuously. "Is there anything queer about my manner of speaking?"

"Now that you mention it, your line of talk reminds me somewhat of a Spanish chap who sat near me in the philosophy quiz. He was a regular whale and could talk the English language far better than the fiend who invented it; but ever and always a close observer would notice that he was putting his words together one at a time, the way a mason builds a wall—and there is something of that in your talk."

"I'm glad it is no worse. I have studied dictionaries assiduously, but it makes me feel quite foolish to speak before any one. I have an unusually fine mind, I think; my father was one of the world's foremost scientists, you know, and he never treated me like a child. I like to say poetry aloud, when I am alone; but you have no idea how I have longed for some one to talk to. I have often and often prowled out after night and have crept after people just to hear them talk and to make up answers as though I were one of the party; but I don't think a bit like other girls. I never made up the same answers that they did. It seems to me that girls are

very silly, they tell such perfectly useless lies about unimportant things."

"You should never go out alone after dark," warned Henry Ham solemnly. "It is really dangerous."

He heard her laugh for the first time: a low, hushed laugh, but bubbling and tinkling like a tiny brook plashing over stones, and he pronounced it the most delectable music in the world. "I like the dark," she said, "for then I am free. I have never actually gone through the town, but I have gone into it part way. I know where you live. If I were slow and stupid like these other girls, it would be dangerous for me after dark, too; but I am different. I have heard men say doubled-faced things to girls, and they would pretend not to know what was meant; but I have longed to rush up, box the man's ears, scratch his eyes, and then lure him into chasing me. I can run for hours and miles, and if he should catch me, it would be more dangerous for him than for me."

Her eyes gleamed brightly and her red lips set with confident firmness. Henry Ham felt that Nate was right in saying that when this girl took the trail, she would run her quarry to earth without fail; but he was warmed at the thought. He had destroyed the brakes upon his love-motor and the faster it ran the better he would be pleased; so that the admiration in his eyes shone warm and untrammeled, and the girl basked in it with the frank enjoyment of a South Sea belle taking a sun-bath.

The rich coloring of her complexion proved the cleanness of her blood, the keenness of her senses, and the normal strength of her desires. She knew and accepted the rational law of consequence and therefore she had no temptation to weakly stimulate what she dared not satisfy. She had felt the boy's kisses steal through the palms of her hands and quicken every nerve-center; but while the sensations were intoxicating, she knew that the road to which they lured was closed against her, and therefore she must deny herself a repetition of these

exhilarating sensations. There was nothing of the flirt in her, but much of that consuming fire which compels the females of all the free, wild species to race through the springtime in simulated disdain of the male.

For some time they discussed life from the peculiar angles of their separate individualities; and then in a lull, Henry Ham suddenly recalled the fact that he was deeply interested in a certain business project; and he asked the girl if she knew that she was the owner of the property upon which stood the domicile of one Fleet Hayes.

"Do you mean that I can do what I want with it?" she asked eagerly.

"Certainly," he replied. "It is of small value to you, but I wish to buy it."

"Oh, I would not sell it."

"What on earth do you want with it."

"I want to give it to that funny little man. I have had lots of fun watching him fussing about, and he was very good to me the other day. I could not think of any way to repay him; but now I know a fine way—I shall give him this property."

"No," said Henry Ham sternly," you must not do that. I will pay you a fair price for the land, and you can give him the money."

The girl thought a minute. "No," she said, shaking her head seriously, "I do not like that way. I should not like to have any one give me money."

The youth arose and paced the floor in disgust. In the abstract, it was all very well to exploit the higher, finer motives; but it was decidedly irritating to attempt to transact business with parties who failed to respond to the human call of commercialism. It was beginning to look as though he would be tormented into an early grave over a paltry parcel of real estate which was not worth the paper required in writing a

deed, save for its geographical location. "How are you going to repay me for what I have done for you?" he asked.

She looked at him in wide-eyed amazement. "Do you not love me?" she asked. This was what, in certain circles, could be called with the utmost propriety, a facer. The logical inference back of the question was so complex that he was forced to consider for several moments before answering: "Yes, I love you," He said it with that lack of fervor one affects toward the census-taker and added: "But I don't see how this alters the question."

"Why, surely in love there can be no thought of payment or repayment?"

"No, oh no, certainly not; quite the contrary—love is eager to do whatever the beloved desires."

"Of course—I knew it could be no other way. I desire to give the property to the funny little man, and therefore you will be eager to help me."

There was nothing but whole-souled sincerity in the girl's voice; and Henry Ham realized for the first time that diplomacy is never so helpless as when opposed by honest simplicity. "You might give it in such a way that he would have the right to live in his house and work the patch of land which is workable," he said, "while I would have the right to dig a ditch across it and dam up the creek."

"No, that would be giving a gift with strings to it. I would not like that kind of a gift. If I were to give myself in love, I would put no strings to it. I would simply give all of me, and would not even ask any promise in return."

"That is all very well in love," agreed the puzzled youth, "but it would not do at all in business."

"My name is Jean. Why do you not call me Jean?"

"Well, my name is Henry Hamilton, Jean; but that is as awkward as a silk hat and Harry sounds like a Japanese valet. I am most frequently called Henry Ham."

"Henry Ham, Henry Ham," repeated the girl in a soft mur-

mur. "That is quite a funny name; but someway, it seems to fit you, and I like it. I want to do something for you, Henry Ham; but I do not want to do this—and so I am glad that you love me and will not ask it."

For a long time they sat in silence, the boy seeking a key to the deadlock, the girl studying his face; and as they sat the shadows grew longer and longer, the sun which calls men to toil sank into the west, and the crescent moon which calls lovers to dalliance stole into the twilight sky. "Wait," said the girl rising and leaving the room by aid of the crutch and such chance support as came in her way.

He heard her going toward the back of the house, and in her absence the desire for the power-site dwindled and gave place to his desire for the girl. He wanted to take her in his arms and teach her what love meant; and it seemed that she was gone a long time.

"Quick," she said from the doorway. "Chetadag is tending to the horse. You must hurry away. The dogs are near the cabin, but they know that you are here and keep watching the house. I will stand in the back door and if they start for you, I shall call them to me. Hurry!"

He came to the doorway and paused close to her with his hands clasped behind his back. He held his face close to hers and looked into her eyes. "Won't you kiss me good-bye?" he asked tenderly.

Her eyes returned his gaze, and as they looked full into his, they filled with glistening moisture; but her lips were firm when she answered: "I shall never kiss you. I never can kiss you."

"Why not?"

"There is a reason — "

At this instant there came a sound in the room above them, a sharp blow as of something falling, and then shuffling steps across the floor. Neither the eyes of the boy nor the eyes of the girl faltered in their gaze, although the expression in

the boy's became a demand, while that of the girl's was defiant.

"It is Bayard," she said after a moment's silence, "Bayard, my favorite collie."

"Oh," said Henry Ham with a laugh, "for a moment, I thought your Zulu had ambushed me. Now, kiss me to make it all right again."

"I can never kiss you," repeated the girl. "You must go at once—and you must never return."

He walked around her in the gathering gloom, and his elbow brushed hers giving them both an electric thrill, but he did not unclasp his hands; and so he left her, standing sweet and lonely, and inviting the caress which some unfathomable duty bade her refuse. It was a hard parting, but he left her with the kiss still in his heart, which proves that it is not unsafe for a boy and girl to be alone in the darkness—when honesty is there as a chaperon.

She followed him to the hall which crossed the width of the house, and she went to one door while he unlocked the other. He kissed his fingers and wafted them toward her, and she pretended to catch the kiss and press it to her heart; but she did not waft him one in return, and he stepped out on the porch and closed the door after him.

After leaving the porch, he ran across the yard and into the woods, which he traversed in the direction of the Hayes edifice. Suddenly he paused, and a look of chagrin came to his face. "That was not a dog," he said fiercely. "That was a human footstep. I would give my left hand to know who was in that room above us."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

While standing thus, in deep reflection, he caught sight of a man coming toward him from the woods, and his first thought was of the gigantic negro; but he soon recognized Nate Shipley and awaited his coming with something akin to exasperation.

"What's the matter," drawled Nate, "did you forget your handkerchief, and are you studyin' about goin' back after it?"

"In the first place, I would like to know whether you keep a constant watch on me, or on the brick house?"

"Well, you see, runnin' a lot o' traps and a moonshine still, sort o' trains a man up to bein' second-sighted. You've give me a heap o' worriment this afternoon, though, sonny. I've been studyin' ever since old Chet got back as to whether or not I'd ort to go into that house after you."

"If you ever do follow me into that house" — began Henry Ham, but paused when Nate raised a warning hand.

"Don't make no threats, Henry Ham," said Nate solemnly. "A threat is a contract, and you don't want to be bound to carry out somethin' you may not want to carry out when the time comes. I'm trustin' ya, and I'm waitin' with patience; but I have my calls the same as the rest, and when they come I answer 'em. What I wanted to say to you now was, that Dummy John can hear as well as anybody. I tolled him out by a dog whine late last night, and he follered me half way down the alley, whistlin' softly and sayin' coaxin' words. I reckon that if I'd been a regular dog, I'd have had to go to him. There's the information you wanted."

"Thanks, thanks, Nate. I don't know what I wanted it for; but I'm mighty glad to have it. Now, I'll give you a piece of confidence — but I want it to be kept — "

"Don't tell it, if it's goin' to worry you," interrupted Nate.

"That was just habit, Nate. I'd trust you sooner than I would myself. That girl loves me, but she won't have anything to do with me—and there's another human being in that house with her. Do you think it's possible for her to be married?"

"Everything's possible with a woman," said Nate, shaking his head humbly at the wonders of creation; "but I'll be garnswazzled if this here don't take the wind out o' my sails. How do you know there's another human in that house?"

Henry Ham recounted as much of his afternoon's adventure as seemed fair to all concerned, and then Nate lifted his slouch hat and scratched his head. "It might 'a been the collie as she said; but I'm like you, I doubt it," h'e said cautiously. "You say that she is generally as honest as daylight, and that when you came to think it over you could remember that her manner this time was far different. I know what you mean; a dog now is naturally honest, and when he is tryin' to put over a little lie his conscience approves of, why he might as well tell the truth 'cause he's as easy seen through as glass; but a cat is more embarassed when she's attemptin' to tell the truth than when she's knee-deep in a perfectly useless lie. Well, there's causes for everything, and reasons for most; so we'll both keep our minds on it. I've got a little matter of business on up the crick, and if you'll sidle along a few steps, I'll show you the smoothest ford hereabouts. As long as you're goin' to spend so much of your time in the crick, you might as well know somethin' about it."

They spoke no more until they reached the edge of the slope; "Do you wear socks?" asked Nate. Henry Ham admitted the soft impeachment, and his mentor continued, "It's a blame poor policy. Socks clam up with sweat and make your feet cold and tender, then when they get wet from wadin' they stay soggy all the rest o' the day, besides wearin'

full o' holes. I ain't wore a single sock for fifteen years, and in winter my feet are warm and dry while in summer they're cool and moist—but of course, you can do just as you please about the wearin' of socks. Start from that white stone, angle upstream toward that oak snag again' the skyline till you get into the swirl, then angle down toward that white stone on the other side. It's sand all the way and not above your knees."

Henry Ham decided to remove his foot-gear as long as he had plenty of time, and while Nate stood watching him with an amused smile on his face he made this additional comment in a soft, pleasant drawl; "I once heard an old preacher say right out in the pulpit, 'Get your souls right with the Lord this very minute, but don't forget to treat your feet with humanity. Your feet will still be standin' under you long after your understandin' has deserted you, and if you don't well-treat your feet when they're young, they'll ill-treat you when you're old.'"

"If you point your toes down when you set 'em in water, you won't make a splash; but then I reckon you never was intended to live outdoors nohow. Good night."

It was a bright evening, and the young man could still follow the path along the shore; but when he reached his destination he saw a light in the shed and going to the open door perceived Mr. Hayes seated upon a soap-box removing burrs from the dainty fetlocks of Caroline, his prodigal mule. He was crooning to her in a soft voice, and between mouthfuls of hay she would turn her sleek head and look back at him. At sight of Henry Ham, however, she gave a nervous start which incidentally toppled her respected master against the side of the stall.

"You, Caroline, you!" he roared in his wrath, drawing back his fist as though to fell her to the earth; "I've a good mind to break every rib in your miserable body. What's the matter with you—you lost all your manners?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Hayes;" said Henry Ham from the doorway, "but I had no idea that Caroline was so timorous after dark."

"She ain't timorous; it's just the low-grade mischief of her evil disposition comin' to the surface through havin' been in bad company. Get over there!" He gave Caroline a rough shove which she acknowledged by laying back her ears, and showing her teeth. "Do you dare to show your teeth at me?" demanded the little man walking up to her head. Immediately the ears of the mule pointed forward with polite interest and she put her velvety muzzle into the man's hand and lipped it playfully. "Talk about horses," said Fleet Hayes, stroking the long ears fondly, "why, that mule knows more in one minute than a horse could learn in his whole life. She knows she can trust me but can't impose on me—and if Darius Waldron knew that much he'd be a heap better insurance risk than he is right now. What is it you want?"

"I came for that meal to which you invited me some time ago."

"What do you think I'm runnin'—an all-night restaurant?" demanded Fleet Hayes.

"Have you had your own supper, yet?"

"I have not. This poor child has been abused, and I have been makin' her easy so she could rest a little to-night. Look here." Mr. Hayes held the lantern and gently stroked a small bruise on the mule's hock, while Henry Ham expressed interest without making too radical an examination. "When I went after Caroline, the galoot in charge of her refused to give her up; but I just called to her and she came gallopin' plumb over him as he tried to block her in the gateway. I ort to have kicked him a time or two when he was down, but he seemed repentent; so I led her back home. I met Darius Waldron right on the public square and I told him as much of what I thought of him as I calculated the law would allow. I began by tellin' him what a yaller cow-

ard he'd been durin' war-time, and I ended up by sayin' that I was goin' to keep him from robbin' his feller-citizens on his water-power scheme if I had to blow him up with dynamite. I didn't want to get tangled up in a libel suit, so I didn't swear at him; but I told him a heap o' things 'at made him choke to swallow, and the crowd about him was so thick he couldn't get away."

"Good work!" cried the youth, striking his palm. "Now say, if you are so everlasting tight-fisted that you won't give me even a crust of bread, come on in and get your own supper and let me sit and watch you eat it. That mule is so conceited already, that if you pay her any more attention to-night she won't be able to sleep for ingrowing vanity."

"Yes, I guess Caroline can night it through all right, now. Good night, little pet, I'm mighty glad to have you back home again."

After patting the mule, Mr. Hayes led the way indoors where Henry Ham was given a hearty welcome by the independent coon. "George," said the youth soberly, "you are living with a miserly old man who is willing to see me starve to death before his very eyes. Have you any food you can spare me?"

"How do you like your eggs cooked, smarty?" asked Fleet Hayes. "I've got the chickens back now, and it would have touched you to the heart to see the happy light in Salina's eyes when I turned her into the lot. She ran all about and examined everything, and I know she made every last hen lay an egg to show their gratitude at bein' brought home again. How do you want your eggs cooked?"

They conversed mostly of the pets during the meal; but after the dishes had been stacked and a tiny company fire built in the open fireplace, they lighted their pipes and fell silent. "Does that bruise on Caroline's leg break my contract with the human shark?" asked Fleet Hayes presently. Henry Ham made an entry in his notebook.

"What is that for?" asked Fleet Hayes.

"I am entering the date that you consulted me professionally," replied the youth gravely. The little man arose, secured a piece of chalk from the workshop and wrote the date above the fireplace.

"What is that for?" asked Henry Ham.

"That," replied the little man without the trace of a smile, "is the date upon which I saved you from starvation. Right now I don't consider your life worth two shillin's; but I may change my mind after you present your bill."

"Stung!" cried the boy, and they joined in a hearty laugh, after which the lawyer said: "Seriously, though, I doubt if any such contract as yours could stick in a court of law. I alone know the way to get you out of this, and I suppose I ought to bind you hard and fast before telling you; but I'm not going to. I'm going to tell you just where you stand, and then settle on what you'll do for me afterward. You had no right to dispose of this land, because you have not paid this year's rent."

"It's not due, yet," flashed Mr. Hayes in return, and then with a quick change of voice, asked: "How did you know I paid rent?"

"I know everything, Mr. Hayes," replied the boy, "and I know how you can keep possession of this place, if you'll follow out my instructions."

"The' ain't no use tryin' to dodge the law!" exclaimed the little man in disgust. "I came out here and picked out a spot which it didn't seem that any one else in the world would want; and now the whole bloomin' beehive is buzzin' about this strip of sand burrs. What I want is peace. How can I get it?"

"This piece of property belongs to Jean Morgan, as you admitted every time you paid rent. She was not bound by her father's jocular contract, and your rent did not really entitle you to anything."

"Good Lord, then I've been catchin' all those poor fish for nothin'! Well, go on—what can you do about it?"

"I shall bring suit for its recovery in her name, you will testify that it does belong to her; then when her title is secured, she will give it to you, and if you have a spark of decency left, you will immediately sell me the water-power site."

"There you are, there is the law in all its glory; you've got about five lawsuits strung together there with possibilities of each of 'em goin' up and down from one pompus judge to another until they die of old age in the Supreme Court; and the very best we can hope for is that the final end will be exactly as it was in the beginning. It looks to me as though there ort to be some way to just pay the lawyers what they think they need out of these cases, and not bother with the courts at all."

"Where law ends, tyranny begins," quoted Henry Ham solemnly.

"Charlotte Rushing!" retorted Fleet Hayes, as he spat into the fire vindictively. "I'll tell you what I will do, though; I'm sick of this endless haggling, and if you can find a way to secure me here in peace, go ahead, and I'll give you the right to do anything you please with the crick—so long as you don't turn it into my chimney."

"Good enough! You are hereby appointed an ex-officio agent of the Benlo Improvement Company, and I want you to set out stakes tomorrow where the ditch should start; and to keep Darius Waldron from doing any work of any kind on this land."

The title of his new office rang pleasantly in the ears of Mr. Hayes, he set his jaws assuringly, and said: "You can trust me from now on."

This being the utmost concession he could expect, Henry Ham soon left in a fine humor, which lasted until he passed beneath the spot at which the girl had dropped the pebble

upon his hat. Here the remembrance of those footsteps in the room above returned to torment him during the rest of his walk townward.

It was evident that Jean Morgan loved him, it was equally evident that she felt it impossible to encourage this love, and the only explanation which seemed adequate to the situation was that she was married to a criminal who was forced to spend his life in hiding. Everything pointed to this, and the boy's heart was heavy and bitter. For one brief period it occurred to him that it might be her brother who had returned from the penitentiary; but as he had been pardoned, there was no reason why the girl should continue to feel called upon to sacrifice her life to his, even though his sensitive nature should impell him to shun his fellow men. There could be no misunderstanding of the girl's attitude. She felt herself bound for life, and this fact brutally continued to face Henry Ham, in spite of his best efforts to suppress it.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

On the following day Henry Ham swallowed a hasty luncheon and returned to smoke his noon pipe at the door of his office, where he could look out through the golden sunshine across the Hollow to the Marndale Pike. Spring was beginning to lose her maidenly coyness and there was more than a suggestion of summer's passion in the noon sun. Inside the room, the silent man was eating his midday bowl of oatmeal, and the youth fell to wondering what curious cause lay back of the line: "His tongue no tales will tell."

He had some time ago decided that Dummy John regarded himself as a dead man, and that the white woolen robe which he wore evenings was his shroud; but there seemed no way to unravel the mystery; so as a substitute for its solution he spent many idle moments in weaving imaginary explanations as picturesque as his fancy could devise.

As he sat thus, weaving the smoke of his pipe into a day dream, his attention was attracted by a man walking toward Benlo on the Marndale Pike, and he gave a mild exclamation upon recognizing Fleet Hayes, with a bundle closely resembling a violin under his arm. Where the Hollow intersected the Pike, Mr. Hayes entered it as though to approach Henry Ham by a short cut, and for a space was lost to view.

Work was plenty at this season, and Dummy John was sought after by every Benlo matron who wished her yard to look its best. Having finished his frugal meal, and washed his bowl and spoon, he now passed the youth with his usual slow and stately bow. Under his arm he carried a bundle wrapped in a piece of old carpet, and as he walked down the alley, he appeared a peculiar type of gardener. The youth

walked to the alley and stood gazing after him with an amused smile.

He was aroused by a clutch at his arm and turned to find Fleet Hayes beside him, but gazing after the retreating figure with eyes wide in astonishment. "Do you know who that is?" he whispered.

"Only by sight."

"That's Richard Morgan, that's who that is—the girl's brother."

"Hoh, you must be crazy!"

Then, as was his custom, Henry Ham having duly scoffed the informer, proceeded to consider the information at his leisure. Dr. Wilson had said Dummy John was less than forty years old, Nate Shipley had said he could hear and speak, and he himself had seen a scar as of a knife-wound upon his neck, and now came Fleet Hayes who said it was Richard Morgan.

"Take a seat," he said calmly, interrupting the flow of Mr. Hayes's indignation, and pointing to the chair by the door, "and as soon as you have made yourself comfortable, tell me what put that idiotic notion into your head."

"Idiotic notion, huh? Not much! I'd know that back anywhere. I've followed it through the woods day after day, waitin' for him to get in the mood to play on his fiddle—he's got a fiddle under his arm now!"

"He has under his arm, now, a bundle of short-handled garden tools. I saw him wrap them up. He is an old man with white hair and beard, and any one in town will tell you that he can neither hear nor speak and is called Dummy John. He has been living in the old brick across from the Court House Square for the last five years, and when Darius Waldron turned him out, I took him in here. Now what do you think?"

Fleet Hayes pushed back his slouch hat and scratched his head in deep thought. "Nope," he said after a moment's

study, "the' ain't no two creatures walk alike—and that was Richard Morgan's walk."

They fell silent, Fleet Hayes recalling the memories of that happy time when one had come to him with the power to make the violins which he had wrought with such loving care lift up their voices and sing the song of the woods; while Henry Ham faced the future from a new viewpoint. The little man had spoken with such assurance that he no longer had any doubt, and was now able to see for the first time how strong his hope had been, in spite of its unreason, that Richard Morgan was living at his old home, and that it was his step he had heard in the room above. The only alternative his imagination had been able to supply, was that Jean was married to a criminal who dared not face the light of day.

The footsteps which he had heard in the room above had been tramping across the most sensitive part of his pride. There must be some good reason for never permitting the blacks inside the house, and he could imagine none except that Jean was hiding a criminal. Now that he was certain it could not be her brother, he found his pride fighting his love with a drawn sword, and knew not which side to take.

"We have been together for weeks now," he said abruptly, "and I have never been able to surprise him into speaking."

"May be they cut out his tongue and punched out his ears at the penitentiary—it would be just like 'em!"

"I have found out that he can both hear and talk."

"Look here, now," said Fleet Hayes warningly, "your stories don't hang together any too well. A man that's deef and dumb can't speak, so you stick to one thing or the other. If he can hear, I know how to make him tell who he is."

"He can hear. How can you make him speak?"

"By puttin' this fiddle in his way, that's how. He could resist a human easy enough—being a man of some strength of character—but he couldn't resist this fiddle."

Henry Ham glanced at the violin case which Fleet Hayes

held forth, and asked: "What are you doing in town and why did you bring your best violin?"

"Because there's goin' to be war up on the Neck, and I don't want this fiddle exposed to danger."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, Darius Waldron sent up a load of stakes this morning and three men to drive them. I burned the stakes and drove the men away; but that won't be the end of it."

"It 'll be the end of you, if you don't stop taking the law into your own hands," exclaimed Henry Ham. "Next time he sends any one up there, you tell them that your case is in my hands, and then laugh at them. Don't do one thing to stop them—just laugh at them free and hearty."

"Well, I'll try it once, but I'm 'fraid they'll find it easier to laugh than I will."

"Never you fear; I'm the man Darius Waldron is most afraid of, and if you will just tell him that I am your attorney, it 'll fetch him up with a jerk. And no matter what happens, you come down here tomorrow morning, and we'll fix a trap for Dummy John and find out who he really is."

"It smells like rain," said Mr. Hayes, sniffing the air.

"Don't come if it rains, and if it looks like rain, you whistle in the hollow and I'll let you know if the coast is clear. Now, I'll lock the violin in this drawer, and you take the key."

"All right, I'll be here, and I won't draw a weapon on the next bunch that comes to the Neck—though it does fuss me up a lot to crawl in under the law for protection."

As soon as Mr. Hayes was out of sight, Henry Ham hurried across the bridge and up the road on the other side. When he came within sight of the big brick he saw old Chet working about the yard, and as there were dogs in every direction he gave up in disgust, and went on to a thicket which commanded a good view of the house. He focused his gaze upon the room in which he had heard the footsteps, and cursed the blinds which hid its interior. The afternoon shadows grew

longer and longer, old Chet continued to busy himself in the yard, the collies strolled about in bored stateliness, but still there was no perceptible movement within the house.

