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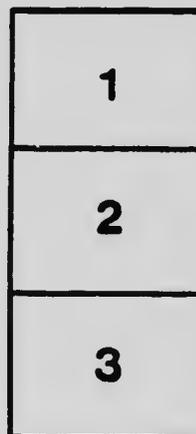
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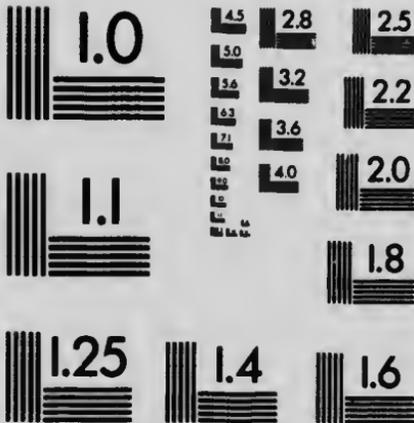
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BERGEN WORTH



BERGEN WORTH

BY

WALLACE LLOYD

Author of "Houses of Glass"

"Which now of these three thinkest thou was neighbor unto
him that fell among the thieves?"

TORONTO
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IN LOVING KINDNESS TO MY FRIEND

W. E. RANEY

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BERGEN WORTH

CHAPTER I

THE RED FLAG

THE great railway strike of 1894 was going on at Chicago; the Pullman car riots were at their height. Apostles of discontent had aroused the masses. Loud-voiced agitators had unchained the tiger of irresponsibility and goaded to madness the wolf of want. The flag of anarchy was unfurled and 'down with everything that's up' became the watchword of the hour.

The effect was felt throughout the civilised world, and little wonder. The heart of the great West—the world's giant food distributor—was paralysed, its arteries of commerce ceased to throb, and the bountiful streams from ranch and cornfield ceased to flow. The great steel highways were deserted. No longer did they thunder with the harvests of a hemisphere or tremble with the tread of a continent.

Chicago was having a reign of terror. The rioters were carrying everything before them, burning cars, tearing up rails, destroying tracks, demolishing buildings, making merchandise food for flames, and—when resistance was offered—shedding human blood.

Fortunately for the City, and for the country at large, there was yet another means of transportation

available during this painful crisis. If there was war on land there was peace at sea. Lake Michigan glistened as peacefully in the sunlight as it did at creation, and the little white caps chased each other as joyously over its surface as when America was a howling wilderness, before man, with his boasted civilisation, had polluted its shores.

The steamboat *employés*, though more or less in sympathy with the strikers, had no particular grievance. They were not 'on strike,' and as a consequence every available craft was brought into use in reaping an unusually rich harvest. Passengers and precious freights were brought by stage to lake-port towns and forwarded by boat to Chicago. This service was not sufficient to affect, to any appreciable extent, the blockade in the carrying trade, but it did something to relieve the feeling of tension that existed in the city.

One day, when the riots were at their height, the steamer *Northcote* was ploughing its way down Lake Michigan with all the speed its engines could muster and its overloaded decks allow. The passengers, eager to reach their destination, were crowding the forward part of the upper deck, anxiously speculating on what might have taken place since last they heard from the suffering city. Away in the distance the troubled metropolis lay beneath its usual cloud of smoke, the spires shone in the sunlight and the towering masses of brick and mortar loomed up against the sky; but even with the aid of powerful glasses nothing could be seen to indicate the upheaval at present going on.

Prominent among the passengers was a tall, clerical-looking man of fifty or more, with coal-black hair, piercing eyes, Roman nose and pointed chin. He wore a silk hat of antiquated pattern, encircled with crape, and a long black ulster which reached nearly to

his heels. He held in one hand a silk umbrella, and in the other a mahogany box shod with brass corner-plates. If his face, dress or manner had not made him conspicuous, his box would have done so at a time when bombs and infernal machines were running in the public mind.

From the manner in which his fellow-passengers fought shy of him, it was quite evident that they suspected both him and his suspicious-looking baggage. But the general estimate of the gentleman in black was considerably modified when it became known that he was the very individual for whom the boat, during the night, had run out of its course, called at a rickety wharf not on the timetable, and waited fully an hour.

Whatever might be the calling of the interesting stranger it seemed reasonably certain that he must carry something better than dynamite to induce the hurrying steamer to vary its time and course. Perhaps, after all, the box had very desirable contents.

The fact that he was responsible for the boat's being two hours late did not increase his popularity. Spiteful remarks, loud enough to be heard, were freely indulged in, but he appeared to be totally indifferent to those around him, and beating his umbrella impatiently on the deck he stood in the bow of the boat looking steadily citywards.

He was muttering to himself and repeatedly consulting his watch. 'If the riots only hold out for a day or two longer there ought to be six figures in it. Stocks will shrink to half price. Everybody will be frightened. Their confidence will be gone. Nine out of every ten are fools. I hope Dorenwein isn't too miserly to keep the leaders supplied with funds. His policy is generally too narrow. Curses on the fate which drove me into exile. I *could* and *would* have been king here.'

The *Northcote* was now nearing her destination. The passengers, with characteristic impetuosity, were preparing to land. They were crushing towards the gangway, eager to rush out the moment the boat touched the wharf—all but the man with the box.

Almost hidden from view, he was anxiously scanning the faces on the wharf below. He evidently wished to avoid someone whom he expected to see in the crowd. Long and eagerly did he look, till at last, satisfying himself that the looked-for party was absent, he gave a sigh of relief and hurried ashore with the agility of a much younger man.

Those of the passengers who expected to find the people of Chicago in a state of panic were doomed to disappointment. Instead of hurrying to and fro in fear and trembling they were evidently going about their business in the usual way.

The voices of the hack-drivers told the whole story. They were announcing reduced rates to the scene of the riots, offering to take their patrons to the spot where the fighting was fiercest for the modest sum of half a dollar.

Then came the newsboys, rushing exultantly at the new arrivals and shouting their wares. 'Here you are now! *Herald*, *Times* or *Inter-Ocean*! Greatest row on earth! Fighting, shooting and burning! All about the riots,' etc.

Our friend of the box was evidently disgusted. 'Damn these people! Will nothing frighten them? Have I come on a wild-goose chase? If one half of the town were burning down the other half would run excursions to see it. If the devil ever visits this earth he'll pitch his tent in Chicago.'

The conversation he overheard on the street car increased his discomfiture. The citizens were either giving the matter little attention or were putting on a bold front to inspire confidence.

Meanwhile, the sombre gentleman had not escaped

attention. He was watched very closely by a tall, athletic man who was pretending to read a newspaper.

Very soon the suspect left the car and hurried down a side street. The athletic man followed, keeping a short distance behind. To the offices of the National Trust Company, to the Stock Exchange, to the headquarters of the Illinois Central Railway, the clerical man hurried, followed always by his shadow. Then away down into the region of the riots went two cabs at break-neck speed, the one keeping the other in sight till the first stopped in front of a shop adorned with the usual sign of a pawnbroker.

It was the den of Dorenwein, the famous miser and money-lender. The clerical man, now minus his box, hurried to the door and tried to enter. But the door was fast. He knocked and called loudly at the keyhole.

'Let me in, Isaac! Quick! It is me! It is Nicholas Cargill from Owasco.'

The athletic man, rapidly approaching on the opposite side of the street, paused for a moment to listen, and then, with a smile of satisfaction at learning the identity of the stranger, turned on his heel and disappeared, leaving the man from Owasco pounding at the Jew's door.

At last Mr Cargill's patience was rewarded. The door opened and he was admitted to the presence of a frail old man with pinched face and stooped shoulders.

'The rioters are close at hand. Let us waste no time, Isaac. How did you dispose of the money? To the best advantage, I hope?'

'The last was stolen,' replied the Jew in trembling tones. 'Last night when they came for their day's allowance they tied me in the chair and took it all.'

Cargill turned suddenly on his companion with a look of suspicion and a smothered imprecation, but

the old man held up his hands protestingly and continued, in whining tones, 'I tell you th' truth. It is all gone. Every cent.'

'The cursed vandals. Little odds if they are all killed. Yet the money may serve our purpose as well in the end. It will keep the leaders enthusiastic, and the rank and file, like idiots, will fight for what they call a principle. But it was too large a sum to let go in that way. I wonder your election experiences did not teach you better. These agitators are of the same breed as the ward politicians.'

'I did the best I could. I gave the crowd the names of the leaders who took it so that they could go and steal their share. What more could I do?'

'Well, it is amongst them at anyrate, and may keep the fight going a day or two longer. I have melted all my securities and staked everything. I consider it a positive certainty. Why do you remain here wasting time and money? I can place every dollar for you.'

'I am not able,' replied the Jew, sadly. 'It is the chance of a lifetime, but I am too old. Ten years ago I could have—'

The sentence was interrupted by a loud crash as an iron bolt shattered a window pane and fell at their feet.

'The mob! Quick! Your securities, Isaac! Have you a cellar? No? Come, then, I'll take your satchel. Heavens! my cab has gone and left me. Hurry! We can't stay here. They'll sack the place.'

They emerged from a side door into a lane, but the Jew was too feeble to go beyond a walk, though his friend caught him by the arm and tried to hurry him along, coaxing and swearing by turns. The roar of the mob was terrific; sticks, stones and missiles of all kinds filled the air; blocks of buildings sent up great tongues of flame, and the rattle of firearms was interspersed with shouts and groans.

The Red Flag

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They knew not which way to turn for safety. The rioting appeared to be going on in every direction. Clouds of smoke obscured their vision.

Suddenly Dorenwein gave a slight moan and fell forward on the pavement. His companion stooped to pick him up, but the ash-grey face of the prostrate man, and a blue spot on his temple, showed that he was beyond all earthly help and that the guardians of the peace were using ball cartridge.

Cargill dropped the lifeless remains and, with a cry of fear, ran off in the opposite direction.

CHAPTER II

UNPLEASANT SURPRISES

THE rioters were now scattering in all directions. The reply to their enforced demands was coming from the iron throats of Federal rifles. The flag flying over the approaching troops meant that the nation was aroused, that law and order would soon be supreme, and there was nothing left for the strikers but to gather their dead and wounded and hurry away to their homes.

The athletic man of the previous chapter was more fortunate in his cabman than the man whom he had been shadowing. A very liberal fee kept his vehicle in waiting, and soon he was being hurried cityward at a furious gallop. They were apparently out of all danger when a giant with a red guernsey and a begrimed face sprang from an alley-way and, presenting a pistol at the driver, shouted, 'Stop! Halt! Another step and you're a dead man. Five dollars if you drive me to Englewood and four bullets if you don't. Take your choice.'

The speaker had evidently been a leader among the rioters, for at his call two men approached, bearing the prostrate form of a boy of ten or twelve.

'I have something to say in this,' shouted the athletic man within. 'This vehicle is already hired at war prices. Drive on, Cabby, or lose the balance of your fare. I am a physician and cannot afford to be detained in times like these,' and, as if to strengthen

the argument, a shining steel nozzle made its appearance at the cab window.

But the physician was not quick enough. His weapon was grasped from behind, snatched from his hand: it pointed at his face.

'Then by G—d you've got to come too,' retorted the giant. 'Keep a bead on the driver, Dick. You can't help yourself, Doctor. Nobody needs you worse than this poor boy here, and doctors are scarce out our way. He has a ball in his hip, and, by G—d, my money is as white as anybody else's. Make room for me till we get the boy in. This way, Fritz.'

One of the men seated himself alongside the driver, while the other two, after placing the lad in a comfortable position, squeezed themselves in beside the doctor, who accepted the inevitable with a sarcastic smile and pulled a rug round him to protect his clothing from the soot-stained garments of his unwelcome companions.

'It's no use getting balky with *me*,' said the giant, noting the physician's dubious attitude. 'You think we may drive the horse to water but can't make him drink. Well, we'll see about that too. We use strong arguments out our way when we need 'em. Ted is my son and a misplay will be worse for *you* than for *him*. You do what's right and you'll be treated square. Now, Cabby, no loafing, or not a d—d cent will you get.'

In grim silence the vehicle, with its strange occupants, sped away southwards, past great areas of uptown tracks and smoking ruins. At last, after many turnings and windings, it stopped in front of a dingy, smoke-stained tenement, in whose doorway sat a middle-aged woman in a state of semi-intoxication.

'Tully is drunk as usual,' said the giant with an oath as he sprang from the vehicle, and, after throwing her out of his way, proceeded to carry his son in and place him on a bed. The two henchmen, after a

whispered consultation, retired in different directions to prevent the retreat of the cabman, who was now bargaining with the physician for the return trip.

'Get to work, Doctor, and be d——d quick about it,' snorted the father within. 'Hector Walsh is not the man to stand any nonsense. I'll drop you both if you try to run.'

The doctor put on a look of surprise as he entered the room and appeared to be quite amused at Walsh's violence.

'Indeed? But you have forgotten my fee. You that are so free with your profanity should be likewise with your money. If you'll oblige me with an X we will discuss the matter further.'

The giant produced the money without question or complaint. He evidently thought it wise to placate the man who, perhaps, had his son's life in charge.

'Thank you, Mr Walsh. Profanity is a luxury, you see. I have only a small pocket instrument-case with me, but I shall manage if you are civil. I always make it a point to have my patients civil to me. It is a peculiarity I have.'

The little sufferer lay white and still, the very picture of resignation. His angular face had a look of premature old age and an air of gentleness strangely at variance with the malevolent expression on his father's countenance.

It was quite evident, however, that Walsh loved his son. There was a tenderness in his look and touch which was almost motherly, and he lent his assistance to the surgeon with a readiness and intelligence which surprised the latter.

Though the bullet had made a long and deep wound it was found near the surface and easily extracted. The operation was soon over and the patient asleep. The physician and the father left the room, closing the door behind them.

The former seemed in no haste to take his leave.

Unpleasant Surprises

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He seated himself near the door, and, leaning back in his chair, looked smilingly at his companion. 'I think we have met before, Mr Walsh, many years ago. I see you are still on the bullying list.'

'What do you mean?'

'Exactly what I say. Here! . . . Look at my card.'

'Card be d——d. I can't read.'

'My name is Elliot—Henry Elliot. Do you know me now?'

The big man looked closely at his companion.

'No, I can't say I do.'

'Do you remember Lucy O'Hara?'

'Yes. D——n the hussy, she ran—'

'Stop right there, Hector, my man!' exclaimed the doctor, springing suddenly to his feet and flashing a pistol in the giant's face. 'Hands up! It's my turn now! This is your own gun and mine is in my pocket. You don't suppose I was going to be outwitted by a groundling like you. Move a step and I'll try the effect of a lead pill on that thick skull of yours! You did not crush me in the corner for nothing, you see! Oh, yes, clench your hands and scowl if you like, but right here is a dose of your own medicine. Sit down! Now, move your chair back. A little further, please! Now, fold your arms and keep them so! There, that will do nicely!'

The doctor reseated himself and smiled patronisingly at his enemy as he toyed with his weapon.

'Do you remember, Hector, one night, a good many years ago, when you went to a house on Cottage Grove Avenue and insulted an unoffending woman? You called her all the low and filthy names you could think of, and even struck her. You also remember the stripling of a boy who undertook to defend her and got kicked into insensibility for his pains? That lady was my mother, and that boy your humble servant. I vowed that day I would

punish the brute and my chance came to-day. I knew you the moment I saw you.'

Walsh made a move as if to rise, but found the pistol staring at him.

'Sit still, Hector! I am not half through yet. You are a big man, but not any too big for this elegant gun of yours, so just get down on your marrow bones! Yes. On your knees, and see how you look. Very good. Now repeat after me, "I, Hector Walsh, do hereby acknowledge myself a slanderer and a coward, and I further admit that all my statements against the character of Mrs Henry Elliot were absolutely false."'

The giant, now completely cowed, did as he was told. He seemed to have lost his bearings.

'There! That settles the old score. Now for to-day's account. You borrowed *my* pistol and I borrowed *yours*. But I'll be more generous than you, for I'll give it back to you if you call for it at my office. So far so good! But the cabman has not been paid yet and you owe me another five for taking me out of my way and putting a soot stain on my coat sleeve, so that ten dollars more will settle the score. You may put your right hand in your pocket and toss it over. That's right! Now we shall be friends—if you like. You may rise now!'

The giant mumbled something in his beard and offered his hand. The doctor's right hand was still on duty, but the left was given with the smiling remark that it was nearest the heart. 'We are second cousins, you know, Hector.'

'By G—d, Doctor, you're a hard man and the first that ever made me take back water. But see the boy through and I'll be satisfied.'

'Good! Here is a cigar. Light up and let us be sociable. Tell me how the boy came to be mixed up in the riots.'

Walsh was so astonished at the doctor's sudden

change of front that he scarcely knew how to reply. He rubbed his hand over his forehead and looked in a dazed manner at his companion, who was coolly blowing clouds of smoke towards the ceiling, and holding the pistol carelessly on his knee, but with the muzzle in an embarrassing direction. The sight of his own weapon seemed to restore Hector's equilibrium.

'Ted has been pleading to go up town ever since the trouble commenced. He just glories in a fight, though you wouldn't think so to look at him.'

'I should think you would have recognised the danger.'

'I did. But I kept him behind me and thought he would be all right. Then when the crowd commenced to run I took him in my arms. I can't see how he got hit without me getting it too.'

'Show me how you carried him.'

Walsh rose and showed the position in which the boy was held.

'Are you sure?'

'Yes.'

'Well, then, the shot was fired from the side of the street and from above. I *thought* that the bullet was not a military rifle ball.'

The giant sprang up with a great oath. 'The shot was intended for me. There's traitors in the gang. Somebody was trying to pink *me*. Show me the ball.'

The doctor took the bullet from his pocket and handed it over. Walsh held it to the light and examined it very carefully.

'What do you make of it, Hector? Is it a military ball?'

'Not by a d——d sight. It's a 32-calibre Colt's.'

'If you remember where you were at the time you can trace the number of the street and who lived there.'

'Yes, and I will. I'll keep this ball and pump it back into the carcass of the man that sent it, and a half a dozen more to boot. You see I've thumped a good many of the bloats round here and they were taking a crack at me when the row was on, just to cover up their tracks. The sneak will die if I swing for it.'

'I should think you'd had enough of shooting and law-breaking by this time. It doesn't pay to break the law. Get your man into a quarrel with somebody else you have a spite at, and let the one shoot the other. Then the law finishes number two and you get rid of both. Beware of the law, Hector. It counts four aces every time. Good-bye. I must be going.'

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CHAPTER III

A MODERN ISHMAELITE

IF we wish to improve our acquaintance with Dr Elliot it will be necessary to visit him in his office on a small side street adjoining the principal thoroughfare of the city, where windowless warehouses towered high in the air and the only sound of life was the rumbling of wheels in dingy basements. But his apartments did not partake of the dismalness of the surroundings. They were well furnished and spacious, and displayed a neatness and taste very unusual in a bachelor's den. The walls were decorated with diplomas from American colleges and several foreign universities, not to speak of a large gold medal which occupied a conspicuous place above his desk. The place was literally lined with books on every imaginable topic. Besides professional and technical works there were ancient and modern histories, treatises on socialism in French and German, sermons of eminent divines, studies on political economy, musical and dramatic references, and side by side with his Bible was a copy of *Voltaire*.

The doctor was an enigma, not only to his neighbours but to his acquaintances. No one claimed to understand him or pretended to read his inscrutable countenance. His boyish face and athletic form gave, at first glimpse, the impression of a lad in his teens masquerading in the figure of a man. The faint trace of a moustache which adorned his upper lip had a

decidedly juvenile cast, and a guileless smile was continually lurking about the corners of his mouth.

His head, small but well formed, was covered with jet-black hair, which was worn parted in the middle in an effeminate fashion. A happy, careless follower of the primrose path he appeared to be, but a closer scrutiny of his brown-grey eyes revealed a cynicism and incredulity sadly at variance with his other features. It was this which baffled his most intimate acquaintances and made it impossible to tell whether he was in jest or earnest, whether the peculiar curl of his lip was an evidence of approbation, appreciation or derision. But though *they* did not *know him* they were morally certain that *he knew them*, that he inwardly amused himself at their weakness, follies and pretended virtues.

The people of the vicinity wondered why Dr Elliot left his former location on Cottage Grove Avenue to settle in a spot where his expenses would not only be greater but his professional possibilities much less. They were also puzzled to know how he kept up appearances on his apparently meagre income.

He dressed well and with unusual good taste, he dined at the best restaurants, smoked the best cigars, and was known to pay his tailor and laundry bills with promptness and regularity. His patients were few and far between, and his neighbours concluded that either his *clientèle* were particularly generous or that he had some private income. Others again hinted that his profession was merely a cover for some less creditable calling, and they referred to the burning of his lights all night as corroborating their suspicions.

But nothing was known against the doctor's character. His college career had been brilliant, his social standing was good and his manners were those of a gentleman.

During the time of the riots, and for some weeks

afterwards, his professional prospects brightened considerably, but now the summer was fading into autumn, Ted Walsh and other victims of the riots were sleeping in the cemetery, and the doctor's visiting list was almost blank.

To-night he was seated in his office studying very closely some documents which lay before him, occasionally comparing them with the paragraphs of a bulky volume. He was so deeply absorbed in his task that he scarcely noticed the entrance of a young man, who gave a few taps on the door and entered without further ceremony. He merely gave a side glance at the new-comer and continued reading as before.

His visitor was evidently accustomed to such a reception, for he quietly pulled off his gloves, laid his hat on a table and sank into an easy chair. He yawned in his shapely white hand and looked around the room for some time before he spoke.

'Hard at it as usual? What? Marriage and divorce? Rather an odd subject for a bachelor, isn't it?'

'Don't you see how busy I am, Crombie? There's cigars on the table, whisky on the sideboard, and here is the evening paper. Help yourself.'

'It is too soon after eating. I have just been to dinner. Lay your book away and be sociable.'

'Did it ever occur to you, Crombie, that it's possible for a man to be a bore? You are surely not foolish enough to imagine that your conversation is entertaining.'

'Not to a man engrossed in the beauties and perfections of our divorce laws,' replied the visitor with a good-natured laugh, and he stepped over to a mirror to arrange his tie and brush his hair. He was inclined to admire himself, and not without cause. His fair hair, blue eyes, peachy complexion and tawny moustache were sufficient to establish a claim to manly beauty.

He was nearly as tall as the doctor, but more fleshy and less erect in his bearing. He stood for a moment examining a spot on his cheek covered with a tiny speck of court plaster.

'You must wear a veil, Crombie, to protect you from the wind, and study your diet more closely or you will ruin your complexion,' remarked the doctor, without raising his head.

'And *you* ought to be an assistant to Old Nick.'

'I do my best here. Since Hades has cooled off, it is necessary to provide punishment for those who talk us to death. I am only vindicating my sense of justice.'

'Stop your nonsense now. An idea struck me tonight—'

'And your health is shattered in consequence. You are taking great liberties with your intellect, Crombie. The risk is too great.'

'And yet I have not come here for treatment, so that my idiocy is not complete. There is no downright insanity in our family.'

'A bare assertion on that point is not sufficient. The evidence points the other way.'

'There is only one way to settle the question. Come and see for yourself. I am going home for my holidays next week and I would be awfully pleased, old fellow, if you'd come along. There's good rabbit shooting there.'

The doctor looked up from his papers and turned in his chair. 'Country life has no charms for me, but I might bear it for one day. How long do you intend staying?' There was a kindlier tone in his voice and a slight difference in his smile.

'Ten days or two weeks. I might as well. There is nothing doing in our line. Business completely demoralised.'

'The departmental store eating you up, eh? Why don't you start up in a prohibition town? You can

always depend on two things at least—there will always be plenty of whisky wherever it is forbidden and plenty of hypocrites to drink it.'

'You are getting worse all the time, Doctor. But now, how about coming for a whirl with me? The folks will be delighted to see you. They are going to have a barn-raising and a dance after it. Then there's an old gentleman out there who could make it interesting for you at the chess-board.'

The doctor shook his head. 'All the old women in the neighbourhood would be telling me their ills and fancying they were doing me a favour. It is time enough to visit Hades when you're dead.'

'You could go *incog.*, as plain Mr Elliot.'

'How far is it?'

'About four hundred miles. Just a few hours' run.'

'What do you call the place?'

'Worth's Corners. It is called after my father. It is only a hamlet, but then we are just four miles from the city of Owasco.'

The doctor suddenly straightened himself in his chair.

'What name was that?'

'Owasco, a town of twenty thousand inhabitants.'

'I have a notion to accept your invitation, if only for a day.'

'Good! Give me your hand on it. But if you go when I do you will miss the party. It does not come off for a week.'

'What have I ever done, Crombie, to lead you to suspect that I would attend a tramping bee?'

His companion laughed. 'Well, no matter, we shall be glad to have you anyway. But oh, by the way, how is Holtorf?'

'He won't be alive in the morning.'

'Well, well, poor Sarah! She will be all alone in the world. I had a letter from Bergen to-day

and he asks me to see that Jack gets a decent burial, also to do my best for the sister in securing her a good situation. You see they were once our neighbours. Bergen never forgets that.'

'I don't think you need trouble about the matter. Mrs Roach has offered Miss Holtorf a situation, and the firm will defray the other expenses. I am very curious to see this philanthropic brother of yours. You must raise strange people out there.'

'There's many a true thing said in a joke. Look here, doctor. I can promise, in all seriousness, to show you the strangest community you ever saw. Just wait till you see the Townline and the Townliners.'

CHAPTER IV

THE TOWNLINE

WHEN Crombie Worth promised to introduce Dr Elliot to a very remarkable community he did not speak without warrant; indeed, he might have said much more without being guilty of exaggeration. The locality merits a detailed description not only because of its notoriety but because it furnishes the principal scenes and events of our story.

A more uninviting pathway for man or beast could scarcely be imagined than was the 'Townline' between the townships of Rupert and Dalziel. Originally it was a portion of the most important thoroughfare in Lincoln county and was known on the map as Sherman Street, but this particular part, which led for a distance of ten miles through swamps and hills, had long since been abandoned, a specially-constructed road three miles to the west having taken its place.

The road led to nowhere in particular, but it served as an outlet to the farms which fronted upon it, and was a line of demarcation between the two townships.

One would have expected that a highway which two municipalities could have joined in maintaining and improving would have been one of the best roads in the county. But the very opposite was the case; indeed, the fact that the responsibility was divided was perhaps the reason why the road was so neglected. The authorities of the two

corporations were continually at loggerheads over the matter, each side accusing the other of neglecting its share of the work. The contention had gone so far that just before the past elections the chairmen of the two township boards had come to blows.

Occasionally the municipalities united on the question, but it was only to fight in the courts some unwary traveller who, having wrecked his vehicle, maimed his horse or broken his leg, sought to recover damages in the courts. The plaintiff generally won in the lower courts, but the municipalities always appealed again and again until the unfortunate claimant was frozen out of the game through lack of the funds with which to oil the machinery of the law. Knowing full well that (practically speaking) justice was in the market, the township fathers were determined to outbid any unfortunate individual who, by mistake or chance, came to grief through the faultiness of their highways. So much money was expended in law that there was none left for road repairs. One half of the cost of these litigations would have been sufficient to make the Townline a splendid road; but the municipal magnates had the glory of winning the game, the honour and privilege of transferring the funds of the public treasury to the pockets of legal luminaries, and the satisfaction of proving that might was right. The people looked on, applauded, paid their taxes and congratulated themselves that this was the land of the free.

The consequence was that the hills were left ungraded, the bridges and culverts were traps, while in the swampy portions the traveller was only prevented from sinking out of sight by the original logs of the corduroy, half-decayed poles which peeped here and there through the mud and bathed themselves in the pools by the wayside.

In odd places along the way might be seen fertile

fields and respectable dwellings, but the farms, as a rule, were two-thirds waste land.

A stranger might wonder why the farmers along the line did not assert their rights and force the authorities to give them a road on which it would be possible to draw their produce to market.

But there were reasons why the Townliners were so indifferent as to the condition of their only thoroughfare.

These strange people, instead of bringing their grain to market in sacks, were said to distil it into casks and to sell their goods only in the dead of winter, when the deep snow not only filled up the holes and ditches in the highway but made it possible to deliver cargoes at night without disturbing the lightest sleepers.

If there is such a thing as *good* whisky, there cannot be any doubt that the 'swamp juice' of the Townline well deserved that name. Sly tipplers, moderate drinkers, votaries of Bacchus and fighting rowdies all united in giving it a high place as a soul-inspiring beverage. It seemed to be suitable alike for a genteel tipple, a sullen booze or a hilarious spree, and many were the euphonious and fantastic *aliases* under which it was ordered with a sly wink to the vendor.

In spite of the fact that the contraband stuff was sold under their very noses, the revenue officers had failed to locate the fiery worms. Occasionally an officer was discharged for supposed complicity in the traffic, but the law-breakers went on their way rejoicing.

The Townliners were a community who kept strictly by themselves. They never quarrelled over the condition of the road. The Townline might divide two townships but it caused no division among them. Their franchises were given for a consideration, for a tacit agreement that they were to be left unmolested.

They had no church or chapel, and their school generally lacked a teacher. The slender interest taken in educational matters and the social conditions made it almost impossible for an outsider to live amongst them. Latterly they had selected a teacher from amongst themselves and all parties concerned seemed satisfied.

The denizens of the Townline were rougher in dress and manner than their neighbours, more given to profanity and pugnaciousness, more addicted to intemperance and lawlessness, but they were said to be hospitable and kind to those who did not seek to interfere with them.

On gala days they came into town to patronise their patrons, the saloon-keepers; they proclaimed in boisterous tones their ability to jump higher, dive deeper and hit harder than any other creatures on earth; they whooped, shouted and occasionally fought among themselves, but, as a rule, they never interfered with or offered violence to others.

Whether the original settlers, Tom Brett and Matt Walsh, were smugglers in the 'old sod,' or whether they had learned their lesson among the swamps of the Townline, no one could tell. It was quite certain, however, that the race had been a fruitful one. The Bretts and Walshes had multiplied till their name was legion. Everybody was somebody else's cousin. They were mixed and intermarried so promiscuously that neither themselves nor anyone else could trace their true relationship.

Besides manufacturing their distilled damnation the Townliners dealt largely in horses. With them it was a pastime as well as a business. Nor did they have much difficulty in establishing a thriving trade. A Townline horse, besides being fleet and hardy, was generally considered a sagacious animal. A steed from this famous locality was supposed to see clearly in the dark, to be capable of jumping fences and

ditches, of picking his way through bogs, scrambling out of holes, walking fallen logs; in fact, of doing almost anything but voting and reading a newspaper.

The animals had gained the reputation very simply. On holidays, when their debauched riders were scarcely able to hold to their saddles, the knowing beasts would gallop off into the night and carry their masters home in safety over roads which even in daylight would be considered impassable.

But the Townline was not all a *terra-incognita* given over to swamps and lawlessness. Like the desert, it had its oasis. At the northern extremity of the 'line' was a high rolling upland where the settlers were intelligent, industrious, sober and respectable—a little hamlet called Worth's Corners, where a number of thrifty-looking farm buildings were clustered together. Beside these were a church, a school-house, a smithy, a small grocery and the inevitable wayside inn.

This little settlement was separated both socially and practically from the notorious portion of the Townline by a long swamp at the foot of the slope. The residents of the Corners held themselves aloof from their neighbours to the south and never forgot to impress upon strangers that they had no connection with the Townliners.

CHAPTER V

A STARTLED WAYFARER

DOWN the slope leading from the Corners, on a cold drizzly evening in November, on the week following Crombie Worth's departure for his country home, a woman was hurriedly making her way. Her head and face were covered by a dark woollen shawl, her figure was enveloped in a huge waterproof—much too large for her—her gown was pinned up, no doubt to prevent its being soiled, and her feet were clad in heavy, coarse shoes. Her face being covered it was impossible to tell whether she was a blushing maiden, a withered spinster, or a middle-aged housewife, but her quick, firm step and an occasional break into a run made it quite certain that her limbs had not yet been touched by the frosts of age. She was rather under the medium height, and her apparel betokened, if not poverty, at least something very near it.

The cause of her haste was quite apparent. A strong wind from the north-west came in fitful gusts, driving before it clouds of rain like drifting snow, howling over the hills and whirling away through the dark swamps. The evening was not only wet, but raw and cold—cold enough for snow. There *had* been snow a few days before, but it had gradually disappeared, leaving only white streaks beside the fences and patches in some sheltered nooks among the hills. Nature seemed to be weeping, crooning a mournful dirge over the summer that had passed away, over the decay and death which appeared on

every hand; lamenting the memory of green and yellow fields which erstwhile laughed so gaily in the noonday sun; dropping her tears upon the faded leaves which, but a few short weeks before, were fluttering in the breeze and mingling rustling whispers with the songs of birds. The naked trees on the hill-tops, bereft of their beautiful garments, were shivering in the blast, and as the last few leaves were whirled away the branches howled their dirge of death. But in the swamps the patient pines defied the breath of Thule and answered the lamentations of the hills by prophecies of Spring.

More disagreeable weather to be abroad in could scarcely be imagined, not only for its chilling effect on the body but for its depressing influence on the spirits. But our traveller had other reasons for haste than the inclemency of the weather. Though little after four o'clock, the murky sky threatened to bring the day to an early close. The shades of night were already beginning to fall and she had evidently considerable distance to travel. The only dwelling visible in the direction in which she was going was a log house at the farther end of the swamp. Assuming this to be her destination, she had more than a mile of mud to traverse, and not only would she probably get a thorough wetting, but it seemed likely that darkness would overtake her before she reached home.

Most women would have been timid about going alone through the long, dreary morass, but, either from extra courage or long custom, she was apparently indifferent to the lowering shades and sounds of the swamp.

Though walking quickly her head was bent as if in thought. Her attitude seemed to indicate that her mind was not occupied by her journey. When she reached the foot of the slope she was confronted by a long, glistening streak of bog—through courtesy called

the roadway—a prospect ominous enough to daunt the most practised pedestrian. But she was evidently accustomed to such difficulties, for she rather increased than diminished her speed.

Her age is now no longer a secret. Neither shawls nor shades can hide it. She hops and jumps over the holes with a nimbleness which shows the agility of youth.

Reaching a portion of the swamp where the road was sheltered by some tall trees, she first looks inquiringly up the hill and then seats herself on the stump of a fallen pine. She pushes the shawl back from her face, to get her breath more freely, and takes from her pocket an envelope, which she opens.

It contains a note and a photograph, both of which she studies very attentively. Ha! she is actually smiling. Even in the dusk one can see two rows of pearly teeth and a glow in the jet-black eyes. Her hair is of silky black, her forehead is low and broad, and on her chin there is the faint suspicion of a dimple.

Her figure panting with exercise and her face glowing with health form a strange contrast to the gloom of her surroundings. The bristling vitality of her presence appears to chide the withered shrubs and leafless trees, and, in odd contrast to the season of death, offers a fitting emblem of life.

In the distance is heard the melancholy tinkle of a cow-bell; back on the hill a few sheep are bleating plaintively in the shelter of some friendly bushes; away in the swamp the greedy crows are arguing over the carcass of some unfortunate animal mired in the bog, and a myriad of frogs are commencing their evening chorus from the green slime of the stagnant water.

Not a very nice setting for the jewel of happiness, and yet our belated traveller sits smiling and com-

muning with herself, beaming with joy in spite of humble garb and lowly station. Nor is it because she lacks ambition or refinement. Her finely-cut features bespeak both, and hint at a proud and sensitive disposition. Indeed, her beauty and her bearing, in strange contradiction to her rough garments, mark her as one to the manner born. The envelope in her shapely hand has filled the air with the rosy glow of love's young dream, and Cupid's wings have borne her far beyond the limitations of her lowly estate. Storm and cloud, cold and wet cannot chill the warmth and joy within. She reads the letter over and over again and gazes admiringly at the picture.

But soon her face saddens. With a hasty glance towards the hill she slips the treasure into her pocket.

'Poor Bergen! How honest and earnest he is! He is so staunch and true. A princess might be proud of the love of such a man, let alone a penniless girl in her teens. Of course I like him. Why should I not? He has been our friend and benefactor. But then it is so different,' and heaving a deep sigh, she sat for a moment in dreamy silence.

Again she brings forth the picture and gazes at it fondly. 'Crombie's very self! How handsome and distinguished looking he is! It seems strange to be loved by two brothers. But I shall never tell *him* about Bergen. He shall never know his brother's secret—at least not from me. How could I know that Bergen was learning to love me? Poor fellow! His face had the look of a martyr and yet he made no complaint. He even tried to hide his suffering from me. He considers it a privilege to help me, even though I cannot return his love, and he is going to "give me a lift" whenever he can. Oh, it made my heart ache to see him,' she concludes, as tears of pity glisten in her eyes.

Suddenly she rouses herself. 'Dear me! What am I thinking of? It is almost dark. Mother will imagine I am lost and Bergen will be still waiting and watching.'

Carefully inspecting her gown to see that it is not soiled, she draws it more tightly about her limbs—no one can see her now—and recommences her difficult journey towards home.

She has gone only a few steps when something lying in front of her attracts her attention. She stoops to pick it up. It is a home-made woollen glove with a grey and black diagonal pattern, almost covered with mud.

'I declare it is one of the pair I knit for uncle last winter. He'll be glad I've found it. He's such a miser with *all* his wealth. But I wonder how it ever came here? And there is the other! Well, now, isn't that queer?'

She stoops under a bush to secure her find, when suddenly she starts back with a scream, and, dropping gloves, shawl and all, she runs wildly on. She does not go far, however, before she recovers her courage. She pauses with her hands over her heart and looks behind her.

Her white face stands out clearly against the silky black folds of her hair, her eyes are wild and staring, and her form fairly shakes with terror and excitement. But she presses her lips tightly together and a look of determination comes over her.

'Why am I such a coward? It may have been imagination. I wonder if Bergen heard me scream. Not likely. The wind is blowing the wrong way. But he'll be there; he said he would. Perhaps he is watching me now.'

Slowly she starts backwards to where her shawl lies in the mud, to where the cause of her terror is hidden. With clenched hands and trembling limbs she presses bravely forward. Her gown is now

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trailing in the mud and the huge mackintosh has almost slipped from her shoulders. No longer does she pick her steps. Her feet are ankle deep in the slime. She looks neither to right nor left but keeps her eyes fixed on a bush beside her shawl.

Tighter and tighter do her fingers press together; firmer and firmer are the muscles of her face drawn; whiter and whiter grows her cheek.

Finally she reaches the spot, gives a reassuring look towards the corner, and seizing a bush to steady herself, she takes a step into the swamp. She pauses for courage and then stoops in front of her. But only for a second. With a single bound she regains the road and runs, half shouting, half screaming, up the hill towards the Corners.

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CHAPTER VI

WARP AND WOOF

IN order to comprehend the meaning and importance of the last chapter it will be necessary to turn backwards and review the circumstances which preceded it.

On the previous day an event of great local importance had taken place. Mr Worth had raised the frame of a new barn and the occasion had called forth one of the largest gatherings ever seen in the district. The Worths were widely known and very popular. They kept an open house. The gentle and simple, the great and small of the county had all partaken of their hospitality at one time or other. Besides the stout yeomen of the neighbourhood to whom the work in hand was entrusted, scores of young people from far and near came to enjoy the festivities which are customary on such occasions.

The whole affair had been a decided success. The work of raising the great beams into their positions went on without a single mishap or interruption, the 'party' in the evening was honoured by the presence of many influential people from Owasco, and all present enjoyed to the fullest extent the revel in the big kitchen and the hearty welcome of the motherly hostess. The dancing lasted into the still, small hours of the night, and for a time the sordid cares of earth were triumphantly trampled under foot.

The excitement, however, was followed by its

corresponding reaction. To-day the Worth household was in great confusion and the cheerful hostess of the previous night sat disconsolately in her arm-chair, gazing at the heap of logs blazing on the open hearth. She was suffering not only the natural consequences of loss of sleep and undue excitement, but she was in grief over her beloved son Crombie, who, instead of remaining under the maternal roof a week longer, as he originally intended, had returned to the city that morning. She was grieved to part with him so unexpectedly, but even that was not sufficient to produce the careworn look on her comely face. She was anxious and uneasy about him. He was the apple of her eye, the idol of her heart, and there was something in his manner she had never seen before, a subtle change in his attitude towards his brother Bergen and herself which she could not understand. Mr Worth, some fifteen years his wife's senior, had noticed nothing unusual in his younger son's manner. He pooh-poohed her uneasiness, and, in his blunt way, insisted that she was suffering the consequences of an overloaded stomach.

But this failed to reassure her. Crombie's laugh appeared to have lost its old-time wholesome ring and there was not the usual candour in his eyes. She felt instinctively that no one else had noticed the change, and was pleased to think it was so because it left her reasonable grounds for attributing her forebodings to her own morbid imagination.

She tried to dismiss the subject from her mind, but it returned again and again. She had never experienced any severe trouble or sorrow excepting when her only daughter—an infant of a few months—was taken from her. Her sons had been a comfort and a credit to her. Bergen was a tower of moral strength to his parents; he had taken all the care and charge from his father's shoulders, and had farmed so

successfully that he had been able to set his brother up in business. She had no fears for *his* future. *He* needed no motherly care. But Crombie, her chubby-faced boy, was always fond of pleasure and had not the iron will of his brother. In Chicago 'Worth the druggist' was looked upon as a very fortunate young man with a great future before him. He had a good standing in society and a wholesome reputation as a business man, but perhaps all was not gold that glittered. Was there a shadow now looming up in the horizon? Was the heart of her baby becoming tainted with the wickedness of a great city?

Her reverie was broken by a cold cheek pressed against her own and a small hand caressing her chin.

'A penny for your thoughts, Mammy.'

'Oh, it's you, Naera. I'm glad you have come. I am feeling so lonely.'

A handsome young lady, with flashing black eyes and cheeks flushed with exercise, seated herself on the arm of the old lady's chair and looked into the troubled face with a kindly smile.

'Why, Mammy, what can be wrong? I never saw you look like this before. You are not feeling well. You worked too hard yesterday and last night. You must be fagged out. Such a houseful as you had was too much for you.'

'Yes. Everything is in a muss, and I don't seem able to do anything.'

'I knew you would be in a stew, and I have come to help you,' explained Naera, removing her wraps.

'I needed your company too, dearie. I was feeling broken-hearted about Crombie going away. I can't seem to—'

'And is he gone already?' broke in her companion, suddenly, as she turned away to hide the pallor that overspread her face.

'Yes, he *would* go this morning—some sudden news he got last night.'

'It must have been sudden. He told me last night before he went out that he wasn't going home till next week. Come into the parlour here if you wish to talk, Mammy,' and Miss Delavan, with broom and duster, commenced restoring to order the chaos of the previous night.

'How did you think Crombie looked, dearie? Do you think he looked as well as usual?' said Mrs Worth, with a ring of anxiety in her voice.

The young lady turned towards her companion with a look of surprise. 'He never looked better in his life—at least I thought so,' she added with a slight flush. 'I never knew him to be more pleasant.'

The anxious mother gave a sigh of relief. 'He is a handsome boy, Crombie. The Blackwood girls and Katie Fenwick made a great deal of him, but it is likely he has his eye on some fine lady in the city. I thought I could see a change in him. Maybe he is in love, Naera?'

Miss Delavan fussed about the room more energetically than ever, but did not venture a reply.

'Mr Leonard was telling me last night that there is a rich widow in Chicago just breaking her heart for Crombie. She invites him to five-o'clock teas, and even calls at the store. He is a nice, friendly young man, Mr Leonard.'

'Indeed I have a very different opinion of him,' replied her companion, warmly. 'He has a dissipated look. I don't like his face. It's a pity he ever went to Chicago. He's no fit companion for Crombie.'

'Really now! Do you think so?' exclaimed Mrs Worth with astonishment and dismay. 'I thought he was real nice. Well now! He might lead Crombie into something bad. Dear me!'

'I told Crombie what I thought. He was going to introduce Mr Leonard last night, but I objected. I said, "No, Crombie, I am very particular about making acquaintances and I think *you* should be more so."

The old lady's face was now full of concern.

'And what did he say?'

'He called me a little Puritan, and said that Jeff was a prince of good fellows.'

Mrs Worth sat motionless and looked inquiringly at her companion as if expecting further information.

'I suppose,' continued Naera, 'that intemperance is Mr Leonard's worst fault, but I imagine there is something worse in him. There is a sinister look in his face which is peculiarly repellent to me. I scarcely see what grounds for companionship there can be between him and Crombie. Dissipation leaves marks on men which neither evening dress nor cosmetics can remove. But God help me, it ill becomes me to criticise habits of intemperance after my own brother's appearance last night. Oh, Mammy, it nearly killed me!' Here the speaker sank into a chair, and burying her face in Mrs Worth's lap, burst into a fit of sobbing.

