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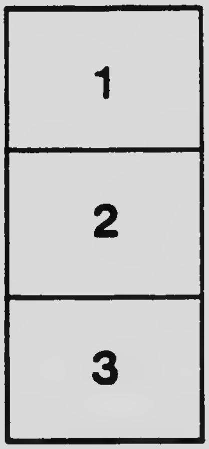

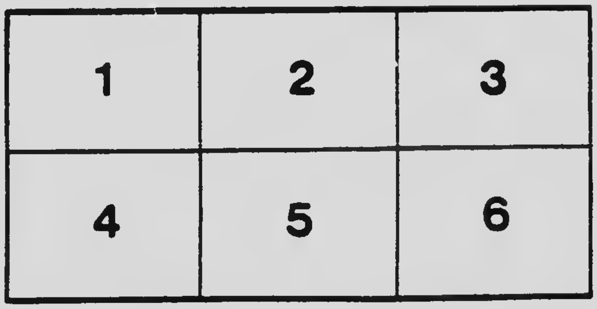

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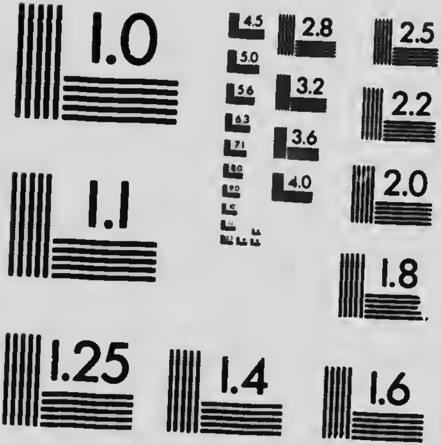
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Cupid and the Candidate

BY

MRS. LEEMING CARR

TORONTO:
WILLIAM BRIGGS
1906

Entered according to Act of the Parliament of Canada, in the
year one thousand nine hundred and six, by
William Briggs
at the Department of Agriculture.

TO

JAMES J. HILL

WHO RECENTLY, THE GUEST OF THE

OTTAWA CANADIAN CLUB,

SAID :

"Canadians have a magnificent heritage in the North-West. In settling it do not be in too great a hurry. Select your population. The quality of the soil is of less consequence than the quality of the man who lives on the soil, but when both are good, Prosperity and Patriotism walk hand in hand."

Cupid and the Candidate

CHAPTER I.

" I WISH for the hundredth time that Johnston had not accepted the nomination."

The speaker, Charles Bevis, Physician and Surgeon, as a modest gilt sign above his office door announced to the public, addressed this remark to his wife.

She, a small blonde woman, whose somewhat languid manner utterly belied her tireless energy, glanced up at him; otherwise she gave no sign of having heard him.

Presently the doctor continued.

" It was rumored in town to-day that the date of the election is fixed for four weeks hence."

This brought forth a reply.

" As far as I am concerned one week would have done; a day would have been even better."

There was that in Mrs. Bevis's reply which caused her husband to hesitate. Perhaps he would have shown wisdom by abandoning the subject altogether; but it held a fascination for him which rendered such a course impossible.

Meanwhile visions of a disorganized household arose in Mrs. Bevis's mind, for the doctor lived a strenuous life during a political interval, and expected the family to co-operate, even to the extent of rising at unseemly hours, dining irregularly, and frequently retiring not at all.

His next remark showed that he thought it best to ignore his wife's expression of opinion regarding the date of the approaching Provincial election.

"I don't believe Johnston has a ghost of a chance to win, notwithstanding that he would make an ideal representative in the Provincial Legislature."

"Ideal!" and Mrs. Bevis smiled the smile of delicate sarcasm which she wore when she wished to irritate. "Your political geese are always swans until the fateful day of election. When the votes are counted they have a distressing way of becoming geese again, and returning to their native farmyard."

"I think I intimated that Johnston is an exception." The doctor's tone proved that the irritating smile had not been lost on him. "He has made a study of the political future of the country, is an eloquent speaker, a successful business man, and has a clean record, all of which makes one wish that he had not accepted the nomination. A man of less than average ability is plenty good enough to be knocked down by a Grit majority, coupled with Tom Culverson's dollars."

"Quite good enough," calmly agreed Mrs. Bevis. "So, since you have made up your mind that it is impossible to win the county, even with an ideal candidate, I hope you will be content *for once* to keep out of the dirt of an election. At least, refrain from bringing the unwashed electorate to the house in numbers. It takes a week to rid the premises of the unspeakable odor of a caucus."

The doctor looked at her, a look which she pretended not to see. Then he reversed the attack.

"Who kept the evil-smelling Connors a prisoner in this house for two days previous to the last election, for the purpose of preventing his person and vote from falling into the hands of the enemy?"

Mrs. Bevis shuddered. "Please do not recall it."

"And who," he continued remorselessly, "drove ten miles across country at midnight to intercept two youths who were being hurried away on the eve of an election on the plea of getting a job?"

"Don't! I even went so far as to imagine poor old Perkins being elected by a majority of two, even the two you speak of."

"Exactly. Then why talk to me as you are doing?"

Finding herself in a close corner, Mrs. Bevis doubled with feminine agility.

"Oh, I know it is useless to talk. You will do just as you have done during previous political contests; you will work night and day, and become foolishly enthusiastic and sanguine of success, only to find when it is over that you have again wasted time and money and energy in a hopeless cause."

"I suppose I am a very foolish fellow." The tone was abject. This was one of the ways by which Dr. Bevis was wont to disarm adverse criticism. Few guessed that both tone and sentiment were simulated. His wife knew it very well, but it amused her to let him think that he could influence her by a fine show of self-abasement.

"Oh, no, dear! not foolish," she answered, "but —lacking restraint. You would find electioneering in moderation to be sufficiently interesting without being so fatiguing."

"I daresay you are right." The tone was still humble.

"I shall be glad," Mrs. Bevis continued, "if Johnston is all you have said. You will at least have the satisfaction of knowing when it is all over that he was worthy of your efforts on his behalf."

"By Jove, yes," and the doctor allowed himself to brighten perceptibly. "There will be a good deal of satisfaction in knowing that the Grits of Middleworth must acknowledge Johnston's superiority over Culverson, even if they won't vote for him."

By which it will be easily seen that Lawrence Johnston was nominated by the Tory party of Middleworth, of which Dr. Bevis was an active member.

They would wish this clearly understood in the beginning, though it matters really very little, for after all there are only two kinds of politicians, no matter by what name they call themselves—those who are good for the country and those who are not.

The doctor said no more, for just then the office boy appeared with the evening paper. He took it from the boy's hand with the haste of one who desires to have rumor confirmed. Quickly running his eyes over its pages, he divided it, giving the least interesting half to his wife. She accepted it dutifully, with a touch of cynical mirth at the corners of her mouth, and silence fell between them.

CHAPTER II.

THE next day Mrs. Bevis saw Prue Stainsby passing along the street. She called to her, and the girl answered by coming over in her slow, graceful way. "I want to talk to you about Johnston," said Mrs. Bevis.

"Johnston?"

"Yes, our Johnston."

"I did not know you had a Johnston," opening innocent eyes.

"Don't pretend to be stupid, Prue. I am speaking of Lawrence Johnston, the man whom we intend shall represent us in the Provincial Legislature after the coming election. Sit down."

"Only that?" said Prue. "Does he share your generous intentions regarding himself? And is he married? I decline being interested in him if he is."

"Why do women always ask, 'Is he married'?"

"Do you mean this particular he? Or are you speaking in a general way?"

"In a general way."

"Then you, being a woman, ought to know," asserted Prue.

"I do," said Mrs. Bevis. "It's because men are not properly labelled. They are all Mr., whether married or single. Natural curiosity would prompt one to ask, Is *she* married? were it not for the prefix Miss or Mrs. which quite obviates the necessity in either case."

"So nice of you to explain it in that way. I was afraid you were going to throw out insinuations. Most people do when the subject is mentioned. Meanwhile, don't forget that you have not satisfied my 'natural curiosity.' Is Johnston married?"

"Not married, but engaged; at least, I somewhere heard a rumor to that effect."

"Rumor cannot be accepted as evidence, so I am told. You may talk about him."

"When are you going to the city?" asked Mrs. Bevis with seeming irrelevance.

"To-morrow."

"Are you really? Would you object to buying a few things for me?"

"Not at all, provided you limit your requirements to the capacity of the stage."

"This time it is a case of limiting my requirements to Johnston's capacity."

"Oh, then, it's things to eat you want?"

Mrs. Bevis nodded.

"Well, for goodness' sake make a list, otherwise I shouldn't remember half of all you will want. When do you expect him?"

"There is a blissful uncertainty regarding his coming to Orran. He may be coming round the corner now, and he may not be here for a week."

"Well, he is not coming round the corner," said

Prue, craning her neck in that direction. "So let us hope for the best. You know him, of course."

"Only by repute. He is the sort of man other men call an awfully decent fellow."

"Rather a pity to sacrifice him," said Prue, teasingly. "There are always plenty of the other variety in the Tory ranks willing to try conclusions with Tom Culverson, are there not?"

"It would seem so. Half a dozen men wanted the nomination this time, not one of whom would stand the smallest chance of being elected. Poor things! Smith can easily see that Jones would have no chance, and Jones clearly perceives the same regarding Smith, yet each fancies himself the strongest man in the party so far as Middleworth is concerned."

"And when they fail to win the race," commented Prue, "they probably console themselves with the thought, ''Twere better to have run and lost than never to have run at all.' Besides, look at the gifts in the hands of the political gods should there be a change of Government."

"As well waste my time looking for another fall of manna from heaven," answered Mrs. Bevis.

"It must be discouraging being always on the losing side," said Prue, sympathetically, noting at the same time the growing warmth of Mrs. Bevis's eyes. "But never mind, Johnston may be a political Messiah born for the restoration of the Tories in Middleworth."

"Not a bit of it; no one can beat Tom Culverson.

He is a millionaire, and a seat in Parliament is his one extravagance."

"Yet he was nearly defeated four years ago. I was not interested in politics then; but I clearly remember how certain people looked when the report got spread about on the night of the election that Culverson was defeated at the polls."

"Yes, that was when Perkins carried the Conservative banner. Culverson did not consider Perkins 'a foeman worthy of his *steal'*; consequently, the price of votes dropped below par, and for once the great electorate failed to recognize Culverson's virtues. So close was it that if the Tories had bought ten more votes they would have elected Perkins and scored a victory for 'honesty and clean balloting;' at least, that was what Charles said, and he was in a position to know."

Prue looked doubtfully at her for a moment; then they both laughed.

Presently Prue said, thoughtfully, "I believe I shall interest myself in this election. It might be the means of giving one a few new impressions."

"Oh, undoubtedly, for that there is nothing better; though to thoroughly enter into the spirit of it, one must live with a man who simply *breathes* politics through an entire campaign."

"Must one? Then I am afraid I shall miss a good deal of it. Daddy does not warm on the subject any more. In fact, I think his interest in politics has become atrophied."

"I shouldn't wonder. When a man becomes that way" (Mrs. Bevis dropped her voice to a confidential tone), "it is because he can no longer blind himself to the evil-doing of his party. Squire Stainsby happens to be a Liberal."

"Perhaps that is it. I shall sound him on the subject when I go home. There is no danger of Dr. Bevis growing indifferent because of the shortcomings of the Tory party, is there? You see I am counting now on gathering impressions from him."

"Danger!" The pause which followed was more eloquent than words. "If Charles ever acknowledges his party guilty of even *one* indiscretion, I shall know that he is losing his hold on material things, and shall begin to wonder that moment how I am going to look in a widow's bonnet."

"I more than half believe you enjoy it immensely," said Prue. "Own up now."

"Of course I do, but I pretend otherwise so as to act as a sort of drag on Charles. If I gave free rein to the pleasure I feel in witnessing a hot political fight, it would be impossible for me, at the same time, to keep before his mind more personal though less interesting duties which must be performed. I should welcome an election, I think, if for no other reason than the fact that it gives us a period every four years in which we have something new to talk about. For instance, when the doctor now returns home after an absence of an hour or two, instead of saying to him, 'How is

Mrs. Jones?' or 'Is it a boy or a girl?' I shall say, if I am in good humor, 'Well, did you succeed in making him promise to vote for Johnston?' If I am in bad humor I shall say, 'Another half day wasted in canvassing for Johnston?' "

"And the doctor," added Prue, "will, of course, give still greater variety to the theme by replying according to the humor in which he happens to be."

"The doctor, my dear, replies only when he is in good humor. In bad humor he *whistles,*—not a tune, mind you, just a defiant tootle."

"What a nice way of relieving one's feelings," smiled Prue. "It prevents unkind words, and admits of no contradiction."

"But it is maddening," confided Mrs. Bevis, "when one wishes to have a heart-to-heart talk with him, and knows that, given a fair chance, one would have all the best of the argument."

CHAPTER III.

THE stage running between Orran and Garri Sound, the county town of Middleworth, was du to leave the last mentioned place on its return tri at four o'clock in the afternoon. Already it was that time; and from the door of an hotel issued the driver, with both arms full of parcels, which he contrived to stow away under the front seat of the vehicle, along with the Orran mail bag. Lest the people of Orran should take offence, it must be explained that the stage was not the only public conveyance afforded them to and from the city. There were "accommodation trains," but as these went citywards at an hour when country people usually leave the city, and returned at an equally unseasonable time, it cannot be inferred that they were accommodating the public. The female portion of the population at least found it so, and continued to avail themselves of the stage. To-day there appeared to be no passengers; and after waiting a full five minutes past the hour, Denny Brady, the driver—an Irishman, who narrowly escaped being of the comic opera type, and who was possessed of a mellow brogue which, instead of diminishing, grew more pronounced as the years advanced—slammed the door and climbed into his seat. At that moment a young lady, breathless and still a block away, waved a handkerchief in the hope of catching Denny's eye. He, still on the alert for a fare, saw her and drew his team up to the curb.

"Any one inside?" queried Prue, as she hurried up.

"No one, Miss."

"Did you find Mrs. Bevis's things in the waiting room?"

"Yes, Miss."

"Good! Put this on the seat beside me, and this, and this. Careful now." And Prue loaded the man's arms with the spoil of a day's shopping. "We're late, aren't we, Denny? I'm sorry to have troubled you, and it was so good of you to wait."

"No trouble to wait upon you, Miss. Sure, I didn't even know you were coming." With which gallant speech the smiling Denny once more mounted to his seat, and they were off without further interruption.

When they had journeyed a mile or more beyond the city limits, Prue concluded that she was to have the interior of the stage to herself, and began to make herself as comfortable for the remaining five miles of the journey as her surroundings would permit. First she called on Denny to dismount and fasten back the curtains, for the Orran stage when closed inclined one to the opinion that the last person to occupy it had been journeying to the mortuary. The moth-eaten rug she promptly put under her feet, and the cushions she piled one upon another on the seat backing the driver. Then she devoted herself to a book bought [illegible] occasion.

Denny looked ruefully at the disarrangemen consoling himself with the reflection, that "Sh always was a terror, an' purty enough to have he own way with any one."

Not for long, however, was Prue to be left i undisputed possession of the stage. Coming oppo site a farmhouse, Denny was loudly hailed by th farmer himself, who was standing, hands in pockets in his dooryard.

"Wait a bit, Denny," shouted he. "Here's a gentleman who wants to go to Orran with you." The gentleman in question shook hands with the farmer, and catching up a handbag that stood nea him came down the short lane with rapid strides.

I hope he will sit outside, thought Prue, watching his approach. Apparently, however, such an idea never occurred to him, for without a moment's hesitation he climbed in beside her, bringing his bag with him. This was annoying enough in itself; but when taken in conjunction with the fact that the man was smiling, and apparently so engrossed with his thoughts as not to notice her, it caused Prue to feel distinctly irritated. The climax was reached when the bag, which he had carelessly placed on the opposite seat, rolled over and fell heavily on Prue's feet. He picked it up, still with that contemplative smile on his face, and without even a word of apology placed it on the seat again. This was too much.

"At least your valise might ride outside," she said, in a tone calculated to gain his attention.

"Certainly, how stupid of me," answered the man. Meanwhile, the glance he gave his companion lingered and turned to a look of surprised admiration as his eyes rested on the face beside him.

"Perhaps you prefer that I should ride outside also," he continued.

Prue shrugged her shoulders. "This is a public conveyance," she answered, provokingly.

"Well, supposing I compromise by taking the other seat," proceeding at once to carry out his own suggestion.

The ludicrous appearance he made perched on the pile of cushions made it impossible to keep the repellent look on her face another instant. Two treacherous dimples and a smile appearing put it utterly to rout.

"This reminds me of trying to feel comfortable in a cosy corner," said the man, vainly trying to adjust himself to certain excrescences that threatened every moment to slide from under him. "Apparently I have all the comforts. Permit me to share—"

"Oh, no," she hastened to say. "Not for worlds would I deprive you of them." Then, as a means of checking further conversation, she rather pointedly applied herself to her book. Nothing more was said during the time it took Denny's team to cover another mile or two of the road to Orran. Prue appeared to be deeply interested in her book, though in truth she was mentally abusing it, and wondering if the author really expected the reading public to enjoy it after the charming stories he had given them heretofore. Turning the pages over she read the closing chapter, and then laid the book in her lap. Like the man's handbag, it presently slid downward to the bottom of the stage.

Stooping to pick it up his eyes chanced on a paragraph on the open page. It held his attention for a moment, and when he passed the book on to Prue she thought she read in his face amusement and tolerance for one who could be interested in such absurd imaginings.

Prue rose in arms at once. He thinks I was enjoying it and is impertinent enough to criticise my taste, was her first thought. Aloud she said sweetly: "Thank you. Are you interested in stories of animal life?"

"Moderately, yes, when the creature about which the story is woven is treated as an animal. Talking animals and animals with souls I avoid reading about as much as possible."

"Do you really?" said Prue, with a look of childlike innocence. "I think them so interesting, especially dogs. Ours now is so soulful, so lofty and wise, one feels a mere human in his presence."

The man opened his eyes, but a close scrutiny of Prue's countenance failed to detect in its expression anything but deep interest in the subject, and good faith.

"Your dog must be a canine prig. I should like to kick the brute," was the unfeeling reply.

Prue's answer to this was cut short in a manner totally unforeseen. There were no preliminaries, just a sudden collapse in which she and the man and their various belongings seemed to be hopelessly mixed. Without quite realizing what had happened, Prue found herself sitting in the road, both arms thrown affectionately round the offending valise; while the man in an equally dazed condition was getting out of the broken-down stage. On the opposite side, and half way up the embankment, Denny lay where he had been violently thrown. The horses, glad of any reasonable excuse to stop, fell into easy, restful attitudes. Prue rose and began shaking the dust off her garments, surprised to find there were no bones broken.

"How do you find yourself?" asked the man, anxiously, as he pushed the dents out of his hat. "This is what one might call rather sudden."

"I'm all right, but do see what is the matter with Denny." Denny, partially stunned and badly shaken up, took some time to recover himself. His first question was as to what had happened.

"The axle broke," said Prue.

"The axle, was it? Faith! I thought 'twas ivery bone in me ould body," groaned Denny, as he rolled over into a sitting posture. "You're not hurted, Miss?"

"Not a bit; but look at the Prime Minister's groceries."

"The what?" said Denny, rising stiffly.

"The Prime Minister's groceries." And Prue, going down into the road, began gathering up the scattered parcels, through the broken wrappings of which sundry edibles were appearing. "You didn't know you were carrying freight for the future Prime Minister of the Province, did you, Denny?"

"Indeed, I didn't. The box houlding the stuff was addrissed to Mrs. Bevis."

"Exactly, and Mrs. Bevis is preparing to entertain Lawrence Johnston, the Tory candidate for Middleworth, in whom the party professes to have discovered a future leader and statesman."

Prue's fellow-traveller was quietly assisting in righting things, and appeared to be quite absorbed in his task.

"For Johnston, are they," said Denny, with a grin. "Then a little dust won't hurt them; he'll find it's dust he needs when he visits Orran."

"This Johnston must be a lucky fellow," commented the stranger. "To have a feast prepared were kindness enough; but when the antidote also is provided one must consider it the height of hospitality," and he held up a box marked "Liver Pills."

"Them are mine," asserted Denny, clapping a hand on his pocket; they must have fallen out of me coat when I flew out of me seat."

While this conversation was going on a man drove up in a light waggon.

"Now's your chance to be getting to Orran, Miss," said Denny. Prue declined, preferring, she said, to walk the remaining mile of the journey.

"The things can ride annyway, and don't you be sampling them dilicacies," Denny admonished the owner of the waggon, as he bundled the stuff in beside him.

The mail bag was too precious a charge to be put into other hands, so Denny flung it across one of the horses, and with this unwontedly light load they finished the day's journey. The crippled stage left behind looked, with curtains partly open, like some poor old creature yawning dismally at the roadside.

I think I must be near my journey's end," said the man, addressing Prue, when Denny had trudged on ahead. "Isn't there a family named Dollinger living about here?"

"Yes, that white house ahead there on the hill is the Dollinger home."

"Is Dick Dollinger at home? He and I used to go to school together."

Prue answered that to the best of her knowledge Dick was now under the paternal roof.

"Curtis, at whose place the stage picked me up, is another old friend," continued the man. "Curtis wanted to talk politics; in fact,' smiling, "he mentioned your friend Johnston."

"Not my friend," said Prue, arching her brows in studied disdain. "To me he is still the great unknown. For social reasons I resent his coming, while for political reasons I am bound to dislike him immensely."

"For social reasons?" repeated he. "Why?"

"Because he has already taken entire possession of the Bevis household."

"Has he? Well, that is some compensation, otherwise things look rather dark for Johnston. Curtis, though a warm friend of his, intimated that it would be easier for him to inherit the kingdom of heaven than to win Middleworth."

"An intimation in which Curtis voiced the sentiment of other friends whom Johnston has yet to meet," answered Prue, meanwhile noting out of the corner of her eye the quick, resolute squaring of her companion's shoulders and the upward movement of the head. What had been suspicion in her mind now became a certainty, and she smiled the smile of one who, for the present, at least, controls the situation. "Perhaps you also are a friend of Johnston's," she said, looking at the man with guileless eyes.

"Yes, I suppose I am, using the term in its broadest sense; at least, I have no other than friendly feelings toward him."

"Is he," hesitatingly, "a very fine fellow? Dr. Bevis thinks he is."

"Well, I would not dispute the doctor's judgment, even if I thought otherwise."

"Which I see you do not. The unanimous opinion, which probably accords with his own, is that Johnston is a splendid specimen of manly integrity and brilliant attainments."

The man smiled. "I don't think he would recognize the mental picture you have drawn as intended for himself. So far as I know him, he appears to be a commonplace, well-meaning sort of chap, with no bad habits, and with a few ideals."

"Ideals! How interesting! His political opponent, Mr. Culverson, is quite the reverse. He has no ideals, and a few bad habits. You lead me to hope that Johnston will vary the monotony of previous attempts to win Middleworth by giving a few distinctive features to his campaign."

"I believe he will," answered the man. "Perhaps," in a slightly mocking tone, "you could suggest something distinctive."

"I could," said Prue. And then remained provokingly silent.

"Such, for instance, as giving each elector a check, with the privilege of filling it out according to his several needs and necessities."

"Nothing of the sort," said she, nettled both by the words and tone, woman-like quite forgetting that she had a moment before been speaking in the same mocking tone herself. "They have had that on a less impossible scale. What they have not had is a man who refuses absolutely to allow one dollar to be expended unlawfully in assisting him to win his own election—one who above all things sets his face like flint against the practice of bribing young men whose names appear for the first time on the voters' list. Such a man offering himself for election in Middleworth would be as rare as a celestial visitor and excite quite as much interest and admiration. Moreover, he would be a credit to his party, whether victor or vanquished, and a check on dishonest opposition. His campaign would be something better than the usual farce of the pot calling the kettle black."

Unconsciously Prue had stopped walking while she talked, and now stood facing her companion in the middle of the road. Impetuously he reached forth and took her hand. "Are there many people in Orran of your way of thinking?" he asked.

"I know of some," she said. "Perhaps there are many. If the man I describe should come," she added, "we should know how many. Votes speak more forcibly than words."

"If I see Johnston I shall tell him—" He paused a moment.

"You will see him," said Prue, a mischievous smile chasing the serious look from her face. "You will see him at the top of the stair in Dollinger's house. Meanwhile, this is their gate and there is Mrs. Dollinger in the garden." She waved her hand to him, and without as much as a backward turn of the head continued on her way to Orran.

That night when Dick Dollinger was showing his guest to his room, the latter came face to face with himself in a large mirror at the top of the stair. He stopped abruptly and gazed at the reflection. Dick, who was somewhat in advance, turned to see what had happened to him. "Smitten afresh with your own charms, old man? You are just the same old Larry, I assure you."

"I'm not so sure," was the reply. "Just now I fancied there was something positively asinine in my appearance."

CHAPTER IV.

When professionally engaged, Dr. Bevis was not what one would call an early riser. When politics and professional duties combined claimed his attention, he was up betimes.

On the morning following Prue Stainsby's visit to Garric Sound, the doctor appeared before his wife in ghostly attire at an hour when sleep seems more desirable than great riches, and informed her that he would like breakfast an hour earlier than usual. Mrs. Bevis, knowing it was useless to remonstrate, arose at once and set the wheels of her house in motion.

On the road about Orran Dr. Bevis and his horse Beeline were as familiar a sight as the daily rising and going down of the sun. There were other horses in the doctor's stable, but when the day was long, or the night dark, or the case an urgent one, this slim-legged son of an illustrious sire was the horse chosen to make the journey.

When he was ready to start, on the morning above mentioned, Mrs. Bevis said to him: "I believe I shall go with you."

The doctor relaxed the grim hold he had on his pipe stem long enough to say: "Do. Get your bonnet on as quickly as you can."

Any kind of female headgear, from a rakish tamo-shanter to a staid and virtuous nightcap, he styled a bonnet, and to make it worse, called it "bunnet." It had rained all night, a steady downpour, and the sky still wore a threatening look.

"I'll be with you in five minutes," was Mrs. Bevis's response.