Then, just as the sun was sinking in unison with his heart, Jean came to the latticed porch with Bayard, her favorite. She was wearing a dark blue frock with lines so simple that they merely brought out the graceful curves of her form, and the heart of Henry Ham arose and began to sing.

She crossed the yard, walking slowly with the help of a cane, and the collies frolicked about her, but made no effort to follow her through the gate, except Bayard who passed through the ranks of his subordinate fellows with that air of conscious rectitude so gracefully worn by self-made men, and other favorites. They made a beautiful picture, the girl and the dog; she walking with slow, painful steps, and he suiting his pace to hers and seeming to offer the support of his tawny back whenever she deigned to accept it. None of this was lost upon the young man, who enjoyed the vision from his point of vantage, and awaited her coming as confidently as though her path had been chosen when the orbits of the stars had been fixed, and was equally unalterable.

And, as she continued to advance, it seemed as though his theory was correct, for she did not waver from a direct course until she stopped in surprise at the opening of his thicket.

For a moment they faced each other in silence. "I am glad to see you are getting along so well," said Henry Ham.

"Oh, it seems as though I have been a prisoner for life. I know I should give my ankle a longer rest; but I could no longer breathe in the house, and so I came—to you."

"Sit down, you must not stand." She sat beside him and after he had taken a deep breath to brace his nerves, he said: "I have news of your brother."

She drew away from him with a start, and fastened upon him a wide-eyed glance of fear. "What do you know?" she whispered.

"He has returned," replied the youth, and she relaxed with a sigh of relief.

"Where is he?" she asked, glancing around.

"He has been living in Benlo for five years, and you would not recognize him if you saw him. His hair and his beard are long and white."

"He does not seem like my brother," murmured the girl. "He was always cold and hardly noticed me. Has he sent you to me, now?"

"No, for some reason he is pretending to be deaf and dumb. He will speak to no one, and I have only discovered him through a series of accidents."

"What a family, what a family!" ejaculated the girl. "Can you see any trace of insanity in me?"

After a long scrutiny in which he drew as close to her as she would permit, Henry Ham replied sincerely: "There is absolutely no trace of insanity; but instead, you seem the one normal girl in the world."

"I have read many books on insanity, and I have none of the symptoms; but I often wonder why. It seems almost enough to drive one insane to live all alone as I have—to say nothing of my memories—but I have lived in the woods as much as I could, and I have made friends with the wild things. Very few of the brutes go insane, and I have tried to learn their ways. Are you religious?"

"I fear not."

"Neither was my father, but my mother was; she was a missionary. I have read the books against religion left by my father, and the books in favor of religion left by my mother. None of them tell me what I want to know. Her religion tried to teach her to accept the trials of life with resignation, his philosophy taught him to sweep away all obstacles. He was very strong, while I fear that she was weak in all except faith. He would have fought for life had he been the last man on earth, while death seemed the only course for

my mother to take. I feel that she must have wanted to stay for my sake, and because she did not stay, I know that she was weak." The eyes of the girl were fixed upon a patch of blue sky, and she chose her words slowly and doubtfully as usual; but seemed to be thinking aloud rather than speaking to her companion: "I have been in prison all my life, but not one religious person has come to visit me."

"That is strange, too, considering all the preparations you have made to welcome visitors."

She noticed the sarcasm in his tone but did not smile. "The birds welcome no human visitors, because bitter experience has taught them to distrust all; but I am still of the human species, and I could have been taught to trust those who were trustworthy."

"You can trust me, Jean. No matter what has happened or what will happen, you can trust me. I love you."

The boy's voice was tenderly husky, and she placed her hand upon his. "I have read novels and magazines," she said, "but I see a different world than you because I am not part of it. You have grown used to the ways of the world, but it all seems strange and unjust to me. You crowd the weak and when they fall you trample on them with contempt; you take advantage of ignorance instead of shielding it, and I am afraid of the world. It is almost impossible for me to keep away from you, and yet I fear you most of all."

"Did you see me here before you came out?" asked the boy eagerly.

"No, or I should not have come. I like that part of religion which says, 'Lead me not into temptation.' That is sound philosophy and I have tried to follow it. I hardly know myself since you have come. I was not restless before you came to draw my thoughts."

"Do you love me?"

"I think I do," she replied honestly. "Have you ever kissed a girl?"

"Why—yes," replied Henry Ham slowly, as though he were putting a prodigious strain upon his memory, "I believe I have."

The girl's eyes lighted with interest: "Tell me the truth. When I have read in books of lovers kissing, I have tried to feel it, but could not. No man ever so much as touched me since my father's death, until you came. Tell me the truth —is a kiss upon the lips really so wonderful?"

It is difficult to decide whether kissing should be classed among the mechanical or the chemical processes, and therefore it embarrasses a youth to discuss the subject with a frank and serious girl who has schooled herself in the sciences without having had the usual opportunities for making the demonstration in question. With Jean Morgan's eyes upon his face, Henry Ham pondered, and, when one is pondering deeply, it is remarkable how many stray thoughts come along like children who pass a smithy and pause to watch the sparks fly. He recalled the cynical remark of a four-year old philosopher: "Hum, I don't see what you make such a fuss about a kiss for. It's nothing but noise, anyway," and at the remembrance he smiled in sympathy.

He recalled as vividly as possible the osculatory prowess of several girls with whom he had skated across the thick, safe ice of "puppy-love;" and tried his honest best to explain just what had driven him on to kiss, and just wherein lay the satisfaction; and then an inspiration came to him, and he turned to Jean with beaming eyes: "It would strain the intellect of Aristotle to explain to a man born deaf, the beauties of melody; but if the deaf man could be given ears, why then it would be quite simple. Now——"

He leaned toward her while his right arm stole about her waist; but she shook her head and closed her lips so firmly that he desisted. "No, you must not. I wanted to kiss you the first time I saw you—and I want to kiss you now—but I

never can kiss you. Is it not strange that I wanted to kiss you the first time I saw you?"

"No," replied Henry Ham, honestly and without conceit, "it is not nearly so strange as that you should tell me about it now."

"It was, too, strange," insisted the girl; "because at the very time I wanted to kiss you, I did not want you to touch me. I wanted to kiss you without your even knowing of it."

"That's perfect nonsense; I'd rather eat an apple than to kiss even you while you were unconscious. What is the reason you won't kiss me, what is the reason you won't marry me, what is the reason you hedge yourself around with mystery until you are entirely apart from the real life of the world. You are made to be loved and you have made me love you, and I don't intend to give you up. I never loved any girl before. If I wanted to kiss one, I kissed her and thought no more about it; but I want your love more than your kisses. I—do you really suppose that you can go on coaxing my love, and still keep me at arm's length? Do you really believe this?"

The boy's voice was low and tremulous with true emotion, and he looked into her eyes with a burning glance which lighted a flame in her breast and filled her with vague longing. She returned his look silently for a moment, but even then there was more of pleading than of love in her glance."

"I do not want to cause you pain," she said softly, "I have tried to keep away from you, I have honestly tried to; and it has meant more to me than to you, for you have known other girls and have kissed them; while I have known only you, and have had to watch myself every moment I was with you. My hands have kept stealing forth to touch you, my whole body has been drawn to you, I have awakened at night and have found my lips kissing yours in the lonely dark and it was the pain on my heart which awakened me. I cannot go away, I

must stay in my prison; but you are free, and you must never try to see me again."

She arose and started to walk homeward, but he also arose and clasped her hand. "I am not going away, and I am not going to give you up. If you lived on an island with fifty Zulus and a hundred wolves to guard you, I should reach you and win you—and you can rest assured of that."

She withdrew her hand gently but firmly: "You might win me from them, you have already won me from myself, but you cannot win me from Fate. If you continue to come to these woods, you will force me to keep to my dungeon. I want you to leave me alone. Good-bye."

Henry Ham resumed his seat. "I'll come unraveled if I think about this much more!" he exclaimed after a time. "What on earth is holding her back? She cannot be married, for she insists that I am the first man to touch her since her father's death; but she is honest about not wanting to see me again, and, hang it all, whose steps were those on the floor above? I suppose I'll get chewed, knocked on the head, or shot; but I intend to break into her house again, some time."

He examined the big brick from where he sat, and noted that it would be a simple matter to climb the lattice work and reach the flat roof of the porch. The possibility filled him with a pleasant excitement; for in spite of his profession, he much preferred to risk physical, than legal consequences.

"Now for your brother," he said rising and starting toward Benlo. "If I was out of love I'd be out of work; but as it is I'm the busiest man in this locality. Well, every blooming mystery subtracted from the other mysteries, makes just one mystery less."

As he walked down Main Street, he met Judge Hooker, who hesitated a moment and then asked him to step over to his office for a short interview. The cold wall of a broken friendship was between them, and they scarcely spoke on the way. Once seated in the Judge's office, the eyes of the youth

roamed over its familiar walls a little wistfully, while the Judge cleared his throat for action.

"Young man," asked the Judge at length, "are you at the bottom of this Hayes person's resisting with a shot gun the men sent out by Darius Waldron?"

"No, Judge, he did that on his own initiative. He has since put his case in my hands and is pledged to non-resistance."

"Putting his case in your hands was certainly one form of non-resistance," commented the Judge with more self-indulgence than diplomacy. "Well, Waldron was in to see me this afternoon, and he's pretty resentful. Some time ago he hinted at a compromise; but since then you have done everything possible to irritate him, and the reaction of your childish impertinence will fall upon your father and myself, the innocent parties—as is usually the case."

"The Benlo Improvement Company (Inc.) has already started work on the Neck, and Fleet Hayes, its agent, was quite within his rights in evicting the trespassers. If we concede Waldron's rights there, we take the defensive, which, as you perhaps know, is the weak side. Don't talk compromise with him—laugh at him. That is what I advised Fleet Hayes, and that is what I advise you."

"Henry, you 're like religion—you are so unreasonable that you are almost convincing. Have you, soberly and seriously, have you any grounds upon which to stand?"

"What would you say if I told you that I had found Richard Morgan and that he has consented to dispose of his interest in the land to me?"

"In the first place," said the Judge dryly, "I should say that you were bluffing; because I have fruitlessly spent considerable money trying to find him, myself; but even if your bluff were true it would not matter, as one convicted of causing a death cannot inherit from his victim."

"That 's so," admitted Henry Ham thoughtfully, "I'd forgotten that. Still, it makes no difference, I know where I

can get a club to beat Waldron into line whenever I want it."

The face of the judge reddened with righteous indignation. "Is there no limit to your pretense?" he demanded. "If you knew one single thing to suppress Darius Waldron, you would threaten him in private, not merely irritate him by having a lot of common gossip printed in the paper by your colleague in adolescent idiocy, Editor Harkins. You have proved by every step your executive incapacity, and yet you are so debased that you insist upon continuing a binding corporation which you won from me as a token of my friendship. I have been weak, but you have been vile."

"You, Judge Hooker, in common with all charter members of the old school have the happy faculty of claiming the honors and shirking the responsibilities. It was you who outraged Fleet Hayes; it is I who alone can straighten out the tangle."

"I warn you that I intend shortly to take steps to protect myself."

"And I warn you that I refuse to be held responsible for anything you do without my permission."

For a full moment the two faced each other in the dim light of the single coal oil lamp, and then with a deep sigh, the Judge said soberly: "Henry, if I had died the day before you first came into my office, the orderliness of my little estate would have added to the respect paid my memory. It would have proved that while I had been modest in my fees, I had been thrifty and industrious; and the bequests of my will are of such a nature that many would have benefited in a small way. Now, I am deeply involved, I cannot hope to pay off the options and interest from the income of my practice, and if I should die tonight the nominated beneficiaries would be justified in thinking that a mere gambler had made a mockery of them.

"In the childish vanity of your surpassing egotism, you cannot even dimly apprehend what I wanted my life to mean to my fellow citizens. In my experience with men I have

found hypocricy to be the canker which starting in small things, finally ate away all that was clean and healthy and strong, and I vowed to myself to live an open life, to use all the little safety valves by which the evil escapes without tearing out the good, to hold up cant to ridicule by setting beside it the simplicity, the honor, the justice, and the generosity of what my father meant by the term gentleman—and you have made me a gambler and a cheat in the eyes of the very ones I hoped to help.

"As a lawyer, I can recall but one case entrusted to my care which causes me any regret. You have repeatedly asked me concerning the trial of Richard Morgan, and I have always turned you aside because this is the one case in which I feel I have not done my duty. He refused to speak, circumstantial evidence was overwhelmingly against him, and yet there was something in that boy's face which burned its mark upon my heart, and the scar aches to this day. He may have killed his father, it seems that he must have killed him, and yet I know that he was justified, and that I should have saved him—and this is sore responsibility for any conscientious man to carry.

"You have thought me careless in my work—oh, I know, I have studied you closely and have read you aright—but I have never been careless except this one time, as a deeper mind than yours would have seen. I put all the work on you that I could; not from laziness but because you needed the work to steady you; and I went into this promotion scheme not from sordid motives, but to give you your chance. Now I shall place one more straw upon your pride and see if that will break it—I forgive you freely and fully for all that has happened to me; but you have struck your father harder than you have struck me. He has a large family depending upon him, and this very minute he is a ruined and bankrupt man. Darius Waldron has him in a vise and he'll squeeze him to the last penny. You brag of the effect your tirades in the

Citizen will have; but the first effect will be upon your father. Waldron knows that you have written the articles and he will make your father pay. Now, I think we understand each other."

Sensitiveness is the soft layer which invariably lies immediately beneath egotism, and the tears had been flooding to the heart of the youth during the Judge's speech; but sensitiveness always shields itself in secrecy, and not yet was Henry Ham able to stand forth naked and unashamed. A penitent word from him would have been as a cool drink in the desert to the judge; but his eyes neither softened nor faltered as he replied with irritating assurance: "I expect to take care both of you and my father, sir; but I am glad to know that if I fail it will disappoint neither of you. Good night."

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE.

It had not been sufficiently cloudy the following morning to keep Dummy John at home; but Fleet Hayes took the precaution to signal in the Hollow, and Henry Ham walked thither to give him a hearty welcome.

"Haven't been arrested yet," said Mr. Hayes complacently, "though I own up that I spent several hours last evening preparin' the animals for the worst. If you had a beard I'd make you swear on it to protect my family in case any thing happened to me."

"I'll promise to protect them and you, too, if you 'll just do what I say."

"I believe ya, I actually do believe ya—though my better judgment warns me that a bullfrog's bark is generally worse than his bite. I'm more on edge just now about makin' our test than I am about bein' arrested, how do you plan to work it?"

"I told him before he left this morning not to expect me any more today and that if any called, to tell them that I would be back tomorrow."

"It's remarkable how close to a lie you can come without actually bumpin' it," exclaimed Fleet Hayes admiringly, "Go on."

"All there is for us to do is to climb into the loft and look down through a knothole. He thinks there is only one key to this building and the last one to leave is supposed to lock the door and hide the key in a lilac bush. I told him to take it with him today, so he'll never suspect us."

"That's just what I hate about it. Honest folks are seldom suspicious, so they 're about the only kind ya can fool.

In this world a feller has to divide off with the tricky successfuls or with the honest failures, and neither crowd suits me exactly, which is why I train mostly with the animals."

"I prefer direct methods, myself; but one cannot afford to let his prejudices interfere with his business. If you can think of any better way, I'll gladly do my part."

"Oh, I suppose we 'll have to go through with it," grumbled Mr. Hayes, who could not have been prevailed upon to withdraw under any circumstances. He opened the violin case, unwrapped the violin and rosined the bow, "I was certain sure it was goin' to rain this morning, and I would have took it as a judgment on us."

"A little shower, now, would be a good thing, as he seldom takes much time to lunch, and might not touch the violin. He never has touched anything of mine."

"No, course he never did, and he don't possess an extra key to this room either; but then, you see, he never was ambitious to be a lawyer, so you can't expect much of him. It ain't goin' to rain after all, the sun's comin' out strong. Well, that 'll make the fiddle sound better, and if it's him he can't resist it."

Shortly before noon, Henry Ham examined the door to see that it was locked, gave the room a final survey, and then assisted Fleet Hayes to climb into the loft through the trapdoor. After making sure that nothing had fallen upon the bunk which stood beneath, he drew himself through the opening, and cautioned Mr. Hayes against any movements which might betray them.

Mr. Hayes listened patiently until he had been warned fully and completely, and then said mildly: "About all the trainin' I ever before had in scoutin' was durin' the Civil War. What war was you in?"

"I'll answer your silly questions some other time; but he's about due now, and you'd better keep still. Have you found a good knot-hole to look through?"

"Only just so so. My nose, as you may have noticed, is a little prominent, and when I try to see the whole room, it scrapes along a joist."

"Better luck next time," whispered Henry Ham; "but we'll have to keep still now, for he's liable to be here any minute."

Just as the town clock struck five, a key entered the lock. It was exactly noon, and the town clock kept perfect time—but refused to tell the truth about it. As no amount of skilled labor could overcome this immorality upon the part of the clock, the citizens of Benlo were assured of a constant and perennial exercise in lower mathematics.

Dummy John closed the door after him with a sigh of relief, and proceeded to wash his face and hands. He next filled his bowl with oatmeal mush and sat at his own table facing that of Henry Ham. It was his custom to eat slowly and masticate his food thoroughly, and as he raised his eyes at the second mouthful, they encountered the violin, and his mouth dropped open in astonishment.

For several moments he sat curiously regarding the instrument and then he crossed the room and touched it reverently. He stood bending above it a moment, then slowly shook his head and tiptoed back to his bowl of mush. He once more tried to eat, but his eyes never left the violin, and several times he crossed the room to touch it gently with his fingers.

After finishing his meager luncheon, he arose and with hands clasped upon breast walked slowly to the opposite table. He bowed above it as some devotee might lean across the altar upon which lay the sacred symbol of his faith; and then sighing heavily, placed the instrument within its case, which he closed and covered with newspapers. He next placed some water to heat upon a coal-oil stove and swept the floor, which task was completed before the water had heated; and while waiting, he removed the newspaper and examined the case again, but did not open it. He now

dusted carefully, but even after this the water was still below the desired temperature, and his hands found their way mechanically to the violin case, which they opened. He looked at the instrument without touching it for several minutes, before again closing the case and testing the water. For a moment he hesitated, and then with lips set, he stole to the door, opened it cautiously and looked intently in every direction, even going so far as to circle the workshop.

Satisfied that he was alone, he hurried inside and proceeded to tune the instrument, murmuring to himself in a low tone as he did so. He rolled the silk wrapper and placed it inside the shoulder of his blouse, and then clasped the violin to his chin. He drew the bow across the strings, and at their perfect response he threw back his face and gazed upward as though returning thanks for a blessed privilege. For several minutes he drove his fingers through one exercise after another, each one calling for increased nimbleness, and then muttered aloud: "I cannot do it, they are stiff, they will not act. Oh, I have been robbed, robbed."

He placed the violin back in the case and stood gazing at it sorrowfully. "Oh, my beautiful, my beautiful," he said brokenly, as with hands clasped upon his breast, he stood gazing down at the instrument. "I must hear you sing," he whispered hoarsely, "I must. You will understand, and none other need ever know."

He hurried to the door and after another quick scrutiny he placed the violin to his cheek once more, and again ran through a series of scales. "They are beginning to remember," he muttered as his fingers responded with greater accuracy. He placed the violin upon the table once more, and fell to rubbing the fingers of his left hand feverishly. "You must become limber again, you must."

Almost roughly he massaged the muscles of wrist and forearm, opening and closing, spreading and interlacing the long, slender fingers and forcing their spatulate tips to strike the

palm with certainty and strength—and then he once more lifted the violin with tender reverence and placed his cheek against it caressingly.

For a few moments the bow wandered over the strings aimlessly and then Dummy John, mute no longer, closed his eyes, shut off all the present and drifted away upon the tender tide of Schumann's "Traumerei." Dreams and reveries, ah, sure enough they come to life in this simple, exquisite melody which tells no secrets but suggests them all.

Over and over he played the movements, bringing out each time a shade more vividly the lonesome heartaches which had stifled him throughout the years which he had tormented and slain at the stern command of his father, during those later years which had come to leer at him in his living tomb, and in that vague aftertime during which he had returned to haunt a world having troubles of its own to brood over, and knowing him no more.

Henry Ham was lost in wonder as he watched and listened from the dusty loft above, and perceived that Fleet Hayes had done no more than simple justice to his own handiwork and to the man who was now bringing it to the fulfillment of its destiny. Low and liquid were the notes, but no matter how fine they were drawn there was never a trace of harshness, never a suggestion of friction; one note blended into another as smoothly as in the most perfectly trained voice; and as he listened the boy, also, forgot his present and let his emotion flow forth and mingle with the music. Something within him cried in unison with every cry from the violin, and there was a physical pain in his heart at thought of what the empty years would mean to him if this love, which he now knew to be his one great passion, were to be torn out of his life through some circumstance with which he would be powerless to cope.

Henry Ham and Dummy John were recalled to themselves by the same shocking discord, and this illtimed explosion

which seemed to rend a world of ideality asunder and scatter its fragments into the sadly mundane workshop, was neither more nor less than a collossal sneeze from the prominent nose of Mr. Hayes, who immediately made such reparation as seemed to him most consistent, by condemning himself to the place of torment in a torrent of profanity which had not previously been given a free outlet since the Civil War.

Dummy John placed the violin upon the table with careful solicitude in spite of his excitement, and then darted for the door; but at its threshhold he paused, turned, and waited with drooping head.

Fleet Hayes continued to explain to the dead and the living just how many different sorts of torture should be meted out to himself, while Henry Ham, after vainly attempting to calm him, descended to the room below. "I don't want no one to help me down," said the repentant Mr. Hayes. "If I was to slip and dive head-first to the cement floor, it would only make a smack like the bustin' 'of a toy balloon; for I swear by all the tribes of Israel that there isn't as many brains in my head as there is in the head of a pin."

However, the agile little man had always taken excellent care of his head, and habits of care which have taken a lifetime in the seasoning are not to be swept away by even the strongest gust of embarrassing shame; so he reached the floor as safely and as cleverly as the younger conspirator.

Dummy John stood near the door, hands limply hanging, head drooping, and upon his face that expression of cynical hopelessness—the thorny crown of him who has renounced his species after they have betrayed his trust and injured him beyond reparation.

Fleet Hayes was at this moment so full of his own shortcomings that he was in a position to appreciate and sympathize; and he rushed forward and took the two limp hands in his. "Dodgone my lonely old skin, Richard, but I am glad to see you back," he exclaimed. "Why, blame it, man, don't

hang your head that way. Nobody caught you playing on anybody else's fiddle. That was your own fiddle. All the time I was shapin' that box and grindin' age into it, I had you in mind; and I tried my best to find you after they turned you adrift. You have n't shown good judgment in hermitin' 'all by yourself, boy; I've just been achin' and yearnin' for you to come back and help me out with my hermitin'. The idea of you 're using your hands for garden hooks. It makes me plumb angry. Now, chirk up and hang out a smile. This boy is all right and just as glad to welcome you as I am. We had to try you out, and that is all we were up to. Come on, now, don't feel hurt."

Compared with most of her sister states, the prisons of Indiana seem to possess rudimentary tendencies toward humanity—which is much like saying that compared with the general run of hydrophobic wolves, one particular wolf has redeeming qualities which entitle him to a painless extermination.

It would probably not outrage a peculiarly vicious cave-dweller to be incarcerated in the Indiana penitentiary; but to attempt to cultivate the emotional soul of Richard Morgan within its clanging and discordant environment was like asking a rose to bloom within a sewer. He had not gone mad, because he had stripped off layer after layer of those finer graces with which the ages had adorned him, had rooted up each tiny hope as it sprouted, and hurled it beneath his feet before it could send out fibers to his heart, until he had at last reverted to the animal type which can tread the endless chain in dumb and stolid silence day after day. He had been a good prisoner because he had become so little like a man, and now he faced his fellows as he had faced them in the dock, asking nothing of them, telling nothing to them.

"D-don't you even intend to speak to me?" demanded Fleet Hayes. "You can't think up anything to blame me for, can you?"

Dummy John made no response; he had been tried at the bar before, and now as then he refused to take any part in the proceeding. He did not ask for their credentials, he did not question their power; whatever burden or shame they chose to lay upon him, he would accept now as he had accepted then; for he believed that his soul had been crushed, and of his body he had but little thought.

Fleet Hayes had turned away from him in sorrow and now stood looking out the window. The queer little man had once possessed a great, loving heart; but when, long ago, it had received the stab which so many hearts must bear in silence and with no changes in the outward and visible forms of living, he had calmly thrust the world to one side and had taken his bruised heart into the waste places, there to create a world of his own—but still his heart, which had been made for loving, continued to love, even as the fox-fire glows on in the swamp, knowing naught of its own nature but continuing to express this nature steadily and without flinching in the midst of the gloom which seeks to encompass it.