The old lady took the young girl on her knee like a child and put her arms about her. But she did not speak. No words could gild that grief. Silence was more eloquent. Naera was the first to speak. 'It seems that Bergen spoke to Crombie about it. He said that the only excuse for keeping company with Jeff was the desire to reform him. If that was the object there could be no danger, but if not, Crombie had better drop the acquaintance. There now, Mammy, I see you are worried. I came to comfort you, but I am only a Job's comforter after all. Of course, it isn't serious. Crombie has eyes and ears of his own, and Jeff will be there only till Christmas. It is all right, Mammy. Don't worry.'

'Do you think so? You always had a good word for Crombie. That reminds me, he left a wee parcel for you. He said it was a likeness. He had some taken before he came home. Here it is.'

Naera coloured as she eagerly caught the envelope

and pushed it into her pocket. 'Come now, Mammy. We must work like bees. Busy hands for brooding minds.'

For the rest of the afternoon Naera appeared to be in the best of spirits. With arms bare and gown tucked up, she plied her broom and duster with elfish activity, and even hummed snatches of song. In her efforts to cheer and comfort her hostess she found a degree of relief from her own cares, which was positively astonishing, though the unread note in her pocket may have had more to do with it than she cared to confess.

It was almost dusk when their task was accomplished and Naera prepared to hurry home. But Mrs Worth protested.

'You must not go before tea, Naera. Bergen will take you home in the buggy. You needn't hurry, dearie. Sit down. I lent my gossamer to Mrs Detzler, and the umbrella is missing, but Bergen will drive fast and you won't get wet.'

'Why, Mammy, I have nothing on that can take any harm. Look at my gown—an old one for the purpose. Besides, you know, I am neither sugar nor salt, I am an old pioneer. Here's a kiss,' and with a laughing 'good-night' she was off.

She had scarcely reached the lane when she heard a voice calling her from the barn. 'Wait, Naera! It is both wet and muddy. Let me drive you home.'

'Thank you, Bergen, very much. But I do not think the rain will amount to much, and as for mud, you know I am an experienced clod-hopper. I am sure I look it.'

'Please, Naera, wait. I ask it as a favour. I'd like to have a little talk with you. Just a minute. There is a mackintosh in the buggy.'

She bit her lip with annoyance. 'Dear me,' she said to herself, 'it must be something unusual. He has no doubt heard about Norbert. Poor Bergen

is always studying the welfare of others, but I do wish he had waited.'

She fumbled impatiently at the unopened letter in her pocket. 'Why, Bergen, that coat is large enough to bury me in. Besides, it seems to be clearing up now.'

'It is no harm to be prepared,' he replied as he hurried to her side. 'If you don't object I'll walk a little piece with you.'

For a few moments they plodded silently along without exchanging a word. *She* was waiting for him to open the conversation, and *he* was too much embarrassed to know exactly how to commence. Finally he found his tongue.

'I've been thinking about your brother, Naera. I feel as if I ought to do something for him. But he is too intelligent for common drudgery. He told you he had left his situation in Chicago because he was ashamed of himself?'

The young girl nodded her head sadly and thoughtfully.

'If he was some ordinary lad,' continued Bergen, 'I would know what to do for him, but his gentlemanly instincts appear to be in his way. There seems to be no place for men of that stamp in this country. It is special and not general intelligence which counts nowadays.'

'God knows, he needs some strong hand to guide him. But he is gone again and didn't even say good-bye.'

'Gone again? When did he go?'

She looked up at him with a troubled face. 'Last night. You know he went home with me. He refused to go to bed, but he lay on the lounge and we made him as comfortable as possible. When we awoke this morning he was gone. Poor mother has been crying all morning. She thinks something has happened him. She had an awful dream about him the other night.'

The big man's face softened as he looked down at her. He took her gently by the arm. 'Was he sober when he left?'

Naera's face reddened. 'We don't know. Last night he fell three times on the way home. But my heart yearned for him in spite of it all,' she continued with a dry sob. 'He tried to be so kind and pleasant with me. He never forgets to be respectful, and when I scold him he never resents it but owns up to everything. No one could help loving him,' she concluded as she wiped the moisture from her eyes.

'Don't fret, Naera. He may turn up to-morrow. You know he always goes away after anything of that kind. I must try and do something with him. I must think it out.'

She took his big hand in hers and gave it a grateful squeeze. 'Bergen, you are our good angel.'

'Look, Naera, if that hand of mine had to be cut off for your sake I'd give it as freely as a chip.' He blurted this out with an eagerness which betrayed him.

She glanced side-wise at the speaker and turned pale. 'Had we not better wait till another time to finish our chat? The rain is coming on again. See,' and she pointed to the drifting rain which was fast approaching.

'So it is. Let us run into the church-shed for a moment. Ah, it is better here,' he added as they reached the shelter. 'Now, let me put the mackintosh on you.'

Her grotesque appearance as she donned the waterproof gave them both a hearty laugh and relieved the tension of the moment, but the elfish locks which strayed over her forehead and the laughing light in her eyes set his heart on fire. Her coarse garments seemed only to enhance her beauty. He was kneeling beside her fastening up the skirts of the coat, and her dimpled face, lit up with a smile, was bent over him.

Suddenly there awakened within her the suspicion that Bergen's feelings towards her contained more than mere friendship. There was something in his manner she had never seen before, a something which made her feel nervous and ill at ease. She was not kept long in doubt.

As he was completing the task of making her rain-proof, he said in low tones, 'To tell you the God's truth, Naera, I have been waiting for a long time to speak to you alone, and now I am ashamed to commence. I'm not ashamed of loving you but of being the rough snag of a fellow I am. It seems a presumptuous thing for me to tell my love when you are so much above me in every way.'

'Oh, Bergen, stop. Let me sit down a moment. I feel so weak.'

He brought a box from the corner and placed it for her to be seated. Then she buried her face in her hands and commenced sobbing. For a time he watched her in silence as if to read the meaning of her emotion. He stood leaning against a post with a yearning look in his face and a trace of moisture in his eyes. His cheek was pale and his voice quavered.

'Don't, Naera. Don't cry like that. You'll have me blubbing too,' he said, choking a sob and brushing his sleeve across his eyes.

The depth of his emotion seemed to relieve hers. She stole a glance at him as he stood with arms folded and cap pushed back from his forehead. There was a beauty in his face she never saw before.

'You mustn't take it so hard, little woman. You are the best and bravest little girl in the world. I'll stick to that anyway.'

Then he pulled his cap over his eyes and commenced pacing the floor in front of her.

'I can see it is all up with me, Naera. I can save you the pain of telling me. I might have known you

were too sweet and gentle a creature for such as me. I thought you knew how I felt all along. Don't cry, little woman. I'd rather have bit my tongue off than hurt your poor heart.'

'Oh, Bergen, forgive my blind selfishness. I should not have been so friendly with you—no, I do not mean that—I should have been more thoughtful as to how you would construe my actions towards you. But ever since we came here I have looked upon you as a big brother and accepted all your many kindnesses. I am ashamed to think of all you have done for me and mine and how little I can give in return. Oh, Bergen,' she continued, as she dropped on her knees and held up her hands in supplication, 'I can only ask you to forgive me.'

'Don't you dare kneel to me, Naera Delavan—a rough lout like me. If there's any kneeling to be done it's me that ought to do it.'

He caught her by the arms and raised her gently to her feet. His face was white and set and every feature betokened suffering, but his voice had regained its accustomed firmness.

'Never mind, little woman. I'm not going to sulk over it. Just at the present minute it looks as if there was nothing left to live for, but I'll take a fresh hold and down it. I'll stand right up to the rack and bear it like a man.'

'I couldn't bear not to be good friends with you. You won't be vexed with me, Bergen?'

'Not one bit, Naera,' he replied with emphasis. 'This does not change my regard for you one whit.'

'You are too generous. I don't deserve it.'

'Stop, little woman. You are wrong there. I've got too much *self* in me and that's what's got me where I stand now. What right had I to get it into my head that you loved *me* as *I* did you? What business had I to suppose that every simple friendly

act of yours was a token of affection? When you foot it up it's nothing but sheer selfishness. That's the thing I've got to crowd back on. But come, let us go. The rain has slackened up again.'

Naera placed her hand pleadingly on his arm. 'Don't come any farther. It is not necessary, Bergen.'

'I don't like to let you go through the swamp alone.'

'Yes, but you have only your smock on, and you'd soon get wet through. Besides, you know I am accustomed to it.' Then, seeing the look of disapproval in his face, she added, in coaxing tones, 'You can wait here and watch me if you like.'

'Very well,' he replied, taking her hand and raising it respectfully to his lips. 'Don't trouble your head about my silliness. I'll see to Norbert. Tell your mother I'll take him in charge. And as for yourself,' he added, with a sad smile, 'I have still the privilege of kicking a stone out of your way and giving you a lift whenever I can. But, Naera, you must not be afraid of me or hold aloof, for I *promise solemnly never to repeat my folly*. May God bless this little hand and whoever has the good fortune to win it.'

Then, pushing her from him, he ran back into a dark corner to shut her from his sight.

CHAPTER VII

THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH

HAD Bergen Worth been asked for a graphic description of himself he would probably have said that he was a 'peculiar stamp of a man, a shade coarse in the grain, full of bad streaks, but heading, as far as he knew, in the right direction!'

In this he would have done himself a grave injustice. His nature was strong and, to some extent, undisciplined, but there was nothing unrefined in his instincts. In many respects he was as tender as a child, but his manner was unpolished, his appearance was somewhat uncouth, and the rugged associations in his life had tainted his language with a rough vernacular. The peculiarity in his speech, however, seemed to pass unnoticed. It was lost in the earnestness and terseness with which he usually expressed himself; it seemed to be a part of himself. With him everything was sacrificed to clearness. He knew nothing of the rules of grammar, for he had been taken from school at a tender age, and yet he invariably expressed the exact shade of meaning he intended to convey. His sentences were often delivered like a succession of blows, each one intended to drive the nail home. He might, at times, shock prudes or scholars, but he was never really vulgar. The gravest subjects were discussed in a matter-of-fact tone which might have given the impression that he was unfeeling and irreverent had it

not been for the conscientious earnestness which illuminated his face and gave force to his words.

The masses loved to hear Bergen speak. When thoroughly warmed to his subject his uncouth diction disappeared and he became intensely eloquent. In everyday life or on the platform no man commanded a better hearing; in fact, he was often listened to with bated breath when speakers with faultless delivery met with indifference. He seemed to make the audience feel that he was one of themselves, that he spoke with them and for them. He had none of the polish which so often suggests insincerity; he went at once right to the heart of his subject, and had the rare faculty of knowing the exact points of information or discussion which the occasion required. As he was at the anvil so was he on the platform, without the slightest trace of affectation or assumption. He always appeared to be, and, in fact, really *was* in earnest, and when moved his face took on a beauty which it lacked in repose.

But Bergen was not handsome. His large ears, closely-cropped head and enormous hands might have given him a grotesque appearance had it not been for his massive brow, firm mouth and large blue eyes. In apparel he was careless even to eccentricity, and, in consequence, was a special victim for the clothiers of Owasco.

To an ordinary observer Bergen's past life appeared very uneventful, but to him it was a constant succession of battles, not only with his surroundings but with his baser self. He saw his faults and imperfections and looked upon his *alter ego* as his deadliest foe. He felt at times the instincts of the savage and saw the hidden fires which burned fiercely in his soul. He often suspected and sometimes *declared* that he was a *bad* man.

There were times when, tempted by affront, he longed to strike, but too well he knew the danger of

unchaining the tiger within him. Battle for him must always mean victory or death, *Oft* did his fingers itch to chastise baseness or deceit; again and again did he picture the savage joy with which some day he might trample tyranny under foot. In the glow of his fire he saw the battles of might and right; the sparks which flew from his hammer were missiles aimed at malefactors, the anvil's ring was changed to clash of arms, and every blow which fell upon the shining steel seemed to strike a dozen foemen down.

His anvil was his friend, his consoler, his teacher and his confessor. Its answering ring was ever leal and true, its readiness to assist him seemed to hint at the brotherhood of man, and its unyielding firmness spoke of the rocks of everlasting truth. The hardened steel which yielded to his blows taught him to say 'I will.' It implanted in his heart a desire to take destiny by sheer force and shape its ends to his will.

But to-night all was changed. He who had previously bent everything to his will seemed helpless and hopeless. He had watched over Naera for years, never questioning for a moment that she was to be his own. In his visions of the future she had always been in the foreground; his every presentiment had told him that she was to be his wife. Nor was it vanity which caused this misapprehension, for he was quite conscious of his own unworthiness, but the something within him which taught him to expect that everything would follow his will and purpose. In all his undertakings here was his first defeat.

For a time after Naera left him he paced the earthen floor of the shed with folded arms and bent head. In spite of his homely garb there was something about him which commanded respect. Neither the faded cloth cap, the blue derry blouse nor the fustian trousers could disguise the dignity of his bearing.

But his attitude was as full of despair as that of the defeated gladiator. The set of his head was not as firm as usual, his stride was less fearless and aggressive, and there was not the old-time relentless exactitude in the folding of his arms. The lines of firmness about his mouth were less tense and the lustre of his deep blue eyes had faded.

He seated himself in the manger in the darkest corner and covered his face with his hands to shut out the light. 'Steady, Bergen, steady! Keep calm and size it all up. I must find out just where I stand. This has thrown my mind clean out of focus. This is a lesson I'm not versed in. Teaching Bible-class for years and preaching against selfishness when, at the same time, the very thing was eating me clean hollow. Oh, but ain't I the self-righteous egotist! And to think I couldn't see it. I ought to have known she didn't care for me. She loves Crombie. I can see that now. Girls take men mostly by their looks.'

He jumped from his seat and went forward to watch the receding figure now almost lost in the dusk. 'Poor little soul! What a struggle life has been for her. What cares and worries she has had, and yet she is but a child in years. She is the real gold, the pure metal. What a soldier she would have made. Fight to the last and die at her post. And then what patience she has shown in her trials. She is the bravest and sweetest of God's creatures. I'm not fit for her, but if I can't win her I can try to be more worthy of her. I've never had the dross hammered out of me. I've got my first trouncing to-day.

'And so I've got to strangle this thing they call love,' he continued as he turned away and again paced the floor. 'That will take some hammering. I rather guess when it's all sized up there's a good deal of selfishness in love, and yet I could embrace

the pain and suffering that would save her. Is a man justified in letting it get such a heavy hold on him? I don't seem to have it footed up right. I'll go and have a crack at the anvil and see what *it* says. One thing sure, I've got to slacken up on the game of saying "I will." It has got me clean downed. *The chap that's shouting "Me, Me" all the time has got to be shut down on. Bergen Worth is the lad I've got to conquer.*

'Hello! What's that? Screaming? It's Naera's voice. In Heaven's name, what can be wrong?'

Without stopping to ascertain the cause of the trouble he ran pell-mell down the hill, shouting, 'I'm coming, Naera. Don't be afraid.'

In a few moments her figure came out of the gloom, running with outstretched arms. Bergen looked to see if anybody or anything were pursuing her, and a tigerish look shone in his eyes, but there was nothing in sight to explain her alarm. When he was within a few feet of her she cried, 'Oh, Bergen!' and fell on her face in the mud.

He picked her up in his arms as if she were a feather. One look at her white face made his knees tremble. He had never seen anyone faint.

'Oh, God! she is dead. This is awful. Naera, Naera, open your eyes. It's me—Bergen. The poor little dove. Naera, Naera!'

But there was no response. She was white and motionless as death. Choking his sobs, he hugged his burden to his breast and ran with all his speed up the hill, through the mud, down the lane, and burst open the kitchen door.

'Oh, mother, look! Naera's dead.' He staggered to a lounge, where he laid her and knelt beside her. 'Something—in the swamp—did it. I don't—know what,' he managed to blurt out between the sobs.

'Bergen, lad, don't take on so. She's only fainted.

Look! Her lips are getting red again. Here's father. He'll know.'

'What? Naera hurt? Frightened, more like. Leave the door open and sprinkle water on her face. She won't die—she's good stuff. But I never knew her to faint either in pain or danger. It must have been something terrible to frighten her so badly. See, she is opening her eyes.'

The fainting girl looked feebly about and then a look of terror came over her,

'What is it, little woman?' asked Bergen, caressing her hand. 'What is it?'

'Uncle Nicholas is lying dead in the swamp.'

CHAPTER VIII

WRAPPED IN MYSTERY

IN forty-eight hours after the discovery of the body of Nicholas Cargill, crowds of strangers from far and near came to visit the scene of the tragedy. The excitement spread like wild-fire. The position of the wound on the head put the theory of suicide out of the question. The circumstances and surroundings all pointed to murder.

Worth's Corners suddenly became a place of great notoriety. Detectives, constables, photographers and reporters were in continual procession to and from the swamp. The newspapers teemed with pictorial sketches of the Townline and the Corner, with woodcuts of the deceased and other prominent citizens of the locality, and with startling paragraphs full of exaggerated accounts of the Townline's notoriety.

Besides the minions of the law and those actuated merely by curiosity, the visitors to the scene included many whose individual interests were involved.

The deceased was a very wealthy man. He owned almost one fourth of the township in which he lived. He had money loaned and invested in many other ways, both at home and abroad. Banks, life assurance companies, loan companies, note-shavers and embarrassed landowners were all more or less financially affected by his decease.

He was a man of very retiring disposition. He lived on one of his farms about a mile west of Worth's Corners and was rarely seen away from home, excepting

at public auctions where farm property was being offered for sale, or at his bankers, where he went once a week with unvarying regularity. He occasionally attended services at the chapel in Owasco, but was never known to appear at any social gathering or function.

The whole neighbourhood was thunderstruck to see Mr Cargill at the 'party.' It was positively his first appearance. 'Something's going to happen when Old Nick is out' was the general remark that night. The only explanation of it was that Crombie had brought a famous chess-player from Chicago to meet the old gentleman. The eccentric bachelor was an inordinate lover of chess. Indeed, he was more. He was not only a frequent contributor of problems to leading dailies, but under his *nom de plume* of 'Rook' was a noted authority on the game. To meet some local champion he occasionally took an afternoon in town, and it was the expectation of meeting a foeman worthy of his steel that induced him to lay aside his usual habits of reserve on this occasion.

A family named Swackheiser worked the farm and occupied the greater portion of the house. They kept his apartments in order and did his cooking, but beyond this they never ventured, for he gave them to understand that he desired no closer intimacy, though he *did* make an exception of little Gracie, a child of six or seven, the youngest daughter of his tenant. She accompanied him on his daily strolls and furnished the only companionship he desired.

The deceased was known to have considerable money on his person on the night of the dance, for, when solicited for a subscription to the 'fiddler's fund,' a large roll of crisp new bills were seen in his pocket-book. He complained at the time that he had no change, but on being assured that the 'change' would be made, he reluctantly took from his roll of bills a ten-dollar note.

The case was supposed to be one of robbery as well as murder, and the perpetrator of the foul deed was thought to be one of the notorious gang who lived by cheating Uncle Sam out of his just dues. Not that there appeared to be any evidence pointing in that direction, but the Townliners were suspected on general principles. Knowing ones shook their heads and hinted at the possibility of the tragedy forever remaining a mystery. These outlaws had so long evaded justice in other matters that it was possible they might be equally fortunate in the present case.

What Mr Cargill was doing in the swamp, or how he came to be near it at all, was a matter for much speculation. His natural route home would be either the first side road to the north or directly through the fields of the Bolton farm, which was almost opposite Worth's. Evidently he had been lured into the swamp before being struck down. But who could have ~~carried~~ carried him? He both feared and hated the Townliners, and it was highly improbable that he would trust himself alone in their company, much less allow any of them to lead him to such a suggestive locality as the swamp. This led up to the idea that there must have been at least two assassins and that the victim had been gagged and carried to the swamp by sheer force.

From the time he left home, on the afternoon of the thirteenth, he had never returned—so the Swackheimers said—consequently he must have lain in the swamp all that night and the next day until discovered by Miss Delavan. Old Mr Swackheimer set out to make inquiries for the missing man at noon on the fourteenth, and was returning home, after a fruitless search, when he heard of the discovery of the body. They thought nothing of his remaining away over night, the roads and weather being so unfavourable; but when at noon on the following day Mr Cargill

had not put in an appearance his tenants began to suspect that something must be wrong. The deceased had spoken about having important business in Owasco on the fourteenth and had signified his intention of going to town that day, notwithstanding the fact that he had spent the previous day there.

The swamp was examined very carefully over and over again. Blood-stains were found on the margin of the roadway a few yards further into the swamp, while a track in slime, and the marks on the clothing of the deceased, showed that the body had been dragged some distance to the spot where it was found. But the inexplicable part of it was that there were not the faintest traces of blood upon the body or clothing, and the point from which the body had been dragged was in the opposite direction from the blood-stains on the roadway. Original footprints were impossible in such soft ground, though in any case they would have been obliterated by the crowds of curiosity-mongers who visited the spot.

The pockets of the deceased were rifled but his watch still remained, a fact which was supposed to indicate great cunning on the part of the murderers.

The wound on the deceased had never bled. The skin was unbroken, and the only tangible clue to the mystery was the broken point of an umbrella-handle or walking-cane clutched in the hand of the dead man.

There was a peculiar contradiction in the circumstance and surroundings which worked excitement to a fever heat. If the dead man had never bled, who had? If the stains on the road were from a wound inflicted by the victim on the assassin, why were they not at the point from which the body was dragged and where marks of a struggle were found? Again, it seemed impossible that the victim could have inflicted a wound producing such hemorrhage without having received some traces of blood on his clothing.

But the mystery was still further deepened when the chambers of the deceased were opened. Everything was in a state of disorder and confusion. Papers were strewn on the floor, ink was spilt on the carpet, cabinets were burst open and the door of the safe blown off.

The Swackheimers could in no way account for this. Mr Cargill always kept his rooms in the most scrupulous order. The family were positive that no one could have entered at night and handled things so violently without arousing them, but on the afternoon of the thirteenth they had all been attending the wedding of an elder son who lived a few miles away. A young man named Garret, the hired help of Mr Swackheimer, drove Mr Cargill into town that day and back again to Worth's Corners in the evening, the family reaching home before the young man returned.

But the most perplexing item was *yet* to come. Among the papers was found a mutilated will, executed some two years previously, in which the deceased, after a handsome legacy to little Gracie, bequeathed his entire possessions to his niece, Naera Delavan. The body of the instrument was nearly intact; the intentions of the deceased were clearly set forth, but the signature was *torn off*.

Burglary and murder were comparatively easy to understand, but who, in Heaven's name, could have any interest in destroying the will?

The inquest did very little to clear up the mystery. The jury returned a verdict of murder by some party or parties unknown. But the sudden disappearance of Norbert Delavan, together with his relationship to the deceased, created a suspicion which increased daily.

CHAPTER IX

STRANGE TIES

IN the meantime Crombie Worth had returned to Chicago, and on the evening of the fifteenth was at his private desk, going over his ledgers with one of his clerks, when Dr Elliot, with his usual smile, came sauntering in.

'Good evening, Crombie. I see you have returned. You received my letter?'

'Yes, and I arrived last night,' replied the druggist, dismissing the clerk and motioning his visitor into a chair.

'Your suave manager did not wait for your return?'

'No, and I am pleased that he is gone. Fortunately his pilfering was not very serious and his running away saves me the trouble of taking him to task. You must have been dubious of him.'

'I came in every day as usual while you were away and I noticed several little things which made me suspicious. I didn't like his looks, though for that matter all men are thieves. It is only a question of price.'

'What, what? Has your pessimism gone mad? But there, before we argue the point let me thank you again,' said the druggist, giving his friend a hearty handshake.

Crombie was much attached to his cynical friend, and, if one might judge by appearances, the feeling was reciprocated.

The doctor's acquaintances marvelled at his attachment to Crombie Worth. That a man almost devoid of sentiment, a pessimist, who had lost all confidence in the future of mankind, a cynic, who saw only the vices of his fellow-creatures, a misanthrope, who distrusted and suspected everybody, should make an exception of the young druggist was a matter for much speculation. Crombie was the exact antithesis of his friend. He trusted everybody, taking them to be as honest and candid as himself; he was buoyant, cheerful, impressionable and emotional. He was a conservative in religion and politics, a conclusionist and a hero-worshipper.

Dr Elliot was one of Crombie's heroes. Once, when he and the doctor were out boating on Lake Michigan, the boat was upset by a squall, and nothing but the physician's presence of mind saved them from drowning. The doctor, after assisting Crombie, who could not swim, to a position where he could hold on to the keel of the overturned boat, gave one of his cynical laughs.

'It's just doubtful, Crombie, whether I did you a kindness then or not. Some day you may have reason to curse me for it. I wouldn't mind the long sleep myself, but I suppose the sensation of drowning is not very pleasant. When I get tired of the play I intend to ring down the curtain myself.'

The white-caps were breaking around them, filling their mouths with water and spray, the wind was off shore and not a sail was in sight.

'But we are not out of the woods yet,' continued the doctor. 'It's only an off-chance whether we've been seen from the shore. I promised myself the pleasure of getting even with that Italian count to-night and I don't like to have fate fool me out of it. Pshaw!' he went on, as he blew some water from his mouth and brushed his hair from his eyes, 'I didn't have any say as to when or where I came

into this world, but I *did* intend to have a voice in my exit.'

Crombie broke down. He wept like a child. 'Poor mother, this will kill her. Doctor, I have the best mother that ever God put breath in, and a brother who would die for me; besides, I've done a good many wrong things I'd like to make right.'

'Don't excite yourself, Crombie. It isn't worth while. It will be all the same a hundred years hence. Life is a d—d hoax anyway, a delusion and a snare, a game that isn't worth the candle. If it weren't for the unpleasant sensation and the devilish coldness of the water I wouldn't mind the trip to Davy Jones's locker.'

'Don't, Doctor. Don't blaspheme. This may be our last hour. I hope God will forgive me, and you too. My hands are getting numb. I shall have to let go.'

'Wait. I have a couple of handkerchiefs. We'll tie our wrists together over the keel and then destiny can do as she d—d pleases as far as I'm concerned, for I am getting tired of *this* game. You seem to have a bigger stake than I have, so you can suit yourself about asking favours. But there's really none going.'

When picked up by a rescuing boat both men were unconscious. Crombie never forgot his companion's first words.

'It's d—d humiliating to have fate playing fast and loose with a fellow like that. But there's one consolation—my friend, the Italian, will have to foot the bill.'

To-day Crombie was in a moralising mood. He was inclined to lecture his friend on his pessimism and his gambling.

'You say every man will steal. Pooh! I wouldn't be afraid to trust you alone here for a month.'

'That's because your stuff isn't up to my figure. You haven't got my price here, and as for larceny, why, it never pays.'

'Do you really mean to say you would steal?'

'I would if the pile were big enough.'

'I don't believe you. How is it that you pay back what you borrow? Ha! I have you there.'

'That's policy, not conscience. If I didn't always pay back *you* wouldn't always lend, and I might often be put to the painful necessity of breaking on my little bank account. It's the same thing in playing "poker." You often have to throw an apple where there's an orchard.'

'I suppose you were gambling all the while I was away?'

'Yes, and enjoying myself remarkably. I emptied a fellow's pockets last night.'

'I don't see how your conscience would allow you to do it. You shouldn't be so unscrupulous.'

The doctor laughed. 'Well, that's cool. Scruples, did you say? Why, man, the only scruples in *any* drug store are those on the scales. When you buy goods you simply wager that you will sell them at an advance of two hundred per cent. All business is gambling. Even agriculture contains a large element of speculation and chance. Everybody knows that the only difference between the Stock Exchange and the gaming-house is the size of the stakes.'

'Suppose I admit your contention for the sake of argument, you have still the overwhelming temptation to cheat and steal in gaming with cards. If "poker" is not injurious, why do you so strenuously advise me never to play?'

'Because, my dear fellow, you are just the kind of a man who could never learn to play. You'd not only lose your money but your head as well. With me it is different. I like to play and win, of course,

but I even like to play and lose. But, you see, I don't lose very often. I can win from nine men out of ten. I never stake more than I can afford to lose, and the consequence is that not only can I live comfortably on my "poker" earnings but I can put something in the stocking as well.'

Crombie shook his head. 'It must surely give you a pang to take a man's last dollar and leave him no option but to blow his brains out.'

'Does *your* conscience prick you when you charge three prices for an article—when you give some poor devil a bottle of coloured water and charge him a dollar? Do you stop to ask whether he has a cent left? And as for blowing one's brains out, it is the proper thing to do when your money and resources are gone. If those rioting idiots who were burning and smashing everything before them a short time ago had blown each other's heads off—for they had no brains—what a boon it would have been to themselves and to the city. The most of us would be better dead if we only knew it.'

'That is begging the question altogether. We have no right to take away that which we cannot restore—not even from ourselves.'

'Upon my word, Crombie, I gave you credit for having a little more sense. Why, *the only real privilege in life is the power to touch the button and put the lights out.* Instead of pronouncing a man insane for committing suicide, we should call millions of them idiots for *not doing so.* When I sat starving for a year waiting for patients, fawning and creeping to the few I did have, I can see now that I was an idiot for not taking a dose of prussic acid. The only idiocy is in choosing some painful, agonising or unsightly means of exit from this vale of tears. When I went into medicine I thought that all I had to do was to get medals and diplomas. Poor fool! I didn't know then that it was a thousand times

easier to acquire skill than to find a market for it.'

'There's a good deal of truth in that. The college professors take your fees and pat you on the back, neither knowing nor caring what becomes of you.'

'They're the most cold-blooded set of vandals on earth. A few sharpers get together and build what they call a college, but what is really nothing more or less than a factory for turning out doctors, preachers, lawyers and druggists—a mill where bogus theories and rotten hypotheses are ground into a lot of dupes. And so they keep on grinding, year after year, fitting at least twenty-five per cent. of their manufactured goods to ornament jails, asylums and gutters. Pah! The *alma mater* sort of loyalty was the silliest bluff of all.'

'Come, come, Doctor. You are too bitter altogether. There's nothing to justify you in going so far as that.'

'You know nothing about it. You never had to suffer. No student on earth worked harder than I did, and yet what came of it all? Why, I sat for weeks and weeks in my office, earning only a beggar's pittance, and pretending all the time that I was doing something. I sat waiting and waiting till my brain was in such a muddle that I was afraid of losing my senses. I had to almost sell out body and soul to keep on the good side of a patron, all for a pitiful, meagre, pharisaical existence. Think of the enforced idleness, the eternal monotony, the hypocrisy, duplicity and humility, all for the sake of something to cover or fill a miserable carcass. And then, half of their pretended science is nothing but guess-work and experiment. The vagaries of medical opinion, even in the last half century, are nothing more or less than intellectual whoredom. I shall "throw physic to the dogs" and make the world my oyster. When I get through eating I'll take a nap. If I *must* be a

worm it will be under the ground and not above it. Don't you see, Crombie, that I am a displaced man. Society wouldn't give me a chance. It befooled and misled me. It neglected a physician and made a gambler. Let it take the consequences.'

'Well, well, have it your own way. Drop in again to-night. I feel a trifle lonely at coming away so suddenly. If your mother had lived, Doctor, and been like mine you would have been a different man. When I lose faith in everything else, when hope has faded into nothingness and good and bad are a hopeless jumble, then I think of mother— But come, it is too early in the evening for deep philosophy. I have a new brand of wine here that will make you sing in your sleep.'

'Not a drop, not even a single minimum. I wish to use my brain to-night. I am booked to attend a swell affair at Marshall Graeme's and I am never at my best with even a spoonful in me. Graeme pretends to be very democratic, but he is the biggest lion-hunter in the Union. He has a French duke on exhibition—a real, live duke. When Graeme invited me he said, after a good deal of humming and hawing, that he would take it as a great favour if I would entertain His Highness at a little game, and hinted that in case I wasn't in luck he could accommodate me with a little loan. Graeme and his shoddy friends like to play when they are sure of winning, but they are all afraid to tackle a man of the duke's calibre.'

Crombie laughed and shook his head. 'Well, since you must play, I wish you luck, but remember, the champion pacer always meets a faster one.'

'Very true. I've got to take my chances, of course. By the way, have you seen the evening papers yet? Here's one I got on the street. Your chess-player has been tapped on the head.'

'What?'

'Old Cargill has been found dead in the swamp and the papers say it's murder. Read for yourself.'

'Good God! The poor old fellow! He was in great humour the other night. He did what he had not done for years. He spoke to his sister, Mrs Delavan. He won every game and went off in the best of spirits. Well, well! This is terrible.'

The Doctor smiled at his companion's look of consternation and dismay.

'The people out there are evidently not careful enough about the whisky they drink. It's a suggestive-looking spot, that swamp. There's been more than dancing going on out there.'

'Stop your nonsense, Doctor. This is no joking matter. Leave me alone and let me think it over.' The druggist spoke quite peevishly, without taking his eyes off the newspaper.

'Very well, my dear boy, but if you don't object I'll borrow your umbrella. The weather looks threatening and this is my only dress suit.'

'My umbrella is lost. I couldn't find it when I came away.'

'Then I shall have to break all former records and buy one. By the way, I fancy that someone has been watching your premises here for the last half-hour. Look! The fellow slouching into the lane there.'

Crombie turned quite pale, but the doctor only laughed. 'Tut, man, don't let that trouble you. The authorities have offered a thousand dollars reward and that will cause many a jackass to lose his head and his time.'

CHAPTER X

SOME FAMILY HISTORY

A STRANGER driving along the Townline about a mile south of Worth's Corners could not have helped noticing a neat little clearing to the west of the roadway. Even in the streets of a country town the place would have been noticed ; but here, with its surroundings of swamp and forest, here, where tidiness and thrift were twin missionaries in a howling wilderness, the tiny oasis of civilisation, with its trim cottage and out-buildings, elicited surprise and admiration.

The log cabin, holding up its head with dignity, seemed conscious of its superiority and refinement, and firm in the conviction that only such a character and reputation as it possessed could possibly withstand the degenerating influence of bogs and frogs. Its windows were lined with flowers, not ordinary denizens of cottage windows, but blossoms of the hothouse variety, which bear the guinea stamp—those dumb witnesses whose duty it is to prove that we have refined tastes and—grandfathers. The curtains also gave assurance that they were not accustomed to doing duty under such humble circumstances. They apologised not only for the plain board window frames and narrow panes but for the whole cottage. The little dwelling with its surroundings might well be chosen to represent the history and circumstances of the inmates. In this humble school necessity had been the stern teacher. Here false pride had been humbled, false idols shattered and

fond hopes destroyed. Here, in the vale of adversity, a proud woman had drained to the last dregs the cup of sorrow, and learned life lessons of humbleness and thrift.

Had Eleanor Cargill been told twenty years ago that she would one day be living in a log cabin, she would have laughed the idea to scorn. Yet when she married handsome, reckless Jack Delavan more than one of the Owasco gossips prophesied that she would come to want.

Her brother Nicholas warned her that Delavan, with his expensive habits, would bring her to ruin. He coaxed, cajoled and finally protested. 'A fig for his blue blood. America has no aristocracy but that of wealth. In Ireland he was the younger son of a broken-down family, but here he is nobody. He was probably sent out here because his people found him useless and didn't know what to do with him. Some parts of Canada and the United States have been for years a dumping-ground for younger sons, reckless fellows who have nothing but good manners and bad habits. For that matter all the Bretts and Walshes on the Townline can hunt up grandfathers who did nothing for a living. Marry him if you will, but, if you do, I wash my hands of you forever.'

His warnings and expostulations, however, were as little heeded as they generally are in such cases; in fact, the more bitterly her brother denounced the match, the more firmly did Miss Cargill resolve to marry the handsome cavalier.

Delavan secured control of the purse-strings soon after his marriage, and, for a time, appeared to make good use of his opportunities; but he had neither business training nor executive ability and his speculations could only end in disaster.

To comfort him for his heavy losses he looked upon the wine when it was red, and soon became a physical and financial wreck. In his business of exporting

lumber and horses he was so much in contact with the Townliners that he became quite familiar with them. On his last visit to that locality he was thrown from his horse and afterwards died in the house of Martin Brett—a notorious contrabandist. He left three children—the eldest a boy of nine, the next a daughter of seven, and the youngest a deformed and stunted girl of five.

With the most scrupulous honesty the widow paid every debt; indeed, her pride prompted her to pay many questionable claims rather than dispute them. But when all was over she found that her husband's wild speculations had left her absolutely penniless. Hard was the fight between pride and poverty, bitter were the tears of regret and pitiful the efforts to keep up appearances, but at last, for the sake of her children, she was forced to appeal to her brother for help.

Mr Cargill was not only miserly, but hard and relentless in his nature. He helped her, but it was done in such a way as to give him revenge and humble her pride. He gave her a life lease of the place in the swamp, a cow, some poultry and other plenishings from his own farms—trivial articles which he would never miss. He gave her, as he himself said, 'just enough to starve on.'

Here for nearly ten years, amid the swamps of the Townline, the widow lived; here, in the seclusion of the most abandoned part of the whole county, she had learned to dig and delve, to hew wood and draw water, and here she reared her children. Here she had wept and prayed in her utter loneliness, and here she had atoned for her over-weening sins of self-will and pride. And yet, in spite of all that she had lost, there were times when she was fairly happy and contented. She felt that she had learned her duty and was doing it with all her heart.

She was a Roman Catholic and would have pre-

ferred educating Naera and Norbert in her own faith, but there was no chapel within reach, and, after long and serious consideration, she sent them to the little white church on the hill. Her respect for the pastor, Mr Carrol, and her knowledge of the good work he was doing, induced her to take this unusual step.

The greatest cloud on the widow's happiness was the waywardness of her son. In Norbert she was grievously disappointed. As a boy he was bright, intelligent and chivalrous. His gentle manner and air of refinement made him a favourite wherever he went. But as he grew to manhood it became evident that he had inherited some of his father's weaknesses. For a time his mother struggled to educate him for a profession, but her contracted means forced her to abandon the attempt. He was then taken into a newspaper office as a type-setter, and in a few years became an expert. But modern invention displaced him, and in the period of enforced idleness which followed the demon of intemperance was let loose, leaving him to drift from place to place, from one occupation to another. Continual anxiety for the son's future gradually broke the mother's health, until at last Naera was forced to become the bread-winner.

To let her daughter go out to service was a crushing blow to Mrs Delavan, but she could not prevent it. Want—grim want—was master of the situation. Nor was it empty pride which caused the mother to hesitate, she had long since outgrown that weakness, but it seemed like sacrilege to allow her daughter's refined nature to come in contact with the coarser elements surrounding the life of a maid-of-all-work. Naera was her pride, her hope, her joy. In her the mother saw all the finer instincts which go to adorn womanhood, all the intelligence necessary to a high sphere in life and all the vitality and energy necessary for life's battle, together with a disposition which nothing appeared to daunt and an intense magnetism

which made her not only attractive but a source of strength and vitality to those around her. It was little wonder then that even a partial separation was like taking the light out of the mother's life, the sunshine from the home.

But Norbert's occasional remittances were not sufficient and there was no help for it. Naera must go out into the world. Fortunately, at this time Mrs Worth was in need of someone to assist her in the dairy, and Naera gladly accepted a position where she would have the privilege of returning nightly to her mother's roof, and would be treated as a friend and a companion by her good-natured mistress. But the young girl was too ambitious to remain long in a position uncongenial to her tastes and abilities. She took up the needle, and from a general sempstress became the dressmaker of the neighbourhood, soon acquiring a reputation which gave both herself and her mother plenty of employment.

Esther sat in her chair all day long but was able to knit and sew, thus contributing in a small way to the family revenues. The little hunchback was usually bright and cheerful. She considered it her duty to keep her mother from brooding over the past.

Such was the condition of affairs at the Delavan cottage at the time of the tragedy.

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CHAPTER XI

ESTHER'S NEW SIGNAL

ONE evening, about a week after the inquest, Naera sat at the bedside cooling her mother's brow. The widow had not been in her usual health since Norbert's disappearance, but to-day she had taken a chill and was now in a burning fever.

'If you are no better in the morning, mother, I shall send for the doctor. Shall I send to-night? Bergen would go.'

Mrs Delavan held up her hand in protest and shook her head feebly. 'You know, dear, I often have headaches.'

'But this is more than a headache. Your eyes are heavy and your skin is burning.'

'The room seems too hot. You might open the door for a moment.'

Naera went to the door, left it slightly ajar and stepped outside to get a breath of the cold, bracing air.

Everything was still—dreadfully still. The whole world seemed dead or asleep. Not a branch or bough was stirring in the pale cold moonlight. The frogs had gone to their winter quarters and the myriad sounds of the swamp were buried beneath a blanket of snow.

She felt nervous and depressed. The cross-questioning at the inquest had aroused within her a dread which had haunted her ever since. It was too terrible to mention, too horrible to even think of.

For pity's sake she had kept her fears from her mother and Esther, and even led them to believe that Norbert's name was never mentioned at the inquest, but to-night she read the truth in her mother's eyes. Suspense was slowly and surely doing its work. Where was it all going to end?

'But I must not let mother see that I too am suffering. I must keep a smile on my lips though my heart is like lead. If I had someone to confide in it would ease the strain. If Bergen would come I might summon courage to tell him.'

She looked towards the hill where the windmill was peeping over the big barn, and started with astonishment.

'Esther,' she called, 'do you know that we can see Worth's house from here now? How does that come? What has happened?'

'If you wouldn't ask too many questions at once a person would know which to answer,' came the tart reply from within. 'You'll stand out there and get your death of cold, just as if we hadn't enough sickness now. Bergen cut down the bunch of cedars on the hill and the tall hemlock at the end of the swamp.'

'When did he do that?' Her face turned pale and her voice trembled in spite of her. She almost shivered as she re-entered the room.

'Yesterday when you were away at the post-office.'

Naera did not ask why. Like a flash she divined Bergen's motive. It was his way of breaking the awful news and assuring her that, come what would, suspicion, contumely or disgrace, he would espouse their cause and remain, as he had always been, their friend and protector.

'Thank God I know the worst,' she said to herself. 'But I must see Bergen at once.'

She went into another room and brought forth her cape and bonnet. Her mother looked inquiringly at

her and Esther snapped out, 'Where are you going at this time of night?'

'I am going to see Bergen and get his advice.'

'Well, you need not go a foot. I can bring him at any time,' said the hunchback, proudly. 'Light that lamp and put it in the attic window upstairs. He told me to do that if we wished any assistance.'

'What made him think we would require his assistance?' asked Naera, turning away to hide her look of affright.

'He thought we might feel lonesome here in the swamp. When I saw him cutting down the trees I wondered, because he loves trees and never cuts them if he can avoid it. Later, when he brought the load of wood, he came in and told me about putting the light in the window, but said that I must not mention it to you or mother unless we did happen to need him.'

Naera gave a sigh of relief and stood for a moment looking through the window towards the hill, as if in doubt.

'Why don't you go, Naera, and put the light where I told you? What is the use of standing there so stupidly?'

The widow turned her face towards her younger daughter with a look of reproof, at which Esther broke into a fit of weeping.

'Sister, come and kiss me. I've been like a bear all evening. I don't know what is wrong with me. Set the light, dear, and you'll see how soon he will be here.'

Esther's predictions were fulfilled. In less than half an hour Bergen came galloping down the road. Naera ran out to the gate to watch him coming. In the white stillness he looked so big and brave and powerful. The long white lane between the snow-trimmed cedars made he and his bounding steed look like giants from another sphere. And yet she

was almost afraid to meet him; she dreaded to hear the truth. She ran inside for a moment to gather her courage. She knew that he would tell her all. Through the window she watched him dismount and lead his horse through the narrow gateway to a sheltered spot in the rear.

Then she went out to meet him. To her dying day she never forgot his hearty, wholesome salute. 'Good-night, little woman. Nothing wrong, I hope? Your mother not well, I suppose? I thought she didn't look well yesterday.'

His voice was like a cool draught to fevered lips. It seemed to restore her thoughts to a rational basis, to give her emotions a proper balance and to lift a load from her soul. But the reaction was too sudden. When he reached out his hand she clasped it between hers and burst into tears. For a time she was unable to speak. With her face leaning on his big friendly hand she gave vent to her pent-up grief.

He stood looking down at her in silence while the tears ran down his cheeks. Noticing that her head was bare he removed his cap, placed it gently on her glossy black locks and waited with patience till she recovered herself.

'It is good to feel that we have one friend left. Everybody looked so strangely at me to-day. I could see it in every face. It was hard to keep from breaking down. I was glad to reach the swamp where I could have a good cry. I understood the message, Bergen. Tell me all. I can bear it from you better than from anyone else.'

He took her hands in his and looked steadily into her face. 'Suspicion has alighted on Norbert. What then? They may come with a search-warrant, but I'll be here too to see that they don't unnecessarily frighten your mother or Esther. As for Norbert, you have nothing to fear. You are surely not morbid enough to doubt his innocence.'

Don't dare to hint to me that you doubt your brother.'