In about double that time she appeared, clad in a dark raincoat and cloth cap, the garb in which on stormy days she had ridden many a mile by the doctor's side in a backbreaking, cobbler-seated cart. A four-wheeled conveyance and heavy clay roads after a rain were not compatible with Dr. Bevis's preferred rate of speed. The doctor had long since ceased to comment on the fact that his wife generally chose a disagreeable day upon which to accompany him. When he had first done so, her answer was, "I go on wet days because wet days are good for my complexion."

The doctor merely said "Um," and turned a look on her face which plainly said that he was in search of something which he was not able to find.

She ignored the insinuation.

By the time he had discovered how short the dreaded miles become when one has a companion who is interested in one, he had also discovered that it was for that reason his wife went with him. "It's pretty decent of you, old girl," he had said. "I get bone-tired of the eternal driving even on fine days; on days like this, I—" An eloquent gesture finished the sentence. In reply his wife nodded gravely and sympathetically.

On this day he made no comment on the state of the weather, and very soon Beeline was covering the road at a fast trot, knowing very well that a moderate pace would not suit his master, no matter what the state of the roads. The cool, rain-washed air smote their faces pleasantly, and on either side a semi-circle of flying clay and water followed the rapidly revolving wheels of the cart. The roadside ditches were filled with lush June grass, bent double with the weight of moisture, and the dandelions, their fluffy yellow petticoats turned over their heads, stood sulkily waiting for the sun to smile again. The rich brown earth was everywhere covered with newly unfolded green; tree and bush and plant alike revelled in it, as from the rain-swollen earth they sucked up new life and vigor which would presently expand to the sun in a wealth of leaf and fruitage.

When they had travelled a mile or more beyond the village Mrs. Bevis inquired of the doctor whom he was first going to visit.

"I am going first to Mrs. Pinnock's," was the answer. "Ezra is worse."

"Is he? I'm glad I thought of going with you. I enjoy seeing Mrs. Pinnock under new conditions."

"You profess a great deal of admiration for Mrs. Pinnock. Is it genuine?"

"I'm an admirer of her administrative ability; besides I want to see into her parlor. Some one told me the other day that she has had the marble slab which Ezra erected years ago to the memory of his first wife, made into a top for a table, which now decorates the 'front view,' as she calls the parlor bay window."

"Oh, I shouldn't wonder. It's likely the slab had been broken off its base and had fallen over, as so many of them have done in that neglected graveyard." The doctor was always willing to judge people's actions generously, unless directly opposed to his conceptions of fair play.

"Were you living in Orran when she and Ezra were married?"

"Yes, I was here when Ezra's first wife died. In fact it was at her funeral that I first saw the present Mrs. Pinnock."

"Oh." Mrs. Bevis smiled. "I fancy I see her upon that occasion appraising Ezra's belongings, and her prompt acceptance of the possibilities."

"Her acceptance of Ezra was prompt enough at all events, for they were married before the expiration of a year, and a very good thing it was for him," continued the doctor, still anxious to be fair to Mrs. Pinnock. "At that time his place bore all the marks of haphazard management; now it is one of the show places of the county."

"And always referred to as Mrs. Pinnock's," supplemented Mrs. Bevis, "thus suggesting the ruling personality." Presently they came in sight of the place, and, as the doctor had intimated, it was, from the white entrance gate and smoothly-gravelled lane back to the farthest field and strip of woods, where the young trees were carefully guarded, a shining example of thrift and foresight. In the side yard was a block, or rather a section, of a maple log of tremendous girth. It was painted white, and attached to it was an iron ring to which the doctor was about to tie Beeline.

"Boy, come hold the doctor's horse." It was a female voice, commanding, incisive, speaking from the kitchen. Almost immediately a boy appeared, to whom the doctor entrusted his horse.

Then as he entered the house, the voice explained: "You feed that horse too many oats, doctor; he can't stand still. Last time you were here he rubbed half the paint off the horse block, and pawed a hole most deep enough to bury him in."

"Did he? I'm very sorry. It must have been the flies. Nothing but flies would ever make Beeline so far forget himself."

Mrs. Pinnock was vigorously kneading dough for bread. She was somewhat stout and very firm and compact. A healthy, unwavering red glowed in her cheeks, over which looked a pair of grey eyes that had a wonderful power in their depths. One glance from them was usually enough to shrivel opposition to her will and cause it to be no more.

She always had about the place two or three "Home boys"—otherwise boys brought out to Canada by benevolent English societies—and the amount of labor they accomplished for Mrs. Pinnock was the wonder and envy of her neighbors. Not that she abused them. They were well fed and neatly clad, for, as she was wont to say, "you can't expect animals to work unless you feed them well. But I never let them into the house, except at mealtime and bedtime. If they once get settin' round the stove they get soft and lazy. Keep them movin'." In order to do this it was necessary to keep moving herself, and while supervising their labor, she frequently carried in her hand some coarse needlework, such as a portion of a shirt for Ezra, an apron, or perhaps a towel to hem. This, of course, necessitated a thimble, and a thimble on Mrs. Pinnock's second finger became a formidable weapon, before which laziness fled in affright.

"She's given me a lump on me 'ead as big as a 'en's haig," one boy was heard tearfully confessing to another.

"Maybe you'll learn to keep hout of the old lady's wy wen she 'as 'er steel spur on," was the heartless response.

Nevertheless, more than one of Mrs. Pinnock's boys, who were now men, grown and doing comfortably for themselves, continued to come to her for help and advice, both of which were given willingly and to the very best of her ability. The doctor watched the magnificent play of her arms, bare to the elbows, as she shaped the dough into loaves.

"How is Ezra to-day?" he inquired.

"Well, you tell," answered she. "I think he is worse; certainly he is no better. In all the years I've known him he never stayed in bed till this hour of the day." With quick, energetic movements she put the bread to rise again, and washed her hands.

"Won't Mrs. Bevis come in?" she asked.

"I'm sure she will if you invite her."

Mrs. Pinnock stepped quickly to the door.

"Come inside, Mrs. Bevis," she called heartily. "It'll rest you to move round a bit."

"Thank you, I was just wishing you would ask me to come;" and Mrs. Bevis stepped down from the cart and came toward the open door.

Mrs. Pinnock grasped her warmly by the hand. "Come into the other room," she said. "Doctor, you can go up and see Ezra. I'll be with you in a minute; first room to the right of the stairs."

The doctor ascended the stairs three steps at a time, and Mrs. Bevis expectantly followed her bustling hostess to the "other room." Mrs. Pinnock made no pretence of dressing up her house. "It pays me better to look after the main thing," had been her only excuse; but now, like a thriving young nation that feels itself forging ahead commercially, she began to think it would be well to give some attention to the fine arts. "Parlor" did not come trippingly to her tongue, so it was "the room," or "the other room," and into it Mrs. Bevis was led over a carpet which was literally a path of roses. With conscious pride Mrs. Pinnock drew up the blind on "the front view," and the light streaming in was reflected from a marble-topped table which stood in the window.

"Do not let me detain you. I shall be very comfortable in this lovely room, and I know you are anxious to know what the doctor thinks of your husband's condition."

"Well, perhaps it would be as well for me to go up. Ezra's such a poor hand at telling how he feels."

"Don't hurry on my account," Mrs. Bevis admonished.

Upstairs the doctor was sitting by the sick man's bed. In contrast to his wife's solid proportions, Ezra's lean frame was scarcely discernible beneath the bedclothes. Near his head a big silver watch ticked, and against the wall, below where his clothes hung, his boots stood side by side. To the doctor's eyes there was something pathetic about those boots, their appearance so entirely lacked vigor and energy. Deeply wrinkled, they toed in as though fain to lean on each other for support, while the tops bent weakly outward, indicative of bow legs. Ezra looked at the doctor with lack-lustre eyes, as for a moment the latter held the sick man's worn, knotty fingers in a firm clasp.

"How is this, Ezra? Not feeling so well to-day? Are you suffering pain?"

"No, I can't call it pain exactly." This in a dry, faint voice. "I can't call it pain, but—"

"It's just weakness, doctor," broke in Mrs. Pinnock's strong voice. "He sleeps well, which he could not do if he were suffering pain."

"Do you experience this weak feeling at intervals, or is it continuous?" the doctor continued, addressing himself to Ezra.

"Well, there are times when I am worse than others. I—"

"I don't think there is much difference, doctor," corrected Mrs. Pinnock, firmly. "He just seems to have given up. If he would make an effort; if he would go out to the hayfield now and watch the men, I'll warrant it would rouse him up a bit. But Ezra always did give up easy."

Ezra looked at her in silence, and the most delicately ironical smile touched his lips.

"He is not able to go to the hayfield," said the doctor, who had been carefully examining the patient's heart and lungs. "He must not exert himself to that extent until I give him permission to do so."

"Dear! dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Pinnock.

"If you could give me an appetite," said Ezra, plaintively. "Seems to me if I could just feel hungry once—"

"Yes, doctor, I think a tonic would do him a world of good. He's been careless about his vittles for a long time."

"I shall do all I can for him," said the doctor, somewhat shortly. Perhaps his tone betrayed more to the sick man's ear than he was aware of, or perhaps Ezra was wearied with trying to gain an uninterrupted hearing; howbeit his face became very downcast.

"Come, come," said the doctor, cheerily. "This won't do. Brace up. You'll be as lively as a cricket by the time the elections come off."

"Elections?"

"Yes, hadn't you heard? The province is going to right itself on the twenty-fifth of June."

A slow color crept into Ezra's face. A gleam lighted his dull eyes, and his hands nervously threw back the covers.

"I suppose you mean by that that the Tories are going to get into power. You've been lookin' fer that fer a long time, hain't you, doctor?" and Ezra managed to smile a smile that would have been mightily aggravating on a well man's face.

"Too long! too long! but the delay will serve to make the defeat of the Liberal party more complete and lasting. During the time they have been clinging to office they have been making rope wherewith to hang themselves."

"Well, of course, if they're ever hung they'll have to do it themselves. The Tories ain't smart enough to do it fer them."

The doctor laughed, thinking there was more than a grain of truth in that remark.

Mrs. Pinnock gave a little snort of impatience.

"If you'd stay and talk politics for an hour or two, doctor, I believe it would do him more good than a bar'l of medicine. Ezra's that Gritty he'd rise from his deathbed to vote for a Grit government."

"I certainly would, and, doctor, if you could make me as hungry for a good meal as you Tories are to get into office, I'd be a well man in a week."

"Or as hungry as the Grits were when they got into Ottawa in 1896," replied the doctor, with a humorous twinkle in his eyes. "They came in barefooted, and now they're riding in carriages and wearing cockades in their hats."

Thus they bandied words till Ezra in his excitement rose up in bed.

"Come, I must go now; you'll be well the next thing I know and cheating me out of half a dozen visits. I'll leave some medicine downstairs, which you are to take regularly, and I'll see you again the day after to-morrow."

Mrs. Pinnock followed the doctor downstairs, and while he prepared medicine for Ezra at the kitchen table, she made the discovery that her guest had forsaken the house and was walking about looking at the garden.

As Squire Stainsby's garden was a perfect flower garden, so Mrs. Pinnock's was a perfect vegetable garden. There were long lines of lettuce and onions, drawn up in military precision; whole battalions of young beets and carrots and cabbages; reinforcements of early beans and "cowcumbers," flanked by an entire field of potatoes. Not a weed dare raise its head, for here the boys worked early and late. Added to all this, the recent rainfall had caused a freshness and crispness which was delightful. Mrs. Pinnock was justly proud of her garden, and although it was quite a labor to market the product in Garric Sound, the income it brought her was more than some of her less thrifty neighbors made off an entire farm.

"I have always thought," said Mrs. Bevis, "that I should be perfectly happy if I owned a beautiful flower garden; now I am not sure that I should not prefer a vegetable garden. What perfect order yours is in, Mrs. Pinnock. It must be painful having to make gaps in the rows of vegetables when you get a load ready for market. I think I should want to leave everything just as it is."

"There would be no money in it then," and Mrs. Pinnock shook her head at such a foolish and wasteful idea. "I'd soon get to hate the look of it, no matter how pretty it was, if it didn't pay."

"Yes, of course, one soon tires of mere beauty." Mrs. Pinnock did not note the satirical little uplifting of the corners of the mouth that made this ready assent to her opinion of beauty *versus* worth. She was busy filling her apron with the largest and most succulent vegetables in the garden; these she carefully tied in newspapers and placed under the seat of the doctor's cart.

"How good of you," said Mrs. Bevis. "These will be a real treat."

The doctor called Mrs. Pinnock aside to give her some directions regarding Ezra. There was something in his face which caused her a feeling of uneasiness.

"You don't think Ezra is seriously ailing, do you?"

"He is. Nine men out of ten in his condition would have given up long ago." This much the doctor permitted himself to say on Ezra's behalf, because of what Mrs. Pinnock had said to her husband in the sick room.

For the first time in her life she began to have the feeling that she was coming face to face with something which she could not *manage.* "Surely you can build him up, doctor. I could manage to get him away if you think a change would do him good."

"A change would certainly be very beneficial; for that reason *quit managing him.*" The doctor laid a gentle touch on her arm, as if to prevent her taking offence. "Humor him instead of managing him; let him do exactly as he pleases. You will not regret it by-and-by."

For a long time Mrs. Pinnock followed the mud-washed cart with her eyes. The doctor had started her on a new and not too flattering train of thought.

Turning about she found Jane (her hired help) looking at her. "Jane," she said, fiercely, "take your ironing board away from that window. I'm a great deal cleverer than you'll ever be, but I wouldn't pretend to iron properly and at the same time watch and gape at every one as you do." In this statement Mrs. Pinnock did herself an injustice. She was capable of doing excellent work while keeping a vigilant watch over all her surroundings.

"And now for Ronan's," said the doctor, lightly flicking Beeline with his whip. "Surely, surely, Hazel is better to-day. My patience and skill are both exhausted if she is not."

Mrs. Bevis did not reply. Her eyes were wandering over the fields in swift appreciation of the change which had taken place since they left home. A warm west wind had risen and sent the clouds hurrying and crowding over the eastern rim of the world. Where they had been was now a deep vault of melting blue in which the sun blazed hotly. Tender greenery shook itself free of heavy crystal drops, and the dandelions spread out their gold to match the gold of the sun.

"Why don't you say something?" demanded the doctor. "Did you enjoy Mrs. Pinnock under new conditions? and oh! what about the gravestone?"

Mrs. Bevis smiled, but shook her head. "I'm not going to begin," she said; "I should not be able to resist the possibilities which the room offers in the way of description, and I have accepted Mrs. Pinnock's hospitality in the form of green vegetables. It is enough to say that it is all as crude as possible. The marble-topped table is there, and it has a sinister look. I was positive the underside of the marble bore an epitaph, but I refrained from looking. I'm not denying that the temptation to look was almost overpowering."

The doctor laughed uproariously. "You don't understand Mrs. Pinnock yet," he said. "It would have pleased her to have shown it to you, and had you, in return, commend her thrift. It was the gravestone right enough. I didn't know that you and Mrs. Pinnock had gone to the garden, and when I had finished with Ezra's medicine, I blundered into the best room in search of you. I didn't find you;

but I found the table, and I can tell you what is on the underside of it."

"What?" Mrs. Bevis's eyes were dilating.

"'Mary, beloved wife of Ezra Pinnock.'"

"Good gracious!"

"And on top of it," continued the doctor, "are the spar ornaments which Ezra bought at Niagara Falls for Mary's successor when he and Mary's successor were on their wedding trip. I have seen them many times."

It was only a matter of half a mile from thence to Ronan's. At Ronan's door the doctor was met by a young woman who had run over from the adjoining farm to inquire about the ailing one. She carried in her arms a lusty six months' old baby. Jokingly she greeted the doctor and was about to pass on.

"How would you like to trade your load for mine?" he said to her, holding up a bulky parcel which he had brought from home.

"Not at all," answered the fond mother. "Think I'd trade my tweetsie weetsie for some horrid old medicine!"

"Never! that would be robbery. What I offered was a fair exchange. Your load and mine are fruit of the same blossom." And to prove it he disclosed the glowing skin of an orange through a rent in the paper-covered parcel.

She looked at him doubtfully for a moment, then her face brightened. "Orange blossoms!" she cried triumphantly.

The doctor nodded. "And so you won't trade.

Well, I don't blame you, for that is really the finest boy I ever saw." The doctor affirmed this unblushingly to every mother of his acquaintance.

"Isn't he, though," beamed the mother, delightedly.

"Yes, the very finest, and for that reason it is such a pity that his—" Here he paused, looking the baby over with critical eyes.

"What is it, doctor?" cried the woman, anxiously. "You don't see anything the matter with him, do you?"

"Such a misfortune, indeed, that his—"

"Yes, yes, doctor, what is it?"

"That his father should be a Grit." Leaving the woman vowing what she would do to him for frightening her, he laughingly caught up his parcel and went to the sick room. Here a different picture met his eyes. On a bed reclined a child, a slight, brown-eyed, brown-haired girl, wasted with the struggle of a long sickness. She moved her hand slightly to greet him, and smiled a smile so faint and chastened that it seemed to him like a pale gleam of sunshine through a mist of rain. Beside her sat her mother, on whose face days and nights of watching had set deep lines and shadows. Today her eyes, heavy with weariness and lately dark with fear, held a gleam of hope, which the doctor was quick to note as he entered the room. While he examined the little sufferer, the woman, with every sense alert and sharpened by mother-love, stood watching his face. At last the doctor finished and lifted up his head. "You are right," he said, smiling reassuringly at her. "Hazel is better to-day, much better."

The woman took a step forward and sank into a chair. "Thank God," she murmured, and then weakly wept.

The doctor was silent. He was thinking of the nights he had risen from his bed and driven miles through storm and wind, a tired man behind a jaded horse, to fan back to life again the flickering flame in the form lying there before him.

Going into the kitchen from the sick room, he found the child's father, big and brown and redolent of the hayfield, in which he had been at work when he saw Beeline's head above the lane fence. The man's honest, deep-set eyes asked the question before his tongue could find words to express it. "She is better, John," said the doctor. "I think I can safely say that she is now on the road to recovery."

The man paled slightly, and hastily turned his back to the light. The little brown-haired girl held a place in John Ronan's heart which the five big rollicking boys never touched.

"I'm sure I can never thank you enough, doctor, for what you have done for us," he said awkwardly, fingering his hat. "Only for you she would have been lying over there," moving his head in the direction of the weed-grown graveyard half a mile distant.

"I certainly did my best, John," answered the doctor, his heart warming at this unexpected appreciation.

"Indeed you did, sir. I sometimes lie awake at night thinking of what would have happened if you had not come the night we had given her up to die. I tell you there never was a welcomer sound to my ears than the first stroke of Beeline's hoofs on the bridge."

Right well the doctor remembered the night Ronan referred to. A blinding whirl of sleet and rain, mud half way to the hub of the cart wheels, and overhead impenetrable blackness; a night when the only thing to do was to sit still and trust to Beeline to keep the track. And the faithful horse did it, showing his dislike for the task before him only by impatient little tossings of the head. Above the noise of wind and rain no sound marked their progress except an occasional *smick-smack* to prove the adhesiveness of wet clay, or the splash and whirl of water as they cut sharply across a pool in the road. A few beats like drum taps told the doctor when they were crossing the bridge near Ronan's. The next moment Beeline swung in at the open gate and up the lane, while the horse who bore the messenger was still floundering along three good miles in the rear. Ronan met him, holding a lighted lantern on a level with his head. In its feeble light John's face looked white and hard, as though he had braced himself for the worst. Without a word the doctor climbed down from his seat, wet and mud-bespattered from head to foot.

"Go in," said Ronan, pointing to the open door.

"Yes, that certainly was a night to be remembered," said the doctor, gathering up his grip and gloves from the kitchen table. "But it's all in the day's work, and we of the medical profession are not permitted to pick the hour or choose the weather."

Ronan followed him out. "Don't be afraid of coming too often," he said. "I want you to see the little one every day till she's running about again. When settling-up time comes I'll not kick over the bill. I'm not of the sort that pays a doctor grudgingly after he has done all that he could for me and mine."

"A pity there were not more like you, and doctoring would not be the thankless drudgery it so often is. By the way," as though the thought had just occurred to him, "how are you going to vote this time?" In view of the fact that every one acquainted with John Ronan knew that he had never cast any but a Grit vote in his life, this question might be considered rather superfluous.

"I haven't thought much about the elections yet," replied Ronan, nervously.

"We are running a very decent fellow this time—Johnston. You have heard of him," said the doctor, insinuatingly.

"Yes, I've heard of him and his people. They were among the first settlers in Middleworth, I believe."

"They were, and a finer lot of people never lived here. Don't you sometimes think, John, that it would be a fine thing to send such an honest, successful, energetic young fellow to Parliament?"

The doctor, once fairly started, was good for at least half an hour. Mrs. Bevis, listening, sighed resignedly.

Occasionally Ronan spoke a word or two, but what little opposition he offered to the doctor's appeal appeared to be half-hearted. As men do when holding a conversation or argument without the anchorage of a seat, they gradually moved round each other, till by and by the doctor, who had started with his back toward his wife, got into a position facing her, and Ronan presented his broad back for her inspection. This was her opportunity. She frowned darkly and beckoned with increasing energy. The doctor took a few steps toward the cart.

"Doctor," Ronan said, earnestly, "I won't promise to vote for him. I can't make up my mind to—I'll tell you what I will do," desperately. "I'll promise, if I do not vote for Johnston, not to vote this time at all."

Well, thought the doctor, as he turned homeward, that is more than I ever expected to make out of Ronan. He has been doing some thinking on his own account. Four years ago, to have said as much against the Government would have brought him to the surface boiling hot. He'll vote for Johnston yet, unless some fool Tory rouses his temper by twitting him with certain things regarding his party which he knows, but would rather forget.

For the space of ten minutes the doctor drove in silence. His wife eyed him tolerantly, until his self-communing became irritating because of the satisfied smile and gentle rocking motion of the body which accompanied it. Then she said: " I infer from your manner that Hazel is better, and also that you have scored one for Johnston."

" Right in both cases, my dear. In the matter of drawing an inference you are unprecedented."

" So Hazel is really better at last. How relieved, how grateful her mother must feel. What did she say?"

" She said, 'Thank God.' "

" Oh!" Mrs. Bevis gave him a swift glance. " If they live they praise their Maker's name, but if they die the doctor was to blame," she quoted.

" That expresses it exactly so far as Mrs. Ronan is concerned. In fact, I think she goes to the extreme and in her heart thanks Him that the child got better in spite of the doctor."

The doctor did not like Mrs. Ronan. The apathetic, listless way in which she had followed his directions and given his medicine to Hazel had annoyed him excessively. She was a fatalist in her narrow, colorless way. If Hazel was going to die, she would die in spite of everything, so why force her to take medicine which she disliked? She preferred to humor her, and would willingly have crucified herself if by so doing she could have afforded the child a moment's ease.

"You don't mind having them praise their Maker's name when they recover," said Mrs. Bevis. "What you object to is being held solely responsible when they die.'"

"Perhaps that is it."

"Well, let me tell you that Ronan would have been the one readiest to blame you if Hazel had died. He has such confidence in your ability to save that if you had lost her he would have harbored a suspicion that somewhere along the line you had either left undone that which should have been done, or done that which should not have been done."

"That may be, too; nevertheless, I prefer John's way. He has enough faith in doctor's stuff to pull him through any sort of illness or accident short of having a tree fall upon him. In case of losing any one belonging to him I'd rather undertake to restore his confidence in me than fight against his wife's apathy."

There was yet another visit or two to make, and by the time Beeline turned in at the lane gate it was nearing the noon hour. Mrs. Bevis got down from the cart and ran toward the house. "Hurry up lunch," called the doctor after her. Before doing so she took a peep into his office. There was no one there, but in the study beyond a tall form loomed up, and a manly voice began an apology for being there.

Mrs. Bevis gave him a bright, comprehensive look from head to foot, then she held out her hand. "You are Lawrence Johnston, and I am glad to see you."

He smiled, disclosing a line of very white teeth, then met her firm hand clasp with one a trifle firmer.

"Thank you. Of course, you are Mrs. Bevis. Judging from what I had heard of you, I felt sufficiently sure of a welcome to make myself at home in your house during your absence."

CHAPTER V.

So JOHNSTON had at last arrived in Orran. The bag which on the previous day had aroused Prue Stainsby's ire, and which contained nothing more weighty than pyjamas, some toilet articles, and a bundle of political notes, reposed in Bevis's best bedroom, and the owner thereof enjoyed the welcome which awaited him. During lunch he and the doctor discussed the situation and formed a plan of action for the morrow. Johnston gave a summary of the work he had already accomplished in another part of the county, work which proved him to be an indefatigable canvasser. Like his predecessors he was hopeful; in all other respects he was not at all like them.

After lunch, while the doctor was engaged in his office, Mrs. Bevis for a short time had her guest to herself. She had been telling him something of what she knew concerning previous elections in Middleworth; and he had found the recital vastly entertaining.

"I almost feel that I should apologize for my share in the present campaign. It is entirely without excitement and diverting by-play."

"Is it? Why?"

"Well, so far as I am concerned, it is merely a plain, open fight, with the odds—so they tell me—all against me."

He was leaning against the window frame, where the light fell strongly on his face. Mrs. Bevis, sitting well in the shadow, was noting every movement and expression. His eyes, more blue than grey, were warm and kindly in expression, but it needed only a word to cause them to become flint grey in color and to light up in a way which was neither warm nor kindly.

Fight, yes, that was the word. It spoke unmistakably in his eyes, in the curve of his lip and chin, and in the language of the hands—a language which reveals the man, even though the lips and eyes have been taught to lie. It might be that sometimes he would fight with a smile on his face and a velvet glove on his hand, but always the will was there which thrives on opposition.

"But is it worth the price?" Mrs. Bevis gave utterance to her thoughts.

Johnston smiled, and a light which was like a glint of sunshine on a blue wave shone in his eye. "That depends," he said, "upon whether you intend to have it at your own price or at the other fellow's price."

"You intend—"

"I intend to have it at my own price."

Mrs. Bevis laughed a little ripple of anticipation. "I have no presentiment," she said, "that Orran will rise to your challenge, but your campaign here will develop a great many features both novel and exciting."

That night Mrs. Bevis sat alone on the veranda.