There had been no choice in the man's attitude toward the impertinent beasts which had squatted upon his bounty as confidently as he had squatted upon Abel Henderson's land. To love was the greatest privilege of his life, and in offering themselves as objects for his love they had restored him to his normal poise and owed him no debt of gratitude. He could make them comfortable, he could give them happiness, he could administer their small affairs; and thus he was restored to his kingdom, for it was intended that every man should be a king, and a king must have his subjects.

In Richard Morgan the little man had stumbled upon a type which combined the patience, the simplicity, and the trustfulness of the lower animals with that rare gift of music which was the other kingdom to which Fleet Hayes aspired but which had not been given unto him. His was the gift to make the instruments which he had not been called upon to

play, and so between the young man and the old was that union of interdependence which is the soul of harmony. For years he had yearned for the return of the youth who had filled his life with the peace of fulfillment and now that this great prize for which he had longed had been placed in his hands, it had faded into ashes even as he had gazed upon it, and the eyes which seemed to be gazing out of the window were glazed with the tears of age, which come from the heart and seem to rend the heart with their flowing.

At this juncture the irrespressible spirit of Henry Ham awoke and prompted him to adjust the situation. "Are you aware that your sister is living, and that she needs you?" he asked the dejected man who stood before him in grim and hopeless silence.

"No, I am not," replied Richard Morgan, and the promptness of his reply was startling.

"You certainly have a well-tanned conscience," said Henry Ham, with an assurance which was quite unwarranted. "Here she has been living in a dreary old museum of horrors with no friends but a pack of dogs, and no teachers but a brace of bigoted Zulus—and you say you are not aware that she needs you."

Richard Morgan made not the slightest response. His face was like a mask, his eyes rested upon the floor, his hands hung at his side; there was no trace of resistance in either face or form; but neither was there any meekness. Society has the power to mold dynamite into the form of lambs, but this makes it none the less dangerous.

"Why don't you answer?" demanded Henry Ham sternly.

"Why did she not answer me?"

"When?"

"I made over to her all my interest in the estate, I had my lawyer get himself appointed administrator and close the estate as quickly, and disturb her as little as possible. I refused to speak of myself, but I did all I could for her. I wrote to

her while I was in prison, she did not answer; I wrote to her when I was pardoned, she did not answer; I went to her in the woods and tried to speak to her; but at sight of me she ran away. She cares not whether I be dead or not for she has willed that I be dead to her; and I am content, for I would sooner be dead, than live in that brick annex to hell."

There was the coldness of perfect sanity in the man's voice; but the contrast between his bitter words and his aloof, impersonal tone, indicated how sub-human his thought processes had become.

"Yes, but you are a man of culture while she is still but a child;" the voice of Henry Ham had found a manly dignity which became it much better than its customary superciliousness. "Do you not intend to persist in claiming your responsibilities? Considering the changes in your appearance, it would have been strange, indeed, if she had recognized, or shown any sisterly feeling at sight of you? She never received your letters, she has never received any letters; she has been treated as unjustly as yourself, and you must be patient."

There was no reply. "Answer me!" cried Henry Ham, stamping his foot.

Richard Morgan raised his eyes to the young man's and they were filled with a queer, brutish blend of fear and resentment—the threat of a coward. "I have kept from going mad by becoming a beast," he said slowly. "I am no longer cultured—great God, I am no longer human. I can go about very well, doing slavish work, but when I really try to think, when I begin to recollect, when I try to tie together the broken strands of my life I become filled with the delirium of a devil. Me claim my responsibilities? You're a fool. You should have let me alone; I do very well as a child, and I am even happy when I nurse the poor dogs; but I hate the harsh grating of a human voice—even my own."

"What you need," said Henry Ham kindly, "is the right

kind of nursing yourself. Also, there is a little matter of business you must attend to shortly. Even though you are no longer, strictly speaking, co-heir to the estate—"

"Co-heir to the estate, co-heir to the estate. Co-heir to all the hellish torments which went with my father's name. My mother was a Spanish lady of rank and a wonderful musician. He treated her like a servant because he could not understand music and she could not understand science; and me he hated always, because I was more like her than like him. I want none of his estate, for it is naught but a succession of curses."

"Well, even at that it is n't very large," said Henry Ham whimsically; "but large or small, you will have to meet your sister and confer with her about it, some time. I admit that you have been cruelly treated; but even this does not excuse you for refusing to be a human being. If you have enough self-control to suppress your identity for years, you also have enough to assume your identity now that it is your plain duty, and we all intend to help you."

"That's the proper talk," cried Fleet Hayes. "You'll bring your fiddle along and come right out to my place this afternoon, won't you? Sure you will, and you can have my room until we get a chance to add yours on. I've had a plan in my head for your room which has been ripening for fifteen years and will tickle you to death. Come on, boy, my whole family are animals, and they'll take you right in and welcome you. Have you anything in your present den that you want to take along with you?"

The tall young man with the old, weary face and the white hair and beard looked down into the eager face of the little old man with its boyishly frank smile, and an expression of doubtful hope came to his eyes. "You'll be comfortable there," continued Mr. Hayes, "We don't have any regular hours for doing anything, but do just as we please. I won't ask you any questions, nor tell you what your plain duty is, nor spy around after you; but I'll be there handy to listen to you

whenever you feel like talkin' or playin' on your fiddle; and the animals will play with you, and the birds and ripples sing to you, and you'll get free and healthy inside again. Are you ready to go, now?"

"That is what I should like," murmured Richard Morgan. "Yes, I should like just that; it would be easier than dying, and just as comfortable. I have a few small things which I should like to take with me."

"Can we carry 'em, just you and I, or had I better hook up Caroline to the cart and haul 'em out?"

"I don't think we can carry them quite all."

"Then come on and we'll put that lazy mule between the shaves and get this off our minds in a jiffy. I had a strong presentiment to drive her in when I came; but when I told her about it, she just made a face at me, and went on eating, so I humored her. Come on."

"Shall I pack up your things while you are away?" asked Henry Ham, a little wistfully. He had grown rather fond of his silent companion, and it cut a little to be left without one word of regret.

"Course not," volunteered Mr. Hayes, "he'll want to do his own packin', and I'm a dodderin' old idiot not to have thought of it. It'll save time for me to go by myself after that no-account mule; and me and you have to save all the time we can from now on, Richard."

The youth felt quite an outsider, and tilting a chair against the wall he lighted his pipe and sat gazing out the window at the tree tops stretching up from the Hollow. Well, he had done his duty, and if the world chose to be thankless, why, the world could go hang.

Moving about the room with soft footfalls, Richard Morgan busied himself in the collection of his humble possessions. When they were finally arranged in the most convenient form for loading, he seated himself in his single, straight-backed chair and fixed his gaze upon the face of Henry Ham, whose

hurt eyes did not falter in their steadfast scrutiny of the trees in the Hollow.

The eyes of the lonely man were full of that inexpressible mournfulness seen in the eyes of a dog who silently awaits the departure of his beloved master, and after a time, he arose and crossing the room placed an apologetic hand upon the boy's shoulder. "You have been very kind to me," he said softly.

A warm flush of pleasure came to the face of Henry Ham, but he did not desert his colors. "Pshaw," he scoffed, "all I ever did for you was to let you alone."

"Yes, but, oh, if you could only know how many, many times I have ached in my heart because those about me would not let me alone. When I bury myself in the deep silence, all seems peaceful and I am poised like a large fish in a quiet pool; but when people talk to me, I am like that same fish jerked upon the dry land, and I flap and gasp and feel as though I would burst asunder—and yet, I am often lonely and it was pleasant to have you near. Some time I hope I can do something for you."

Henry Ham was deeply affected. "Nonsense," he said lightly; "I feel exactly that way about things myself, and you have suited me perfectly as a companion. I'm deuced sorry to have you go, and I want you to call upon me any time you need anything. What you want to do when you get back to the woods is to just relax and soak yourself full of the outdoors. Fleet Hayes will be a tonic for you, and you'll feel like a new man in a couple of months."

He arose and paced the floor, his softer personality revelling in the tender fellowship which seemed to fill the room like the fragrance of a lily; and then he spied the open box containing the written verse, and because his versatility was spontaneous and incorrigible, he promptly knocked it off as though by accident.

"Confound my awkwardness'" he exclaimed, hastily pick-

ing up the magazine pictures and putting them back in the box, but coolly pausing to read the verse aloud.

He glanced at Richard Morgan with quizzical innocence after finishing, and remarked; "Well, that's a curious verse. What does it mean?"

"I do not know," replied Morgan. "It is in my father's writing. I found it among his papers, and it has been saying itself over in my mind ever since. I think it means myself, but I do not know. They took it from me — the paper upon which it is written — when they put me in prison, and they gave it back when they turned me out, but all the time it was saying itself over and over in my mind as I sat in the hole in the wall: 'The best part of me is dead.' I think the verse means me."

The simple sincerity in Richard Morgan's voice was so unmistakable, that Henry Ham with a gesture of mild disappointment resigned all hope of finding a solvable mystery in the verse. Fleet Hayes soon returned, the well worn furnishings were loaded into the wagon, and Dummy John climbed in, a faint smile of hope hovering about his lips beneath the frown of doubt which clouded his brow.

Just before he was ready to mount to the post of honor, Mr. Hayes turned to Henry Ham and said with a chuckle: "Darius Waldron sent two new men up there today with shovels, and they asked me where to begin diggin'. I laughed at 'em friendly and free for several minutes and then set' em to diggin' in the quicksand down on the Neck; he, he, hah."

"Quicksand?"

"Well, I don't really suppose it is regular quicksand. Quicksand, ya know, is the all around darndest stuff in creation, it'll leak through any place water will, and flow a stream through the eye of a needle. This here is a puddle of water-sand deep enough to swamp an elephant, and it's all the time kept saturated by crick seepage.

"I hinted to 'em that soundin's for a foundation was wanted

there, and they started in; but one of 'em had a pretty close shave of it. None o' these fellers Darius sent out knew anything about work; and my opinion is that he's just holdin' your crowd up some way."

"That's been my opinion all the time; but we've got him fixed. All you need to do is to keep your eyes open and report to me. Well, good bye; Caroline's beginning to get fussy. Take good care of my old partner. Good bye."

He stood watching the odd pair, or to be more accurate odd trio, until they were lost to sight, and then muttered: "Quicksand, eh! I wonder what effect this will have?"

CHAPTER THIRTY

Two mornings later, Henry Ham received a formal notice to attend the board meeting of the Benlo Improvement Company(Inc.), and it immediately occurred to him that he would strengthen his own position before facing those not entirely in sympathy with his methods; so he prepared a general power of attorney and betook himself to the woods above the Swan's Neck.

He so thoroughly regarded himself as a child of Destiny that he invariably expected Destiny to attend to all the minor details essential to the success of his projects. On this occasion, with absolutely no conscious thought on his part, he went directly to the thicket where he had last seen Jean Morgan, and was not a whit surprised to find her already there.

"Do you know anything about law?" he asked abruptly.

"Why do you wish to know?"

He regarded her with frank disapproval, and then said loftily: "If you had had sufficient experience to comprehend the sting of a general reproach I should say, 'that is just like a woman', but under the circumstances I shall be patient with you. In order to carry out your wishes in the matter of making Fleet Hayes the bona fide owner of the land he now occupies, certain legal formalities are necessary. I am a lawyer."

"You don't look anything like the other one."

"Other one. What other one?"

"The one who attended to my brother and me after my father's death. His name was Judge Hooker and he was a very kind man, I am sure, because I asked him never to come here again, and he never did."

"He is a kind man and a mighty fine man; but I am a different kind of a lawyer, and so I have to show my kindness in a different way. Here is a paper giving me your power of attorney in the manipulation of that one piece of land. Read it and sign it, and then I'll go."

Jean did not entirely like Henry Ham's manner this morning, and though she read the document with her eyes, her feminine mind was chiefly occupied with divers reflections concerning this manner. Presently she signed the paper, thinking to arouse his gratitude and thus leave him defenceless to the barbs of punishment with which she was minded to shoot him; but much to her astonishment, as soon as she had handed him the signed paper, he arose, wished her good morning, and walked rapidly away. Of course she had told him that she never wanted to see him again, and really she never did; but for just a moment she was strongly tempted to run after him, pull his hair, and scratch his face.

Quite unconscious of this state of mind which he had left behind and entirely satisfied with the success of his mission, the youth strode jauntily through the woods, forded the creek, and presented himself at the home of Fleet Hayes, who was seated at his door whittling a stick into fantastic shapes in harmony with the kaleidoscopic emanations of his mind.

"What's taking place in your brain?" asked the youth.

"I'm tryin' to study out a plan to raise four or five hundred dollars without selling something I didn't make to sell."

"Just as soon as we get actually to work here, the Benlo Improvement Company is to pay you five hundred dollars for your water-right privileges. I'm your lawyer and I'll look out for your interests."

"Well, that'll be just dandy!" exclaimed Mr. Hayes without a tinge of skepticism. "Now, all I need to do is to decide on my plans. I am going to build a studio and bedroom for Richard, back of mine and with an outside door. I'm goin' to build it of yellow brick with a slate roof, and fix it so sound-

proof he can shut out the last trumpet if he wants to. I'm goin' to put a regular bathroom in it, too. He's the greatest hand to take baths you ever saw, he is for a fact. He plunges into the crick every blessed morning of the world, and sometimes the last thing at night; but I want a bathroom for him through the winter. He cured himself of the consumption by discarding his socks and underwear, and bathing his body in air every minute he wasn't bathing it in water. That's why he wears such far-fetched clothes."

"How is he enjoying himself with you?" asked the youth, settling down for a talk.

"Well, all animals are quiet and offish when they begin to live with me, so I was in a measure prepared for him; but I must say that he is by all odds the exclusivest member we've ever had in this family. He loosens up more when he gets to playin' the fiddle than at any other time, but I sometimes fear it's goin' to take years to get him tuned up again.

"He's altogether a different man when he fiddles. Do you know"—pausing to glance furtively around—"sometimes I fear his mind's been wore pretty thin. Why, he won't reason with ya as much as George will. I talk to him like a father, sometimes, as much as an hour at a time, and then I notice that he hasn't been heedin' me at all—just been sittin' there with a resigned look on his face as though he was wonderin' why I didn't speak up and say somethin'.

"Then sometimes he'll take the fiddle and go out into the night and sit on a stump or something, and pet the fiddle and croon over it for minutes on end. I never speak at these times, but just sit close and sympathize with him. Then maybe, he'll make the fiddle laugh mockingly, or make it scream with pain, and then he'll wrap it up and shuffle back home again. At other times the music comes to him and he plays it right out of the night, the same as he used to.

"Listen to me, lawyer, the' ain't no man nor the' ain't no dozen men who've got wisdom enough to shut up the mean-

est human of us all, away from the sunshine and the ripplin' waters and the music of the birds. I'm winnin' him back, and I'm goin' to win him clear back; but sometimes he gets a long ways off in spite of me."

Henry Ham smiled at the confidence with which the little man stood upon the plateau of his seventy-five years and gazed upwards at the peaks still to be climbed; and then he shook himself back into his own affairs, rose, promised to get the five hundred dollar check as soon as possible, and took his way back to Benlo, where he awaited the meeting of the board of directors with considerable equanimity.

At the meeting the Judge once more begged that the corporation be dissolved, and in the discussion which ensued, Henry Ham led the opposition with decorous respect, and thus surprised both his allies and his opponants, if not even himself.

"What is the sense in hanging on?" demanded the Judge. "Darius Waldron owns that strip now, he has declared his intention of erecting a power plant, if we attempt to take it from him through condemnation proceedings, we shall have to pay all it would be worth to us—which is quite a different matter from claiming it of that squatter by right of eminent domain."

"Why?" asked Editor Harkins.

"Because then it would have been appraised merely as waste farm land, while now it has become investment property through Waldron's declared intention; and he is in a position to make us pay."

"I should say he is," added Hiram Trotwood mournfully. Mr. Trotwood's face, formerly so smooth and placid, had of late become drawn and marked with lines of worry.

"I can secure all the rights we need on the Neck for five hundred dollars," said Henry Ham quietly.

"Five hundred dollars," exclaimed Mr. Trotwood. "I'd

give twenty-five hundred dollars this minute to be out of this scrape, and then thank my lucky stars ever after."

"Well, I wouldn't give five cents without knowing exactly how it was to be used," said Judge Hooker gruffly.

"It's to be used for a studio and bathroom." The youth did not wish to say this, but he could not help it.

"Henry," said Mr. Trotwood, "if you realized how seriously I was involved, you wouldn't have the heart to make light of it. You have ruined me unless I can make a compromise with Darius Waldron. And I can't do this as long as you insist upon keeping up this fool corporation. For years I have been opposed to corporations because they robbed the common people; but it's worse to be in one than out."

"How could you arrange matters if you were free?" asked Henry Ham.

"Well, you see"—Mr. Trotwood paused in some embarrassment — "awhile back he seemed more friendly like, and I tried to get him to take my options off my hands at a fair reduction. He wouldn't do that; but he said if Judge Hooker and I would come in with him, he might be induced to let those options stand as part of the capital of a new company."

Henry Ham whistled a significant swell; but Judge Hooker hastened to say: "We turned down this proposition cold and flat—although I am bound to admit that it would be much more comfortable to be associated in business with Darius Waldron than with a parcel of irresponsible children. I have become senile, I am an old dotard, I am crawling and sniffling about in my second childhood, or never would I have permitted myself to fall into the control of a creature with a malformed intellect, which is mature only in viciousness. I mean you"—pointing a finger at the complacent Henry Ham. "You have fooled me; and I am not wont to be fooled."

The Judge was dramatic, almost tragic. "For years I have been intrusted with the business of men, and I have transacted it in a manly way; but you, you have beguiled me

into playing like a prattling babe. I let you have your own way because it amused me to see you trying to learn to creep mentally, and I laughed behind my hand at your silly sprawls; but hang it all, you've got me into a pit and piled your own father in on top of me—and this has gone far enough.

"If I had acted upon my best judgment from the first, we should have taken that strip of sand without any concessions to savage sentimentality, and we should have put up the power-plant in an orderly, civilized way; but no, no — I had to let you have your own way—and what I can't get over is, that I did let you have your own way. I have always thought that the father of the prodigal son was elevated far beyond his intellectual and moral capacity when he was entrusted with the destiny of a fatted calf. The calf had more sense than he did, or it would have been the prodigal son who was slaughtered; and then we should have had one parable which really did teach a valuable lesson.

"I say to you freely and frankly that I have always held to this belief, and then what did I do—after my mind failed? Why, I rushed forth and kidnapped a prodigal son—I, who had no son of my own, fairly threw my arms about the neck of a son so prodigal that, by comparison, his prototype was like unto Shylock, in the administration of matters financial.

"There is no excuse for me, and I do not even ask your pity. There is no especial charm about this young viper, whom I warmed in my bosom until he saw fit to sting me, his manner is not remarkable, his methods are not convincing, he did not overcome me with his wiles—I overcame myself with my silly softness—and I defy any man to deny it; but now the scales have fallen from my eyes and I refuse to longer continue in the undignified role of a child's rattle.

"You"—aiming the accusing finger at young Dr. Wilson—"have in your keeping twenty thousand dollars of real money which belongs to Mr. Trotwood and myself, and if this is not returned to us within—well, within a very short time I will

take the trouble to prove to you that I have recovered from whatever obsession it was which gripped my mentality, and am once more able to use the law as a skilled fencer wields his rapier."

It had been long since the Judge had been granted such a verbal out-pouring, and his mind felt cleansed and refreshed. He had so thoroughly admired his own figures of speech that he was beginning to experience a weak feeling of gratitude toward the youth who had provided the opening for his rounded periods; especially was this true because he knew that this youth had masticated each one with keen appreciation and had nicely assimilated all the finer points. It had been the hidden spirit of play in the Judge which had rushed forth to greet the youth as a comrade in the stars, and the bond between them, being natural, was still too strong to be torn asunder by a merely economic wrench.

"Henry Ham," said the Judge in a low and confidential voice, "you have the mysterious faculty of twisting these two young squibs about your finger, even as you once twisted your father and myself, and therefore I appeal directly to you. You know that I have, under the law, the power to force this corporation into the hands of a receiver, and that this will make you as ridiculous as you have made me. I shall do this unless you are reasonable. You boasted of being able to get the title for five hundred dollars. Will you be so good as to give us the details of this enticing scheme?"

"Not yet, Judge," said Henry Ham. "So long as you are considering an alliance with Darius Waldron, I cannot place in your hands any information which I now hold as a club over him."

"That's just it," complained Mr. Trotwood, "you have clubbed him so in the *Citizen* that he is taking his revenge out of me. Henry, why won't you be reasonable?"

"I am. I have told you that Darius is the least of my bothers, and now you are free to take any steps you wish.

My advice to you is to have the power-site examined by an expert. I move that we adjourn."

"Second the motion," said Editor Harkins, who had nothing tangible to lose, and greatly preferred the picturesque to the commonplace.

With the amount of reluctance consistent with the five thousand which he had at stake, Dr. Wilson voted with them and the meeting was adjourned, leaving the two older men kicking against the pricks of youthful conceit and arrogance.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

For a few days Henry Ham devoted himself to self-examination. He counted so implicity upon Nate Shipley's alleged power over Darius Waldron that he simply denied that gentleman admission to his thoughts, and tried to discover how serious were the flaws in his love for Jean Morgan.

As completely as possible he cleared his mind of all extraneous matter so that there might be a fair field in which his prejudices on one side and his natural tastes and desires on the other, might fight it out to a finish. At the end of the second day he was certain that he did not fear the criticism of those who held blindly to the conventional; but that in his secret heart he still did fear that after all the conventional might be right, and that he would himself awaken to this after it was too late.

He did not spare himself at this period; but acknowledged his own impulsiveness, his tendency to lose interest, his selfishness—he stripped himself to the soul, and did not weigh his virtues until he had placed upon the balance his entire list of shortcomings. However, when he came to the virtues he was no less fair with them, and was forced to admit to himself that, in spite of his flippant conceit and venturesome vanity, he averaged rather decently. No matter what steps they might take in retaliation of his irritating manner, at heart and in act he was loyal to all men, and only fickle toward girls because they were so seldom frank and sincere; while Jean Morgan——

Then he spent nearly another day in the examination of Jean Morgan, compared her with all other girls, and his heart glowed with love and pride. In his own peculiar way he had taken every possible precaution, so that neither adventurer

would regret the long voyage of matrimony which he contemplated, and there was much justifiable satisfaction beaming in his face when he finally sprang to his feet, shook his fist at the west wall of his improvised office, and exclaimed: "Why, hang it all, the very things which have made me hesitate, are the very things which prove her worth. She is normal in a family of freaks, she is beautiful amid hideous surroundings, she is faithful to duty, no matter how tormenting that duty may be; and I don't care anything about her past, present, or future, if she is free to marry, I am going to marry her—and I intend to find out this very day why she has refused to marry me."

It was late in the afternoon when Henry Ham came to this decision; but he was much given to executing his conceptions before they had time to lose the thrilling lure of new creations; and he promptly substituted tennis shoes for the pair he was wearing, slapped on a hat and hurried to the enchanted woods. He saw her walking with her dog, and rejoiced to see that the limp had been replaced by the old-time graceful spring. She waved her hand to him in recognition, and then turned and hurried to the big brick house which she entered without once glancing back. He followed her until she would have a chance to reach a window, from which he did not doubt she would watch his subsequent movements; and then he struck his palm with his fist, and stamped off into the woods.

He was not angry, however, but bubbling to the brim with the spirit of adventure. They also starve who only stand and wait, was the way he had twisted the quotation for his own use, and as starving of any sort was not to his liking, he intended to stand and wait upon strictly feline principles—which advocate these ceremonies as a fitting prelude to an effective pounce.

The shadows were lengthening, the dogs had gathered about the negro's cabin expectantly, and Henry Ham was merely waiting until old Chet finished stabling the horse, before mak-

ing the test which would end his suspense and decide his future course.

As soon as the huge form of the Zulu disappeared within the cabin, Henry Ham crept within the yard, stole to the latticed porch, and started to climb. The slats in the lattice work were horizontal and perpendicular instead of diagonal, and as the horizontal ones were on the outside, he experienced no difficulty and ran no risk except from a loose nail—or discovery.

Reaching the flat roof of the porch, he drew himself across the ornamental balustrade, and crouched for a moment in tense silence while listening with all his powers of concentration. The hunter was uppermost in the boy now, and his eyes were bright, his nostrils dilated, and every muscle cleared for action. Hearing no sound, he stole to the closed shutter and peered within, but could see nothing in the gloom, and turned to the windows nearer the rear.

The first one he tried was locked, but the next was unfastened and he raised it cautiously, stepped inside, and closed it after him. He found himself in a small room crowded with curios, as had been the lower floor of the house. In the gloom he saw the hideous faces of idols gleaming at him with unseemly mirth. One in particular, a reproduction of the archaic form of Brahma, the five-headed Hindu deity, stood closest to him and seemed to menace him. The five leering, idiot faces seemed to mock and threaten him. There was a base intelligence in their expression which seemed to read his character and purpose, and to gloat over the outcome of his venture.