She kissed his hand eagerly and her sobs broke out afresh. 'Thank God, thank God! I don't know—what I thought.'

'Shame on you, Naera. You deserve to suffer for your doubts. You have exaggerated and extravagant notions about what an intoxicated man may do. Look here. I have known Norbert since his boyhood. I have seen him in the most trying situations. I have known him drunk and sober. I have noticed all his moods and impulses, and I tell you,' he continued with great emphasis, 'that it isn't *in* him. Whisky will make men bad by multiplying tenfold the evil in them, but the *instinct must be there, even though it is not developed*. Norbert wouldn't even kill a worm if he could help it. It never was his gait or game to destroy or injure *anything*. His faults don't lie in that direction. There isn't the first streak of cruelty in him. He's as unlikely to kill a fellow-creature as a turtle is to fly. When I know a thing I *know* it.'

'I can bear anything now. You have given me new faith. Let us go in or Esther will wonder. Take your cap. I must dry my eyes. I must have a smile for mother. Some snow will take away the tear-stains. I am afraid her illness is serious.'

The widow's illness was a blessing in disguise. In the delirium of typhoid fever she did not notice the strange men who came to search the house, nor could she see the poster on a tree opposite the gate, offering a thousand dollars reward for the apprehension of her son.

CHAPTER XII

A MIDNIGHT VISIT

'WHO is there?'

The speaker was Bergen Worth. He had been awakened by the sound of gravel dashing against his bedroom window and was now peering into the darkness below. The night was cold and dark, and as he leaned through the window he almost shivered.

'Who is there?' he again shouted as he watched intently for sounds or objects below. 'I must have been dreaming,' he thought, 'and yet I could have sworn I heard it twice. But there is no light in the attic yonder. It cannot be anything wrong there. It must be after midnight.'

He was about to close the window when he noticed a dark figure run out from the corner of the building.

'Is that you, Bergen?' said a soft voice in muffled tones, a voice he could never mistake.

'Why, it is you, Naera. Anything wrong? Is your mother worse? You might have answered my call instead of standing in the cold.'

'Your voice sounded strange at first. We were afraid someone else might be awakened. Can you come down, Bergen? Mother is much better but there is somebody here with me.'

'Go round to the back door. I'll be down in a moment.'

Bergen readily guessed what had happened. He knew instinctively who her companion was. He

dressed hastily and, lamp in hand, crept softly down the stairs to admit them. He knew that Norbert had returned, and yet he was not prepared for the sight which met his eyes when the light fell upon the two figures out in the night. The faces in their corpse-like pallor were like visions from another world, so much alike and yet so different. *He* stood trembling with excitement, looking half anxiously, half timidly at the face of his former friend, and *she*, with her shawl partially wrapt around him, held him closely to her side and led him towards the open door. *His* countenance, hollow-eyed and haggard, was stamped with the suspicion and fear of a fugitive; hers was an embodiment of pity, hope and confidence.

In a moment Bergen's arms were around them both and moisture shining in his eyes. Norbert gave a great sob and buried his face on Bergen's shoulder, while Naera patted her brother caressingly on the back and wet his wasted hand with her tears. For a time there were no sounds but sobs. Brother and sister, in their great hunger for sympathy, nestled against their stalwart friend, who then seemed to look upon them as a father would his children.

Norbert was the first to speak. 'My God, Bergen, if you only knew how I hungered for a sight of your face. I knew *you* would believe in me.'

'Because I know you, Norbert. But come, this is a poor welcome. Sit down beside the stove here till I shake up the fire. It is a bitter cold night and you will be none the worse of something to warm you. Naera will make us some tea and we will talk it over.'

'Had we not better speak low?' said Naera, with her finger on her lip, as she motioned her head in the direction of an open door.

'Don't be afraid, little woman. Nobody sleeps there, but you may close the door for warmth's sake. I'll bolt the outside one and pull down this blind.'

When they had warmed and cheered themselves by a humble repast they sat around the fire while Norbert told his story. It ran as follows:—

‘Before coming here on the night of the dance I hid, in the manger of the church-shed, a flask of brandy. It is a vulgar admission to make, but I must not spare myself. I knew I was not capable of conducting myself properly, and I did not dream of coming in, but Jeff Leonard came along and almost pushed me in.’

‘To revenge himself on *me* for ignoring him, I am sure,’ broke in Naera.

‘Very likely. In his schoolboy days he was very spiteful. But to proceed. The first glimpse of me sent poor mother and Esther home broken-hearted.’ The speaker swallowed a sob and rubbed the moisture from his eyes. ‘You remember how Travis good-naturedly took me away and walked me around till my brain was clearer. Naera followed me up to Travis’s and induced me to go home with her. On the way down—God forgive me!—I was wondering how to get the flask, but Naera kept hold of my arm. When we got home I tried to sleep but found it impossible. An overwhelming craving for a stimulant came over me till I would have sold body and soul, heaven, earth and all eternity for something to ease the horrible inward sinking. When everything was still I crept out and started back to the Corners for the flask.

‘I never got through the swamp, at least I never reached the shed; in fact, I cannot remember anything further until I awoke in bed in a small room with bare walls. I lay for a long time wondering where I was and how I got there, but I could not solve the mystery. I could hear strange voices through a board partition, and through the window I could see some children running about the yard. I made several efforts to get up, and finally fell on the floor. A stout man with red whiskers came

running into the room, picked me up and put me into bed again. "You don't feel quite so well as you think, my boy," he said with a strong Irish accent. I knew at once he was a Brett or a Walsh, for I had seen him several times before. "How did you get here anyway?" I told him I did not know, that I had not the faintest idea. He laughed and said that I must have had it pretty bad. Then he asked how I cut my head. Had I been fighting? I reached up and felt this cut on my head.'

The speaker here parted his hair and displayed, for the first time, the remains of a very extensive scalp wound.

'A very ugly wound,' said Bergen, examining it closely, 'but it seems to be healing nicely.'

'Yes. They washed and dressed it twice daily, and I thought they did it with some skill. I keep my hair brushed loosely over it to keep out the cold. They treated me very kindly, and gave me plenty to eat. A few days afterwards I was able to sit up, and later on was able to move about. But I had very little liberty. I was not allowed to go outside the yard that surrounded the house. Mr Walsh told me that his business was of a private nature, and that when I got quite strong I would have to stay with him for good or leave at once. I was ashamed to go back after disgracing you all at the dance and I had not a solitary cent to go anywhere with, so I asked permission to remain long enough to earn money to take me to Chicago again. A week ago Saturday, when Mr Walsh returned from Stevensville, he told me about the murder and the reward. Oh, Heavens! I shall never forget the horror of it. I was being hunted down like a wild beast. Dennis said he was no great friend to the law, and that I need not be afraid of his peaching on me because he knew my father and liked him, but he said that the money would be very tempting to many. He thought the

whole Townline would be searched, and some of the "boys," annoyed at having the officials spying around their premises, might betray me. He gave me a paper bag full of eatables and a ten-dollar bill, and told me to keep in hiding till the excitement was over and then get out of the country. He reminded me that it would always be warm in his horse stable, and that he would leave eatables and newspapers lying about, but I must not let him see me again, for he had as many crows now to pick with the law as was good for his health. Since then I have been hiding in the swamps and sleeping in Dennis's stable at nights, but yesterday a red rag hanging on a bush near the barn warned me to get further away. Then I became sick of the horrible suspense and made up my mind to try and see you. I watched around for Naera to-night, and she brought me here.'

'Did you tell Walsh you were innocent?'

'Yes, but he just shrugged his shoulders and said it was no affair of his.'

Bergen sat for a long time looking thoughtfully into the fire.

'Do you believe me, Bergen?'

'I do, Norbert. I feel certain you had nothing to do with the death of Nicholas Cargill. But what a strange mystery it all is!'

'I am almost stupid trying to study it out. It seems like some horrible plot to ensnare me. And yet I never injured anyone willingly in my life. God knows I have been worst to myself and my poor mother. If *she* dies it will be my doing. Oh, Naera, sister, I shall go mad! Would suicide not be the quickest and best way out of it all?' The speaker covered his face and rocked himself too and fro in his chair.

'Steady, Norbert, steady,' said Bergen, with his arm laid caressingly across the unfortunate man's shoulders. 'Patience, patience. Have faith. Noth-

ing in this world, great or small, can be done without faith.'

'Without your faith in me, Bergen, as sure as God is above, I would have ended my useless life. I would not have the courage to give myself up. But now I can go like a man. Why, I had rather be torn to pieces by wild beasts than suffer again the horrible feeling of being hunted. I remember you told me one night at Bible class that some great suffering or calamity might be necessary to arouse my moral nature and make me an abstainer. Well, it has come. Accused of murder, an outlaw and an outcast, I am stronger morally to-night than I ever was. If my sins were proportionate to the punishment I must have been a vile creature. But with God's help, come what may, *I will be more worthy of the life He gave me.*'

Naera knelt beside her brother with her arm about his neck and Bergen grasped him by the hand.

'Norbert,' said Bergen, solemnly, 'this is the turning-point in your life. This affliction has not been sent in vain. An innocent man can face anything, and if you keep firm and steadfast in the faith that all this is necessary to your moral and spiritual development you will be astonished to find how light your burden will become.'

'I will try to be a man. Now we may go and wake up Constable Travis. I can go into town with him to-night.'

'Naera and I will accompany you, and then I can see her through the swamp. But before we go I was going to ask you, Norbert, if you met anyone on your way through the swamp that night.'

'Well, I thought I did, but I am not certain. It may have been fancy.'

'Let us hear it.'

'I thought I met a man with a light overcoat, carrying an umbrella with a white bone handle.'

'You did? Whereabouts?'

'I cannot say exactly, but it was somewhere between home and the north end of the swamp.'

'Had you any idea who it was?'

'I thought I knew. But remember I may have been mistaken.'

'No matter. Let us hear who you thought it was.'

'So help me God, I thought it was Crombie.'

CHAPTER XIII

A RUSTIC SHRINE

DURING her mother's illness Naera fought the battle of her life. For twenty odd days and nights she never sought her pillow nor left the sick-room for more than a few moments. Bergen Worth and Father O'Flynn came alternately to sit through the long watches of the night, and Esther gave companionship, but their presence could not relieve Naera of her continuous duties, and her mother's delirium left no opportunity for snatching a few moments' rest at the bedside.

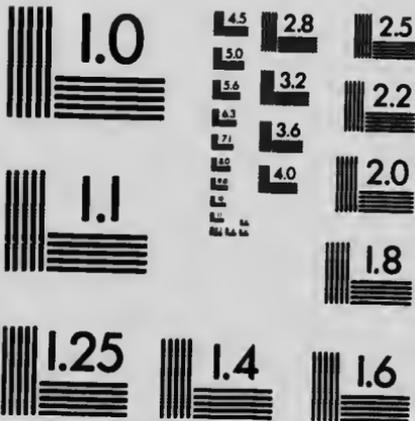
Soon she lost all desire for sleep. She seemed to have forgotten how to rest. She doubted whether she would ever be able to sleep again. But her vitality was little impaired. Her cheek was pale but her eye did not lose its lustre nor her step its elasticity. She had perfect confidence in her own physical endurance and had not the slightest fear of contagion.

But the mental struggle was much more trying. She sometimes feared that she would lose her reason, and she daily prayed that God might spare her that. With her mother hovering between life and death, her brother's fate in dreadful uncertainty, her sister's health shattered, her little savings fast disappearing and grim poverty staring her in the face, it was little wonder that at times her soul was filled with the chaos of despair. She was alone with her sorrow and anxiety, and to one of her tender years the



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responsibility of the situation was overwhelming. With her mother at the helm, Naera had faced difficulties with equanimity, but now necessity had rudely pushed her into the forefront of the battle, and she was not yet able to fully grasp and control the affairs of the family or adjust herself to her new burden. Henceforth she must lead and direct. She must face the world with her dear ones under her protection.

She had perfect faith in her mother's recovery, in spite of the doctor's doubts. She knew not why, but she never seriously considered a fatal termination. Sudden and unfavourable changes in the symptoms sometimes made her knees tremble or her heart quiver with affright, but only for the moment. She dared not falter or doubt. She dared not betray the slightest emotion in her sister's presence. The merest trifle would lay Esther, too, on a bed of sickness. A false tone or uncertain look might prick the bubble of hope upon which the poor cripple lived.

Occasionally Naera stole away out into the woods to ease her bursting heart with tears. The lonely snow-capped cedars seemed to understand her and give her sympathy. They enclosed a rude temple hallowed by prayers for help and guidance, a holy shrine where her inmost soul was laid bare.

And with her cross she had her crown of thorns. Since the issuance of the reward for Norbert's apprehension the face of womankind had never appeared at her door. Not one of her own sex came to give her a word of comfort or cheer, and all Bergen's efforts to secure a lady-nurse proved futile. Someone ought to go, the neighbours all agreed, but some were afraid of contagion, others feared that their respectability might become tainted, and still others dreaded the possibility of being drawn into the trial with all its notoriety and

publicity. And so Naera struggled on, longing and waiting for some kindness or recognition from her former friends.

But at last she gave up all hope, and a strange bitterness crept into her soul. Was all the passing show of religion merely a lip-loyalty to creed or method? Were they all holiday soldiers and sunshine patriots in the cause of humanity? Was the church on the hill, which she attended so regularly, and which she had grown to look upon with such reverence, only a meeting-place whose aim and end was its own individual existence? Was it only a superior sort of club which sanctified its adherents in proportion to the new members they gained? Had she taken it all too seriously? Perhaps she was expecting too much. Perhaps it was childish of her to expect anything more than the purifying and refining influences which religious associations had exerted on her own heart. It had done her good to believe good things and to think pure thoughts, of that she was perfectly certain, but she expected that words would be crystallised into deeds.

And what about Mrs Worth? Was she, too, false? Why had mammy forsaken her? Was this motherly creature, enshrined in her heart as a very goddess of benevolence, merely an idol of common clay? How was it possible for her to believe in anybody after *her* defection? But stop. There was Bergen. *He* had never changed. But he did not explain. Twice she asked him if his mother was ill, but the tone of voice in which 'he replied 'No' showed that he did not wish to be questioned on the subject.

At last the explanation came, and from a very unexpected source. One evening, about a week after the date of Norbert's surrender, there came a letter from Crombie Worth. The Chicago postmark and the handwriting on the envelope sent her heart bound-

ing into her throat. She stole into a room to read it alone. It ran as follows:—

'DEAR MISS DELAVAN,—I hope you will not despise me when you read this letter, for I would be loth to lose your good opinion. But even at that risk I am forced to make an explanation which—to you—may seem cowardly and unworthy. I shall, however, be perfectly candid in my confession—if such I may call it. Some time ago I wrote to mother and suggested that it would be advisable for her to drop the intimacy with your family until the affair of the Townline was cleared up. I did not wish to be severe with your people, but, as it was, the fact that the "party" was at our house gave me more notoriety in town here than I cared to face. I was sorry afterwards that I had written the letter and would gladly have recalled it. But it was too late. When the letter reached home Bergen flew into a rage—mother says he was quite beside himself—and vowed he would rather have seen me drop dead than pen such an epistle. Father, who as you know is very stiff and proud, took it up, and he and Bergen had a serious quarrel over it. He ordered Bergen to keep away from your place altogether. Bergen firmly and respectfully refused to obey the command, and the result is an estrangement which is very distressing to mother. Bergen sent me a letter, and of all the withering documents it was the worst. It was written in sorrow, not in anger, but every word was as sharp as a lance. The letter convinced me that I owed you an explanation of my own conduct and an apology for placing mother in a false light. The excuse for my action is that the name of Worth has always been above reproach, and we cannot afford to besmirch our good name even for a friend.

'When I read in yesterday's newspaper that a

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portion of your uncle's money was found in your brother's pockets by the jailer I felt that—'

'What? God of heaven! Norbert a thief as well as a murderer? No. It must be a mistake. Let me read on.'

'--felt that all intimacy between us must end. The bills—which were new ones—are proven to be those paid to Cargill by the bank that afternoon, so that—'

She crushed the letter in her hand and ran out into the woods. Crombie false? Norbert guilty? Was she in a nightmare? Had she at last taken leave of her senses? Everything looked strange and wild. What was the horrible singing in her ears? Oh, for a pain or an ache! Oh, for some bodily suffering to relieve her seething brain! The world was a hell peopled with demons.

Suddenly she stumbled, her forehead struck the sharp limb of a fallen tree and she dropped insensible in the snow. How long she remained there she did not know. The stinging of her hands and the burning of her cheeks gradually restored her consciousness.

At first everything was swimming around her. 'Ah! I am not mad! My senses are returning. Oh, God, I thank thee! But I cannot pray. My thoughts are too confused. I am in the snow. Thank God for snow, the pure, cold, peaceful snow which bites my hand and face. There is blood dripping from my forehead and a sharp pain there. But I love pain. Oh, sweet, restoring pain, thou art one of God's mercies! Thank Heaven for the bitter, biting wind which has blown the fumes of madness from my brain.'

She rose and looked around. 'There are my poor, dear, patient cedars. They look at me in pity. And

up yonder are the stars. Bless them, they do not change. They remind me that I have duties and responsibilities. They tell me to watch and wait.'

She must remove the stains from her face and hurry back to the sick-room. It was getting dusk. Poor Esther would be frightened.

The curtains were up and she could see right into the room where her mother lay. Esther was in her chair as usual, but someone else was there. Who had come during her absence? What? A woman removing her wraps? At last some friend of better days had come to give them recognition and assistance. No? It was Mrs Briggs. It was the village washerwoman, she who fought like a slave for every mouthful of bread. Bent with age, worn with the toil and worry of weary years, half clad and half starved, she had waded through a mile of snow to give the hand of sympathy and help.

Suddenly an unseen veil was lifted from Naera's consciousness, a flash of light illuminated her soul. In the stooped shoulders, coarse garments and rugged features of her welcome visitor she saw a new and strange beauty, a condensation of a *new gospel*. For a moment she stood in awe of her previous ignorance, then, weeping tears of joy for her new discovery, she stole into her room, and throwing herself upon her bed she sobbed herself to sleep.

CHAPTER XIV

THE TRIAL

THE trial of Norbert Delavan for the murder of Nicholas Cargill was an event of more than local importance. The notoriety of the Townline, the great wealth of the victim, and the peculiar circumstances of the case gave it more than a passing interest.

One of the Chicago dailies, commenting upon it, spoke as follows:—

‘ It would, of course, be very much out of place to offer any opinion on the matter, which might prejudice the prisoner’s case, but we feel at liberty to point out the reasonable presumption that the lawlessness of this notorious district is, directly or indirectly, responsible for the tragedy. The murder seems to be the result of certain conditions and surroundings peculiar to the locality, and while we are tracing out the criminal we must not forget the larger duty of breaking up this nest of contrabandists. It is a national scandal that such a condition of affairs is allowed to exist; it is an imputation against the respectability of Lincoln county. It appears that these outlaws have been tolerated, yes, even catered to, by municipal authorities for election purposes, and that the privileges they enjoy are a sort of *quid pro quo* for their allegiance to certain political bosses. It is high time that the people arose in their might and not only cleared the neighbourhood of such outlaws,

but relegated to political oblivion those who have been trafficking in such iniquity.'

Such comments and the expectation of many curious developments brought great crowds to Owasco to hear the trial.

The theory of the State was that Mr Cargill started home, umbrella in hand, about one o'clock in the morning; that Norbert Delavan, who was in a half-intoxicated condition, was, at this time, returning to the Corners in quest of more liquor; that they met near the north end of the swamp and there, after some angry words, the prisoner snatched the umbrella from the hands of the deceased and inflicted the death blows. Then, secreting the body behind some bushes, the prisoner secured the dead man's pocket-book and fled, but afterwards, seeing the impossibility of escape, he gave himself up. He forgot, however, that a portion of the stolen money was still in his possession, and thus supplied damning evidence of his guilt, though he maintained that the money had been placed there in order to incriminate him.

The prisoner, during the opening proceedings, was pale but composed. His eyes wandered from time to time over the court-room without the slightest embarrassment. His winsome face and air of refinement gave rise to a great deal of comment. It was claimed on all sides that he was the handsomest man in the room. Once, during the arraignment of the prosecuting attorney, he rose to contradict some damaging statement, but at a warning look from his counsel he subsided. The evidence for the prosecution occupied two days, but long before it was completed the general opinion was that the prisoner was guilty. There was being woven around him a web of circumstantial evidence from which it seemed impossible to extricate him.

And yet the prosecution had its weak points. It

did not pretend to explain what the deceased was doing in the swamp, why he was taking the longest and most unlikely road home. It ignored the nouse-breaking of the previous day, and it failed to show that either the deceased or the prisoner carried an umbrella.

This last link, however, was forged at the eleventh hour. The barkeeper and hostler of the 'Green Bush' of Owasco deposed that they were driving northward on the Townline about one o'clock in the morning of the fourteenth and they saw a man answering to Cargill's description coming out of Mr Worth's gate carrying an umbrella. The barkeeper swore, he said, to his companion that the man with the umbrella looked like Mr Cargill.

Cross-examination failed to make much impression on these witnesses. It seemed so likely that these two worthies were out in the dead of night procuring a fresh supply of liquor that the hesitation with which they gave their evidence was overlooked by both judge and jury, and was supposed to be due to their natural efforts to hide the doubtful nature of their errand.

The first witness called for the defence was Dennis Walsh. Of all the Townliners Dennis was the best known. He was credited with being the shrewdest smuggler of them all. He visited town very frequently, had a pleasant word for everybody, was particularly upright in his dealings with the townspeople, and was a general favourite. His broad, smiling face, his mass of curly hair, his ready laugh and rich Irish brogue were familiar to almost everybody in Owasco, but his appearance in court was quite another matter. The atmosphere of a court-room could scarcely be congenial to a man who made his living in defiance of the law, and many were anxious to see how Dennis would conduct himself.

Up to this point the proceedings had been rather

monotonous, inasmuch as the finding of Cargill's money on the prisoner had already settled the question of guilt, but when so notorious a character as Dennis was in the box, something of a sensational nature might be expected.

The sturdy Townliner was not at all abashed. He looked smilingly round the room with an air of unconcern and raked out his tangled whiskers with his fat fingers.

'Now, Dennis,' said Mr Carswell, after the witness had kissed the book with a loud smack, 'just tell us in your own way what you know about this case. Commence at the beginning and go right through without giving your own ideas or opinions. State the plain facts.'

The witness put on a grave look and commenced. He came home from Stevensville horse fair at two o'clock in the morning of the fourteenth, and on lighting the lantern which hung in his stable he discovered a man lying in an empty stall near the door. On looking more closely witness found that the man was unconscious, that he had a large cut on the top of his head, and that his face was covered with blood. At first witness thought the stranger was only drunk, but, after several unsuccessful attempts to arouse him, made up his mind that the stranger had been stunned by a blow on the head. Then he sent for Tip Kelly, the local quack surgeon, who pronounced it a case of concussion of the brain. In three days afterwards the patient recovered consciousness sufficient to ask where he was.

Up to this point Dennis got along famously. He spoke slowly and deliberately, cutting his sentences as short as possible and occasionally passing his hand over his mouth as if to prevent too much from escaping. But the smiles and good-humour caused by his brogue and appearance began to tell on him. He commenced to feel more at ease, more communicative

and confidential, and in proportion he began to mix his statements with 'sez I' and 'sez he,' and to add little epigrams of his own. 'Sez he, where am I? and sez I, ye're at Dennis Walsh's and many a worse place ye might be. I'm on the Townline then? sez he. Yes, sez I, and I suppose you've heerd tell of it before. But where did *you* come from? Sez he, I'm Norbert Delavan, and no credit to anybody, and I was at Worth's party *last night*, but the divil o' me knows how I got *here*.'

Mr Curry, the prosecuting attorney, jumped to his feet and demanded that the witness be allowed to give evidence only and not to formulate a romance.

The Court explained to the witness that anything beyond bare facts was unnecessary.

Dennis immediately froze up. It was with much difficulty that Mr Carswell extracted the balance of the evidence from him. In recapitulation, however, Dennis made the statement that the prisoner must have arrived at his barn on horseback. Horse tracks were noticed leading from the gate to the rear of the stable, and there were no footprints of any kind either in the lane or the surrounding field. He was certain that the prisoner had been brought there by someone else, because Delavan was certainly not able to walk or ride himself. Again, the prisoner's trousers showed that he had been riding a grey horse, the said trousers being so soiled with clay and blood that witness furnished another pair.

Mr Carswell undid a parcel and displayed a pair of brown tweed trousers which witness identified as those worn by the prisoner on the night in question. Dennis concluded by swearing positively that Norbert Delavan *must have been taken to his stable on horseback*.

Cross-examination did not weaken his testimony, but it elicited a great deal of amusement. The appearance of the case was considerably altered. Dennis delivered his evidence in a straightforward manner

and the Court appeared to place considerable confidence in his testimony.

Mr Curry was nettled. He had anticipated an easy victory, and yet the first witness for the defence was sufficient to stem the tide of opinion running against the prisoner.

'Now, Mr Walsh, I do not wish you to make a speech but simply to answer my questions. What business do you follow?'

'Farmin', sor.'

'Do you sell much grain off your place?'

'Not a great dale.'

'Come now, on your oath, do you ever sell any?'

'An odd jag once in a while.'

'How is it nobody ever sees you hauling out grain?'

'They don't be lukin', I suppose.' (Laughter.)

'Don't try any of your horse wit here, sir. You make and sell whisky illicitly?'

No reply.

'Well, why don't you answer?'

'It wudn't be polite to contradict ye here, but if yez were out doors I might beg to differ 'id ye,' came the reply, with a good-natured but suggestive laugh, in which the audience joined.

THE COURT—'I don't see anything gained by that sort of tactics, Mr Curry. It only wastes time.'

MR CURRY—'But, your honour, I wish to show the jury the character of this witness. I wish to emphasise the fact that he lives by evading the law and hence his testimony is unworthy of credence.'

THE COURT—'Oh, very well, you may go as far as you like within the limits, but of course the witness knows he is not forced to incriminate himself. Besides, a man's occupation *may not* affect his veracity.'

MR CURRY—'But I claim it does, your honour, and I—'

THE COURT—'Well, well. Perhaps so. In a

matter of that kind one can only speak for himself. Your candour is unusual.'

The hall fairly rang with laughter at Mr Curry's expense and the constables had the deep sagacity not to interfere with the merriment following the judge's joke.

But Mr Curry returned to the attack. He was determined to embarrass the witness and make him contradict himself.

'Now, Dennis, you stated that the prisoner was insensible when you found him. How do you know that he was not drunk?'

'He never grunted when I kicked him. Besides, Tip said it wur the blow.'

'Never mind what Tip said. Had you any other way of telling whether he was drunk? Do you mean to say you can tell exactly when a man *is* drunk?'

'Yes, sor. Easy.'

'Stop now. Tell me how.'

'By experience. Sure it's many a one I've seen in me time.' The laugh which followed scored another point for Dennis.

'I want no evasion, Mr Walsh. I want you to tell me the symptoms of the prisoner's condition,' demanded Mr Curry in thunder tones.

'His face wur white whenever it wur washed and not red or blue. He niver snored—and he didn't luk as he wur drunk.'

'Humph! Of course you don't know. You only think so. Now you swore a moment ago that the prisoner was *brought* to your barn on horseback. How can you be so positive? He might have ridden the horse himself.'

'Bedad, he cudn't ride a stone-boat. He rolled off it whenever we wur takin' him to the house on it.'

'Mr Delavan might have fallen off the horse at the door and received the wound which stunned him?'

'No, sor. The blood wur dry on the cut and there wasn't any spots on the straw or doorstep.'

'But he might have lain there some time before you found him, and the bleeding may have been only on his face. He may then have opened the door and gone in?'

Dennis shook his head. 'His clothes were kivered with blood and the grey hairs wur rubbed into it. He cudn't open the door. Sure he cudn't crawl.'

'But on such slender evidence you have no right to maintain that a man with a grey horse brought the prisoner to your stable. Remember you did not see him.'

'Bedad, I *did*, with my own two eyes.'

This reply acted like a thunderbolt on the whole assembly. The audience murmured, the judge sat bolt upright in his chair, and the jurymen whispered to each other. The plot was thickening.

Mr Curry was almost knocked off his feet. He would rather have bitten off his tongue than have asked such a disastrous question. He mopped his face with his handkerchief and took a drink of water.

THE COURT—'Did I understand you to say that you saw the man with the grey horse?'

'Yes, yer honour. I wur jist coming to the gate when a man wid a grey horse came tarin' out fornenst me and tuk aff the other way.'

THE COURT—'Are you quite sure of this?'

'Yes, sor, and I wondered who the divil it wur. Excuse me for swearing, yer honour, but it popped out unbeknowns to me.'

THE COURT—'You thought it was an excise officer.'

'Be me sowl, I did that same.' (Laughter.)

Mr Curry had now recovered his composure and again took the witness.

'How was it, sir, that you never mentioned this before?'

'Sure yez niver gave me a chance. The more I try to tell ye the worse yez are down on me. You told me to say nothing barring when you axed me.' (Renewed laughter.)

'It was a very dark night?'

'Yes, sor, but the horse wur light.'

'And who was this wonderful headless horseman?'

'I don't know, sor. He wur a *big* man. That's all I can tell.'

'Could you swear to him if you saw him now?'

'No, sor.'

Mr Curry breathed easier. 'A few more questions and I have finished. How was it that when you knew there was reward you did not give Delavan up to the law?'

'Because I wur sorry for the poor divil. His father liked a drop but he wur the sowl of honour. I don't belave the lad killed the ould man.'

'You committed a criminal offence in harbouring a criminal.'

'I don't belave he's a criminal. Yez haven't proved it yet.'

'You gave him food and money to abscond with?'

Mr Carswell here reminded the witness that he was not compelled to answer such questions.

MR CURRY—'There must have been some powerful reason why you did not bring him in and get your money. A thousand dollars is a large sum to a poor man. How was it, I say?'

'Because I didn't want the dhirty ould law money. It's mostly mean divils as takes it. It wur beneath me, sor.'

The air of righteous indignation with which Dennis delivered the last sentence was too much for the gravity of the Court. He was cheered to the echo and Mr Curry was only too glad to allow him to stand down.

The next witness was Tip Kelly, a long, lean,

lantern-jawed individual with tobacco-trimmed lips, enormous ears, long hair and wrinkled face.

He was a veterinary surgeon of twenty years' standing, and had been physician to the Bretts and Walshes for the latter half of that time. He did not make any charges for visiting patients, but took gratuities when offered. Was called to see the prisoner professionally at four o'clock in the morning of the fifteenth. Found patient suffering from concussion of the brain caused by a blow on the head. Bled him from the arm, put ice on his head, gave him twenty grains of calomel and an ounce of salts. In three days the patient could speak. He was quite certain that the patient would never have recovered without his treatment. Would swear positively that the prisoner could not ride a horse at the time he saw him or for some time before. The cut on the head was several hours old when he dressed it. Would swear that it would take a full hour to come from Mr Worth's to Dennis Walsh's. The distance was only six miles, but owing to the condition of the roads it would take a good horse to do it in that time. Never saw prisoner till he visited him professionally, nor from the time he left Walsh's up to the present.

Mr Curry poked fun at witness's professional claims, but not did shake his testimony on any vital point.

Several reliable witnesses, residents of the Corners, deposed that on the day following the inquest, while fencing on the roadway north of the swamp, they discovered a much-trampled spot in a corner sheltered by some bushes. There were also marks on the fence which indicated that a struggle had taken place.

Dr Keene testified that the bruising of the mouth and gums might either have been caused by a blow upon the mouth or by the forcing of some hard

substance into it. He thought, however, that it would be more likely to be caused by the latter, as the bruising extended into the mouth.

Mr Harris, the undertaker, swore that white or grey horse hairs were embedded in the clothing of the deceased in such a way as to indicate that he had been carried on the back of a grey horse.

After a number of minor witnesses the defence was closed by the evidence of Professor Spencer Ellis, a famous microscopist, who claimed that beyond all doubt the horse hairs found on the clothing of the *deceased* were identical with those found upon the clothing of the *prisoner*.

The two days' session of the Court had been very trying, and by common consent the hearing of the addresses of the learned counsel was postponed till the following day.

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CHAPTER XV

A FIGHT FOR LIBERTY

MR CARSWELL'S closing address was a masterly effort on behalf of his client.

'The murder,' he maintained, 'was not the work of a drunken man, but of a cunning and practised criminal. The deceased,' he claimed, 'did not meet his death in the swamp, but on the roadway to the north of it, at the spot indicated by the fence-builders. On coming out of the gate the victim had been seized from behind, gagged to prevent his outcries, and carried to a point down the hill where his struggles were not so likely to be seen or heard.

'Angered by his failure to secure the booty in the housebreaking of the afternoon, the outlaw was determined to make the most of his opportunity. The amount of money on Mr Cargill's person was too small for so unusual a chance. He temporarily released his captive and demanded a ransom proportionate to the wealth of his prize. In the wrangling which ensued over the amount demanded, or in the victim's efforts to escape, the ruffian struck the fatal blow.

'Then to remove the body the murderer placed it on the back of his horse and galloped off to the swamp. Having secured the money and secreted the remains he was about to hurry away when someone stumbled towards him in the dark. Here was a witness who must have his lips sealed. Quick as

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a flash the murderer struck again and down came victim number two with a gash in his head.

'But in a moment the fell destroyer sees his mistake. A second thought comes as the identity of the second victim dawns upon him. Why finish number two when a means is at hand of covering up all traces of guilt? He must have time to think it over, but he must lose no time in getting away from the scene of tragedy.

'He puts the unconscious man on the back of the horse in front of him and gallops away to the southward. Delavan's relationship to the dead man has shown him an avenue of escape. The raiding of the Cargill premises and the tearing of the will is sufficient to throw suspicion, or perhaps fasten the guilt on the nephew.

'Reaching a lonely part of the swamp, where there is no danger of being overtaken, and where he is as safe from discovery as in his own house, the murderer strikes a light to count his gain. He sees the new bills and knows they are traceable. He is loth to part with them, but by placing them in the pocket of the unconscious man he can purchase his own liberty. He may now set his burden any place. Fate is playing into his hands. It is now to his advantage to have Delavan live to bear the brunt of the crime.

'Knowing Dennis Walsh's reputation for hospitality and kindness, he hurries on, lays his victim down in the stall, and makes off, not, however, without being seen by Dennis. But the darkness befriends him and he escapes unknown.

'Gentlemen of the jury, I tell you solemnly that no other theory under heaven will explain the facts.

'Let us examine the theory advanced by the State. What does it explain? Nothing but the presence of the deceased's money in the prisoner's pocket, in a position where it might have been for weeks without

his knowing it. If the prisoner knew the money was there why did he not dispose of it or secrete it before giving himself up? If he were guilty would he not be careful to divest himself of everything connected with the crime? Or, if it were mere forgetfulness, why was there nothing but the new bills? Where is the balance of the money—some six hundred dollars? The only explanation which can possibly be accepted is that he did not know the money was there.

'Again, how did Cargill come to be in the swamp? In God's name let them tell us that! What was he doing there? Why should he walk six miles instead of one? Why should he wish to prolong the journey on a dark night when the roads were well-nigh impassable? It won't do to say that he lost his way. No one would believe that story. There wasn't a man in Lincoln county who knew the highways and byways better than did the deceased.

'The next incongruity is their theory about the prisoner's condition. They tell you he was so intoxicated that he scarcely knew what he was doing, and in the same breath ask you to believe that he overcame a lithe, wiry, active man like Mr Cargill. They ask you to believe that a man whose legs refused to carry his body could drag and hide away a corpse a half heavier than himself.

'And what about the blood on the roadway? *Whose blood was it?* Why in heaven's name do they not tell us? The deceased never lost a drop of blood, as you all know. According to their theory it must have been Delavan's. It was the wrong man who bled—the murderer and not his victim. Who struck the blow? Mr Cargill they will tell you. With what? The umbrella? No. That won't do. Uncontrovertible evidence on both sides proves that *the umbrella could not have inflicted that wound.* Away, then, goes the whole theory.

'But now, about this umbrella. They say that the

deceased had one in his hand and it was snatched from him when the fatal blow was struck. Fifty respectable people in the glare of a dozen lamps, and witness Bolton in the lane, could not see an umbrella in Mr Cargill's hand, but two saloon loafers from the spot where Detective Breen has been boarding could swear to both the deceased and the umbrella in the inky darkness. It is a wonder that these owl-eyed worthies were not able to tell whether the umbrella was of silk or alpaca. But they did very well and no doubt earned their fee. The gold cure, even when administered by the hell-hounds of the law, is very effective in strengthening the eyesight, but let me say here that if there is a creature on earth away below the level of an assassin it is the human reptile who tries to swear away the life or liberty of an innocent man.

'The State, like the lady whom Shakespeare speaks of, has protested too much. As a matter of fact, there was no umbrella in the case whatever. The weapon was a walking-stick. If you examine the portion in your possession you will be convinced that, while it might at one time have been an umbrella handle, it has been latterly used as a walking-stick. Look carefully at the wearing of the ferrule on the end and the traces of red clay peculiar to the lower Townline. The perpetrator of the deed knew full well that there is no weapon more convenient than a cudgel. Unlike a pistol, it makes no noise; unlike a knife, it draws no blood. One good blow on the proper spot is sufficient.

'But there is a still more ridiculous feature to the State's theory. The pool of blood on the roadway was at least thirty feet from the point from which the body was dragged. It was in the opposite direction. If Delavan were bleeding when he pulled the deceased into the swamp, why were there no blood-stains about or on the clothing of the deceased?

If the body was secreted before Delavan received his wound, then who struck the blow? The whole fabric falls to the ground. It proves that the man who bled was not the man who secreted the body, and you may be sure that the man who secreted the body was the man who committed the crime.

'I should like to hear them explain how the prisoner, bleeding, drunk and unconscious, reached Dennis Walsh's in the marvellous space of less than an hour; how he covered six miles of the worst road in the State in less time than a fleet horse could. They ask you to believe that he walked, or ran through holes and creeks, and over fallen logs at a speed which neither he nor they could attain on a race track, and, at the same time, had leisure to cut his scalp, take a ride on horseback, and go to sleep or stupor in the stable.

'The State completely ignores the housebreaking of the afternoon, because a hundred witnesses can prove that Delavan was in Owasco from morning till evening, and yet they try to make use of the impression which the mutilated will would convey to your minds. They dare not advance any theory upon it, and yet they try to keep it ever before you. Now, as the will was drawn in favour of Miss Delavan, what motive could the brother have in destroying it by tearing away the signature? That would be merely taking from his sister and giving to his mother.'

Mr Carswell here requested the prisoner to stand up.

'Now, gentlemen of the jury, look at the prisoner. Note his delicate appearance and comparatively small stature. Look at the white hands and effeminate features and tell me, in the name of common sense, if he could overcome, even when perfectly sober, so wiry a man as Mr Cargill? No, a thousand times no. The man who murdered

Nicholas Cargill was a giant. Give me that walking-stick. Now, gentlemen, let a taller man than myself stand in front of me and watch the result. Mr Millar, please stand up. You are taller. I go to strike you with the knob of this cane and where do you catch it? Between my hand and the knob. Of course. Now, Mr Swartz, you try it. I am much taller than you. I go to strike you and where do you catch it? At the point of course. So did Mr Cargill. The man who struck the blow was taller. Look at the prisoner and draw the inevitable conclusion.

'I repeat, gentlemen, that the man who struck the blow was a tall man; the man who carried away his weapon was a cunning man; the man who carried his victim to the swamp was a sober man; the man who burglarised Mr Cargill's premises in broad daylight was a bold man; the man who, on the spur of the moment, struck down a presumptive witness was a quick-witted man; the man who recognised Norbert Delavan was no stranger in the locality; the man who rode through the swamp in the darkness was familiar with the Townline, and the man who parted with a share of his booty, because it was traceable, was a calculating man in full possession of his senses, one of the coolest and cleverest criminals of the age.

'We call this a murder. It is more. It is a mystery which cannot be cleared up by convicting an innocent man. I tell you this Townline tragedy will take time to unravel. Look at it in the light of common sense, in the light of probability, in the light of all the evidence and all the facts and you will give a verdict which will free an innocent but unfortunate young man from the charge of a deed which, I venture to say, is, for daring, deliberation, strategy and cunning, unequalled in the annals of crime.'

Mr Curry's charge was also a masterpiece in its way. He began by pitying the prisoner and his relatives,

and pointing out how sad it was to see a young man, so handsome and intelligent, in the criminal's dock. He interspersed his remarks with short dissertations on the baneful effects which alcohol produces on the character of those addicted to it.

'The prisoner, on the night of the tragedy, had no money; he had spent it all in the saloons that afternoon. He had no means of satisfying his unquenchable thirst for liquor excepting to leave his mother's house in the dead of night and go in quest of his hidden bottle. But, as the defence admits, he never reached his goal. Why? Because he met in the swamp, on his way back, the man who now sleeps in the churchyard.'

'My learned friend has challenged me to say what Mr Cargill was doing in the swamp; he insists on knowing why he went to the south instead of the north. Had he been listening as intently to our evidence as to his own, he would have remembered that the deceased had a sister living at the far end of the swamp—a sister to whom he had not spoken for years until that night, and what more likely than that even at this untimely hour he sought to complete the reconciliation so auspiciously begun. We have every right to believe that Mr Cargill was on his way to ask forgiveness of his sister for the silence of years; aye, the very words may have been forming themselves upon his lips when the assassin's blow silenced them forever.

'This explanation of the deceased's presence in the swamp is at once natural and probable, and requires no array of superlative events or arguments to support it. The theory propounded by my learned friend is very ingenious, it does great credit to his powers of imagination and invention, but it is too complex and too mysterious for the average mind, and too spontaneous in its events for this work-a-day world. We do not, however, grudge the defence all the

theories it can advance. We are satisfied with the facts.

'And what are these facts? That Mr Cargill left Mr Worth's house just in time to meet the prisoner in the swamp, that Mr Cargill was murdered, in the swamp, at that very hour, and the money on the person of the deceased found its way into the prisoner's pockets. We know that the prisoner disappeared suddenly and remained in hiding till after a reward was offered for his apprehension, and we know by the witness for the defence that it was only when all hope of escape had fled that he gave himself up. But the prisoner made a slip, just such a slip as criminals are apt to make—just that forgotten something which always traces the guilt home. *He forgot to hide away the new bills.* He had secreted the greater part of the spoils, but in a separate pocket. He knew they were traceable, but he did not like to throw them away, so he put them apart till he had time to decide. Any other explanation is sheer extravagance,' and the speaker snapped his fingers as if to dismiss the matter as unworthy of further notice.

As to the grey horse theory, Mr Curry did not think it necessary to dwell upon it. As an ingenious romance it was a success and no doubt had entertained the assembly, but the gentlemen of the jury knew too much about the Townline and its denizens to be led astray by a 'will-o'-the-wisp' from that locality. The fact that there were grey horse hairs on the clothing of the deceased proved nothing. There were scores of grey horses in the neighbourhood, and several on Mr Cargill's own farm. Sitting in a vehicle on a rug or horse blanket would explain all that. The evidence of the learned professor was, no doubt, given conscientiously, but experience had taught jurors that, of all things in this mundane sphere, the most unreliable and uncer-

expert

evidence. He owed the gentleman, however, some thanks for strengthening the case against the prisoner, and proving by his microscope that the prisoner and the deceased had been in actual and close contact. It was not unlikely that when the prisoner was rifling the pockets of his victim, the horse hairs were transferred to the clothing of the dead man.

'Hold firmly to the facts I have given you and remember that you are here, not to listen to dime novel stories, but to administer justice and enforce the law. I say that Norbert Delavan owed his uncle a grudge, as witnesses have already proved, and no matter whether the mother or sister was heiress it was quite certain that he could not reach one dollar of the money while the old gentleman was alive. We do not claim that Norbert Delavan burglarised his uncle's house, but we do say that he may have done it by proxy, and his unlettered substitute may have blindly followed his instructions. Remember this. The prisoner had no reason to suppose or expect that either his mother or sister was mentioned in the will; indeed, he had every reason to believe that Mr Cargill would cut them both off without a shilling. The only safe directions to give an accomplice in a case of that kind was to *destroy the will by tearing off the signature and to bring back the body of the instrument to prove that the work had been done.* In the confusion of papers, the search for money, or the fear of being surprised, the mutilated will was forgotten. Perhaps, on the other hand, the *torn signature* was kept by the accomplice to prove his handiwork. Either hypothesis will explain the facts.

'We insist that Norbert Delavan had *everything* to gain by his uncle's death, because, no matter whether the fortune came to his sister or his mother, he was reasonably certain to get a share of it.