Johnston was with the doctor in his study, through the open window of which she could hear voices blending harmoniously as they conned the pages of the voters' list for the Orran division.

"Has the Prime Minister supped yet?" The voice was Prue's, speaking within a few feet of Mrs. Bevis.

"Prue! how you startled me. I was just thinking how mean it was of you not to have come to supper after promising to join us."

"It was, rather; but really the day was too warm to get one's self up either mentally or physically to Johnston's level. Does he fulfil your fond expectations?"

"He does, so entirely that I shall feel too dreadful for words if he is defeated. He is quite different, inside and out, to anything we have had."

"A greater candidate than has been! Describe him, beginning at the outside," commanded Prue, stretching luxuriously in the hammock. She had not told Mrs. Bevis of her encounter of the previous day, and, perhaps, never would. Prue waits on events.

"Well, in the first place, he is a fighter, for which my heart warms toward him. One could never imagine him sitting smug-faced and tongue-tied on a public platform while some party hack extolled his virtues and gave the assembled electors every possible and impossible reason why they should vote for him. Without having heard the rumor which precedes him regarding his oratory, one would know that on any subject of interest to him he would have something to say and no uncertain way of saying it. In appearance he—well, I don't know that one would call him handsome. At first sight he impresses one as being nice looking and good-natured looking. He listens smilingly to what one has to say, and somehow one talks a great deal to him. Then presently, when attention has been drawn elsewhere, one suddenly becomes aware of being subjected to a keen, scrutinizing look."

"I know," said Prue, breathlessly. "At least," she added quickly, "I understand what you mean."

"If you have talked," continued Mrs. Bevis, "as I did, you will hastily turn over in your mind all you have said to him, almost terrified with the conviction that he has gained possession of the key to your inner consciousness. You will be like little Red Riding Hood when she discovered the wolf in her grandmother's bed, only you will say: 'What masterful eyes you have, and what an uncommonly square and inflexible jaw.' For the rest, his hands are sinewy and brown and thoroughly well-cared for, and he is dressed in a rough, well-made tweed suit, decidedly the worse for wear."

"Good," said Prue, softly. "Do continue. I feel as though I could sleep and dream of winged victory."

Taking no notice of this, Mrs. Bevis continued: "You do not know what a relief that old tweed suit is to me. The 'best black' had become so monotonous. His predecessors in the Middleworth political field all wore such, and in Perkins's case its charms were augmented by a silk hat of Krugerian design and dimensions."

"I know," nodded Prue; "the sort of outfit that is always worn with discolored linen, and that makes one feel that Eve's daughters are still being punished for the transgression that made the wearing of clothes a necessity."

"After all," said Mrs. Bevis, "as a candidate for political honors where defeat is almost certain, I believe I prefer Perkins and others of his kind."

"Why?"

"Because when the elections were over and one's feelings had become normal on the subject, one felt that, after all, the candidate himself was the only loser when he failed to obtain a seat in Parliament. If Johnston be defeated I shall feel very differently."

"Clearly you are of the opinion that Johnston's defeat would be a distinct loss to the community at large, as well as to his party."

"That is my opinion."

"And you have known him—how long? Two hours or three? Impetuosity at your age, Mrs. Bevis, is inexcusable."

"I feel as though I had known him for an indefinite period; but wait until you meet him. I am sure you will feel as I do regarding him."

"It may be so; nevertheless I shall reserve my opinion of him until the close of the campaign. Honesty will probably have worn thin by that time, and fearlessness have given place to the deceitful ways which we have learned to associate with men seeking political honors."

While this conversation was taking place Johnston and his host had been joined by a number of the faithful. First came a man from Theal, named Gregory, a prosperous farmer and mill-owner. Gregory had once been offered the nomination for Middleworth, and since had rather fancied himself an authority on political matters. He smoked prodigiously, and scanned Johnston with a look meant to be critical. Johnston covered a little smile, and then, with marked impressment, gave ear to what Gregory had to say, thereby winning him to the opinion that he (Johnston) was a sensible fellow who knew what he was talking about.

Next to arrive was Billy Wingate, a thin, nervous-looking, sandy-complexioned man, who was to the Conservatives in Middleworth as a thorn in the side. From one end of the county to the other he was known as a "temperance crank." There were others who might have borne the same name, both on the Government and on the Opposition side. These, however, experienced no difficulty in sinking their temperance convictions and giving a straight party vote when it came to an election. Not so Billy. He was torturingly conscientious, and with anxious eyes and wrinkled brow insisted upon having an expression of opinion on the temperance question from the Tory nominee. A great deal of this was due to certain of Culverson's followers, who fraternized with Billy when it was straight blue-ribbon business and no question of politics. It was well known that Culverson was a life-long consumer of strong drink; therefore, when an election was drawing near, Culverson's friends kept Billy from pressing the question home to them by raising a doubt as to the Tory candidate's soundness on the all-important matter. It was a plan which never failed in its object, and while Billy fluttered about, convincing himself and every one who cared to listen that he could vote for the man his party had chosen with a clear conscience, his temperance friends on the other side went quietly along and voted for Culverson.

Besides Gregory and Wingate there were two or three others who would play minor parts in the coming contest. They solemnly shook Johnston's hand and made remarks more or less appropriate to the occasion. Then followed another reading of the voters' list. Such sentences as these were audible to the women on the veranda:

"Joseph Jobson, laborer. What about him?"

"Well, he is working for John Ronan now. You know what he is. If Joe votes Tory, and Ronan knows it, there'll be something doing."

The doctor made a note of this. "I'll see Ronan one of these days," he said.

"William Black, laborer. He's all right."

"Oh, is he?" broke in one of the men with a laugh. "Just ask him."

"Anything wrong with Black?" asked Gregory. "He voted Tory last time."

"Yes, I know, but he won't this time; he's mad because he's down as laborer, and he blames some of you fellows for it."

"What else is he?" questioned another. "He hasn't a trade and he doesn't own a foot of land."

"I know, but since he married his employer's daughter he thinks he should figure on the list as William Black, gentleman."

"What a fool!" grunted Gregory, blowing out a great cloud of smoke.

Presently Wingate began to grow restless. In another moment Johnston would be brought to book on the temperance question, and totally unprepared.

"You are busy just now, Wingate, and anxious to get home." The doctor's voice was convincing. "Johnston and I are coming around to see you to-morrow. He wants to have a talk with you."

"All right," answered Billy, falling in at once, and evidently quite pleased withal. "Come in the afternoon; I've got to go to market in the morning."

"We will be there," was the hearty response. Then Billy said "Good-night," in his high treble voice, and in a moment Prue and Mrs. Bevis were watching him fluttering away like a big restless moth.

Shortly after the others followed, all excepting Gregory. He remained for some time, and the three men talked earnestly. Only a word now and then reached the hearing of the women outside of the window, until suddenly a sentence, clear and distinct, cut like a knife across the thread of their murmured conversation. "Hush," said Prue, softly. In the silence which followed the same voice spoke again:

"Gentlemen, my decision is unalterable. There shall not be one dollar spent unlawfully to assist in my election."

"Impossible! you will surely be advised differently." The reply was from Gregory.

"When I accepted the nomination, was it not agreed that I should finance the campaign according to my own judgment?"

"Yes, but—"

"Otherwise I should not have accepted it."

Silence.

Then Gregory spoke again. "Culverson will have a majority of five hundred."

"So be it."

Then Gregory reasoned, coolly at first, then angrily. "Heavens, man!" he exclaimed, "they'll beat you right in my division. I've always controlled it, but it took two hundred dollars to do it every time, and that wasn't buying them, mind you; that was only enough to keep our own from selling to Culverson."

"Well, supposing we let 'our own' sell to Culverson this time. Keeping them has never won an election. It's a matter of twenty-five or thirty years, is it not, since Middleworth sent a Tory to Parliament?"

Gregory nodded grimly.

"Well, don't you think there are better ways of playing the game than merely following Culverson's lead? After every election that has passed of late years you have talked loudly of a protest. Evidence of the most bare-faced bribery on the part of Liberal workers could be had for the asking—and official coercion made no effort to hide itself—and yet there was no protest. The thing fell flat. There was not enough righteous indignation in the whole Tory party to carry a protest against Tom Culverson as far as a court of law. A man can't feel righteously indignant at another man for doing what he himself is guilty of as far as his opportunities will permit. It is paltry child's play to set ourselves up as superior in honesty to the Liberal party of the Province when we *know* otherwise. I hold, gentlemen, that an honest, single-dealing opposition forces an honest government. They *dare* not be otherwise than honest. Personally, I intend to use every honest means in my power to win this election. If I fail, and Culverson by his usual methods succeeds, I shall then be ready to bring him to book for every act of bribery and corruption which money and determination can bring to light against him."

For a long time Gregory smoked in silence. The doctor, busy with pencil and paper, was smiling under his moustache. There was a saying that

Gregory would buy up the very devil if he was for sale.

At last the doctor was glad. He felt like expressing his feelings by a friendly slap on Johnston's shoulder. He was sick, sick to death, of crying 'thief, thief!' at the heels of the party in power, when so many of his own party, while professing purity, were sinning in like manner to the extent of their limitations.

By and by Gregory grunted. "Well, unless Culverson, too, takes a notion to spring something new in the campaign line, there will be no trouble in proving him and his agents guilty of bribery. But what of it? My experience of such cases is that you enter a protest, spend your time and money getting witnesses, then when you have your case nicely arranged, word comes from headquarters that you've been 'sawed off' to save the head of some chap in your own party who has a bigger pull than you have."

Johnston smiled. "Not in my case," he said. "I was in a position to provide against that, and took good care to avail myself of it before taking the nomination."

"You did, eh?" Gregory's face softened into something like a look of approval, and he said, "Well, supposing everything turns out just as you have calculated, you enter a protest against Culverson, and succeed in unseating him, what will it amount to? Simply this, they'll run a better man in his stead and give you a worse beating."

"The Grits haven't a man in Middleworth who can poll as many votes as Culverson," said the doctor.

"It makes no difference who they run," said Johnston, and his jaw squared till the outline of his face looked as hard as granite. "It makes no difference who they run. If he runs straight I shall win, and if he runs crooked I shall beat him before I have finished with him."

Outside the window Mrs. Bevis whispered tensely, "What did I tell you?"

Prue was smiling softly to herself. "I should like to meet him," she said.

"Come," and Mrs. Bevis laid a hand on her arm.

"Oh, not to-night!" and the girl shrank back. "I have already met—the ideals. Good-night."

CHAPTER VI.

A GREAT many people said that Prue Stainsby was spoiled, meaning that she did exactly as she pleased. It was quite true, and what pleased her was usually worthy of all acceptation in the eyes of her father, who, as he watched her grow to womanhood, was reminded every day of the girl he in his youth had won from half a dozen eager suitors. In the matter of housekeeping Prue was fond of describing herself as a failure. She did not mean it really. What she meant was that women generally would consider her so, measured by ordinary accepted rules of right and wrong housekeeping. Measured by her own rule, which she had good reason for thinking was better than theirs, and which she had now been practising for four years, she was a perfect housekeeper, or rather a perfect home-maker.

At twenty she attended school in Garric Sound. She had taken up a special line of study, with a definite object in view, and the future seemed to promise the fulfilment of several cherished hopes which were quite within the bounds of reason. Her sister Janet, who was ten years her senior, was at home, and being one of those women who seem always to live a colorless, uneventful sort of life, Prue had never thought of there being a possibility that she would one day leave them. She was very much surprised, therefore, and frankly aggrieved, when Janet one day told her that she was about to be married. When, in addition, she imparted the information that she would also be the stepmother of five small children, Prue felt that it was quite possible for one's closest relative to possess totally unsuspected and appalling depths of duplicity and abnormally foolish tendencies.

But as soon as her sister was married, Prue faced the situation bravely.

"You must come home now," said Mrs. Peabody, calmly, "or leave father to the tender mercies of a servant."

"I shall come home," was the reply.

"It is your duty to do so." And then Mrs. Peabody went home to live with the five expectant little Peabodys; while Prue, her dream-future shattered, sat down and brought before her mind for deliberate contemplation the changed condition of affairs.

She knew that home was everything to her father. He had put so much of himself into the making of one, that to take him away from it would be as ill-advised as to tear a tree from its rooted bed and set it to grow upon a rock where it has neither shade nor moisture.

When his neighbors went abroad to seek social intercourse, and found time to exchange ideas at various meeting places in the village, the Squire rarely joined them. He spent his spare moments gardening, or pottering about with an eye to making his surroundings more convenient or more beautiful; and in so doing rather set himself apart, paving the way for a time when, lacking such means of enjoyment, he would have neither the inclination nor the opportunity to cultivate other means. So Prue abandoned at once the idea of trying to induce him to leave the farm. To go herself and leave him there alone seemed equally impossible. To live in the old home nest, with no youthful presence to keep his thoughts from dwelling entirely in the past, and no service save hired service, would have been a gray evening indeed to crown a life of honesty and industry and good works.

Clearly duty left but one way, and that way meant a ceaseless round of household duties for which she then felt a positive distaste. To rise each day to appointed tasks, which would have to be performed again that day week, and on all succeeding weeks; to go to Orran, to the post office, and to church; to be meeting people whom she did not care to meet, until by and by the monotony of it would kill ambition, and she would become fixed in a groove even more narrow than the one her sister had occupied. Prue cried out in impatient protest; and, raising her head, found her father looking in at the door with doubtful, yearning eyes.

"Come in, father, dear," she said. "I'm just having it out with myself. I'm not going to pretend that I'm giving up school and everything willingly—I'm just hating it. The only thing that will help me to bear it is for you to say that you want me dreadfully. Don't talk about duty or anything like that." And down went Prue's head again with a little sob.

What the Squire said to her is not to be told here. But when he finished there were tears in both pairs of eyes, and the wonder in Prue's heart was that she had never before realized how deep was her father's affection for her.

So Prue brought her books home and made no complaint, except to a small white pillow, which, for three succeeding nights, was thumped in the darkness or bedewed with tears according to the humor in which she thought of her relinquished "career."

After that she forgot all about the career, planning what she was going to do on the morrow. "For everything is going to be different," she explained to her father. "You may not like it at all at first, but I am sure you will when I have finished."

"What are you going to do?" asked the Squire, his mild, blue eyes expressing some trepidation. Like most people when verging on old age, he dreaded radical changes in the ways of his household.

"It's not so much what I am going to do as what I am going to undo. I'm going to turn the house upside down," she continued, with sparkling eyes. "Firstly, because I love reconstruction, and secondly, because I really cannot stand it as it is."

This sounded rather sweeping. The perturbed look on the Squire's face deepened.

"I hope," he said, "the process of reconstruction will not be an expensive one. The price of outdoor labor seems to be continually advancing, and to make your responsibility lighter I intend to hire a married man who will live in the village and board the extra men we shall require during the summer."

"Oh, that is lovely, daddy," and Prue felt an immense relief. "I once read a story of a woman who was taken prisoner by a tribe of savages in a heathen land. They spared her life, but only on condition that she should provide food for them; and on the day that she failed to do so they were going to devour her instead. The story fascinated me, and I always think of it when I see a tired, flushed woman bending every energy to the preparation of another meal. I think the story was an allegory suggested by the lives of women on farms, most of whom spend their best days struggling desperately to fill a ring of hungry mouths. I think, daddy"—laughingly—"it was wisdom as well as goodness which prompted you to provide for the men elsewhere; otherwise I should myself have been devoured some day when nothing was provided. But, talking of my plans for reconstruction," she continued, "you need not be afraid of the cost. It is less of everything I want, not more. In the first place, I am not going to have a parlor." Prue paused to give this assertion weight.

The Squire looked at her. He would have looked at her in the same way if she had said, "I'm not going to live over five minutes." This was satisfactory.

Prue felt that nothing could surprise him now, so she continued: "No self-respecting farmhouse should countenance what is really a nasty, vulgar imitation of city drawing-rooms. It is nothing short of a crime for a woman to take the best room in the house, put the best she owns in it, as a nucleus round which other best things are to be gathered, call it a parlor, and keep it closed three hundred days in the year. How often in the course of a year do you make use of our parlor, daddy?"

"Not very often," said the Squire. "I don't feel at home in it; I'm always afraid of disarranging things."

"That's just it," said Prue, triumphantly. "Well, when I have reconstructed it, it will be a living-room, and there will be nothing in it which you will be afraid of putting out of place. Do you realize, daddy, that it is the sunniest room in the house, and the room from which the prettiest view is to be had of the garden, the creek, and the hills? And here we sit" ("here" was in the dining-room) "on the north side of the house, looking through windows that command a view of the barns and a few of Orran's chimneys."

"Well, do not tear the house down," said the Squire, with a half-smile on his face.

The smile encouraged Prue to say, "I shan't tear it down, but with your leave I'm going to take out a partition or two. You won't object, will you, daddy?" And she waited breathlessly for an answer; for when the Squire refused a request it was useless to coax or to argue.

"Well, well," he said, "go ahead, only leave me a quiet corner for my desk and slippers, and don't meddle with the garden." Then he put on his hat and went out to see where a helping hand was most needed on the farm.

Prue was glad to have won his consent. She had known him to object to some minor alterations during the time Janet administered the affairs of the household. She then went to take a look at the room which was so soon to be robbed of its aloofness and turned into active service. Prue's nose, somewhat scornfully inclined by nature, took a decided upward tilt as her eyes rested on the eruption of silk drapes, glass vases, bad pictures, hand-painted monstrosities, and velvet cushions which during the passing of time had broken out all over the parlor. "It looks like a jackdaw's nest," was her comment.

The spare bedroom, which opened off the parlor, gave her a shudder. Its bravery of stiffly-starched white things looked like graveclothes, and it emitted an odor suggestive of death and disuse. In future, guests at Squire Stainsby's would sleep upstairs, for the partition between parlor and bedroom was one of those which Prue had decided must come down. Then she would have a fine large room.

with two windows looking westward and one looking south.

Prue lost no time in putting her plans into operation. The next morning a man was at work with hammer and saw, and lime and sawdust followed in his footsteps.

For a time the Squire went about uneasily, like a cat in a strange garret, then peace settled on his spirit. The living-room stood revealed, and noting its simple attractiveness, and the arrangements contained therein for his comfort, he willingly admitted that it was good.

Shortly after this Mrs. Peabody came over for certain articles of hers which had not yet gone to her new home. She had occasion to go up to the attic for a packing-box, and there she came upon the stuff Prue had taken from the parlor. She stared at the accumulation in simple wonderment.

Prue, who had followed her, anticipating something of the sort, enjoyed the look immensely.

"What in the world are the parlor ornaments and pictures doing up here?"

"I—" Prue got no further, for it suddenly came to her how difficult it would be to make Mrs. Peabody look at the matter from her point of view. So, instead of entering into explanations, she said, "I do not like those things. I wouldn't waste time dusting them and keeping them in order."

"Oh! they were good enough for the rest of us. I hope you are not going to make father pay for whatever extravagant notions you may have taken into your head while in town. Mother's picture among the rest!" she continued, in a shocked tone, lifting up a crayon copy of a photograph in an ugly ornate frame.

"A caricature!" said Prue, hotly. "A wooden, staring face, which I hate, because it bears just enough resemblance to her to be an insult."

"Are the parlor walls bare?" inquired Mrs. Peabody, as she recognized one old friend after another, "or have you invested in copies of the old masters?" For Janet this was the limit in sarcasm.

"There are two new pictures in the living-room," said Prue, the laughing light dancing back into her eyes again. "They are not copies, they are by *the* Master, and at present are called 'Autumn Days.'"

Mrs. Peabody looked mystified, but scorned to give expression to her perplexity. "Well," she said, "since father has permitted you to send these to the attic, I shall take them. They are quite good enough for my parlor."

"I would not, Janet, if I were you. Think of the effect on the artistic sense of future generations of Peabodys." And Prue looked thoughtfully down into the big packing-box which contained the banished bric-a-brac. "Don't set up a parlor, Janet, and fill it with little tin gods. Make instead a big playroom for the little Peabodys. Don't herd them in the kitchen when they come in from school and from work. Father and I were at Ronan's the other day. He went on business, and they made us remain to tea. It was ludicrous in the extreme, or would have been if it had not been pathetic, to see John Ronan and his big boys tiptoeing over the sacred surface of the parlor carpet, and sitting gingerly on the edge of fat plush chairs, their faces meanwhile painfully anxious for fear of having made 'a track.' It made me simply furious. I wanted to throw all the trumpery stuff down and trample on it, and the whole time we were in there they looked like criminals. When we came out into the room they eat in, which is a poky little place, but if thrown into the parlor would help to make one large room, they looked immensely relieved. When the boys got into the kitchen they were boys again, and when the youngest reached the yard he turned a handspring. No wonder Ned Ronan threatens to fit up a room for himself in the bank barn. And yet Mrs. Ronan is both kind and conscientious. She tends to their physical wants like the veriest slave, and while she bakes and brews and mends, she also weeps because Billy will play cards down in the village night after night, and Tom goes too frequently to Garric Sound. If on fall and winter evenings she would have a roaring fire in that room, a big table drawn out with a lamp lit in the centre of it, and a row of books and magazines round the lamp, and a row of chairs round the table, I don't believe one boy of the whole five would leave the house unless he was obliged to. I'm going to tell her so some day."

"Shall you? I believe you are capable of it." And Janet, though reluctantly fingering the contents of the box, looked as if she was half-minded to leave the things where they were.

"Quite capable," assented Prue. "And I shall probably add that if she would let Tom's heels and Jack's elbows go unpatched for once in a way, and take a look at the books herself, they would all enjoy the change immensely. If one of those boys should ever become a millionaire, with palaces to burn if he choose, I am quite sure he would never recover sufficiently from the effects of his early training to be able to enter a drawing-room without getting stiff-legged and nervous over it. But come downstairs and see the alterations I have made." And she slipped her hand under Janet's arm and drew her toward the stairway.

Divining a deeper reason for Janet's downcast look than the mere casting off of the old furnishings, she said: "You are thinking that it is a reflection on your taste and judgment for me to go about changing things so soon. I should feel that way myself, and be perfectly hateful about it."

"I daresay," answered Janet, with rather a forced smile. "But you are one of those privileged individuals whose hateful spells are quickly forgiven. If I had proposed tearing down walls and pulling things about as you have been doing, father would have looked over his spectacles at me as if he thought I had gone daft, and would have paid no more attention to me."

"And then you would have promptly drawn into your shell and said no more about it, instead of insisting upon having an answer. You were too reserved with father, Janet. You should have discussed all the little things with him. He likes it."

By this time they were at the door of what was now the living-room, and Prue threw it wide open. Janet gave a little gasp; it was so surprising. Sunshine and space where she had been used to open on a dim light and a room crowded with objects large and small.

After the first start Janet looked about her, taking note of everything. The carpet was the one familiar thing she saw, and she took it as the starting-point, just as Prue had done in remodelling the room. Owing to the Squire's habit of buying a good article when it was left to him to buy, the carpet was not a stumbling-block in the way of success. In color it was mossy green, with a sprinkle of small pale yellow flowers over its surface. With the additional space added to the room a wide margin of floor was left uncovered. This Prue stained a dull green, the shade which grows in patches on decaying timber. Above the oak wainscoting the walls had previously been papered; now they were painted, beginning with the same dull green which bordered the floor, and imperceptibly growing lighter till it melted into the shade on the ceiling, which was cream color merely touched with green.

The hair-cloth furniture had entirely lost its funereal look under covers of heavy chintz, which duplicated the tints in carpet and walls and contained also a dash of crimson. The Squire's heavy flat-topped desk sat in the best light between the windows. His book-case, full of books well and wisely chosen, occupied one end of the room, and on the wall opposite the windows hung a picture, a large canvas, on which glowed a wheat-field, full-eared and golden, rolling wave on wave to the horizon.

The western sky was a blaze of crimson, which deepened to blood-red where the sun had just dropped from view. Along the eastern side, where the sky-line was grey and clear, loomed spectrally beside the standing grain the wide arms of a reaper. There was something stealthy, a suggestion of the inevitable, about those wide arms waiting silently beside the standing grain. One felt a vague regret that for the last time the golden waves would rock to the dry, fitful breeze which blew across the plain. For the last time the stars would look on the swaying heads freighted with food for mankind, and the sun, rising in the east, would gild the field with glory for the last time.

The picture was called " A Stretch of Manitoba Field and Sky." It had been given to Mr. Stainsby by an English artist whom he had met and travelled with through western harvest fields. It was full of life and vigor, and Prue loved it because it was a bit of Canada, glowing, virile, simple, painted as Canada should be.

Mrs. Peabody's eyes rested on the picture as if on something that was new to her. She recognized in it greater meaning and dignity, without knowing the reason, which was simple enough, as Prue explained, " A good light and a wall to itself, with no useless, trifling surroundings."

" Where are the new pictures ? " Janet next inquired.

Prue pointed to the western windows, which stood unshrouded and with raised blinds.

Janet looked and understood. Like the painted scene behind her, the one that lay unrolled before the windows took on new meaning and beauty hitherto unnoticed. She dimly felt that somehow she had missed the best, that her mind and eyes had never been raised high enough to appreciate the beauty that lay between her and the distant hills, on which a miracle was daily wrought, whether it was the first faint flushing of their sides with tender green, or the bold laying on of autumn's colors. She heaved a long sigh as she turned away to join her husband at the door; but she was not sighing for the vanished gauds of the old home.

When Janet was about starting for home she said to Prue: " Come over and help me make a play room for the children. The room is not as large as it might be, but it has a good big bay window, and—"

" I shall just love to help," said Prue, laughing and kissing her. " God bless you and the little Peabodys. Life for them will not be bounded on the north by a cold bedroom, on the south by a hot kitchen, and on the remaining sides by morning and evening chores. Good-bye," and she tucked her sister in beside the glowing Peabody.

CHAPTER VII.

THE day following Johnston's arrival in Orran he spent among the men whose work kept them in the village. Very soon he was known, at least by sight, to every man, woman and child there, and every one who came in contact with him, whether Grit or Tory, was willing to acknowledge that it was impossible to help liking him. As one of them remarked, "He has a way with him," which was nothing more or less than the gift of understanding individuality and the power of adapting himself thereto.