Henry Ham shuddered, and made haste to leave the room and close the door after him. It was even darker in the hall, and in groping with his hand he came into contact with a complete human skeleton, fully articulated with wire and suspended in an open case. The boy's nerves were beginning to jangle by this time, and in his face the look of the hunter was

giving place to the look of the hunted. A low gasp escaped his lips as the bones rattled and the grinning skull became visible to his focussed eyes. He had no intellectual fear of the occult, but in common with the balance of his species, the fear of fear still lurked in his blood, to spring upon his reason at the least opportunity, and a weakening faintness swept through him. Still, he took a deep breath and continued along the hall.

He tried the door which should have led into the room whose shutters were always closed, but it was locked, and he went on to the front of the house where the light was stronger. At a door near the head of the stairs he saw a key in the lock, turned it slowly and paused to listen. It was the room next to the one with the closed shutters, and he opened the door with the utmost care, ready to close and lock it should the need arise. It was a large room, but much like the cell of a hermit, so primitive were its furnishings; and, as it appeared to be entirely empty, he stepped to the center; but this time he did not close the door after him.

There was also a key in the door which led into the room which he believed held the clew to the mystery, and he paused at its threshold for several moments, listening intently, and examining himself to see if he still dared to carry his adventure to its conclusion. He had no weapon, but neither did he have fear of the physical. Through his exercises he had brought up his condition to a high state of perfection, and he had been something of an athlete at college. It was the fear of fear which still hung over him, the fear that horror might melt his nerves and leave him weak at the moment he needed them most. It was a new sensation to him, and he knew not how to overcome it.

And then thought of the torments which suspense had caused him returned, and with a steady hand he turned the key and opened the door. He could not hear a sound and thrust his head inside the room. In the twilight he saw

several children's toys scattered about on the floor, and fear gave way to suspicion. He entered the room and gazed about. The walls were covered with bright-colored pictures for the most part, but in the gloom of a corner stood another hideous idol. This one was tall and broad shouldered, but had the appearance of a body which had been overfed and under-exercised. The huge head was much like one of those he had seen upon the Brahma in the first room, and he turned from it in loathing to examine the room more carefully.

While standing with his back to the idol and gazing toward the window through which the dull red of a belated afterglow was sifting, he heard a slight noise behind him, and whirled with a quickness which proved the state of his nerves. To his horror the idol was moving toward him, while he stood in the paralysis of shock, powerless to move. With fingers stretched and spread the creature came slowly toward him, its face sagging into a cruel leer; and the veins of the boy seemed filled with ice, so cold and dead did his flesh rest upon him.

When almost ready to touch him, the wide mouth of the creature opened crookedly, and he made a gutteral, incoherent sound in his throat. The sound seemed to touch to life the spark of vitality still remaining in Henry Ham, and with a smothered scream he whirled, leaped through the door, closed it after him with a bang, turned the key in the lock, dashed across the room, locked that door also, and sank upon the topmost stair dripping with cold sweat. He was too shocked to think, he was too relieved to care; and so he sat without speaking while Jean Morgan ran through the hall below, and started up the stairs.

Halfway up she saw him and paused, and he said in a voice which he scarcely recognized as his own; "It is I, Henry Ham. Do not be frightened."

The girl continued up the stairs without speaking, she drew her skirts aside with disdain as she passed him, opened the

door, locked it after her, and he could hear her light, firm footsteps crossing the room. Presently he could hear her low voice, and queer, animal noises responding to it; but he paid very little attention; he was beyond the power of concentration, and sat supinely while thoughts and faces, armies of them, fluttered about and pestered him. Only one ray of light remained, and that was the recollection that he had thought of her comfort as she came up the stairs, and had warned her not to be frightened. He focussed upon this recollection, and through it pulled himself back to something like a normal poise.

Presently she returned and passing him as before, asked him in a low tone to follow her to the room below. He did so, with a queer mingling of honest shame at having forced the lock of her secret, and relief that at last he had reached the fork of the road, and there would be no further mystery to block his choosing.

She took him into the room in which they had sat upon his former visit, or rather invasion, lighted a student lamp, drew down the heavy shades, motioned him to a seat, and sank wearily into one opposite. For a moment she pressed her hand against her forehead, and breathed tremulously; then she straightened her shoulders and looked him squarely in the face.

"You have robbed me of my secret," she said coldly. "What can you offer in return?"

His first impulse was to offer his love and his life, his next was to offer sympathy and help; but with the eyes of the girl still fixed on his, he finally replied with blunt indecision: "I do not know."

She smiled, and the smile was as old as woman's sorrow.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

For what seemed a long time they sat without speaking, while each looked in through the open portals and sought for the soul of the other. Outside, the night noises of early summer were under full sway, and once a dog came and sniffed, close to the window. It may be said for Henry Ham that during this period he had no thought of his immediate future. He did not consider the dangers which might await him when he left the house, he did not worry about those who might soon begin to worry about him, his whole heart went out to the girl and ached in sympathy with her. He wished he might have soothed the pain which stood moist and quivering in her eyes; but he did not even know his own mind, and he refused the empty flattery of polite phrases to one whose courage had dared so much, had survived so much, and which still stood staunchly at hand to keep her true to herself.

"You saw who was in the room above?" she asked after a time. He nodded his head and she continued, "That was my brother."

He had not once considered the identity of the creature into whose prison world he had forced himself, and therefore was not surprised at the girl's affirmation. He had no reply to make, and so bowed his head once more.

"My mother wanted to be an artist," said the girl; "but she was not an artist. She wanted to reproduce all the beautiful things which she saw, but she could only appreciate them, she could not make them live again. It was loneliness which induced her to become a missionary, and it was the increased loneliness of that life to which she

had not been called, which impelled her to marry my father. The dove may not mate with the eagle, it was marriage in name only.

"To my father the world was a laboratory and a museum, to my mother, it was a kindergarten wherein one prepared for the real life of the spirit; his intellect was never weary and the days did not hold hours enough for his activities, while to her the days were long as they are to the butterfly which sees only the surface beauties and flits among them unquestioningly. They ground against each other as stone against stone, and the substance of her nature was the weaker.

"He was not unkind, he was never unkind; but neither is the dog unkind when he destroys the rabbit. He had gathered his treasures from all the world and each one was like a living page from the history of man; but to her they were the demons from hell, come forth to torture and torment her. The idols were merely subjects to him; to her they were objects. She could not read stories of the past in them as he did, and they seemed to wait in the darkness to spring upon and crush her. He had learned life in its whole, but he knew not how to live, he knew not how to sympathize with weakness because all weakness was foreign to himself, and during the first year of her life in this house she walked through the valley of death, and there was no light to guide her."

The girl stopped abruptly, arose, walked swiftly into the hall, and as swiftly back again. "Oh, I can pity her, I can *pity* her!" she cried, standing before the boy and looking down at him. "I am more like my father: I dare to probe all that may be probed, and for the rest—it is as though it were not; but she, my mother, the little butterfly lady shut away from the sunshine in this stifling inferno—oh, it must have been terrible for her!

"I have never been frightened, never once. Many

nights I have wondered about this and have risen and wandered through the dark house, feeling the skulls with my fingers, telling myself their gruesome stories, for most of them have stories and many of them contained the brains of murderers and perverts; but I never could frighten myself; so that I cannot truly sympathize with my mother.

"It is only because of the loneliness which has crept after me at every step, that I can understand and pity her. At times I have longed for death, at times even for madness; but always a hand seemed to come and place itself on my shoulder, my right shoulder, and I would become steady and calm again. My father did not talk to me a great deal, but he used to place his hand thus to comfort me, and it comes back even now. I have tried to imagine her fear, add it to my loneliness, and then picture what a Pit of Acheron this must have been to her who had to live with a man who treated her with scorn. Their first child was my brother, my full brother — the creature who is locked in the room above us."

The girl's voice dwindled away in a hoarse whisper, while her eyes became bright and a little hard as they glared defiantly at the boy. Henry Ham had never before been so depressingly conscious of his youth, his untempered inexperience. All his life he had played his games and taken his risks with boyish zest; and then he had thought to straighten the lines in his face suddenly and lay aside childish things. For the last few months he had regarded himself as a man; but as he saw the strength of the girl's spirit, the hopelessness of the lifelong battle she had waged, the love of life which had prompted her to steal out and mingle with it while still remaining as effectually shut off from it as though she were a spectre of the air; when he perceived all this, he felt small and young and humble. He knew that his love for her had ebbed away, but in its place he felt admiration, respect, reverence.

The girl observed this, and comprehended it even more completely than he did. She had schooled herself through rigorous discipline to a life of lonely duty; but she had not been able to hush the cries of her own nature. The touch of the boy's lips upon her palms had seemed like the one, personal reality of life, and it was not his reverence that she craved, it was the protection of his arms, the warm light in his eyes, the close union which, having its origin outside of reason, is independent of reason and may be felt even when it cannot be explained. Yet, even at her next breath, she had risen above the throbbing pang in her heart and was thankful for the discipline which had made her strong, and for the duty which was still hers to perform.

"At first they would not believe that this child was not normal," she resumed in an even voice, after she had again seated herself across from him. "His body was strong, and my father's pride and longing made him blind to the hints of his scientific insight. During this period my mother enjoyed the short blossom time of her life. It was not until after I was born that my father was willing to admit that my brother was — what he is. With the shock of his self-surrender, his entire nature changed. Formerly, he had not been unkind, because he had been so self-centered that he had never cared to mould the life of another; but now he sought to drain the world for the essence which would restore his son. Although himself a craniometric specialist, my father continued to believe until the day of his death that there must be some operation which would restore his son to health, and this was why he experimented upon animals. It was horrible, it was useless, but his motives were not cruel.

"That his fear convinced his reason long before his hope would admit it, is shown by his compelling my half-brother, Richard, to drop music and take up the study of surgery

in order to assist him in his experiments. He and Richard never cared for each other, and Richard hated the experiments above all things. He was a dreamer, and to him the realities of life were its melodies. He could not bear to look upon — the one who is now locked in the room above us — and he roamed the woods as much as my father would permit, with only his collie dog for companion. Oh, I — I am the one who should have been the man child! I feel the call of hard facts, I can nerve myself to do whatever needs to be done, I would rather fight for what I want than to get it through pleading — and yet, this also has been, at times, a thorn in the side of my womanhood.

"I suppose my mother just drooped away and died before my father's eyes without even attracting his inmost attention. He was a man possessed, his whole nature was concentrated upon the solution of his problem, and he cared for me according to a scientific formula which he worked out and which I still possess. I must have had a queer infancy, but I was vigorous and had a keen mind and curiosity. My father taught me to read when I was three, out of Preller's "Greek Mythology" in the original, because that happened to be the nearest to a child's book in his possession. It was a child's book to me, and I revelled in it.

"Strangely enough, I was fond of him and tried to be his companion. He never refused to answer any of my questions, and at five I discussed with him the phenomena of life, real life, with as much zest as the usual child would listen to a fairy tale. The skulls were my toys, the idols were my dolls, and they held no terrors for me, because they told me stories even as they told them to my father. Truth is not a virtue to me, it is merely a commonplace, because no truth was ever denied me; and my curiosity walked naked and unashamed before my father and through the books of his library.

"From the time I was four, I was the little mother of my brother, of my helpless brother two years older than myself; and he is still my baby, still the only outlet for my motherhood. Oh, it is true, no sacrifice is useless! I have given my life to him — but it has all come back to me — because I can love him. He is still but a baby and he knows me only as the weakest of babies knows its mother. He whimpers at my frown, he coos and gurgles when I play with him, he has no life but the life he draws through me; and all these years I have shielded and cared for him, have studied and planned for him, have lived and suffered for him, and he is not hideous to me; although I know what the first shocking sight of him would be to another. I think I should kill a child with my own hands rather than condemn her to a life like mine; but it has fitted me for my duty, and I would not have it otherwise.

"I do not think that Richard killed my father. He told me quite simply that he intended to, but did not, that my father stumbled and struck his head upon the operating table, and I believe that this was true — although I do not care in the least. I cannot care about little things as you would. Death, my father's death, was the big fact, but about its details I do not care. And you say that Richard has returned?"

Henry Ham told of Dummy John, of the way in which his identity had been established, and of his present situation as the honored guest and companion of Fleet Hayes. He told his story simply, touching but lightly upon his own part in it, and the girl listened quietly.

"What a family we have been!" she mused aloud. "I did not realize my own individuality until just a few years ago. I found a magazine in the woods, and read it with amazement. Scientific books were simple to me, but I could not understand why people acted as they did in the stories, and I made Chetadag buy me other magazines,

novels, and books of poetry. I tried to understand them, but I never could understand them, until" — her voice sank to the merest whisper — "until that day when I peered out through the evergreens and saw you.

"Something leaped from me to you — and it has never come back. You were my Greek god, you were my knight, you were all the lovers in all the stories, and from now on I shall have a double sacrifice to make of my life — for I never can cast you out of it again. Not the real you, understand, but the you which I have set up in my heart.

"I could not talk to you as I have tonight if we were ever to talk to each other again. I have told you all, so that you could not betray the secret which is mine to guard. Even old Chetadag does not know of the one in the room above; no one knows but we two, except Bayard, my collie; and Richard, if he has not forgotten."

The boy was deeply moved; the heavy sorrow which trembled in the girl's voice echoed in his heart; but like her he comprehended and accepted his own inability to make the sacrifice demanded by the situation. She would not give up her brother nor her environment, he could not adjust himself to them; so that, even while he despised himself for his weakness, he made no attempt to deceive either himself or her, by making the perfunctory speech he would have made to another girl. He breathed tremulously at the bitterness of the situation, and the sorrow which stood in his eyes was too sincere to be doubted; but the test was not for him, and he refused to make it.

"I am sorry I have had to burden you with all this," said the girl with a wistful smile, a smile which passed her mouth bravely but failed in the upward climb to her eyes. "You have changed a lot since that day when I first saw you and you have changed through me. You were such a gay, thoughtless boy, then, and I wanted to keep you so;

but even the touch of my eyes brought a trace of sorrow into your life. I know that you have thought much of me, have dared much for me, and now that the time has come to say good bye — I wish you the best of luck, and a life free from pain and disappointment. I would even ask your forgiveness, but I know you bear me no resentment. I should not have dropped the pebble on you that day, and I fought against it a long time; but there has been so little real play in my life, and that was done in the spirit of true play. I am sorry I did it. Good bye."

She held out a hand which did not tremble, but which appeared to the boy to tremble, for he saw it through a mist. "I can't go just yet," he said brokenly. "I do love you, but I cannot see how we could marry. I — hang it all, I'm not big enough nor strong enough to do what I want to do, and I dare not risk the happiness of either of us — oh, Jean, I cannot say what I want to, and I will not say what I can."

He buried his face in his hands and a beautiful, white light came to the face of the girl as she watched him. She was braced for her renunciation, and now it would be less hard, for he really cared, he really loved her.

After a time he raised his head and asked, "Is he much care?"

"No," she replied, "very little. Sometimes he will stand perfectly still in a corner for hours at a time. It is all perfectly plain to me. There was a wonderful image of Brahma, which stood in my mother's room. It was my father's pet possession, he said that the faces had been wrought by a genius, by one who understood how sorely the ignorance of a race rested upon its best individuals, and who had revenged himself by giving them as a god to worship an image of superhuman power and superhuman ignorance; but there was a reaction to this revenge, as there is to all revenge; and the image so menaced my weak mother

that it came to life in her son — in the one who is now locked in the room above."

"Does he eat the same food that you do?" asked Henry Ham, for want of something better to say.

Suddenly the girl's face turned white, her eyes opened wide, and then narrowed with suspicion. "That is very strange," she muttered. "Chetadag has not brought me my supper this evening. Wait."

She left the room rapidly and the boy heard her going to the rear door. She soon returned with Bayard, who regarded Henry Ham with calm aloofness.

"When I came into the house this afternoon," said the girl quietly, "I threw myself upon the couch in this room, leaving Bayard shut in the back hall. He has been taught not to bark and I forgot him, I forgot everything. My poor child upstairs has had no supper either. You must go at once."

"I hate to leave you alone with —" began the youth and then paused.

The girl pressed her hand to her heart as though she had been stabbed. "I suppose you think that the one in the room above must be the sorest trial of my life — and for the fleetest of moments I have thought so myself, once or twice, since you have come — but it is not so, it is not so. What I dread most is, that — but never mind, you must go, now."

"Am I never to see you again?" A note in the boy's voice pleaded for her to take the responsibility from him and then to order the future as she pleased.

For an instant her eyes blazed, and then they softened again. "No, I am not like that, I am not weak; I do not continue to tempt myself with what I may not have. I have wavered because you did not know; but now we both know, and we cannot meet again. I have my duty to perform and you, if you would ever be a man — must

find one. The yard dogs bark fiercely but I do not know if they would bite. I shall call them upon the lattice porch and shut them in; then we shall leave by the front door."

"We?"

"Yes, I shall accompany you to the woods."

He was utterly miserable when she left him to call the dogs; all the glamour of his adventure had fallen from him, he saw how he must look in the eyes of this girl who treated him as a child, and he wished that something might occur which would reverse their relations and make her dependent upon him; but his mind seemed numb, and the fertile imagination which had so often stood him in stead offered no suggestions. The room had lost some of its haunting gloom as he glanced about at the scattered books and the comfortable chairs, and he sighed heavily There was sorrow but no sweetness in this parting, and he was torn with a score of warring regrets.

"Come," said Jean briefly.

At the front door, she took his hand and, following a winding path through the shrubbery which occupied this part of the yard, she hurried with swift, sure feet to an opening in the fence. He caught a whiff of lilac buds as they passed, and their sickish fragrance reminded him of himself.

"Good bye," he said as soon as they were outside the fence.

"Hush!" she whispered, fiercely. "Come on, and step carefully."

He obeyed, with his teeth gritting together resentfully.

"Do you know where you are?" she asked after a time.

"No," he replied, in a tone which suggested that neither did he care.

"You are beside the log in which I hid the day I dropped the pebble upon your hat. Can you find your way from here?"

"Of course I can."

"Then, good bye." She turned as if to leave him, and then asked, quite as an afterthought, "Are you armed?"

"Of course not," scoffed the boy.

"Take my revolver," she said, taking a small automatic from the bosom of her dress and holding it out to him. "All you need to do to fire it is to pull the trigger. I — I am nervous, tonight, and I want you to carry it in your hand until you reach the road across the creek; then if all is well fire two shots close together and then one after a short interval. It is so quiet tonight that I can hear you clearly — and it will be our last good bye."

"Jean, Jean, I can't — "

"No, we must not open up the subject again. I can never bring myself to tear a page out of a book; but I have three books in which pages are pasted together. I like the books, but I hate these few pages. Let it be so with our — with our acquaintance; we cannot tear it out of our lives, but we can, and must, shut it off from the rest. Good bye."

"I won't take this revolver."

"Not even to comfort me?"

"No, if you have ever needed it, you need it still. I have never needed a weapon in my life, and I don't expect to. Neither shall I say good bye; if Fate intends it to be good bye, then Fate herself can say it. Good night."

He thrust the revolver into her hand, the coldness of which he felt appealingly for a moment, and then she turned and hurried away into the darkness.

With clenched hands at side, he stood straining his eyes after her. The night was clear, and though thicket and shrub soon blended the background into a solid wall, he could still make out the tree trunks and her lithe, graceful form hastening between them — hastening away from him, hastening back to — he shut his eyes tightly and groaned,

and the groan was echoed in the heart of Nate Shipley, for the faithful Nate had been watching them from a nearby thicket.

Nate was a pagan, and Jean Morgan was his sylvan goddess. He had watched her and had watched over her from her infancy, and she was that one woman in his life without which is the life of every man but a rudderless ship in a driving gale. Henry Ham's ally had he been, but the limitations which he had placed to his alliance were clear and unbreakable. He had grown very fond of the boy as he had watched him closely and had seen that the foundation of his character was foursquare and solid, and that the superstructure would in time adjust itself to match. There was no small jealousy in Nate's make-up; he was positive that these two were natural mates, and mate they should if he could bring it about.

He had seen Henry Ham enter the house, and the suspense had been a torment until he had come forth again. He had circled stealthily about them to make sure that old Chet had not followed, and then his curiosity had triumphed and he had crept near to listen. There was no mistaking the note of final farewell in the girl's good bye, and there was no doubt in his mind that the boy had been true; so that the echoing groan in the heart of Nate Shipley was heavy with real sorrow. With that delicate refinement which blooms in such odd places, he decided never to let the boy know that he had witnessed this farewell scene, and so he remained motionless when Henry Ham started slowly toward the creek.

Matched against the dull craft of the ordinary white man, the alert senses of Nate Shipley would have shone like a searchlight; but this night he had been competing with the cunning of the jungle, the serpent stealth which is all ears and all eyes, which can creep through a thicket of dry twigs as silently as a vine crawls up the trunk of a

tree, and when the time comes can concentrate and hurl its strength in one spring, as does the tiger.

Old Chet had known for long that Nate Shipley was guarding the boy, and now that the boy had forfeited his life by entering the house, Nate must be first eliminated. The black had located him long before the boy and the girl had left the house, and the simplicity of the subsequent stalking had filled old Chet with grim humor. The cat hunting the mouse feels as little sympathy as old Chet felt. Long ago he had been told that no human being but Jean herself must ever enter the brick house; one had entered it — and there was no law but Morgan's.

As Henry Ham started, Nate made ready to follow at a safe distance. He had no thought of further danger to the boy, but as a silent expression of his deep sympathy he would keep close to him until the town was reached. Pluto, with senses keener than any man's, had been left at home to guard that which no man must see without his master's permission; and now, with his heart full of sympathy and his mind free from suspicion, this master rose to his feet, no subtle sixth sense warning him of the shadow within the shadow which crouched just behind.

A slight rustle of the leaves as the two jaws of a black vise closed about a throat, a smothered gurgle as the cry of panic was choked before it could reach the lips — and then the rasp and flutter and chirp of the common night noises resumed their monotonous routine.

Chetadag knelt above the limp form for a moment; the man had been nearest to a friend of any and he had not meant to kill him — the red liquor was good and a great comfort — but he had work to do, and so he bound wrists and ankles with rawhide cord, and muttered as he tied. He would return when he could, and if the white man were dead, or if he bore resentment, he would carry him, also, to the "Swallowing Sands." He had seen the silly white

men digging there but a few days before, one of them had nearly been caught; but now the sand was all smooth again, and the surface looked dry and hard. He grinned as he thought of it. Morgan had been the giver of life but other white men had been the takers of it; and Chetadag had many a debt to pay.

Henry Ham had continued slowly toward the slope; and so tangled and matted was the wilderness of his mind that he took but little heed of his footsteps, and crashed recklessly through the woods to the utter disgust of its humble citizens.

Close behind him, his huge bulk melting from shadow to shadow, as noiselessly as the shadows themselves swung with the revolving sphere upon which they rested, crept Chetadag, his fingers hooked in anticipation, his eyes gleaming beneath their rugged brows, and his heavy lips snarling back from his powerful teeth.

He held no code but the jungle's, he knew no law but Morgan's, he had no mission but to protect the child who had grown to be his queen.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

ALTHOUGH Henry Ham remembered to take the ford which Nate had showed him, he forgot to point his toes as Nate had directed, and splashed through the water as heedlessly as a colt. Above him in the deeper water the negro swam with silent, powerful strokes, only his bullet head cleaving the dark surface. He felt an utter contempt for this white weakling whose neck he was to break and whose body he was to throw in the "Swallowing Sands," the little patch of sand in which he had once seen a dog sink yelping piteously. That day he had hurried in vain to save the dog, but this time he would dance silently as the sands swallowed their prey. He had hoped that some day the boy would stumble into these treacherous sands with his blind, silly feet; but his fetish had saved him, and now he was to settle things himself.

They reached the bank at the same time, and while each was disposing of the surplus water with the quick, half-conscious movements of ancient instinct, a queer, moaning cry was heard farther down the creek. It rose, swelled, and died away again, leaving the darkness tingling with a new mystery. Henry Ham decided that it was a bird, straightway forgot it, and plodded on with his shoes churning at every step. Chetadag knew that it was from no animal of those woods, and was filled with superstitious premonitions as he resumed the trail; but the time was close, now, and he had no thought of wavering.

The youth had lost all track of time, and vaguely thought that it must be nearly morning, so that he was surprised when the moon, toward its last quarter, began to silver the

opposite cliff, and cast hazy spangles upon the ripples. This told him that it could not be much after ten, and he marvelled that so much could have taken place in so short a time. He now walked more slowly as he had no wish to reach home before the family had retired.

Chetadag had hoped to finish his task before the moon rose, and now he drew steadily closer. There was a jutting of the cliff a little farther along, which forced the path close to the water's edge, and he resolved to be at the boy's back here, and to spring upon him as soon as he had rounded the turn. If he could but reach the throat at his first spring, he knew the struggle would be short.