'The defence has wasted a great deal of energy in

trying to show that the murderer was a big man, but the possibility and the likelihood of the victim being pushed over or knocked down before the blow was delivered upsets, very ruthlessly, the study and ingenuity of my learned friend, and explains the

nor points to which he has taken much exception. 'Remember, we do not claim that Norbert Delavan killed Nicholas Cargill for his money; nor do we claim that the original intention of the prisoner was to kill at all; but we do say positively that the prisoner committed the deed, whatever his motive may have been.

'The meeting in the swamp was accidental, and perhaps there were some extenuating circumstances. Perhaps the deceased rebuked the prisoner for his condition, perhaps the prisoner, in the irritability of semi-sobriety, was exasperated by his uncle's caustic remarks, and perhaps the first blow was thoughtlessly given. Perhaps the deceased deserved some moral punishment for so long leaving the prisoner's mother and sister in poverty. We do not know. Such things are not within our province. We do not pretend to look into men's hearts. We leave that to the "Giver of all good," or to men of second sight like my learned friend. But we have established, by every reasonable means, that the blow was struck by Norbert Delavan. We cling to the facts and maintain that, whatever his motives may have been, the prisoner did, on the fourteenth day of November, cause the death of Nicholas Cargill.'

The court-room was packed to the doors. Every word which fell from the lips of the learned counsel was listened to in breathless silence. Every face in the audience wore a puzzled and anxious look, which the judge's impartial charge did little to dispel. Hundreds congratulated themselves on the fact that the State had abolished the death penalty, and many thanked God that they were not on a jury which had

to decide between such masses of contradictory evidence.

The Court was adjourned to give the jury more time, and the crowd collected again and again to hear the verdict, but it was over forty-eight hours before the twelve wise men could give their decision.

The verdict was 'Guilty.'

The prisoner was white as wax when he stood up to receive his sentence, but he was calm and self-possessed. In reply to the judge he said he could only affirm his innocence.

Norbert Delavan was then sentenced to imprisonment for life, the awed and silent crowd filed out of the court-room, the big doors closed and the great trial was over.

CHAPTER XVI

VOX POPULI

IMMEDIATELY after the trial the newspapers throughout the State set up a great clamour about the lawlessness of the Townline. The current of public opinion ran so high that the county fathers awoke and called a meeting of the ratepayers of Lincoln to take into consideration the best means of remedying the long-standing evil.

The day of the meeting was a memorable one in Owasco. People came from far and near, by rail, in vehicles and on foot. The object of the meeting was novel, and public curiosity was aroused. The city hall was crowded to the doors. Dignitaries filled the front seats, and the platform fairly overflowed with judges, clergymen, temperance orators and college professors.

The chairman of the County Board, Mr Henly, a swarthy man with a hang-dog look, was presiding officer for the occasion. He arose and announced the purpose of the meeting. He said that for many years the matter had hung heavily on his mind and that while he was chairman for the Municipality of Mulhem he had always done his best to—

‘Catch the Townline vote.’

The interruption was followed by shouts of laughter and cries of, ‘You’ve got him.’

A red-faced constable jumped to the platform and threatened to put out anyone who disturbed the meeting.

The chairman then went on to eulogise his own career as a municipal officer. He maintained that if his record had not been spotless he could never have attained his present lofty position. 'Some people would like to lay blame on me, but I always went in for pure elections. What is it that has put me where I am?—'

'Canvassing at all hours and being everybody's lick-spittle.'

The constable called on a policeman at the door to eject the unruly elector, and the officer commenced elbowing his way through the crowd.

Just then, however, affairs took another turn. A waspy, thin-faced man with a soprano voice sprang to his feet and asked if he might speak to a point of order. Permission was granted.

'Well, sir, I maintain that, as this is a Lincoln county meeting, the Owasco police have no business here. Our holding the meeting here was only a matter of convenience. Everybody knows that Owasco is not in Lincoln county. This is a people's meeting and we are not going to be gagged or bossed. If we can't have our say here we'll go somewhere else and meet.'

The amount of applause which followed Mr Jenkins's declaration showed clearly the feeling of the meeting. Mr Henly, after carefully gauging the amount of applause and peeping critically at the audience through his eyebrows, ventured to remark that Mr Jenkins was correct.

'I am always in favour of free speech. I have been that way ever since I first got to be supervisor. I am always anxious—'

'To trim your sails.'

The speaker wisely ignored this sally, and, after thanking the audience for its kind hearing, took his seat.

The various clergymen were first called upon. The

Revs. Wilbur and Frame thought the lawlessness of the Townline was due to a lack of godliness. Nothing else could be expected of a people who never darkened a church door, whose children grew up without the untold blessings of the Sabbath school. They thought it best to drive the malefactors from their fastness before they corrupted, by their evil influences, the young people growing up around them. The law should be enforced even at the point of the bayonet.

The Rev. Mr Deane took an entirely different view. He thought that charity ought to begin at home. Surely, when we spent millions on foreign missions, we ought not to grudge time or expense in converting those at our own door. The Townliners were not, he believed, half as bad as they were supposed to be. At anyrate, they were certainly more amenable to moral influences than untutored savages, and surely their souls were just as precious. Christian teaching and moral suasion were better than force. Someone going to live amongst them would, he thought, be able to accomplish a great deal.

Mr Deane, however, 'put his foot in it.' The Rev. Mr Slater, chairman of the Mission Board, who followed, criticised him very sharply and received many 'hear, hears' from his clerical brethren. He characterised Mr Deane's address as an attack on foreign missions uncalled for and unchristian. These outlaws had, for years, been living within the sound of church bells. It was all very well to speak about living among them, but he defied Mr Deane to point out anyone who would undertake it.

'I will.'

In a moment every eye was turned towards the body of the hall. The interruption was strange and unexpected. A man in the vestments of a priest was standing up in the audience. He repeated the words in a firm tone, apologised for the interruption and resumed his seat.

For a moment Mr Slater was nonplussed. A great deal of his argument was lost. But he was too experienced a speaker to be easily put to rout. He resumed his unctuous smile.

'If I am correctly informed, the Townliners have already passed through the hands of such missionaries with more success to their Church than to morality.'

'Shame! shame!'

It was Bergen Worth who stood pointing his finger at the speaker. 'Shame!'

Those who could not see him knew the ring of his voice.

'Platform, platform,' shouted the audience in loud chorus, while the chairman vainly endeavoured to restore order.

Bergen again rose and, with the full force of his powerful voice, apologised for his hasty action. In the quiet which followed Mr Slater returned to the attack and concluded by saying, 'I was not aware there were any Townliners present, nor do I think they have any right to be here unless they are prepared to listen to some very unpleasant truths. The very tone of the gentleman's remarks convinces me that nothing but the strong arm of the law will be of any use in dealing with these outlaws.'

No sooner had the speaker sat down than the crowd commenced calling for Bergen Worth.

The chairman came forward and explained that Mr Worth was not on the list of speakers.

'He ought to be. Pat him on.'

'I think myself he ought to have been put on. I think I said so to one of the committee. Will you come forward, Mr Worth?'

'No. I have no right to disturb the programme.'

'The meeting wishes you to speak.'

'That doesn't make one whit of difference. I'm not going to push some other lad out of his turn. The crowd has no business to be unreasonable.'

Mr M'Lean of the *Owasco Express* arose in his place and stated that he was the next speaker on the programme, but he wished to give his time to Mr Worth and would take it as a great favour if Mr Worth would accept.

Thus appealed to, Bergen came forward. He wore a coat and vest of fustian and nether garments which showed signs of shop-wear. He had evidently come direct from his forge, for traces of black dust still adhered to his face. The moment he reached the platform, without waiting for any preliminaries, he commenced to speak.

'First let me square myself with this meeting. The last speaker was right in putting me down as a savage. My words were as badly out of time as his were out of taste. *His* faulty motive was no excuse for *my* bad manners. But I trust the audience will forgive *me* and I know that Father O'Flynn will forgive Mr Slater.

'The question we are here to discuss is, what are we to do with the Townliners? and the first move to make is to find out the spirit in which we ought to go at it.

'If we are after *revenge*, then I tell you we are in a very small business. We are a bright lot of citizens if we have come here only to see how we can get even with them; if the intelligence of the whole county has got to be scraped up to see how we can overwhelm and overpower them.

'If we are prompted by *fear*, we're at it wrong. If we're after *self-protection* we've only got one end of it. If this meeting is to accomplish anything we must have the proper motive, the true aim.

'It's no trick to hit the target if your aim is correct. You may not make a bull's eye at first, because you can't always count on distance or windage, yet you'll make a decent score. But if you keep blazing away with your ~~gun~~ shut you have only a small chance of getting near the mark at all.

'If we haven't the proper feeling in our hearts towards these men we're beaten before we start. We must get it into our heads that these Townliners are our fellow-creatures; we must get good will in our hearts towards them. If we can't reach that point of moral elevation we might as well strike for home right now.

'First let us all get rid—for a few moments at least—of our self-righteousness. Let him that is perfect cast the first stone. Let us look into our own hearts and confess that we're not the clean potato ourselves. Look out that while these lads are breaking the excise laws openly we are not breaking some higher law in secret. Keep your eye on the chap that's always right. The fellow who thinks he never does anything wrong is the very lad who never does anything right.

'We know that these men are cheating the country out of its lawful dues in the matter of revenue, but that is no reason why *we* should rob them of the good will we owe to every creature on God's earth. *They* don't pretend to be anything but what they are, but *we*, in the intoxication of self-righteousness, call ourselves Christians.

'We have a right to ask ourselves what it was that led up to this state of affairs. How long have we kept this Townline a beastly causeway, a mere cow-path where it is out of the question to draw a load. How often in the past fifteen years have we put our fingers in our ears when these lads were shouting for a decent road? How long have we been taking their taxes and giving them nothing in return? When it's all footed up I'm not so certain that the balance isn't in their favour.

'Before dropping this end of the question I'd like to tell you something about these same Townliners. I don't know that it's any secret, but it is no harm to tell it.'

Here the speaker lowered his voice to a confidential tone and added, 'Every man Jack of them pays his debts.'

'That's not much of a trick you say? And yet a good many of us are not any too good at that game. There is a sense of justice in a man who pays what he owes. He's not all for self. There's timber in him to make a man if we'll only whittle away the bark.'

'Now what do we see in all this? Have we not a duty towards them? What *should* we do under the circumstances? Excepting Mr Deane, whose ideas I heartily endorse, the previous speakers claim that we ought to use force, that we ought to try enforcing the law, but I believe that we ought to begin by paying our debt towards them. *I believe we ought to try Christianity.*'

The smiles and murmurs which followed his last sentence caused him to pause a moment and cast his eyes around the room. The air of inquiry in his face showed that his grim humour was perfectly unconscious. He only added, in a firmer tone and with greater emphasis, '*It would be no harm to give it a chance.*'

'I've got it in my head that we owe these fellows a decent road out, that we have every right to give them a chance to mix with their neighbours. It is our duty to open up the swamps and let in the light. Disease doesn't like daylight and sin is a slink that hates the sunshine. Send a wide smooth road down through there with graded hills and fine bridges and you'll outsize them. When the top-buggies, fancy carriages and yellow stage 'buses go tearing up and down the line you'll see these lads make a different move. When they see fine teams and new waggons hauling grain to market they'll be imitating their neighbours. We are all slaves of fashion and custom, and all you have to do is to make respectability fashionable on the Townline.'

'It has been proposed to root them out. But how are you going to justify this rooting? These men are citizens with citizens' rights. How can you take away their property? Because *they* are smugglers must *we* be robbers?

'The road would be money well spent—less money than it would take to drive them out by force. It would have the advantage of giving employment and putting bread and butter into the mouths of many poor families.

'But the road won't settle the account. We must drive out the lawlessness and not the individuals. We owe them fellowship and social recognition, and if we are honest we will pay in full. I am going to shake hands with the man who stood up in the audience and offered to go amongst them. My acquaintance with the Rev. James O'Flynn is very recent, but we'll fight this thing shoulder to shoulder. What matter about forms? It is motives and deeds we want. We have the example of Christ to follow and that will do us both. What matter whether they build church or chapel so long as they build up character?'

The speaker now became carried away by his theme. His staccatoed words came in swift succession, his face was lit with a glow of enthusiasm, and his whole form was vibrating with intense earnestness.

'Mr Slater called me a Townliner. So I am. So I will be. I'll visit them. I'll associate with them. By the Eternal, I'll even *drink* with them if necessary. If there is no other way of getting in touch with them I'll drink the cursed stuff and suffer the headaches and penalties with which nature will afflict me, and *I'll call the pain a cross I carry for their sa.* I'll get right down amongst them and be one of *...em*, and if I keep my motive pure I'll come out as pure as snow.

'Who am I that can thus boastingly wade into temptation? Am I more moral than the rest of you? No, a thousand times no. I have as much evil in me as I can master, but I shall receive the strength which high motive will give, the strength which anyone may get if he fills his heart with good will. If we have faith as a grain of mustard we shall move mountains. A heart filled with love becomes a channel through which Almighty benevolence flows; it partakes of the irresistible force which spins this planet through space, the infinite law and power which gives us summer and winter, seed-time and harvest. Benevolence and beneficence are manifestations of God, the normal vibration of the whole Universe.

'I want you to go home to-night and say that Bergen Worth is a Townliner. Put it in the papers that I have espoused the cause of the under dog. Say further that the erratic blacksmith will use every atom of his energy to see that the Townliners get fair play, that he will spend his time and his money to make them worthy citizens of this great republic.'

The audience were spellbound by his wonderful enthusiasm, electrified by earnestness and intensity. They forgot his shabby coat, his grammatical errors and erratic phrases. The words came from the depth of his soul and went to theirs. When he spoke of his intentions they knew he would keep his promise, and many a head was stooped to hide a tear.

Father O'Flynn pushed his way forward and grasped the speaker's hand. Not a word was spoken as they greeted each other in sympathy. The feeling of fellowship in their faces was more eloquent than words. For a moment the audience sat in breathless silence, and then came a great shout which was a mixture of sobs and cheers.

The outcome of the meeting was the adoption of the road scheme on a generous scale, with Bergen Worth as chairman of the Road Commissioners.

CHAPTER XVII

A COGENT CLIENT

MR CARSWELL, there's a lady here to see you.'

'Very sorry, Jones, but you know very well I can see no one to-day. Show her into Boyd's room.'

'I was going to do so but she said that nobody but yourself would do. I gave her card to Mr Carruthers.'

'Then let her call to-morrow.'

'She says she has come all the way from Chicago to see you, and must go back to-night.'

'I can't help that. I have no time for trifles to-day.'

'I told her that too, sir, but she said *her* time was as valuable as *yours*.'

The lawyer pushed his pen behind his ear and looked up in amazement. 'What's that you say?'

The clerk repeated his story.

'Well, that *is* cool. She must be out of her senses. Tell her it is simply impossible. Clear out.'

The young man retired to deliver his message, but soon returned with a doubtful look on his face.

'The lady will take no refusal. She says she will pay you double, and by the minute.'

'Show her in then. I'll make short work of her and her impudence. For cool assurance and unlimited cheek give me a woman every time.'

But the irate attorney changed his tune the moment he caught a glimpse of his visitor. Here was a person of more than ordinary importance. Her

attire bore the unmistakable stamp of affluence and her face displayed a force of character unusual in one of her age and sex. Though apparently not long out of her teens, she was considerably above the average in stature, and her demeanour was very grave. Her features were too prominent for beauty, but her great coils of yellowish hair and her large blue eyes were good to look upon.

'I beg your pardon, Mr Carswell, for my seeming rudeness, but unusual circumstances and the importance of my mission will excuse me.'

'Pray be seated. This is my busy day. I shall be able to spare you only a few moments.'

'Thank you. I have come all the way from Chicago to consult you, and urgent business compels me to return to-night. Here is my card.'

GWYNNE & GWYNNE

REAL ESTATE AGENTS AND BROKERS

*Residences Bought, Sold, Leased or Erected
in all parts of Europe and America.*

'Ah. Yes! I have heard of the firm, of course. One of the most progressive firms in America. You are a daughter of some member of the firm, I presume.'

'I am senior partner,' she replied, without the slightest change of voice or manner.

Mr Carswell straightened himself up as if he had received an electric shock. He could scarcely believe his ears.

'Do you really mean to tell me that a girl of your age is the backbone of the concern? God bless me, it seems impossible! You can't be more than twenty.'

Miss Gwynne smiled faintly. 'I am twenty-five.'

'Well, even that! Look at me working away here this twenty years, putting all my energy and ex-

perience into my business, and you, a mere child, flash past me in the race. There's American enterprise for you. Miss Gwynne, you'd be an impossibility in any other country on the face of the earth.'

'I am a Canadian by birth and education. I was sixteen when we came to Chicago. I was born in Toronto.'

'A Canadian?' queried the attorney, more surprised than ever. 'We always concede to Canada a spotless judiciary, a staid and reliable press, and a high educational standard for professions, but we flatter ourselves that in business enterprise we rather distance them. Would you mind telling me how you came to occupy your present position? You have aroused my curiosity,' he added, apparently forgetting his previous haste.

Miss Gwynne commenced her story with childlike simplicity. 'When father died, six years ago, Nora and I were left alone in the world. Mother died when I was born. But we were not left entirely in poverty. He left us two thousand in life assurance, besides a small property on Clark Street. We saw that so small an amount would not keep us long, so we sold our property and decided to go into some kind of business. The only education we had was from the public schools, but we had a taste for business.

'I suppose you have heard that one of the great bug-a-boos of city people of the moneyed classes is house-hunting. People move about so much nowadays. We conceived the idea of classifying and listing empty houses and opening a bureau of information, an agency where, for a reasonable commission, we could secure for our patrons, on the shortest possible notice, just the kind of house required. Knowing that it is always the wife or mother who requires to be suited, we fancied that we would better understand women's wants than our male competitors. First we

thought of taking a cheap office on a back street, but we reconsidered the matter, and decided that if we wished to make money we must go where money was, must get among the wealthy classes. It took every cent of our two thousand to start us, but we staked it all and won. My sister Nora married, and her husband put considerable capital into the business, but we still retain the name of Gwynne & Gwynne, and the responsibility of the management still rests upon me.'

'And in four years you have built up a great business. Marvellous, marvellous! Miss Gwynne, if you will allow me to say so, you are a most wonderful person, the product of a progressive and democratic age.'

Mr Carswell broke into a hearty laugh. The quiet, unassuming self-possession of his visitor touched his sense of humour.

'Excuse my rudeness, Miss Gwynne, but I am proud to meet a woman of such rare ability. It is a privilege indeed. You must do me the honour of coming to lunch with me. My wife and daughter will be delighted. Will you come?'

'I shall, with pleasure.'

'Good! And now to business. Excuse me for forgetting that business should come first. What can I do for you?'

'You were counsel for the defence in the Cargill case?'

Mr Carswell nodded.

'Your charge to the jury led me to think that you thought the prisoner innocent?'

'I certainly did and do yet. I am as confident that Norbert Delavan is innocent as that you are sitting before me, and I intend to prove it some day.'

'I am pleased to hear you say so, because it was about re-opening the case I came to see you to-day.'

The lawyer was on the alert in a moment. He

fairly beamed with interest. 'Ha! You have discovered something of a startling nature, some new evidence or some fact not known at the time of the trial?'

Miss Gwynne smiled sadly and shook her head. 'Indeed, I have never heard the case mentioned since the trial.'

Mr Carswell gave a sigh of disappointment and leaned back in his chair. What could be her motive in coming if she had nothing to tell? He drummed his fingers on the desk and waited for her to proceed.

'I have taken a decided interest in the case and I wish to set on foot a private investigation. I thought I could not do better than go to an attorney who had faith in the innocence of the prisoner. You believed in your client. The whole country was convinced on that point. Nothing can be done without faith. That is the first lesson in business. Since I have seen you, I feel that I can trust you. I am quite a physiognomist in a small way.'

The old gentleman smiled at the implied compliment and bowed in acknowledgment. 'Are you acquainted with the family?'

'No. I wish to get some information concerning them from yourself. The prisoner has a mother and two sisters, I believe?'

'Only one sister now. The youngest died lately. The mother, too, was very ill for a long time. Typhoid fever, I believe.'

'Poor souls.'

'Yes. No one goes near them now. They are under a social ban. But they come of a good stock and are intelligent and refined people. The mother is a lady by birth, education and instinct, and the daughter is a little heroine, as brave as she is beautiful. They are both proud and sensitive, but that, of course, makes their suffering more intense.'

'Dear me! What trials there are in life for some.'

There is nothing so infinitely cruel as respectability. How did they manage during their illness?

'The little girl — Miss Naera — fought her way through it. Her sister died while the mother was in the convalescent stage, and she was the only one left to follow the remains to the cemetery. I attended the funeral and saw Miss Delavan there. It was pitiful. There she stood, alone, bearing the grief and disgrace of her family, her young face bleached with anxiety and her cheek hollow with fatigue and physical suffering. As the sods fell on the coffin she turned as white as marble and her hands trembled, but no sound of grief or word of complaint escaped her. There wasn't a dry eye in the cemetery. Patient suffering and resignation were written in her face so plainly that even hard, grasping men of the world turned away to hide their emotion. This seems to have been a moral shock to the neighbourhood. Everybody remembered that they had neglected a sacred duty. Then a reaction set in, and, to use a homely proverb, they resolved to lock the stable after the horse had been stolen. They resolved to offer help when it was no longer needed, and, as usual, went to the opposite extreme. Some well-meaning people gathered a liberal purse and went down one evening to present it.'

'Oh, oh! Wouldn't that be terrible?' broke in Miss Gwynne. 'The donors would think they were doing her a kindness. What a terrible situation!'

'Of course. It was the "most unkindest cut of all." Unconscious cruelty is the hardest to bear. It was simply the last straw. The village washer-woman, who had a son with a deformity, was there at the time and tells that when Naera learned the nature of their errand she trembled like an aspen, begged them to forgive her for refusing their kindness, suggested that the hundred dollars contained in the purse was just the amount required for the

surgical treatment of the washerwoman's boy, and then took a severe chill followed by an attack of inflammation of the brain.'

'And did they get no help at all during their illness?' demanded Miss Gwynne in a tone of indignation.

'Oh, yes. Young Mr Worth, who lived near by, visited them daily and gave them a great deal of assistance, but the feeling against the Delavans was so strong at that time that Mr Worth, senior, quarrelled with his son over the matter. The fear of contagion no doubt kept many away, but, besides that, the will being made in the daughter's favour created a very unfavourable impression.'

'I suppose so. Some cynic has said that while charity is almost deaf and blind, suspicion has a thousand eyes and ears. Did no clergyman visit them during their illness?'

'Oh, yes. Father O'Flynn visited them daily, and does yet, I think. A whole-souled priest of the old school, one of the most benevolent men that ever lived. It is a positive privilege to meet him.'

Miss Gwynne's face warmed into a smile. 'I am acquainted with him. He is my uncle.'

'Indeed? Is it possible? Your uncle? Well, he is a credit to you and to the Church he represents. He is a credit to his country and to the whole human race. No child is too innocent for him to play with, and no sinner too black for him to pray with. Even the Creator might feel proud of a man like James O'Flynn.' Mr Carswell blew his nose so vigorously that the moisture came to his eyes. 'You might get further information regarding the family from *him*,' he continued in a more business-like tone.

A faint trace of colour passed over the young lady's face. 'I would prefer to keep the matter between ourselves, Mr Carswell, if you please.'

'Oh, certainly, if you wish it.'

'I have here a cheque for a thousand dollars which you may place to the credit of the family and use for their advantage and assistance as best you can. It is a marked one,' she added as she handed it to him.

The lawyer looked at his client in ill-disguised wonder.

'Really, Miss Gwynne, I am not certain that I ought to receive this. Your munificence is overwhelming. They are proud people, broken-down aristocrats, who would rather die of starvation than accept charity; besides, they are the heirs to the Cargill estate, though for that matter the widow told me that she would never touch one farthing unless Norbert's name was cleared. What they need is employment.'

'Very well. You will be able not only to purchase employment, but to see that they are well paid for it.'

Mr Carswell laughed. 'I see you know something of the world's wicked ways. Money, money, money! Why, even the labourer who works on the sewer nowadays must give a percentage of his earnings to the "boss" in order to hold his situation. Everything has to be bought in these degenerate times. A thousand dollars is a goodly sum. I shall be able to arrange it in some way. But now it is almost lunch time. Is there anything further?'

'You understand that I wish the case re-opened and sifted to the bottom, regardless of expense?'

'It shall be as you say. I intended doing so on my own behalf, but your assistance will be of sovereign service. Remember, though, that in a matter of this kind it is easy to spend four or five thousand.'

'I shall not hesitate if it costs twice that amount. You have my implicit confidence. All I ask is that the money be spent to the best advantage. Draw on me from time to time, remembering always to draw on me personally, and not on the firm, because this is, of course, a private matter between ourselves.'

'Have you thought this well over, Miss Gwynne?'

You must not let your generosity carry you too far. Mature consideration may change your views of this matter.'

'I have thought over it for the past month. I am not what the Stock Exchange people call a plunger.'

'Well, well. This beats all. And shall I not tell these people who their benefactress is?'

'Decidedly not. He would know at once—I mean Mr Delavan.'

'Oh! I understood that you had never met any of the family. You are acquainted with Norbert, then?'

A distinct wave of colour overspread Miss Gwynne's face. 'Yes, incidentally. He was my sister's coachman last summer in Chicago.'

CHAPTER XVIII

A HOME MISSION

THE tenth day after the County meeting in Owasco found James O'Flynn making his way on horseback down the Townline to the scene where his self-imposed duties called him. As soon as he received the consent of the local bishop he gave up his comfortable position in Owasco and set out on his new mission with perfect confidence in his ultimate success.

He was not naturally timid, and yet, the deep wilderness on each side, the road, a mere pathway dug into holes and ditches by the rain, and the vanishing signs of civilisation gave him a slight fluttering at his heart. Several times he was inclined to turn back and reach his destination from some other direction; again and again he was about to dismount and lead his horse through gulleys, until he discovered that his willing steed did not share his faint-heartedness nor take fright at apparently impassable spots. The animal's willingness to scramble in and out of the various holes led the good-natured priest to wonder whether the horse was not, after all, a better philosopher than man. So impressed was he with the courage and sagacity of his mount that he abandoned all responsibility in its favour. He resigned himself to whatever fate had in store for him and kept up his courage by whistling some old Irish ballads.

At last, reaching a spot where a narrow lane led down the slope to a point where the roof of a barn was visible, the horseman dismounted and opened the

gate, when the horse gave a snort and started down the lane at a swinging trot, leaving his disconcerted rider to follow as best he might.

After a few seconds of self-commiseration the clergyman started in pursuit with all the speed he could muster. He had gone fully a hundred yards in anxious haste, when a stout man with bushy red whiskers suddenly made his appearance, and catching the priest by the coat collar, spun him round like a teetotum. The new-comer had evidently been taken by surprise. He had on neither coat nor hat, and the cudgel in his hand was freshly broken from the limb of a tree.

'Good-day to ye, sor, but the roads is tarrable bad this way. I wudn't advise ye to go any further. It's a foine place to turn just here,' he added as he whirled his victim about.

Father O'Flynn was so taken back by the suddenness of the encounter that he could not collect himself to reply. Before he knew what he was about he was marching arm in arm with his captor towards the gate.

'Wan av the boys'll bring out yer nag, so ye can jist wait out here.'

'Faith, I was only after a bite to eat for myself and the pony. I was told you were Irish here,' said the priest, quietly, with a look of expostulation.

'So we are, but we don't intind to have a lot of divils blackguarding us and then spying on us, de ye see? Ye're from Owasco?'

'Yes, sir. But you may see by my coat that I come in peace.'

'I don't know about that,' replied the Townliner with a doubtful shake of his head. 'Sure, the last priest we had here brought the dipity marshals on tap av us. Black coats don't always kiver white hearts. I've seen many a wolf in sheep's clothing in me time. But by my soul, now, when I get a good luk at ye, I belave you're Father O'Flynn.'

'That's who I am. My business is to come and live amongst you. This is the only weapon I carry,' and he drew from his bosom a tiny cross.

The irate Hibernian let go the clergyman's arm and broke into uproarious laughter. 'Excuse me, yer Riverance, but I wur jist thinking what a narrow escape ye had. Only for the cut of yer coat collar I'd been after trying the thickness av yer skull. Yez missed a fine sight of stars this very minute. So ye are Father O'Flynn? I'm Dinnis Walsh, at yer service. Take back the nag, Tip,' he shouted to a man who was approaching with the recreant steed. 'Come away in, and welcome. Sure, we heerd all about ye. I suppose ye've heerd tell av me?'

'I have indeed. You are a sort of leader among your people and I have come to you for help.'

'What kind of help do ye want?' queried Dennis with a half-humorous, half-quizzical glance at his visitor.

'Help to make a living and help to make you all better men. I have come among you to thrive or starve, to live or die. My fate will depend on you and yours.'

'Divil a fear of ye starvin'. I'll go bail on that. But as for the other part,' he added with a broad grin, 'we'll not make anny promises.'

By this time they had reached the house, a white plastered building of respectable dimensions.

'Here's Father O'Flynn, the priest I wur tellin' ye about,' exclaimed the host to his wife, a tall, dark woman, who hurried several dirty-faced children out of the room.

'Sit down, yer Riverance. Nancy'll have the dinner in a jiffy.'

Mrs Walsh bowed to the priest in an awkward, embarrassed way and brought forth a stone jar with two goblets and some cake.

'Help yourself, Father. Ye needn't be scared av

it. It's the pure stuff. Not a headache in a barrel of it.'

The priest hesitated a moment. Here, at the very outset, was a crucial point. He wished to be sociable but he dared not risk it even for the cause. 'Listen, Dennis. I nearly went to the dogs once with whisky. I might get too fond of it again. But I take a smoke occasionally. Can you do anything for me in that line?'

'Bedad, I can fix you rightly,' replied the host, producing from his pocket a pipe whose colour and odour struck terror to the heart of his guest.

The priest ruefully watched Dennis wipe off the stem of the pipe with his big rough hand, but there was no escape. He lit up and puffed away for a few moments with pretended enjoyment. 'A rare pipe, Dennis. Get me a glass of water and we'll drink a toast. Here's prosperity and progress to the Town-liners.'

'Good! Here's me hand, Father. You're a brick. If any man will do the boys good it's yourself.'

At dinner Dennis surprised his visitor by asking him where he got his horse.

'I bought him from the man that keeps the livery opposite the market. They told me he was quiet and gentle—I mean the horse. If he hadn't left me at the gate I would have said he was the most knowing animal I ever rode.'

'Oh, he's gentle enough now, I'll engage ye. He has sinse enough to luk out for hissself. He'd rather walk as run, barrin' when he's hungry, like he wur to-day.'

'Is he not a first-class serviceable animal?'

'Him? No, yer Riverance. He's a plug now, saving yer presence. He's been foundert bad and he's as ould as Methuslas's off-ox.'

'Dear me! I depended on that man's honesty. I gave ninety-five dollars for him.'

Dennis laughed heartily. 'Ninety-five dollars. Sure there's not a man on the line would have done ye half as bad.'

'He seemed like an honest man, this Mr Gale. He told me the horse would suit me splendidly.'

'Av coorse. And the price suited *him*. But Gale's a dacent man. I don't blame him, mind ye. No man purtends to tell the truth when he's sellin' or tradin' a horse.'

'Well, but it's downright roguery. It's as bad as stealing.'

The Townliner shook his head with an air of patronising superiority.

'No, no, yer Riverance. Horse-dealin's a business by itself. Ivery man has to luk out for hisself. Wait for a while till ye be at it, and ye'll larn better nor that. I wudn't be argying on the boys like that or they'll think ye're foolish.'

'Why can't you be as honest about that as anything else? Come now, Dennis, honour bright!'

'It's a different thing,' protested Dennis with a serious air. 'When a man's dalin' in horses he wurks on his own knowledge. He does the best he can iver time. I always let a man run down me horse as much as iver he likes. I niver argy with him but jist let him think there's enough good in the horse to kiver up his faults. Then I nivir find fault with *his* horse nor say a word about the blemishes because I mightn't see them all, but I jist looks kind of solemn-like and says the horse won't suit me. He thinks *I* see blemishes as he doesn't, then he loses concate in his horse and I have it all me own way. Sure that's as honest as the day. Then, if ye're sellin', it's no harm to get all ye can.'

Father O'Flynn laughed. 'I am afraid, Dennis, that your diplomacy is weak in its ethics. I'll keep clear of you when I'm horse trading.'

The host smiled. He was always pleased at any tribute to his greatness. He did not know the meaning of his companion's remarks but he took them as a compliment.

Dinner being over, Dennis drew back his chair and lit his antiquated briar-root. He was in a mellow mood now and he lowered his voice to a confidential tone.

'I've been soaked purty bad in me time.'

'He must have been a shrewd dealer.'

'It wur over to Campbeltown some years ago. He wur a nice slick man, as solemn as a prayer-meetin'. "Are you Mr Walsh?" sez he. "I am," sez I.

"I have a horse here I wud like to get tamed down—a fine animal but too high-spirited for me. They say your people can tame any kind av a horse," sez he.

"We do a little in that line," sez I. "Suppose we have a luk at him."

'Well, we went round to the stable and, sure enough, he wur a beauty, clane as a whip.

'Sez he, "I'd like if you could make him so my wife could drive him."

"I'm afeerd it can't be done," sez I, lukiing at his teeth. "He's too high-spirited for a lady's horse."

"That's too bad," sez he. "It's more for my wife nor myself that I got him. What had I better do?"

"Trade him off," sez I. "What else can you do?"

"Oh, but it would be wicked for a preacher to trade," sez he.

"Tut, tut," sez I. "Jump in that cutter and try that mare av mine. If she suits ye, we'll trade."

'I wanted to get him away so as to have time to luk at the grey because he wur a beauty. There wur snow on his feet and tacks in the yard, so I nivir bothered tryin' him. Well, we traded. The horse I had wur a snag worth about thirty dollars. Av

course I axed boot, but the preacher wudn't listen. I mustn't chate a greenhorn. He cudn't give the horse away altogether. We badgered about till I gave him twenty dollars, and aff I goes with me new blood. My. He wur a beauty. He made the cutter fairly dance. But as I wur pulling him up for a corner he stopped and wudn't move a peg. Bedad, I was bate. I spoke to him quiet like and purtended to fix the harness, but it wur no good. It was a clane balk.

'I gave him a swack with the whip and then the fun began. Kick! Ye nivir saw annything like it. Sure, he fairly reached for the moon. He nivir stopped till the cutter wur in splinters.

'As bad luck wud have it, who should come along but Wilson Brett. He laffed and laffed till bedad I swore at him. "Where did yez get the torpedo, Dinnis?" sez he. "Great snakes, but he'd make a foine futball player."

"Do you know him?" sez I.

"Av course," sez he. "I tuk ten dollars aff the 'acher for him last night." . . .'

When the laugh had subsided Father O'Flynn ventured to ask his host what he eventually did with the horse.

'I tuk him home and made up me mind to kill or cure him. I stuck to him till he wur as right as a fiddle and then I sold him for a good price to Frank Gale.'

'The man I bought my horse from?'

'The very same man, and, by the same token, it's the same horse.'

The clergyman jumped up in horrified surprise. 'Not the same horse surely? You must be mistaken.'

* 'Mistaken is it? Lord bless ye, no. Luk here, Father, ye may belave me or not, but if ivir I own a horse I can swear to him in the dark. All I want

is the outlines. Sure, when Ted Fahey and me wur over in Ireland two years ago we met a coachman drivin' wan day with a fine pacer. The minnit I saw her, sez I, "By the great mortal gobs, there's Kitty." The jackass wur drivin' her wid an overdraw, so I runs up and catches her by the bridle.

'Well, wud ye belave it, the poor dear whinnered. The coachman swore at me to let go or he'd shoot me, but the boss he poked his head out and axed what I wanted. "Nothing," sez I, "only to kiss Kitty. Sure I raised her, and to prove it I'll show ye. Kiss me, Kitty," sez I, and sure enough she licked me on the cheek. Bedad, I cried and put me arms round her neck, and the boss he came out and cried too. Well, he wur took wi' me and no mistake. The best in the castle wur non too good for me. Since then I've sent him, for a mate for Kitty, a geldin' a half a hand higher but a dead mate in ivery ither way.'

For a time there was silence. Dennis, touched with the memory of Kitty, was wiping the moisture from his eyes, while Father O'Flynn sat ruminating over the frailties of horse-flesh and the wickedness of man.

The latter was by no means convinced that the sagacious beast who bore him over holes and ditches so carefully was the same animal that had so deceived his host. Surely hypocrisy belonged to man alone.

'How did you conquer the grey horse?'

'By kindness. I've tried all plans. I've had the meanest brutes on earth and kindness fetched them all. But I hadn't much trouble with Din after all.'

'My horse's name is Din?'

'Av coorse it is. Sure, didn't I christen him meself after dinnamite. Come away out now and ye'll see whether he knows me or not. I larned him to take a candy out av me pocket.'

In a few moments they were at the barn.

'Listen till him whinner now. Din! Where's Din? Poor old Din!'

There could no longer be any doubt as to the identity of the horse. It whinnered again and again and tried to turn round in the stall. Going up beside the animal Dennis whispered something in his ear, and in a moment Din was nosing a piece of candy out of his old master's pocket.

The moisture came to the eyes of the gruff Townliner as he stroked and patted his old friend. He drew his sleeve across his face and apologised for his weakness by explaining that for a friend the horse was far ahead of man.

'A horse, ye know, Father, has a rale character, but a man hasn't.'

'How long is it since you owned this horse?'

'Six years coming next January.'

'The creature must have a wonderful memory. And have you niver seen him since?'

'No, I niver met him since to spake to. The last time I saw him he wur gallopin' up that lane wid a man on his back. *It wur the night as old Cargill wur murdered. I wur goin' to tell it in the coort but they wudn't have belaved me.*

'You said at the time, Dennis, if I remember aright, that it was too dark to swear to the man.'

'Yes, but it wud have to be a *dale darker* if I cudn't swear to old Din.'

CHAPTER XIX

BERGEN DINES OUT

ABOUT this time the social atmosphere of Worth's Corners was considerably affected by the advent of a new pastor for the White Church.

The Rev. Stephen Silk was young, handsome, energetic and attractive. His finely-cut features, erect head and tall lithe figure gave him a very impressive appearance, and although his manner was a trifle imperious, his ready smile and soft musical voice were taking the hearts of the people by storm. Already he was a leading attraction at all the local gatherings, and being unmarried the ambitious mothers of the neighbourhood commenced laying plots against his single blessedness.

Mr Silk was a good speaker, and although he lacked the simplicity and warmth of Mr Carrol—now superannuated through age—he was a model of punctuality in his pastoral visits, and, in a general way, was giving satisfaction.

On the other hand *he* was not altogether pleased with his flock. They were well-meaning and industrious people, but there was an air of democracy in their spiritual relations to their pastor which struck a discordant note in his sensitive nature, a familiarity which, he thought, was certain to weaken his power. He concluded that his predecessor had held the reins too loosely for the general weal, and he set himself the task of remedying this defect with indomitable energy.

He soon discovered that, in this particular line of action, he had to count on a powerful opponent. One of his flock was a black sheep—black in the sense that he made no effort to keep in line with his pastor and was inclined to strike out a path for himself.

Although young in his calling, Mr Silk had gone through previous experiences in which fractious and rebellious followers resisted or resented his methods, but in this case the delinquent appeared totally unconscious of his defection.

At class meetings Bergen Worth was always in opposition. No matter what text or verse was under discussion the blacksmith's conception of it was the very opposite of his pastor's, and, what was still more irritating, the former generally carried the class with him. He had a habit of harmonising his teachings with common sense which was very convincing but very unprofessional; a plebeian way of dragging every question out into the daylight and robbing it of its mysticism, a kind of tactics which the young pastor conceived to be a menace, not only to his clerical dignity but to the best interests of the Church. Bergen was never argumentative or contentious, his tones were always deferential and his manner respectful, but this only seemed to make the situation the more unbearable for the pastor.

Mr Silk conscientiously felt that it was his duty to bring his stalwart hearer into subjection and lead him into clearer conceptions of the gospel.

The uncompromising democracy of the blacksmith appeared to be out of harmony with the tenets of the Church to which he belonged; it ignored the censorship of the clergy and made religion a matter of individual conscience.

Clearly Bergen was a source of danger, more particularly as he was very popular in the neighbourhood and was a liberal subscriber to the church. If individualism was going to creep in, if the clergyman

was to have no restrictive authority, where was it going to end? How would it be possible to preserve an established form of Church government if men like the blacksmith were allowed to go unchecked? The whole fabric of denominationalism would crumble, the vitality of true Christianity would be lost and religious chaos would ensue. He confessed to himself on many occasions that Bergen's interpretations of certain passages appeared more reasonable and applicable to every-day life than those which he received at college, and yet it could not be possible that an untutored mechanic could have the intellectual insight of the learned professors who marked the pace not only for their own denominations but regulated the religious conscience of all Christendom.

At anyrate his duty as a clergyman was clear, and however disagreeable it might be he would not shirk it. He would invoke the harmlessness of the dove and the wisdom of the serpent; he would use all the tact at his command.

He invited Bergen to dine with him in his own comfortable quarters at Mr Clarridge's, where he could have an opportunity of impressing the doughty blacksmith with the advantages of a trained mind over an untutored one, and of convincing him that the pastor was necessarily more learned and wise than any of his flock could be.

The evening came, the guest arrived and the dinner passed off very pleasantly. When they adjourned to the library Mr Silk felt certain that his guest would be impressed by the rows of volumes which adorned his shelves.

'You appear to be a great reader,' was one of Bergen's first remarks.

'Indeed, I am a great student. I am afraid sometimes that I read too much. Do you read much yourself?'

'No. I don't appear to have time. Latterly I seem to get more out of studying men and things than I do by reading. It seems as though I want to go to the fountain head instead of taking other fellows' ideas of things. I used to read a good deal on sociology and economics.'

'Yes? I confess that I have never paid much attention to those subjects. The relations of labour and capital are only for politicians. Religion and politics do not mix well.'

'I'm not so sure about that. If there was more religion in politics and more politics in religion it might be better for us all. Of course, I mean politics in its highest and broadest sense.'

'I suppose it *would* be better if politicians were inspired by higher motives, by religious motives, but it is hard to see how the Church could touch pitch without being defiled.'

'The great trouble in speaking of politics is to draw the line between it and partyism. They've kept company so long that we can't imagine them apart. And yet I have it footed up that *pure* politics is really a part of applied religion. At anyrate they have a common ground—the relation of man to man.'

'It would weaken religion to mix with it the temporal affairs of everyday life.'

Bergen smiled. 'I'm at it the other way round. *You* think religion should keep out of bad company, but *I* think it's the want of religion that *makes* the company bad. Christ didn't hunt for the fellows with fancy coats. *He* wasn't afraid of having His respectability tainted. Religion is a thing you can neither blacken nor bruise. I believe the Church will take hold of this question of displaced labour. In the present state of things it seems the most important of all questions.'

'You can hardly mean that, Mr Worth,' pleaded Mr Silk, with a patronising smile.

'Yes, but I do,' repeated Bergen with an emphatic nod. 'I believe that the Church has *got* to take it up.'

The host compressed his lips and looked hard at the ceiling. He gave a slight cough as Bergen concluded.

'Mr Worth, you have spoken without thinking. What is it compared with the duty of saving immortal souls?'

'That's just what I'm coming at. If you take—'

'The question can never become a religious one,' broke in Mr Silk, with a wave of his hand. 'It can never have any bearing on the gospel. What can trade and commerce have to do with the word of God? What can the temporal affairs of this world have to do with the next?'

Bergen listened with keen interest to his host's remarks. He moved his chair closer and placed his hand on his companion's knee.

'We can't seem to get on common ground. Let us have a fair start. Suppose we commence by saying that the object of all religions is to make men better. How does that suit you?'

'It does not completely meet my ideas, but for the sake of argument I shall accept it.'

'Well now, if Christianity doesn't make men lead *better lives*, doesn't make them more *charitable*, more *generous* and more *unselfish*, the whole thing is a failure. Is that right?'

'No, I cannot agree with you there. Our highest duty is that we owe to God. Our duty to man is only a secondary matter. We must first give God our worship and our praise.'

'Supposing I agree with you, how are you going to praise God?'

'By offering up our voices in song and prayer.'

Bergen straightened himself up and snapped his fingers.

'It's not worth one snap alone. There must be something behind it. Any slick lad can play at that game. Faith without works is a shell with no kernel, a programme with no performance. I've got it in my head that our duty to God is *exercised in our duty to man*. The way to praise God is to give a lift to every poor fellow you meet. Every conscientious man knows that a real good honest prayer is a great steadier when he's drifting loose, and hymns help too; but we've got to crystallise the good motive into action, or the whole thing's as flat as a flounder.'