From the beginning Johnston had not thrust himself among the people merely as a politician in search of votes, but rather as one who with the kindliest motives sought to know them and wished to be known in return. "I want to handle them," he said to the doctor. "I want to know what sort of stuff these Canadians are made of."

"Well, now is your opportunity," was the reply. "There are a few new people in the county, but generally speaking they are the descendants of English, Irish and Scotch emigrants who settled here four and five generations ago."

So Johnston went among the people and talked of many things. Opportunities for conversing with the women he never neglected, those busy, practical, clear-sighted women, whose work and influence is the cement which holds together the building of a nation. And they liked him; for a woman is first of all a woman, no matter to what party or sect she leans in matters political or religious. Firmness and honesty of purpose in the opposite sex are qualities which she instinctively recognizes and admires; and when she sees the possessor of these qualities engaged in a struggle in which there are arrayed against him all the devices of a dishonest and unscrupulous opponent, her sympathies are at once enlisted in his behalf. More than one good Liberal household was momentarily startled by hearing the voice which was seldom raised in discussing political matters declare itself for Johnston; and if it were impossible to influence the voting side of the house in his favor, at least those comprising it were made to feel that they were demeaning themselves by refusing to vote for the better man.

Mrs. Bentley, who at the hours of twelve and seven assisted her husband in dispensing the contents of the Orran mail-bag, and in conducting the trade which comes to a thriving general store, remarked to a customer that the Tories had a man this time whom they need not be ashamed of. "Joe's tickled to death with him, and now I'll have the business to attend to while he talks politics. Politics!" she exclaimed, scornfully. "The man actually thinks," meaning her husband, "that he's a Tory because he believes the Tories to be in the right of it. He doesn't know that he's a Tory simply because he was born one, same as he was born web-toed and a Presbyterian."

"Just like Wakeley," declared Mrs. Wakeley, "excepting that Wakeley's a Grit. I daresay your husband has more peace of mind, though, than mine has, for I know Wakeley wanted to vote against the Government last time, but didn't do it because he thinks it a sign of weakness in a man to change his politics."

"As if that would be changing his politics," interjected Mrs. Bentley.

"Yes. I said to him that when he voted against keeping our last Methodist clergyman for another year, no one thought he was going to change his religion because he wanted to get rid of the man who was at the head of our church affairs."

"And what did he say to that?"

"He said they'd think so fast enough if I voted to put a Baptist in his place."

"Oh, that's what breaks his heart," laughed Mrs. Bentley, "the thought of giving the Tories a chance. He'll be in a worse pickle than usual this time," she continued. "Johnston, they say, leans to the temperance side, and Wakeley, being such a temperance worker, will be expected to vote for him."

"Will he, indeed? Well, if they knew Wakeley as well as I do they'd know that when it's a matter of sending a man to Parliament he votes Grit first and prays for the success of the temperance cause afterwards."

At the store door they nodded to another woman who was passing along the street.

"She," said Mrs. Wakeley, indicating the woman, "says Sam isn't going to vote this time."

"Sam starts that report before every election," was the reply. "He discovered long ago that his vote is his most valuable asset, and he takes that way of starting the bidding. I know a man who gave him five dollars for a wooden tub the night before the last election."

Sam is a cooper.

"No!" Mrs. Wakeley's voice expressed the utmost incredulity.

"It's a positive fact."

"Well, he didn't get his vote even at that, for I know that another man gave him eight dollars on the same night for fixing a clothes-wringer."

"No!" Equal incredulity on the part of Mrs. Bentley.

"Dreadful, isn't it?"

"I should say so. If it even did the family any good, but Sam spends it all over the tavern bar the next day. Joe says that's the way the hotel-keeper gets even; he puts up for the Government and then gets it back again from the poor fool who thinks he's doing something clever when he sells his vote."

"Wakeley holds that opinion, too, but he doesn't express it—not while the Government is Grit."

"Well, I hope Johnston will fool them," said Mrs. Bentley. "I'd be proud to be able to say for once that there was no money used on *our* side."

Towards evening Mrs. Bevis met Johnston and her husband just outside the village. They were on their way home. She was going to Stainsby's and invited Johnston to accompany her. He did so.

"Don't lose your heart to Prue," the doctor warned, as he continued in the direction of home.

Squire Stainsby's house was separated from the public road by a wide stretch of greensward, set about with groups of elm and locust trees. The house, low and roomy and built of grey stone, testified to its age by an absence of architectural adornment. On one side of it was the garden, fenced about with panels, each in a different pattern, and built of slender cedar columns still in their shaggy coat of bark. This fence had been a labor of love on the part of Squire Stainsby when he brought his young wife home forty years before. She was devoted to the culture of flowers, a taste fully shared by her husband, and together they planned and made the garden. By and by little children played within its precincts, but Prue, who was younger than the others, played alone.

At the open door the Squire received Mrs. Bevis and Johnston and ushered them into the living-room, and Prue—well, Prue in a muslin gown, her face framed in a cloud of fluffy brown hair, looked so unlike Prue in a short tweed skirt and severely plain hat, that Johnston, with the latter picture in his mind, hesitated before the one presented to him, not sure that they represented the same individual.

Prue greeted him gracefully, but gave no hint of having met him before. Johnston bowed gravely, but a smile threatened for a moment to express all that he did not say, for he knew her when she spoke; that smile and those eyes, he told himself, made it impossible to do otherwise.

When they had conversed a little while, Johnston could not refrain from saying to her: "Have you a sister, Miss Stainsby? I met a young lady the other day whom you exactly resemble."

Prue replied in the affirmative, and said that it was not at all unlikely that he had met her sister.

Mrs. Bevis opened her eyes somewhat. Janet was not at all like Prue.

Presently conversation led into political channels. Johnston was pleased to find in his host a man who was interested in politics without being partisan, who was not wilfully blind to the failings of his party, nor unwilling to credit a stray virtue or an honest inclination to the party in opposition. He said: "You are the first Liberal I have conversed with in Middleworth, Mr. Stainsby, who would acknowledge the present Government guilty of a misdemeanor without pointing as an excuse for it to something similar which had in the past been perpetrated by the Conservatives."

"Mr. Stainsby," said Mrs. Bevis, "is a Liberal in the true sense of the word."

"Yes," said Prue, "if he would only write an open letter to some one denouncing the methods of his party, you Tories would gloat over them and call him a 'gentleman' and a 'Liberal of the old school.' As it is," patting him on the head, "I believe, daddy, that when you are not looking they call you a hide-bound old Grit."

Johnston was attracted by "A Stretch of Manitoba Field and Sky," which still occupied the place of honor opposite the windows. He rose and stood before it.

"A bit of our wheat-growing country," said Mr. Stainsby. "I have ridden for days through just such harvest-fields as are there depicted."

"And I, too," said Johnston, with deep satisfaction in his tone. "I feel an intense national pride in Canada's great possibilities as a wheat-growing country. According to a learned professor, it will shortly be the greatest in the world."

"So it is agreed by those who have given it thought," said the Squire. "We are in a position to-day to send out invitations to the world that would read, 'This way to the world's great wheat fields, the world's great timber lands, and the untold wealth of mineral deposits.'"

"Yes, Canada needs people, good people; she has the best to offer them. Among the nations of the world she lacks supremacy only because her vast places are thinly populated. At the same time we should not forget that nation building, like all other building which is to be of lasting worth, requires time. It is infinitely better to build on a sure foundation with the best material we can bring to our shores—refusing all other—than it is to build quickly, using material which gives neither moral nor physical stamina to a nation, and is frequently a source of weakness and disintegration."

"I quite agree with you," said the Squire, warmly. "I believe it is of the highest importance that Canada should accept as home-makers only agricultural laborers and workmen of some degree of efficiency. Of course, we know that the Dominion is too vast to be quickly populated and promoted if we accept only the best of the Old World that come seeking homes in the New. Nevertheless, we do not want the low order of emigrants, who, as a rule, prefer to herd in cities, where they at once become a menace to honest government by falling into the hands of political bosses. We expect to be a powerful nation; we expect to be a rich nation; but are we going to be a noble and a good nation? If we are, we must seek to develop in our national character true moral greatness. Generally speaking, Canadians do not appreciate the bounties which they have fallen heir to."

"It is dawning on them," was the answer. "Another decade will work wonders in that direction. What Canada has wanted through all her history is a strong Canadian sentiment. Take Japan, for instance; her success to-day is due to her systematic teaching of patriotism in every department of her educational system. Canada has sadly lacked in this respect. Even to-day in our public schools very little is being done to instill pride of country and pride of possession into the minds of our boys and girls. I should like," he continued after a moment's pause, "to see established a chair for the study of Canadian history in our chief university. It would do much toward fostering patriotism."

"Some say there is little of interest in the history of Canada," said Prue.

"You are not one of those?" and Johnston turned a quick, bright glance on her face.

"I—" Prue flushed and paused.

Mrs. Bevis laughed. "Prue," she said, "is a firebrand on the subject of Canadianism. Please do not get her started. At one of our society meetings—a society," she continued, turning to Johnston, "which meets fortnightly for the discussion of intellectual matters, home-making and the moral and physical needs of growing families—some one asked the question, 'What shall we teach our boys?' Our answers were written and handed to the secretary, and Prue's answer was, 'Teach them that Canada is theirs; that their country is the best in the world; that patriotism is next to godliness, and then—teach them to shoot straight.'"

Johnston turned to Prue a look full of interest; then he said, "If every mother in the land were to take that suggestion to heart and act upon it, Canada in twenty years would be invincible."

Presently Mr. Stainsby invited his visitors to a stroll round the garden, a privilege not by any means accorded to every one who visited him. It was a garden difficult to describe, being without definite arrangement, and, therefore, wholly guilt-less of the stiffness which characterizes gardens that are "laid out."

It had been a stony slope falling gradually away from the south-west side of the house. Bit by bit this had been reclaimed and planted until now it was a small paradise in which Flora herself might have dwelt with the feeling that she had come into her own. A moistness and richness pervaded the earth which comes only after years of deep spading and generous fertilizing, and from daffodil day till dahlia time tender flushed faces crowded each other for first place. Flowering creepers held each other by slender green fingers, and climbed gaily up to see what the world was like outside the cedar fence. A giant rose daringly scaled the stone wall of the house to the second story windows, where, catching at Prue's casement, he looked boldly in at her, tempting her to take the great crimson heart of him and wear it above her own.

"I declare," said Mrs. Bevis, who was moving from one cluster of bloom to another, inhaling deep draughts of perfume, "I declare, you have everything that is lovely growing here. I am totally discouraged with my bit of a garden. The doctor, when he thinks I'm not looking, treats Beeline to a roll on the patch of grass we call a lawn. It is a process they seem to enjoy about equally, but the flower borders suffer in consequence."

"The doctor and Beeline are busy these days, I suppose," said Mr. Stainsby, with a meaning smile.

Knowing what he meant, Mrs. Bevis gave him an answering smile, and in schoolboy parlance replied, " They're beginning to get busy."

Meanwhile, Prue and Johnston followed a path which took them under a grape arbor and down a few steps to a lower plane, where a miniature bridge arched a stream that one of Johnston's length of limb could easily have leaped across.

" Dad rather prides himself on this bridge," said Prue. " I believe in his heart he considers it a fine example of modern engineering."

Johnston did not answer. He was looking at something on the handrail of the bridge, which, like the fence, was of undressed cedar. Prue's eyes fell upon the spot, and her color instantly rose. What she saw was two hearts roughly carved, entwining the words, " Prue and Dick." How horribly silly it looked! She had helped Dick carve it in a spirit of fun one day, and then had entirely forgotten the circumstance.

" Prue and Dick," said Johnston, reflectively. " My friend Dick Dollinger?"

" The very same," answered Prue, with exaggerated carelessness.

" Prue stands for Prudence, I infer."

" Imprudence, Mrs. Bevis says."

" What does Dick say?"

" About what?"

" Prudence, of course."

" Oh, he says, as a name, it reminds him of the days when his ancestors wore stays and galluses and the men settled their little differences with weapons."

"Good for Dick!" laughed Johnston. "Beyond a doubt it was the blood of those same ancestors that rose in his cheek when I asked him to tell me the name of the most beautiful girl in the county. I had just seen her and naturally wanted to know who she was."

"Yes," said Prue, resolutely refusing to lift up her eyes.

"He unhesitatingly said, 'Prudence Stainsby,' and now"—slowly—"I shall have to tell him it was not Prudence, but her sister, that I referred to."

A few moments later, on coming back for something which Mrs. Bevis had forgotten, Johnston saw a young lady vigorously using a knife on the handrail of the bridge.

"I'd make Dick do that if I were you."

The words were very softly spoken, nevertheless the young lady started guiltily. Without looking around she answered as softly: "It will please him that I should do it. I'm only cutting the hearts a little deeper. You know they were rather indistinct."

"Oh, I thought you were—"

"What?" There was undoubted defiance in the tone.

"Never mind, will you give your sister a message from me?"

"With the greatest of pleasure."

"Tell her I am glad it was not her heart I found entwined with Dick's."

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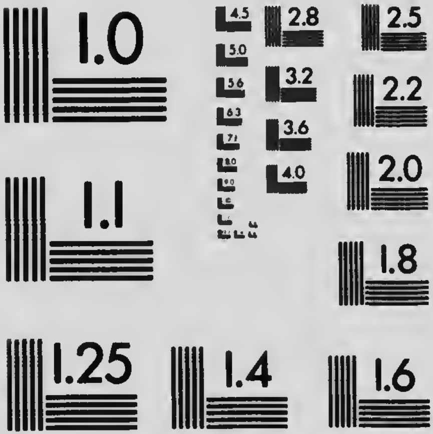
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CHAPTER VIII.

THE next day being Saturday, Johnston, as he had done on that day since the beginning of his campaign, left early in the morning for the city in which his interests were centred.

"Gone to see his lady-love, perhaps," said Dick, with a cheerful fellow-feeling.

Dick was calling upon Prue while his horse was being shod in the village.

"He has a home to go to, I suppose," answered Prue.

"Not a bit of it. His nearest approach to one is what he finds inside the walls of a boarding-house."

"Well, I daresay even there he can shake the dust of Middleworth off his feet and change his clothes."

"He will certainly change his clothes," said Dick, with a broad smile. "I told him to deal gently with that old tweed suit of his or it would never stand the strain of another campaign."

"What did he reply?"

"That, like himself, it would not have to."

"He expects to be elected, then?"

"Oh, I suppose so. He is one of those who go in to win and then never think of losing."

"I often wonder why you never mentioned having known him years ago."

"You have heard me speak of Larry Lennox," answered Dick.

"Haven't I? Was there ever an occasion upon which you failed to speak of him? But what has that to do with Johnston?"

"A great deal, when you consider that they are one and the same individual."

Prue looked puzzled.

"When and where did he become Johnston? Explain, Dick, and don't beat about the bush. You know nothing annoys me more."

Dick had his own way of relating a story, a way which required time. Moreover, he enjoyed talking to Prue better than anything else in the world, unless it was having Prue talk to him. So he began leisurely:

"I first knew Johnston when he lived north of Garric Sound. We were little chaps then, going to the public school. I was ten years old, and he, perhaps, two or three years my senior. His father and mother were dead, and he lived with an aunt whose name was Lennox. This old lady made Larry—Lawrence Lennox Johnston is his name—drop his surname and call himself Lawrence Lennox. She was immensely proud of the name, and of her illustrious parent, Larry's grandfather, who had been the first judge of the County of Middleworth and a fighting man in the War of 1812. Mrs. Lennox was continually urging upon Larry the necessity of living up to the old gentleman's record, and we who were permitted to annex ourselves to her nephew after school hours were divided in our sentiments between shame and relief, because of not having had a grandfather worth mentioning.

"After that Larry and I were together again for a term or two at the Garric Sound Collegiate. Then we—that is, my people—came to Orran, and Johnston began business on a pretty low rung of the ladder, too, in the manufacturing concern of which he now occupies the head office. It is surprising, considering the distance that separates us, how often our ways have crossed during the past ten years. Meanwhile his ascendancy in the business world has been sure and rapid; so much so, in fact, that he threatens to become a shining and tiresome example to future generations. I often wonder how much of his success is due to luck, and how much to the far-reaching influence of the grandfather."

"Did he take you into his confidence regarding his fiancée?" asked Prue.

"No, I do not know that he has one; in fact, I think it unlikely. He never seemed to have time to bother with girls."

"Proving how widely he differs from his schoolmate, eh, Dick?"

"A difference in which I have the advantage," asserted Dick. "Besides, he had not met you."

Prue paid no attention to this compliment. She was sitting on the other side of the wide doorstep, her chin in her hand and elbow on knee. With lover-like fondness Dick took a long, admiring look at the prettily rounded cheek, against which rested a glimpse of dark eyelashes, upward curled like the rings of hair about her ear, and at the round white throat.

Presently Dick's thoughts found words.

" Prudence, when are you going to marry me?"

" Why this unseemly haste, Richard? To be considered orthodox one must first become engaged."

" How can I when you will not consent? A whole year has passed which properly belonged to the engaged period. Now I've decided to skip the preliminaries and take up the question of setting the wedding day."

Prue looked at him for a moment. She was well aware that the light tone in which he spoke covered as true a love as man ever offered to woman. Gravely she said, " I wish, Dick, you would give up the idea of marrying me. I wish I could convince you of my unfitness."

" Unfitness!" repeated Dick, looking at her with big candid eyes. " Why do you use that word? I'm sure you do not mean it. In your heart, Prue, you consider yourself a fit mate for the best man living; and so do I."

" Well, perhaps I do," admitted Prue, smiling. " But unhappily there are others that think differently. You do not realize what an indifferent housekeeper I am." In saying this Prue thought she was putting what she called her unfitness before him in a way which he could understand, and she hated herself for the thought. "Father knows, because a great many ladies, disinterested, of course, have told him so. Just contrast everything—" with a dramatic gesture, and a backward look which included the living-room, not very tidy, but comfortable as usual—"with your mother's surroundings and notice the difference. I do not insist upon having certain things put in certain places, and have no set time for doing things. In short, I positively refuse to follow an established routine of housekeeping which soon leaves one with no time for rest or recreation, and becomes as monotonous as a treadmill."

"Thank heaven!" said Dick, fervently.

In Prue's mind there clearly arose a picture of the room in which Mrs. Dollinger's big work-basket sat the while Mr. Dollinger read the evening paper. It was without spot or blemish, and so evenly balanced that to subtract a chair from one side of it to add to another, or to add to or take from the books standing at "attention," on top of the desk, would have daunted a braver spirit than even Prue's. The walls were adorned with diplomas awarded Mr. Dollinger's cattle at different expositions. Photographs of these horned celebrities mingled familiarly with those of the family. Crayon sketches of Mr. and Mrs. Dollinger (given by an enterprising firm in Garric Sound with so many dollars' worth of goods) were flanked by a

Holstein mother and daughter; while Dick and a young Jersey bull nicely balanced the mantel shelf.

This, of course, was not the drawing-room. There Mrs. Dollinger reigned supreme, surrounded by an up-to-date collection of art drapes, sofa pillows and pyrography. Mrs. Dollinger, as Prue expressed it, "went in for things." She had been a school-teacher before her marriage, and, as it is with the generality of school-teachers, the dogmatic side of her character had been unduly developed. She was apt even yet to deliver her opinions marked —Infallible. Only when in opposition to her husband did she come anywhere near a true estimate of herself, for Mr. Dollinger was pompous, with inflated cheeks and small twinkling eyes, and a smile which was at once capable of expressing great contempt for, and easy tolerance of, feminine independence of thought.

She was now president of various societies and secretary or treasurer of others. She read papers at women's meetings in which she presented to her audience truths which had been perfectly obvious to them all their lives. However, as some one commented, after listening to one of those papers, "If they do no particular good, they likewise do no harm," and no doubt the act of composing and reading them left Mrs. Dollinger with a generous warmth at her heart, generated by the feeling that she was assisting in educating and broadening her sex.

When Mrs. Dollinger delivered an address on scientific cooking it was really worth listening to. She had mastered the meaning of a perfect diet, and so knew that a most appetizing meal may be anything but a well-proportioned one. She knew all about carbohydrates, proteids and calorics, and never set before her family an undue amount of heat or fat-producing food. That she was able to keep abreast of what she considered her work proved her to possess an iron constitution.

Dick thought his mother the embodiment of wisdom, and was secretly a little bit afraid of her. It troubled him that she did not like Prue, who, he had a suspicion, covertly laughed at his mother's assumption of superiority. Manlike, and foolishly, he thought that a liking each for the other would grow with a longer acquaintance.

Between themselves Mr. and Mrs. Dollinger regarded their son as a possible, nay, a probable, successor to Culverson. That they were ambitious for him was patent to every one; and not without reason. Dick was already deep in municipal affairs, and if anything a trifle too anxious to be on his feet when there was a chance of impromptu speechmaking.

"Are you convinced, Dick?" Prue asked after this brief mental survey of her proposed mother-in-law's talents and surroundings. "Are you convinced that I am lacking in many of the essentials?"

"I am convinced of only thing, dear, and that is that you are the only—"

"Oh, that will do," and Prue laid a firm hand on

Dick's lips, thereby interrupting what promised to be a very fervent burst of feeling on his part. To bring him back to the subject upon which they began, she said, "How do you reconcile your refusal to vote for Johnston with your avowed friendship and regard for him?"

"I did not refuse to vote for him; fact is, he has never asked me for my vote."

"Nor will he," said Prue.

"Why? Do you think he takes it for granted?"

"Not at all, but he quite understands how necessary it is for one of your political aspirations not to offend 'our party.'"

"Our party" was said in perfect imitation of Mr. Dollinger's somewhat pompous manner. Dick colored.

"Oh, hang it, Prue, a man can't go back on his party simply because he happens to have a friend running in opposition. For my part, I can't understand why such a decent fellow chooses to belong to the Tory ranks."

"Dr. Bevis would tell you it is because a decent fellow would find himself painfully conspicuous in the Grit ranks."

"Don't quote Dr. Bevis to me," said Dick. "He is a regular—" Words for the moment failed him. "With that horse of his, the one he calls Beeline, he can cover more ground and see more people the night before an election than any four men in the township combined."

"What if I should ask you as a special favor to me to vote for Johnston?"

"I would say you did not mean it."

"But I do mean it."

Dick looked at her as though waiting for the joke.

"I do mean it," she repeated. "In fact, I have set my heart upon it."

"Ask your father to vote for him," smiled Dick.

"Do not be too sure that he will not."

"Has he made up his mind to do so?"

"Perhaps not quite, but I have made up my mind, which amounts to the same thing."

Dick laughed and said no more.

Prue saw that her request seemed so impossible to him that he did not even consider it. One of those small tempests of rage which sometimes rose in Prue's heart suddenly took possession of her. For a moment she indulged it. The next she smiled sweetly at Dick, and all unconsciously he was face to face with the fight of his life.

"And just a little while ago I was ready to believe that you really love me. Ned Ronan told me that if I wished to test the depths of your affection, all that was necessary was to ask a favor of you."

Dick's face darkened. Ned was the oldest member of the Ronan family; he was studying medicine, and spent the greater part of his vacation with Dr. Bevis.

"What did he mean?" Dick asked.

"He meant that you did not think well enough of me to grant me a favor which would interfere in the slightest degree with your own pleasure or inclination. That is what he meant."

"All of which you know to be quite untrue."

"I thought I knew it to be untrue *then.*"

"You think otherwise now?"

Prue shrugged her shoulders expressively.

"What is all this about, Prue? I can't think it is because I said I was not going to vote for Johnston."

"But it is."

Dick regarded her closely. "Does your request spring from a desire to benefit Johnston, or is it merely to see how far I will consent to be bullied?"

"Both, to be perfectly candid with you. But why state it so bluntly? You are overlooking all the fine points of the case."

"And if I still refuse, what then?"

"What then? Why, I shall have failed to benefit Johnston, and I shall also have proved that Ned was correct in his estimate of you."

Dick got to his feet; a repetition of his rival's opinion of him was planting the sting once too often. "We will leave Ronan out of the question, if you please. What he says or thinks—if he does think—is of the utmost indifference to me."

Prue, with a hurt look on her face, remained silent. Such was the course she pursued when Dick made an unkind remark. She found it much more subduing than to retort in kind. Any one can have the last word, but it is not given to every one to know when not to have it.

Presently Dick, who was walking back and forth, stopped before her. "Don't look like that," he said. "You make me feel as though I had behaved like a brute. I can't vote for Johnston, Prue. If father or I were to vote for the Tory nominee, people would think we were crazy. It would be as impossible as it would be for Dr. Bevis to become a Grit. Why, I can remember, when I was a boy, hearing father say that if he ever caught a son of his voting for a Tory government he would shoot him. I do not think he would, you know; I am telling it merely to show you how strongly he feels on the subject."

Prue's lip curled contemptuously.

"Men of such narrow, mulish obstinacy as you describe are a guarantee of continued power to the government for which they vote, even if it be the most unworthy that ever existed. Does it ever strike you that the men who profit by your slavish following value it simply for what it gives to them as individuals? My father says if the intelligent ratepayer would be more honorably served he must prove to the man in Parliament that he is sending him there, not following him."

"All rot, Prue," said Dick, loftily. "You get a lot of such nonsense talked into you at Bevis's."

"Thank you. I rather thought myself intelligent enough to have a few ideas and opinions of my own. I consider Dr. Bevis quite as one-sided in politics as your father; but I must say I expected better things of you, Dick. I have heard you deplore the custom of bribery and speak with such contempt of the man who gives or accepts a bribe that I thought you would give a helping hand to the first man who offered to contest Middleworth without such unlawful aid, no matter by what name he called himself politically."

"You [illegible], but I have yet to know that Johnston is that man."

"He is, Dick. I can bear witness that he has positively forbidden bribery on his behalf in the coming election."

Dick laughed long and heartily.

"They've got you going, Prue," he said. "But Dr. Bevis cannot catch the Grits napping with that very improbable story. Johnston's all right, as honest as the day, but you may take my word for it, he is not going to leave one stone unturned which would help him to win this election."

Prue rose, her tall young figure drawn up very straight in the doorway. She had spoken from the heart on a subject which interested her deeply, only to be vulgarly told that she was merely a communicating agent for an improbable story. Her eyes, very cold and angry, were raised to Dick's.