The boy walked very slowly, and the moonlight had filtered nearly to the path by this time. A fish leaped into the air and fell back into the water with a splash, a stone rolled at his feet from a level spot a short distance up the cliff, but he heeded neither; he was looking into the darkness of the future which would not be silvered by the moonlight of the girl's presence, and the night and its noises held no interest for him.

He paused just before reaching the jutting buttress of the cliff, and looked into the rippling water. Organic life had its origin in water, and water still holds a mystic charm which lures all life back to itself. The old sea has a mood to match every mood of man, and every little streamlet has its own coaxing voice. As the youth looked into the running water a stream of thought rippled in unison with it through his brain. Little details of his past stood out plainly, tipped for a moment with silver as were the ripples in the water, and he saw them impersonally, and judged them as others had judged them.

He saw his lack of gratitude in a new light. He had always supposed that the crass rudeness of his independence had sprung from pride; but now he saw that it was merely an expression of his vanity, and that he had not been inde-

pendent in fact but merely in pretension. Independence is the ability to stand calmly alone for a principle; but he had not acted from principle, he had tried to get the credit for doing that which was above his capacity, and at last his conceit had betrayed him. Face to face with the great crisis of his life, he lacked the independence which would have enabled him to grasp it with dignity. Independence! No man is independent who is not above the sting of ridicule.

He had found a girl above price, and he loved her with all the love of which he was capable; but he had to give her up because of the horror he felt for her defective brother, and because he feared the cheap scorn of the gossips. He hated himself; but he did not flinch at his self-examination. He looked back upon his life to see whence came his weakness, and found causes for it in every occasion upon which he had yielded to his selfish desire for the soft, the easy, and the popular.

And then he sought for some one act in his life which might have given him the stamina to be independent, to do what he wished to do in spite of associations with the grotesque and the repulsive which this would involve. As a drowning man grasps at a straw, he reached across the flood of memories and clutched the dead form of Stringhalt, with all the mingled feelings which had surged upon him that night in Nate Shipley's wagon-shed when he had fastened the rope which made his practical joke possible. It had required the last atom of his courage then; but as he looked back upon it now, he saw that this straining of his courage had made it stronger, and a faint ray of hope flashed across his darkness.

"If I am too much of a coward to live my own life," he muttered, "I hope this life will soon be taken from me."

With a sigh he started on; but as he walked he trembled. He hoped it was the chill of the night, he hated to think his nerve at fault; but a premonition came upon him that

he was being followed. A queer creeping ran along his back and he paused and half turned, listening intently. Not a sound and not a movement; the path over which he had come lay faint and gray just below the moonlight, but clear enough to show that no one was following him; and hating the coward in him more fervently than before, the youth once more started around the protruding wall while from out the shadows leered the face which that afternoon had struck him with the shock of terror, and beside it the face of Stringhalt, and in each face was the grin of cunning triumph.

Henry Ham, who little realized the fine adjustment of the delicate nervous temperament which instinct prompted him to hide beneath the padded cloak of impertinence and conceit, regarded its supersensitiveness as mere weakness, and now tried to throw off the shivery creep in his back. He clenched his fists, shut his jaws tight, and breathed deep and slow; but across his shoulders and down the backs of his arms the flesh seemed hardening as if to repel the clutch of cruel fingers, and just as he rounded the projection he once more turned, saw a vague shadow slipping hazily along in the deeper shadow of the cliff, and felt his heart fill with blood and stop beating.

For an instant he stood in the agony of conscious paralysis while fear of the mysterious probed at the centers of his brain. And then the vague form crouched, the fingers at the ends of the long arms spread in menacing curves, there was one endless moment of suspense as the figure poised for its spring; but in that instant Henry Ham had recognized old Chet and with a gasp of pure joy his heart started to beat, the terror fled from his brain, and in its place came other blood-memories, equally as old and equally as strong — the instincts which had bidden his earliest forefathers begin that long fight for the world which is not ended yet.

As the powerful frame of the Zulu shot through the air, the youth crouched to receive the impact, and against the bulk and strength of the savage he matched his youth, his quickness, and the habits he had formed in trying to make the football team. Low to the ground he went and the hooked fingers passed above him just as he grasped the legs, and rising suddenly threw them upwards with all the force he possessed.

And then it was that the heritage of the jungle saved the neck of her wandering son. As he turned in the air he also whirled and instead of alighting on head or back, as would a civilized man, he lit on feet and hands.

In an instant the youth was upon him and twice struck him in the forehead, clean, hard blows, but the black only grunted and struggled to his feet. He seized the wrists of the boy and gripped them as with clamps, he burrowed his woolly head beneath the boy's chin, and with a savage wrench tried to break his neck, but Henry Ham was kicking, struggling, fighting with a joy new to himself but old to the race — the joy of fighting for his life, yet feeling no fear.

The thought of Jean was uppermost in his mind; she had dreaded this when she had offered him the pistol, and his only regret was that she could not know that he had met his test without flinching. He knew tricks of fighting but could not use them with his wrists gripped until the bones seemed breaking; yet he twisted his body, once he struck the black's chin with his shoulder, and struggled on with hope which did not falter.

The moon rose steadily and soon its light was full upon them, and he could see the beady eyes of the Zulu glowing with hate. Suddenly the long, wavering cry which they had heard before floated out on the air above their heads, and with a gasp the black relaxed his grip. Instantly Henry Ham jerked loose, struck his adversary a dazing blow on the soft spot in the forehead just above the union

of the brows. It is a numbing blow in most cases, but old Chet's skull was of flint, and he only staggered. Still, this gave the youth a chance to secure a heavy club, and when the black came at him again, he was met by a rain of blows. They fell on arms and head and the rotten wood broke with every stroke.

The youth slowly retreated, the black pressed after him and as the club grew shorter the distance between them lessened. Henry Ham's strength was failing, and when at last the cruel black fingers closed about his throat, it seemed to him that rest would be sweet. This was not the hopelessness of despair; he had done his best, he had used every fibre of his strength, and his courage had not failed him. He would lose the fight with old Chet, but he had won that greater fight with himself — he had conquered the fear of fear.

The pressure about his throat increased, the tips of the thumbs drove in and in through the soft flesh, a fiery vapor seemed rising from his throat to his eyes and searing them — and then with sparks dancing dizzily about him he sank slowly into a pit of inky blackness which at last swallowed even the torture of suffocation and the consciousness of self.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

When he regained consciousness, Henry Ham felt a heavy body being dragged from him and as though from a great distance, he heared the voice of Fleet Hayes: "No, no, Richard, no, that won't do. You did the right thing in knockin' him down, and if you've killed him, why that was the right thing, too, and I'll back you up in it and claim half the credit; cause I tried to do just what you did do; but now that he's down and out, we'll not carry it any farther."

Henry Ham wondered vaguely what the words meant, but it all seemed unreal and impersonal, and he tried to recall his true consciousness as one seeks to awaken from a horrid dream.

When the weight was removed, he rolled over and sat up. Fleet Hayes was standing in the path, gently stroking the arm of Richard Morgan, who held a heavy stone in his hand and looked fiercely at a limp form which lay just beyond the boy's reach. Suddenly Henry Ham knew that this was old Chet, and with a gasp of repulsion he struggled weakly to his feet.

"That was a pret-tee tight squeak, son," said the little man solemnly, as he shook the boy's hand. "Richard, here, was restless tonight, and he came out with his fiddle to work it off. He frets at what he calls his nervousness, but I tell him it's only the life coming back in his veins with the spring, and to encourage it all he can. He was sittin' on the ledge, down there, waiting for his tune to come with the moonlight on the water; but you came along instead, and I sort o' reckon it was a good thing for you that he

happened to be here. I always tag along with Richard 'cause I can't bear to miss any of his music."

"I — am much obliged," said Henry Ham awkwardly to Richard.

The silent man tossed his missile into the creek and turned to him, and the boy was surprised to see the stern confidence in his face. "I tried to kill him once before," he said. "I hope I have done so this time."

The form on the path gave a convulsive shudder. "Well, you haven't," remarked Mr. Hayes. "Prisoners are more bothersome than any other kind of enemies, hang 'em. What'll we do with him?"

Old Chet sat up and placed an inquiring hand to his woolly head, then he looked slowly upward to where Richard Morgan's silvery hair gleamed in the moonlight.

"Do you know who I am?" asked Morgan, in a low, hard tone.

Another shudder ran through the negro and he gave a guttural cry, struggled to his knees, and bowed his head. The two remaining spectators could make nothing of this except that it was abject submission; but a strange smile played across the face of Richard Morgan.

"No," he said sternly. "I am his son, the son whom you lied into prison. Now that I have come back, what can you expect?"

Old Chet did not raise his face; instead, he bowed still lower and the arms which he held forth with crossed wrists and drooping hands were higher than his head. As Henry Ham read the absolute abnegation in the attitude, he glanced at the man to whom this capitulation was made.

Richard Morgan stood with his arms crossed, a half contemptuous smile upon his lips, while his brows, drawn down and close together, seemed massive in the sharp contrasts caused by the moonlight. For the nonce his father's blood was in the ascendency, and this blood, regarding laws

and constitutions merely as the prejudices of weak men made permanent, passed and executed its own judgments with the calm poise of unlimited power. "You have forfeited your life," he said inscrutably, "you are not fit to be at large, you must die."

The negro did not move, Henry Ham experienced a thrilling apprehension which kept him silent, Fleet Hayes cleared his throat twice and then suggested diffidently, "Now, it seems to me, Richard, that this would be a wee mite extreme. I don't want any more frolickin' with the law than you do; but a feller can't get shut of the law simply by takin' it into his own hands. Sure as bugs some one would snoop around and make a fuss about it. Mustn't make up your mind too hasty."

"Either he dies or he goes free," returned Morgan.

"What do you say, Henry Ham?" asked Mr. Hayes.

Before the boy could reply, a low, clear voice called from the shadows across the creek, "What is the matter?" It was the voice of Jean Morgan.

Fleet Hayes gave an expressive whistle and then answered as reassuringly as possible, "The' ain't nothing the matter, gal; you'd better just go on back home where you belong."

In response to this advice, Jean Morgan stepped into the creek and hurried across, Bayard close to her side. In her hand she held the small automatic, in the paleness of her face was the frank avowal of dread, but in her eyes blazed the courage which years of trial had tempered to stand any strain which duty might put upon it.

She hurried to the group and eyed each face in turn, after which she filled her lungs with a gasp and sighed in relief. She spoke to the negro in a low tone and he arose and started toward the water. "Stop," ordered Richard Morgan.

"Go," ordered the girl, and then Jean and Richard Morgan faced each other for the first time in years, years in which the man had been shut away from the tests of

responsibility, years in which heavy responsibilities had tempered and refined the character of the girl.

As they looked into each other's eyes, the high confidence and stern purpose slowly ebbed from the face of the man until it became once more the humble mask of Dummy John. When the transformation was complete, Jean thrust the revolver into her bosom, motioned to old Chet, and without a word to the others followed him into the creek, and was soon swallowed by the darkness.

Fleet Hayes once more whistled in comprehensive appreciation and said, "You'd better be steppin' along, Henry Ham; we can talk this over some other time. Richard, I'll get the fiddle, and then we'll go on home and turn in. This neighborhood is beginnin' to get too stirrin' for me."

After Henry Ham had gained the Marndale Pike, he noticed that his throat was very stiff and sore, but it was as nothing compared with his heart; and by the time he had reached home the adventures of the evening had faded away before the problems of the future.

Could he give up this wonderful girl? He faced all the wreckage which the fierce blood of Angus Morgan had caused; but through this wreckage shone a face of surpassing beauty and a personality which made him feel weak and childish. He paused a block from the house and visualized her as she had faced her half-brother in the moonlight, and his heart glowed with admiration. For greater contrast, he placed Clara Waldron's pert prettiness beside her, and then gave vocal expression to a contemptuous, "Pooh!"

And Richard, also, had stood out that evening in a way to prove that there must have been some foundation for greatness in him, if he had but possessed the courage to assert himself. Then suddenly the repulsive face upon which he had stumbled in the room above leered at him, and with a shudder he hurried home and into the room where Grandma was sitting in the hickory rocker.

She put down with a sigh the sequel to "Terrible Tom," which, after a long and almost hopeless wait, she had at last managed to confiscate from the backsliding Bud, blew a puff of smoke to the ceiling, took her corncob pipe in her hand, and scrutinized her grandson, who had without apology filled his own pipe from her pouch.

"Henry," said the old lady, "you're taking it too hard."

"Taking what too hard?" asked the boy self-consciously.

"Hum!" exclaimed the old lady, raising her eyebrows. "How many irons have you in the fire, just now?"

"Well," replied the youth with a sigh, "I have so many that it keeps me worn to a bone running from one to another."

Grandma rocked and smoked placidly for several moments, and then said, "You might as well tell me what's the matter with you, Henry. You look as if you had been mixed up in something interesting. You are wet, muddy, battered, and bruised; but your suffering is more inside than outside and I want you to tell me what it is."

"Oh, you wouldn't understand it."

"Is that so?" returned the old lady, sitting forward upon the edge of the chair and regarding the youth with snapping eyes. "Have you gone and got into a mess with that Morgan girl?"

"I haven't got into a mess with any girl," replied Henry Ham with dignity.

"Do you mean to tell me that you have actually fallen in love with a girl whose father was a maniac, whose brother was a murderer, and who was reared and raised by a pair of Zulus and a pack of dogs?"

"Her father was a scientist, her half-brother was a musician, and even though he was convicted of manslaughter I doubt very much that he was guilty. Her full brother, of whom you have never before heard, has been an idiot from birth — and if you breathe a word of that until I

give you permission, I'll never speak to you again, in this world or the next. Jean Morgan is the grandest girl I have ever heard of. Now you know what I think of her, and can govern yourself accordingly."

The old lady removed her glasses and wiped them carefully. She was beginning to hope that Henry Ham's adventures would compare favorably with those of the fascinating Terrible Tom, and after a moment she said, "Henry, there's no sense in your getting me all riled up. You simply have to tell me everything, now, or I wouldn't sleep for a week."

So, half in shame at not being able to keep his secret, and half in relief at an opportunity to share it with the certainty that it would go no farther, Henry Ham told his story. He told it as briefly as possible, leaving the facts to do their own pleading, and when he had finished, the old lady's eyes were moist.

"Poor little Mary Henderson," she murmured. "All her life she was seeking happiness, and she never found it. Just think of her living in that house full of heathen idols, skulls, and mummies, and then to have her baby with no doctor but her half-human husband. And to think of that poor child taking care of her idiot brother all alone in that haunted house! Mercy! Can she read?"

"She knows more in a minute than most girls do in a lifetime. She can read in half a dozen languages, and she can talk well, too, only not as well as if she had had more practice."

"What are you going to do about it, Henry?" The boy shook his head.

"Do you love her?" He nodded his head.

"Enough to marry her?"

"I don't know, Grandma," he replied with a sigh.

"Well, it's easy enough to tell," said the old lady sagely. "Love is like having a fever, but marriage is like learning

a trade. You catch a fever and generally you get over it; but you can never learn a trade by catching it. You have to pick out a trade which suits you and be mighty patient about studying it, if you want it to be successful. My advice to every one is, never marry as long as you can keep from it. If you can keep from marrying this girl, Henry, don't you think of marrying her."

"How long did you keep from marrying my grandfather," asked Henry Ham, "and how long did it take you to learn the trade of marriage?"

The old lady grinned scornfully, and then her face softened. "No advice is needed in a case like mine," she said proudly. "I wasn't foolish or romantic, I just saw as plain as daylight that he was the best man in the world and the only man for me; and I'd have married him if both his parents and all of his relations had been scientists, criminals, idiots, and Zulus. I never doubted either him or myself for one moment — but it's entirely different with you. You're afraid that some one will laugh at you, and therefore, if I were you, I should pack up a few things this very night, and leave for the West. Folks will think it was disappointment about the power site, and I will give you the money to go on."

Henry Ham pondered for a long time, his eyes fixed on the carpet, and then the cloud lifted from his face, and in its place came a light, a beaming light of peaceful confidence.

"Are you going to go?" asked Grandma.

"No," said Henry Ham. "I'm going to marry Jean Morgan — and I'll dare anybody to laugh."

The old lady stepped to him, raised his face, and kissed him. "Henry," she said fondly, "you were doomed with the fool-streak from the very beginning; but — your great-uncle Ezra was always happy, and so was your Uncle Ezra. I was beginning to get afraid that you would continue in a respectable puddle with the ducks and never

even find out that you were a swan. Remember though, it's the free things which are hunted, so don't take flight until you're sure of yourself. Now, get to bed, and don't you dare to look at the clock."

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

SLEEP was usually one of the most convincing of Henry Ham's demonstrations; but he slept little that night. He had finally arrived at the stage in which love expresses itself in the moonlight, and he sat in his open window for an hour sighing forth his passion with such fervor that it seemed as though an electric connection was formed through the atoms of the air and that his heart was beating against the heart of Jean.

He had no light in his room, and when he turned away from the window he invoked all the distressing features of the big brick house as a final test, visualized them as completely as possible, placed himself among them as part of them, and faced frankly the eyes of scorn and the tongues of gossip; but he was not shaken, for Jean was at his side. He at last recognized her as his complement, felt her bracing his character where it was weakest, felt her clinging to him for the support her own peculiar experience could not have given her; and with this new sense of completeness he stood and faced life as he had never faced it before. Always before there had been the swift, impulsive rush of boyish whim in his movements, but now he felt the calm patience of strength which, acting from conviction alone, buffets each opposing wave good-naturedly and holds to its course, let the weather be what it will.

It is a fine thing to be a man and to be conscious of it; and Henry Ham lay upon his back, fingers clasped beneath his head, and gazed out into the moonlight with bright, eager eyes. Occasionally he would shudder, as the sickening remembrance of old Chet's hands swept across him so vividly

that his still aching neck intruded upon his notice; but even this faded into an oddly agreeable effect, for he felt a whimsical affection for the gigantic black who drew no lines in his protection of Jean — Jean, Jean, always Jean.

Arising from the few brief winks which the dawn had vouchsafed him, he took a cold bath and hurried through his exercises; after which he felt refreshed and fit for whatever the day might offer.

When he reached the dining room, he found the family at table but strangely silent. Mrs. Trotwood's face was pale and troubled and she was not even pretending to eat. Mr. Trotwood's face was grim and set, but he went through the motions of eating doggedly. Elizabeth and the two boys wore puzzled expressions as though they did not fully realize the threatened blow which had not yet affected their appetites, and they acknowledged the situation only so far as to keep silence.

His father did not glance at him as he took his seat, and his mother's eyes only rested upon his for an instant, in mingled reproof and pity. Henry Ham was decidedly uncomfortable until he noticed that the countenance of his sturdy little grandmother was beaming with more effulgence than usual, and as their eyes met she gave him a roguishly solemn wink of encouragement. It was evident that the Trotwood family had received a severe shock; but Henry Ham found it impossible to don sackcloth and ashes this wonderful morning upon which his love had laid by childish things and was prepared to enter forum and market place, and proclaim itself without apology or explanation, and upon no other authority than, "Thus sayeth myself."

Mr. and Mrs. Trotwood soon left the table and entered the front room, and as soon as the door was closed Bud asked, "What's the trouble?"

"The trouble is that you boys are so dilatory that your parents are utterly discouraged," replied Grandma briefly.

"Humph," remarked Pikey skeptically, "it struck 'em mighty sudden."

"Then the best thing for you to do is to get about your chores mighty sudden." The old lady's eyes snapped from one to the other until they arose and departed without further speech.

"What really is the matter?" asked Elizabeth.

"The matter is that you do not appreciate what has been done for you. You hurry right up the back stairs and make all the beds and it will please your mother amazingly." Elizabeth tilted her head in disdain for a moment, and then her eyes also fell before the imperious glance of her grandmother and she began to hum cheerfully, and left the room slowly as an unmistakable indication that she was acting upon her own initiative.

When they were alone, the old lady once more expressed herself in a roguishly solemn wink, placed her hand at the side of her lips in order to confine her voice to the requirements of a strictly confidential secret, and whispered: "Henry, I have ten thousand dollars at your disposal."

"Ten thousand dollars! Why I thought — "

"That's all right. Through the arrangement I made with your father, my money income is only two hundred a year; but — well, I've managed pretty well."

"Honestly, where did you get it?"

"Is that your idea of a proper question from one pal to another?" The old lady leaned back and regarded her grandson reprovingly.

"Palship ceases when money arrives. I shall have to know all about it or it is the same as though you had not spoken."

The old lady sighed, and yet she was greatly pleased that she could not order her pal as easily as she did her other grandchildren. "Your Uncle Ezra was just every bit as good a son as your father, only he was a whole lot

more like you. Every old minx in the country came to me with long faces and tales about how wild he was, and it made me feel mighty bad about it until I suddenly discovered that I was wild, too; and after that the minxes didn't bother me any more. Still, I didn't just turn Ezra out on pasture to run loose, and when I discovered that he was speculating in Chicago I ordered him to take his coat off — and he must have been thirty years old.

"He took his coat off, all right, and then he says to me, 'How do you know it's wicked to speculate, Mother; did you ever try it?'

"Of course I had to admit that I'd never tried it, and then he started in to wheedle me and the upshot was that I took twenty-five dollars I'd been saving to buy a plum-colored dolman, and I speculated with it."

"Do you mean that you actually gambled in margins?" asked Henry Ham.

"What else could I do — I couldn't buy a carload of wheat for twenty-five dollars, could I? Well, I won, and it was a new kind of excitement; but try as I would, I couldn't see where it had hurt my soul one speck. I just let the dolman go, and took my vow that I would never risk another penny when that original twenty-five was lost; but it never was lost. I never looked at this money as anything else but an entertainment fund, so that I wouldn't feel amputated if it got cut off from me. It kept on growing a little at a time, I opened an account in Chicago, and when that young whippersnapper tried to corner the market a few years ago, I plunged in with him, but my feet got cold before his did, and I made over ten thousand dollars. I took out certificates of deposit with it, and a new vow that I wouldn't risk anything but the interest any more. Now, you've pumped it out of me, and I want you to use the money as you see fit — but don't you ever tell on me."

"Do you own a string of ponies, or does playing the pool room suit you better?" asked Henry Ham.

"Stop your nonsense, now, and go in and see your father. He blames you for everything."

"All right, come along."

"No, I'm not coming in. Your father has been a good man and a good son and I wouldn't take sides against him for the world; but I must say that he's not a good loser, and I fear I might say something. Your Uncle Ezra was just the same with money as he was with air — when the air was good he breathed deep, and when the air was poor he went somewheres else where it was better. Go along, now, and don't act like a smarty. Your father is terribly broken up."

Henry Ham found his father seated in a straight-backed chair gazing disconsolately out the window. His mother sat close beside him in a low rocker, and the son felt intuitively that she had been holding the plump red hand of his father, although the idea was shockingly preposterous. At any previous period the youth would have been moved to mirth; but he thought of Jean and was moved to tender sympathy. After taking a chair he cleared his throat and asked, "What's the matter, father?"

Mr. Trotwood turned and fixed reproachful eyes upon his son. "I am ruined, Henry — busted."

"For the life of me I can't see how. Those options can't amount — "

"They don't seem to understand options here, Henry. We had to pay half on what we contracted for here, but they didn't amount to much. It was the Marndale chair factory that mired us down. You haven't any idea how that factory has grown since it went to Marndale. They're making the finest sort of parlor furniture, now, and they'll need a larger factory by spring. Judge Hooker and I investigated pretty thoroughly, and we came to the con-

clusion that if Benlo didn't get that factory away from Marndale, Marndale would get the Court House away from Benlo. Henry, that factory is worth a hundred and fifty thousand dollars now, and we had to put up fifty thousand dollars with an option of paying in the rest before the first of the year — and those fellows do know what an option is."

"You'll have to go on and buy it," said the youth, although the size of the figures staggered him.

"When apples once get in the cider mill, Henry, it's too late for 'em to start bargaining for their juice. Cheap power would have made it all right; but now that that's fallen through, it's fallen on top of Judge Hooker and me. We're busted."

"How long a time have you?"

"Haven't got any time, that's the worst of it. We thought it would be best to borrow at as low a figure as possible, and Darius Waldron offered to lend us the money at four per cent on a call loan — we to pay back on ten days' notice. We can't raise money on our holdings in that time, and he'll take everything, farm, store, home, everything. I've got to begin life all over again, and I'm an old man, Henry. The Judge and I are to meet Darius this very morning, and I hate to face it. Paying my debts on the nail has always been a point of honor with me."

"Listen to me, father, don't you settle with Darius on any terms — don't you think of such a thing! I'm not bluffing, I've got him cinched so tight he can't move. You'll have ten days to go on, won't you?"

"Ten days from yesterday."

"Then you just laugh at him. Don't pay any more attention to him than if he was your own son. Just tell him simply that you want more time and laugh at every proposition he makes to you. He's got something on his conscience, and he'll think you know what it is."

A feeble ray of hope came to the eyes of Mr. Trotwood,

flickered, and expired. "That don't sound reasonable, Henry."