Mr Silk sat with an air of fixed resignation on his face. Mr Worth was his guest, and, of course, it was his duty to allow him every possible latitude. He did not venture to reply.

'Now, take a look at this end of it. If a poor fellow can't get a job of any kind, what's he going to do—beg, steal or starve?'

The clergyman shook his head gravely. 'Those who are out of employment have themselves to blame. Why don't they get work on the farms?'

'Work on the farms. Phew! There's none for them. The gang-plow, the seeder, the mower, the binder and other machinery has settled all that.'

'They should go to the cities and manufacturing centres. There is employment there for hundreds.'

'Yes, and thousands waiting for it. It's the same story there. A machine comes along that does the work of twelve men. One remains to watch the machine and the other eleven are turned adrift.'

The clergyman leaned back in his chair and smiled defiantly at his guest.

'According to your philosophy, machinery has been a curse instead of a blessing. Rather an untenable position, I think.'

'No. I am merely telling the facts. Machinery has been a blessing, but not an unmixed one. But

that's not the question. It has come and it's here to stay. Our only plan is to shape ourselves for it. But we'll go back to our original argument. Supposing I grant your contention that every idle man *is some useless gawk*, what then? Are these not the very men that Christ tells us to take in hand? We're supposed to go right into the ditch after them. Is that right?'

Mr Silk nodded.

'Well, you remember 'he man who got robbed by thieves on the road betw... Jerusalem and Jericho? They clouted him, took his money, tore his clothes and left him all battered up.'

The clergyman again nodded.

'Now keep your eye on this point. There were two wayfarers came along and—'

'There were three.'

'Yes, I know. But I'm only after the two now. The first went straight ahead and never let on he saw the poor fellow. He had it footed up that if he noticed the lad in the ditch he couldn't well get out of giving him a lift. But he hadn't time; he had some preaching to do, and so passed by on the other side. The next lad didn't do any better, only that he didn't pretend *not* to see the poor unfortunate. He felt sorry, but he had his own axe to grind and so passed by on the other side.'

'I fail to see how all this applies.'

'It's as plain as day. The *fellow in the ditch* is *displaced labour*, the *priest* is the *Church* and the *Levite* is the *State*. The Church is looking the *other way* and saying "Let us pray"; the *State* is saying "Poor fellow!" But they are both passing *by on the other side*.'

'And what about the good Samaritan?'

'He hasn't showed up yet.'

Mr Silk was aroused. He rose and commenced pacing the room. 'Do you mean to say that the

Church has done nothing for humanity? What about hospitals, poorhouses and asylums and a thousand and one other charities?’

‘I don’t well see how the Church can claim much on that ground. It has generally been on the begging line itself. What you mean is that *religion* did it. Then you’re on bed rock.’

‘I am astonished to hear you utter such opinions. Are you aware it is rank heterodoxy?’

‘I’m only giving you my opinion. I don’t care one straw about heterodoxy. Give me a man with the *spirit of Christ* in his heart and I’ll bank on his *doxy* every time.’

Mr Silk’s righteous wrath was rising. His lips were tightly compressed and his face was pale. How was he to talk to this ruthless, cast-iron creature who had no spiritual insight.

‘You will admit that the Church has done great mission work.’

‘Certainly. Nobody would think of denying that. But in proportion as the mission was tainted with corporate selfishness, so were the results unsatisfactory. Many were merely bringing grist to their own mill, like fraternal societies skirmishing for new members. But let us go back to the lad in the ditch. He’s our man.’

‘Well!’

‘I want to show you how the Church is behaving towards him. It’s standing across the street preaching a sermon. Now *you* would go over and help the poor fellow out. You’d feel like clouting the man that didn’t take hold and help him. If Christ was on earth to-day *He* would condemn the whole thing. He would see that we had buried our talents, that we were untrue to *Him*, that we are still crucifying *Him* and still making a shibboleth of eternal truth.’

‘Stop, Mr Worth. I cannot listen to such a tirade

any longer. If the Church has done no good, why are *you* a member of my Church now?’

‘I see plainly that I’ve been misunderstood,’ said Bergen, with a kindly smile. ‘No man alive thinks more of the Church than I do. I have faith in its future. It has kept principles alive. Supposing it *has* gathered some rubbish it saved the *jewels* too. But I want the Church to do *more*—infinitely more. I want the *priest* to turn Samaritan, I want the *Church* to take hold of the *lad in the ditch*. With a gentle, patient hand she’s *got to unravel* the great tangles of Labour and Capital.’

As Bergen concluded he rose and placed his hand on Mr Silk’s shoulder. ‘I rather guess I’m a bit too earnest, but it isn’t temper.’

The clergyman, however, mistook the meaning of Bergen’s proffered kindness and waved him back.

‘Your theories, Mr Worth, would reduce the Church from its high spiritual position. The moment you direct religion entirely to the affairs of this life you destroy its effect on the life to come.’

For a moment Bergen did not reply. He seated himself in front of the fire and seemed lost in thought. ‘I don’t see that we can do very much about the next world,’ he said in low, meditative tones. ‘But we have a first-class chance in this one. If we wish to be in good shape for another life it’s no bad thing to keep on rehearsing right here. We ought to act our parts as well as say our lines. The showy vine that keeps on blossoming all the time may be a fine thing for ornament, but it’s a little short on the useful side. You remember that Christ did not have a very high opinion of the barren fig tree. Don’t you think yourself,’ he added in coaxing tones, ‘that we ought to show up a little heavier in the fruit line?’

Mr Silk frowned and moved in his chair. Bergen’s

matter-of-fact tones and utilitarian views were very irritating to him. How would it ever be possible to work shoulder to shoulder in the church with one so diametrically opposed to him in every way? 'Will you kindly tell me, Mr Worth, what your religion really is?'

'Christianity.'

The clergyman shook his head and held up his hands in protest. 'No, no, no!'

Bergen smiled. 'Don't mistake me. I don't claim *to be* a Christian, I am only *trying* to be. I'm not sure that I'll ever succeed, but I'll never quit trying. There's always a chance for a man that's willing to take a fresh hold. I steer clear of creeds and doctrines and theologies—the kind of thing you might call *Churchianity*. There's too much machinery in it for my understanding. I just take Christ as my ideal. He was a good enough Christian for me. Look here,' he cried, arising and standing before his companion with his hands and his face glowing with enthusiasm. 'There's two hands and they're no great sight to look at. They're big and rough but they're willing. One of them is for myself and those depending on me, and the other for the poor weak lads that can't get through themselves. That, with all the goodwill to everybody that my selfishness will allow, is as far as I've got. It's a long way behind my ideal, but it is the best I can do so far. If you expect me to bring up the technical end of it then I'm beat. I never can get that part of it into my system. I rather guess I'm a little weak on that point, but there seems to be no nourishment there for me.'

The clergyman smiled in spite of himself. Bergen's candour, though crude, was perfectly genuine. His child-like earnestness might have been amusing had the subject been less serious.

'Will you tell me, Mr Worth, in what way the

Church can help the unemployed? How are we to go about it?

'By taking the question up. The pulpit should come *ahead* of schools and colleges as a place to educate the people. Deal religion out in samples for them to see and feel and examine. Don't put it on the shelf to be talked about on Sundays. Fetch it down and pass it around. It is not only raiment but food. The poor creatures are hungry for it. They've seen it on the top shelf for centuries and heard its praises sung, and it's no wonder they're wearying to get hold of it.'

'You would fill the Church with socialism. You would make it a political body. Surely the world had enough of that before the Reformation. Think of the danger.'

'I don't well see how there can be danger in a movement which has the Spirit of Christ behind it, no matter what it is called. I don't see how helping and cheering your neighbour can breed any disturbance. I'm inclined to think that we'll have another Reformation some day. You may not see it and I may not see it, but I have an idea that the Kingdom of God *will come—in reality—right here—on this earth.*

The result of the interview was very disappointing to Mr Silk. His task was even more difficult than he imagined. But he would persevere with patience and do his best even though he saw in the dim distance a final appeal to the congregation.

CHAPTER XX

ONE MORE UNFORTUNATE

CHICAGO is always in a hurry. There is a feverish haste in the very atmosphere. Everybody goes hurrying and scurrying to and fro as if life depended on odd seconds. To 'get there' quickly appears to be the first, second and last consideration.

More particularly is this the case on a cold wet night when the theatres and music-halls are discharging their hordes of pleasure-seekers. A raw wind from Lake Michigan is a persuasion which none can ignore. It calls for whip and spur and disperses a crowd with a rapidity that is truly amazing.

On just such a night, and about such an hour, a woman muffled in a long grey cloak was walking to and fro in front of Dr. Elliot's office. Once or twice she paused as if to ring the door-bell, but after listening a few seconds passed on again. For at least half an hour she paced the distance between the corner of State Street and the shadows beyond the doctor's office, glancing nervously about from time to time to make sure that she was not being watched, and drawing her cloak more closely about her face whenever she approached the light.

Finally the door of the doctor's office opened and from it came a coarse, brutal-looking man who frightened her into a hasty retreat. This was the creature whom she overheard talking to the doctor in language that fairly bristled with oaths and in tones that threatened violence. This was the reason

she dared not enter. The big man had curses still in his beard as he pulled his hat over his eyes and disappeared in the shadows. Waiting till the sound of the giant's footsteps died away, she hurried forward and rang the door-bell.

In a few seconds the doctor appeared at the door and admitted her. Not a word was spoken till the door was closed. Then she threw back her hood and disclosed the comely face of a young woman of about twenty, with fair hair, rosy cheeks and blue eyes swollen with weeping.

'Well, Miss Holtorf, what brings you here at this time of night? I am not at home to anyone excepting those who wish to pay their bills.'

'Henry! For God's sake don't talk like that. I heard you were going away to-morrow and I wanted to see you. Is it true you are going?'

The doctor stood with his hands in his pockets, smiling grimly at the pleading figure before him. He was inwardly commenting on the ripe beauty of her face and the wealth of physical energy displayed in her rounded outlines.

'You don't answer, but I can tell by the look of things that you are going. Everything is packed and you never told me.' She buried her face in her cloak and burst into a paroxysm of grief.

'I am sure I ought to feel flattered by the interest you take in my affairs. If I had wished to see you I would have sent you word.'

'Henry! please,' she cried, moving towards him with outstretched arms. 'You used to love me. You used to tell me I was so pretty. You used to tell me about my hair and my eyes being so lovely. Have I become ugly and plain?'

'No, Miss Holtorf, you are still beautiful. You never were more so than you are now.'

She smiled hysterically through her tears. 'Why don't you call me Sarah? You used to call me your

country maiden. Do you remember the night you gave me this locket? It was the week after poor Jack died. See, here it is, with a lock of your hair and the picture you gave me. I have worn it ever since. Why have you avoided me lately? What have I done?'

'Sit down, sit down. I thought you would have sense enough to know why I avoided you. The easiest way is surely the best.'

'What do you mean?' she asked, as a deadly pallor overspread her face.

'It means, of course, that all intimacy is over between us.'

She threw herself at his feet and clasped his knees. 'You don't mean it. You can't mean it, Oh, Henry, I'll be your slave, your worshipper, but don't turn me away. Have pity! have pity!'

Firmly but forcibly releasing himself, he took a cigar from his pocket and coolly lit it at a gas jet. She still remained pleading on her knees.

'Is it because of the innocent child that is to come? Have you forgotten how you told me that it was not a clergyman or a magistrate saying a few words over a couple that married them? You said that all marriage forms were only popular prejudice—and silly prejudice at that. I believed everything you said—'

'You are only wasting time,' he replied, with an impatient wave of his hand. 'I have some important business to do to-night. What is it you want of me?'

'To do your duty and make me your wife in the eyes of the law.'

The doctor broke into a sarcastic laugh. 'You may be sure I shall do nothing of the kind. How can you be silly enough to imagine such a thing?'

She sprang to her feet with a gleam in her eyes. You vowed over and over again that you loved me and you said that love was marriage. If the form amounts to nothing what harm can it do you?'

'Jove laughs at lovers' perjuries. We are all liars

unconsciously, myself included. But I never intended marriage. You must have sadly misunderstood me. Sit down. I don't wish to be unnecessarily harsh, but I certainly never promised to marry you, and to tell you the truth, I never thought I was deceiving you. I thought you understood your position.'

'Shame on you for a villain! Shame! You met me at a time I needed sympathy, a poor, ignorant girl from the farm. I thought our love was sacred when you kissed me beside the death-bed of poor Jack. You knew I trusted you from the first. Oh, God! Oh, God! What have I come to? Am I an outcast? Is this some horrible dream?'

'I am really sorry for you, Sarah—sorry that you have to give up your situation. But you need not take it so seriously. What can it matter if you get enough money to keep you?'

'Oh, man, man! Did you never have a mother who loved you? Is your heart made of stone? Thank God that mother did not live to know of my disgrace. Oh, mother, mother! were all your lullabies and kisses wasted on me? Did you work your poor fingers off for such as me?'

Even the doctor was moved by the impassioned grief of his unfortunate companion in sin as she rocked herself to and fro and wrung her hands. But he was irritated at the useless waste of words and at the futility of protracting a painful situation. Could she not see that all her tears and lamentations would not alter his decision?

'Are you going to the old country?' she asked as she dried her eyes and looked up at him with a strange calmness.

'Yes.'

'When are you coming back?'

'I don't know. Perhaps never.'

She arose, buttoned her cloak and moved towards the door.

'Wait one moment, Sarah. You don't suppose I was going to clear out without making some provision for you. I was going to send you a parcel through the express company.' He opened a safe and took from it several rolls of bank-notes. 'We are both alike to blame in this matter. This is the extent of my pile at present. I propose to share up. I am sorry it isn't more, but it will keep you comfortably, and raise the child too, if you are reasonably economical. Besides, if you ever need financial aid put an advertisement in the *New York Herald* and it will be sure to reach me in any quarter of the globe. I am anxious to do what is fair.'

She watched him counting over the notes and placing them in a large envelope, but she did not seem to realise what he was doing till he placed the package in her hand.

'What's this? The price of my shame? Your money is as horrible as your cruel self. I loathe myself that I ever loved you, you snake, you viper! To think that a creature like you is the father of my child. If you had been human I could have borne my shame for its sake,' and tossing the money in his face she ran out into the wind and rain.

She hurried along for some time before she noticed the direction of her steps or realised where she was. It seemed as if every good and bad impulse she had ever known was surging through heart and brain. Love and hate, joy and despair, weird fancies and woeful facts were all as one. Thoughts and emotions were jumbled into a strange chaos. Was there a God? Was life a reality or a myth? Was she Sarah Holtorf or some strange creature of her fancy? Where was she going, and what for? What were all those lights? Where were the people all going?

A dash of sleet in her face as she turned a corner restored her to consciousness. The objects in the street became realities. Crowded cars were rushing

past, rattling vehicles were racing for their respective havens of rest, hurrying pedestrians jostled her in their haste to reach home.

Home! Friends! She had neither now. Where would she go? Then came back the awfulness of her situation and she hurried on faster than before. It couldn't matter now where she went. But she must keep going or lose her senses.

Mechanically she turned into a quiet street and sat down on a doorstep. It was nice and quiet there with no lamps to look at her. It was good to get away from the light. No one would notice her there. Thank God for the darkness! Ah, but the daylight would come—and then what? Could she bear to let people look into her face by the light of day? Could she not go some place where it was always night? Was there no way of running away from the sunrise that would surely come? She must be going or she would go mad. She must hurry on. She arose and started onwards. Her walk waxed into a run. On, on she sped. She must get away from everybody. Ha! What noise was that? The swish of waves? She could go there. She almost laughed for joy. Thank God it would be dark there. There was a good God above. Here was a friend at last. The waves would have mercy. They would cover her shame.

Oh, but the child! The innocent babe. Must she take its life too? Was there no way to die alone? It must live—for what—shame? No. Death was better.

She paused for a moment and rocked herself to and fro in the agony of doubt.

The waves were dashing and splashing against the breakwater, while away in the distance their voices were blended into a sullen roar. How fearful was the great black stretch of water!

How fierce and cold it sounded! But she must not think. She must act.

Her mind is made up. She fastens the loosened coils of her hair and brushes some stray locks from her forehead. She pauses, as she steps on the pier, to take a parting look at the city with its thousand lights.

She thinks of her mistress and her household tasks, of father and mother, and the old home with its familiar doorstep. She thinks of the playmates of her childhood, of her school friends and her first long gown. She thinks of the time she left home, of the parting at the railway station, of her mother's kisses and her brother's good wishes, of her first impressions of a great city and the undreamt-of splendour of her new mistress's home.

Then she thinks of her brother's face as it grew grey in death and the terrible feeling of being all alone in the wide world. And then she thinks of the man who first stirred her pulses and of her first love kiss—of the man—who to-night—this very hour—

A thousand demons cackled in her ears, mocking her with jibes and jeers. Oh, the awful sights and sounds! Run for the waves! Quick! Escape!

Suddenly jerking her cloak over her face she darts towards the end of the pier.

'Stop! I've got you. It's no use struggling. I've been following you this ten minutes. Come and let us talk it over. You poor soul, can't I give you a lift in some shape? I suppose it was cruel to stop you but I couldn't help it.'

The sound of the newcomer's voice brought her suddenly to her senses. For a moment she peered into his face.

'God of Heaven, it's Bergen Worth!'

CHAPTER XXI

A FRIEND IN NEED

'HERE you are, Mother. Don't get nervous now. Let me have your valise. They ought to have checked it for you.'

'Dear me, but I'm glad to see you, Bergen. It's good to get hold of your hand. I was afraid you wouldn't be here. How is Crombie?'

'He is better, mother. The doctor says he is out of danger. This way, keep hold of my arm. It's his nerves that are troubling him.'

'And so he is out of danger? Dear me, isn't that good? It is awful riding on the cars. I was afraid all the time. Where can all the people be going? Look at the children there! Will the poor things know their way home? So this is Chicago—well now. Does Crombie live close?'

'No, no. He lives about five miles away.'

'And are we not in Chicago?'

'Oh, yes. We're in part of it. But you know it's a big city, mother. It's twenty miles long—about as far as from our place to Aunt Ferrish's.'

'Do you really tell me? Well now, isn't that wonderful? Which way do we go? I am wearying to see Crombie. It's no wonder the poor dear's nerves are bad. There's too many folks here.'

'Come and sit down a minute. I want you to do me a favour, mother, right now.'

'I don't think I could do anything just now, Bergen. I'm all in a fluster. When I get a cup of

tea and have my face washed I'll be better. What are we going into the station for?'

'Listen, Mother. I had a strange adventure to-night. Look out through that window. Can you see the water?'

Mrs Worth rubbed the mist from the panes and peered out into the night. 'Is it that great black moving thing?'

'Yes. That's Lake Michigan. To-night, when I was waiting for your train, I had an hour to spare because the train was late. I took a walk down the shore and what do you think I saw? A woman jumping off the pier, trying to drown herself.'

'Well now! Dear me! And did you catch the poor thing?'

'Yes. She is in the other room waiting for you. I told her about your coming and she came here with me to meet you.'

'Law me, Bergen! What can she want with *me*? I'm sure I don't know the ways of the city folks.'

'You can give her help and advice, mother. She is in trouble.'

Mrs Worth's eyes dilated to their full extent and her voice dropped to a hoarse whisper. 'Is she a bad woman?'

'That's no fair question. Are we not all good and bad? You have one fault, me another, and the next one another. It seems to depend on the chances we have and what goes on around us.'

'If she's an out-and-out bad one I wouldn't like to have anything to do with her.'

'Well, she is not. When it's all footed up she is just as good as the most of us. You'll be surprised when I tell you that you know her well.'

'Dear me! Is she from out our way?'

'Yes, she is the daughter of an old neighbour that's dead and gone. Many a time you've patted her on the back and given her a cake in her hand.'

Mrs Worth looked puzzled. 'I can't think who it can be. My head is all in a muddle.'

'It's Sally Holtorf.'

'God bless my soul! Poor Sally! Doesn't that beat all? I told her mother before she let Sally go that time, two years ago, that Chicago was a wicked place. Well, well,' and the old lady shook her head in horrified dismay. 'And who is he, this fellow?'

'I don't know,' replied Bergen, 'and I don't want to know. It can't matter much when he has deserted her. We have no right to ask any questions.'

'If she'd have behaved herself she wouldn't have got into this trouble,' said Mrs Worth, bridling with puritanical severity. 'Some girls are always gadding—'

'Whist, mother—not so loud. She is in the next room and I wouldn't for the world she would hear you. I always thought you were the best woman in the world, mother, but I see you can be cruel too. Be gentle with her. The poor soul is nearly out of her mind. Remember if she'd have had her own way she'd have been at the bottom of that black water out there.'

The old lady still looked severe. 'Goodness alive, Bergen, I must give her a talking to. She has no mother of her own. Mrs Holtorf was too easy with her. I always told her she was spoiling that child.'

Bergen jumped impatiently to his feet and paced the floor in front of his mother. 'Stop, mother. You're at this all wrong. You play that game on her and she'll head for the lake first chance. You must switch right around and go at this the other way. She's suffering enough as it is. Listen now. Suppose she was your own daughter. Just imagine you think as much of her as you do of Crombie.'

'Dear me, how you talk, Bergen. I should be with the poor boy now.'

Bergen ignored the interruption and continued,—

'Poor Sally has no father or mother, and Jack was killed, you know, in the riots here. She hasn't a friend in the whole world—not a single soul who cares whether she lives or dies, not a creature under the stars to give her a word of comfort or cheer. Think of it.'

Mrs Worth's face softened. The tears stood in her eyes. Bergen sat down beside her and put his arm on her shoulder. He spoke in low, soft tones.

'Do you remember the question asked: "*Who is neighbour to this man?*" If *you* are not her neighbour, mother, then *who* is? As I see it, you ought to stand right to her.'

'What would the folks say out home when they heard about it? They would be sure to make out that we had done something wrong.'

Bergen snapped his fingers. 'We have no right to figure on that end of it at all. Did Christ always look round to see what people would say when He went to give some poor creature a lift? We'd make great speed doing our duty if we stopped to listen to every lad that's sneering on the corner. And if you keep your eye on these same fellows you'll see they're not much ahead on it either.' His arm was now round her neck and his words came in a low monotone. 'You've got to step right in and be a mother to her. That's the proper game to play, and the question is—are you good for it?'

'I'll try, Bergen, and do my best. But I'm not much for babies. You see—'

'There now. That will do,' he said, stopping her words with a kiss. 'Go right into the ladies' waiting-room there, and may God bless you for a dear old soul. But remember,' he added in a tone of warning, 'you must get that prim look off your face or you'll scare her to death first thing.'

'What shall I say to her?' whispered the old lady, dubiously.

'How can I tell? Yes, hold on. The chances are she'll fill up and break down the moment she gets her eyes on you. So you can just—but, dash it all!—how can I tell? Ten to one you'll blubber too. Wasn't I at it myself till I was ashamed? The very looks of her fairly broke my heart. Oh, the pity of it all! But look now. There's the place in there. I'm off to get a cab. Don't be afraid of losing me. You stay there till I come back.'

'But poor Crombie will be waiting.'

'No. He's all right. He was having a splendid sleep when I came away. Better not to disturb him for a while.'

'But wait, Bergen. Where can I take her to?' asked Mrs Worth with her finger on her lip. 'I won't have to take her out home, will I?'

Bergen scratched his head in perplexity.

'I'm not well up on this line of thing. You'll have to foot that up yourself. But this same thing has no doubt been going on long enough in town here to have it provided for. I rather guess there's a place for the purpose. In the city here, if you'll foot the bill, you can generally get anything. I'll make it my business to inquire before I come back. Run now,' and pushing his mother into the room he closed the door behind her.

An hour later, when the cab drove away from the women's hospital, Bergen left his seat beside the driver to keep his mother company.

'You're a good old soul, mother. You'll never be the worse of your kindness this night. Perhaps some day some of yours—maybe me or Crombie—might need a helping hand. We can't tell, you know. But now I know you're just dying to hear all about Crombie. Well, his rooms are above his store, and the store is a half an hour's drive from here yet. The whole trouble with Crombie is that his business is not doing well. He's going further

behind right along. Between worrying and losing his sleep his nerves have given out. But he has improved every day since I came. He's not in bed now, you know.'

'Dear me, he ought to be at this time of night. You said he was sleeping when you came away.'

'I mean he isn't confined to bed. He is able to be up every day.'

'Can I see him to-night?'

'I think you'd better not. I told him you'd be here in the morning. You'd be kissing and crying over him till you spoiled his sleep,' added Bergen, as he playfully pinched her cheek.

'Who cooks his victuals? The city folks will kill the poor dear with cakes and things. I'll see to it myself. I brought him a jar of black currants. He used to like them when he was little; besides, they're good in sickness.'

'He can only get what the doctor orders. His food is sent from a restaurant close by, and it's just the finest cooking you ever saw.'

'Dear me. Well now. You would wonder how these city folks get time to learn anything. Who is with Crombie now?'

'Miss Sage, the nurse.'

'Miss who?'

'Miss Sage, a professional nurse. She's only a young girl about nineteen or twenty but she's very clever and attentive.'

The old lady held up her hands in horror.

'Bergen Worth, do you mean to tell me that a young chit of a girl is waiting on my Crombie? Land sakes! What next! Chicago's next to the bad place. How does her mother allow it? The brazen thing! I'll teach her better.'

'Go easy there, mother. I had the same notion when I first came. Their plan in sickness here is different from ours, but I rather guess they're quite a

few jumps ahead of us. You mustn't crowd back on the nurse. I tried that game and got beaten at it. She was too many for me. The doctor, too, is clever, but there's something about him I don't like. He and I have had several bouts.'

'Not quarrelling, surely?'

'Oh, no. But we seem to strike fire every time we meet. We take different sides on everything. He is going to the old country in a few days. He's only waiting till Crombie is better.'

'Well now. It's Dr Elliot, the one that saved his life on the lake. I'm sure he likes Crombie.'

'Yes, and I'll tell you how far it has gone. He's leaving all his office furniture and books with Crombie and he has lent him five hundred dollars to make a fresh start.'

'Dear me! I knew he was a nice man the first time I saw him. I won't forget him for it. You should have thanked him, Bergen.'

'I did, mother, as sincerely as ever man did. But stop, cabby. Here—hold on! It's raining again, I see, so we'll just go in the back way. It's a wet night but we have only a few steps to go.'

'That puts me in mind, Bergen, that our good silk umbrella, that cost three dollars, has been lost ever since the night of the party.'

CHAPTER XXII

THE SKELETON IN THE CLOSET

'THERE'S something in all this, Doctor, I don't understand.'

Bergen Worth was pacing the floor of his brother's apartments with bent head and perplexed face. Crombie was improving physically, but his mental condition was so disappointing that Bergen felt the need of more light.

The doctor leaned back in his chair, as was his custom, and lit a cigar. He blew clouds of smoke towards the ceiling, and occasionally glanced at his interlocutor with his usual smile.

'Mystery and myself always quarrel,' continued Bergen. 'I've turned the question over in my mind, and I have got this far. Either you are not in possession of all the facts, or you are hiding from me something I ought to know. Excuse me for speaking so plainly, but we appear to have dropped into the habit with each other of saying exactly what we mean. If there is some secret cause, I ought to know, and if not, Crombie ought to be improving a little faster.'

'He is recovering.'

'Yes, after a fashion. But he doesn't appear to be his old self. There's something behind all this. I know it instinctively. My sympathy for the lad gives me the kind of knowledge that comes with love.'

'Supposing it were something which Crombie would not wish you to know?'

'That shouldn't make one whit of difference when you understand my motive. For that matter, you couldn't keep me from knowing. Love will follow truth and find it every time. But it takes time and patience.'

'You have faith in intuition, then?'

'Yes, in the intuition which love gives. In many places it will come in ahead of what we call learning.'

'You think loving ignorance is better than unloving knowledge?'

'No man or woman who loves unselfishly can possibly be ignorant. Such love is a part of the eternal truth. It is an education in itself far deeper and more lasting than that we get from books.'

The doctor took the cigar from his lips and almost laughed. There was something about the stalwart blacksmith very irritating and yet intensely interesting to him. The moment they came together a spirit of antagonism appeared to be aroused, and no matter how the conversation began it invariably ended in polemics. The doctor saw in his companion hypocrisy of the most consistent and thoroughly unconscious type; and Bergen saw in the doctor a brilliant and refined intellect run to waste for lack of sentiment. Bergen thought the doctor much better than he seemed, and the doctor thought Bergen much worse. Each supposed that the altruism on the one hand and the cynicism on the other was assumed. Each thought the ethical code of the other was beyond the range of ordinary possibilities.

'My judgment may be only blank cartridge after all,' said the doctor. 'My knowledge is merely book-learning.'

Bergen shook his head. 'It is more than book-learning. You have also a liking for the lad, but you regard it as a weakness and are too proud to confess

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it. You have a combination which is bound to master the case.'

'You pay me a very doubtful compliment. As to Crombie, I may warn you in advance that the truth will be very unpalatable. The basic cause of his illness is alcoholism.'

Bergen stood motionless, gazing at the doctor in speechless amazement.

'And in its worst form,' added the doctor with an affirmative nod.

Bergen sank into a chair and drew a long sigh. 'Poor mother! It will be an awful blow to her. It will break her heart. And Crombie! Poor fellow! I don't suppose you'll believe me, doctor, but I would suffer the torments of the damned for his sake. Poor lad! He is as much to me now as he was when we trudged to school together and ate out of the same dinner pail. I know he must suffer.'

'I don't think he realises his position—as yet. His mental condition is scarcely clear enough for that. In any case I do not expect he will suffer acutely. Conscience is largely a matter of imagination.' The doctor delivered the last sentence in a tone which he knew Bergen would resent. He was in the humour to be amused at his companion's intensity.

'Conscience imaginary? Why, man, I find it the most relentless of all chastisers. It never forgets and never makes mistakes. Not only every deed we do, but every thought we think, brings its consequences. Every force in nature travels in a circle, every expression of energy, mental or physical, *must* return to its fountain head. All the malice, hate or envy we project even in thought towards our fellow-creatures returns to ourselves for the same reason that the earth travels in its orbit. It cannot be otherwise. *It is universal law.* How can you or I or Crombie, who are but specks on a grain of sand, hope to escape the law which governs the whole universe? We may

postpone the day of reckoning, but we can never avoid it. Don't lose track of the fact that there are other punishments than those inflicted by the laws of the land.'

'Humph! You imagine that everything acts on the boomerang principle?' queried the doctor with an amused look. 'Quite an interesting theory, but unfortunately not in keeping with the facts of everyday life. Men go through the world stealing everything, but are shrewd enough not to be caught, and they die rich and happy; indeed, the greater the steal, the more the glory. The lives of our capitalists prove it. The only crime nowadays is being found out. That is the truism of the age.'

Bergen shook his head. 'Conscience will *always* find them out. It's no use. They can't hide from it. Who sins *must* suffer, be he rich or poor. Two and two make four.'

The doctor looked at his companion inquiringly as if to discover whether he was in earnest. 'Is this cyclical hypothesis not a little creation of your own? There is nothing in Holy Writ to warrant it.'

'Go easy there, doctor. Are we not told that as we do unto the meanest of our fellow-creatures so shall it be done unto us? Are we not advised to cast our bread upon the waters that it may return after many days? Are we not admonished to give unto the poor and thus lend to the Lord? Do you not remember—'

'Stop. I'll take your word for it. I see you have it all quite pat. Doing good is simply loaning beneficence at a fair interest, sowing seed for a bountiful harvest. *Your* Christian is a very groundling after all. He is simply a wiser speculator, a better financier than his neighbour. *Our* argument, like your hypothesis, travels in a circle. We can shake hands and agree. There is method in your madness after all,' concluded the doctor, with a chuckle.

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Bergen's face flushed with anger. Hasty words rose to his lips, but he suppressed them. 'You have missed the key of the whole situation and that is *motive*. Give with the motive of *gain* and your gift falls flat, but give in the *fulness of your heart* and your action throbs with eternal life, because benevolence is God's law, the normal vibration of the Universe.'

'We are getting into theories which neither of us can demonstrate. We were discussing Crombie's condition, were we not? Is there any further information I can give you?'

Bergen again folded his arms and paced the floor for a time without speaking. 'Have you any idea when the habit commenced?' he finally inquired.

'Not exactly. But I noticed that after his visit home last fall he became worse rapidly. He consulted me at that time for insomnia, but I fancy he got little relief, for he commenced taking opium and morphia. I discovered this accidentally and induced him to quit it, but he soon substituted a stimulant for the narcotic, and used the most expensive liquors at that. Of course I could see this coming but nothing would prevent it. I saw from the first that he was a hopeless case.'

Bergen paused in front of the doctor and shook his head with great emphasis. 'You are wrong, doctor. Crombie Worth will never fill a drunkard's grave.'

'What is going to save him?'

'The God element that is in him and in every man. Once get that loosened up and he is safe. There must be a way to get that moving; there always is if we only apply ourselves.'

'I admire your faith, and I hope, for Crombie's sake, you may not be disappointed, but his moral strength is gone.'

'But the divine spark is there yet and *good* will always defeat *evil*. Have you any idea of the cause of his weakness?'

'There were probably several causes. Idleness was, I think, a factor; waiting for customers. Trade as well as labour suffers from displacement. The wheel of the Juggernaut is no respecter of persons. That's just another reason why I consider Crombie hopeless. He has not the capital to conduct a business of his own and his pride will object to his working for anyone else.'

'Ah, yes. The old problem. What shall we do with our unemployed? I shall solve it for him.'

'You may make some shift for Crombie, but, as I told you the other evening, there's no solution to the great problem. Present conditions are a result of what we call civilisation. There is nothing for it but bloodshed, revolution, anarchy and a return to our primitive conditions. Whenever civilisation reaches the exploding point up she goes and the survivors go back and start over again. All the civilisations of the past have fared in the same way, and why should we be egotistical enough to imagine that our *little pet era is to be any exception to the rule?* But the world, as it is, will last our time. Let it slide and be d——d to it.'

'Never. I still maintain there is a solution. We will find it in Christ's teachings. When we *act* His teachings instead of *speaking* them, then the problem will be solved.'

'Tut, tut. You take religion seriously. The world only laughs in its sleeve at such as you. It must have toys. Don't be silly enough to take it all in earnest. A *Christian* to-day would be a monstrosity. He would be landed in jail as a vagrant, or in the asylum as a lunatic,' concluded the doctor, as he snapped his fingers, lit another cigar and prepared to go.

'You leave Chicago to-morrow?'

'Yes, and sail two days afterwards.'

'Well, let me again thank you for all your kindness

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to Crombie. If you ever think it worth your while you might write to me. I would like to see you with a better motive in life, for I feel certain you can never find happiness in your present path.'

The doctor's smile became more pronounced. 'I can see pity in your eye. But you are wasting your sympathy. My chances of happiness against yours are easily ten to one. But it is no use discussing it. We can agree on only one point and that is Crombie's welfare. And now I have hesitated for days as to whether I should tell you of a peculiar, and, to me, a puzzling fact. Crombie has something on his mind. If you can relieve him of that you may reform him. He has—or thinks he has—some *terrible secret* and he disclosed it in his delirium. He is continually haunted by something connected with his *last visit home*. I'll tell you what he said, but remember, I tell it only that you may relieve him of his strange delusion, and also remember that I took the nurse's place that night to protect him, that no one else has heard this, or ever will, from my lips.'

He looked cautiously about the room, closed the door, and coming closer, whispered something in Bergen's ear which turned the latter's cheek to ashy grey. 'Remember it's all a delusion which you must rid him of,' and with a wave of his hand the speaker disappeared, leaving Bergen standing like one in a stupor.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE HAND OF TIME

TWO years had passed away and, although events move slowly in rural districts, many changes had taken place at Worth's Corners and the Townline.

Old familiar faces had disappeared and new ones had taken their places. Some had been attracted by the proverbial greenness of far-off fields and others had taken the long journey that knows no return.

The venerable and beloved pastor of the church on the hill was now sleeping beneath the green sod and old Mr Worth was gathered to his fathers. The Boltons and the Swackheimers were gone, the Delavan cottage was fast falling to ruins, and the blacksmith's shop was deserted.

But the greatest change of all was in the appearance of the 'line.' It was beyond recognition. It seemed impossible to believe that the broad, smooth white road was the same that once lay buried in bogs and wound its tortuous way among the hills. From the Corners one could see for a distance of five or six miles right into the heart of the once notorious portion of the Townline, no longer a mystery or a *terra incognita* to the neighbourhood.

Respectable dwellings were in the course of erection and several new barns stood out in bold relief against the hills. The low dark swamps had been cut and burned away, the black mud of the road had given place to a lime-like whiteness, and the

slimy green pools were supplanted by graded drains and ditches.

Nor was the work of regeneration yet complete. Once having taken action, Lincoln county was determined to stop at no half measures. Gangs of men were still grading the steeper hills and supplanting the rickety wooden bridges by substantial structures of stone and iron.

The colonisation road scheme had been a complete success and the leaven was still working. If the Townliners were still innately wicked they had certainly ceased living in defiance of the law, and, like good citizens, had learned to sin only in secret.

Bergen Worth had been true to his promise. He not only threw himself heart and soul into the construction of the road, but he cultivated the acquaintance of every man, woman and child on the line. His attitude towards them was one of perfect confidence. Never was there the faintest trace of espionage in his visits. He turned away when anything was transpiring which he did not wish to see. He ignored their vices and applauded their virtues; he never talked religion, he simply acted it.

But matters had gone badly with Bergen in a worldly sense. The last tenant of his blacksmith's shop had allowed the business to drift away till the place was closed. Then the farm was said to be so heavily mortgaged that it was impossible to redeem it. Repeated loans to Crombie was supposed to be the principal cause of this indebtedness, although Bergen's neglect of his own business during the reconstruction of the Townline was said to have contributed in no small way to this result.

The troubles of the family did not come alone. Crombie had failed twice and finally given up business to take a situation as travelling salesman for a wholesale drug firm, but that position he held

only for a few months. Twice afterwards he was sent to establishments for the cure of inebriates, but in both cases the results were merely temporary. Since then his whereabouts was unknown, but it was generally understood that he had become thoroughly dissipated.

With the head of the family dead, the younger son on the highway to ruin and the farm heavily mortgaged, it was little wonder that Mrs Worth and Bergen had aged considerably beneath their weight of sorrow.

The bringing home of Sarah Holtorf and her child imposed upon the family a heavy social burden for a time. The whole neighbourhood was scandalised. The child must be Crombie's. What other reason could there be for harbouring one who had gone astray? It was a bold, barefaced thing to do in a respectable community, a step for which Mrs Worth would not soon be forgiven.

But that was all past and gone. Sarah now came and went like one of themselves. The badge of respectability had been restored to her. And she was worthy of it. She bore her shame with modesty and patience; she bowed her head to virtue and purity; she suffered in silence the scorn of the self-righteous, and she worked with tireless zeal to repay the debt of gratitude she owed to Bergen and his mother.

And then she had her boy, as bright and handsome a child as ever gladdened a mother's heart. She knew that if anything happened to cut her off the little one would never lack for care as long as Bergen lived. And so she worked and sang till she became the pillar of a home. She smoothed the pillow of old Mr Worth in his last hours, she filled a gap in a time of grief and was now taking a load of responsibility from 'Mammy,' whose failing health and many trials had made her less able to cope with the worries and duties of everyday life.

To the old lady Sarah's companionship was an inestimable boon. Mrs Worth loved a good listener, and the young mother soon learned how to humour her benefactress. Little Harry also was a great comfort to 'grandma.' The child seemed to keep warm in her heart the spot which Crombie had neglected. The infant supplied an object upon which her generous motherly instinct could be bestowed. He seemed to furnish the mystic bond of sympathy between the cradle and the grave.

But Mrs Worth never forgot her fair-haired boy. Crombie was her theme morning, noon and night. Every smile and prattle of the child served to remind her of a similar act of *her* boy in his babyhood. Bibs and baby clothes were unearthed to refresh the memory of bygone days. The embers in her heart were changing from red to grey and she was prone to turn from the dim twilight of the present to the rosy skies of the past. The realities of to-day were lost in the fond memories of yesterday, and she appeared to live only in the hope of to-morrow—the to-morrow which would bring her wandering, wayward boy back.

For two long years she had hungered for a sight of Crombie's face. Nearly every day saw her wandering to the gate and looking wistfully up the road in the hope of seeing his dear familiar form. People became accustomed to seeing her at the gate and ceased to smile at her repeated assurances that Crombie would soon be home. To prevent her travelling through the snow during the past winter Bergen had recourse to deception. From time to time he pretended to have heard from Crombie and that he was arranging to come home in the spring.

But spring had come and grown into summer, month after month had passed away, and still the prodigal had not returned ; indeed, for a long time they

were uncertain whether he was dead or alive. But Mammy, in her simple way, was always hopeful; her child-like faith in his return was truly pathetic.

Nor had Bergen lost hope. In spite of countless disappointments and sleepless nights his faith was still strong, though his eye was sunken and his cheek was hollow with weary waiting.

News came at last. But it was bad news. Bergen returned from the post-office one day with traces of tears on his face. He avoided the house and stole away down into the orchard, where he sat for an hour with a letter in his hand. The letter was from one of Crombie's college friends, who was now mate on a lake steamer running between Rochester and Toronto. One day, while waiting in Toronto for some repairs, he accompanied the captain on a short trip inland to visit some relatives. Their destination was a small town about ten miles from that city, and the trip was a very pleasant one, but on going to take their vehicle from the sheds of the principal hotel of the place they stumbled over something in the dark lying near their horse's feet.

'I called to the stable boy to bring a light, and there—so help me God!—lying in the filth and dirt was Crombie Worth. My heart almost stood still. I had not seen him since his first year in Chicago, and he was frightfully changed, but I knew him at once. The clever, handsome fellow that I used to know lay there in the muck for dogs to bark at and horses to tramp over. The poor fellow cried like a baby when we brought him to and told him who I was. My first thought was of you. I wondered how it was that you, who are always helping everybody else, could not help your own brother. I told Crombie so, but he said that you had nursed him, sobered him, worked and prayed for him. He says that you mortgaged the farm and ruined yourself for him, so I suppose you have done your best. We took him to town and the

captain allowed me to take him on board, but I scarcely know what to do with him, for we are not in need of a deck-hand just now.'

Bergen sat fingering the letter over and over. Thank God, Crombie was alive and had found a friend in the time of need. Had the hour of his reformation come at last? Had the wayward boy's pride been humbled and broken? Had remorse and shame at last taken possession of him?

The policy of unlimited kindness had signally failed in Crombie's case. Everything that Bergen could do in the direction of helping his brother had been faithfully tried, till there appeared to come a time when it was best to leave him to his own resources; not to give him up for lost, but to let him feel the responsibility of his own actions and the necessity of his own maintenance. From a long and deep study of his brother's nature Bergen came to the conclusion that Crombie's great vice was selfishness, and his stumbling-block pride. Only when this pride was humbled, when cruel, bitter, relentless mental and bodily torture had clutched him firmly in its grasp, when the agony of remorse and shame had ground its way into his very soul, would Crombie find his better self. Nothing but *some great moral shock* would shatter the *crust of selfishness* which pampered boyhood and early manhood had cemented about his heart. Only from the very ground floor of degradation would the reformation commence.

The 'let alone' policy was a hard one for Bergen to follow. His impulse, now, was to run to the railway station, fly to the rescue and take the erring one in his arms.

But experience had taught him the unwisdom of such a course, and he must content himself by sending a message of thanks to his sailor friend, advising him not to overdo his kindness.

Having come to this conclusion he was ready to go

to work again and was about to make his way back to the plough when Sarah called him to dinner. He had no desire for food, but, for his mother's sake, he must put in an appearance at the table. His absence would make her uneasy, and it was no use loading her poor heart with sorrow.

When he entered the kitchen door his mother looked up with a smile which was like the sunshine of hope beaming through the shadows of sorrow.

'Dear me, Bergen, I was just thinking it will only be a fortnight till Crombie comes home. He is to bring me a new cap and dress. Sarah wants to buy them in Owasco, but she mustn't. Crombie's would be far nicer. But we must fix this one up, for he likes to see me look nice.'

Bergen could bear it no longer. He glided rapidly through a side door, closed it quickly behind him, and beating his hand on his breast, ran rapidly towards the barn.

His mother thought he had gone after some stray sheep or cattle that had got into mischief. But Sarah knew better. She hastened to the back door to watch him.

She saw him hurry into one of the sheds where he could not be seen from the house, then, throwing himself face downwards on a pile of straw, he gave vent to his grief in great sobs which shook his frame.

She dropped on her knees on the doorstep, and, with upturned face, said, 'May the great God above us be with him in his troubles.'