"When you have the courtesy to treat my opinions with respect, and are prepared to believe in the honesty of your friend's avowed intentions, you may come here again—not before."

The next moment Dick was left alone, and, troubled and crestfallen, he turned toward the village.

In his office Dr. Bevis, after a hard day's work, was busy making out accounts. His wife ran a bundle of them through her finger.

"Worth about twenty-five cents," was her summary, as she tossed them down on the desk again. They were addressed to certain of the villagers who were notoriously "poor pay."

"I know," said the doctor. "They are valuable merely as persuaders, or, if you word them so, firm reminders of obligations not yet discharged. As such I am using them."

"I see. What would Johnston say to it?"

"Oh, he couldn't object; this is a little business matter in which he is not concerned."

"Nevertheless—"

"Yes, yes, I quite agree with you, and I intend to keep within the law; but apart from *money* I am going to use all the leverage I possess. It may be necessary in order to keep within hailing distance of our former majority in Orran."

. . . .

In the city Johnston was at that moment indulging in a short period of rest and relaxation. Before him was a heap of finished correspondence, also several sheets of paper, upon which was the outline of a speech, the skeleton, which would later on be rounded out and delivered, clothed in the best oratory of which he was capable, to the people in the vicinity of Orran. To-night he was thinking a good deal of the past years of his life, years in which strength came with the struggle, and patient, hard endeavor was at last crowned with success. It was all clear to him up to the point where Margaret Ainslee entered his life; beyond that he found it difficult to control his thoughts because of another face lately seen, a face with firmly rounded cheek and chin and luminous brown eyes that could flash sudden fire or soften to approval. It came between him and his thoughts of the woman whose face was always calm and confident in the proud surety of beauty and the charm which culture gives.

He had not seen Margaret Ainslie since beginning his campaign in Middleworth. For years she had seemed to him the most desirable, perhaps because of being the most unattainable, of his female acquaintances. The coming of wealth to himself had brought opportunities for social intercourse, which in turn gave him her friendship. It was a friendship which ripened slowly. In him was the pride which forbids a man to become a suitor until he has shown the world that he is the equal, if not the superior, of the woman whose hand he seeks. Margaret Ainslie understood this and would not have had it otherwise. She held herself a prize worth struggling for. He had once heard her say that the woman who marries beneath her socially not only sins against her class instincts, but against her nature. He agreed with her; that she did not consider him beneath her did not strike him at the time. He regarded her as belonging to a world which he had yet to conquer. On the eve of his departure for the scene of his political battles she had spoken to him of the time when they should meet again. He had answered: " When I have succeeded in winning Middleworth, I shall come to you. I shall then have the courage to plead for a greater prize, the giving of which lies entirely in your hands."

Margaret's cheeks had faintly colored, and she bent her stately head beneath his gaze. " If you win Middleworth you may take it as a good augury. ' Nothing succeeds like success,' to quote a trite saying." And she had softly added, giving him her hand at parting, " I shall be hoping to see your name among the victors."

CHAPTER IX.

MONDAY found Johnston again in Orran. He had previously arranged to be in a more eastern part of the county on that day, but when, about noon, the train slowed up for a moment at the little red station on which "Orran" was painted in huge black letters, he looked forth longingly. The village, built comfortably with its back to the foot of the hill, was looking its best. A passing shower had cleared the air and brought out vividly, and yet softly, the myriad shades of green in surrounding field and orchard. Johnston took a deep breath as a tantalizing breeze laden with delicate odors swept over and beyond him. In an instant he had made a sudden resolve. As the train slowly gathered speed he swung himself down to the platform, determined to throw care to the winds and give himself for the remainder of the day to whatever enjoyment chance might throw in his way.

There were other little red stations along his route, and other little villages just as charmingly embowered in green through which he passed that morning, but for some reason none of these had even claimed his attention, much less appealed to his imagination. He walked in on Dr. Bevis while the latter was engaged in compounding some evil-smelling thing in a bottle, and *whistling*. At sight of Johnston the doctor suddenly left off whistling and exclaimed, "Hello, old man! What's up?"

"Nothing, if one may so call an overpowering desire to loaf for a few hours." Johnston pushed his hat well back on his head, selected the most comfortable chair, and deliberately sat down.

The doctor looked puzzled. "You're not sick, are you?"

"Sick! I never felt better in my life."

"Then why—" The doctor paused. Sickness would have been an easy matter to cope with, but this wilful and openly expressed desire on the part of a candidate to waste precious hours loafing when within a short time of the election filled him with dismay.

"Anything new in matters political and otherwise?" inquired Johnston, cheerfully.

"Yes, Billy Wingate was just in. He says the old schoolhouse in his division has been rented by an implement agent and filled up with implements."

"Yes?"

"It was the only building available for your meeting. Culverson held his there three nights ago."

"Clever Culverson! Who owns the building?"

"Some private individual. Of course, he had a perfect right to rent it, but I hate to have them get ahead of us in that way." And the doctor whistled a continuation of the defiant ear-splitting tootle he had been indulging in when Johnston entered.

Hastily the latter asked, "Is there no other building we could get? There are some fine barns out there. Why not rig up one of those for the occasion? Such surroundings might inspire one to say the very words which would most surely appeal to the sturdy husbandmen who dwell thereabout. One would need to be careful, though, not to overdo it. I once heard of a city chap who tried that little touch on a gathering of farmers once too often. 'I am a farmer myself,' he said. 'I was born in the country. In fact, I was raised, so to speak, between two rows of corn.' 'A punkin, by gosh!' was the loud and hearty exclamation of one of his hearers." Clearly Johnston was in a gay and frivolous mood.

The doctor laughed, but constrainedly. He dimly felt it to be his duty not to encourage frivolity; at least, not at present. "Let us go to lunch," he said, leading the way across the hall to a door that opened into the dining-room. It seems to me that Mrs. Bevis announced lunch before you came. By the way, old man," with his hand on the dining-room door, "I'm thinking you will have pot-luck this time. There is a church function on foot, and Mrs. Bevis and Prue Stainsby have arranged to go to the woods this afternoon for ferns and other decorative material for the schoolroom. They are making a sort of picnic of it, and

I've a dim recollection of hearing that we were to lunch on the fragments, the choice portions having been packed for the picnic."

"Is it indeed so? The gods are good to me," said Johnston.

"Well, if you look at it in that light I have nothing more to say," replied the doctor, totally misunderstanding him. "For my part, I should prefer the contents of the lunch basket now. 'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.'"

It was while this brief colloquy at the door was in progress that Mrs. Bevis became aware of Johnston's presence. Her first thought was for her table. Owing to a resolution taken when she first began housekeeping, and since strictly adhered to, the dining-table was fresh and neat. A pyramid of roses (Prue's gift) adorned the centre. On one side was a plate of cheese sandwiches, on the other some brown bread and butter. At one end was a plate containing pieces of cold fowl, and at the other glasses and a large jug of milk. Mrs. Bevis gave the cloth a pat here and a twitch there, covered an infinitesimal spot with the salt holder, and removed the cold fowl, which did look rather scrappy, to the side table, where a napkin safely hid it from view. When Johnston entered he was received by his hostess as though it was the delight of her life to have gentlemen unexpectedly to luncheon.

The doctor cast a rueful look at the table; his worst fears were realized. "We might have some Force, or a bottle of Beef, Iron and Wine," he said.

"Don't let him frighten you, Mr. Johnston," said Mrs. Bevis. "I have something better waiting in the kitchen," breathing meanwhile a silent prayer that the kitchen fire was yet alight. She drew Johnston's attention to Prue's roses, one of which, a dark crimson one, he carefully pinned on his coat. While he was thus engaged Mrs. Bevis slipped away to the kitchen. The fire was burning. She threw on some light wood, put a frying-pan on one hole of the stove and the kettle on another, all with marvellous speed and in silence. Then she caught up some eggs, an egg-beater and a bowl, and sped to the woodshed, from whence the sound of egg-beating would not penetrate to the dining-room. "The help" on occasions of this kind stood aside, for rear of being caught up in the whirlwind of Mrs. Bevis's energetic movements.

In three minutes an omelette was cooking on the stove; in ten minutes the omelette, a pitcher of cocoa and a plate of ham, pink and juicy, were being carried on a tray to the dining-room, and Mrs. Bevis was trying to look as though she had merely sauntered out and conjured the edibles out of space

"I believe you robbed the lunch basket after all," said the doctor, his face brightening perceptibly.

"As if people carried omelette and other hot things in lunch baskets," replied Mrs. Bevis, quite ignoring the ham, which had been intended for the picnic.

Finding the impossible task of lunching on next to nothing removed, the doctor gradually fell in with Johnston's humor, and a half-hour passed very enjoyably. At the end of that time a shrill whistle sounded at the rear of the house.

"Prue!" exclaimed Mrs. Bevis, rising to go to her. "She has the dogs with her. She always carries that whistle when she takes those canine imps for an airing."

It was Prue, standing in the sunshine outside the open kitchen door. One of the dogs, a fox-terrier with a huge scarlet bow on his neck, snuffed loudly at imaginary rat-holes under the kitchen steps; and the other, a Bedlington, swept across the lawn to the back premises, where he now stood looking through a high picket fence at a flock of imprisoned hens and chickens, and grinning a grin of exceeding wickedness.

At sight of Mrs. Bevis Prue extended a bulky parcel to her. "Do take this," she said. "The weight of it, together with the excitement of getting the dogs through the village, has reduced me to the verge of nervous prostration."

Mrs. Bevis undid the parcel. "Angel cake! Blessings on your curly head, Prue. You are the dearest thing that ever happened. And what's this in the jar? Chicken salad! This will take the place of the vanished ham. Prue, you have saved the day."

"Have I?" answered Prue, gazing round her and up at the sky with an angelic smile. "How nice! I hadn't even realized that there was a danger of its being blotted out. Has anything happened?" she next inquired. "You look as though some one or something had put you on your mettle."

"Yes," was the answer. "You could never guess who is here and is going to honor us with his company this afternoon."

"Not the Prime Minister surely?" This in a deeply awed tone of voice.

"Yes; hush! here he comes."

"May I come into the kitchen, Mrs. Bevis?" asked Johnston, from the other side of the door.

"Certainly you may."

"Yes, come in," supplemented Prue, hospitably. "Mrs. Bevis considers that she is conferring a privilege and a pleasure on those whom she allows to enter her kitchen."

Johnston advanced toward Prue, and so rapt was he in the picture before him that he forgot to say "Good morning." She stood three steps below him, a softly rounded pink-and-white figure against a background of shimmering gold and green. A big white sunshade, faced with soft shirrings of mull, made a charming frame for her face, round which the hair clung in tiny waves and rings. The neck of her pink cotton frock was turned back from the throat, and a big lace kerchief was folded daintily across her bosom. She called the kerchief her "Martha Washington," and wore it because it was vastly becoming. Her eyes, uplifted to Johnston's, had the half-wistful, half-mysterious expression which was the chief charm of her face. It was this expression, together with a childish, roguish smile and bewitching dimples, that made Prue's face so alluring.

As Mrs. Bevis turned from repacking the hamper she caught a look on the girl's face which caused a sudden tightening at her heart. She glanced quickly at Johnston, unconsciously hoping to see the same light in his eyes that shone in Prue's The next moment all became feverishly anxious to break the silence.

"Why not enter this charming domain yourself, Miss Stainsby? We can be mutually benefited by sharing its pleasures."

"Oh, I am watching the dogs," quickly answered Prue.

"Teddy" (he of the scarlet bow) "is undermining the driving-shed, and Bitters is laying siege to the poultry yard."

"I am going to get my hat now," declared Mrs. Bevis. "It is a mile to the woods, and I do not intend to hurry in this heat."

When she had gone Johnston turned again to Prue. "It is a long time since I spent an hour idling in the woods—not since I was a small boy. There was a spot in a woods that I used to know, a circular hollow, not much larger than this room, round which a grassy knoll ran, surmounted by beech trees. I took all my troubles there and a good many of my pleasures."

"I know of just such a hollow," said Prue, looking shyly up at him. "It also has the advantage of being guarded by a sphinx; you can see her quite clearly on moonlight nights. Father first showed her to me when I was quite a little girl, and the place has held a fascination for me ever since."

"Will you show her to me sometime?" Johnston asked this in the tone of one requesting a favor.

"Oh, it is not possible except when the moon is full; for the sphinx is only a shadow, and refuses to appear at any other time."

Johnston thought a moment. "The moon will be full next week," he said.

Here Mrs. Bevis returned, stoutly gloved and booted. "We had better start," she said. "We shall carry nothing but the small spade. Ferns and plants of that variety must be taken up root and branch, else they will look like mere rags before to-morrow. The doctor will have a horse out by and by, and follow us with the lunch basket; and I think"—looking round for a suitable receptacle—"the large clothes-basket will be the very best thing in which to carry the ferns."

It and the lunch-basket were placed in readiness for the doctor.

"Is the doctor engaged at present, Mrs. Bevis?" asked Johnston.

"He is. As I passed the office door just now I heard him trying to convince an old lady that the severe pain she felt in her left side was not in her liver."

"Let us hope for many old ladies with various ailments. I want the doctor's attention to be fully occupied until it is time for him to join us."

Mrs. Bevis smiled. "Even that will not prevent Charles from mentally calculating the number of voters you might have seen and influenced this afternoon."

Prue blew another shrill blast on the tiny silver whistle she carried at her belt, in answer to which Bitters tore himself reluctantly from contemplation of the poultry. Teddy ranged up alongside for a moment, and then galloped on ahead, his abbreviated tail standing as erect as a flagstaff.

Johnston shouldered the spade, and the little cavalcade filed out into the road. It was an hour when country roads are nearly deserted. They met only one man. He, of course, had something to say about Johnston going away "to bury himself in the bush." As a joke it was somewhat involved and lacked point, but Johnston won the man's profound regard by pretending to find in it something uncommonly witty.

The woods, which belonged to Squire Stainsby, was worthy of being called a woods; not a thin, wind-stricken strip of scrub through which glimpses of surrounding fields could be caught at every turn, but a generous twenty-five-acre lot, thickly wooded and abounding in unexpected ridges and mossy dells, and cut through by a narrow ravine, at the bottom of which the little creek that watered the Squire's garden threaded its way.

Said Mrs. Bevis, "If Squire Stainsby is not rewarded in this world for sparing the lives of these grand old trees, I am sure he will be in the world to come."

"The pleasure of owning them and walking beneath them is sufficient reward for not allowing them to be turned into lumber," answered Prue. "Daddy would not part with his bit of ' rest for twenty times the amount it would bring him in the market."

In the ravine ferns and wild wisteria grew so plentifully that a short time sufficed to bring together all that they required.

"It seems to me," said Johnston, "that Squire Stainsby has more than one possession that must give rise to envious feelings in the hearts of his fellow-men."

"He has," was Mrs. Bevis's reply. "One in particular causes the young male members of the community to break the—which commandment is it that says, 'Thou shalt not covet anything that is thy neighbor's'?"

"The tenth," answered Prue, promptly.

"Thank you, Prue. You must have made a study of that particular commandment, having so often been the source of its violation," and Mrs. Bevis smiled teasingly at the girl. "There is one blessing which the Squire lacks," she continued, "and that is a son. I like to see a fine old place like this continue in the name by passing from father to son."

"Perhaps Squire Stainsby has learned to regard Dick in the light of a son," said Johnston.

Mrs. Bevis had been slowly moving down the ravine and was now out of the conversation. Prue arched her brows. " I have never heard father say that he contemplated adopting Dick."

Johnston was looking at her with eyes that expressed the tender admiration one bestows upon a little child or a beautiful flower that one has come on unexpectedly. Prue tried to meet his gaze with her natural directness, but was not successful; her eyelids fluttered down and the wild-rose tint in her cheeks deepened to crimson and then faded to pearly white. She felt helpless and nervous, and longed for the presence of Mrs. Bevis.

It is safe to say that the doctor, whom she suddenly espied coming through the trees, never before received such a welcome from Prue. The comical appearance he presented with the clothes-basket inverted and resting on his head and shoulders, the lunch-basket in one hand and a small tea-kettle in the other, was sufficient excuse for a good deal of laughter. This relieved her feelings and restored her to her usual gaiety and confidence.

" Where is Mrs. Bevis?" asked the doctor.

" The usual question," scoffed Prue. " How many times have you asked it during the past ten years?"

Meanwhile Mrs. Bevis had comfortably seated herself upon a log at no great distance. " It is very mellow and mossy," she explained, " and makes a lovely soft cushion. If it should collapse you may call Bitters and Teddy to dig me out. By the way, where are the dogs?" In response to a great deal of whistling they finally came, both wet and mud-bespattered and with lolling tongues, but both intensely happy. Chattering squirrels and excited birds flying from tree to tree testified loudly to the sort of behaviour the dogs had been indulging in, and the " furred and furtive folk " peered with watchful eyes from secret hiding-places at their mad racing to and fro. Teddy grinned, but Bitters preserved the impassive countenance of the true aristocrat.

" Which is the 'soulful' one?" inquired Johnston, looking at them as they lay panting, one on either side of Prue.

Prue gave him a swift glance and a smile. " Neither. Old Collie is the soulful one; he is also deaf and very blind, poor old chap."

" Which accounts for his soulfulness," was the response. " Like a 'mere human,' he attained to that quality when old age and infirmities claimed him."

" How well you remember one's foolish speeches," said Prue, a little vexedly.

" I remember every word you have ever spoken to me, whether foolish or wise," was the answer.

Prue hastily turned again to the dogs. " This," she said, laying her hand on Bitters, " is the one to whom wisdom belongs. If he were only as harmless as he is wise, he would be a very Solomon among dogs. He likes to meet a friend, but pure, unalloyed joy is his when he meets an enemy."

" I think I should prefer Teddy," said Johnston. " He is a jolly, friendly-looking little chap."

"That is just it," said Prue. "He makes friends quickly wherever he goes, and thinks all men and dogs are equal; but Bitters outside the family circle has not even a bowing acquaintance. His gentlemanly reserve and wickedness are something beautiful to contemplate."

While Prue and Johnston drifted lightly from one topic to another, the doctor and Mrs. Bevis erected a tripod from which they suspended the tea-kettle over a crackling fire of dry brushwood. Then the lunch-basket gave up its treasures to be spread upon a white cloth, which was thrown over an obliging mound about the circumference of an ordinary dining-table.

"I really believe we have *everything*," said Mrs. Bevis, producing salt and pepper from a recess in the basket.

"I know I have an appetite and a consuming thirst," was the reply from the doctor, as he peered anxiously into the kettle to see if it was boiling. While thus engaged a sportive puff of wind drove a small cloud of smoke and ashes straight into his eyes. He stepped back hastily, and in so doing caught his foot in a slender root. He next made a wild effort to save himself, and ended by flying headlong toward the improvised lunch-table. A dreadful tragedy was barely averted by Mrs. Bevis, who with great presence of mind snatched the chicken salad from the very jaws of destruction.

"You had better sit down," said she, with some asperity, as she rearranged the luncheon.

"That is just what I was doing," said the doctor, as he wiped his smarting eyes. "Didn't you see me?"

"Yes, I saw you," pretending not to smile. "Next time try and do it with fewer active preliminaries."

When they had all gathered round the feast, and were proving that the doctor was not the only one who had brought an appetite, Mrs. Bevis said to Johnston, "Do tell us something about the city. It is so long since I felt the throb and rush of city life that I begin to wonder if such places exist except in dreams. When one lives for ten years in a self-centred community where nothing is ever really stirred but small moral or social mud-puddles, one is apt, unless one is an exception, to become bored and cynical, or else succumb to its influence and take to stirring mud-puddles too."

"I am sure you are the exception," said Johnston, with a kindly look. "I was just thinking that you are one of the few fortunate ones whose enjoyment of life is not governed by external surroundings. You make even disagreeable things endurable by seeing their humorous side."

Prue gravely looked the doctor over, first on one side and then on the other.

"What's the matter?" he anxiously inquired. "Anything crawling on me?"

"I was merely looking for your humorous side," was the response.

The doctor had not been paying attention to

Johnston's remark, and when the laughter which the former's puzzled expression called forth had subsided, Johnston said, "I believe you would find the restrictions of city life exceedingly irksome if you were to return to it. Here you have perfect freedom; no social etiquette, no—"

"No social etiquette!" broke in Mrs. Bevis. "Ah!" with a long-drawn sigh, "I thought that, too, when I first came to Orran. It was one of the most serious mistakes of my life. Another one was in returning the butcher's wife's call on the first Tuesday instead of on the first Wednesday. When I espied her in the meat shop I thought that sufficient reason for not having been admitted to the house; so I ceased ringing the house-bell and entered the shop, which was just next door. I was secretly glad to miss the parlor business, and sat down sociably on a clean meat-block, with quite a friendly glow toward the trim individual behind the counter. You may judge of my feelings when she said, in a tone calculated to quench all foolish attempt at ignoring social observances, 'Wednesday is my day for receiving, Mrs. Bevis.' I humbly apologized and withdrew. That I distribute no cards and have no 'day' is, I believe, regarded as a blot upon my character. A few, in a more kindly spirit, attribute it to ignorance. If it were not for Prue I tremble to think of what might have happened. I might have been driven to adopting a first Wednesday or a second Tuesday, notwithstanding an old-fashioned idea of mine that tea and twaddle and calling-cards properly belong to 'those who put their trust in chariots,' along with silken gowns and footmen."

"You were lucky to find in Miss Stainsby a kindred spirit," said Johnston.

"Lucky does not express it; and she is such a dear to confide in. As well as never repeating what you tell her in confidence, she makes you feel that she herself has forgotten it. There are a few who will keep a secret, but they cause you uneasiness by continually reminding you that it is in their possession."

"I have already noticed how charmingly Miss Stainsby's memory obeys her will." Johnston lost no opportunity of covertly reminding Prue of their first meeting. It was a secret bond between them, and moreover he never tired of seeing those telltale blushes and dimples of hers playing at hide-and-seek.

The doctor took very little part in the conversation. Occasionally he addressed a remark to Johnston, the trend of which showed that his thoughts were still dwelling on the perfidious machine agent.

During a political interval there are limitations. Duty to one's wife and friends may cause one to countenance frivolity and waste of time, but nothing should make one pretend to enjoy doing so; therefore the doctor was rather silent, though not too preoccupied to do full justice to the chicken salad and accompaniments, as well as slyly feeding the ogs. "You're a knowing one," Prue heard him remark to Bitters. "I feel like offering you a cigar." With a word of apology to the ladies, the doctor lit one himself, and peace descended on his troubled spirit.

By and by the sun began to weave long quivering bars of crimson beneath the trees. Little beams danced for a moment like fairy sprites over mossy bank and russet hollow, and then vanished. Distant sounds from field and village proclaimed that evening was very near.

Johnston looked at his watch; it shut with a quick snap as he rose to his feet. "It is later than I thought," he said. "I must leave you; but first let me thank you for a delightful afternoon. I feel that I shall be able to redouble my efforts after this agreeable relaxation."

"You are going to Theal, I suppose?" said the doctor, who had also risen.

"Yes, I promised to attend a committee meeting there to-night. We are not far from the station, are we? I shall catch the evening train."

"Let me drive you out," said the doctor, eagerly. "My horse is tied to the fence not a hundred yards away."

"Very kind of you, doctor, but it is quite unnecessary; besides it would never do to leave the ladies with all this on their hands," indicating the ferns and baskets. "Perhaps Miss Stainsby will be good enough to walk a little way with me and point out the nearest road to the station."

Again the doctor volunteered his services, but almost faltered at the finish, so dreadful was the look which his wife flashed at him.

"Prue will go with you, of course," she said; then turning sweetly to Johnston, "A few minutes' walk will land you at the station platform. Meanwhile Charles and I will carry the things to the buggy. You will come back, of course, Prue, and drive home with us." She gave her hand to Johnston. "Good-bye; drop in on us as often as you can."

"Thank you, I shall certainly do so," was the response.

There was no time for conversation between Prue and Johnston. A hasty scramble brought them to the fence beyond which was the public road. Down the road a couple of hundred yards the railway could easily be seen. Prue told her companion that he had only to follow it round the curve of the hill and he would be at the station.

Johnston held out his hand. Prue hesitated slightly, and then laid a slender, firm little hand lightly within his clasp. Slowly the man's fingers closed around hers with a gentle pressure. Prue would have given worlds to have been able to meet his eyes carelessly, happily, as she did Dick's. She could have wept because her eyelids would come down and that foolish flutter arise in her throat.

"Good-bye," he said.

"Good-bye," in a voice scarcely above a whisper.

"You might give me that bunch of wild flowers you are wearing, as a memento of one of the happiest days I shall ever know."

"They are very much fresher than your rose," she said, endeavoring to speak lightly. "If you really care for them I shall give them to you to wear in its stead."

She unpinned them and handed them to him.

"Oh, but I do not intend to part with my rose. I shall keep it, too, because of the garden where it grew," and in a low tone, "because of the little girl who plucked it."

A warning whistle sounded at no great distance. Johnston vaulted lightly over the fence and sped away. A moment more and the curve had hidden him from view. Prue stood there till the train flashed past, halted for a moment at the station, and then panted on again.

When Prue returned to Mrs. Bevis, the latter was ready to start for home. "You and I will ride," she said. "Charles prefers to walk. He has a visit to make on the way." So they drove home together in the twilight, a mass of plumy ferns filling the back of the buggy and rising to a level with their heads. Bitters and Teddy acted as outriders, and showed by their manner that they had enjoyed the day to the full. Prue was gay and silent by turns. To her gaiety Mrs. Bevis responded in kind; when silent she stole side glances at the girl's face, sometimes with a smile which was a trifle sad but wholly comprehensive.

While they were putting the ferns in the cellar, hoping thus to preserve the frail fronds more perfectly, Prue said, under cover of the darkness, " Did you notice the rose the Prime Minister wore in his coat?"

" I did. Why?"

" It was of a peculiar tint. Daddy has a few of them in bloom just now. He rather fancies them because of their supposed rarity."

" And so you were disturbed for fear they grew in other gardens? Not that you wished to know if that one had been given to the Prime Minister by some designing female, but because ' daddy ' would cease to fancy a rose which had become common. Make your mind easy, dear. The rose he wore grew in your garden. I told him so, and also that you had picked it and given it to me."