"You can't reason with him, you can't afford to; he could outreason the serpent in the Garden of Eden; but if you do something sufficiently unreasonable, you'll have him guessing in short order. What made him settle down on you just now?"

"Henry, there's quicksand up there; you can't build a dam there."

"Oh fudge! I know all about the quicksand and it was my agent who set Waldron's men to digging in it. Now you go on to Judge Hooker and tell him what I said, and laugh, father, laugh! Waldron never intended to construct a power plant; he does not know one single thing about producing real wealth; all he knows is how to milk dollars, and if you'll do what I tell you, he won't get a chance to milk any of yours. Now brace up, make the Judge give you good backing, and I'll touch a match to the fire under Darius."

Leaving his father torn between faith and doubt, Henry Ham hurried through the town to the home of Nate Shipley where he found Pluto wearing an expression of worried determination.

He was on fair terms with the dog by this time, and after patting his head he walked up to the door and knocked loudly. Pluto at his side gave a low whine. "Where is he, Pluto, where in thunder is he?"

The dog looked up the sand road, raised his head and sniffed deeply, then he whined again. "I doubt if your nose is much good," commented Henry Ham candidly, "but any port in a storm. Come on, let's go hunt him."

Pluto had considerable confidence in this human, because he had never attempted to usurp the privileges which belonged exclusively to his master; but it required an hour of coaxing before he yielded. Several times he left the youth and circled the house, he gave expression to every

possible doubt in curious nasal whines, and it would have been interesting to know exactly what pledge the soft brown eyes were asking as they looked into those of the boy before he finally yielded.

It was a curious winding path they took together that morning and most of it was across fields and through woods. Beyond a doubt the dog caught the scent occasionally in the soft places; but beyond a more discriminating doubt, he had often made the journey before. Once, in an abandoned log shack near the home of a prosperous farmer, famous for his puritanical views, they came upon a jug containing liquor, and with a rope through the handle tied with Nate's distinctive knot; but they wasted no time in idle speculation.

They crossed Beaver Creek a mile above the Swan's Neck, and were soon in the woods near the big brick house. Pluto, who had frequently gazed reproachfully into his companion's face in the hope of increasing his speed, here utterly lost patience, and hurried ahead; but now he was under the guidance of memory and intended to first explore the thicket from which Nate had most frequently made his observations. Henry Ham continued blindly, and although the dog had traversed much the greater distance, they reached the prostrate man at about the same time.

At the sight of Nate Shipley lying in a distorted position, with upturned face gaunt and wan, the heart of Henry Ham stood still in his breast, and the face of his father with the twisted expression his advice to laugh had brought to it, appeared before him and smote through his vanity to the sensitive layers beneath.

But there was no introspective hesitancy upon the part of Pluto; he had not been seeking Nate Shipley to ask a favor of him; Nate Shipley was his love and his lover, his world and its ruler, and with a whine differing from all those in which he had spoken to the youth, he crept to the

man's side and licked his pale cheek — and this was what was needed.

With a groan Nate opened his glazed eyes and gazed mistily at the branches above him. "What's the matter, Nate, what's the matter?" cried Henry Ham, dropping on one knee.

For several moments the dull eyes did not lighten, but finally recognition came to them. Moistening his lips with his dry and swollen tongue, Nate said solemnly, "God, I'm glad to see you! He's a nigger, after all, and I thought he'd get you, too."

Saying which, Nate Shipley once more lapsed into unconsciousness. Dashing to a rill only a few hundred feet away, Henry Ham filled his hat with water and it was not until he returned that he noticed that Nate was tied. Splashing the water on brow and lips, he cut the rawhide thongs, chafed the wrists, and Nate was soon able to speak again. This time it was the dog's turn. "Pluto," he said brokenly, placing a limp and nerveless hand on the dog's head, "did you find me, old feller? I've been a-callin' to ya all through the night, and I'll never leave ya behind again. I never fainted in my life before, Henry Ham; but I've made up for it last night. How did you get away?"

The youth, with a certain degree of pride, showed the marks on his own throat, and told of the struggle across the creek. Several times he was forced to pause in order that Nate might express his determination to be "garnswazzled."

"And you say that Dummy John is Richard Morgan? Course he is — I can see it myself now; and I'm deef, dumb, blind, and lost my sense of smell. And he came out of his trance and knocked old Chet down with a rock? Well, dog my cats, I certainly will be garnswazzled this time. Go on, now and tell it again about how you wore out your club on the Zulu's indja-rubber head."

"He's not safe," said Nate quietly when Henry Ham had finished, "I'm going to take care of him. Yes, I'll have to do it. Now if you'll give me a lift I'll make a try for the branch. I'm simply burning up."

It required some time, much rubbing of ankles, and several rests before Nate was able to make the short journey; but his thews were as tough as whalebone, and after slowly drinking his fill he wiped his lips with the back of his hand, and said with a genuine grin, "Now, I'm ready for anything, even old Chet." Pluto growled softly deep in his chest, and Nate glancing sharply to the left added. "And, by gum, there he comes."

The banks of the rill were above their shoulders while old Chet was crossing an open space. His grim face was set in lines of childish resentment which made a grotesque combination. "He's thinkin' only of himself," growled Nate. "He's not botherin' his black head any more about me than if I was a rick o' rotten driftwood."

When the black disappeared in the thicket, Nate placed one finger on his lips and then crooked this finger significantly. The quality of life enjoyed by the woods people of all species differs as greatly from that of the indoor dwellers as the flight of a swallow differs from walking in heavy boots across a plowed field. There is never anything negative about the woods, a creature is either entirely dead or entirely alive; and, although the chance of the game throws him into the death zone frequently, the reactions are as resilient as the rebounding of a rubber ball from a stone wall. The haggard appearance which had startled Henry Ham on his arrival had entirely left Nate's face, which now glowed with an earnest desire to pay any debts due, especially the one to old Chet.

Nate, Pluto, and Henry Ham crept up the side of the rill which here described a long curve so that they came out at right angles from the point at which they had left

the thicket. Here Nate stooped and looked into the dog's face. A lap dog would have held Pluto in high scorn for not resenting the meager thanks he had received for his morning's work; but Pluto had not been imposed upon; he had carefully weighed the notes in which he had been paid, and he knew that each tone and each inflection was a sight draft which he could present at any moment in the future. He was supremely happy, but his foolish canine way of showing it was to plead for still further service, and now his stumpy tail vibrated ecstatically as he turned his gaze toward the spot where Nate had taken his drink from the branch.

Again placing finger to lips, Nate led the way through the thicket in a direction which would intersect the path they had just come, at each alternate step dropping his eyes to the mobile ears of the competent Pluto. As they neared the top of the bank, Nate slipped a bulldog revolver of wicked appearance into his hand, and Henry Ham began to get nervous.

With head tilted to one side, body rigid, and bristles slowly rising along his back, Pluto's eyes steadily moved along the top of the bank, until finally the woolly head of old Chet came into view.

"Throw up your hands," ordered Nate, leveling his revolver.

The black stopped with a jerk, but did not raise his hands. "Pluto," said Nate as they advanced, "that is the snake who kept me trussed up all night; how would you like to tear his throat?"

Pluto looked eager, old Chet merely grinned. "Got anything to say for yourself?" asked Nate.

"I didn't mean you harm," replied Chet quietly, "You got in way, that's all. I meant come back last night and let you go; but she shut me into stone house and not let me out until noon. If you set your dog on me, I kill him.

If you shoot me, I kill you. Look!" He bared his right shoulder, and exposed three old scars. "Look," he repeated as he bared his left shoulder and exposed two similar scars, round, and of a peculiar drab. "White men have shot me many times."

Chetadag stood with his weather-beaten form as straight and rugged as an oak, and there was no wavering in the dark eyes which looked steadily into those of the white man. A curious grin came to Nate's lips. "You're only her dog," he said, "and I ain't got the heart to kill a dog for bein' faithful. Go on back and keep up your watchin', I'm glad she's got ya."

Chetadag bobbed his head slightly, turned on his heel and walked slowly in the direction of the big brick house, his head held high, his face calm and unruffled. These white men were naught to him; there was no law but Morgan's.

"Well, I'll be garnswazzled!" ejaculated Nate Shipley fervently.

As old Chet disappeared, Nate turned and said with a shade of embarassment, "Henry Ham, I got somethin' I have to say to you. I'm not goin' any deeper into history than to say that my little brother was shot by a Tennesseean —and since then I've had prejudices, and I came from Kentucky to begin with. The first time I ever saw this Richard Morgan, he looked so infernal much like that Tennesseean that I hated him on the spot, though he never gave me any reason to. I used to roam about in the woods up here just to give him a chance to pick a quarrel with me, but he never minded how I leered at him; fact is, he hardly seem to see me. Still, I was opposed to him, as well as opposed to gettin' mixed up with the law, so I let him go to the pen."

"*You* let him go?"

"Yes, I let him go. I saw what went on in the old stone

house that night. Richard Morgan never killed his father; the old man stumbled and struck his head on a corner of the stone slab where he used to tie his victims. This custom of the old man's used to rile me deep, and I laid to catch him torturin' a dog — when I intended to sit into the game myself; but he never did torture 'em, he allus put 'em under the influence first; and I've seen his face, when he thought he was alone, get so full of anguish that I knew he wasn't doin' it out of mere devilment.

"I've trapped, hunted, and fished all my life, and I've et butcher's meat; so I ain't got the nerve to set myself up as the judge of who shall, and who sha'n't take life. The old man had some deep purpose in his experiments; but you can garnswazzle me if it wasn't gruesome to see him bendin' over his victims night after night, watchin' their brains work. And yet one night I saw the tears come clear to his cheeks as he stood with his hand on the head of a dog he was just about to give the qui-eetus to. 'Poor creature,' he said, 'poor, wonderful creature, your life has been wasted, too, even as mine; but you have escaped all the misery, while my entire life is misery.' Then his face grew hard and he threw back his head and lookin' straight up as though speakin' to some one just above him, he said, 'But I would give my soul for eternal vivisection, could I but now learn the secret for which I search'; and he'd have done it, too, whatever he meant, for the old man was steel and granite."

"How much sleep do you require, Nate?" asked Henry Ham irrelevantly.

"Oh, when I'm not busy, I usually cord up about four hours out of the twenty-four. It took me near a year to take care o' that Tennesseean, and durin' that time I learned how to travel on foot, and how to pack my sleep into a mighty small parcel."

"Nate, that news about Richard Morgan is mighty welcome to me, and I may ask you to testify to it sometime."

"The' isn't much I wouldn't do for you, Henry Ham," rejoined Nate with an odd smile. "You remind me most of my brother of any one ever I saw — and I'm subject to prejudice."

"Nate," said Henry Ham, who seldom forced an opportunity to knock the second time, "when will you be ready to take the starch out of Darius Waldron?"

"White-cap him, you mean?"

"No, you said you had something worse than stealing on him. He has me in a fix unless you can bring him to time. Could you 'tend to it at once?"

Nate grinned. "I don't mind tellin' you, Henry Ham," he replied, rubbing his throat, "that your affairs are a considerable strain on me; but if you'd give me time to get a bite to eat, why, I'm with you. It's now about one o'clock, I can be where you say at two."

"Be at my office at two, then, and I'll do my best to have Darius there. I'll go back on this side and stop at his house. So long."

"See ya shortly. Pluto, you think up what you'd best like to eat, on the way back, and I'll see that you get it. Come on."

Darius was just leaving his front gate when the youth reached it; and at first he was inclined to be overbearing, but he was a coward, and the obvious assurance in Henry Ham's manner started his imagination, when that individual finally said, "I'm not asking a favor of you, I'm giving you a chance. Take it or leave it — it's all one to me. If you are there by a quarter after two, all right, if not, Benlo will have to prepare for your departure. I am going to hurry ahead and get a sandwich."

When Henry Ham reached his office, Nate Shipley and the faithful Pluto were seated near the door, the man with wan face and closed eyes reclining against the jamb, the dog leaning his head against the man's knee, and wearing

upon his hard-featured countenance an expression of such angelic peace that it was transfigured into a thing of beauty.

"You countin' much on what I'm goin' to say?" asked Nate as soon as they were inside the office.

"Well, I should say I am!"

"I think it'll fix him, but you never can tell. He's so everlastin' stingy that he hoards up even his meanness; but I've had my eye on him for some time, and I think I've got him guessed off pretty near right."

"I'll chance it. Now, you'd better go to the Hollow and come when I throw my cigar out the door."

Mr. Waldron, with lips pursed out and eyes hard, reached the office ten minutes after two. "I didn't intend to come at all," he said, "but I decided I might just as well come up and have it out with you, first as last. Your father tried to beg off this morning; but I told him pointblank that I couldn't see my way clear to accommodate him. Now, what do you want?"

"Sit down. Do you smoke?"

"No, I don't smoke. What is it you want?"

"I think you would find smoking beneficial for your nerves. You seem irritable. Well, all I want is for you to write a letter to my father and another to Judge Hooker, telling them that owing to certain information which I very kindly furnished you, you have decided to give them a year's time."

"Heh, heh, heh," laughed Darius.

"I would suggest that you practice laughing, Mr. Waldron. You do not seem to do it naturally. As long as you do not smoke, I'll defer to your prejudice, and throw my cigar away."

The youth tossed his cigar out the door, and Darius rose to his feet, saying, "If that's all you've got to say to me, I'll be going."

"Be seated, be seated, I have several other things to say to you. Did you ever intend to build a power site at the

Swan's Neck, or was the whole thing merely a holdup? I ask only from curiosity."

"You're the silliest young cub I've seen for many a day; and I don't propose to waste any more time on you. Good day."

Darius turned to the door just as Nate, wearing his most innocent smile, slouched into it followed by Pluto. "Mr. Waldron, Mr. Shipley," announced Henry Ham in his most flowing style.

"I guess I've seen him as often as you have," was Mr. Waldron's ungracious response.

"Mr. Shipley," said Henry Ham, "I have asked a little favor of Mr. Waldron which he does not seem willing to grant. Can you recall anything which might have a tendency to soften his obstinacy? Be seated, both of you."

"Would my smokin' a corncob pipe be objected to?" asked Nate humbly.

"Certainly not; make yourself comfortable," replied Henry Ham.

"Well," said Nate dreamily, "Mr. Waldron is a Christian man, and if your favor is one that wouldn't cause any friction to his duty towards his neighbor, why I reckon he'd do it — if you was just to remind him of his duty towards his neighbor."

"What sort of a put-up game is this?" asked Darius, scowling fiercely.

"Oh, this ain't no regular put-up game at all," replied Nate softly. "I have no idea what favor it is that Henry Ham wants, he don't know what I know about you; so I'm just kind o' sort o' soundin' you out to see how you feel about things. You believe in the Bible, don't ya?"

"Yes, I do — but it's none of your business!"

"The Bible's a curius book; and what he gets out of it depends a good bit on the state of a feller's mind. I suppose, now, that you'd side with Jacob and again' Esau, while I'd

do just the opposite; and then again, I'm pretty near certain you'd think Abraham was a fine and thrifty old gentleman, while just because Hagar and Ishmael seem sort o' related to me, like, I can't help but think he was a confounded old reprobate. What do you think about it?"

There was a deep and subtle undertone in the soft voice of Nate Shipley which would have suggested to Mr. Waldron the steel gauntlet beneath the velvet glove, had he been familiar with such accoutrements. As it was, the hot flame in his breast was denied a vent, and he arose with the remark, "This is neither the time nor the place for the discussion of such topics, and I shall waste no more time with you."

"Don't tramp on that dog, please," said Nate in an anxious voice, pointing to Pluto, who lay across the doorway in an attentive attitude. "He's wonderful nervous, and I'm afraid if he was to bite ya, some of his teeth might get broke."

Darius faced Nate with his right eye closed to a narrow crack and his left opened so wide that the pupil seemed an island of fire in a sea of milk. Nate had filled his mouth with smoke and now he opened it wide and, as the smoke slowly oozed forth, he watched with childish interest its rapidly changing cloud forms as the draft caught them. When his mouth was empty, he turned to Mr. Waldron and asked quite incidentally, "By the way, Darius, whatever became of your son?"

Darius certainly had an evil eye; but looks have lost much of their destructive power in these piping times of science, and the glance which in an earlier day would have turned Mr. Shipley into stone was as harmless as a violet's perfume.

"Did you pick out a Bible name for the boy, Darius? Ishmael would have suited him first rate."

"I have no son."

"Suit yourself; I don't have to wear your conscience. Are you about ready to grant this young man's favor, or shall we change the subject and discuss what I happened to see on the Milton farm one day when I was ginsengin'? It really seems to me that as good a business man as you would be willin' to pay a fair price to maintain his reputation. You see a neat and orderly reputation is as necessary to a Christian business man like you as substantial fixtures are to a bank. I'm not suggestin' that you become extravagant and go in for the luxury of a good character; but I do advise you to have the wormholes in your reputation puttied up."

Darius seated himself heavily. "I suppose you intend to blackmail me?" he growled.

"I'm not makin' any bargains, but you know, now, how long it's been since I've known more about you than you'd care to have advertised, and you can count on what I'd be likely to do in the future. I don't even know what it is that Henry Ham wants you to do; but I'd count it a favor if you'd be so good as to accommodate him."

Darius sat with his eyes on the floor for several moments while Nate placidly smoked his corncob pipe. "What else do you know about me?" he demanded.

"It would take too long to tell you, Darius. You've abused women and children and horses and men, and you've about reached the end of your string. I've let you have all the slack you'd need, so that if ever I had use for a bondsman, you'd be ready and waitin' — it's mighty convenient for a disreputable feller like me to have a respectable Christian business man to fall back on; but I've never needed you. I'm not likely to dig up anything from the past just for amusement; but the next time you feel like abusin' something, you'd better make sure that I'm not about."

"I'll write your letters," said Mr. Waldron, turning to Henry Ham.

"Thank you," said Nate Shipley, rising, "and now Pluto and I'll have to be on our way. Good afternoon to ya."

Henry Ham followed him outside, where he shook hands vigorously. "Nate, you're a brick," he said.

"That so?" responded Nate, rubbing his neck. "I never before knew that a brick ached like a hollow tooth from one end to the other. Well, good luck to ya."

Dictating the letters was an act of pure joy, and Henry Ham did not allow any inflammation of modesty to interfere with his choice of euphonious phrases. When they were finished and the envelopes were addressed and sealed he placed them in his pocket and said, "That's all for this time, Mr. Waldron. You may go now." And Mr. Waldron, having nothing to say, left in silence.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

FOR several moments after Darius had left, Henry Ham sat in deep reflection. Richard Morgan was innocent, his father, though a hard man, had been made so through circumstances rather than disposition, and this hardness had found a chastening alloy in the tender nature of Jean's mother. Judge Hooker and his own father would be forced at last to acknowledge that he was dependable in a pinch, and the only remaining puzzle was the verse, the unreasonable verse which continued to repeat itself in his own mind, as it had repeated itself in the mind of Richard Morgan during his prison sentence.

Still, a verse was a small matter when all the world was bright and smiling, and he recalled his grandmother's simile, tilted back his head, and felt a very fit swan, indeed, to leave the ducks in their puddle behind him, arch his neck, spread his wings, and fly up into the ether where one was truly independent because he had caught his vision of the Absolute.

He arose and paced his narrow quarters while his eyes grew moist and his smile tender. "Poor little girl," he murmured tremulously, "you won't have to shine alone in the darkness much longer. You've called out the man in me, and no one else ever did. I am a man, now; no male human is a man until he feels ready and able to protect the woman he loves. Oh, I'm not only ready, I'm on fire to begin. I glory in being one of the free things, and let them hunt me with whatever venom they will, you and I will soar above their nasty puddle up into the blue; up into our own blue, and they cannot follow us there."

It was then only a little after three; so he adjusted his raiment, placed his hat precisely, and started forth. He casually noted this change to neatness and after considering it he commented with satisfaction, "Ah, love's conviction must express itself as well as love's indecision."

He had no definite plan when he started; but he mailed the two letters and by the time he had reached the high ground across the creek he was determined to march confidently up to the brick house and win his lady by storm. With this resolve his head went a point higher, his shoulders assumed a new aggressiveness, and his step took on a martial defiance. He paused to climb the stile and glance across the little graveyard, but it was empty and he hurried on.

He turned down the lane and when he reached the gate he saw the yard dogs watching him while old Chet was just putting the white horse to a small garden cultivator. "Call those dogs," ordered Henry Ham, "I wish to go to the house."

He had decided upon this test only since having turned in at the lane. It had occurred to him that Jean would have held converse with old Chet on the way home the night before, and the gist of this converse might be gleaned in the black's attitude toward himself.

Chet gave a long whistle, the dogs responded obediently, and Henry Ham, for the first time, walked up the brick walk to the front door. A bronze knocker of antique workmanship adorned this door, and with it he struck a resounding blow which echoed through the house. Waiting but a few seconds, he struck again, and this time he heard footsteps hurrying down the stair. The door was opened without ceremony, and Jean stood within, an expression of inquiry upon her weary, wistful face.

For a moment they gazed into each other's eyes. Oh, an old, old phrase, this; but what other phrase of them all contains such a wealth of suggestion? It is when eyes

gaze into eyes that the glorious dawning of a new life lights all the world, or the twilight of empty resignation falls in dark shadows across the future. The girl's eyes were as limpid pools and in them was mirrored the confidence and love which shone with dazzling brilliancy in the eyes of the new-born man. Slowly the wonder grew in her face as she looked unwaveringly into eyes which beamed steadily into hers, slowly the tingling conviction that Love had at last come — in the light of day and with banners waving — to claim her as his own, spread throughout her being, kissing into life the true consciousness of herself which had slept through her girlhood, and she breathed so deeply that for a moment she felt faint and dizzy.

" May I come in?" he asked.

" Why have you come?"

" I have come because I could not stay away, because I never can stay away from you again."

She made no reply; she merely looked at him as with the wide eyes of childhood beholding a spectacle beyond their comprehension. Real childhood had been denied her, but, as a divine compensation, the wonders, the enthusiasms, and the simplicities of the child spirit would be hers forever.

" I have come to ask you to marry me, Jean." The words came in a hoarse whisper; but oh, the music, the world filling melody of them! She had no doubts of him, there was no room for doubt. Only yesterday, when he had learned her secret, he had pitied her frankly, and the pity, like a two-edged sword, had cut her asunder from her dreams, and had left her all alone in the dark valley of her duty; while now — now his eyes caressed her and the gladness in his face so filled her heart that it ached in her breast. Ah, this was a new ache, this wonderful pressure of joy!

She lifted her eyes to the blue sky, she let them roam across the green vistas of the woods, and then she dropped

on her knees and threw her arms about the neck of the collie in a torrent of weeping. She had not expected to weep, it seemed that for the first time in all her life she was in a position where weeping was inconsistent; but the tears relieved the pressure in her heart and this was the more strange because they had never come to relieve the pressure when it had been caused by the heaviness of sorrow.

"Have you thought of everything and every one?" she asked, raising her face and smiling up at him through a mist of tears.

"I have done nothing else," he replied. "Yesterday, Jean, I was merely the ugly duckling in the muddy puddle; but today I am the swan, I have soared away up into the sky where I can see the world spread out before me, and it is a good world. I want nothing, and I ask nothing, except that my mate come up and soar with me."

"And am I your mate?" she asked with trembling unbelief.

"What does your own heart say?"

"Oh, I cannot tell, I cannot tell! It does not speak; it dances and sings, and my head dances and sings with it. Nothing has changed, everything is just the same as it was, and yet all has changed, all is new and wonderful and precious."

He stepped inside the door, closed it, and clasped her in his arms. She did not resist him; but neither did she yield. Her form was limp, and her face white as marble, while the long lashes of her closed lids rested upon the violet shadows beneath her eyes. "Don't kiss me — yet," she whispered.

"Why?" He held her with a wonderful ease, she seemed buoyant rather than a weight.

"Come upstairs first."

He did not immediately release her, nor did he attempt to kiss her. "As you wish. I have taken all your world with you, Jean, and shall try to see it through your eyes."

She sighed restfully, as she opened her eyes to drink in the sincerity and tenderness which glowed steadily in his. "All in a single night," she murmured, "all in a single night!"

So with clasped hands, and the dignified Bayard close behind, they climbed the stairs and she unlocked the door at the top. Together they entered the room whence but yesterday he had fled in blind horror. Upon the floor, playing with a set of blocks, was the old, old child, the child who had never grown.

She did not speak to him as one speaks to a child, but as a lonely dog-lover speaks to his dog, in crooning monotones; and the creature's dull eyes brightened as they turned to her.

"Feel of his pulse," she said to Henry Ham.

Without hesitation Henry Ham felt the pulse and noticed its weak irregularity.

"Can you read it?" asked the girl, and he nodded.

"That is what I have known for long, and have dreaded. He has been so much of my life that I have not dared to picture what it would be after he was taken from me. See the color of his hands, there is no pink beneath the nails, and his flesh is not firm as it used to be. If he were as we are, subject to the wear and tear of emotions, he would have worn away long ago; and even as it is, he — he will not be here long."