CHAPTER XXIV

A TANGLED WEB

MR CARSWELL was a man who possessed, in an eminent degree, the qualities of patience and perseverance. 'Slow and sure' was his motto. He had little confidence in anything done in haste. Facts as well as fruits, he thought, required time to ripen into proper proportions. Even the 'stubborn chieftains that winnading' did not always receive his entire confidence; indeed, he claimed that facts as well as figures *could* lie, and that an improper juxtaposition of *facts* was often more misleading than downright *falsehood*.

His favourite method of illustrating this was the following stereotyped statement: 'An item in the newspaper stating that Mr Carswell was *sober* on Saturday would be more damaging to me where I was not known than if it stated that Mr Carswell was *drunk* on Saturday.'

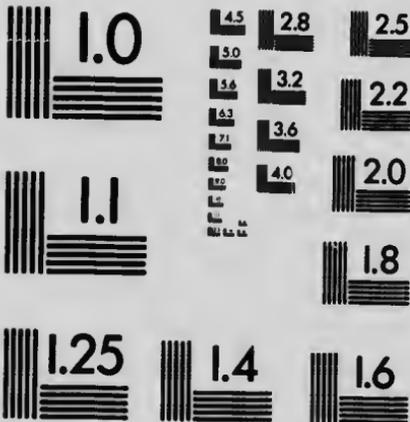
As a criminal lawyer he had acquired more than a local reputation by virtue of his plodding patience and his sterling integrity. The residents of Owasco taxed the credulity of their visitors by pointing out their *rara avis*, an honest lawyer, a man who turned away any case, civil or criminal, which he considered legally and ethically unsound. He never argued contrary to his convictions and never defended a man whose innocence he doubted.

The Cargill case was the first criminal case of any consequence in which he had not been on the winning side, and he did not take his defeat very kindly.



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His complaint was the undue haste with which such a grave and intricate case had been disposed of, allowing no reasonable time for the collection of evidence. The fact that the State had strenuously fought against any postponement of the trial showed, to his mind, a downright disregard for the interests of justice.

His resolve was to probe the matter to the bottom, even if it took a life-time, and the free supply of funds now at his command gave him perfect confidence in his ultimate success.

But two years had passed away and the mystery remained as deep as ever. He had followed false clues and expended both time and money in learning a few facts not known at the time of the trial, but these facts seemed only to make matters more puzzling than before.

His first step was to move for an appeal, a process which in itself was extremely tedious. Then he obtained permission to interview his client. He remembered at the very first what Bergen had told him about Norbert fancying he met Crombie in the swamp, and he naturally expected that Delavan would be quite candid and communicative.

Not so, however. The convict positively refused to say anything further about the matter. Again and again Mr Carswell urged him. But all in vain.

'Mr Carswell, I shall always be grateful for your kindness and persistence. Your loyalty and perseverance are worthy of a better cause. I have brought disgrace upon mother and Naera, why should I bring it upon others? What I am suffering is the penalty of a useless life. I am dead to the world. Let me remain so.'

But the wily lawyer could read between the lines. He saw plainly that Delavan thought that Crombie was guilty, and for some reason, probably on Bergen's account, was anxious to shield him. For the same

reason Mr Carswell was very loth to follow this clue, but he would allow no human creature, high or low, to stand between him and his duty.

Very soon the following facts were gathered. Crombie, on the night in question, wore a light-coloured overcoat and carried an umbrella with a white bone handle. He left the 'party' shortly after Mr Cargill's departure, and on the following morning returned to Chicago very hurriedly and unexpectedly. He brought with him from the city the umbrella referred to and did not have it with him on his return. Then he took ill a few days before the trial, failed in business shortly afterwards, and his career since that time had been very dissipated.

This clue gave Mr Carswell many weeks of hard and patient toil, until he found himself in a *cul-de-sac* from which there seemed no outlet.

About this time a peculiar fact came to light which changed the whole course of the inquiry. Boyd Carruthers, the junior partner of the firm, discovered one day that he was being shadowed wherever he went by odd-looking individuals whom he finally recognised as one and the same person. Why a spy should be dogging the steps of the young lawyer seemed very hard to understand. Mr Carruthers was, at first, inclined to feel alarmed about it, and thought seriously of placing the matter in the hands of the police. He declared that since he had found he was continually being watched he could neither eat, sleep, nor attend to his duties.

They employed a man to shadow the spy, and on the fourth day received the astounding information that Mr Carruthers's faithful follower had his headquarters in the State Attorney's office and was twice seen in close consultation with Detective Breen.

Here was a bombshell. What could it mean? Boyd was certainly not contemplating robbery or burglary, nor had he been guilty of stealing, except-

ing in a professional way, and why he required watching at the hands of the State Attorney was beyond conjecture. Perhaps Mr Leonard was hatching some little plot of his own, or, what seemed more likely, his brain was beginning to soften.

Finally the secret was let out by the State Attorney himself. Meeting Mr Carruthers on the street one day, he said he was surprised to hear that Mr Carswell was following a still hunt on the Cargill case, foolishly wasting his time and money. He might as well give in beaten and be done with it.

When Boyd told his partner of the conversation the old gentleman jumped to a conclusion like a flash.

'I see it now, Boyd. It's as plain as day. His work in the Cargill case has been far more crooked than we suspected. He fears investigation; he dreads disclosure. There's something rotten in the State of Denmark.'

'But what would the motive be? He couldn't have had any spite at Delavan, for Norbert was not in Owasco more than once or twice in a year.'

'True, it must have been some extraordinary motive which induced him to betray the sacred trust reposed in him as an officer of t'he peace.'

'Stop, I have it. Jeff was at the party, and I heard only the other night at my club that the gay young Lothario had some sort of an escapade that night.'

'May God forgive him then. His punishment will come, indeed it has come. John Leonard is only a ghost of his former self and they tell me that he has to be drugged to sleep every night. So, so. And this was the reason of all the haste at the time. A culprit must be found and a conviction be secured before Jeff was safe. Ha! Where is Jeff now? We will just turn our attention and see if there were not two men with light overcoats and umbrellas. We will make haste, too, but slowly. Many thanks, John

Leonard, for your valuable assistance. Ha, ha! Boyd. There's no pursuer like a guilty conscience.'

This new suspicion was strengthened when they learned that Jeff Leonard had gone to Europe a week or two before—about the time when Boyd first noticed that he was being watched.

That they had a tangible clue to work upon seemed certain. Jeff's general reputation and the father's peculiar actions made them feel that victory was at last in sight.

They might now renew their efforts with increased vigour, but on the other hand they must be careful not to rush at conclusions. They must follow patiently, step by step.

Mr Carswell knew, from experience, that nothing was more misleading than suspicion. He invariably warned his junior to shun it as far as possible.

'The moment you suspect a man you bestow upon him a character which is inaccurate and distorted, you lose your proper sense of proportion and are apt to place facts in a false light. The old adage that it takes a thief to catch a thief is true only in a general sense, inasmuch as thief and pursuer are usually on the same moral plane, but the officer who has not in him a spark of generosity or kindness is almost sure to misconstrue the motives of a better class of criminals who, in strange contradiction of popular opinion, have often many virtues. The man who takes everybody for a thief or a rogue makes more mistakes than he who takes everybody for an honest man, because jealousy and suspicion are more distorting to the judgment than benevolence and charity.'

The failure of the law in many cases, Mr Carswell thought, was due in some measure to the spirit in which it was administered. The officer working for fee or fame often cared little whether the innocent or guilty suffered so long as there was a culprit and a

conviction. This spirit of revenge, he thought, existed to a greater extent in States where capital punishment had not been abolished. The extreme penalty engendered a more brutal spirit and gave the law coarser and more unscrupulous tools.

He soon came to pity Mr Leonard for the horrible fear that gnawed at his vitals. There was no need for revenge. The State Attorney was undergoing a sentence ten times more severe than Norbert Delavan's. In the court of his own conscience he had been tried and condemned and was now being slowly executed.

For a long time, however, nothing could be found to implicate Jeff. No doubt the father had taken all precautions, covered up all traces and blocked all avenues of inquiry. His spies were still closely watching Boyd's movements, no doubt to avoid every new danger and to cover every contingency not already provided for.

But patience was rewarded. One day Boyd came hurrying into the office with a smile which betokened success of some kind. 'I have something for you now.'

'Good! Close the door and come into the inner office. Now go ahead. Bare facts,' and Mr Carswell seated himself at his desk, pen in hand.

'Jeff bought a new umbrella and a new overcoat on the day after the dance.'

'There is not much in that itself. But go on.'

'The overcoat he wore on the night of the party was almost new.'

'Who told you this?'

'Scovell, the tailor, told me, or rather I got it out of him incidentally. Jeff told Scovell that he lost his coat that night.'

'Very good. Did you manage to find out who went with him that night?'

'Yes. It was Crombie Worth. Jeff hired the

horse at Gale's livery and he and Crombie drove away together. It was a *grey horse!*'

'Good heavens! That looks bad. What next?'

'The horse came home at half-past three in the morning, minus vehicle, harness and driver. The buggy and harness were found beside the church-shed at daylight that morning!'

'Stop! There is a terrible fact—a damning fact. The prosecution knew this all along and yet suppressed the information, not only at the inquest but at the trial. Could there be anything more iniquitous?'

'And I am not through yet,' continued Boyd. '*There were patches of the red clay of the lower Town-line on the horse's legs and body and blood-stains on its neck and mane.*'

CHAPTER XXV

DISTRESSING NEWS

'How do you do, Mrs Fenwick? And you too, Katie? Come in, come in. I am delighted to see you.'

Mrs Delavan's greeting was more than empty words. Never did she receive visitors more gladly. Since leaving the Townline, not a soul had darkened the widow's door excepting Bergen Worth and Father O'Flynn.

The complete isolation of the past months had kept the cloud of social ostracism continually before her. Her first impulse after Norbert's conviction had been to fly as far as possible from the scene of disgrace. A change of surroundings seemed necessary to her mental and bodily health. She had been advised by Bergen to remain and live the disgrace down, but the death of Esther filled her cup of sorrow to overflowing and made the home in the swamp positively unbearable. She could no longer live in a spot so full of painful memories.

Since their removal to Owasco fortune had favoured them. They no longer felt the pinch of poverty, their home was comfortable and their earnings were more than sufficient for their modest wants; in fact, they were already accumulating a fund which was to be appropriated for the purpose of establishing Norbert's innocence.

The estate of Nicholas E. Cargill had been liquidated, but the widow gave notice that not one farthing

of her brother's money would she touch until her son was acquitted, a resolution which was much noticed and lauded by the whole community. More people bowed to her as she went to chapel and the attitude of her neighbours was less forbidding.

She hoped that a wave of sympathy was approaching, and when she saw at her door an old neighbour she felt sure that the clouds were breaking. Here, at last, was social recognition. The Fenwicks were people of high standing in their own community and represented the best element of the rural districts. But Mrs Delavan had other reasons for being pleased.

Katie Fenwick was one of the most lovable young people the widow had ever met. Blunt and unsophisticated to the verge of simplicity, she possessed the charm common to those in whom kindness and candour are combined. She was quick to detect anything artificial and was an uncompromising enemy of duplicity or injustice. She would tell the news of the Corners without the venom or jealousy of a newsmonger, and the widow, though far above the level of an ordinary gossip, had a human weakness for knowing something of the social world about her, more especially as the lines of communication had so long been severed.

The situation as the visitors entered was not free from embarrassment. An explanation was due the hostess for the long period of neglect.

Katie rushed into the breach in her usual candid way. 'I'm heartily ashamed of myself, Mrs Delavan. Don't look cross or queer at me or I'll sink through the floor.' She finished with a hearty kiss which the hostess returned with interest.

Mrs Fenwick also commenced an apology but the widow good-naturedly protested. 'Not a word! You have come now and that is enough. If you only knew how welcome you are, you—' The last

sentence was interrupted by a sob, as tears of gratitude ran down the speaker's cheeks. Katie and her mother also gave way and a new bond of friendship was baptised by tears of sympathy.

The hostess, however, was too anxious for the comfort of her guests to indulge long in such weakness. She threw a warmth into her manner which put them at their ease and caused the current of conversation to flow freely.

Miss A. was to be married, Mrs B. had twins, Mrs C. was not living with her husband and Mrs D. was not expected to recover.

'And have the Worths heard anything lately of Crombie? Of course we see Bergen quite often, but he never speaks about his brother and we don't care to ask.'

'Poor Crombie! I am afraid it is all up with him,' replied Mrs Fenwick, sadly. 'Mrs Clarridge was telling me that her nephew met him in Detroit one day—'

'Don't, mother,' said Katie, holding up her hand. 'I don't think we ought to repeat it. It may not be true.'

'I hope not, Katie, but everybody seems to think he is a total wreck. Poor Bergen is suffering the consequences. He has paid off the claims of Crombie's creditors and hopelessly sunk the farm. He is making a great struggle to save it.'

At this moment Naera entered the room, rosy with her long walk in the brisk wind. She was so overcome with astonishment that she forgot to speak. She had learned to think that she and her mother were dead to the world, and the presence of strangers led her to imagine that something unusual had occurred during her absence. Her gaze plainly asked their visitors what their errand was.

Katie, who understood Naera's look, flushed to the roots of her hair. 'We plead guilty, Naera, and

throw ourselves on the mercy of the court. We haven't a word to say for ourselves. Your mother has forgiven us and so must you.'

Naera replied with tears and kisses as a second scene of reconciliation was enacted.

'You were speaking of Bergen Worth when Naera came in,' said Mrs Delavan, as soon as her guests had regained their composure. 'Did I understand you to say he was likely to lose the farm?'

'So we are informed. They say this is his last summer on it.'

Naera turned pale and her eyes dilated with wonder.

'Why? What has happened?'

'It has taken nearly everything to satisfy Crombie's creditors.'

'That is positively dreadful. Shocking. Poor Bergen! Why did he never tell me about this, I wonder?'

'You let the cat out of the bag that time, Naera,' laughed Katie. 'Bergen comes here pretty often.'

'Don't joke, Katie. It is too serious—I mean his losing the farm. He would give away his last crust and starve himself. Mother and I were just wondering to-day what had happened him. He has not been here for a week. It is terrible to think of his losing the old homestead.'

Mrs Fenwick nodded sadly. 'But—out there—we do not worry over it. It seems impossible to imagine Bergen in a position in which he could not give help to others. Mr Fenwick, in speaking of it the other night, said that Divine Providence would take care of a man like Bergen, and for the same reason that he is always giving he will always have it to give.'

'Something will turn up, I am perfectly sure, which will bring better luck to him,' protested Katie.

'And yet his quarrel with Mr Silk would make it appear otherwise. It must be bad luck. He looks terribly worried ever since and—'

Mrs Fenwick's sentence was broken short by an exclamation from Naera. 'What? A quarrel with Silk. Is it possible?'

'Yes. And a serious falling out it was,' replied Katie. 'It was about a lesson in class meeting last Tuesday evening.'

'No, Katie,' interposed her mother, 'that was only a small part of it. The trouble has a deeper source. Bergen's style of teaching does not please Mr Silk, who is very particular on doctrinal points.'

'Were *you* there at the time, Katie?' inquired Naera, with increasing interest.

'Yes. It was in the class-room. Mr Silk came in when Bergen was explaining a chapter. It was on regular class night and the lesson was—hem—I cannot just remember. I am afraid I am not as diligent a student as I ought to be. At anyrate it was about King David,' continued the speaker with an apologetic look at her hostess. 'Well, you know Bergen was taking the moral of it in his usual earnest way and applying it to everyday life. You know how oddly he talks and what odd expressions come out of him at times. He was comparing the life of David to that of a pioneer who comes to the country when it is all swamps and forests. The settler has all sorts of hardships to contend with, to fight bears and wolves, to live in log huts, to walk through miles and miles of forest for a sack of flour and all such difficulties incidental to his isolation. After he gets his farm cleared and the stones and stumps all removed and nice buildings and plenty of money to spare, he makes up his mind to enjoy himself. I can almost remember the very words: "Then he's got to look sharp or he's lost. He must be careful or he is a gone man. Why? He ought to

be at his best. He has leisure now to improve his mind and cultivate moral strength. He has surmounted all obstacles and conquered every enemy. All but one! He has forgotten the worst of all, the strongest and the most powerful—the enemy in his own heart. He takes to pleasure-hunting and gratifying his desires and it's more than even chances if he doesn't go clean to smash both morally and physically.

"Well, that's what King David did—he conquered all his enemies but the one inside. He didn't even know it was there till it had him down. Lower and lower he sank till he reached the lowest depths of moral and spiritual degradation."

"Just then Mr Silk came in. He listened for a minute and then came forward. "Mr Worth, you will lead the class to believe that King David was a bad man."

"So he was for a while. Are we not all bad when we let ourselves loose? He was pretty far off the track at one time, but he straightened up, and I was just showing the class what a credit it was to him. The heavy end of the lesson is that very point."

"How can you, in the presence of these young people, ascribe vices and villainy to a man after God's own heart?"

"I am telling the truth, Mr Silk. How are you going to get over *that*? The whole lesson is brought out by his wrong-doing." Bergen was white now.

"The question had better not be discussed here. Kindly dismiss the class."

"As you please, Mr Silk. But for the sake of these young people I must finish my explanation and tell them why David was a man after God's own heart. It was not because he *sunk* to the lowest depths, but because he *rose* from them. It was because he was *great* enough to rise, because he had the dross burned out of him, because his *own* sins taught him how to

sympathise with *other* sinners and lead them upward. There's the lesson intended to be taught. Good-night, and thank you, boys and girls, for coming.' In a minute we were all tramping down the aisle to the door and we made such a noise that we couldn't hear what Mr Silk said, but it must have been something very cutting because Bergen sat down by the stove with his face in his hands. He had been so earnest in explaining the lesson that he took it very hard. Some of the girls thought he was crying, but of course he wouldn't do—'

Katie paused abruptly. Naera turned away towards the window with a suspicious moisture in her eyes. There was a distinct tremor in the voice. 'Go on with your story, Katie. Don't let me interrupt you. I am very much interested.'

'Well, where was I? Oh, yes! We stayed in the porch listening. Of course it was wrong, but it seemed as if we *must* hear. The door was shut and we could not catch every word, but we could tell that they were still arguing about the lesson. We heard Mr Silk tell Bergen that his whole method of teaching was wrong, but he had borne with it since he came for the sake of peace. He told Bergen that his tones lacked reverence and that his voice sounded just as if he were discussing a newspaper article. They referred then to other lessons which Mr Silk said had not been taught in the proper way, adding that in many respects Bergen had been little short of a curse to the church. The wind was blowing and the windows were rattling so that we could not make out Bergen's reply, for they say he always speaks low and soft when he is angry, but we could hear Mr Silk. "Very well. Let it be so. The congregation shall know of this and decide between us." Mr Silk then started for the door and we all ran like deer. The result was that Bergen, that very night, not only resigned his position as superintendent of the Sun-

day school but his membership in the church as well.'

'The very last thing I should have expected him to do,' said Mrs Delavan, shaking her head gravely. 'I am very, very sorry to hear of it. I think he should have stood his ground.'

'Everybody is sorry. They think he did it for the sake of peace, to avoid any further disturbance or hard feelings in the congregation. There is to be a meeting of some kind at which the matter is to be thoroughly discussed. Bergen has been invited to attend so that both sides of the question may be heard, but it is not known yet whether he will consent or not. For the first time in my memory Bergen was not at church on Sunday. Everybody noticed his absence. Mr Fenwick, knowing he would be lonesome, has invited him to dinner next Sunday.'

'And wouldn't it be nice for you and Naera to come too? I am going away to-morrow, but will be back on Saturday afternoon. We can take you out in the surrey on Saturday and bring you back on Monday morning. Of course. A breath of country air will do you a world of good, especially when the weather is so hot. We'll call it settled,' and Katie sealed the invitation by giving her hostess an emphatic hug.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE PRODIGAL'S RETURN

IT was milking-time in the gloaming of a cloudless August day, the sun was sinking behind the distant hills, deep shadows were creeping across the valleys and the sky was lit up with a halo of purple and gold. The sultry heat of day was giving place to the cool, delicious shades of evening, and all animate nature seemed gladdened at the change.

The toilers from the harvest, tired of the glare of the day, were wending their homeward way through fields of yellow stubble; the men with weary steps and sun-browned faces, the beasts with lowered heads and sweat-stained sides, all welcoming in their several ways the hours of cool and rest.

The blackbirds sailed in long dark streaks towards the distant swamps, the song of the whip-poor-will echoed from the mystic shades of the wooded hills, and the air was drowsy with the hum of insect life. Away across the fields, like lullabies of home, came the familiar call of 'co-boss, co-boss' echoing dreamily in the distant woods, and mingling its rhythmic sounds with the bleating of the sheep on the hill-sides.

The cattle had left their leafy shades and waded from the streams to keep their tryst at the milking-place, and now with half-closed eyes and switching tails were lowing in the lane.

Sarah and Mammy, with pails and stools, appeared

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at the little side gate and commenced their evening task.

'Is Bergen not through yet, Sarah?'

'Wait a minute. Listen! No, I hear the binder going yet.'

'He must be tired, poor boy. But when he undertakes anything he won't be beat. His father before him was just the same.'

'He's working *too* hard, I think. He's getting as thin as a rail. Drat the flies! The poor beasts can't stand still.'

Sarah's hands flew nimbly up and down, causing a steady white stream to flow into the pail, but her mistress worked half-heartedly, occasionally pausing to look around and often heaving a deep sigh. Poor Mammy had sadly changed in the past few years. Her dark hair was now streaked with grey, her once smooth and comely face was now marked with furrows of care, and her once plump arms, now bare to the elbows, were flabby and unshapely. She always insisted on helping Sarah to milk, though very often her mind wandered off and she forgot what she was doing.

But Sarah humoured her in this as in most other things. She always spoke as if her mistress were a real help instead of, often, a hindrance. Occupation of any kind seemed to chase away the shadows from the sorrowing mother.

Mrs Worth had been a busy worker all her life, and to follow her old habits even in a routine way afforded her some comfort and satisfaction. She was still active in a limited sense and was reasonably 'smart on foot,' but she had lost her mental grip of the problems of a household. She was never ill; she ate and slept moderately well, but she was gradually shrinking, both bodily and mentally. Her principal occupation was to look after little Harry, to amuse him and keep him out of mischief, but

the little fellow was getting too active for her to follow.

This evening Mammy was less cheerful than usual. In her afternoon nap she had a disturbing dream. She dreamt that she went out into the orchard to pick some fruit from a tree in which a scarecrow had been placed to ward off the blackbirds.

When she went to push the scarecrow out of her way it seemed to suddenly come to life as Crombie. He was covered with blotches and scars and vermin, a picture so frightful that she screamed out as she awoke.

She brooded over her dream all afternoon and became very nervous and restless. She had not yet told Bergen about it, but she had confided in Sarah and consulted a book on dream-reading.

'And so you think it isn't really a bad dream, Sarah?'

'I'm sure of it. Dreams, you know, always go by contrary.'

'The book says that vermin means sickness.'

'Yes, but you know, Mammy, that book is away out of date. The old ideas of everything are changed now. The new books are just the opposite of the old ones.'

'Dear me! Do you really tell me? And are the *new ones* true, Sarah?'

'Everybody *thinks* they are. People are far smarter nowadays.'

'Dear me! And will these ones again not be true when *more* new ones come?'

'I suppose not,' replied Sarah, impatiently, as she moved her stool to another cow.

'They shouldn't make books till they find out if they're true. I think I'll ask Bergen. I wish he would come.'

Sarah paused and listened. 'I think he must be through now. I can't hear the machine. But he'll go

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at something else and work till he can't see. You should speak to him, Mammy, about working so hard. It would be a bad job if he fell sick.'

'Well now. Do you think he isn't well? He wouldn't get sick, surely. The dream can't mean him. He's too determined to get sick. Do you think he frets about Naera? I always liked poor little Naera, but Crombie made us give her up. Do you think he likes her, Sarah.'

'How can I tell, Mammy? I never saw them together. But somehow I think he does, though for that matter there isn't a girl in the State good enough for Bergen Worth.'

'You always speak well of Bergen, Sarah?'

Sarah paused and looked up. 'And why shouldn't I? Only for meeting him that night in Chicago I was lost body and soul. I will always believe that God sent him along that street just in time to save me. Bergen is a man—a real man.'

Just then the collie dog which had been lying near by started up the lane, barking furiously. Sarah peeped under her cow and saw someone entering the big gate out at the road.

'There is another pedlar coming, Mammy. I wish the dog would give him a good nip. That's the second to-day. Collie. Here. Come back and lie down.'

'Let the poor fellow come, Sarah. Maybe he's hungry. One never misses the bite they eat,' and Mrs Worth rose from her seat to get a look at the stranger. 'I'll go and get a cup and give him a drink of milk. It's likely he—Look! Quick, Sarah. Look! It's his walk. Is it him?—Yes—See—Oh, my God, it's Crombie! Run, Sarah, and tell Bergen.'

Sarah jumped up and looked at the distant figure in astonishment, but Mammy dropped her pail, and, with streaming eyes, ran up the lane with all the speed she could muster.

'Oh, Crombie, darling! Mammy's darling! You've come at last,' shouted the mother, as, bare-footed and bareheaded, she hurried to meet him with open arms.

At first sight Sarah thought that Mrs Worth had taken leave of her senses. There must be some mistake, surely. God of heaven, could that man be Crombie Worth, the handsome, gay young man she once knew? Yes. There was Collie barking for joy and licking the stranger's hands.

The prodigal quickened his pace till within a few yards of his mother; then he dropped his satchel, and, leaning against the fence for support, he broke into a fit of sobbing.

Sarah waited only to see Mrs Worth laughing and crying with her arms around her long-lost boy and then ran away to the back fields to tell Bergen.

Mammy did not see a dissipated-looking man. She saw only her boy. Time turned backwards in its flight and he was again a child in her arms. 'Don't cry, dear. Mammy is here.'

She caught him in her arms and swung him to and fro in the very transports of joy. She almost choked him with her tears and kisses. 'Oh, I'm so glad, so glad! Thank God I lived to see you again. But you must be tired and hungry. Come away in.' Then in a whisper, 'Bergen isn't vexed, dearie. He'll be glad to see you and he'll find something for you to do. Come now and get a drink of milk. Excuse my bare feet, Crombie. I know you never liked to see me that way, but I'll keep my shoes on now that you've come home.'

'Oh, mother, mother, you are always the same, no matter what comes or goes. It makes me feel like a little boy again. I was ashamed to come. I've been waiting in the bush yonder since noon, waiting for a chance to see you alone.'

'Poor dear! You've had no dinner. You must

be starving. I'll run and get some supper for you.'

'Don't go for a minute yet, mother. Wait. Where is Bergen? I'm ashamed to meet him.'

'Tut, tut. You mustn't be afraid of Bergen, dearie. He's always kind to everybody.'

'Yes, mother, he's been too kind. He has ruined himself for me. Isn't he cutting in the back field?'

'Yes, dearie. Sarah's gone after him.'

'I wish I could clean up a little before he sees me. I must look awful compared with what I used to.'

'Dear me, Crombie, that's nothing, I'm sure. Here, drink this milk. You've been walking a long piece. Now, I'll run and get you something to eat. There's little Harry crying too. He has just woke up. I can work and run now, dear,' she concluded, as she gave him another kiss and hurried away.

Crombie sat down on a milking-stool and gazed at the familiar objects and scenes around him. The house looked as of yore, but the ivies on the verandah had been cut away and the paint on the doors had faded. The big tree in the lane was just the same excepting that one of its largest branches was broken off. Then there was the old water trough which he and Bergen hewed out of a log years and years ago, and the wooden spout leading to the pump, which he had taken such pains to make water-tight. The stone doorstep looked just as it had the last time he saw it, and the interior of the big kitchen, so dear to his boyhood, had not changed an iota. He thought of what he was then, of the hope, the joy and the ambition which filled his breast, and then he thought of his wasted years and the furrows in his mother's cheek and brow. A score of fond memories tugged at his heart-strings till he bowed his head and wept

like a child. But hark! He hears voices. He must not be seen weeping.

Bergen, with his long, rapid strides, is coming round the corner of the barn, followed by Sarah, running to keep pace with him. His face is shaded by a huge straw hat and he is begrimed with dust, but his very step is joyful. He seems to guess what is passing in his brother's mind and is determined to put him at his ease.

'Welcome home, Crombie, lad!' he shouted cheerily, as soon as he was within hearing. 'I was wishing for you to-day to help me. You've just come in the nick of time.'

He spoke as if nothing unusual had happened and tried to assume an air of nonchalance. But when he came closer and saw the great change in his brother he found it impossible to bear up any longer. The face, once so smooth and cleanly shaven, was dust-stained, haggard and dissipated; the faultlessly-fitting suit and spotless linen had given place to threadbare rags and a soiled handkerchief.

Bergen was the last man in the world to notice anyone's appearance, but the transformation in Crombie was a shock he was not prepared for. Immediately there flashed through his mind the weary, winding, wayward path through which this goal was reached, the temptation, the sin, the degradation and the suffering necessary to bring about the sad result. He gave a great shout of grief and wept upon his wayward brother's neck.

'Never mind, Crombie, lad. Don't look like that. You're not beat yet,' he stammered through his tears. 'We'll stand shoulder to shoulder. Don't you mind the day when we two little lads were lost in the swamp? Do you remember how we tried to put it off by pretending that we were only playing lost, and kept up our spirits till we found the road

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out? Then we both cried. Well, that's where we're at now. We are just finding ourselves.'

Crombie's only reply was to press his brother's hand and wet it with his tears.

'Tut, man,' continued Bergen, as he rubbed his sleeve across his eyes, 'don't take on so, lad. You're not beaten yet.'

'Yes, I am, Bergen, clean beat.'

'I know better. I tell you a man with a clean heart is never licked. Pooh! Dash it all, you're a better man to-night than you ever were. Stand right up to the rack and bear it like a man.'

'It's hard to come down in the world, to drop from the position of a gentleman to that of a beggar. To go about begging for leave to earn enough to keep body and soul together, to feel that the world has no place for you. I used to be hard on Norbert Delavan, but I know better now.'

They sat down on a bench with arms entwined, like two great school-boys.

'I tell you, Bergen, that it was only the thought of mother that kept me from suicide. And to see her to-night with her dear face wrinkled and changed. Oh, my God, it was awful! It's all my doing. And then I've sunk the farm and you with it.'

'Don't worry about that. Let the money go. You've had the worth of it in experience. The farm will come again. Tell me how you put in the time.'

'Making good resolutions and breaking them. Working for a while and then drinking for a while. Twice before I saved up enough to come home but temptation came at the wrong times. But I would have straightened up long ago if I had been able to get a steady job. I was here to-day and away to-morrow. It was no use trying to get a drug situation. My appearance damned me every time, and I had to take anything that I could get. I've

dug ditches and worked in sewers, but it wasn't the work, it was the associations that drove me mad. Sometimes I would wake up at night in some low filthy den where I was forced to lodge. I would look about at the rags and filth, and dirt and coarseness, and think of what I had been and what I was then. Then I'd sell out heaven for something to bring forgetfulness. And so it went on and on till the sailor picked me up.'

'And did you get that flash of light which I told you would come from your innermost soul?'

'I did—to-night—when I saw poor mother's face. Oh, my God. What a revelation. I am a beast, a monster. I almost cried out with horror. You mustn't leave me alone, Bergen. I am afraid to be alone with myself. I am actually afraid of Crombie Worth. Keep hold of my hand.'

'It's the slough of despond, Crombie. It's the battle we all have to fight with ourselves before we are able to take our real places in life.'

'There is one thing more I wish to say while I have courage to do so. You often coaxed me to get rid of any unwholesome secret preying on my mind and I always prevaricated. But now I *must tell what I know about the Cargill tragedy*, something which my own cowardice prevented me from telling.'

'Time enough for that, lad, in a day or so. I *knew* it would come. Mr Carswell will take it down in writing, though just as likely he knows already. Come! There's mother calling us to supper. Bless her old heart, it will do her good to see us together,' and away they went, arm-in-arm, into the old kitchen.

CHAPTER XXVII

AT LONG RANGE

'CROMBIE'S story pricks the bubble, Boyd.'

'I can't see that it does, and I have studied it over carefully.'

'The fact that Jeff got home before the horse spoils the whole fabric. Taken in connection with Mrs Dwyer's story, Crombie's statement actually clears Jeff. Now, here is what happened, as nearly as I can judge.

'Jeff went out before Mr Cargill, and we had that fact placed against him, but it turns out now that he went straight to Mrs Dwyer's at the corner and made a jolly good fellow of himself. Then he came back and Crombie went out with him (on the sly). Crombie, as we now know, was quite fond of his toddy, but he was very cautious about being seen taking it. When they reached the hotel Crombie insisted on having a private room where they could enjoy themselves without being seen. There they remained till after the dance was over and the "party" broken up. Jeff, by this time, was pretty far gone. Mrs Dwyer says that when they left the house Crombie could not keep Jeff from falling. It appears that when they got to the shed the horse and buggy were missing and they were in a quandary as to what they'd better do. Crombie could easily have taken Jeff home with him for the night but that would have compromised him with Bergen and his mother, so they resolved to go back to Dwyer's

again. They roused the old lady out of bed and told her the horse was gone. She took pity on Jeff and sent him home in her own vehicle, with her son Jimmie as driver. As soon as Crombie saw Jeff safely off he went home to bed. There's the whole story.'

'There are still two points yet to explain—Crombie's sudden departure and the missing umbrellas.'

Mr Carswell laughed. He took from his safe a ledger labelled—'The Cargill Case' and read a footnote on one of the pages. "'Jeff Leonard left in his rooms on Madison Avenue, on the tenth of November, an umbrella with a white bone handle, and the said article did not leave his rooms till after the fifteenth." Crombie's is in the inner office there. Mrs Dwyer gave it to me last night.'

'Good heavens! Then the jig is up.'

'I should say it was. We are a nice pair of jackasses,' and the old man laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks. 'Another three months' work gone for nothing. It's a God's blessing nobody knows it but ourselves.'

'What about Jeff's father and Breen?'

'Tut! It isn't what they know that has inspired them with fear but what they suspect. They are working in fear and trembling. Verily, the wicked flee when no man pursueth. They both feel certain that Jeff is guilty because they *know* that Delavan was *not*. *Their* mistake is more fatal than *ours*. The poor old man is dying by inches. Death would be a welcome relief to him. There's a great lesson for us both. None of us can escape the consequences of our misdeeds.'

'I can easily see how the father came to suspect Jeff. The mud-stained clothes, the bruised face, the missing horse and Jeff's mistaken idea that it was his own umbrella he had lost.'

'Exactly. The two umbrellas were so much alike and were purchased at Seigel Cooper's at the same time. But on the night of the murder Crombie's was left at Dwyer's and Jeff's was still in Chicago.'

'You haven't explained Crombie's hasty departure.'

'That's quite easy. It appears that Crombie left instructions in Chicago to have his letters mailed to Owasco in care of Jeff, not only because of better mail service but because he spent most of his time in town at Leonard's. In Dwyer's back room, in the old lady's presence, Jeff gave Crombie a letter which he had been carrying about in his pocket all day, having forgotten it. Crombie opened and read the letter and said that he would have to return to Chicago next day as the man he had left in charge of his business was making himself too much at home. Oh, it's a complete rout—horse, foot and artillery.'

'Why didn't Mrs Dwyer tell all this before?'

'She had no special reason to do so; in fact, it was a point of honour with her to remain quiet. Two young swells had patronised her house very liberally and she considered that it would be very ungrateful on her part not to keep secret their little escapade, though for that matter I am sure she never had the slightest suspicion of the two lads. Had she said anything about it she might have been fined for keeping her bar-room open after the regulation closing hours. Only for Crombie's statement it is not likely that she would ever have given any information at all. There is a sort of Bacchanalian free - masonry between hotel - keepers and their patrons which makes secrecy part of their business code.'

'There was a reason then for Crombie's dropping Jeff's acquaintance so suddenly?'

'Yes. Crombie was sure that Jeff was guilty. The missing umbrella, which Jeff thought was his own, the amount of money spent, the soiled clothes,

and the strange disappearance of the horse were sufficient to plant suspicion in Crombie's mind.'

'Does Crombie explain why he did not come forward at the time of the inquest?'

'He states that pride and fear prevented him. He was afraid of his pet weakness becoming known. No one at that time ever suspected him of bibulous habits, and he was too proud to admit his companionship with a drunken man. Then as the case went on and his suspicions of Jeff grew into certainty he was still more afraid to make a statement because it seemed possible that he himself might be an object of suspicion. Besides, his previous cordial relations with Jeff's people and the position which the father occupied, placed difficulties in his path which he had not the courage to face. Crombie's sin was selfishness. But it was a sin for which he suffered severely. A guilty conscience in hiding what ought to have been told was, he claims, the real cause of his ruin. He did not spare himself in making the statement. He considers his punishment just.'

'Humph! That settles the matter as far as *he* is concerned. But now we are just where we started.'

'Yes—and yet not quite. I have been silently following another course, because, although I really *did* think that Jeff was our man, I felt that our past methods were in direct contradiction to the principles which should have guided us in tracing this crime.

'I reasoned in this way. Here is a very complex crime, so complex that the murderer's motives up to the last moment were wavering and uncertain. I cannot help thinking that murder was not the original intention at all. The housebreaking and mutilation of the will would seem to contradict the subsequent tragedy.

'I also feel certain that somewhere, in the victim's past life, lies the key to the mystery. There must

have been some very strange passages in his life, because, without some powerful reason, a man of his wealth and speculating spirit would never have buried himself here. Remembering that, in some way, each of us sow what we reap, I set on foot an inquiry into the life of Cargill from the time he came to America till the time of his death.

'We have been starting at the wrong end and we deserved defeat. We started out with a presumption and wound up at nothing. We shall try the other plan now. We don't know who did the *killing* but we do know who was *killed*. We're on solid ground there. The proper plan, in this case, as, indeed, in all others where evidence is lacking, is to follow out the life of the deceased and find out who owed him revenge or who would have any interest in his removal.'

Mr Carswell here took a voluminous note-book from a private drawer, wiped his spectacles and read as follows :—

.
'HISTORY OF NICHOLAS ELLIOT
CARGILL

'About the age of twenty-two, N. E. Cargill left Belfast, Ireland, having in his possession and under his control about twenty thousand dollars. There remained at home a sister (much younger than himself) and his mother, then about sixty years of age. He first settled in Patterson, N. J., where he devoted himself to speculating in real estate, doing business there as Cargill & Company. He himself constituted the firm, but inasmuch as a portion of the money in his possession belonged to his sister, he probably considered her a partner. He was a man of frugal habits. He appeared to throw all his energies into his business and never dissipated nor indulged in the routine of pleasures common to

young men of his age. He remained in Patterson only a few years, but in that time was said to have wonderfully increased his capital.

'Next we find him in Jersey City, speculating in lots all along the water front from Hoboken to Weehawken, and creating quite a stir in the local real estate market. Here, as before, he lived a comparatively retired life, although he was a member of a fashionable chess club in New York and was spoken of as an expert at that game. His business here must have been very prosperous, because we find that, in five years after his arrival, he was quoted as being worth a million. During his career in Jersey City he had an excellent reputation both in his social and business capacities, nor does it appear that scandal, intrigue or complications with the opposite sex ever became attached to his name.

'Then, selling out his business in Jersey City, he moved to Chicago, presumably to find there greater scope for his speculative genius. He opened an office on State Street, and, judging by his steadily increased ratings, rolled up wealth very rapidly. Some years of phenomenal prosperity, however, were followed by a sudden reverse. His rating fell to less than a million at the time of a great slump in the wheat market.

'This was followed by a marked change in his career. He sold his seat in the Stock Exchange and left the city.

'When next he appears, after a gap of three years, he is a retired gentleman farmer near the city of Owasco, where he lived, till the time of the tragedy, a very retired and uneventful life, though we are reliably informed that he spent considerable time in Chicago during the riots, and that he was singularly successful in his operations at that time.'

'There, Boyd, that is report number one. Not

much information of any value, you think. We'll try report number two.'

'We have discovered that, during his career in Chicago, Mr Cargill became enamoured of a young lady who was playing a leading part at one of the cheap theatres. He was known on many occasions to visit her behind the scenes during play hours. The singer referred to was Madame Lucilla, but this, we think, was her stage name only. We have as yet been unable to discover anything as to her personal history or antecedents, excepting that she was an American from the West and occasionally had visitors whose appearance was very disreputable. We also find that she disappeared at the time Cargill left Chicago.

'As to the whereabouts of Cargill after leaving Chicago we are still in the dark, but a prominent member of the Stock Exchange gave it as his opinion that Cargill went to Pennsylvania, because, while in Chicago, Cargill had repeatedly spoken of the wonderful possibilities of coal mining. We have searched the hotel and city registers of that period in all the principal cities of Pennsylvania without finding the slightest trace of him.'

'That's the extent of it so far, Boyd. What do you think of it?'

'It is very interesting, but I can't see that we are any further advanced. There is no reference in this report to his sister, Mrs Delavan.'

'I told them they might omit any reference to her. I remember when she first came to Owasco, as dashing an Irish beauty as you ever laid eyes on, and as proud as an empress.'

'Humph! The poor thing is far enough down now. Where did you get this information?'

'From detective bureaus.'

'I thought you had no faith in detectives.'

'Neither I have, as a rule. But they are useful to find out specific things, to hunt up crumbs. A man is not necessarily an architect because he carries a hod. They know nothing of my purpose excepting what they may infer. I merely ask and pay for information on definite points.'

'Do you think you got value for your money?' laughed Boyd.

'Indeed, I do. It is absolutely necessary that we should know everything about the deceased. I am inclined to think that this opera singer is the proverbial woman in the case.'

'You think Cargill ran away with the actress?'

'My knowledge of human nature and my experience in criminal work lead me to think so. When a man so selfish as Cargill reaches the height of his ambition, then look out for vices. There's no road so fraught with danger as the path of pleasure. Up to the time of his financial reverse Cargill had been in the race for wealth, and, for the time, he won. This play-actress turned up at the very time when he was ripe for folly, and she was just the sort of flashy creature to catch his eye. His running away with her so soon after his loss was probably a consolation such as others find in liquor.'

'I see. And that is why you have decided to take a run through Pennsylvania? Supposing that you do find traces of him, what then? What can you find that would be of any service?'

'First, whether he took the actress with him; second, whether he married her; and third, whether there were any children.'

'But he may not have gone to Pennsylvania at all.'

Mr Carswell wiped his glasses thoughtfully. 'Quite true. But if you look it up, you will see that there was quite a boom in coal-mining at that time. After

having been hit so hard with wheat a man like Cargill would be apt to try some new speculation. You see, I knew the man, Boyd. I played chess with him and did business with him.'

'If his relations with the actress were not of a legitimate nature, he would probably go to some out-of-the-way place where he would not be known.'

'A very good suggestion, Boyd, and well worth consideration, but somehow I don't think he could, at that time, have kept away from the whirl of speculation. Mrs Delavan tells me that, from the time he left Chicago till he settled on the farm, they heard from him several times. His letters were dated from Pittsburg, Philadelphia and another town which she cannot remember.'

'Well, uncle, I wish you every success, but when the detectives failed to find him, I don't see that you have any chance. It is a big undertaking. Will you go alone?'

'No. Julia is anxious to go with me. She says that if Madame Lucilla was ever in Pennsylvania she'll find her out. She thinks it was stupid of us not to search for *her* instead of *him*. She sent to all the photographers in Chicago for a picture of her, and she has managed to get four in different characters and costumes.'

'Julia is a born lawyer. She's as close as a police prefect. She never even gave me a hint of all this.'

'Do you know what she said when she looked at the photos?—"This woman's vanity will betray her. She loves display more than she could any lover. Cargill couldn't keep her from making a fool of herself. He may have changed her name but he couldn't change her nature. Instead of hotel or city registers, we shall look for old concert and theatre bills, and make a search of photograph galleries. We'll find traces of Madame Lucilla, or I'm not my father's daughter."'

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CHAPTER XXVIII

MR CARSWELL'S LUCK

'DEAR BOYD,—I have delayed writing you until I should have something particular to communicate, and even now it may be that I have over-estimated the importance of the information which we have gathered.

'Right at the outset I may say that the experience we have just passed through is one which I would not care to have repeated. There is something about the vulgar mentality of this kind of work which jars upon me much more than I expected.

'I shall begin at the beginning. We reached Scranton about two o'clock in the morning, and it was only when we were nearing our destination that we realised the hopelessness of our errand. The nearer you get to an undertaking of this kind the worse it looks. When we left home I was quite jubilant, but every mile eastwards seemed to weaken my faith, and when we began to glide through the fire-lit hills to the west of the town, my courage had gone to the low-water level. I could see that Julia was having a similar experience, but we were too proud to confess it to each other.

'To make a search running back for a quarter of a century is like looking through the wrong end of a telescope. One has no idea how far away everything seems, how swiftly flows the current of time, and how rapidly past events drop astern.