By this time they had come out into the light again. Prue's face was a study. Mrs. Bevis had not hit the mark exactly, but had come very close to it.

" Ah, Prue, there is nothing like it, is there? You make me wish that I were young again." And Mrs. Bevis, who usually abhorred between women anything that might be termed demonstrative, leaned over and kissed the girl's velvety cheek. " But what," she added, feeling in her heart that she should hold up a warning finger, " what if rumor for once is correct? What if Johnston is already engaged?"

" You ask that as though it were a conundrum," replied Prue, innocently. " I should say that if he is engaged he will probably marry before long; and you and I will be interested in reading of how beautiful the bride looked clothed in Duchesse satin and a shower bouquet; and of how he gave her a sunburst and the bridesmaids each a jewelled stick-pin. You must ask me something more difficult to solve than that, Mrs. Bevis, if you wish to puzzle me." And she laughed over her shoulder at Mrs. Bevis as she descended the steps.

"I shall see you at church to-morrow, of course?'

"Of course. Good-night."

As Mrs. Bevis stood watching the girl till she and her four-footed companions were out of sight, her thoughts ran in this wise: "You are a thoroughbred, Prue. If you are hurt, the world—our little world—will never know it."

CHAPTER X.

It was Culverson's night in Orran; or rather, since Culverson himself cut such a poor figure at a bout of speech-making, it would be better to say that it was the night of the Liberal mass-meeting. This meeting promised to be of greater interest than usual, because, to offset Johnston's meetings, care had been taken to provide a speaker of note, one whose name the people of Middleworth were perfectly familiar with, but whose presence hitherto had been denied them. He was to be the first speaker at a political meeting in Garric Sound on the evening of Culverson's meeting in Orran, and had graciously consented to show himself at the latter meeting later on.

Meanwhile, pending the arrival of the orator of the evening, there would be other speakers to extol the virtues and achievements of the existing Government. There would be abundance of boastful assertions, meant to tickle the ear of the waiting electorate—unreasoning men, a good many of them, who come to such meetings with small measures, which the paid wind-bag on the platform fills heaped up and running over with talk. If what he says goes unchallenged, the elector goes home apparently satisfied that his little measure contains uncontestable proof that the Government for which he votes is all that it claims to be. If the meeting is a mixed one, and the challenger is there ready and eager to demolish the fine fabric that has risen before the elector's eyes, the latter, in place of profiting by this, becomes at once fiercely partisan; he is conscious merely of wanting to fight. Neighbor glares wrathfully at neighbor, separated for the time by the fetish "Grit" and "Tory."

"Them polyticians," said Denny Brady, who was taking a refreshing drink over the bar, after stabling his horses for the night; "them polyticians remind me of me two cows, the wans we call 'Betty' and 'Widdy O'Lone.' When drinking time comes, Widdy O'Lone, being the strongest and longest in office, so to speak, takes possession of the wathering trough, an' dhrinks and dhrinks till she can hould no more. Then she stands with her fore-fate in the trough an' viciously horns her mate if the latther tries to stale as much as a sup out of wan little corner of the trough. When I think she's had enough an' go to dhrive her away (for unlike the gineral run of electors with their men in Parlyment, I'm minded of the fact that they're there for my benefit as well as their own) she says, as plain as the day, 'I'm administering it for you, sur. I'm kapin' that murderin' thafe of a Betty from stalin' an' desthroyin' your wather, an', perhaps, layin' down in the trough.'"

"You forget to add, Denny, that Widow O'Lone's herd, even to the third and fourth generation, have also gathered around to catch the overflow, and to spoil what little chance Betty might possibly have had of getting a drink."

Denny wheeled about. "Oh, it's you, docthor," with an ingratiating smile at that gentleman, who had just put his head inside the door in search of some one. "Have something? No? Well, here's lookin' at you. May all your clouds be rosy wans, an' all your gurls be boys. An' hot Tories they'd be, too," he added, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

"You'd have more than enough to balance them, Denny," said some one, facetiously.

"Seven," said Denny, promptly. "I've always said that next to havin' a large family the worst that can befall a man is to have none at all."

"I hear you're going to join the Episcopal Church, Denny," said one of the men present.

"Did you hear about it?" said Denny, with a wide grin. "Shure I had to tell the good Father something, or he'd pester the life out of me." The crowd looked expectantly at him, and Denny, always willing to be the centre of attraction, continued: "It was all because of the big church they're building in Garric Sound. Father McGrath said I could well afford to give two hundred dollars towards the building of it. 'Two hundred dollars!' said I, 'it's more than I'm worth.' 'It's only a small tithe of what you're worth,' said he. 'Make it fifty dollars,' said I, 'an' that'll be deprivin' the children of bread.' "

Denny was really very well off, but he liked to pose as a poor man.

" No, not a cent less than two hundred dollars would he agree to take, an' at last I became so exasperated that I up an' told him I'd join the 'Piscopals an' go to purgatory first."

Meanwhile, the public hall was filling rapidly, while in the lobby and on the steps men smoked and talked, awaiting the arrival of the speakers. Dick Dollinger was voted into the chair. He was ruddy from recent ablutions and looked the typical prosperous young Canadian farmer. John Ronan was there, big and bewiskered, a generous expanse of red and black checked flannel shirt showing in the opening of his vest; and Ezra Pinnock, looking anything but fit, poor man, but with a pleased, expectant look softening his thin face.

Suddenly the crowd at the door parted to admit the tall form of a man whose soft hat was pulled somewhat low on his face. For some reason or other the crowd chose to think that this was the first to arrive of the men whom they expected to address them, and they at once set up a vigorous stamping of feet and clapping of hands. Decidedly surprised, the man turned back the collar of the light overcoat he wore and pushed back his hat, thereby disclosing the well-known features of Squire Stainsby. The crowd of men laughed good-naturedly at their mistake, and then, perhaps because Mr. Stainsby had never been known to make a political speech in his life, or anything approaching one, they began with one accord calling. "Speech! Speech!" He sat down and the demand grew louder.

That day Prue had asked her father if he was going to the meeting. When he replied in the affirmative, she had said, "I'm going, too, with Mrs. Bevis. I wish I were a man, daddy."

"Why?" He never failed to ask the reason in a tone of mild surprise, though he heard her express the wish very frequently. "Because I should like to make a speech. You know what I would say?"

"I have some idea of it."

"Yes. Well, it would be all that and a great deal more. There would be a rattling among old Grit and Tory bones if I were a man and had the privileges that some men have. I would not confine myself to politics. I would talk Canada, Canada, our own dear best beloved. Daddy," turning swiftly on him, "why is it that we have no poet, no story writer, whose thoughts are big and grand enough, and whose words simple and truthful enough, to mirror Canada to the world? Why is she so little known, so little understood? We, her children, should cling to her with loving hands, should press our lips to her dear heart, who has so few to love her, and comfort her and each other by telling her that she, who is so richly endowed with all that nature can bestow, shall one day stand unrivalled among the nations of the earth."

Prue's lips trembled and her eyes filled with tears. Her father's eyes grew moist in sympathy. He felt vaguely troubled, and wished she did not feel so keenly, especially on matters which few girls concern themselves with.

He had known her when a mere child to become a little whirlwind of passionate anger because a visiting cousin from the State of New York had undertaken to tease her by comparing the Republic with the Dominion to the latter's disadvantage. They were eating supper together in the kitchen. Prue, her face framed in a feathery cloud of hair, was contentedly drinking milk out of a mug and listening to her cousin, who, boylike, was inclined to exaggerate. Suddenly she set the mug down and her eyes darkened ominously. "I'd like to know what you have that we haven't?" she said.

"Well, to begin with, we are a great deal bigger'n you are."

"No, you're not. Canada's bigger than the States, isn't it, daddy?"

Daddy was obliged to answer in the affirmative.

The boy colored, inwardly disbelieving. "Well, we have bigger cities, anyway—cities you'd get lost in. Garric Sound 'd only be a village over in New York State."

"Yes, you have bigger cities and swellder heads."

"*Swellder* heads!" The lad laughed loudly.

Prue's sensitive little face flushed hotly. In her excitement she had used a word which she thought had been safely left in babyland.

"An' we have a President, an' a White House, an' soldiers, an' lots and lots of people."

"Yes, niggers and all sorts of trash. Daddy says God made the States to keep the scum that crosses the ocean from getting into Canada."

Signs of rising rage on the part of young New York. "Bah! What do you know about it? Canuck!"

"Yankee Doodle!"

"We'll come over and lick the stuffin' out of Canada some day."

"Try it."

The onlookers were not very clear as to what happened next, only young New York was underneath, and little Canuck was raising lumps on his head with her drinking mug.

. . . .

"Speech! Speech!"

A smile touched the Squire's lips; he thought of Prue. He had no doubt that she was now with a group of women who were sitting over against the opposite wall, wishing again that she were a man and feeling sorry and—yes, a little contemptuous of the weakness in her old dad's knees (he told himself it was in his knees) which prevented him from saying that which was in his mind.

"Speech! Speech!"

Well, why not? The next moment Mr. Stainsby was on his feet facing the assembled electors. A fine patriarchal figure he looked, tall and erect, carrying proudly the frosts of more than sixty years on his head.

"Mr. Chairman, old friends and neighbors," he began, "if you will permit me I shall say a few words standing where I am. I shall feel less embarrassed than upon the platform. As you are aware, I am not one of those favored mortals who possess the royal gift of speech-making; but since you insist, you must not blame me if what I say is not entirely to your liking.

"In one way I am glad of this opportunity of explaining what might later on have seemed to you reprehensible conduct on the part of a life-long Liberal."

Dick looked quickly over at Prue, and met a triumphant smile in return.

"We all know with what suspicion a community regards one of its number who, after giving a political party his influence and support for a great many years, suddenly withdraws both. The reason for such suspicion is, I take it, that withdrawal is usually the cause of some personal matter, some real or fancied slight, or because of not obtaining some coveted office or concession; none of which are fair or manly reasons for deserting the party with which one has always been identified. It is a suspicion that I for one do not care to place myself under; therefore, as I said before, I am glad ot this opportunity of explaining why I for the first time in forty years am undecided and contemplate voting against a Liberal Government."

"That's enough! You've been reading Tory newspapers!" It was the voice of one of those pert young men who frequent the back benches at political meetings, and mistakenly imagine they are displaying cleverness by interrupting the speakers.

Mr. Stainsby paused a moment and quietly turned toward the chairman. The latter, more in obedience to the challenge in Prue's eyes than for any other reason, commanded order. Mr. Stainsby then continued: "Lest there be some *thinking* men in the audience who agree with the person who has just insinuated that my change of opinion is due to the influence of the Conservative press, I will just read to you an extract from the paper which is sometimes called the 'Scotchman's Bible,' the paper which I as a youth brought weekly from the post-office to my father's home, and which has daily entered my own house for forty years as regularly as the light of the sun."

While speaking Mr. Stainsby selected one from a number of newspaper clippings which he held in his hand.

"This is the extract which I referred to. It contains an expression of opinion which I entirely agree with, and which carries double weight from the fact that it appeared in the paper I have just mentioned at a time when the House of Commons and all legislatures from Halifax to Victoria, save one, were Liberal, and at a time when the Government of this Province was fighting for its life." Unfolding the paper, Mr. Stainsby slowly and impressively read the following: "The curse of politics in every Legislature from Halifax to Victoria, and in the Senate and House of Commons at Ottawa, is the notion that political conduct has no relation to the Ten Commandments, that party expediency is the first law of politics, that being *found out* is the only political crime. The present distress in the Legislature of this Province, the uncertainty of the Government's life and the derelict helplessness of the Opposition, is not the result of accident or of blind unreasoning fate; it is the Nemesis of political crime, the inevitable outcome of the defying and outraging of moral law for the sake of party gain."

In profound silence he laid the paper upon the table.

"Such being the case, what are we, the electors, going to do about it? The blame lies largely with ourselves, and with us rests the remedy. What we need in Parliament to-day is fewer Grits and Tories and more honest men; and the latter, I take it, we will never have so long as we wink at this system of bribery that is becoming more extended, more firmly seated, with the passing of every election. When a man comes to us and says, 'Put me into Parliament; I'm a fit person to represent you there, and honorably guard your interests,' does he not at once disprove this assertion when, to make his election sure, he proceeds to cheat one-half of the electorate by buying the other half? And do we not by assisting him, or at least keeping silent when we know such practices are being indulged in, place ourselves in a position to be laughed at? Practically we are helping a man in at the window when the doors are barred against him, and then expecting he will not crack the till. For myself, I must solemnly avow that no man will ever again obtain my vote to assist him into Parliament unless he is prepared to prove to me that he is running solely on his merits, and not on the length of his purse or the strength of party expediency."

"Then you have cast your last vote." It was the voice which had spoken before, this time scarcely louder than a whisper, but distinctly heard in the stillness of the room.

"Then God help the country," was the involuntary response, "if we have reached the point when government, selfishly and carelessly administered, makes no better opportunity than for the rascal that is out to oust the rascal that is in."

A sound of carriage wheels and men talking outside the door announced the tardy arrival of the visitors.

"Mr. Culverson is here," said Mr. Stainsby, "therefore I shall take my seat. In the hope," he added, with a rather grim smile, "that what I have said has been sufficiently interesting to beguile the tedium of waiting."

The audience drew a deep breath. Hand-clapping, begun in one corner, pattered irregularly like big raindrops, and then ceased suddenly as the party just entering, evidently under the impression that it was for him, bowed and smiled encouragingly. It was Culverson, with the meek, confiding air he thought most beguiling when he presented himself before his constituents to beg for a continuation of their support. With him came the representative of the adjoining county, a thick-necked gentleman, and, as Denny said, "a polytician by thrade," who was capable of supplying thunder by the hour for Culverson or other dumb but well-meaning members of the Legislature.

The latter, on being introduced, began by explaining the unavoidable delay. The train was late in reaching Garric Sound, and for that reason Mr. Subsidy would not be able to reach Orran. Needless to say, the gentleman was deeply disappointed, as disappointed, perhaps, as those he saw before him, though that would be impossible unless they had learned to properly value this great bulwark of the party. "However, if they were good children," he jocularly continued, "he could tell them later on when they had heard from Mr. Culverson what good things were in store for them."

Then Mr. Culverson stepped forth. He looked just what he was, solid, stolid, without culture or education, but possessed of considerable intelligence of the slow-moving order, and capable of sighting at long distance an occurrence which might be turned to the advantage of T. Culverson, M.L.A. He told them how glad he was to see them, and that nothing but the most pressing duties, Parliamentary and otherwise, kept him from seeing his constituents more frequently. He intimated that he had been a very good fellow during the past four years, that indeed they had all been very good fellows, notwithstanding certain wicked stories circulated by the Conservatives and—and "the treacherous independent press."

There was something reminiscent about his allusion to the press which brought a smile to the faces of certain of those present. It was doubtful if Mr. Culverson really meant it, but the phrase had clung to his memory, and so came handily when original expressions refused to flow. For the space of fifteen minutes he strove to prove that the men who were administering the Government were doing so with an eye single to the good and glory of the Province, men whose first thought was for the good of the people, and whose farthest thought was personal aggrandizement or remunerative concessions. Finally, with a slighting reference to his opponent, Mr. Culverson took his seat.

Something was awry; the thick-necked gentleman had it borne in on him through every one of his senses. The meeting was *dead,* and as cold and suspicious, he told himself, as the eye of a temperance delegate. Nothing daunted, however, he rose to face it with the jauntiness of a trick elephant. For well on to two hours he poured forth a turbulent stream of words, which carried nothing new or especially interesting to the ears of his hearers. Touching on the question of timber limits, he became unduly heated in his defence of the Government. With his eye in a "fine frenzy rolling," he cried, "I tell you, sirs, the present Government is a close-fisted one. I have bought timber from them, and I have found them regular Shylocks to deal with." In view of the fact that the speaker had made large sums of money in turning over the timber thus obtained, this statement left one to infer that the speaker could go Shylock even one better.

"What is he talking about?" whispered a young reporter from Garric Sound, who was in search of "copy" and somewhat late in arriving.

Denny Brady undertook to enlighten him. "He's proving an alibi for the Government, as near as I can make out. Shure I never knew we was suspected of so much divilment till he rose to prove us 'not guilty.'" By which remark it will be seen that Denny identified himself with the Government. "The story he tells reminds me," continued Denny in a whisper, "of a boy I found in me garden the other day. The missus told me there was a boy in stalin' me cherries, and I started out to catch him. I met me lad right at the gate lookin' as innocent as a lamb. 'How many cherries did you stale?' says I. 'Not wan,' says he. 'Show me your tongue,' says I. 'All right.' With that he pokes it out, and shure enough it was clane as a whistle. 'Mebbe you'd like to look at me pockets, too?'

and he empties them out, looking mighty injured the while. With that he got clane away, and it was not till the next day that I found he had stripped the cherries off the far side of the tree and sold them to a boy across the fince for a quarter of a dollar."

"Hip, hip, hurrah!" Cheers for Mr. Culverson, and cheers for the thick-necked gentleman.

"I move that we give three hearty cheers for the first speaker of the evening." The voice was big and rough, not modulated to public speaking, and the owner of it, John Ronan, was standing in their midst, a greater surprise even than was Mr. Stainsby. He raised his hand, and with a mighty swing of his arm started a ringing "Hip, hip, hurrah!" It was given, three times and a tig

"He's crazy," muttered Ezra Pinnock, driving home alone. "Stainsby's clean crazy, and Ronan, what did he mean by jumping up and calling for cheers for him? He's the last one—oh, Lord," and Ezra clutched at his side, "that pain! I'll have to see Bevis again. No, I'm blessed if I will," and Ezra stiffened suddenly. "He is at the bottom of this. He has been at Ronan all the time that girl was sick. I'll send for another doctor this very night."

Ezra was feeling very poorly by the time he reached home, but his anger had not one whit abated. Mrs. Pinnock was in the garden among the cabbages. She was dressed in a calico frock, which had become almost white with much washing, and she looked large and luminous, moving about in the uncertain light. Mrs. Pinnock did not rely on being up in the morning early enough to catch the worm; she made sure of him the night before by the light of the moon. Every time she stooped over a cabbage plant, a foolish worm, feeding in false security, was reduced to a mere smudge of green. "I'll help you unhitch," she said, coming forward when she saw Ezra getting down stiffly from his buggy. "I've sent the boys to bed, so's they'll be up bright and early in the morning. You go into the house and I'll lead Jerry to the pasture-field."

As Ezra ascended the veranda steps, she called after him: "You'll find a bite of supper ready on the kitchen table. Eat it."

He sat down just inside the kitchen door, and remained motionless, too tired to even utter a complaint. By and by he drew off his boots with the aid of a wooden bootjack. Ezra always wore top boots. When he donned his best clothes, the boot legs went inside his trousers; below his trousers they sustained a wonderful polish. In work-a-day garb the order was reversed; then it was the boot legs' turn to take an airing, and the trousers went inside. After placing his boots carefully side by side against the wall, he listlessly looked at the "bite of supper." He was not at all hungry, but supper was prepared for him; therefore he must eat.

Mrs. Pinnock attended carefully to his bodily wants, and was sedulous in her efforts to make him eat. Nevertheless, he refused to "flesh up"; in fact he grew, if possible, a trifle more meagre every day. It was heartening he wanted; not that it mattered now, but there had been a time when a dish of herbs with kindness and commendation would have been food and medicine beside. Presently he heard his wife approaching, and sitting down at the table he made a pretence of eating.

"You haven't et anything," she cried, disappointedly. "Try them pickled pig's feet."

"No, thank you."

"There's some potato cake, you used to like it. And have a glass of milk, it's mostly cream."

Ezra took some milk.

"Was there many at the meeting?" she inquired.

"Of course there was," irritably.

"Did Mr. Culverson make a speech?"

"He did, and a mighty good speech it was, too."

"He must be improvin'," said Mrs. Pinnock, dryly.

"He is; not that it signifies, so long as he has good sense. It's only women that 'ud think more of him if he had a name for speechifying." Ezra had formed a wise habit of generalizing when he spoke in contempt of women's opinions. Mrs. Pinnock uttered never a word. She was at last beginning to learn.

"Jane," he said, suddenly, "if I get a bad turn to-night I want you to send for Dr. Hay."

"What's Dr. Bevis been doing?"

"Nothing," snapped the little man. "He hain't even been minding his own business. I'll have no more Tory doctors poking among my ribs."

A sudden light broke on Mrs. Pinnock's puzzled face. She did not laugh aloud in derision of what he had said, as she would once have done. She said, "I'll send for Dr. Hay if you want him; but I hope you are not going to have a bad spell."

CHAPTER XI.

WHEN Prudence Stainsby and Johnston next met it was to find themselves in sole possession of the Orran store and post-office. Mr. Bentley had gone to Garric Sound, and Mrs. Bentley, taking advantage of the usual lack of business on a summer morning, was busily engaged in the vegetable patch at the rear of the garden.

Prue, who wanted a straw hat of the kind the men wore in the hayfields, took a look about the shop and found what she wanted in the window. Reaching in, she began turning over the pile of hats to get one that suited her. Presently she heard a step, and supposing it was some one to wait upon her, she offered a cheerful "Good morning," and without looking around, continued in her search.

"Good morning, Miss Stainsby."

"Oh, it's you!" Blushing rosily, Prue drew her head and shoulders out of the window and turned to face Johnston.

"How you startled me!" she said. "I thought Mr. Bentley had sent some one to arrest me for shoplifting."

Johnston held out his hand and she gave him hers for a moment. "How are you?" he asked, "and—how is Dick?"

It was an unfortunate question, and he felt it to be so. Prue swept him a look from under her lashes, and with no other answer turned again to the window.

"Allow me," said Johnston. "Which one do you prefer, or have you made a choice?"

"The one nearest the glass, I think," said Prue.

Johnston reached a long arm and most of his body in over a motley collection of brooms and brushes and coarse crockery in an effort to reach the coveted hat. It evaded him. He took a look around and then stepped boldly into the window. The inner window was raised so that Prue could just touch it with the end of her fingers. It was tempting. To reach up and pull it down required only a moment. The bolt slipped noisily into place, and, startled at the sound, Johnston faced around to find himself a prisoner.

Pointing to the hat, which he now held in his hand, Prue said, in the tone of one offering valuable advice, "If you are going to stand there exhibiting Mr. Bentley's wares, you may as well put the hat on your head. If you carry it in your hand, the crowd which will be around presently will think you want them to drop pennies into it."

Johnston flushed and looked uncomfortable. Evidently she was going to punish him.

"Good-bye," she said, moving away. "I

shouldn't wonder if you will be called upon to make a speech before you are liberated."

Prue moved leisurely to the nearest corner. As yet all was quiet on the street, and Mrs. Bentley was weeding with unabated energy. But once the corner was turned, and Prue was out of sight of the window, she fairly flew to Dr. Bevis's door. Rushing in upon Mrs. Bevis, she told her what she had done.

"You may go and let him out," she said. "And be sure you make it appear that you just happened along. I wouldn't have him think I repented and sent you, not for the world. Oh, hurry, before some one finds him there."

No need to tell Mrs. Bevis to hurry. She was frantically pinning on her hat. "Prue, if you have succeeded in making him look ridiculous, I shall never forgive you. The bucolic mind can forget almost anything detrimental to a man excepting that he has been in a position to be laughed at." And with dire threats Mrs. Bevis hastened to Johnston's rescue.

The whole transaction occupied only a few minutes. Judge, then, of Prue's surprise when, stepping out on the veranda, she discovered Johnston lying in the hammock, having all the outward seeming of one who has been spending an idle morning. She stared, and involuntarily the words, "You! I thought you were in the post-office," dropped from her lips.

"In the post-office?" he repeated with exaggerated surprise. "Impossible, Miss Stainsby; it must have been my brother." Rising from the hammock, he brought a chair and placed it for her with elaborate courtesy.

Prue sank into the chair feeling that she must resemble a pricked bubble. She did not know what to say, and Johnston was lost evidently in contemplation of the distant hilltops. She wondered if he could have heard the whole or part of her conversation with Mrs. Bevis, and how on earth had he managed to escape so quickly from that window? At any rate, she decided that Johnston was intolerable, and that she must appear even worse in his eyes. She thought of herself with scorn as a practical joker. Could anything be farther beneath contempt? She had her hat in her lap and was impatiently pulling the trimming this way and that.

Meanwhile Johnston had taken his eyes from the hilltops; curved red lips and silky lashes and the ebb and flow of rose tints on a smooth cheek seemed more deserving of scrutiny. "Lovely!"

Prue's lashes suddenly lifted and she darted him a look. "You mean the morning, or the hills?"

"Neither. I had not intended voicing my sentiments. I referred to—er, the hat."

"Oh, the hat," with quiet disdain. "Hardly lovely in view of the fact that it has reached the hash stage."

"The hash stage," he repeated helplessly.

"Yes, like the Sunday roast, you know. On Sunday it's roast beef, on Monday it's cold sliced beef, and on Tuesday it's hash. It is three summers now since this hat possessed the dignity and freshness of the Sunday roast."

"It must have been incomparable in its original form," said Johnston, gravely.

"It was." Pretence and gravity suddenly ceased. Those treacherous dimples of Prue's came out one by one, and were met by a frankly amused smile on the face opposite. Then man and maid joined in a hearty laugh.

"All the same, it was unkind to take advantage of me when I was engaged in your service. Tell me why you did it?"

"When you tell me how you got out of the window," she answered.

"No, that is my secret. I shall never tell it."

"We are quits, then."

"With the advantage on my side. I know why you made me a prisoner, but you are yet ignorant of the means by which I made my escape. Good morning, Mrs. Bevis," addressing that lady, who had just joined them. "How comes it that you are abroad so early?"

"Ask me something that I am prepared to answer," was the reply, as Mrs. Bevis turned a mystified look on Prue. "You are abroad somewhat early yourself. How and when did you arrive?"

"Walked. Since breakfast."

"Walked! not from Garric Sound?"

"No, from Theal. I dropped in on Mr. Culverson's meeting there last night."

"Good; do tell us about it."

"My dear lady, it was just the same."

"As what?"