"We must have a doctor," said Henry Ham simply.

"You *are* a man," she said, slipping an arm about his neck; "but there is still some of the boy left in you, the boy that I first saw from the clump of evergreens. No, a doctor could not help him. I have studied his case as no doctor could, and I have seen one organ after another begin to falter and need bracing. Oh, it has been hard to sit here all alone, to watch and wonder. Neither science nor religion seemed to have any answer to my questions. I have asked if he were a soul in prison, or if the soul of him had never

come at all — or if there really was a soul; but there was no reply out of the silence, and so I nursed his poor body, and gave him all my love."

We have presented Henry Ham heretofore with perfect frankness, and therefore it is to be distinctly understood that now, in spite of the very real change which had taken place in him, he was neither able to love the poor creature who was to be his brother-in-law, nor to pretend to the girl that he did love him; but so powerful and holy a thing is love, that he had actually lost all feeling of repugnance, and felt a profound compassion which made his smile very grave and his eyes a little moist.

"Did you ever play that you were God?" asked Jean seriously.

"Well, hardly!"

"I have, lots of times. I have tried to make myself feel that I had almighty power, and then I would try to see if I could not take all the suffering out of the world; but there is no way. Insects, beasts, and human beings live by taking and eating other life, life which gave pleasure until it was taken, but after it was taken it became a higher form in most cases; so that it would have spoiled everything to make all the creatures harmless.

"Still, it is horrible to imagine all the death struggles which omniscience must see, and I used to get faint and weak. Once I nearly went mad because it suddenly occurred to me that instead of God being loving and merciful, he was worse than the Brahma. Instead of being merely a symbol of almighty ignorance, he was the incarnation of fiendish malevolence, that his only delight was in witnessing an endless chaos of desperate and torturing struggles, while ever conceiving a higher type of creature so that it could suffer more completely, more horribly.

"Even when I played that I was God, myself, the idea of punishment was uppermost, and I used to sit in this

room for hours and try to decide just whom I would be punishing most by sending the body of my brother to earth without a soul; but such a punishment as this, a punishment which would scatter outward in ever-widening circles, could not be devised by a sane being; and God must be sane.

"Then I sought for days, years maybe, to find some excuse for such a condition, and at last I have come to a point where I am not quite sure that there is a God, but I am sure that if there is one, he is just — not ill-tempered, vain, and cruel as religion makes him, but absolutely just in all things. You see, it really makes no difference to us whether God made the laws or the laws made God, the great comfort is that we live by laws which do not change, and therefore in time we can learn how to live; but if we lived beneath the sway of impulsive whim — oh, that would be terrible!

"And so for the last few years I have been looking at this poor creature as a lesson, not as a punishment; and while I have played with him upon the floor I have studied him to read the message which had been sent to me. I think I have read it at last, and so — and so I won't need the lesson-leaf much longer. Every day it seems to fade a little before my eyes, but as the letters become more dim, they become more precious, and you cannot imagine how hard it will be for me to close this simple book, and say good bye to it forever."

"What was the lesson you read?" asked Henry Ham huskily.

"Come," she said, appearing to ignore his question but holding out a hand to him and rising. She patted the head of the creature, dully intent upon his stolid play, and then she drew her lover out into the hall, and up the stairs to the attic. In a small observatory which rose above the peak of the roof and was reached by a ladder, she showed him her watchtower gleefully. Handing him a powerful

binocular, she pointed out the Marndale Pike, portions of the road leading up from the Hill, the cabin of Fleet Hayes, and other points of interest.

"There," she said, "this is the last view, and the best. That is your house, and when there is a light in your room it seems so close as to be quite within hailing distance. You have no idea what a comfort it has been."

"Why did you not let me know? I should have kept a light burning all night."

"Then I should have had no sleep; for I could not sleep so long as your light winked kindly messages to me; and they always did seem kind, even when my heart was heavy with present sorrow and dread of the future."

"Jean, Jean," he murmured, pressing her hands. They sat thus for several moments, and then he said, "Now, tell me what you read in your lesson."

"Well," she mused, "if my parents had loved aright, had lived each for the other, my brother would have been normal; while if I had loved my brother less I should not have been normal. Love does not demand, love gives; and so I read that love, love was the law of this world, the great master-spirit of human life, and that only those acts which were founded on love could live and grow. If God is, God is love. If there is no God, then in the struggle for supremacy love has triumphed over all the other motives and forces, and when the race learns this, the race will at last be free. Oh, boy, boy, I have a lifetime of love to give you. Take me in your arms, hold me tight, tight; and kiss me, kiss me, kiss me."

Her voice sank to a whisper and, as her arms clasped his neck and his arms encircled her, there was nothing of that small triumph he had felt in kissing other girls, there was no room for it. His heart was full to bursting with reverence, joy, thankfulness, and a great, strong purpose to cleave unto her only, forever.

"No wonder I could not understand the stories," she said after a time, looking into his eyes with eyes which beamed mistily. Her cheeks were flushed, but beneath the radiance of her smile there lurked a trace of sadness as though she pitied all who could not sympathize with her.

After a certain period which was quite outside the dominion of time, Jean said, "Now we must go and tell Chetadag; I made him pass beneath the yoke when we returned last night."

Henry Ham smiled at her regal air, although he took a pleasurable pride at the thought of its not having been in the least a smiling matter to the black.

"You can't think how glad I was to see you order him to call the dogs, today," she continued. "You won't have any trouble with him now."

Before leaving the attic, Henry Ham glanced about it. As with the rest of the house, it resembled a museum. "What is that?" he asked, pointing to a massive case. "It looks like a primitive coffin."

"Well, it is; it contains a mummy, the only one my father possessed." She spoke in a perfectly matter-of-fact tone, as though most fathers were accustomed to keep at least a dozen mummies in stock. "My father would never tell me the story of it, but he told me to treasure it to the last even if I disposed of everything else."

They wandered down the enchanted stairway to the lower floor, stopping often to refresh themselves with caresses, and they went into the yard, hand in hand. Jean called, in the jungle language, and old Chet hurried to her from the garden. "This is to be my husband, Chetadag," she said with dignity, using English so that Henry Ham also might understand. "Whatever is mine is his, he speaks with my voice, his life is my life, his enemies are my enemies, his friends are my friends, and there is no key to my house which is not his."

To Henry Ham's surprise and embarassment, the gigantic black dropped upon his knees, bowed his head, and extended his hands to him in the same posture that he had assumed before Richard Morgan upon the preceding night. Henry Ham had been embarassed before, but never by homage, and it was necessary for him to clear his throat several times before saying, "You may get up now, Chetadag. I am very much pleased with the care you have taken of your mistress and I bear you no resentment."

The approval in Jean's eyes assured him that he had spoken well, and so he was able to assume a confident poise when the negro rose to his feet, and they turned to walk away.

"He's a queer old codger, isn't he?" was Henry Ham's comment.

"Chetadag is a great man," said Jean with dignity. "My father saved his life after the battle of Ulundi, and he freely gave that life to my father to use as he would. I have the power of life and death over Chetadag, and now you have it; but you must never forget that he has been a ruler over men, and that his allegiance is that of a prince to his king, not that of a slave to his master. He would hand you the ax and lay his head upon the block, without a quiver; but he would not endure the touch of a whip. Well, where shall we go in this new, wonderful world?"

"Let's go back to the tower," said Henry Ham. "On such a day we must get above the earth in body as well as spirit."

After they were comfortably settled, according to their new interpretation of the term, Henry Ham happened to recall the verse, immediately cleared his throat and, with a pleasant return of his former self-appreciation, he repeated with his trained voice:

"No din will rouse the slumberer within his winding
sheet,
The heartless man can trust but him who has no heart
to beat.
The shroud still hides his taunting leer, his tongue no
tales will tell,
He has no breath to hold, and so, he holds his secret
well."

After having repeated this queer verse twice, Henry Ham examined Jean's face closely and asked, "Does it mean anything to you?"

"It means nothing to me," said Jean after a moment's thought.

"Did your father write poetry?"

"My father could do anything he wished."

They discussed the verse for a few minutes, but gradually drifted back to their own affairs. "I hate to leave you alone," he said when the lengthening shadows warned him that it was time for him to go.

"Why do people have to wait a long time before they are married?" she asked in innocent perplexity.

"They don't have to, but it is generally considered best."

"Are we going to?"

"What do you think about it?"

"I think it would be silly to wait. We have gone into everything, we have faced everything, we have satisfied ourselves, and I don't want to wait."

"Then we'll be married very soon," said Henry Ham, "a week from today, say."

"A week, that is, most weeks, are not so very long; but this will be a long week to me."

"No, we shall make it a very, very short week. We shall crowd it so full of happiness that it will pop into

flinders like an over-filled balloon. And now, we must say good night."

"We do not really part, anyway," said the girl. "I can feel you almost as plainly when you are away as when you are close beside me; and after a week from today we never shall part at all."

"Never at all," repeated Henry Ham.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

As he walked homeward through the evening calm, his thoughts dwelt fondly upon his sweetheart and the love which would be his; but his imagination was never long at rest, and soon, speculation being its normal habit, it began to busy itself with the verse. Surely a man of Angus Morgan's mould would not have treasured an idle rhyme, and he felt that there was a message of importance hidden away in the jingle which had been found in his papers and which insisted upon repeating itself in time to his own steps. He pondered over it through the evening and far into the night.

For the next few days he gave himself up to making the week seem as short as possible to Jean. He brought her small presents, a tiny ring which reduced his capital to nothing worth speaking of, photographs of himself as the interesting illustrations of his interesting past, and they were as children together. She had Chetadag serve them feasts, whereat she played that she was entertaining his friends, who loomed vague and terrible before her conscious inexperience, and the hours flew swiftly by.

Each day they spent an hour with the one in the room above, and each day it became easier for Henry Ham to find a path for his pity.

" When he was but a few hours old, my father named him Angus Carlyle Morgan, Junior," she said. " Just think of that!"

" You never speak of him by name."

She smiled sorrowfully: " No, no, I can't do that."

She asked him many questions about the marriage cere-

mony, how long it took, how many people had to be present, if she would have to wear any peculiar garb; and to all her questions he gave answers in which playfulness and solemnity were blended much as they are in the blended life which grows and blossoms about a real marriage.

Yet through it all, the verse was never far from his wayward imagination, which worked as it would when it would; and one afternoon as they started to climb the ladder to the observatory, his glance fell upon the casket containing the mummy. He pointed toward it, and repeated the lines dramatically:

> "No din will rouse the slumberer within his winding sheet,
> The heartless man can trust but him who has no heart to beat.
> The shroud still hides his taunting leer, his tongue no tales will tell,
> He has no breath to hold, and so, he holds his secret well."

"Do you think it could mean that?" asked Jean.

"Let's open the case and see," said Henry Ham.

She came to the battered case with its dim and dusty hieroglyphics, and stood looking down upon it. "Would it not be strange if that really did hold a message to me from my father?"

"No, it would be perfectly consistent."

"Well, let us open the case," said Jean.

Knowing practically nothing of Egyptian mummies, Henry Ham was not able to appreciate the value of the one which was soon exposed to view. The faint odors were slightly depressing and he did not relish a thorough examination; but Jean's curiosity had been aroused and she insisted upon tracing the clew to its conclusion.

"You can tell that it is a mummy of the first class because its fingers are encased in silver," she remarked.

"I'm a little peculiar," said Henry Ham dubiously; "I'd prefer the company of a fourth-class live dog to that of a first-class mummy."

The mummy proper did not appear to have been disturbed, and, because he felt a frank repulsion for the task, he sought to discover a short cut to the possible secret. The outer case was very much larger than the mummy proper, and, while they were discussing the advisability of unwrapping the linen bands, he suddenly lifted the feet, and was surprised at the lightness of the rigid form. With scant ceremony, he propped the feet upon the edge of the outer casket, and gave an exclamation of satisfaction upon discovering that beneath the mummy was a cleverly arranged false bottom.

Reaching in his hand it encountered a bed of pebbles, which struck him as being utterly irrational, and he felt farther into the aperture until he felt a small leathern bag. Drawing this forth and opening it, he gave a whistle of amazement as the light from the observatory was reflected with dazzling brilliancy. He picked out one of the larger stones and held it up, gazed for a moment in dazed appreciation, and then, crossing to a window, drew the stone across one of its panes. It cut the glass deeply, and Henry Ham returned the stone to the bag which he held out to Jean sorrowfully.

In the meantime she had extracted from the hiding place an envelope, and when she took the bag she handed Henry Ham the envelope, which he opened mechanically. Inside was a letter written in the same bold hand as had been the lines of the verse, and he read aloud in the tones he would have chosen had he been delegated to read the death sentence to a condemned prisoner:

"'This being the sixth birthday anniversary of my

daughter, Jean Morgan, I write to say that in all save the unavoidable accident of sex she has suited me perfectly. I trust that I shall be spared to guide her footsteps to maturity and, my own physical condition being perfect, I fully expect so to do; but in case I should be taken away suddenly, I will that the contents of this case be entirely hers.

" 'I fully comprehend that my son Richard, her half-brother, has a presumptive claim to a portion of this wealth; and therefore I urge her to leave the law entirely alone. All dead men who leave large estates can be proved insane, and their wills broken; but if she will follow my advice she will remove from the lawyers all temptation to break this true expression of my will and purpose.

" 'If she become vain and wish to advertise her wealth, she will immediately convert these stones into cash, and the resulting lawsuits will advertise her well; but if she develops as I hope, she will not desire capital, but will sell such stones as she may need for an income, and live freely the life which should appeal to one who has shown much of the virtue of wisdom at the early age of six. In the sale of these stones she may rely absolutely upon Emil Rhinehardt, Amsterdam.

" 'She will have no peace if she fail to provide for both her brother and her half-brother; but I have no wish to pose as Providence. Her brain is active, her affections are deep and sound, and I leave her to rule her life freely. I have but one mission in life, and she knows what this is. My reason tells me that this mission is hopeless; but I refuse to surrender.

" 'If she marry, I strongly advise her to spend much time in choosing a mate. Marriage among civilized beings is a difficult matter, and it is utter nonsense to yield to the purely biological attractions of sex; but if she foolishly marry a dolt, let her eliminate all ambition and be a dolt

with him; for two dolts can do very well together, while a bird and a fish will not work in double harness. Her mother was a good woman, I suppose I have been a bad man; but I have toiled while she has merely existed, and I hope my daughter can read the lesson which was set before her.

Good bye and good fortune,
Angus Carlyle Morgan.' "

"I did not know my father could say so much at one time," mused Jean at the close. Henry Ham said nothing. His own lack of resources had suddenly appeared to taunt him with many familiar tongues. He well knew that his candid fellow townsmen regarded him as a pensioner upon his father's bounty, and this was the more galling because of its humiliating truth. Unable to support himself, he was pledged to marry a girl of wealth. He had braced himself to ignore the ridicule which would be his when it was known that he had married that queer Morgan girl; but when his friendly enemies would discover that she was rich, and would express their natures by immediately seeing in this the motive for his marriage, it presented a complication he dared not consider.

When he made no comment upon her remark, Jean examined his face and instantly became grave. "What is the matter?" she asked.

"I cannot marry you."

Amazement flew to her face and transformed it. "Why not?" she demanded.

"Because I'm a dolt."

She laughed: "Oh, pshaw! You never were until this minute. If you had not been brave, you would never have come into this house; but if you would let the words of a letter shake you, you would be a coward."

"You do not understand," he sighed. "I have no money and do not know how to earn any."

"Well, what do you want with any?" she asked with earnest simplicity. "All we need to do is to send a few diamonds to that man in Amsterdam and then you can have all you want."

"You don't understand," he protested. "It is considered shameful for men to be supported by their wives."

"I know better. I have read several French novels, and men's parents go and bargain to see how much money the girl's parents wili pay to have their sons marry her." Jean was too earnest to bother about the construction of her sentences. "I have been worrying a little about this ever since you promised to marry me. I only have a few hundred dollars in cash; but I hoped you would be satisfied with the farm."

He grinned: "In America men prefer to support their wives and the best of them prefer to do all the supporting."

"Then we shall go to France to be married."

"No, Jean; you are wealthy and I —"

"Do you love me?" she interrupted.

"Of course I love you."

She stamped her foot. "Then you shall marry me, if I have to make Chetadag tie you and perform the marriage ceremony himself. All my life I have lived in loneliness until you came, and each day it was getting harder for me to feel the tugging at my breast which I could not soothe. Do you suppose it would have pleased me to have found the diamonds before I found you? They would have meant no more to me than gravel! Do you suppose I should have given you up merely because I had no dower? I felt sorry about this, but I intended to make it up to you by loving you the more.

"Why, your people out in the world have no sense at all! That is why I cannot understand them — because they have no sense. The animals I can understand, they fight for what they want and they do not care what the other

animals think about it; but your people shiver around for fear that they will be laughed at, and if you are like that I don't — I don't — Oh, yes I do! I want you just as you are whatever they think about you. I know you better than you know yourself, and I'm not going to let you be foolish."

She put her arms about his neck, kissed him, and clasped him tight while he stood in flushed and tingling unresponsiveness. "Now you have had your revenge," she said. "You kissed me before I would respond, and now I have kissed you against your will. Henry Ham, when are you going to marry me?"

Her eyes were dancing roguishly although pride could be seen in her sensitive face, ready to step forth and take command at the slightest sincere harshness. "I have done more than half of the wooing already," she continued, "and I am willing to do it all; because I have never had to live in the stupid world and do not care for its whims. All I care for is happiness, and I am going to have it. Diamonds are carbon like coal, and we will burn the silly things and then you can support me."

She was in earnest, and after satisfying himself of this Henry Ham said reprovingly, "That would be a wicked waste."

"It would not. If diamonds could make us more happy, I should be glad of them; but if they dared to even think of separating us, I should burn them, every last one, and dance around the fire. You were free until you asked me to marry you; but you never will be free again."

Henry Ham recalled what Nate had said about the futility of running if once this girl took to his trail, and he smiled in perfect satisfaction as he returned her embrace with vigor. "Understand this, then," he said; "I shall never permit you to use this wealth as a club, and I shall never ask your permission to spend money as I please."

"That is perfectly right," she agreed. "We shall both spend it as we please, we shall waste it recklessly, the way birds waste fruit, and when it is gone we shall fly away like the birds, hunting more fruit."

"All right. We shall live here together as long — well, as long as duty bids us; and I shall build the dam, and shall start an electric railroad, a telephone system, a lighting plant, a — "

"That will be fun, and I shall come and watch you; but don't let's bother about it now. Let's decide on just the kind of a wedding we are to have. My dress is done and I am all ready. Oh, you have no idea how beautiful I am in my new dress! It was all I could do not to put it on today; and if I had, you would never have dared to treat me as brutally as you have."

"What nonsense! I never have, and I never could treat you brutally. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Oh yes, you have " — her voice was demurely reproachful as she freed herself from his embrace and stepped to the window. "You have hurt me very much, many times."

He stood looking at the tall, lithesome grace of her active young figure, and it found much favor in his eyes; but he found himself wondering if she were going to develop into a woman of morbid moods. He could not then, and it is doubtless if he ever did fully realize that Nature herself had been this girl's godmother, and that Nature has many little arts of her own which all women long for, but few women learn.

He went to her, diffidently determined to soothe and instruct her at the same time; but as he reached her side, she whirled and seized his arms in a firm grip. "I would just love to wrestle with you!" she cried with a jocularity that was actually winsome. "I want to race with you, swim with you, climb with you! Oh, your poor, poor friends!"

— she held him at arm's length and laughed in ripples of silver melody — "I am so hungry for life that I can never learn to take it a spoonful at a time. Of course I shall try, I shall try very hard — unless they disgust me — but I would much prefer to watch a kitten madly chasing its own tail than to see one trained to perform. It always gives me an ache to read of trained animals, and yet, some way, your friends always remind me of trained animals. Why don't you get angry with me, real, real angry? You may beat me if you will — and are able. I should not mind that in the least; but oh" — her voice became serious, her eyes tender and pleading — "don't ever let me see that I have shocked you before others.

"I have tried to imagine everything, and this has seemed to me the worst that could happen. Whatever you might do to me when we were alone would be the same as though I did it to myself; but to put on a shocked expression before others would separate us instantly, and then I should not care what I did. To put on a pained, bored, martyr-like expression before others would seem to me to be asking them to help you beat me, and then all the tiger in me would come to the surface." She shook him from side to side and he thrilled at the genuine strength of her.

"Oh, Henry Ham, you may bruise me yourself, if you will, but if ever the time comes that you try to bruise me through another, you will look back upon the day our eyes first met as the blackest in your life. I am not vain, understand, I shall not care if you ridicule me openly, for then you would stand with me in my action, whatever it was, but should you seek to gloss it over and hide it, then you would stand with the others, and I should hate you. Do you want to send any diamonds away today to that man in Amsterdam?"

Laughing the laugh of amused admiration which has as little sting as an honest kiss, he caught her in his arms:

"Not today, you wild gypsy, not today. I love each of your moods more than the others, Jean."

"And you haven't begun to start on them, yet! Why the spirit of play has only come to life in me since the day I threw that pebble on your hat, and" — a little wistfully — "there hasn't been much to cultivate it until just the last few days. Now put away these other and far less precious pebbles, and talk about our wedding. Who is going to marry us?"

"I suppose we'll have to have a justice of the peace," said Henry Ham thoughtfully.

"I don't want one."

"What do you know about them?"

"Nothing, not one single thing — except what I have learned from the tone in which you just said you supposed we'd have to have one. Why do *we* have to have one? I want the very best kind of a wedding there is; my dress is really beautiful. I think I should like a Cardinal of the Church of Rome to marry us."

"For pity's sake, why?"

"Because I like the robes they wear. There is a picture of one in the encyclopædia, and I should like to be married by him."

"I'm glad there was not a picture of the Pope," said Henry Ham with a grin; "but seriously, you can't be married by a Cardinal because they are very scarce and do not marry any but members of their own church."

"I saw the Methodist minister, once, and he looked just like any other man. I wouldn't want him."

"You're a lot like other girls, even if you are only partially civilized. I think, perhaps, I can induce the Episcopal minister to come down from Auburn, and his service will just about suit you."

"All right. Now, who is to be invited?"

"Invited?"

"Yes, of course. I have been reading every scrap I could find about weddings and you cannot spoil ours by trying to dodge all the bothers. I am going to have some guests, if I have to hire them with diamonds."

Henry Ham had previously decided that a simple little wedding with Nate Shipley and old Chet as witnesses would about suit him; but he surrendered this plan without a blow in its favor, and was more in love with her than ever. "We'll have guests," he promised, "plenty of them."

"I love you," she whispered, cheek against his, and then with softened voice, "Let us go, now, and play like little children, with the child who never grew."

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

As Henry Ham walked homeward his face was a pleasant sight. The boy in him had not abdicated, as he had truly supposed; but had merely invited the man in him to share a throne wide enough for them both, and it was the boy who had hung out the joy-banners upon the wall, the smooth and smiling wall of his face. In addition to the daily discovery of new charms in his love, was the solid satisfaction that she was usually right even when she differed with him. About the diamonds, now; why, it would have been as foolish to have them influence his marriage one way as another, and he would not squander them or become a mere idler because of them; he would use them as an instrument of development for Jean, for himself, and for the community. Life was a pleasing vista and joy was more consistent than sorrow.

It was thus with beaming face that he encountered Judge Hooker while crossing Main Street, and it was the complacency of expression more than anything else which irritated the Judge.

On receiving their year's extension, both the Judge and Henry Ham's father had felt the gratitude of men saved from drowning; but, as they had immediately secured the services of an expert and had discovered that the cost of construction would be at least twice what they had expected, they remembered that it had been their rescuer who had originally rocked the boat, and they complained bitterly of their wet clothing, their hunger, and of the fact that while he had kept the breath a while longer in their bodies, he

had merely drawn them on to a waveswept rock in the face of a rising tide.

Henry Ham would have felt this situation keenly — had he not been otherwise engaged. Therefore, when Judge Hooker beheld the rosy joy upon the youth's cheek, he frowned severely, and said gruffly,

"You seem to be bearing it well."

"My dear Judge," said Henry Ham in his largest style, which proved that the boy in him was again holding the sceptre, "every prospect pleases and not even man is vile."

"Some men are vile," corrected the Judge. "A man who will waste other men's money is vile."

"I take it that you refer to the power site?" said Henry Ham mildly. "Well, Judge, I have decided to go on with it regardless of expense."

Judge Hooker's eyes blinked rapidly, and he removed his glasses to wipe them. "Would you kindly suggest the financial source upon which you are basing your erratic considerations?"

"Certainly; I shall construct the power plant with capital which I shall get from Amsterdam, and after it is in good running order I shall parcel out the shares to the members of our corporation so that all will be satisfied — or at least so that all will have just grounds for satisfaction. Good evening."

Judge Hooker had no reply. In fact he remained standing in the middle of the crossing and gazed after Henry Ham in puzzled perplexity. "Amsterdam?" he muttered. "Amsterdam? Damn nonsense, that's what it is; but I'll stake my honor on that boy having some new idea up his sleeve!"