'When we had rested from our journey and began

to feel more at home in the place we felt our confidence returning, and, as Bergen Worth would say, "we took a fresh hold."

'Julia's ideas were to search the photograph galleries and mine to go through city and hotel registers as far back as was obtainable, being continually on the lookout for a probable *alias*. I secured old voters' lists and assessment rolls after a good deal of trouble and expense. The name of the deceased being Nicholas Elliot Cargill, I thought it probable that he might select Elliot or Nicholson as an *alias*.

'But all our efforts were futile. Day after day we returned to our hotel with the same story for each other—no developments. Julia found, to her great disappointment, that there was not a photographer in the town who had been there long enough for our purpose, though in one case the successor to a photographer, who was doing business there at the time, had a number of old negatives which she went through with untiring patience and perseverance.

'When I satisfied myself that Cargill had no mining interests here at that time, I was inclined to leave at once, because we had already spent two weeks in Scranton, and I was anxious to push on. But Julia, with woman-like curiosity, wished to see all the sights of this great mining centre. By the merest accident she ran across an old man who was a sort of time-keeper in one of the mines, and who went by the name of Kargell. She got into conversation with him, and asked him if he ever saw or heard tell of anybody of the same name. He replied that at one time there was a mine of that name at Wilkesbarre. Julia was delighted with this information. As soon as we were alone she danced and "ha ha'd" around me in the most exasperating way.

'Off we went to Wilkesbarre on the very next train. I could hardly restrain her impatience till we got there, but we met with disappointment there as much

as at Scranton. It seems that there *had* been a mine of that name, but it had been a complete failure, and had long since been abandoned. We found a sort of sub-foreman who had worked on the mine, but he said that the manager of the company was a fair-haired, stout man, who used to come from Pittsburg once or twice a week. We described the late Mr Cargill as closely as possible, and asked Mr Potter if he ever saw anyone in connection with the company who resembled the deceased.

'To our delight Mr Potter replied that he remembered that, on one or two occasions, a dark man with a hook nose had accompanied the paymaster, and was evidently a person of some importance. The headquarters of the company had been in Pittsburg, of that the miner was absolutely certain.

'On the strength of this information we set out for Pittsburg (which, by the way, is the dirtiest place under heaven) and there we lost two weeks without finding any trace of our man. At last, in the national bank of that city, we found, in some old ledgers, the name of N. E. Cargill, and the description we received of him from one of the senior officers of the bank put the matter beyond all doubt. At last we were on the right track. Julia's eyes fairly snapped. I could scarcely keep her from cheering. But we made another discovery, which, in a manner, offset our success. Mr Checkly, who, by the way, was very kind and courteous to us, incidentally mentioned that some two or three years ago *a gentleman had visited him on much the same errand, and had in his possession a photograph by which Mr Cargill had been identified.*

'This information so completely changed my mental focus that I sat staring stupidly at Mr Checkly till he must have thought I had taken leave of my senses. We, of course, tried to ascertain who and what the inquirer had been, but all that Mr Checkly could

member was that the stranger was a tall man without whiskers.

'As to where Cargill lived while doing business with the bank the manager could not say, as at that time he was only a junior, though he said that it was a very common thing for wealthy Pittsburgers to live in some of the suburban towns. The cheques had been mostly sent from Wilkesbarre or other mining centres near by. Mr Checkly evidently thought that our purpose was to find an heir to the estate. He asked a good many questions, but we managed to satisfy him without giving him any hint as to our real motives.

'Then came another fortnight of weary hunting. We were wanderers to and fro upon the face of the earth. North, south, east, west we went, taking towns and villages in routine, till the people along the line, or the railway officials, must have thought we were agents or pedlars of some sort. We searched nearly every town on the direct line between Pittsburg and Wilkesbarre till we convinced ourselves we would have to give in beaten. We decided to put the matter in the hands of a local agency and go home, because we were completely discouraged by our multiplicity of disappointments. One or two points on a little branch line we decided to "do," as a last resort, when a little incident happened which sent a ray of light across our path as suddenly and unexpectedly as a thunder-bolt from a blue sky.

'One day a woman, whose whitish hair showed her to be pretty well up in years, was sitting on the platform at D—— Junction weeping as if her heart would break. She had evidently got off the east-bound express and was waiting for the branch train like ourselves. Julia, who was always a kind-hearted soul, in spite of her ascetic face, spoke to the old lady and asked her the cause of her grief.

'It appeared that the poor old body had lost her

ticket or left it on a seat in the train, and having spent all her money in shopping she had nothing left to take her home. She had a multiplicity of bundles and parcels, but these were not legal tender for a ticket. Julia, of course, took pity on her, and, marching into the station, bought her a ticket, remarking at the same time that our destination was the same as hers.

'The old lady was very profuse in her thanks and insisted on our partaking of some fruit which she was taking home to her grandchildren. Her tongue wagged pretty freely. She started questioning Julia as to the nature of our business. And, in turn, Julia questioned her. After some conversation upon the social history of the town of "L—," of which Mrs Urquhart (so she gave her name) was an old resident, Julia handed her the photo of Madame Lucilla, more as a matter of habit than through the expectation of any result. The old lady adjusted her spectacles, looked at the picture and sent us both bounding out of our seats by exclaiming, "*Oh, yes. It is little Mrs Elliot. I was with her when her baby was born.*"

'Imagine how excited we were. Here, after weeks of fruitless search, information came tumbling in upon us pell-mell. Julia's kindness and consideration for old age accomplished more than all our weary toil.

'To make a long story short, we learned from her, and from others in "L—," that Cargill used Elliot as an *alias*, that Mrs Elliot had some sort of marriage certificate, and that her husband left her on account of a scandal with a prominent young attorney of the town. Cargill never returned, but it appears he left her well provided with funds, and she remained at "L—" till her child was born, after which she returned to Chicago in search of her husband. She did not succeed in finding him, but she lived for years on Cottage Grove Avenue, and when she died

she left her son under the guardianship of an attorney of note, who also died about the time the son would come of age. What he did with the boy—now a full-grown man if living—I have not been able to learn, but no doubt that will appear later.

'Your greatest surprise will come when you learn that Madame Lucilla was none other than Lucia O'Hara, a stepdaughter of Martin Brett of the Townline, a lady who, in her young days, was famous as the best horsewoman in Lincoln County.

'There is no doubt that Cargill was, in spite of his apparent asceticism, a veritable Lothario, and it was *such entanglements* and the *fear of being prosecuted* which drove him into a life of seclusion; but was it not a strange irony of fate which induced him to settle within six miles of the spot where the destroyer of his happiness was born; for by all I can learn he really loved this wayward creature who was so unfaithful to him that he doubted the paternity of his child. His previous marriage was without issue and his first wife was in an asylum in Montreal or Quebec when he wedded Miss C'Hara. Whether the second marriage was valid or not will depend largely upon where the ceremonies took place, for, as you know, every State has its own marriage and divorce laws.

'At anyrate I am satisfied that we hold the key to the mystery and we may return feeling that our voyage has not been in vain. Let us not talk about luck or chance. Julia's kindness was more than all the skill we could bring to bear upon the question. We are now *en route* for home but will remain a day or two in Chicago to complete our inquiries. In the meantime make no definite arrangements till you see or hear from me again. Your affectionate uncle,

'WALTER CARSWELL.'

CHAPTER XXIX

THE WOOD-NYMPH'S CALL

ON the afternoon of the Sunday preceding the day of the inquiry-meeting, Bergen was strolling through the fields towards the Fenwick homestead in compliance with the invitation of the previous week. He was so constant a visitor there and had so often dispensed with the formality of an invitation, that he casually wondered why the present occasion should be any exception. Mr Fenwick had always been a staunch friend, and, in the present ecclesiastical crisis, had shown his sympathies to the extent of resigning his position as deacon as soon as the nature of the trouble between the pastor and school superintendent became known.

Perhaps the invitation was to afford an opportunity of giving some advice on to-morrow's meeting.

Bergen grieved much over his changed relations to the church and the estrangement of many of his neighbours, who regarded him as an apostate, but the joy of his brother's return and the renewed cheerfulness of the old home gave him fresh courage. With eager sympathy he watched Crombie's struggles for self-mastery, and already he had cause to think that the battle of moral reform was won.

He felt the responsibility of his brother's future career, and he saw no solution of the problem but to gradually instal Crombie on the homestead while he went back to his anvil. Crombie must have some-

thing to look forward to, he must be made to feel that he was accomplishing something. There were many things which, though luxuries to himself, were necessities to Crombie, and to give the latter the best opportunity to rebuild his moral nature there must be no undue pressure of circumstances and not too much falling off in those little perquisites which, in his better days, Crombie had been taught to expect. The farm, in its present encumbered condition, even with Crombie's assistance, would not be equal to the occasion, but the old smithy could be opened and all would be well.

To-day, however, Bergen's thoughts were mostly of himself. There had been subtle changes in his inner nature which he could neither understand nor control. Emotions of various kinds were taking a more prominent place in his everyday life, and modifying his ideas of the various problems which presented themselves. He had always been more or less introspective, but latterly he had become more self-conscious, and, in proportion, the process of self-analysis grew more comprehensive. He began to criticise not only the gruffness of his speech and manner but his dress and general appearance. To recognise a fault was to immediately commence its correction, and he began to school himself with unflinching vigilance even though every day brought to light a new and arduous task.

The routine of his daily life for many months had been brightened to such an extent by his visits to the Delavans that he fell into the habit of counting the days between his visits. The house in which they lived, and the street on which it was situated, seemed remarkably bright, and the town itself had grown in importance since the mother and daughter had taken up their residence there. His heart always beat faster as he approached the door, and the first sight of Naera gave him a feeling of weakness

entirely foreign to his past life. He found himself admiring her figure with its graceful motions, her creamy neck, her shapely hands and her silken hair. He was becoming more and more sensitive to the peculiar incandescence of her eyes and the musical rhythm of her step. He was thrilled by her touch, charmed by her voice and inspired by her presence.

But he had given her his promise never to speak again of love, and this, to him, meant that he was in honour bound to stifle any feeling of that kind towards her.

He was convinced that her love for Crombie had long since died a natural death, and he deeply pitied his brother for having thoughtlessly sacrificed so inestimable a boon. But this did not improve the situation for *him*. Never by word or act did she lead him to infer that her interest in his affairs was other than the natural outcome of that friendship which had always existed between them, and she took no pains to conceal her stolid indifference towards the opposite sex. He felt assured that it was impossible for a creature so beautiful and refined to form an attachment for one so unpolished as himself, and yet, if he must confess the truth, it was for the sake of being more worthy that he was subjecting himself to a new discipline.

Every refining thought and act seemed to bring him closer to her. She alone appeared to understand him. To her he could relate his various mental struggles, and with her he could discuss the gravest problems. *She* seemed to know by instinct what had taken him years to learn. Often when he thought he had conceived some new idea he found, on confiding it to her, that she had already gone over the ground and completed a conclusion he had only begun.

Grim necessity had apparently been a great benefactor to Naera. Under the pressure of misfortune her mental force had grown by leaps and bounds

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Adversity had sounded the depths of her nature. From a girl in her teens she had developed into a capable and resourceful woman, and was now a tower of strength to her mother.

At the risk of his own happiness he had bestowed upon mother and daughter the sympathy and companionship which his conscience declared to be a sacred duty—at least until their social isolation disappeared and they began to mingle with the outer world. Since learning of Mrs Fenwick's intention to visit the Delavans, however, he had absented himself from Owasco altogether. He could now begin to discontinue the visits so dangerous to his peace of mind. He could now withdraw his companionship, but he must do so in such a way as to attract little attention and give no offence. He could still watch over them, in secret, and be ready to assist them if the necessity arose.

He longed to know what Naera thought of the course he had followed in consequence of the trouble between himself and Mr Silk, and whether she had noticed his unusual absence. She was the only creature on earth whose condemnation or approval might influence his future actions, and yet he preferred to dispense with even her advice. In matters of conscience he must fight his battles alone.

The day was intensely hot. The fiery sun was glaring in a cloudless sky and the air was vibrating with tiny waves of heat. Even Bergen, inured in the harvest fields to burning suns, was glad to seek for shelter by making a detour which would lead him through a patch of forest and a long lane lined with trees. He leaped over a high fence and was hurrying into the leafy shades when he heard a voice among the trees.

'Whither away in such haste, Bergen? I have found Elysium here.'

It was Naera. She was seated on a little mound

beneath a spreading beech. Even his surprise at her unexpected appearance was overcome by admiration. She was enveloped in a filmy white muslin with open neck and semi-transparent sleeves, its white purity accentuating her rich black tresses and flashing eyes and giving perfect freedom to her graceful outlines. She seemed half angel and half woman, so cool and pure and white, and yet so warm and human. A few stray locks blown across her forehead by the gentle breeze gave her a mischievous expression, which was enhanced by her smile of approval as he approached in a neatly-fitting suit of blue.

'Why, Bergen, how handsome you look! You gave me quite a start. Blue is your colour. You should never wear anything else. It gives your hair a richer and deeper hue.'

His heart was beating too rapidly and he was too much abashed to speak. Anyway, how could he reply to such a personal remark? If she had noticed the change in his appearance she might surely have been merciful enough not to speak of it. She looked as if she were going to tease him. Women, with all their angelic proclivities, were at times very cruel.

She evidently read his thoughts by the expression of his face as he came closer. 'You need not be offended at my compliment, Bergen. It was positively sincere. You deserve some punishment for your behaviour of late, but I'm going to forgive you on account of your other troubles.'

'I never expected to see you here, Naera. How is this? Is your mother with you?'

'Now, isn't that a nice question? Just as if I were not a responsible person. Come here and sit down. You must be almost melted.'

'Yes, it is very hot,' he replied stupidly, not knowing what else to say. He had not yet recovered from his sudden fit of embarrassment.

'Mother and I are paying a visit to the Fenwicks.

They brought us out last night and are going to take us home in the morning. Katie was to have returned last night, but, unfortunately, she missed her train. Mr Fenwick was asleep, mother and her hostess were having a confidential chat, and so I came out here to renew my acquaintance with the trees. There is nothing like the woods to me. I fairly love the trees. They seem so steadfast and true.'

'There is sympathy and individuality in trees. I often come to the woods for consolation and advice.'

'You have certainly not been going to your friends of late,' remarked Naera, with a smile. 'You were afraid I would scold you for acting on an impulse. Perhaps I might have then, but now I am glad that your absence prevented me from being so presumptuous. I know you well enough, Bergen, to feel sure that neither impulse nor advice, nor pride nor dignity, nor hope of reward nor fear of punishment will deter you from following the best promptings of your own heart. I don't wish you to know in advance what course you will pursue at to-morrow's meeting. I know you have sought advice from the only true source and I have perfect confidence that whatever you do will be right. All I can say is, "May God be with you."' She held out her hand in token of forgiveness.

He took it and turned away to hide the moisture in his eyes. He longed to kiss the shapely fingers which had defied the disfiguring influences of labour, the little hand which had accomplished so much, but she gently withdrew it and addressed him in a different tone. 'But there! Let us not talk or think seriously to-day. It is a sin to be sad when all nature is in smiles. When you came along I was imagining I was a child again. I was making a necklace of dandelions. You can help me. It will rest your tired brain to do and think of childish things. Do you

remember the long chain of dandelions we made one day at school?’

Very soon Bergen was busy at his new task, but was oblivious to everything but the presence of her who threw a mesmeric spell over him till the woods became a fairyland and the earth a paradise. The leaves rustled overhead, the birds sang in the boughs, and the little stream rippling through the glades beyond added its voice to the song of praise. The hours flew by like moments. She took a red rose from her hair and pinned it in his button-hole, and she taught him how to make a wreath of leaves. Then they wandered through the woods gathering ferns and making bouquets. He helped her over stiles and lifted her across boggy hollows to save her dainty boots, and they drank together out of the brook. Before they could realise it the sun was spreading a crimson mantle over the hills and throwing its long shadows across the valleys.

Evening had come and Bergen had not reached his destination or fulfilled his appointment. He scarcely remembered how Naera apologised to the hostess for delaying her guest, or what passed during the rest of the evening until he was on his way home and she accompanied him to the gate. In a little bower there they sat and watched the glorious sunset fade into the pale moonlight, till, at last, he bade her good-bye and stood for a moment with her hand in his looking into her eyes. Then—he never exactly knew *how* it happened—but he caught her in his arms and held her lips to his. In a moment she eluded his grasp and vanished in the shadows.

CHAPTER XXX

LOVE'S LESSONS

THE thrill of delight which Bergen experienced was followed quickly by a wave of remorse. His first thought was to follow Naera and offer a humble apology. He had allowed himself to be carried away by an impulse and done that which would lessen him in her esteem. He had taken a cowardly advantage of their mutual friendship, and had not only broken his promise never again to speak of love, but had acted the part of an accepted lover.

'What a savage I must seem. Poor little woman! In the fulness of her heart she gave me her sympathy and companionship, and how have I requited her? I seemed to be under a magnetic spell—and yet there is no excuse. I shall think it over and make a fitting apology.'

He turned abruptly and started homewards with his usual rapid strides and then suddenly paused.

'Shall I return and go down on my knees to her? I must not let her suffer—even for an hour—the thought that there was any disrespect intended. But stop! Of course she would know there was not. How can she help knowing that I consider her the purest and best of God's creatures? I have sometimes thought she understood me better than I do myself. She will only pity me. I never touched woman's lips before, and never will again, but hers, if it is God's will that I ever have that right.'

Unconsciously his steps led him homeward by the

circuitous route he had chosen earlier in the day and he soon found himself skirting along the edge of the woods. The moon was throwing its soft shadows among the trees and lighting up the little mound where she sat but a few hours before. He approached the spot softly. It seemed as if the enchantment of her presence still lingered there. He would not break the spell by his rude footsteps. He remained motionless, out in the moonlight, gazing at a fairy-land in mourning for an absent queen. The rivulet beyond, which sang so joyously in its noonday shades, now sobbed its way through lonely darkling shadows and hurried off to tell its tale to sister streams; the drooping shrubs were bowed with gentle grief, and the trees with dewy leaves mourned in solemn silence, yea, even the rustic stile which had known the touch of her snowy garments seemed to look at him with an air of sad inquiry. He felt a tightness in his chest and something rising in his throat. Oh, those hours of happiness! Gone! Forever! Ruthlessly receding into the past!

There was something white lying within the shadows. Perhaps it was something he might keep as a token. He went forward on tip-toe and picked it up. It was her fan, a little ivory trinket with a feathered edge and a faint odour of violets. He kissed it eagerly, looked shamefacedly about to see if he had been observed, and then burying his face in his hands he groaned aloud. 'It is no use. I cannot fight it off. I cannot help loving her. What *can* I do? What *shall* I do?'

He hid the token tenderly in his bosom, and with downcast head walked slowly and sadly away. He was strangely conscious that he was forever changed, that life would never again wear its former aspect. An alchemist with magic touch had turned baser metal into gold; a pure woman had taught him, in a moment, the lesson of a lifetime.

'I cannot resist this love. I must purify it, make it unselfish, make it holy. I feel that it would be a privilege to give my life for hers. I could bless the pain I suffered for her sake. Ha! Then why should I not welcome *this* suffering?'

His thoughts became calmer and more subdued. The brisk walk was cooling his brain. He could study the situation more philosophically.

Love—true love—worthy of the name, could not, in the nature of things, be an evil. It was an emotion which must ennoble and purify every heart it touched. No one had ever died of *love*. Life and happiness might have succumbed to shattered *hopes*, unfulfilled *desires* and the unsatisfied *longings* of physical and mental affinity, but these could be no part of love, unless, indeed, it was love of self. Why then should his love for Naera be anything but a blessing? By plucking desire from love he might rob the rose of its thorn. The idea brought a glow to his heart. He had explored a new field. He had learned a new lesson.

He was so absorbed in thought that he scarcely noticed he was nearing home. Already he was traversing the field adjoining the church. The congregation were just dismissing. He could see them forming into groups and driving or strolling homewards. Unconsciously he heaved a sigh of regret. A strange feeling of loneliness came over him. For fifteen years he had never missed a service, but now he was a stranger. He had banished himself from the beloved sanctum, perhaps for years and perhaps for ever. All that was best and purest in him had been brought to light there and yet his own hand had severed the tie which bound him to it. Was he prepared to give up the little church with all its memories and associations? Was he able to make the sacrifice? Could he bear the loss with patience and fortitude?

He threw himself down under a tree near by and lay looking up at the stars. An after service of prayer was being held, and the soft, sweet cadence of a hymn came floating from the open windows. Gradually the music took possession of him. It seemed to blend with the shadowy stillness of the moonlight and to bring him nearer to the blue dome till he became a part of the sparkling gems wheeling their way through an eternity of peace. Tears welled up in his eyes and coursed down his cheeks. The still, small voice of conscience was whispering in his ear,—

'And shall you, a speck upon a grain of sand, hurry the patient footsteps of Eternal Truth, or chide the tree of life for tardy growth? Shall the mushroom of to-day chide the oak of eighteen centuries?'

He rubbed his forehead uneasily and tried to change the current of his thoughts. But the voice continued:—

'Touch not, with ruthless hands, the prejudices which bind thy fellow mortals to the truth. In the light of Almighty beneficence their existence proves their necessity. Take heed thy weed be not another's flower.'

He moved suddenly from his reclining position and turned his face in the opposite direction. And yet the spell was unbroken.

'The fleet and the strong must tarry for the lame and the halt. Let loving patience mark the pace.'

He arose and stood with folded arms, then moved away to escape pursuing sounds.

'Be not vain of thy strength in body or in spirit. 'Tis but a loan from the Eternal. Beware of pride.'

He went to bed but not to sleep. The conflict still went on. To-morrow he must speak and act before the bar of his own conscience, and yet, even now, at the eleventh hour, he was not clear as to his duty. The time for solving the problem had been all

too short. He must show the congregation, and Mr Silk as well, that he wished to assist them in their efforts without sacrificing one iota of the principle from which the trouble had arisen. He might crucify his pride if necessary, but not his conscience. The truth, as he saw it, he would stand to at all costs. There must be no compromise with expediency. Not hope of heaven nor fear of hell could reach him there.

It was not for him to say whether Mr Silk had sinned. The fact was that Bergen Worth had. He had resented, in anger, the rebuke of the pastor, and had neglected the soft answer which turneth away wrath. Now the penalty must be paid. How? He could not tell. He had prayed for light again and again but it had not come.

Suddenly he thought of Naera, of his love and of the sacrifice he could make for her. He thought of her gentleness and patience, her soft voice and kindly eye, and he became filled with a generous glow. Naera's attitude, of late, appeared like a caress to everybody and everything. Ah, if he could only become like her, he would even love Mr Silk. 'What? Love Mr Silk? Love Mr Silk?'

He repeated the words mechanically over and over again till he began asking himself, 'Why not?' Here was a *duty*—the duty of the hour. He would not shirk it. He would commence *now*.

He began to put himself in Mr Silk's position, to sympathise with him, and, in a few moments, he was kneeling by the bedside thanking God that the light had come.

CHAPTER XXXI

A BORROWED COAT

THE day of the meeting had been appointed by popular vote and was blessed with perfect weather, so that no excuse was offered to many who would have preferred being absent. It so happened that, on this very day, Mr Clarridge was having a threshing, and it was customary for the neighbours to turn out and assist, but substitutes had been provided for all those whose duty called them to the meeting.

The whole community dreaded the occasion and its results, but the trouble had arisen and must be disposed of in some way. Even those who openly took sides with the clergyman would rather have evaded the responsibility of doing an unkindness to Bergen. It was one thing to denounce his methods and another to vote for what probably would be his permanent exclusion from the church. Already the matter had caused serious dissension and a dividing into factions of a community which, for years, had been singularly united. Two brothers had come to blows over it; a husband and wife quarrelled about it; and an expensive lawsuit between two neighbours had arisen out of it.

No one regretted this unfortunate state of affairs more than Mr Silk. He respected and even admired Bergen in spite of the antagonism which had arisen between them, but he felt that the cause was more than personal, that the battle was not so much between Bergen and himself as between two opposing

principles. If every man were qualified to construe and to teach the Scriptures, where was the use of clergymen, of any special training, or of ecclesiastical schools and colleges? How was it possible to maintain the denomination or the integrity of any body where individualism was allowed to run rampant? Doctrinal restraint was as necessary to the Church as discipline to the Army. He would always espouse the cause of cohesion as against that of disintegration.

Again he felt that the strained relations between himself and the Sunday school superintendent had seriously interfered with the usefulness of both. He had kept on hoping and waiting for Bergen to become convinced of the danger of his course, and he was not sorry that at last an opportunity had come for making the issue plain and bringing to a climax a painful and embarrassing situation.

At the appointed hour every seat in the church was filled. Mr Silk's face beamed with pleasure. A good attendance augured well for his success, more particularly as there was a preponderance of lady members. He was too chivalrous to further his case by any unfair measures, but he was human and was not unwilling to accept the advantage which his popularity gave him. There was victory in his manner and triumph in his smile.

After an invocation by a visiting clergyman, a chairman was appointed and the meeting opened in due form. Judging from the attitude of the congregation the occasion was one of much gravity. One of the ladies fainted and the others had recourse to smelling-bottles.

The chairman announced the cause and motive of the meeting. The pastor had challenged the teaching of the Sunday school superintendent, both in method and matter, and the latter had immediately sent in his resignation. The resignation of Mr Worth, however,

had not been accepted, and in order to have the voice of the congregation the meeting was being held. It was charged by the pastor that Mr Worth's teachings were heretical and Mr Silk would endeavour to support the charge, while, on the other hand, the defendant was there, he supposed, either to refute or acknowledge the said charges. After both parties to the dispute had been heard a vote was to be taken which would finally decide the matter. The question on which they were to vote was whether the pastor had made good his charges, and upon this result, yea or nay, would follow the acceptance of the resignation of pastor or school superintendent, as the case might be, for Mr Silk had given notice that he would resign if the voice of the meeting should be unfavourable to him. The situation was very painful to the congregation, but the duty of the hour was to face the responsibility with calm consideration and unbiassed judgment, apart entirely from any personal feelings towards either party.

Mr Silk then took the platform.

'Ladies and gentlemen, fellow-workers in the cause of Christ, let me first express the heart-felt regret with which I bring before you a matter which, had I consulted my own feelings, would have passed unnoticed. There is no position more trying than that in which I am placed to-day. Holding Mr Worth in the highest personal esteem, it is very difficult for me to assume an attitude of antagonism towards him, but the cause in which we have met must be deemed far beyond all personal considerations. Our duty now is to God, and it is upon the faithful discharge of such sacred duties that the welfare, not only of the Christian Church, but of our civilisation depends.

'It is not necessary for me to eulogise Mr Worth's many sterling qualities. He has lived among you for the greater part of his life and you have all learned

to appreciate his kindness as a neighbour. It is his attitude towards the Word of God which forms the question for our most serious consideration. If I can show that his teachings are at variance with the teachings of our Church, the teachings of the apostles and the teachings of the Lord Jesus, then you will see the necessity of his either conforming to the truth or severing his connection with us. If Mr Worth arises to-day and disclaims his teachings of the past few months, I, for one, will meet him with outstretched arms and greet him with tears of joy.

'You all know that for years the spiritual development of your children has been in his charge, consequently, you will readily understand that if his doctrines are false this church is not only being gradually undermined but the feet of the little ones are being led into paths unrighteous and unholy. I shall not dwell upon the erroneous principle which has evidently guided Mr Worth in the past (that of interpreting the Scriptures regardless of clerical authority and denominational or doctrinal restraint). If every member of this church were to adopt this principle all united effort would be impossible, the congregation would be torn asunder by discordant factions and ecclesiastical anarchy would be the inevitable result. There must be some well-defined central authority and some theological limitations or the whole organisation will crumble away. Theology is the foundation upon which all religions are based, and if we allow the foundation to be tampered with the whole superstructure must fall. This side of the question is so plain to each and all of you that I shall not dwell upon it, but pass on to show you his attitude towards the Old Testament.

'Before proceeding any further I may say that for every statement I make I have corresponding witnesses. I shall make no charge which I am not

prepared to substantiate should Mr Worth be unwise enough to attempt a denial.'

The speaker paused, looked ominously around, and refreshed himself from a pitcher of water near by. There was a shuffling of feet and a faint murmuring as all eyes looked askance at the culprit. 'I had no idea he would do such a thing. Bergen, of all men. It is worse than I thought,' were the whispers which passed round the room.

But Bergen sat with folded arms looking straight before him with the glow on his face which he always wore when in deep study. His eyes were directed towards the speaker, but their expression showed that his mind was preoccupied.

The reverend gentleman took the large Bible which lay on his pulpit and held it out in his hand with a look of deep reverence. 'This is the book of life, the foundation of all truth, the Rock of Ages for you and me, and yet Mr Worth in the pride of his heart has taken the liberty of criticising it. He claims that the Old Testament is a mixture of error, truth and allegory, that its writers were not specially inspired, that it is merely the history of a semi-savage people in an age of barbarism, that Jehovah is not God but merely a Jewish conception of Him. But this is not all. Had the matter rested there this meeting would never have been called. But he has voiced his opinions, he has taught them and given prominence to them. He has instilled these ideas into your children, and yours, and yours,' he added with swelling voice and manner till the walls fairly rang with his earnestness.

'He has led his pupils to think that, at least, one half of God's Word is obsolete and—'

'Be fair, Mr Silk,' said Bergen, in a quiet, unimpassioned way.

'I am not unfair,' replied the speaker, with heightened colour. 'Is there a member of the Sabbath

school here who will say I am not? If so let him stand up.'

To the great astonishment of all, Katie Fenwick rose in her seat. 'May, I, please say a word?'

'Certainly,' said the chairman. 'The speaker has requested it.'

'I wish only to say that I never have heard Mr Worth criticise the Bible in the way that Mr Silk represents. Whenever we found a passage which seemed cruel or unjust we always asked him to explain it. He told us we had a *right* to challenge any word or deed which grated on our *conscience*, but never yet did we find a passage in which he failed to point out the moral lesson it contained. He told us again and again that if we looked for the *good* we would never see the *bad*, or if there *was bad* to look for the good that was in *it*. I never heard him criticise the Bible or speak of it in a fault-finding way.'

The audience heaved a sigh of relief. The air was cleared. It became evident that the trouble was not so serious after all. The congregation had confidence in Katie's veracity, and her father, sitting by her side, had no doubt given his consent to her testimony.

Mr Silk saw that he had made a grievous error. He had allowed his enthusiasm to carry him into exaggeration. He had lost ground which it would be impossible to regain. Katie had not actually contradicted him, but she had done what was far worse—she had bleached all the colour out of the impeachment.

'I shall not now reply to Miss Fenwick's statement, but will later produce testimony covering that part of the question. Now from general I come to specific charges. I have here in my own note-book Mr Worth's own language word for word. We shall let his words stand upon their own responsibility. The

first is that referring to King David. Here are his words—"King David was—"

'Fire! fire! fire!'

A great cloud of smoke was seen rising from Mr Clarridge's barn. Everyone guessed what had happened, and immediately there was a stampede for the door. A spark from the engine supplying the power had ignited the dry chaff and straw. The long period of hot weather had dried everything to a crisp, and the thistledown and fuzz liberated by the machine furnished a material through which fire spreads with such rapidity that occasionally those engaged in the work can barely escape with their lives.

Long before the crowd reached the spot the flames were leaping high in the air, and the total destruction of the barn was certain. Nothing within its walls could be saved. The heat was too great to permit approach. The fruits of the toil and perseverance of a whole year were being swept away

There was nothing left but to look on in dismay and protect the dwelling which stood a short distance away. Suddenly there came a great shout from the farther side of a row of sheds where a number were engaged in drawing some vehicles and implements beyond the range of destruction.

'Help! Help! Help! There's children in the barn. Willie Coulson and Eddy Clarridge are in the barn.'

With a cry of horror the house was abandoned. The crowd rushed to a spot where a boy's face and hands could be seen at some pigeon-holes near the roof. The lads had evidently gone to the dove-cote to see their pigeons, and the fire spreading so rapidly had cut off their retreat. A little hand was waving frantically and no doubt was accompanied with cries of terror, but in the wild roar of the flames no sound could be heard.

Women shrieked and fainted, strong men wept and wrung their hands. Mrs Clarridge, with a wild cry, made as if to rush into the flames. 'Let me die, let me die with my darling! Oh, the evil hour that took me from home! Oh, God! have mercy, mercy, mercy,' and the poor mother swooned away. Mr Coulson ran about like a madman, begging someone to kill him before his son was burned alive before his very eyes. The shrieks and groans, weeping and wailing, confusion and consternation were beyond all description.

Ha! Look! There is someone putting a ladder against the blazing building. Some madman dreams of climbing to the roof. It is Bergen Worth. Crombie runs forward and catches him by the arm.

'Stop, Bergen! It's madness. It's murder. It's bad enough now. By God, you *sha'n't* go!'

There is a momentary scuffle between the two brothers, in which Crombie rolls in the straw and Bergen escapes minus his coat. 'Keep back, Crombie, or, by Heavens, I'll floor you. I tell you I *can* do it, and I *will*. A woollen coat, somebody? Excuse me, Mr Silk,' and off came the clergyman's coat. 'Give me that axe. Stand back, boys! I'm going to save those lads.'

With his axe over his shoulder and his cap drawn over his forehead he runs nimbly up the ladder in his stocking feet, and, in a few moments, is hacking a hole in the smoking shingles. The west wing of the barn is to the windward, and the flames have not yet enveloped it. A log partition between the hay mow and the barn proper holds the flames in check for a moment.

Ha! Bergen disappears through a hole in the roof.

'God help him! May the Giver of all good be with him!' A score of voices are lifted in prayer.

'Look! There's Willie on the roof, and Eddy too. Hang on, boys, for dear life.'

But it is useless to shout. A salvo of artillery could scarcely have been heard through the roar of the flames.

'See! Bergen has taken his borrowed coat off and is wrapping the boys in it.'

But it is too late. With a fierce roar the flames burst through the roof between them and the ladder, enveloping the latter in a sheet of fire. 'Oh, Heavens, they're lost! they're lost! There's no escape now.' Shrieks and groans again fill the air. 'But stop! Look! He has them in his arms. He is climbing to the peak of the roof. My God! what strength he must have. Now he is on the very peak. Run for blankets! Quick! Fly! He'll toss the boys down and then jump.'

There's not a moment to lose. Every second is a human life. High up in the lurid glare of the flames the rescuer stands for a moment in doubt. He looks at the burthen in his arms and then into the depths below. If he jumps and holds them tightly the boys, or at least one of them, may be saved. But he must decide quickly. The blankets are too late. The flames are reaching out for the victims. Their garments are smoking. What will he do? Will he slide down the roof and jump for it? No, he cannot. The roof is burning there too. It would not bear their weight. Ha! he is signalling. What is he doing now? Pointing to the small haystack near the west wing? He is lying down with the boys in his arms. God of heaven! he is going to roll. Run, run for the stack. It's the last chance.

Like a flash the human ball shoots down the slope, sends a shower of sparks from burning roof, leaps from the eaves to the partly burning stack, bounces several feet in the air and lands a smoking mass amid the steaming muck of the barnyard.

Up went shouts that made the welkin ring, and, for once, rivalled the roar of the flames.

'They're saved! They're saved! Hurrah! Hurrah!'

But stop! Though the boys are laughing and crying in their parents' arms, apparently little the worse, it is not so with Bergen. A dozen run to lift him in their arms. He waves them back and opens his lips to catch the cool breeze. But he over-estimates his strength. He staggers and sways like a drunken man and then falls forward on his face.

Then there is hurrying to and fro. Medical aid is sent for. A stretcher is improvised, and in silent sympathy and awe the sufferer is borne home. His hands and arms are horribly burnt, a patch of skin is hanging from his cheek and his voice is only a hoarse whisper.

On the way home he motioned Mr Richardson (the chairman of the session) to put down his ear, and pointing to his blistered throat, said, 'You'll have—to postpone—the meeting—I can't talk. Maybe this is all—the answer—I can—ever make.'

CHAPTER XXXII

THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS

ON the Sunday morning following the Clarridge fire, the mellow-voiced church bell on the hill was silent for the first time in many years, for, near by, the hero of that event lay hovering between life and death. The congregation which gathered for the morning services were subdued and silent, the pastor was thoughtful and dejected, and a tremor of sadness ran through the opening hymn.

The events of the past week had disturbed, to an unusual degree, the tranquillity of the neighbourhood, had produced a mental shock from which there was only a partial recovery. One who but a few days ago was full of life and strength was now helpless in the hands of an inscrutable Providence, and the fact that he was stricken down at a time when their evil thoughts were raised against him lay heavily on the hearts of many, but especially those to whom the rescued children were near and dear.

Many things reminded the congregation of the absent one. The vigorous hand-shake at the door was missing, the front seat to the right of the aisle was vacant, and in the rows of Sunday-school pupils were two little lads, one with his arm in a sling and the other with a strip of plaster on his cheek.

In proportion as the sympathy of the congregation went out to Bergen, so did their new-born antipathy to Mr Silk. The reaction was so great that they

looked with almost unanimous disfavour on their pastor, and it was only a regard for consistency which prevented many from openly denouncing him. They felt that in taking part in the movement against Bergen they had been led astray, that the trust they had reposed in their spiritual adviser had been betrayed, and, human-like, they were ready to place all blame and responsibility on the shoulders of others.

The heresy question was forever dead—and buried. Its mention would be a mockery. In their unlettered way the public reasoned that the religion which prompted Bergen to save the boys in the face of almost certain death could not be unworthy of their Church, or indeed of any Church or Cathedral on God's green earth. The doctrines, they thought, which bore such fruit as last Tuesday's deed of heroism could not be false or unholy. If a tree in the orchard bore apples, all the logic or eloquence in the world would not convince them that it was a locust or a palm.

To Mr Silk the past few days had been a period of sore trial. He had eaten little and slept less. Locked in his rooms he had been communing with himself, and excepting for his morning and evening visit to the sick man's house had kept himself in solitude. His ardent admirers avoided him, and even the Clarridges looked askance at him.

To-day he looked quite old and haggard; his self-assertive expression was absent, and in its place was a subtle something which the congregation could not understand, but if appearances could be depended upon, there was to be an unusual sermon.

As he looked at the faces before him he saw that he had lost his hold upon the hearts of his people. He saw that, while they were willing, for the present, to tolerate him, a mine was being sunk beneath him which might explode at any time in the near future. No matter, he would do his duty according to the light which God had given him.

Instead of announcing his text in the usual way, he arose, and leaning forward on his desk spoke in low, earnest tones, in which there was a ring of sadness.

'Kind friends, I shall have to crave your indulgence this morning if, instead of addressing you in the usual way, I refer to a matter in which we are all interested, and one which, for the past few days, has lain very heavily on my soul. Before attempting to speak to you with the words of authority, incidental to my position as your spiritual leader, I must lay bare my heart before you and clear my conscience of the stain which rests upon it. I would only ask you to remember that it is human to err, and, in extenuation, point out that, to some extent, my sin was unconscious.'

He paused for a moment and let his eyes wander to the furthest corners. He felt his self-possession returning, his thoughts and words began to come more freely, his embarrassment was disappearing. The congregation began to soften, and even now there was a gleam of sympathy in some of the upturned faces.

'If you will look in Acts xxii., taking from the first to the seventh verse, you will be prepared for what I have to say to-day. I cannot do better than repeat the words of that great worker in the cause of Christ, the Apostle Paul, selecting only such portions of each verse as apply to the matter in hand. "Men, brethren and fathers, hear ye my defence which I make now unto you:—*I taught according to the perfect manner of the law and of the fathers, and was zealous towards God, as ye all are this day. And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering to prisons both men and women—and went to Damascus to bring them which were bound unto Jerusalem for to be punished. And it came to pass that, as I made my journey and was come nigh unto*

Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light about me. And I fell unto the ground and heard a voice saying 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?'"

'There are different theories as to whether the word "light" used here refers to light in its ordinary physical sense, perceptible to the eyes, or to the glow of superconsciousness discernible only in exalted mental conditions. Reading superficially it would appear to mean the former, inasmuch as the following verse tells that others perceived it, but I am convinced it has the deeper significance. Our greatest teachers are our own personal experiences, and I doubt not that many of you, at some time in your lives, have felt that sudden quickening of the soul and widening of the perception in which all the complex things of life appeared plain and simple. This, I believe, is what occurred to Paul and in a less degree to his companions.

'A broader and a clearer aspect of the truth was suddenly presented to him, causing a shock so overwhelming that for a time he was morally and mentally blind. The terrible upheaval of his soul left him in such a state of confusion that he scarcely knew what he was doing. All his previous plans and intentions were swept away. He knew not which way to turn nor what course to pursue.

'In that flash of light he saw the horror of hate and the lustre of love, the errors of the past and the dangers of the present, and he gazed with fervent joy on the glorious possibilities of a fulfilment of God's law. He beheld himself walled in with self-righteousness, enclosed in a self-made prison, while through the bars of prejudice and preconception he saw the glorious sunshine. The idols, worshipped in the twilight of his understanding, turned to ghouls in the light of perfect day, and the sanctified forces of the cruel night of perversity became instruments of

torture in the morning of eternal truth. The picture with its realistic force was too much for the human mind to grasp, and Paul fell to the ground, while the voice of conscience, multiplied into tones of thunder, resounded in his ears.'

A shade of pallor came over the speaker's face and there was a tremor in his voice.

'Friends, I have seen that light. I have heard that voice. Last Tuesday afternoon, when the fire had done its worst, when the enthusiastic cheers for the rescue had subsided, I beheld a light ten thousand times greater than the glare of the flames. In the smoking straw of the barnyard I saw, clasping a precious prize in their embrace, a pair of blackened human hands which had defied the blistering fire and burning cinders, an arm whose white and quivering flesh had braved the torturing flames, a garment, once my own, singed and smeared in a holier cause than e'er it had been worn in, and, lastly, a face disfigured with torture, a face with ashy lips and quivering chin, with blackened brow and blistered cheek, whose eye was lit with the glow of self-sacrifice.

'And then the image of Stephen Silk confronted me. God of heaven! What a revelation was there! Could this hideous creature be one who essayed to lead his fellow-creatures to salvation? I shudder even now. In his eye I saw the glare of the tyrant and the gleam of the zealot, in his smile the truculence of the traitor and the cruelty of the executioner, and in his hand the skeleton of a thumb-screw. And all this in the name of our dear Redeemer.'

The speaker paused to wipe the moisture from his eyes and the audience gave a great sob of sympathy. His earnest candor touched their hearts and moved them to tears.

'Can you wonder that, for a time, I wished to hide my moral nakedness from the eyes of honest men? I who, like Paul, taught according to the "perfect

manner of the law and of the fathers and was zealous unto God as ye are this day," I wept and prayed till the tempest of my soul subsided, until I could look with calmness upon the glorious future when God's love will be supreme. I gazed first upon that picture, and then upon this, the great struggle for existence, whose every condition fosters in our hearts the innate selfishness which feeds the canker worms of hate. I saw in this struggle every man's hand against his neighbour, position frowning at displacement, success feeding on ruin, and plenty smiling upon want. I saw the blind leading the blind and complaining because they failed to reach the path of righteousness. I saw the man with the beam in his eye essaying to remove the mote from his neighbour's. I saw clergyman and layman earnestly and honestly working for the Church, believing that they were labouring for the salvation of human souls. I saw the merchant extending his business, the farmer improving his soil, the artisan plying his trade, the politician struggling for place and the clergyman increasing his congregation—all working on the same plane. I saw them all striving for their rewards—wealth, fame, influence, personal aggrandisement or the satisfaction of success. But I saw *one clergyman* poisoning, with sanctified selfishness, the fountain springs of salvation, dropping gall and wormwood into the pure sweet water of eternal truth. I saw him crushing the conscience of a fellow-creature, and I heard a voice shout, "*Stand back. You tread on hallowed ground. Hands off, I say. Lay not a finger's weight upon a soul that's on its upward way.*"

After the deep silence which followed Mr Silk dropped his voice to a conversational tone and came forward as if to be nearer to his audience.

'I can only confess my sins and wait for the revelation to mature itself in my soul. I know now that no cause, however sacred it may appear to us, can

sanctify jealousy or envy or coercion, but I also know that such can never be necessary. I am overwhelmed by the new duties and responsibilities which have appeared to me, and, as yet, I know not which way to turn, but I shall wait with patience for God's guidance. I would ask you all to offer up a prayer for the hero who lies on his bed of suffering, and while we say "Thy will be done," we may fondly hope that he may be spared to his family, his friends, his neighbours and, I say it with a contrite heart, to this church.

' I or others may minister to your spiritual needs for years, but never will there be uttered by human tongue a more eloquent sermon on the doctrine of deeds than was given by the hero of the Clarridge fire. He has been an instrument in God's hands for my salvation and yours. He has taught us the emptiness of method and the fulness of motive. He has reiterated the apt words of the poet.—

"For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight,
His can't be wrong whose life is in the right."