"As all other political meetings that you have attended." Johnston spoke as though somewhat disheartened. "Those in attendance who called themselves Liberals went away apparently satisfied that the Conservative speaker lied. Those who called themselves Conservatives were equally convinced that the truth dwelt not in the mouths of their political enemies, the Liberals. At least," he added modestly, after a pause, "I did my best. Being limited to thirty minutes was somewhat of a handicap, besides Mr. Subsidy is not as easily vanquished as some I could mention."

"Was he there?"

"He was the speaker of the evening on behalf of Mr. Culverson."

"Thank goodness, he did not reach Orran. I haven't patience to listen to that man."

"Nevertheless, he's a clever juggler and past master of the art of misconstruing one's statements and making smart answers to something one has never said."

"Yes, so I have heard. We had something vastly more refreshing offered to us at Culverson's meeting in Orran," and forthwith Mrs. Bevis launched into a full account of it. The chief feature in her estimation was Mr. Stainsby's speech.

It was not a surprise to Johnston. He had heard something of it in Theal the night before.

"The Liberal party in Middleworth should be proud of Mr. Stainsby," said Johnston. "Few men are brave enough even under the spur of pique to publicly lay a finger on the canker spot in the political party to which they have given life-long allegiance. None do it in a kindly spirit. If both parties had a dozen such men in every township, this bribery system would be cast off like a parasite growth from a healthy body."

"Proud of him?" exclaimed Mrs. Bevis. "They will be down on him to a man."

Prue made no comment; she was intently listening. Had Johnston's reply given her even in the smallest degree the impression that he valued her father's expression of opinion only for the benefit it might be to himself in the coming election, a great many things would afterward have happened differently. For instance, she would not have bestowed such a bright smile on Dick, who just then came opposite the doctor's house driving in his road cart.

Dick took the look as an intimation that Prue was willing to be friends again. He stopped and entered into a conversation which included Johnston and Mrs. Bevis. He told them that he was obliged to drive to Theal that evening, and asked Prue to accompany him. She hesitated, glanced at Johnston, and then accepted. There had been a gleam in Johnston's eye; perhaps a challenge, perhaps displeasure, perhaps only mirth, but decidedly it was a gleam, and what girl would not be driven thereby to accept attentions from another? Certainly not a girl of spirit.

The time being set at which Dick was to call for her, he briskly went on his way. Scarcely had he gone when a stout woman seated in the front of a light waggon drove up to the door. " Mrs. Pinnock," said Mrs. Bevis, rising to speak to her. Plainly Mrs. Pinnock was in trouble. Her face, florid as a rule, was blanched and drawn, and the usually calm, calculating eyes looked as though tears had found them out at last. She wanted the doctor to come in haste to Ezra, who had " suffered a bad spell " in the night and was not showing signs of recovery. Knowing that another doctor had been called to see Ezra, Mrs. Bevis looked dubious, but said she would tell Dr. Bevis that Ezra wanted him as soon as he returned. As it happened, all responsibility was removed from Mrs. Bevis's shoulders, for the doctor himself drove up at that moment. To him Mrs. Pinnock repeated her request.

" Has Dr. Hay been attending Ezra?" Dr. Bevis asked, bluntly.

" Yes, but it was not my wish, I can assure you. You told me yourself that I was to quit managing Ezra." This small thrust Mrs. Pinnock permitted herself, although in truth she was trembling in fear for Ezra's life. " You'll come, won't you, doctor?"

"When was Hay last at your house?" asked the doctor.

"In the night."

"Did you tell him you were coming for me?"

"No, doctor."

"Well, until you do, the case is his."

"Well, but doctor, Ezra may die in the meantime."

"Should have thought that all out before he sent for Hay," was the obdurate reply.

"Well, if you'll come I'll send one of the boys right on to tell Dr. Hay not to come any more, that Ezra wants his old doctor again."

"But does he want him, Mrs. Pinnock?"

"Does he? If you had heard—" and she told him what she had heard Ezra muttering over and over to himself in the night.

"Drive on," said the doctor, in quite a different tone of voice. "Drive on. I'll follow you as soon as I have changed horses."

CHAPTER XII.

DICK had merely stated that he was going to Theal on business. That it was election business Prue did not know until they arrived there. Dick drove to the house of one of the township councillors, meaning to leave Prue in charge of the latter's wife while he and the councillor retired to a quiet corner to discuss the matter which had been the cause of his hasty summons to attend a committee meeting which was to be held there that evening. As it happened, this little arrangement was forced to give place to another and an altogether different one. The councillor's wife was not at home, and the evening having grown chilly, the good man had built a fire in the family sitting-room, and was there comfortably settled with two or three members of the committee when Prue and Dick arrived.

The host, with good intent, would have shown Prue into the parlor, but she begged to be excused on the plea of being cold, and slipped into a chair beside the fire. The men gathered around a table, and very soon her presence was forgotten by all excepting Dick. As usual the divisional voting list was "run over," and those who were not able to be of assistance in that part of the business gathered in a knot by themselves to discuss what they called politics. Soon their conversation became an interchange of experiences, each man striving to appear as the central figure in some scheme more or less questionable for obtaining another man's vote.

"I mind when Coulter ran," piped up a man with a falsetto voice and weak eyes, which the light affected painfully. "Let's see, that's sixteen years ago. Old Johnny Connors was choring round here then, and near election time he happened to be at Pinnock's. Well, old man Pinnock was pretty good to him and Connors promised to vote Grit. Pinnock watched him, but just two days before the election he went on an errand to Gregory's and never came back. Of course, Pinnock knew what that meant, and you bet he was pretty mad, too, more especially as Mrs. Pinnock sent Connors there and Ezra suspected she did it a' purpose.

"As it happened, Gregory had engaged me for the next day to haul a load of dressed hogs to town, so I says to Ezra, 'I'm goin' to Gregory's in the morning. What'll you give me if I get a hold of Connors and bring him away?' Pinnock says, 'I don't encourage bribery and keruption' (here the hero of the story grinned and made a futile effort to wink), 'but I'll see what can be done for you.' That was good enough for me, so when I pulled up at Gregory's I kept an eye open for Connors. Sure enough he was there, and helped to put the load on the wagon. Gregory was there, too, and I hadn't [illegible] chance to peep.

"When I was all ready to start, Gregory stepped into the drive-shed for something. I saw it was my only chance, so I grabbed Connors up—he was a little [illegible] man—and shoved him down between two of the biggest hogs. 'Don't make a sound,' I said to him. 'There's a bottle of whiskey under the seat for you.' I knew that would keep Connors quiet any place you had a mind to put him.

"Well, it was no sooner done than out came Gregory again. 'Where's Connors?' he said. 'Why,' said I, innocent as a lamb, 'he was here a minute ago; must have gone into the barn for something.' With that I climbed onto my load and started for town, and Gregory started to hunt for Connors, and so far as I know he's huntin' for him yet."

The climax of this interesting little story appealed so strongly to the sense of humor in the man who was relating it that he gave way to cackling laughter, and choked and gurgled at intervals, while another member of the company related an episode in which he earned an equal share of admiration and approval.

In disgust Prue turned from them to listen to the group surrounding Dick. They were almost through with the list, and would soon come to the matter upon which Dick was expected to be able to throw some light. To appreciate it one must go back a few months to a night when a couple of sober, moral citizens of Theal found themselves in a hotel in Garric Sound. It chanced to be a night upon which Tom Culverson, forgetful of the fierce light which beats upon a member of the local Legislature, was indulging in cups and conviviality. He noticed the men from Theal, and ordinarily would have given them a few civil words and passed on. This occasion happened to be extraordinary, so he insisted upon treating "old constituents and good supporters of the Government." As it happened, they neither drank intoxicants nor smoked cigars, so they politely, if somewhat shamefacedly, refused Mr. Culverson's offer of good cheer.

"Do you eat hay?" he inquired, and there was a dark gleam in his eye which bordered on the quarrelsome.

Again they were obliged to confess that they "had never cultivated a taste for it."

"Well, I'm ——," said Culverson, "you are company for neither man nor beast."

This raised a laugh at the expense of the visitors from Theal. They became offended. Their dignity, a vital spot when one is a deacon, was hurt, and in the cold, displeased look they cast upon him Culverson might have read warning of a reckoning day to come. Perhaps he did, and resolved since he was in for a penny to be in for a pound. At any rate, both dialogue and action became very boisterous in his vicinity. Things reached a climax when two Salvation Army lasses entered the room adjoining the bar for the purpose of selling copies of the *War Cry*. Culverson snatched the papers, and holding them aloft in one hand, began reading certain startling headlines. "'Hellfire and No Water'; how is that, boys? Would whiskey put it out, I wonder?"

"Try it," said some one.

"All right," and he dashed the contents of a glass over the bundle of papers.

Waiting to see no more, the men from Theal departed. They might have forgiven, for time—especially election time—is a great healer, and people have fallen into the way of showing large forgiveness to members of Parliament. But there was the other more personal offence, the jeer of the ungodly at the conscious rectitude of a deacon. It rankled and cried for satisfaction.

In the course of time it became rumored throughout the neighborhood that those two worthy Liberals would never again vote for Culverson. So positive were they in this assertion that the party came to regard them as lost. Thus matters stood until the night of Culverson's meeting in Theal. On that night it was told, not publicly, but whispered from mouth to mouth, that Johnston was an infidel, and that the two offended deacons had said that if such were the case they would be obliged to vote for Culverson; but first they must be assured by some one who knew the facts of the case that Johnston was really an unbeliever. Of course, it at once became the duty of the committee in charge of that division to furnish the desired proof, and with that end in view Dick Dollinger was summoned. Dick had known Johnston since childhood and should be in a position to testify against him. Did he know if there was any truth in the rumor? "It would hurt him a lot round here," said the councillor, almost pleadingly.

"It certainly would," said another. "A number of people are tired of Culverson, but they're church people and they wouldn't vote for an infidel."

Dick listened quite as much because of the girl sitting so quietly at the other side of the room as for himself. Unconsciously, he had placed himself at Prue's view-point. He understood her feelings when he saw the color rising like a storm-signal in her half-averted face. In sympathy with her, a feeling of disgust against the low trickery discussed around them took possession of him. "I've never discussed religious matters with Johnston," he said, shortly. "My own opinion is that all this talk about infidelity is a straight out-and-out lie, hatched up to injure him at the polls and to give certain weak-kneed individuals an excuse to get back to Culverson."

The councillor and those around him fairly gasped with astonishment, as much because of the way Dick flung the words at them as because of their import.

"Oh, well, I suppose it's just as well to keep quiet about it," said one of them, foolishly. "It's not our business."

"We seem to have made it our business, though, and keeping quiet about it once a story is started is only part of the game." Dick's blood was up, and when such was the case he was apt to bear down on the bit. "You will do as you please," he continued. "For myself, I shall deny the truth of the rumor every time I hear it mentioned."

"Seems to me you weren't always so careful of the Conservative candidate's good name," said one of the men, with a sneer. "When Perkins ran there was a story got out about—"

"Never mind," said the councillor, who saw signs of trouble ahead. "Never mind, all is fair in love and war and elections, eh, Dick?"

"I used to think so," answered Dick. "Lately I have been in doubt. One thing is certain, if Johnston carries this campaign through as he began it he will meet with fair and just dealing so far as I am concerned."

"Perhaps you will vote for him," said the same man, continuing to sneer.

"It isn't likely. I don't mind telling you, though, while we are on the subject, that I think it about time the Liberals of Middleworth were brave enough to try an election without the usual accompaniment of bribery and official influence."

For a minute or two they sat in silence; then a man who up to this time had remained a silent listener said, "I'm glad to hear you say so, Dick. I wish our young men were all of the same opinion."

The company looked at the speaker. Some of them smiled.

"I know you've all heard things, and a good many of them true, I dare say, but I want to say right here that I've never yet put money in a man's hand for his vote without feeling that I have weakened whatever moral character he may have had, and influenced him on the side of wrong-doing to an extent which would probably bear fruit in other matters besides elections."

Little more was said on the subject, and after they had arranged certain legitimate committee work Dick excused himself, and in a few minutes Prue and he had started for home. On the way Prue said, slipping her hand under Dick's arm, "You came out nobly, old boy, and I want to offer you an apology. For one moment I thought you were going to encourage the spread of that silly tale regarding Johnston. I wonder who started it."

"I fancy it originated with the wily councillor himself," said Dick. "He is an adept at making balls for others to fire."

"What was that story about Perkins they referred to?"

"Why, during his campaign, I one day said to Gregory, who was riding me pretty hard because of Culverson's intemperance, that he had better be looking after his own man, that I had just seen him drinking down in the village. So I had, but nothing more cheering, poor man, than a glass of water. Gregory knew enough to pay no attention to it, but someone who overheard it repeated it, with variations, I dare say. And so it grew until it became a wondrous story of drunkenness, in which Gregory figured as well as Perkins. We who knew better only laughed at it, though I must admit we made no effort to correct it. But upon my word, I had no idea to what extent it was believed until after the election. There are persons, I believe, who are thoroughly convinced of the truth of it till this day, though I don't suppose Perkins was ever intoxicated in his life. So you see, little girl," turning to look at her, "you need not apologise for having wronged me in your thoughts. If I did not deserve your suspicion at this time I did at another, and who knows but temptation might have been too strong for me this time if I had not been seeing with your eyes and listening with your ears instead of my own?"

Prue was silent. She was touched, as what girl is not when told that her influence is for good over the man who loves her. "Dear old chum, Dick," she said.

"Yes, but what about the old lover Dick? Is he never to be dear?"

"Perhaps, some day."

"Be more definite, Prue. Make me the happiest fellow upon earth."

"What shall I say, then? What particular time shall I set? I have it: I'll become engaged to you—mind, only engaged—if Johnston wins the election."

Dick looked at her.

Her lips were innocently and demurely closed. Her eyes were safely ambushed in the shadow of her hat brim.

"If Johnston wins the election, um—" He repeated the words slowly and ruminatively.

A lengthy pause followed, in which Dick fully realised that since the fight of the other day Prue had never laid down her weapons.

"Prue, I believe you are the sort of person people have in mind when they talk about a strategist."

When Dick and Prue passed through Orran, Dr. Bevis was just turning in at his own gate. He was returning from seeing Ezra Pinnock, the second visit since morning. Poor Ezra's days were numbered; the unseen hand had reached forth, and now all the "old doctor" could do was to make the passing of another fellow-mortal as painless as possible. It was saddening, this frequent encounter with the inevitable, and the doctor, fatigued in mind and body, sat carelessly huddled on his buggy seat, one leg and foot dangling out over the side.

"Brace up, doctor. There is nothing so bad but it might be worse," called Dick, cheerily, in passing.

The doctor was really too tired to reply. He barely turned to look as the two figures quickly passed, a succession of brilliant dashes showing where the moonlight struck on the rapidly revolving wheels of Dick's buggy. Straight to bed the doctor went, and in ten minutes was sleeping like an infant.

It was with something like consternation that

Mrs. Bevis, a couple of hours later, listened to the approach of a galloping horse. Rub-a-de-dub, rub-a-de-dub, the heavy, uneven gallop of a farm-horse down the road, over the wooden planking of the crossing, straight to the doctor's door, where the gravel was thrown up like spray by the animal's clumsy feet as he was brought to a sudden halt. A loud "Whoa!" was the prelude to a still louder cry of "Doctor!"

Mrs. Bevis was about to bring her elbow into play, but the doctor, like a well-trained soldier, was up before the cry to battle had fairly died away. He threw open the window and thrust out his head. "What's the matter? Who's there?" Before the man had time to answer he said, "Oh, it's you, Jim. Wife sick?"

"Yes, you're wanted out home quick as yeh can get there." Then a brief sentence followed, which, out of respect to motherhood, shall be omitted. Nevertheless, it was shouted up to the doctor in a voice which all the town might have heard.

"All right, Jim, I'll come right off." The doctor shut the window. The lumbering gallop again crossed the planking, pounded on the roadway, and died away in the direction whence it came. The doctor leisurely lit a lamp, then sat down on the edge of the bed and yawned cavernously.

"Why do you smile?" he said. "I don't see anything mirth-provoking.

"No! That's because you are so unimaginative," answered his wife. "It has its disadvantages. Just picture to yourself the panic Jim would create if he were to gallop from door to door shouting that last piece of information he imparted to you." Mrs. Bevis laughed. "The villagers would rise from their peaceful dreams and flee to the highest ground available, sure that another Johnstown disaster had overtaken them."

The doctor was hunting for his clothes. "Jim does get rather excited over little things. There will be something like a panic out there if this is another girl."

"Are they all girls?"

"Every one, so far; seven, I think."

"Goodness!"

"I'll never forget," said the doctor, becoming more animated, "I'll never forget when the third girl—I mean the third pair—arrived."

"Goodness gracious! Do they come in pairs, then?"

"Frequently. Jim was plowing in a field near the road. He wouldn't come near the house for fear of what might have happened. He didn't speak to his wife for a week after the second girl was born."

"The brute!"

"So when I passed the field on my way home I called to him, 'It's all right this time, Jim; it's not a girl.' Poor Jim did not observe that the distinction was between 'girl' and 'girls.' I did hear that he waited for me at the corner with a breech-loader for the space of a week, but I didn't happen to pass that way, so his anger had time to cool. At the end of another year he was obliged to summon me again, but "— Mrs. Bevis had dropped off to sleep, just a wink or two, and awoke to hear—" but when the sixth girl came—"

"Oh, do hurry! the poor woman will be dead."

"I am hurrying. Did you," in an aggrieved tone, "see my other boot? Never mind, here it is under the bed. When the sixth girl came—" Again Mrs. Bevis slipped into the land of dreams. This time when she awoke the doctor was struggling with his coat—and the seventh girl.

"Are you home already, dear?"

"Home already! You've been asleep, woman. I haven't gone yet."

"Oh, dear me! that poor woman!"

When the doctor did get home it was in the broad light of another day.

"Another girl?" asked Mrs. Bevis, anxiously.

"No, ma'am," this in the tone of one who takes a great deal of credit to himself. "A boy, and the counterpart of his long-expectant sire."

"Jim will be delighted."

"Delighted doesn't do his feelings justice; he's the most tickled man you ever saw. But the risk I took "—and the doctor ruffled his hair with a tragic gesture.

"He wasn't armed, was he? Jim, I mean, not the baby."

"No, but I jollied Jim into making a compact with me that if it was another girl I would vote for Culverson. If a boy, he was to vote for Johnston. Jim felt secure; he had given up hope, and I felt reckless enough to take a chance. The result—"

"The result," declared Mrs. Bevis, "proves what I have said all along. The women are willing to do all *they* can to bring about Johnston's election."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE day of the election was drawing closer; the intervening days could now be counted on the fingers of one hand. Outwardly the Province was very quiet regarding it. Apart from the ceaseless wrangling of party newspapers, the election would go on record as one in which there appeared to be very little interest taken. In that fact alone the Government might have read, and probably did read, its downfall. It was the stillness which presages new actions. The body, the Liberal body of the Province, which had too long borne with an offending right hand, was about to cut it off.

It being generally conceded that the Province was going against the Government, the Conservatives of Middleworth thought they at last saw a chance of winning the county. Dr. Bevis did not give himself a moment's leisure, but he was not as sanguine of success as he had been upon the occasion of former elections. There were so many voters in the village who were more amenable to money than moral suasion, and under the circumstances contact with these men was very depressing.

This condition of affairs made Mrs. Bevis restless, especially as Prue had ceased running in at all hours. When she had not seen the girl for two whole days, she decided to go and learn the cause of her prolonged absence. It was well on in the afternoon when she approached the big farmhouse, the western side of which glowed warmly in the sun's rays, while from the eastern side a long, cool shadow stretched across the grass. The front door was ajar, and Mrs. Bevis entered the hall. Closed shutters (closed because of the heat) made it very dim, and the stairway rose to an upper hall which was even more shadowy.

"The palace of the Sleeping Beauty," said Mrs. Bevis, aloud. "Where art thou, Prudence?" The only response to this was the low, rhythmic tick of a tall old-world clock that stood on the landing, a clock which had come over seas with Mr. Stainsby's grandfather. It had a faded, moon-like face and trembling hands, and it tolled the hours off lingeringly, as though loath to see each one depart, now that it was growing old.

By and by a faint rattle of dishes sounded from the region of the kitchen. Mrs. Bevis went in that direction, and pushing open the door saw Martha, Prue's handmaiden, with her arms immersed in dish-water, dreamily gazing into space.

"Where is Miss Stainsby?" inquired Mrs. Bevis, sharply.

Martha started violently and dropped a cup, thereby severing it from its handle. "She—she's gone to the attic."

"No wonder," and the look Mrs. Bevis swept over the girl and her table, still littered with dishes, was comprehensive in the extreme. Mrs. Bevis knew the way to the attic; she had been there before, and thought it one of the pleasantest places in the house. Quietly pushing up the trap-door that closed over the stair leading to it, she saw Prue enthroned in the midst of what appeared to be the contents of several rag-bags. She was sewing, and looked flushed and impatient.

"What on earth are you doing?" Apparently it was Mrs. Bevis's mission to go about upsetting people. At sound of her voice Prue started forward; the three-legged chair, which had bravely borne her weight while she exercised care, suddenly deserted her, and she sank helplessly in a sea of rags. Mrs. Bevis closed the trap-door and walked over to her. "How nice it is," she said, "to see people collapse at the sound of one's voice. I scared Martha, below stairs, out of her usual state of somnolence, and now you go over like a nine-pin. What on earth *are* you doing?" and selecting a chair that seemed fairly firm on its legs, Mrs. Bevis sat down to await a reply.

"I'm sewing carpet rags."

"Sewing carpet rags—you!"

"You seem surprised. Is not the making of rag carpet a time-honored institution in all well-regulated farm-houses? I find also that keeping the light and dark rags evenly mixed is good discipline." And Prue carefully pieced a strip of faded blue shirting to the end of a string of dark calico. "The trouble is I want to pick out all the long pieces and all the bright pieces, they are so much pleasanter to work with. The dark short pieces, which I would rather not sew, are like the dull, colorless bits of life which one has to live through, but once lived through they make the bright bits look brighter by contrast."

"I'm going," said Mrs. Bevis, rising in haste. "It was enough to see you sewing carpet rags, but when you also moralize the limit is reached."

Prue laughed. "Sit down, and I'll tell you how it came about. You are not a member of the Ladies' Aid Society?"

"No."

"I am. Mrs. Dollinger as president grows rampant every year over a bale of goods which we send to a certain missionary in the far north. He wished a number of yards of rag carpet to be sent this year—they wear it out there, I believe, and requested that we should send it shortly, as winter has an unpleasant habit of descending on them in that region before we are fairly out of summer. At the last meeting, Mrs. Dollinger, to be more expeditious, divided the rags, giving each member a portion of them to sew. She said to me, 'Is there any use in giving you a share of them, Prudence? I shall want them all brought here in two weeks' time, ready to be taken to the weaver.' The other members who were present anxiously awaited my reply. I disappointed them by meekly replying that I had never sewed carpet rags, but would do my best to have them ready at the time specified. When I took my bundle of rags, she said, 'Now, dear, don't let your natural dilatoriness overcome your good resolution.' "

"Hem!" commented Prue's listener. "Mrs. Dollinger is certainly qualifying for the position of mother-in-law."

"To-morrow the two weeks are up." With a tragic gesture Prue pointed to the pile of rags, and then to one small ball, which was all she had sewn.

Mrs. Bevis burst into a ringing laugh. She was minded to have some amusement at Prue's expense, because she knew she had it in her power to lift this burden from the girl's shoulders, and to render unto Mrs. Dollinger more than the amount of Prue's share of carpet rags beautifully sewn and carefully rolled into balls.

"To-morrow, when you fail to appear with the other members of the Ladies' Aid Society, how disappointed they will be, and how *pleased*. Prue, you will not have a shred of character left. Mrs. Dollinger will probably call on her way home and insist upon taking the rags with her."

"Let her," said Prue, suddenly firing up. "But oh, the worst has not been told!" and she as suddenly collapsed again. "She asked me in the post-office the other evening how I was getting on with them, and—"

"You let her bully you into telling a fib?"

"Almost," and Prue colored like a naughty child, continuing meanwhile to sew with desperate energy.

Suddenly Mrs. Bevis bent over, took the needle and thread from Prue's hands, and with her foot sent the rags flying across the attic floor. "That for Mrs. Dollinger and her rags!" she exclaimed. "Relieve your mind of the whole business, Prue. Come home with me, and I will give you balls of carpet rags sufficient to clothe and carpet the missionary throughout." Prue looked dazed and incredulous. "I'm not joking; an old lady visited me once who insisted upon doing something to help. When her insistence became painful, I told her that it had been the dream of my life to own a rag carpet. She took to the suggestion at once, and burrowed among the rags for days, turning out ball after ball with stitches fine enough for cambric embroidery. They have always been rather a burden to me, so you are entirely welcome to them."

"Is it really true? Oh, I am so glad!" breathed Prue, fervently, looking up with grateful, shining eyes. Then she rose and shook her skirts. "Come along downstairs. I feel like celebrating. If you will stay and have tea with daddy and me I'll walk home with you later on." It was agreed upon, and they descended to the living-room, which was cool and dusk and full of the odor of flowers.

Mrs. Bevis sank into a chair with a deep sigh of content. There was something so restful about Prue's ways and Prue's surroundings. "I should have the room tidied to death," Mrs. Bevis admitted to herself, regretfully. "Nothing could be prettier than that ring of fallen rose-leaves, crimson and white and yellow, lying around that green bowl on the polished surface of the table, and yet in my own house I should think it looked untidy. The very chairs seem to take positions which invite repose, and the table and bookcase, always littered with papers and magazines, suggest hours of quiet enjoyment.

"You are not fond of Mrs. Dollinger," said Prue.

"At a distance, yes," said Mrs. Bevis.

"She admires you. I have heard her say you are possessed of a 'vivid intelligence.' How is that for a compliment?"

"Meaning that it comes in flashes," replied Mrs. Bevis, "or, in other words, that I have occasional lucid intervals. The compliment was carefully veiled."

The soothing influence of the living-room, the low drone of bees, and the odor of flowers coming through the open window had almost lulled Mrs. Bevis to sleep, when suddenly Martha appeared in the doorway and in a stage aside announced that Mrs. Dollinger was "jist coming up the drive." Then she withdrew to obtain a better view of the lady's approach.