At table Henry Ham assumed a meek and lowly appearance which soon had the effect of attracting an attack from his father. "Young man," said Mr. Trotwood in the most approved tone of parental condescension, "are you aware

that the citizens of this town regard you as a drone and an idler? Judge Hooker was in to see me this afternoon, and informed me of your exact standing. It is a shame and a disgrace! You have not even the decency to show a proper regret for the financial loss which you have caused, and I am beginning to think that you have no decency. But Judge Hooker is one of the finest men in the world, and for the sake of the affection which he feels for you, and, I may say, for the friendship he feels for me, he is willing to take you back into his office again."

"The Judge has fine powers of observation, and knows my worth," returned Henry Ham; "but I found the routine of his office quite without interest, and even if I were not otherwise occupied I could not accept."

Mr. Trotwood's congested amazement suggested apoplexy; but he controlled himself and asked with biting sarcasm, "May I inquire as to your plans?"

"In the first place," began Henry Ham calmly, "I want it to be distinctly understood that my mind is fully made up, and that I want neither advice nor criticism. You will all be prompted to give both copiously; but I warn you in advance that I shall accept neither.

"I intend to marry Jean Morgan, who lives in the big brick above the Swan's Neck, and whose father was supposed to have been murdered by his son, her half-brother. After the marriage I shall begin the construction of the power plant at once with capital which I shall get from Amsterdam. At its completion I shall distribute stock among the members of our corporation, which will pay them splendid dividends upon their investments.

"I wish no break in the pleasant relations which have heretofore united this family; but much will depend upon the treatment accorded my wife. Kindly refrain from making comment until you have thought it over, and after you have thought it over I trust that you will all accept

the invitation to my wedding which I hereby formally issue. I am now going for a walk."

"Henry Ham," called Grandma as he stepped into the sitting room, "I shall go to your wedding if I have to go in a wheelbarrow, and if a single member of this family misbehaves, I'll make it hot for him the balance of his life. Good luck to you!"

Henry Ham went to his office and, after an hour of delicious dreaming, he wrote the article for the *Benlo Daily Citizen.* He touched upon the standing of Angus Morgan in the world of science, and the valuable discoveries he had made through original research. He wrote of Richard Morgan's musical talent, and the scene in the stone house as described by Nate Shipley, the terrible effect of society's injustice in sending Richard Morgan to prison, and his return as Dummy John. He paused here and enjoyed some of the pleasure this would bring to Judge Hooker.

When he came to write of Jean he found no suitable words, but managed to give a brief sketch of her life in the woods and her scholarly accomplishments. When he reached himself, he found a rare enjoyment in magnifying his shortcomings, as others saw them, suggested that all the time he had been preparing himself for big things, and was now about to put his plans into operation with mysterious capital from Amsterdam. Then he added, "The marriage of Jean Morgan and Henry Hamilton Trotwood was solemnized in the woods adjacent to her home this afternoon, your scribe being one of the fortunate guests," and settled back to enjoy a leisurely revision of his work.

He had to keep Jean's secret, although it was hard not to give her credit for the long years of sacrifice which had strengthened and tempered her character until she was the wonderful girl whom no one in all the world knew but himself. In the generosity of his joy he wanted to hold her up for all to see and appreciate, but that could come

later when there was no longer a secret to keep. He was himself surprised at the real pang this thought caused him; but for the last few days he had loved Jean best while they had together been at play with the child who had not grown; for it was here that he felt most completely that softening tenderness which distinguishes genuine love from all its counterfeits.

After writing to the minister at Auburn, and incidentally asking the loan of a prayer book, he locked his contribution to the *Citizen* in his drawer, clasped his hands behind his head, and fell into a luxurious reverie. He reviewed his boyhood and found it good, for with all its foolish windings it had finally brought him to her, and with her at his side his manhood was bound to justify his boyhood, and make even its trivialities matters of importance.

The next day he called upon Fleet Hayes for the first time since the night of Chetadag's attack, and found that worthy philosopher whittling a stick and discoursing with Richard Morgan, who did not seem pleased at the interruption.

Henry Ham examined the face of Richard Morgan with interest, and found it much changed. In spite of its reserve it had lost most of that utter rejection of life which had distinguished the visage of Dummy John, and in the eyes he saw much to inspire hope.

"I am going to marry your sister," he said bluntly, "and we want you both to come to the wedding."

"I shall not come," said Richard.

"You will, too!" said Fleet Hayes. "You'll come if I have to hitch Caroline to ya, and drag you there."

"No," said Richard nervously, "I cannot."

"I wish you would," said Henry Ham earnestly. "If you still feel any embarrassment at having been sent to prison wrongfully, the need for that is past. Nate Shipley, a hunter, saw what took place in the stone house that night

and that it was an accident entirely outside of your control. This will appear in the evening paper the night of the wedding."

Richard Morgan drew a full breath, and straightened himself. "I am glad of that," he said; "but still I cannot come."

"You leave him to me," said Fleet Hayes. "He's been growin' more human every day since he's been livin' here with me an' the animals, and I'll bet my life he'll come. Run along, now, and see your gal."

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

It was a perfect day and the woods gleamed in their fresh greenness as though they fully understood that the nymph who had graced them and loved them in sunlight and starlight, in wind and rain and calm, was about to enter into the blossom time of her own life.

There were not many guests, but most of them came early and wandered through the woods in that natural fellowship with which our common humanity still responds to the great elemental festivals of birth and marriage and death. Fleet Hayes was there in a single-breasted frock coat which had turned green with jealousy of the more comfortable garments which were his daily companions.

Nate Shipley also was there and he had brought his present in a jug. He was wearing a collar so high that it made all who beheld it hot and uncomfortable until they noted the beaming satisfaction in his face. The note of sadness in his eyes was not for others to see, and so they did not see it.

Judge Hooker, the minister from Auburn, Editor Harkins, and young Doctor Wilson arrived in a carriage while the Trotwoods arrived in two. Even Henry Ham's diplomacy could not have kept Pikey and Bud from the house, as their notions of the privileges which came with a brother's marriage were broad in the extreme, had not Grandma been in the secret. She was at her best in a gray silk and she made it perfectly clear to all that they were invited to the woods, not the house, and that when the house was improved and decorated they would receive due notice. The old lady's powers of assertion were so well developed that after she had expressed herself all the other guests felt

secretly ashamed at having thought it odd that the house was not thrown open to them.

Henry Ham, in a blue serge suit, seemed to be everywhere at once. The kitchen of the old house had been scoured, Benlo's cateress had been put in command with the doors to the front of the house securely barred, and all the dogs except Bayard confined upstairs to account for any peculiar noises. The great mahogany sideboard had furnished a wealth of damask, yellow from idleness, but satiny and beautiful, while the cut glass, china, and silver compelled Henry Ham to again revise his opinion of Angus Morgan. Fleet Hayes would only shake his head when asked about Richard, and Jean refused to see the impending bridegroom until just before the ceremony; so that he was rejoiced to have the numerous details as safety valves for his nervous excitement.

At last the hour arrived, the minister took his place, the guests took theirs, and Henry Ham took his. It was four o'clock in early June and, as the small group of humanity fell into an expectant hush, the chirp and twitter of the busy little woods people, the distant call of a plowman, and the faint tinkle of Beaver Creek racing over the stones of the Swan's Neck blended into a gentle melody in perfect harmony with the scene and the occasion.

And then she came, leaning upon the arm of a tall man of peculiarly distinguished appearance. At first those waiting merely gazed in amazement, and then their astonishment found mild expression in the throaty, nasal sounds typical of each individuality. Hiram Trotwood was the most deeply affected, and his smothered "Hu-ooh-um" was sufficiently pronounced to draw the attention of the rest to the self-satisfaction which had come to his face.

Richard Morgan's beard and hair had been trimmed, and he was wearing a frock coat, white vest, and lavender trousers which he had brought with him from Paris, and which still

fitted him after all the long years they had been awaiting his return to the big brick house. It was the recollection of this suit which had finally decided him to do his part in the wedding of his sister and with the donning of the suit his true personality had returned to him free of all misgivings.

And Jean — radiant as the dawn she was, and as beautiful! She was wearing a white satin dress with a short train, a wreath of apple blossoms crowned her dark tresses, her cheeks were flushed, her eyes sparkling, and the white column of her throat arose from the square neck of the gown as graceful as a lily. She had found the dress in an old chest and pinned to its bosom was a queer little note in her mother's writing: "He brought me this dress from New York. It does not fit me, and I could not wear it if it did; but it shows that he sometimes thinks of me, and it may be that after all he loves me, in his queer, silent way." In the midst of her own great happiness, Jean had dropped a tear upon the note, and had wondered if it could have been meant for her, or was only a tangible expression of her lonely mother's self-communing.

The dress was a Paris model which had in some odd manner attracted the attention of Angus Morgan, and it fitted her tall, lithe figure almost without the alteration of a stitch. She had tried it on before the pier glass in her mother's room, and had stood for a long time lost in admiration of her own reflection. She had then hastily gathered magazines whose illustrations had filled her with vague feelings of wistful envy, had taken them to the room, and quite impartially compared them with herself. As she looked, most of her misgivings fell away, and finally, with a whimsical wag of her head, she had said aloud, "I don't think I'll be afraid of your friends, with this dress on."

So now, like some princess out of a book, she came through the woods to marry her lover, and in spite of her beating

heart there was neither diffidence nor awkwardness in her manner. It is doubtful if Henry Ham, with all of his many justifiable occasions, had ever felt truly humble, until he saw Jean coming toward him through the woods to give her life into his keeping. He could feel the tears welling up in his eyes, but they were driven away by a strong, steady purpose which came and took possession of his heart.

Like a flash his past stood naked before him, and he saw that most of his activities had sprung from a desire to flaunt his vanity before his fellows, while his real powers had lain dormant. In the future — oh, in the future he would win real prizes and lay them at her feet. He tried to tell her this with his eyes, and she saw the light in them; but thought it must be the love light, and the light in her own eyes sprang forth to meet it.

They had learned the responses, and when Richard Morgan gave her to him, he took her right hand in his, clasped it tightly in a grip which steadied them both, and his vow was made slowly and distinctly, and in a voice entirely free from the histrionic embellishments with which he had rehearsed it to himself.

When she took his right hand in hers, and began, "I, Jean, take thee, Henry — " her low, flute-like tones shut them off from the rest of the world as with a high wall, and with eyes upon eyes and hand in hand, they stood all alone in the green woods, while the woman plighted her troth to the man.

For nearly a minute after the ceremony no one moved, and then Hiram Trotwood rushed forward, seized his son by the hand, and exclaimed, "Henry, I take it all back — you're not a fool, and you never was! Jean, I'm mighty glad to welcome you into the family."

This relieved all tenseness immediately and it was a merry, noisy group which took its way to the orchard, where the wedding feast was spread, Richard Morgan alone maintaining

his dignified reserve. Of course the guests indulged in many furtive glances, especially at the small stone house which had been the scene of tragedy; but for the most part the festivity, which had been the reaction, continued undisturbed, and even Chetadag relaxed as he waited upon them.

After the feast, Henry Ham took his mother for a short stroll and never before had they been so close together, so completely mother and son. He told her that, instead of going away upon a honeymoon trip, they intended to live quietly in the big brick house, and to have no company. At first Mrs. Trotwood thought this a little peculiar, but finally admitted that it would be as well for Henry to actually accomplish something before presenting his wife to a criticism which would not be prejudiced in his favor.

During this time, Grandma had locked arms with Jean and had strolled in the opposite direction. For a few minutes neither spoke, and then Jean asked, " You are his pal, are you not?"

" Yes, dear," replied the old lady, " and he's been a good pal."

" Do you know my secret?"

" Everything. How did you guess?"

" Oh, by the way you kept watch and said just the right word each time the conversation started in the wrong direction."

" Sharp eyes," smiled the old lady approvingly, " and you'll need them. He is only a boy, you know."

" I know," replied Jean slowly, " that he is something more than that. I know that he sometimes pretends boyish carelessness to hide real hurts, and I think he has done this so long that he is not himself aware of it. He does not change or give up easily, although he may seem to and even try to; but I love the boy in him as well as the man, and I know his tenderness better than any of you."

"Well," said Grandma with a chuckle, "I think a mighty sight of Henry Ham, and I wanted to warn you not to worry about his moods; but I've changed my mind. You seem to be a very capable young person. Tell me all about his wooing, he's been stingy with it."

By the time the account was finished, Jean and the old lady were close friends and allies, and when they returned to the group they found Henry Ham talking quietly about the power site. He quoted the adverse opinion of Fleet Hayes as being more reliable than that of the imported expert, and proved that the dam could be constructed for about his original estimate. He had genuine imagination and was able to construct piece by piece in his mind; so that his study of mechanics for the sole purpose of interesting Judge Hooker and his father had given him many details, and now that the question of capital was settled, he spoke simply and earnestly, until finally Judge Hooker was moved to arise and deliver a short oration upon his own unshakable conviction that Henry Hamilton Trotwood was a man of destiny. He admitted that he had recognized this at his first interview, but had a selfish interest in hiding it lest the boy should refuse to enter his office.

Hiram Trotwood felt encouraged after this to testify to his son's worth, and he was succeeded by Editor Harkins and young Doctor Wilson, until Henry Ham refused to listen to any more.

"Well, I guess you'll listen to me," said Fleet Hayes. "All these others deserted you at the first change of wind; but I didn't. I knew all the time that you'd win out, and so I stuck through thick and thin."

"Humph," said Nate Shipley. "There wasn't a single one of you who saw anything out of common in him until he was a man grown; but I saw it when he was a boy; and if I felt so disposed, I could tell you all a thing or two."

"Look at his face," whispered Jean.

"Whose — Nate Shipley's?" returned the old lady with twinkling eyes.

"No, Henry's. He is neither flattered nor confused. He has that same quiet confidence in his face that Bayard has when he is waiting for me to give the word. I think I know him best of all."

"You have all been mighty good to me," said Henry Ham, smiling but serious, "and I rejoice in the thought that I shall some day be able to show my appreciation. We all have our own methods, and, in the past, mine has been to irritate all who tried to help me; so that they would feel under no obligations to continue helping me and I would still be independent. You see, I have been unbalanced and lopsided most of my life, and this was why I had to be independent; but I have found my other half in these old woods and from now on I shall be balanced. No balanced man wants to be brazenly independent, he knows that interdependence is the normal state of a civilized being, and this has a chastening effect upon his egotism.

"I have used my egotism as an airship in the past and I'll have to admit that I've had a lot of fun in it; but now I'm going to work, and you'll all have to help, whether you want to or not. I give you all the privilege of criticizing me for the sake of Benlo; and if we don't make Benlo the model town of this planet, then I'll stand right up in meeting and admit that I'm the premier duffer of them all."

Henry Ham's smile, his chief reserve asset, had always been contagious, and now that it had a foundation of seriousness to give it stability, it was irresistible; but Editor Harkins was beginning to fidget. He had found it impossible to keep from anticipating the effect which Henry Ham's article dealing with the Morgan family and his own wedding was to cause, and he was anxious to lay anticipation aside and feel directly the editorial thrill; so that he began the farewell handshaking.

After the carriages had left, Nate Shipley took Jean's hand and looked steadily into her eyes; and what she saw in his own tender ones filled her with pleasurable amazement. "I think you two were made for each other," he said; "but any time he don't travel to suit you, you just let me know and I'll straighten him up for ya."

"All right, I'll count on you," replied Jean, returning his smile and also his firm grip.

"Good afternoon, Henry Ham," said Nate with a return to his whimsical reserve, "I'm obliged to sneak off into the woods somewhere so I can bury this infernal collar; but I'll see ya again, sometime."

"If you don't I'll go gunning for you," said Henry Ham.

Richard Morgan had gone into the house to restore his wedding raiment and to don once more the comfortable suit to which he had grown accustomed. Henry Ham had told him of finding the diamonds and that he was welcome to whatever he wished, whenever he wished it; but Richard had shaken his head. "I have never been so happy in my life as with Fleet Hayes," he had said. "If a desire for the world returns to me, I shall return to the world, but I have no such desire now."

"Son," said Mr. Hayes in parting, forcing a heavy frown upon his smiling features, "I'm going to keep my eye on you, and don't you forget it. If you dare to swing back to the opposite extreme and take yourself so bloomin' serious that you're a burden to that little gal, I'll settle down on you and handle you without gloves. Tell Richard I've gone home to feed Caroline and the rest o' the children, and that I want him to hustle along and play me some wedding music. If you two sillies want to sit up on the cliff and listen to it, why, I guarantee it'll help to keep the time from draggin' with ya. Good evening."

The cateress had been paid and had gone, leaving old Chet and his quiet helpmate to put things to rights, the

twilight calm had settled over woods and fields, and Jean came and slipped her hand into her lover's. "Let us go in," she said softly, "and share our joy with the one who cannot know."

They found the door at the top of the stairs unlocked, and within the room, Richard Morgan, in his familiar suit of blue denim, was seated beside the couch, and holding the wrist of its quiet occupant. The wrist had grown very thin, and in the glow of the single candle the fingers were transparent.

"How is he?" asked Jean.

Richard Morgan's dark eyes glanced about the room. "He is like a candle in the wind," he replied in a low voice.

"Does he suffer?"

"Not at all, and he will not suffer. Like the candle in the wind he may go out with a little puff, or he may last until the last spark of vitality is consumed; but he will not suffer. Do you wish me to stay here tonight?"

"No," said Jean, after a thoughtful pause, "I would rather have you go back to Fleet Hayes. I shall give him his nourishment, make him as comfortable as may be, and then we shall go to the edge of the cliff and listen to your playing. Play just as you feel, mingle the joy with the sorrow, for thus it is with life. I have planned everything, and when the time comes he will lie beside my father and mother, and no one will know but we three, and Chetadag, who will ask no questions. Now go; if I need you, I will send for you."

. . . .

After the yard dogs had been given their freedom and the house locked, Jean and Henry Ham once more walked through the woods, hand in hand. They sat close to the edge of the slope, Henry Ham leaning against a tree and Jean leaning against him. Below them the ripples murmured

of other days and other loves, and across the stream the violin was singing softly of joy or sorrow as the mood of the player changed. The yearning notes predominated as they are wont to do when the violin is played by one who understands, by one who has searched in the world vainly for that which the world could not give, and as they listened in vague sympathy the two who had found their treasure nestled closer together and spoke in whispers — or not at all.

"What change has marriage made in you?" asked Jean after a long silence.

For a space, the new man gave no answer as he examined himself frankly. He found himself possessed of a new calmness and a new strength, and it seemed to him that some great mystery had wrought upon and modified his nature; but it was no mystery, it was merely the working of an ancient law, a very ancient law: love is not all in the giving; much of the ecstacy of love lies in the pressure of control against desire. Where desire is not, love is an arid desert; where control is not, love is a flood of foul water; but where desire rushes between the strong banks of control, love is as the mountain brook, sweet to the taste, melodious to the ear, entrancing to the eye, brimming with life, changing ever with laughter and song and quiet pools of deep tenderness; but ceaseless in the constancy of its strong flowing.

"It has taken away all restlessness," he replied after a time, striving to express in words that which he was as yet only able to feel. "It has given me strength and patience. I could bear separation, now, without being consumed by fire. I think of all the future which is waiting for us and a day or an hour seems but a little matter."

She sighed blissfully. "That was what I wanted," she whispered, her cheek against his, "and that is what I knew you would give me. Oh, I would not have him stay, I would not have him stay! But he has been all I have had

for so long, he has meant so much to me, that I could not bear to enter love's holy of holies — until after he had been put to rest."

"There shall never be laws or rules for us, Jean," whispered Henry Ham, his voice a pledge and a promise. "We shall do your way because it is your way, or we shall do my way because it is my way; but the lesser wish shall always yield to the greater. We are one, now, and all of you is part of all of me. Whatever would make you unhappy would make me unhappy — even to little things — and so there will be neither please nor thank you; but perfect frankness because perfect unity. I never realized this until tonight; but it can be no other way."

"Oh, the stories, the stories!" said Jean, with a little laugh which the tears in her throat made tremulous. "The real stories never could be written, and that is why I could not understand the others."

THE END.

JUST A FEW GENERAL THOUGHTS

'Tis largely our own fault, you know, this antlike climbing of little hills of sand in search of a contented conscience; but then, come to think of it, an ant is blind and has no recollection, while we have eyes to see with and many books to retain our observations, so that it is unjust to the ant to judge her from the standpoint of our own opportunities and then speak slightingly of her lost motions and wasted energies.

The great trouble with man is, that he is never frank with anybody — not even himself. Each man plays so many different parts that the only correct estimation that can be made of any man is that he is playing some part all the time. Philosophers do not help much, for they pose and strut, and pretend with the worst of us; novelists help but little because they build heroes and heroines out of whole cloth and omit reference to aught which may offend the conventional reader; teachers are hopeless because they are bound to hold up the external appurtenances of success without alluding to the risks and follies which contributed to this success or the final and melancholy disappointment of it; preachers are bound to extol the virtues and neglect the vices, while scientists care only for those portions of life which lie beyond the natural vision and must be reached by telescope or microscope. Until all these specializings be made harmonious, the growth from infancy to maturity must continue to be a growth from frankness to expediency.

"Naked and unashamed." Curiously enough these qualifications of the original parents of our species are linked together as though their combination were inconsistent enough to form a dramatic climax; but the truth is

that shame and nakedness are incompatible and only dwell together when united by the man-made ritual of convention. The calm-eyed beasts of the field are gloriously naked but they are never ashamed because they are never immodest; the savage is only slightly ashamed because he is only slightly clothed and only slightly immodest; but those poor humans who suffer most with civilization are most completely clothed, most completely immodest, and, thank the gods for the negative sign of hope, most completely ashamed.

Civilized beings are almost never calm-eyed. Most of the fibbing, which is absolutely essential to civilization, is delegated to the eyes, and they can't stand it. They finally yield to the strain until even they can no longer go naked and unashamed, but have to wear glasses which distort the rays of light in order to make objects appear normal. Thus we see that the joke is once more on us.

What a grand war it is that the babies are constantly waging against clothing and shame, and how sublime and comforting is the list of their victories! Physical swaddling clothes are now a thing of the past, the stupid long dresses only last a few weeks instead of many months, and the most highly favored infants are even given an hour or so each day in which they may kick up their feet and coo in that naked unashamedness which is their rightful heritage.

But alas, it requires even more time to reform things spiritual than things physical. The stiff collars and tight shoes of etiquette and ritual chafe the soul until it burns with shame at its cowardice before the lorgnettes of Vanity Fair. Against our deepest convictions, we clothe our egos, our real selves, in motley robes of affectation and hypocrisy; and shame cowers so close to the surface that at the slightest rip in this hampering garment of pretense we blush to the ears and hate ourselves for blushing.

Strangely enough, just as some of us wear high collars

and others wear low necks as full dress, so some of us cover our best qualities and others brazenly expose those which affront the social instinct. If, however, our souls went naked and unashamed, no one would ever think of hiding his generous and affectionate impulses; while as it is, many a beautiful ego swaggers about clothed in impudence, superciliousness, and snobbery, or skulks through life in a shrouding cloak of artificial exclusiveness.

Whosoever takes his life briskly enough to gather wide experiences and leisurely enough to extract the full flavor from them will find endless amusement in stripping the raiment from the souls he meets and noting how seldom this raiment has set off the ego to its best advantage. Some external characteristics hurt others like a wayward hatpin, and these should be removed by due process of law, while some others are merely comical, like hobble skirts and plug hats. A young naked soul is as beautiful as a naked baby; but both lose their shapes with the wearing of fashionable raiment.

In company with thirty of his fellows, the author was forced some fourteen years ago to bare his body seven times in one day at the Third Avenue Recruiting Station in New York City. The first time he was hot with indignation, the second time he merely grumbled at the buttons, but when for the third time he stood forth naked and unashamed in the midst of his similiarly glorified fellows, he politely asked the sergeant in charge if he might not remain thus until it was finally decided whether or not he would make a sufficiently presentable corpse in case his uniform were shot completely away in the heat and bustle of battle. The sergeant being properly conventionalized would not permit it, and the incident is offered merely as personal testimony to the swiftness with which a deeply ingrained prejudice melts away before the rays of a frank and natural test.

Heroes, no more than other mortals, wear personalities which proclaim their identity; and so we dislike presenting our hero as a hero. We much prefer to send him forth dressed in his everyday foibles and presenting the same appearence to the reader as to his familiar associates; for, even as you and I, he is forced to wear raiment which both disguises and handicaps him.

The body constructs itself, bone and tissue and hair, out of digested food products and these lose their identity in the identity of the body; but the clothing of the body never becomes part of the body. Now, the processes of the soul are quite comparable, and so a number of otherwise unimportant incidents have been recorded in the foregoing pages to show the sources from which a particular ego drew the materials from which to construct his character, and also the airs and vanities in which to clothe this character and hide it away from a world whose approbation he craved but whose judgments he did not trust.

R. A. W.