CHAPTER XXXIII

SILKEN THREADS

'STOP! Hold on, doctor. You're the very man we wish to see. How is Worth?'

Father O'Flynn jumped lightly from his vehicle and stood beside Dr Keene, who, in his gig, was returning from a visit to the sick man.

'Is it true he is worse?' continued the clergyman in anxious tones.

'Yes. He is in a very critical condition.'

'But tell me, doctor. He'll get better?'

'I cannot say that he will.'

'Dear me! Is it so? I heard you required another nurse, so I brought this young lady along as a volunteer. Tell me the particulars.'

'The principal danger at present is from his throat and lungs. The breathing of superheated air has a very destructive effect on the air passages. You see the terrible exertion of climbing the roof with the boys in his arms caused him to breathe very deeply, and, in this way, he got an extra dose of the fiery air around him. His right arm, too, was almost cooked. It is just possible we may have to amputate it.'

Naera—for it was she who sat listening in Father O'Flynn's buggy—uttered an exclamation of dismay. 'Oh, doctor, you'll try to save him and his arm too. This is terrible. Let us go. I must see him.' Her face was white and her breath came fast.

'Wait a moment, Naera. Keep firm. Something tells me he will get well again. The world needs

such men, and his work isn't done. Please God, we won't let him die. We'll go there and never quit him till he is well again. But we must get the doctor's permission. Will *we* do for nurses?'

'I am afraid not. You know I am very particular on that point. My theory is that every person who goes into a sick-room either *gives* to or *takes* from the vitality of the patient. One nurse will soothe while another will irritate. It is for that reason we are releasing the present nurse.'

'Well, well. I always heard that you were something of a faith curer. In my time there was nothing of that.'

The doctor smiled and shook his head. 'I am none of your drugless healers by any means, but I cannot ignore the effect of mind on matter. The man who excludes either the physical or the mental robs himself of half his powers. The faith curer is one extreme, and that man who laughs at him is the other. At least that is my opinion.'

'You really think, then, it makes some difference?' queried the old man, with an air of disappointment.

'Most assuredly. In a limited sense, good health is catching as well as disease. I don't pretend to explain it. I am content to recognise the facts and make use of them. I always prefer a young person with plenty of vitality and energy, one who is the opposite in physique to the patient. I am afraid, Father, you are too old for the task. I intend wiring to Chicago for a professional nurse, though I am not always partial to professionals.'

'Wait, now, till I show you. Come here, Naera. It's too dark for the doctor to see you there. Pull off your veil and let him have a look at you. There's a piece of energy for you, and as for opposites, why, Bergen's as red as a fox and she's as black as the sloe. Look at the eyes in her head. Regular incandescents.'

The doctor broke into a hearty laugh, and Naera smiled in spite of her emotion. Father O'Flynn's intense earnestness made the situation all the more grotesque.

But the doctor scrutinised her closely. 'Are you in perfect health?'

'Yes, sir. I never was ill but once in my life. I am always strong and hearty.'

'Hearty, is it? Sure she sat for over twenty days and nights nursing her mother with the fever a year or two ago. Faith I knew the whole breed of them. The divil wouldn't kill them. Her grandfather fought a duel when he was turned sixty.'

'Let me have your hand a moment, Miss—'

'Delavan, sir. Delavan. A good old Irish name,' exclaimed the enthusiastic priest, as Naera offered her hand.

'Well, Miss Delavan, I think I shall give you a trial. But remember, if you don't suit I shall release you. We cannot afford to neglect anything in this case. Have you any experience in nursing?'

'None whatever, excepting in my own family. Will that debar me?'

'Not necessarily. Professional nurses, I find, very often know too much. A little learning is sometimes dangerous. A great deal depends on the motive. If their object is to show how clever they are, they are a dismal failure. A great many professionals, too, have not the physical energy necessary for the position, and they absorb strength instead of giving it. It is as much a question of personality as of skill. An intuitive woman is more apt than a trained one, but, in any case, it is necessary to be in absolute sympathy with the patient. There is no field of labour on God's earth so exacting as that of nursing. You are required not only to give your labour and skill, but your energy and vitality as well. Nurses are born, not made.'

'Bedad, if good wishes towards the patient are any qualification, I'm eligible yet myself. If there's a man on earth I love, it's Bergen Worth, and as for Naera, why, she—'

'Yes, Mr Worth is a very dear friend,' broke in Naera, with a frown at her companion. 'I shall regard his welfare as a sacred trust and the faithful obedience of your orders as my supreme duty.'

'Very well,' replied the doctor, bowing in acknowledgment of her sincerity. 'You will find a full list of directions at the house. I shall return to-morrow morning.'

The pair then hurried on, their anxiety increasing as the distance grew less. Naera was nervous and excited. The kitchen curtains were up, and the light was shining through the windows as they approached. Mrs Worth was sitting with her face buried in her hands, Sarah was hurrying to and fro, and Crombie was pacing the floor with downcast head. Suddenly there flashed upon her a great sense of change. She had not seen Crombie since the night of the dance. She almost blushed to think of her feelings towards him then and now. This man who, in her youthful imagination, was something more than common clay, whose very presence stirred her pulses, was now an object of indifference—and pity.

Instead of going directly into the house, she stepped aside into the shadows to collect her scattered thoughts and emotions. Her girlhood days came back with a bound, and every familiar object reminded her of a time when poverty was her *only* sorrow. She thought of the thousand times she had tidied that very room, of the first money she ever took home to her mother, of the night of the party when her heart was in a flutter of expectation, of the dance with Crombie in which sweet words were whispered in her ear, and of the shame she felt when

Norbert came in with flushed face and uncertain steps. She remembered the rainy afternoon in November, the declaration of love from Bergen and the terrible discovery in the swamp. She recalled the cold clear night when Bergen told her the awful suspicion about Norbert, the scene in the old kitchen after the fugitive's return, and the time when Bergen's voice was the one cheering thing in the whole world. She thought of his faith, his helpfulness, his hopefulness and his patience, of all that he had done for her family, and of all that he deserved at the hands of a community in which he had toiled, prayed and suffered for others.

And now this pillar of strength to the poor and needy, this patient worker in the cause of humanity, this iron-willed soldier in the ranks of right might soon be nothing but unconscious dust.

What wonder that she paused before entering?
What wonder that she wept?

But she must learn to control herself. Her position as nurse depended upon it. Was not his life in her hands?

'God give me strength and courage to do my duty.'

The moment she entered the room she ran towards Mrs Worth and fell on her knees in front of her. She did not see Crombie's inquiring gaze or the mother's look of surprise. She put her face in Mammy's lap and kissed her hands.

'I've come to help you, Mammy, in your trouble. I couldn't stay away. I wish to pay some of the debt I owe to you and him. I have applied to the doctor for the position of nurse and he is going to give me a trial.'

'It's Neery. Well, now, I'm glad you've come. It's like old times. Poor Bergen! His voice is nearly gone, but we thought he asked about you.'

'No, Mammy, he didn't,' said Sarah, who at this

moment entered the room with a glass in her hand.

'Neery's come to nurse Bergen. She says the doctor told her to.'

'I don't see how that can be. He told *me* to take care of the patient till he got a professional nurse. I'm sure Miss Delavan knows no more than myself. I'll stick to my post till I get different orders.'

'Come, come, Sarah,' said Father O'Flynn, who entered in time to take in the situation. 'It will never do to fall out about it. I give you my word of honour, Sarah, that she's to get a fair trial as head nurse, so you and I will have to play second fiddle. The commanding officer isn't always the best soldier. Faith, I think I know as much as Naera myself, only I'm a trifle too old. We're going to stay, Sarah, if you'll have us. We must keep on the good side of you. It would never do to be at loggerheads with the boss of the house. Don't be cross with us now.'

Sarah was somewhat mollified at the priest's allusion to her authority. She allowed the matter to go under protest, but shook her head and muttered something about knowing Bergen's ways. But there was enough work for all.

Week after week passed without any improvement in the patient's general condition. Night and day he required constant attention. One after another was worn out by the long night vigils. Eminent surgeons and physicians from Chicago were called in consultation, but could do nothing further.

The sick man appeared to drop into a weak, torpid condition from which it seemed impossible to arouse him. He seemed to reach a point from which he could neither recede nor advance, a sort of deadlock between the forces of disintegration and recovery.

At last there came a change. It was one night when the united arguments of the others induced Naera to retire and take some much-needed rest.

For three weeks she had remained at her post night and day, snatching an occasional nap when her patient slept. At times her head swam and she almost staggered, but an occasional bleeding of the nose seemed to restore her.

For several hours her sleep was unbroken. For a time she was oblivious to everything, even the condition of her charge. Then she awoke with a strange feeling of anxiety and a consciousness of approaching danger. She listened for a moment.

There was an unusual stir downstairs. A vehicle drove off at great speed. Was Bergen worse? Had someone gone off for the doctor? Her heart leapt into her throat. She had been guilty of neglect. She sprang out of bed, opened her door and listened.

Mr Silk was speaking. 'We can at least pray, Father. In the supreme moment our prayers will at least harmonise in spirit.'

'Yes. We are brothers all. Our paths have a common ending.'

Naera's heart stood still. 'Heavens! he is dying! Why did I leave him? My conscience told me I was doing wrong, that I was stealing. No one else understands him. Oh, what a traitor I am! If I were a soldier I would be shot.'

She dressed hurriedly and ran downstairs two steps at a time. In a moment she was in the room. All were kneeling in prayer. She waited till they had finished. One look at the sick man's face showed that he was worse.

'Leave the room, please, everyone of you. There have been too many here. It always exhausts him.'

She had *one last remedy* to try, but not in the presence of others. As soon as the door was closed she knelt beside him and put her lips close to his ear. 'Bergen, take courage. I love you, and couldn't live without you. Live for Naera's sake.'

Her tears were running fast as she kissed his forehead. 'I will not leave you again.'

She took his unwounded hand in hers and *willed* her strength towards him. She concentrated her mind upon the idea and prayed for the power to put it into execution. She held the hand against her beating heart, and sat for hours while every atom of her being throbbed with sympathy for him till her faith seemed to grow into power and she soothed him to sleep.

He slept for hours without interruption, and when he awoke Dr Keene said that the long-looked-for change had come at last, and that Bergen had passed the critical point on the road to recovery.

But the nurse, pale and listless, was taken home to a bed of sickness from which she did not arise for many days.

CHAPTER XXXIV

STARTLING DISCLOSURES

'WHAT? At last! The missing link turned up?' Mr Carswell eagerly snatched from Miss Holtorf's hand the remains of a *walking-stick* and hurried to the window to examine it. 'Where did you find it?' he asked in tones of excitement.

'In the field near the swamp, the one on the west side which has lately been cleared.'

'God bless me! You have found, by chance, what hundreds sought in vain. Such are the ways of Providence. Was it buried in black soil?'

'No. It was lying alongside the decayed limb of a tree which I stumbled over when I was bringing home the cows. I picked it up for a gad, never thinking what it was. When I came home Bergen saw it in my hand. He looked at it for a moment and then suddenly guessed what it was. He was quite excited over it. He made me come and bring it myself.'

'Very thoughtful of him. I am glad to hear that he is able to be about again. So, so. It wasn't in the swamp after all.'

'I suppose I may go now?'

'Yes. Tell Mr Worth to come in as soon as he is able. And, by the way, I would ask you to kindly keep this matter quiet in the meantime.'

As soon as the door was closed Mr Carswell called

eagerly to his partner, 'Boyd, come here! Quick! Shut the door behind you and look at this! What do you think of that?'

Boyd gave a low whistle and gazed in astonishment at the article in question. 'It has every appearance of being the right thing. Wonders will never cease.'

They brought forth a model from the original piece found in the murdered man's hand, and they compared it with some diagrams describing the quality of wood and style of finish of the fateful fragment. Without doubt here was the weapon which had given the death-blow. In spite of decay caused by sun and rain the identity of the stick was unmistakable.

For a time they sat looking at it in silence. It appeared to have a strange fascination for them. Boyd was the first to speak.

'Here is also the description of the cane which Brett says was taken from his place the day before the murder. It tallies exactly with this. Our man was at Brett's that very day, so our case is complete. We may proceed at once.'

At this moment a messenger boy knocked at the door and handed in a telegram. Mr Carswell adjusted his spectacles and read as follows:—

'Come immediately. If no train convenient, hire special. You must be here at nine to-morrow.
(Signed) E. N. GWYNNE.'

'God bless me, Boyd, did you ever see the beat of that? She thinks I am a millionaire like herself. Think of her nerve.'

'She is quite willing to pay for it all, you may be sure. She is a wonderful woman.'

'Yes, a marvellous creature. Of all the mysteries on earth woman is the most inexplicable. Only the

other day I learned that she had visited Norbert quite frequently since the time the investigation commenced.'

'And do the prison authorities allow her to see him?'

'Allow her? Why, man, you couldn't stop her with a million mountains. She has a written permit from the Governor, and has given so lavishly to every official about the place that they look upon the prisoner as a prince in disguise and treat him with as much respect as the warden himself. To her Norbert is a martyr and a hero.'

'Well, there is chivalry in a man who will suffer as he has done rather than betray a friend, or the brother of a friend, because, of course, he is consoled by the thought that he has repaid Bergen's many kindnesses by doing as he has done. He is a handsome fellow too, and that always counts with even the most sensible women. But Miss Gwynne might have chosen — or bought — the pink of European nobility.'

'To be sure she could. I begin to think she can do pretty nearly as she likes with anybody or anything. There is no resisting her. Of course I'll have to go. I have an hour yet to catch the limited. She has discovered some new fact or feature in the case.'

'I don't see what it can be. If anything special had occurred Barret would have wired us.'

'You forget that even if our man were convicted there would still be the mystery of the torn will to account for. We have not yet reached the sub-soil of the matter. Perhaps Miss Gwynne may have done so.'

'What about the disclosures which Miss Holtorf accidentally made to Julia?'

'Leave that with Julia altogether. We would only spoil it. But don't neglect to take in black and

white, with signature and witness, any statement that Dennis or Brett may make. There might be some influence brought to bear on them afterwards.'

'Very well. I have every confidence in Dennis; but as for Brett, he'd do anything now to repudiate his statement.'

'All we ask them to do is to tell the truth.'

'Had I better make application for the court properties and make sure of the cane?'

'Yes. But no, wait. There may be something in this affair that calls for delay and secrecy. Do nothing till you hear from me. I shall return as quickly as possible.'

Mr Carswell reached Miss Gwynne's office an hour ahead of time. She was pleased with his punctuality and ready to receive him.

'Sit down, Mr Carswell. You are prompt. I expected it of you. We have an hour yet in which to keep our appointment. One quarter of that time will be necessary to reach our destination, which means that we have the balance of the time to talk the matter over. You are wanted at the Charity Hospital to take the ante-mortem statement of a man who was fatally stabbed in an affray at Kensington.'

'But I have been fifteen hours on the road and he may be dead now.'

Miss Gwynne smiled reassuringly. 'I have made every provision for such a contingency. I have an attorney in the building ready at any time. But let me tell you the whole story. Father Morris telephoned me yesterday to meet him at the Charity Hospital. He had been called to see a man with a knife wound in his spine. The encounter rose out of a shooting affray which occurred at the time of the Pullman riots. Some man named Mullen shot at this man Walsh during a general *mêlée*, but hit

Walsh's son instead, and from the wound received the boy afterwards died. It appears that it was only within the last few weeks Walsh discovered the assassin of his boy, and yesterday the two met in a saloon, with the result that Mullen is dead and Walsh cannot possibly recover.'

'Well, well. We had all the necessary evidence against this man and were considering when best to spring the trap.'

Miss Gwynne consulted her watch and continued, 'It seems that this Mr Walsh insisted on seeing me. I visited his boy, Ted, regularly when he was ill, and the father seemed to think a great deal of what he was pleased to call my kindness. He told Father Morris that he wished me to be present when he made his confession. I requested Walsh to wait for your arrival, and he agreed to do so provided that we kept someone at hand to take his deposition in case any sudden change should take place. The house surgeons say there is not much danger for a day or two but that death is absolutely certain. You see I was anxious that no detail should be omitted which is necessary to clear your client.'

'And have you learnt anything of the nature of this intended confession?'

'Nothing except that it is sufficient to clear Mr Delavan. He confesses the crime, but it seems there was an accomplice, whose motive was succession to the estates. Whether it was the fear of exposure or some flaw in the validity of Mr Cargill's marriage which had prevented this accomplice from advancing his claim the dying man cannot say.'

'That is still more puzzling. People have an impression that criminals do everything like clock-work, but they are often as careless and uncertain as the rank and file in everyday life.'

Mixed and uncertain motives are as common in criminals as in social life. Both often lack consistency.'

'It appears that for several years nothing has been heard of the alleged accomplice, and Walsh is inclined to think it will be almost impossible to locate him. However, I should think that would scarcely be a vital point in the acquittal of your client.'

Mr Carswell shook his head. 'Nothing short of a complete explanation of the facts and details of the crime will procure an honourable acquittal for the man who is already convicted. Dying criminals have been known not only to be mistaken in their last statements, but (such is human perversity) to satisfy their thirst for revenge by making false statements even in the shadow of the grave. Many a statement and deposition of that kind has been torn to tatters by a clever attorney.'

'Quite true. We must have nothing short of an absolute proof. We will go now. We must not be late. An *hour*, with me, means exactly *sixty minutes*.'

'I suppose there is no danger of the wounded man changing his mind and refusing to go on with his deposition? Was your postponement not a little risky?'

'I think not. Father Morris said he would remain with him, both sleeping and waking. We Catholics believe in making a clean breast of everything before we die.'

'Very good and useful it is, sometimes. But I feel that I am merely going to listen to a story I already know.'

'There is one suggestion I would like to make. If this presumed heir is holding back for fear of what Walsh knows, then Walsh's death, freely

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advertised without any reference to a confession, would be likely to bring the culprit to the front.'

'A capital suggestion. We shall keep the matter entirely within ourselves till we find villain number two.'

CHAPTER XXXV

THE HEIR-AT-LAW

DR ELLIOT was lounging in his luxurious rooms at Monte Carlo in a very unhappy frame of mind. For months past his usual nonchalance had deserted him, leaving him subject to periods of great mental depression. To-day he was particularly nervous and restless. He lay back in his easy-chair smoking a fragrant cigar and trying to compose himself, but soon threw the weed away in disgust and commenced pacing the floor. Occasionally he paused by a window to look down on the street or away out over the sea. Once or twice he donned a cap as if to go out, only to throw it aside and resume his seat or his restless steps across the floor.

His health, of late, had not been the best. The delicacies of the table had lost their accustomed relish and his nights were often sleepless. He suffered no actual pain, but he laboured under a form of unrest which he could not account for and a feverish desire for something he could not name. His thoughts and impulses were as restless and uncontrollable as the waves he saw from his window, and every atom of his body was vibrating in discord. His sumptuous apartments, with their costly paintings, large mirrors and brilliant tapestries, appeared to mock his misery.

Nor could he determine the cause of his unhappy condition. He did not fear future misfortune and he

had a decided contempt for death. His career as a gambler had been crowned with success and he had no regret or remorse for the past. His earnings, or rather winnings, at the gaming table were more than sufficient to supply his every want, and he had at his command every comfort or luxury he could possibly make use of. A letter from his legal advisers this very day assured him that his succession to the Cargill estate was now absolutely certain, as his father's secret marriage, in spite of previous complications, turned out to be perfectly valid.

But the knowledge that he was soon to become the possessor of great wealth gave him little comfort. He had gratified every sensual desire and indulged himself in every possible pleasure till he was tired of everything. Even the delight of gaming had lost its hold upon him.

No bird of prey ever swooped down upon its quarry with keener delight than did the doctor—until recently, pounce upon the purse-proud, patronising nobleman. The consternation, dismay and agony of his victims had been a constant source of pleasure and pride. When told of an occasional resultant suicide he merely snapped his fingers, smiled, and went on his way rejoicing. He regarded such occurrences as additional tributes to his skill.

His knowledge of French and German had given him an almost unlimited field of action in European cities and resorts where the classes with money and leisure were likely to be found. He carried everything before him wherever he went, and was known in gaming circles as the 'Poker Prince.'

His phenomenal success procured for him a number of followers and admirers. They smoked his cigars, drank his wines, ate his dinners and enjoyed his hospitality, while, in return, they burned incense

before him and furnished a convenient butt for his cynical jokes and scathing sarcasms.

His great success as a gambler was no doubt partly due to the fact that he played only one game, in which the element of chance could be largely counter-balanced by skill, daring and self-confidence, in which he received full value for his impassive features and wonderful self-control, and had full scope for his ability to analyse every look and gesture of his opponent. He claimed to be a specialist in an age of specialties. Not even for ordinary pastime could he be induced to touch a card excepting at his favourite game.

For years he had purposely avoided Monte Carlo. Games, in which there was nothing but blind luck, he considered only fit for dupes and lunatics. He had nothing but contempt for the idiots who claimed to have faultless systems for breaking the bank on hazards in which a schoolboy had as much chance of winning as a professor of mathematics.

But he came to Monte Carlo at last, not to try his luck or tempt fortune at the roulette table, but to see whether the atmosphere of the great gaming centre would offer any new sensation or amusement. He came because wines, dinners, cigars and the companionship of *demi-mondes* had palled on him.

But now he hated Monaco, and everybody and everything within its bounds, from the Prince with his puny kingdom to the pauperised gambler with a system. It puzzled him to think that he, who had revelled in every pleasure, had failed to procure happiness, that his years of opulence were ten times more unhappy than those spent in struggling with poverty. Had he lost the power to enjoy? If so, of what use was wealth? If satiety was more dreadful than hunger, if his senses were so dulled by satiation that they were no longer capable of

recording pleasure, what was there left to live for? Why live at all?

His reflections were interrupted by a knock at his door.

'Don't come in to-night. I'm in no humour for company,' he shouted snappishly, thinking, no doubt, that some of his satellites were about to call on him.

But what was his astonishment when the door opened and in stepped a well-dressed young man with an air of authority, a stranger whom he had never seen before.

'And who in the devil are you?'

'My name is Carruthers. I have come all the way from America to see you.'

'Well, Mr Carruthers, I must say there is room for improvement in your manners. This is not my hour for receiving visitors.'

'I have no wish to put you to any particular inconvenience, but my business is too important to admit of any delays.'

'Very well, my man. Go on with your business and be quick about it or I may be under the painful necessity of inviting you to retire.'

'You are, no doubt, aware that your old friend, Hector Walsh, is dead?'

'Yes, I saw a notice of it some weeks ago. Calling him my friend, however, is an incivility which I would promptly resent if it were worth while.'

'I should have said "relative," I suppose.'

The doctor changed colour and rose to his feet. 'Do you know, Mr What's-your-name, that I am just in the humour to pitch you out of the window, only that it would muss the pavement and make a nasty newspaper item.'

'Sit down, doctor. It is useless to bandy words. I am here to arrest you on a very serious charge. Never mind your pistols. I have half-a-dozen policemen at my back. Don't make a scene, but sit down

and let us talk it over quietly. Out of respect for your education and intelligence I wish to save you any unnecessary indignity or exposure. I wish to treat you in a manner becoming one who, to all appearances, is a gentleman.'

The doctor's eyes gleamed, but he foisted his arms and sat down. 'And what is this charge?'

'Complicity in the murder of Nicholas Elliot Cargill, your father.'

'You are raving mad. This charge is trumped up to offset my claim to the estate. My friend, you have awakened the wrong passenger. I play bluff myself sometimes.'

'Hector Walsh made a confession before he died.'

'I don't believe it. The papers did not say so. If he did it was the ravings of a drunkard's delirium. He could say nothing against me.'

'Would it be of any interest to you to hear what he *did* say?'

'Certainly. By all means.'

'The original statement is not only long and tedious, but it contains a great deal of extraneous matter and unimportant detail, and is couched in rather faulty language. I shall read some extracts which I brought for the purpose.'

Mr Carruthers opened a roll of papers and read as follows:—

'EXTRACTS from the ANTE-MORTEM STATEMENT of HECTOR WALSH (who died at Charity Hospital, Chicago), ATTESTED and SIGNED in the PRESENCE of—JOHN D. MORRICE, ELLEN GWYNNE and WALTER CARSWELL.

'The first time I ever saw Mr Cargill (to know him) was about a year before the Pullman strike. I was visiting the boys on the Townline and I met

him one Saturday in Owasco. The moment I saw him I remembered him as the man who caned me in the lobby of the Lyceum Theatre, Chicago, when I was only a stripling. I went to the theatre to see my cousin, Lucia O'Hara, and I think he was jealous of me. I "lay for him" months and months after that, to get even with him, but I never saw him again till that day in Owasco years afterwards. I knew him by his long nose, sharp chin and black eyes.

'The bar-keeper told me that this Cargill was a millionaire who lived retired out at Worth's Corners. I always suspected he was the man who ran off with Lucilla, but of course I wasn't sure. I thought I'd work a bluff on him anyway by *pretending* to know, so I waiks up to him and I says, "How do you do, Mr Cargill or Elliot? How do you get along without Lucy and the boy?"

'Well, his face got white and then dark, and he says, "What do you want?"

"Something to heal the cuts you gave me in the Lyceum," says I.

'He threw me a ten-dollar bill and told me that if I ever spoke to him again that he would set the police on me. Of course Lucy was dead then, but I didn't know it at the time, but I knew that, after running away with Elliot or Cargill, she was back in Chicago ten years later with a lump of a boy she called her son, because I accidentally saw her on the street one day and followed her to her house on Cottage Grove Avenue.

'I knew Cargill had some secret he was afraid of by the way he looked at me. I couldn't guess exactly what it was, but I thought I would put up a bluff on him every time I was in hard luck. But I never troubled him till I was discharged from the Pullman works about a month before the strike, when I got Mrs Tully to write him saying that if he

didn't send me some money to a certain address I'd blow the whole story on him. The letter didn't work, so I got Tully to write another threatening to shoot at sight if he didn't come down handsomely. We signed no name for fear of the police, but he knew where the letter came from and we kept waiting for an answer. The money never came and I gave up the idea because I got money other ways in the meantime. I never thought of it again till the day Ted got shot and I got acquainted with Dr Elliot. I didn't know him till he told me he was Lucy's boy. We didn't hitch at first 'cause I forced him to come, but when I saw how clever he was with Ted I took up with him.

'The bullet he took out of Ted wasn't a military ball, and when I explained how I carried the boy at the time the doctor said the shot was fired from the side of the street. Then I knew just what had happened. Somebody had been trying to square an old grudge by plugging me while the row was on. We were opposite to 103 L—— Street when he was hit, so I went to the place to find out who lived there. It was only an old Jew that got pinked himself when he was trying to get away, so it couldn't have been him.

'I went to the doctor that day for medicine and I told him about number 103. He seemed surprised. "What? One hundred and three, did you say? I have the photo here of a man who ran in there, pistol in hand, a few minutes before the crowd came along. I followed him five miles on Halsted Street to find out out who he was. *He's your man, no doubt.*" He showed me the picture and, sure enough, it was old Cargill.'

The doctor moved in his chair and Mr Carruthers looked suggestively towards the door. But neither of them spoke and the reading went on as before.

'Of course I thought the old chap was trying to

get rid of me because he was afraid I'd get the drop on him some time. I didn't blame him much for it, but I made up my mind that if Ted died the old fellow would have to eat dirt all the same. I told the doctor all about it and he agreed it must be him. But after a while I found out, by putting this and that together, that Cargill was the doctor's father, and that there was a great hatred from son to the father. I began to suspect that the doctor was putting up a job on me because he was always nagging about it.

'One night, a week or so after Ted died, he came to the house and told me that he was going out to Worth's Corners to play chess with Cargill on the night of the thirteenth. He told me this because I often said it would be hard to catch the old fellow, for I had found out that he never went out at nights. He pretended that it was only by chance he thought of it, but I knew what he meant. Before he went away that night I said it would be a good thing for him if old Cargill was out of the way. He winked and smiled, and then he said it wouldn't be much good if there was a will unless it was destroyed after the old fellow was dead.

'I asked him what it would be worth if the old man was dead and the will destroyed. What would he give me?

'He pretended to be quite shocked, but the last words he said to me that night were, that if Doctor Elliot had the Cargill money Hector Walsh would be a rich man.'

Dr Elliot again essayed to speak. 'This story may be interesting but it is no use as evidence. I should like to ask if this is the kind of trash to arrest a respectable man on?'

'Have patience, doctor. Wait till you hear it all. I shall hurry through. How Walsh robbed the house

and tore the will, how he lay in wait at Worth's gate for the victim, how he gagged him and dragged him to the fence corner out of hearing of anyone coming out and in the gate, how he gave the murdered man a chance to buy himself off with a large sum, how high words arose and the blow with the cane was struck but not intended to be fatal, are points which we may pass over. How he rifled the dead man's pockets, took the grey horse from the shed, unhitched it from the vehicle, threw his victim on the horse and galloped off to the swamp to hide the body. How Delavan came upon the scene, half unconscious with liquor, and was struck down on the spur of the moment for fear of being a witness, how the murderer relented when he discovered the condition and identity of the second victim, and why Delavan was carried to an out-of-the-way spot, where absence and a relationship to the dead man would throw suspicion on him, and all the other details we may pass over because, with the exception of a few minor points, they were foreshadowed to the life in the memorable address which my partner, Mr Carswell, made at the Delavan trial.

'It appears that Walsh did not stop in the swamp to count his gains, however safe it might have been, and it was not until the next morning that he thought of the new bills. Then he visited Delavan's room and slipped them into the coat pocket as it hung on the bed-post. It seems also that he did not recognise his second victim that night until he went to lay him beside number one. Then he saw that Delavan was still alive and he made up his mind not to leave him in the swamp. It was not until he was half way home that he thought of Delavan's relationship to the dead man, and then he saw how easy it would be to fasten the guilt on the nephew.

'In every other particular Mr Carswell was absolutely correct. Walsh foolishly furnished the

clue himself by negotiating with his Uncle Brett a note given by one Ferguson to Cargill, which we can prove to have been in the dead man's possession when he left Owasco that night. As to the supposed umbrella handle, it was a cane belonging to Wilson Brett, and the reason it was not found at the time was because the State maintained that the murder was done in the swamp and all search for it was made near there. But now comes what is to you a most important portion of the statement.

'A night or two before Dr Elliot left for the Old Country I went to his office and wanted him to pay me for the job and for the piece of torn will with the names signed on it. I had it with me and showed it to him, but he said it wasn't worth a d——d cent because, in the way it was, he couldn't dare to make a claim. He cursed me for an idiot for not taking all the will, and we had a big quarrel. I swore and tried to scare him but I couldn't. Though he walked me out at the point of his pistol he came next day and offered me fifty dollars for it. I took it. He went off and I never saw him since.

(Signed) HECTOR WALSH.'

'So that is the story? The silly drivellings of a wandering mind. Pah!'

'I have also the statement of one Mrs Tully, who heard several of your conversations with Walsh and saw the money paid.'

'Not worth the paper it is written on.'

'And still another witness who gave her testimony very reluctantly, after tears and prayers for guidance, after weeks of hesitation. It is in reference to a conversation overheard by Sarah Holtorf on a night which she has occasion to remember well. This poor creature prays that death may come to her and her boy before it is known that her darling's father is a murderer.'

The doctor was moved at last. 'Great God! this is terrible,' he exclaimed, as he paced the floor distractedly with his hands clasped over his head.

'And it is terrible to others. The night before I came away Bergen Worth was nearly distracted. He actually wept, and said he would be willing to sacrifice all his worldly belongings to clear poor Sarah and her boy of the disgrace.'

The doctor did not reply. His bowed head and pallid cheek gave token of the mental strain he was undergoing; in fact, he appeared to have lost all interest in the conversation and had ceased listening.

'I have treated you like a gentleman, Doctor. I have followed, for your sake, a course which is not only unusual, but unwarranted. The Worths have not forgotten that you saved Crombie's life and did him many kindnesses, and we all remember that you are a son of the murdered man and a cousin of the innocent man now doing sentence. Your arrest will be a blow to our community, but duty must be done. The question is now, will you fight extradition or come with us without delay.'

The doctor stood in front of the attorney and held out his hand. 'You are a gentleman, Mr Carruthers. It was kind of you to come instead of sending a brutal pin-headed officer. I under-estimated Hector's intelligence and I have committed the unpardonable crime of being found out. I had no idea I was so stupid. The blunder of my *hand*, curse it, was worse than of my *head*. A week's pistol practice would have been worth all my confounded college training.'

The speaker made a rapid movement with his hand towards his face and coughed slightly,

'But I'll neither go nor fight extradition. Policemen and courts be d——d. I can snap my fingers at them all. I've just swallowed a full dose of hydrocyanic acid. Let the officers come. They'll find an empty jack-pot. Worth always claimed I had no true aim

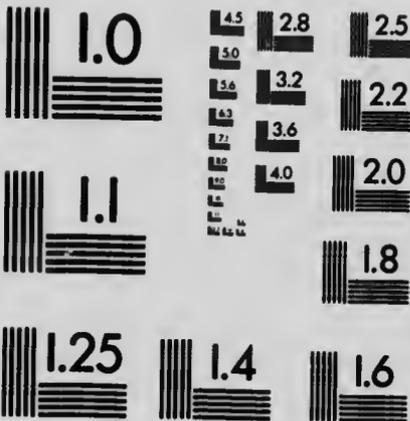
in life. Ha! ha! Neither I had, or I wouldn't have *hit* Dorenwein and *missed* Cargill. That was an infernal blunder, a wretched piece of marksmanship. But I have had more out of life than Worth has, or ever will, if he lives a century. I've witnessed the whole drama while he's been dawdling at a side show. Tell him and Crombie that I rang—the curtain down myself—Tell them—Touch that bell—Quick—Some water—Air—Ha!—Yes—Come on!'

He staggered towards the open window, his head dropped forward on his chest, his knees twitched spasmodically, and before the officers reached him he fell to the floor stone dead.



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CHAPTER XXXVI

A SENSIBLE SOCIOLOGIST

THE light was fading from the grey sky of a cold December day, and the whistling winds were wafting white wreaths from the knolls and hilltops, weaving them into fantastic shapes in the neuks and valleys, or moulding them into miniature mountains by the wayside.

Old Boreas, in his fiercest mood, was driving all creatures to shelter and heralding, in fortissimo tones, the reign of the hoary king. As far as the eye could reach, Winter's white mantle was spread over hill and dale, broken here and there by groups of buildings or patches of forest. All animate nature was wrapped in a great shroud, and but for the smoke which whirled from the various chimneys, one might have fancied that the inhabitants of Worth's Corners had fled in terror before the icy invader or laid them down to sleep till summer suns returned.

But, as the daylight faded, a bright glare could be seen lighting up the dusky windows of the old smithy, and the merry ring of the anvil could be heard above the roar of the storm.

The place had been rejuvenated. Loose boards had been replaced and there was now an extra window in front. The dingy, time-worn doors had been supplanted by more substantial ones, and a rough shed to the windward offered temporary shelter to the teams and vehicles of patrons.

Inside everything remained as before, even to the grimy old bellows which, for nearly half a century, had ornamented the neuk behind the forge. But there was a change in the appearance of the workman. There was a transformation in Bergen's face hard to describe or define. The look of aggressive determination had given way to a soft, subdued expression in which there was a tinge of sadness. A scar on his neck caused a slight deflection of the head to one side.

He had suffered much and witnessed many changes. Eighteen months had passed away since the disclosures of the Townline tragedy startled and surprised the whole State. The great nine days' wonder was now a thing of the past. People had ceased talking about it, had given over rehearsing marvellous stories of Cargill's wealth, Walsh's brutality or Dr Elliot's cunning.

The Delavans were now wealthy and affluent. Norbert was soon to join the army of benedicts and become a partner in the firm of Gwynne & Gwynne. Mrs Delavan, as a member of the best society, was doing full justice to the social position which wealth gives, and Naera had been whisked off to the Continent to complete her education and perhaps to form an attachment among the rich and great of the old world.

Nearly everyone on Lincoln Street had thriven and prospered. A village was budding into existence on Jackson Brett's property; poles, wires, mile-posts and showy advertisements now decorated the newly-built thoroughfare to the south, and the word Townliner had lost its meaning.

The poorest man in the whole neighbourhood, at least in worldly goods, was Bergen. Financially he was just where he stood when he first started in life. The shop with its contents was the sum-total of his worldly possessions. To encourage Crombie he had

given up all right and title to the farm with the sole condition that a portion of the old homestead be reserved for his mother's use and comfort during the balance of her life. But he had no desire for wealth and little need for it. He had no one to sustain but himself. His mother was happy and contented. She rejoiced in Crombie's reformation and in his happy marriage. Katie Fenwick was a most satisfactory daughter-in-law.

Sarah, in her own little cottage, was beyond the reach of want and was as contented as her past would allow.

Bergen's own wants were few, and, even though his earnings at the shop were small, he always had a shilling for any good cause. His poverty diminished the scope of his usefulness, but then his principal tasks appeared to be accomplished. His mission among the Bretts and Walshes had been fulfilled, the estrangement between himself and Mr Silk had been turned into a lasting friendship, and the White Church was progressive and prosperous. A new foundry down the line, with its improved machinery for the manufacture and repair of implements, was gradually reducing the extent of his business.

But he had learned to bow to the inevitable and was content to be pushed aside if only he could remain to cheer his mother's last days. After that he looked forward to a new career in the Far West.

His greatest grief and most carefully-guarded secret was the increasing weakness of his right arm—disfigured by the effects of the Clarridge fire. It grew weary very easily and appeared to be losing its cunning. To-day it failed him completely. It refused to do an ordinary piece of work which once would have been but child's play. At first he was determined not to recognise its weakness. He persisted and persevered till the cold sweat stood out in

great beads on his forehead. He rubbed it, bathed it in cold water and tried it again. But all in vain. The blow delivered was either too heavy or too light. Finally the hammer fell at his feet and the arm hung limply at his side. He looked at it for a moment and a grey pallor overspread his face. The terrible truth was forcing itself upon him. He sank on his knees beside the anvil, while a big tear traced its way down his dust-stained cheek.

His cup of bitterness was now full to overflowing. The loss of his property he bore with complacency; the sacrifice of his love was met with patient suffering; the gradual displacement of his handicraft tested his courage; but the consciousness that in the prime of his manhood the power to earn his bread was slipping away from him caused him to cry out in the bitterness of his heart, 'Oh, God! oh, God! has it come to this?'

Suddenly it occurred to him that he might train his left arm. Why had he never thought of it before? Many a good workman was left-handed. There was no need to despair. Suiting the action to the thought he set to work at once and appeared to be satisfying himself with the first lesson when the sound of sleigh-bells outside caused him to drop the hammer guiltily.

A moment later the door opened and there, enveloped in white furs, stood Naera Delavan, looking almost as he had seen her in his dreams. The white cap pulled over her ears held a few stray locks over her forehead, her eyes flashed through the frozen snow which clung to her eyelashes, her cheeks bloomed like roses and her mouth bore an expression of determination.

He gazed at her in speechless astonishment while she came forward and held out her hand. 'Good day, Mr Worth. I suppose you are too busy to entertain strangers?'

'God bless me. It is you, Naera—Miss Delavan. Come to the fire and get warmed. How did you manage to get here on such a day as this?'

'We drove right to the door. Mother and Norbert are with me, but they have gone down to see your mother and young Mrs Worth. We have not yet had an opportunity of congratulating Katie.'

'You must have had a terrible time getting through the snow. It is a bad night for our anniversary entertainment.' He spoke very awkwardly. He was overcome by her rich attire, her increasing beauty and the magnetic force of her presence.

'The storm is almost sublime in its violence,' she replied, removing her storm collar to shake the snow from it. 'We upset twice near the old house in the swamp, but we rather enjoyed it. It seemed like old times.'

Bergen brought a box, spread his coat over it and asked her to be seated. Then he folded his arms and stood looking at her with an air of inquiry.

'Go on with your work, Bergen. We can talk just as well while you are working. Ostensibly I came to-night to hear your address on Sociology, but in reality to demand an explanation. I am going to speak very plainly. I know you are not given to mincing matters yourself. It is now three weeks since we returned to Owasco and yet you have never called on us. Have I offended you?'

'No, Miss Delavan, you certainly have not.'

Her eyes flashed and her cheek burned, but she bit her lip and continued, 'Has mother or Norbert?'

'No.'

'Well, what is the reason?' she demanded. 'I insist on knowing why he, who was our only friend

in poverty and disgrace, should be the first to desert us in our prosperity.'

Bergen did not immediately reply. He lit the lamp overhead and put fresh fuel on the fire. He dared not resume his work. She might discover his weakness. From her, above all others, he must keep his sad secret. 'I don't know that I can explain it in a way that you will understand. You must not overlook the fact that the ways of wealth and poverty lie far apart—far enough to destroy sympathy. It *should* not be so, but it *is* so. There appears to be no harmony between the cottage and the mansion. Wealth seems to lack the *will* and poverty the *courage* to bridge the gap.'

'Do you mean to say,' she cried, rising with tears of indignation in her eyes, 'that you have a moral right to estrange yourself because we became rich accidentally? Is that true democracy?'

Bergen winced. She little knew the strain she was placing upon him. He dared not look at her in tears. 'I respect and honour you all as much as I ever did, but—' He stopped abruptly for lack of words and pumped thoughtfully at his bellows till the fire waxed brighter.

She looked at him through her eyelashes with an inward glow of admiration. His arms were bare to the elbows, his cap was pushed back from his forehead and his earnest face was lit up with the glow of the fire. He was in deep study.

'But what, Bergen?'

'I don't know that I am at liberty to make any further explanation.' The words came with a deep sigh.

'The gulf has been of your making. You told mother you thought it was her duty to let me mingle with the rich and great of the Old World before forming an attachment. She asked your advice. You gave it and it was acted upon. You seemed anxious to get us away.'

He took one of her hands and looked earnestly into her face. 'And have you come back heart free?' His voice trembled with emotion.

'No, I have not.'

He dropped her hand and was turning away, when she caught his withered arm and raised it to her lips. 'If you had not been so ill one right you would have remembered how a certain young lady was carried away by her emotions and—'

'Oh, my God, it was true, then?'

In a moment she was lifted off her feet and her face covered with kisses. She twined her arms round his neck, weeping and laughing as his protestations of love fell on her ears.

'Naera, darling, you brought me back to life. An angel from another world seemed to raise me from some dark, deep abyss; a creature of life and light seemed to take me in her arms and soar away into space. But it was *your* touch and *your* voice telling me that Naera loved me. Oh, the soothing joy of it! But when my mind became quite clear you had gone away and your manner afterwards led me to think that my bright dream was merely the phantasy of a fevered brain.'

'I was ashamed to look you in the face. I did not know whether you heard me or not. The uncertainty placed me in an embarrassing position. But do you know, I was never sure I loved you till that Sunday evening—you remember,' and she blushing hid her face on his shoulder.

'That stolen kiss, Naera, lay heavy on my mind. When I was on the blazing roof I felt glad I had written you the letter that morning.'

She freed herself from his embrace and looked at him with mock severity. 'It was the greatest disappointment I ever had in my life. It was positively stupid of you to send an apology when I was nursing my new-found happiness and thank-

ing fortune that Katie had missed her train the day before. I have the letter yet and shall keep it to tease you.'

Just then an exclamation came from a bench behind them where a heap of robes were piled. It was a childish voice calling 'Bergy!'

Naera started with affright. 'What was that?'

'That's my shopmate Harry,' replied Bergen, drawing from a bed of furs a curly-headed little boy who looked with wondering eyes at the unexpected visitor. 'I bring him with me in the afternoons. He piles the blocks and nails for Bergy. Don't you, Harry?'

'The little darling! What bright eyes he has! Come to your new auntie, dear,' said Naera, coaxingly, as she held out her arms. But, to her surprise, the child turned away in terror and clung to Bergen's neck.

'It's no wonder he's afraid of you, Naera. Your face is daubed with black dust. Shall I get some snow and wipe it off?'

'Yes, quick. I must look horrid. Take this handkerchief. But wait,' she added, with a roguish gleam in her eyes. 'Leave a spot where it won't look too bad—just for mischief. Katie can't tease me. She is too young a bride herself. It will save explanations. And, by the way, it will suggest *my* solution of your pet problem.'

'How so?' he laughed.

'Why, Labour and Capital can no more do without each other than you and I. There will be a wedding some day if busybodies and sociologists don't interfere. Combines and trusts are mere preliminaries, *engagement rings*. There is a text for your lecture. Ha! ha!'

The storm howled and beat in their faces as they went out into the night and wended their way homewards, but they laughed merrily as they stumbled

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Bergen Worth

blindly through the snow, for they knew that a warm welcome awaited them, and the farther end of the way was lit up by the cheery lights which shone through the windows of the White Church.

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