Mrs. Dollinger drove about in a stylish little phaeton and wore dressy hats and wraps. The village maids and matrons copied her extensively, and the village dressmaker went so far as to ask her for the loan of a certain costume so as to enable her to see more closely into its intricacies, and thus be in a position to satisfy the desire which so many of her customers had expressed to have one "just like it." Far from being offended at this, Mrs. Dollinger was pleased. She liked to be considered "the glass of fashion and the mould of form" in Orran.

When Prue realized the full meaning of Martha's announcement, she cast a startled look at Mrs. Bevis. "She has come for the missionary's carpet rags."

Mrs. Bevis promptly sat up. "Leave her to me if rags are even mentioned."

Prue rose and met her visitor at the door. "My, how warm it is!" the latter exclaimed.

"Distressingly so," agreed Prue.

"*You* look quite cool and leisurely," glancing the girl over.

Prue had put on a fresh white frock and, of course, looked "leisurely" to the woman, who was gazing at her with a touch of jealous disapproval in her eyes.

"Oh, personally, I enjoy warm weather. I meant it was distressing to those who do not," Prue replied. Together they entered the living-room, and Mrs. Bevis and Mrs. Dollinger exchanged greetings.

"Won't you remove your hat? You will rest more comfortably without it." And Prue pulled a chair, which had wide, inviting arms, before one of the windows.

"No, thank you, I have only a few minutes to stay." And Mrs. Dollinger sat very upright, her eyes, which were quick and bright, roving about the room. Mrs. Bevis had once said that Mrs. Dollinger's eyes reminded her of a terrier's eyes when someone has just said "Rats!"

"Dick is always preaching against having so many useless things in a home which require time and labor to keep clean and in order. He quotes your house as an example of what a house should be." ("Foolish Dick," murmured Mrs. Bevis under her breath.) "Certainly your rooms are distinctive, but—rather bare. It is a matter of taste," and a tolerant smile crossed her face. "Of course, if one does not care for housekeeping and takes no pleasure in the work of making one's surroundings homelike, then it is better undoubtedly to live plainly. For my part, I am very fond of being surrounded by pretty things."

"Such as—?"

Mrs. Dollinger colored slightly at the dry tone of Mrs. Bevis's query. "Oh, pictures and curtains and little knick-knacks; you know very well what I mean, you have them in your own house."

"I blush to confess it. Some day I shall yield to the temptation which frequently assails me, and make a bonfire of them in the backyard, especially the knick-knacks. I think Prue has set us all a most sensible example. The amount of trash which women will collect in a house is most extraordinary. If a taste for simplicity could be cultivated, we would realize that the real beauty of the home is in the objects for which there is actual need. Let those be as beautiful and of as excellent workmanship as the means of the buyer will permit. Then we should obtain that restfulness which was a joy in the houses of by-gone times, and the friction of every-day life, as we are now situated, with good servants scarcely to be had at any price, would be wonderfully minimised. I believe if men would undertake the housekeeping for a short time, the first change they would make would be to sweep the stuff which women consider ornamental into the ash-heap. Their broadness of view and average good sense would not tolerate that which is the root of one-half the women's nervous ailments to-day. Only yesterday I was reading of a man who left a luxurious home and built for himself a shanty in the woods, where he might with an eye single to the beauties of nature enjoy a life of freedom and simplicity. His furniture consisted of a bed, a pine table, and two chairs—the second chair, I presume, to put his feet upon—also a writing-desk and some tin cooking utensils. To this were added a couple of pieces of limestone which he used as paper weights, but when he found they required daily dusting he threw them away. He was a sensible man. Had he taken a woman into the wilderness with him, she would have painted hideous flowers on the limestone and insisted upon his admiring them. She would have made drapery for the chairs, and scolded him when he disarranged it; and probably some doilies and a centre-piece for the pine table, and so have gone on accumulating trash until the wretched man would have been obliged to build another shanty. Of course, I am speaking now of the average householder, of those who too frequently are foolish enough to try to make a ten thousand dollar display on a two thousand dollar income."

Prue remained silent with a demure smile on her face, which she kept carefully beyond the range of Mrs. Dollinger's vision.

Mrs. Dollinger fidgeted. "I am afraid you judge men all alike. I can assure you Mr. Dollinger enjoys being surrounded by pretty and dainty things quite as much as I do myself."

Mrs. Bevis smiled. To imagine Mr. Dollinger, pompous and rotund, enjoying pretty and dainty things was as difficult as to imagine an elephant enjoying a French hat and a string of beads. "Let me assure you that Mr. Dollinger is exceptional," she said.

Mrs. Dollinger was beginning to feel that there was opposition in the atmosphere. She bridled perceptibly. "I do not agree with you in that either, Mrs. Bevis. I believe there are a great many men who would object to having their homes stripped of such things, even if their wives were foolish enough to wish to do so. Dick is the only one I have ever heard advocating such a thing, and he, of course, imbibed the idea from Prudence. I shouldn't be surprised to see him living in a tent yet."

Prue rose to this. "What a delightful idea! He and his wife would be in a position to lead a sort of Sarah and Abraham existence. No house-cleaning, no bother of any kind, only to pick up the tent and move it to a fresh place occasionally. My Biblical knowledge may not be very correct, but I have an impression that Sarah's culinary achievements were not on a very extensive scale either. A measure of meal made into cakes and baked in the ashes, and a kid or a calf killed and roasted by one of the men servants, seemed to be the perpetual bill of fare. It must have been nice for Sarah when Abraham brought home unexpected visitors to dinner to know that nothing more was expected than the same old measure of meal. Barring their trouble with Hagar, Sarah's life must have been serenely happy, just the sort of life I should enjoy."

"Perhaps Hagar had a turn for domestic science, and a taste, shared by Abraham, for pretty and dainty things," said Mrs. Bevis, wickedly.

Mrs. Dollinger turned her back upon her and addressed Prue.

"By the way, Prudence, if you have those carpet rags sewn, I should like to take them with me. The weaver is ready for our work, and he may as well begin with those you have."

Prue was taken by surprise after all, and, as usual, a swift rush of color to her cheeks betrayed her. "I understood you to say that you shouldn't need them before to-morrow."

Mrs. Dollinger smiled. "You think you may have them ready by to-morrow? Martha must have been mistaken, then; she came out to help to tie the pony, and I asked her if she had helped you with the carpet rags. She said you hadn't been sewing carpet rags."

"Admirable Martha!" said Mrs. Bevis, quickly. "She is the only one of her kind who ever failed to know exactly what the mistress of the house had been doing. Let me testify on Prue's behalf. I found her sewing rags in the attic when I arrived an hour ago. I begged of her to leave them, so please do not insist upon having them this afternoon, Mrs. Dollinger; to-morrow will do."

"Oh, very well, I shall be at the schoolroom to-morrow at three o'clock. Send them there, as I should like to see them before they go to the weaver." Mrs. Dollinger rose to go.

The delicate color in Prue's cheeks had become fixed, and her head went a degree or two higher. She shook her head in answer to a meaning look from Mrs. Bevis. "Doubtless Mrs. Bevis will be good enough to attend to it, as she is giving me a sufficient quantity of rags already sewn. Of those you gave me I managed to sew only one very small ball."

"Ah!" Mrs. Dollinger looked from one to the other. "You gave me to understand in the post-office one evening—"

"That I was getting on with them, yes; but I had only begun, and had no idea what a disagreeable task it was going to be."

"And you always make it a rule to lay disagreeable tasks aside." Mrs. Dollinger laughed. She was not really ill-natured, only perpetually fidgeting about little things; besides, she was rather pleased than otherwise that Prue had done very much as she had predicted. She was in a position to say, "I told you so," which, as all the world has heard, is soothing, even to a saintly woman. But she yet had Mrs. Bevis to deal with, and the latter, seeing that her little tactics had gone for nought, felt revengeful.

"Good-bye," she said. "Remember me to Mr. Dollinger. By the way, how well he is looking: I saw him last Sunday on his way to Sunday-school." (Mr. Dollinger is the strictest of superintendents.) "He looked the picture of health, and so charmingly unconventional in the matter of dress."

"I was visiting in Garric Sound over Sunday," answered Mrs. Dollinger. There was an uneasy note in her voice.

That night, beneath the rows of horned celebrities, Mrs. Dollinger long regarded the portly figure and ruddy face of her husband. It was a face which was capable of looking extremely acute and occasionally contemptuous; now it had an after-supper expression of good-nature. Mrs. Dollinger approached the subject which was uppermost in her mind. "Did you have much rain here on Sunday? It rained heavily in Garric Sound."

"So it did here," answered Mr. Dollinger, without raising his eyes from his newspaper.

"Did you go to Sunday-school?"

"Yes."

"What did you wear?"

"I wore my black suit." Mr. Dollinger looked over his spectacles and over the top of his paper. He was beginning to grow suspicious. Mrs. Dollinger was puzzled; the black suit was immaculate, a Prince Albert coat, and trousers made by the best tailor in Garric Sound.

"You were not able to wear your silk hat, I suppose?"

"Oh, if that's what you're worrying about, spare yourself. I wore it, but I didn't get a drop of rain on it. I wore my long boots on account of the mud; and, while I think of it, I wish when you go away you would leave a white shirt out. I had to wear a flannel one."

A change came over Mrs. Dollinger's countenance. She rose. "You wore that coat, a *Prince Albert coat,* with your trouser-legs stuffed into your boot tops. What you must have looked like from behind! and," incoherently, "a flannel shirt and a silk hat on your head!"

Mr. Dollinger's face became contemptuous, and he replied with great dignity, "I didn't say I wore the shirt on my head."

CHAPTER XIV.

"Prudence, if you are not tired I should like you to run down to the village and get the mail. I'm a bit tired myself to-night. I don't think I shall stir out of the house until morning."

It was the evening following Mrs. Bevis's visit, and the Squire, after a long day in the fields, stretched out his slippered feet and regarded his paper-littered desk lovingly. Prue had just returned from the cool depths of the cellar, where she had been straining milk. Her muslin dress was protected by a big blue apron, and a brigadierish hat rested on her curly locks. "Have some, daddy," and she placed a brimming glass of milk at his elbow. "Do I look tired?" she demanded.

"No, quite the reverse."

"I've been wanting to fly all day. Did you ever have a feeling that if you were to run to the top of the highest hill"—pointing to where the hills darkened the western sky—"and spread your arms wide, you would be carried up into the clouds?"

The Squire shook his head. "No, my imagination never lifts me off the ground—at least, not bodily."

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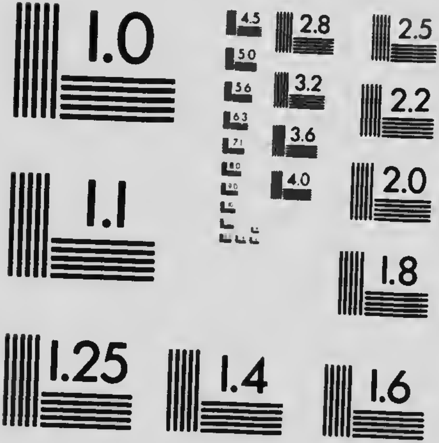
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"Yours is a nice, sensible imagination; it never soars and is never in the depths. To-morrow I shall be dull and spiritless, and imagination, like a broken-winged bird, will scarce be able to move along in narrow ways where to-day it would scorn to alight. But who cares for to-morrow when to-night is like this?" And she tossed her hat and apron into a chair. "Good-bye; I shall not be long—that is, unless I should try a flight from the hilltops. When the night is like this," she repeated, passing down a garden walk leading to a footpath which made a near cut to the village. A rose branch caught at her dress, and a lumbering toad, dazed with fat living and sweet scents, squatted helplessly in the middle of the path. With a little cry Prue sprang over him and ran down the slope to the foot of the garden, where the meadow and the narrow footpath began. At a small gate set in one of the cedar panels she stopped a moment and looked to all sides of her. So still and sweet it seemed, and so fresh the breath of evening, that she lifted up her face to meet its soft caress.

The sun, as a token of his return, had left a cloak of many colors hanging low in the west. Eastward the moon, newly risen, was silvering the world with her matchless light, and, as is her way, causing deep black shadows to lie athwart the brightest spaces—shadows in which love and a lover might lurk, or hate and an avenger.

In a bit of swamp which followed the creek lower down, a whip-poor-will sang over and over again that song which is not a song but only a refrain, with a rising inflection on the last note which fills the listener with restless forebodings.

"Whip-poor-will, whip-poor-will," answered Prue. "You are as old and full of mystery as the moon herself."

The bird was instantly silent. The moon grew brighter as the western sky paled, and shadows that were thin and pale grew black and bold in outline. The bird began again, then as suddenly ceased; those plaintive notes which have followed the moon and the shadows since "the evening of the fourth day" were being blithely mimicked by a man.

"Dick," murmured Prue. "Always aggressively cheerful."

He was coming down the high road, which was just to the left of where she was standing. Suddenly as he strode along he began singing an old song which was a favorite of his. The words, "Why should we wait till to-morrow? you're queen of my heart to-night," were distinctly carried to Prue in his musical, untrained voice. She waited to see if he were going to turn in toward the house. He did so, and when he came nearer she called to him, "Come round to the foot of the garden. Father is too tired to be bothered, and I am going to the post-office; or rather I was, but now I think I shall send you instead."

Dick was close beside her now, and he was in a mood which the woman he loved, provided she even liked him, would find hard to resist. He was a handsome fellow, a stalwart young Canadian, with the bright light of the North in his eyes, and a touch of the fire of her fervent summers on his thick wavy hair. He was dressed to do Prue honor, and when she said, "How nice you look, just as though you'd had a bath and put on your very best clothes," he colored with delight.

"That grey flannel suit is altogether becoming, and the flowing silk tie lends a picturesque touch. Let me straighten it for you," and with that touch of coquetry which is inseparable from womankind Prue reached up and untied the silk scarf he wore about his neck and then proceeded to retie it. She was quite conscious of the beauty of Dick's throat, rising round and straight from his broad shoulders, tanned to a golden brown above the line of his collar, below which it was as white as her own. She was also quite aware that his heart was beating triple time, and that the eyes looking down at hers were full of passionate love. Her fingers trembled just a little, and she made haste to finish knotting the scarf. In doing so her hand brushed beneath his chin. Dick's hands instantly came up and closed one over each round, white arm, holding her fast.

"Prue."

At that moment Dick was compelling, absorbing. The girl's eyes moved up to his, and if her heart had followed her desire she would gladly have acknowledged herself his. Driving her on was an impression that by doing so she would escape something which was entering her life from another and comparatively unknown source, something which was so great that, seeing merely a glimpse of it, as something which might be, made her afraid. And Dick, dear Dick, was so loving and faithful and—familiar.

He looked into her eyes, and his head bent lower and lower. He knew that if she permitted him to lay a lover's kiss on her sweet lips she was his, as much as if a hundred words had been woven into a promise. An instant and that which had seemed his had flown again. Prue's face was pressed close down on his arm, and she was saying, with a little sob, "Not yet, Dick; not yet."

Dick stood silent a moment and his face paled a little. He lifted up her head and pressed it against his heart. "I'm afraid I am but a poor wooer, dear. I am not quick enough to take advantage of my lady's moods. I have waited patiently on your sweet will, Prue, but some day I shall *take* you. I believe it is the only way of getting you. And yet I want first to be sure of your love."

Prue gently freed herself and moved a few steps from his side. "Perhaps," she answered, with a little penitent smile. "At any rate, to be taken by force would relieve one of all responsibility in the matter."

"I am afraid you do not love me," said Dick.

"There is no one you like better, is there, dear?" he asked, boyishly.

Prue held out her hand with a little gush of tenderness. "Dear old boy, I do not know what I should do without you."

"Shall you wait here till I go to the post-office and back?" he presently asked. "Or shall we go together?"

"I shall wait here; or no, I shall go to the top of the big hill and back, and meet you here when you return. I have been longing for a climb up its steep side and a run down again, all day."

"Why not wait until I come back, and we'll climb the hill together?"

"No," she said, wilfully, "I prefer to go alone, and I shall go now, before that lovely color is all gone out of the west."

So Dick went one way, crushing ruthlessly in his haste the tangled sweets in the meadow, seeing nothing but Prue's face, and counting the time long until he should see it again. By the other way went Prue, daintily picking her steps, her light skirts softly brushing over red clover tops, meadow-sweet, and plumy wild grasses. Field daisies on slender stems bowed and swayed to each other across the narrow footpath, sometimes forming a fairy bridge where two touched and became entangled, a bridge over which homing insects crossed.

Prue reached the top of the hill, warm and breathless, and threw herself down to rest. There was a huge boulder not far away, the outline of which was quite familiar to her. She noticed in a preoccupied way that it bore an unusual projection above one corner; but it was not till the odor of a cigar drifted to her that suspicion led her to discover that the unusual projection was the crown of a man's hat. Curiosity overcame a strong inclination to run away, so she rose and moved softly around the boulder. Another step would have placed her in a position to obtain a look at the wearer of the hat, when suddenly, with an impatient exclamation, he sprang up and stood facing her.

"Oh!" she cried, stepping back a pace, and looking with startled, confused eyes into Johnston's face.

"You have come at last," he said, holding out his hand to her. "Did I frighten you?"

"A little. What made you think I should come at all?"

"Your father told me you were either in the village or on the top of the hill. I had just come from the village, and so took the chance of finding you up here."

"You were at the house, then? I thought you had gone to the city hours ago."

"Did you?" Johnston smiled down at her.

Prue bit her lip; the little admission that she had been thinking of him had slipped out unawares.

"I missed the afternoon train," he added; "so I came to Orran an hour or two ago. Dr. Bevis is going to drive me to Garric Sound in time for the late train. At present the doctor has some work to attend to, so I came to you, thinking perhaps you would show me the hollow in the woods which the sphinx guards on moonlight nights."

"I fear the sphinx must wait," said Prue, soberly. "Her home is in the woods in which we picnicked the other day, quite a mile away, and it would not do for you to miss another train."

"Never mind," he answered. "There will be other moonlight nights, and even the sphinx could scarcely repay one for leaving this," indicating by a wave of his hand the picture that unrolled itself from the base of the hill whereon they stood.

Prue's face kindled with pleasure. "You think it beautiful," she said. "Say you think it is the most beautiful spot in the world." And indeed it was a picture to make those who shared in it sing with pride and joy.

On one side a handful of lights marked the village, through which the broad, white highroad led westward, threading other villages on its way. Apple and peach orchards checkered moonlit places with dark squares of foliage; and dotted here and there, like scattered fireflies, were single lights, each one marking a peaceful, prosperous rooftree. Straight before them the little creek ran, gleaming like quicksilver, and looping itself at intervals to form a tiny, placid pool, like a pearl pendant on a string of jewels. Afar off, with gentle sweep, circled Lake Ontario, a burnished sickle against a purple sky. High overhead a single metallic note smote the air, marking the rapid beating back and forth of a nighthawk. In the woods the whip-poor-will tried once more to tell the story of his love and banishment. Over all hung the sweet breath of June, exhaled from field and orchard and garden, and to the hilltop it was wafted in warm perfumed waves.

"It *is* beautiful," said Johnston. "But to me Canada is beautiful in all parts and in all moods."

"You have travelled through the length and breadth of Canada. So few have."

"Yes, too few. Those of us who travel prefer, as a rule, to go abroad, overlooking meanwhile mountains and lakes and rivers much more beautiful and having the additional charm of home. As for myself, I have always desired to become thoroughly acquainted with Canada's natural beauties and resources; as a result my travels for pleasure and recreation have been entirely within the Dominion. Once I crossed to the Old World, but the trip was purely a business one. I have spent solitary days fishing and hunting in Muskoka, convinced while I was there that it contained the most exquisite scenery ever painted on Nature's canvas. Then there were days spent far west in the mountains, when it seemed as if there could be no other place of importance in the world; and other days when the world was a huge flower-bed, because it was spring and I was on the plains surrounded by hundreds of acres of flowers wherein were all the colors of the rainbow.

"My last holiday was spent in North Quebec, in the dead of winter, snowshoeing over its lonely white wastes. There were times there when, standing on some high ridge and looking far across distant peaks, clad in dark cedars weighted with snow, I thought the warm, living beauty of other scenes dwarfed by comparison to insignificance. One seemed face to face with a mystery, a white frozen mystery, chilled to the very heart, but yet instinct with that which gives one the impression that Nature is listening and waiting under that frozen calm for something, we know not what. She even seems to speak, although we hear not, with our dull ears."

Prue was silent for a moment, then she quoted:

"Bring me men to match my mountains,
Bring me men to match my plains,
Men with Empire in their purpose
And new eras in their brains."

"That is Canada's inarticulate cry," she softly added.

. . . .

It was half an hour later that Johnston and Prue ran down the hillside hand-in-hand like two children. When they reached a lower plane they proceeded at a more dignified pace, and Prue drew her hand from his. She was endeavoring to keep the conversation, which had become personal, as near the surface as possible.

Coming through the meadow he said, in continuation, "I cannot remember the time when I did not envy fellows who had sisters. When I was a small boy I respectfully admired little girls in calico dresses and bare feet. In white dresses and colored sashes I thought them the prettiest things in existence. Even their dolls were a source of wonder and pleasure to me, and I once blackened a boy's eye for kicking over his sister's playhouse. I longed with all a child's ardent longing to have a little girl of my own, and to have her surrounded with all a little girl's natural accessories."

"Did you outgrow the longing, or is it only in abeyance?" Prue's red lips were parted in a smile.

"It is only in abeyance, and I still have a grudge against fate for having denied me a sister."

"Oh, I shouldn't let an oversight which can so easily be rectified cause me to harbor a feeling of ill-will against fate. There are plenty of nice girls any one of whom, I am sure, would promise to be a sister to you."

"You think so? I am not so sure. Anyway it would be rather difficult to ask a nice girl to accept me as a brother."

"Yes, I fancy it would, if you approached the subject in that way. The proper way is to ask some nice girl if she will accept you as a husband; she refuses, but softens her refusal by offering to be a sister to you. Of course, too much care cannot be exercised in choosing one to whom it would be safe to offer yourself as a husband, otherwise complications might arise. It is best, I think, to choose one who already has a collection of brothers. A new specimen is always welcome to a collector."

"May I ask if you are speaking from experience?"

"Only a very limited experience. Some have even been so unkind as to refuse to accept me in the character of a sister."

"Impossible! How unfeeling! I certainly thought better of—Dick."

"Oh, Dick and I have never discussed—the alternative."

By this time they had crossed the meadow and were within a few yards of the garden gate, where Dick and Prue had parted an hour before.

"I see. You never reached that point. 'Complications' arose when Dick offered himself as a husband."

Prue laughed. Johnston had neatly caught her in the trap which her own words had woven. She had no chance of replying; a horse and buggy rapidly driven from the direction of the village, and a loud "Hello" from the driver as he halted before the house, arrested their attention.

"The doctor!" Johnston exclaimed. "He has come in search of me. It is time, I suppose, that we were starting for Garric Sound."

"Quite time," said Prue. "In fact," looking at a diminutive watch that she carried, "no one but the doctor would attempt it. You have just forty minutes."

Johnston took her hand in his. "Good-bye.

When I want a sister I shall act upon your suggestion; at present I want—a wife." Stooping, he kissed the hand he held, and then in answer to an imperative "Hello, Johnston!" moved quickly away.

Two minutes more and the sound of [illegible]'ine's hoof-beats had died in the distance, and silence and a white dust-cloud hovered over the broad highway.

Prue drew a quick little sigh and turned toward the gate in the garden wall. Opening it she passed through, and came upon a tall, gray-clad figure standing stiff and unbending in the shadow of a group of evergreens. It was Dick, with every vestige of tenderness and gaiety gone from his face. It was the clear, cold light of the north now in his eyes as they gleamed whitely in the dark, angry color of his face. Not flushed anger, but cold and grim, the outline of cheek and chin and brow clearly defined by a tense hardness of expression. He stepped out of the shadow and in silence they stood face to face.

Prue thrilled strangely. To cause a man to suffer the fierce pangs of jealousy gratifies the savage that slumbers deep in the breast of every woman. It is retaliation, a desire for which was born in women when they were slaves to the males of their kind. There could be no doubt that Dick was suffering. Prue came a step closer and looked into his eyes.

"So you refused my company because you expected to meet another lover on the hillside."

Prue made no answer, but looked inclined to smile.

Dick's anger increased, and hot words sprang to his tongue. "You lied to me when you said you preferred being there alone."

"I never lie, as you very well know. I did not expect to meet Mr. Johnston there, or indeed anywhere; but even so, supposing that I had, and that he is my lover, is it not better to meet one's lovers one at a time? Together, one or other is apt to become jealous and so place himself at a disadvantage."

"Yes, I have no doubt I look a sorry fool in your eyes at present. I'm jealous enough. I have been suffering the tortures of the damned for the past half hour, ever since I heard his voice and saw you and him coming home hand-in-hand. What was he saying to you?" Dick demanded fiercely. "And what right has he to hold your hand and kiss it? Did he kiss it?" Dick grasped her right hand and looked at it as though he expected ocular proof on its smooth surface as to whether it had recently been kissed.

"He did, just there," and Prue pointed out the spot with her left forefinger.

Dick dropped her hand as though it burnt him.

"I don't want to call you a flirt, Prue."

"Thank you. You called me something worse a moment ago."

"I know it, and I humbly apologize. If any one else had said it I should have knocked him down."

Dick looked at her for a moment or two in silence. Her face was downcast, and she looked tired. Already the dull and spiritless condition which she had prophesied for the morrow was upon her. Something of the shrewdness which characterized his father's face crept over Dick's countenance as his eyes rested on her. "Will you answer me a question or two," he asked gently. "I think I deserve some consideration in this matter."

"If they are reasonable questions, I have no objection."

"Was Johnston making love to you?"

"By which you mean—?"

"I mean just one thing. Did he give you to understand that he is in love with you? Did he ask you to marry him? I distinctly heard him say 'wife.'"

A slow little smile crept around Prue's mouth. "Calm yourself, Dick. Even the most sanguine of spinsters could not construe Johnston's words into a declaration or an offer of marriage."

"Do you love him?"

"Certainly not." Certainly not, indeed. What girl of spirit would acknowledge to herself, much less to another, that she loves the man she has just avowed had given her no reason for supposing that he sought her love.

The shrewd look on Dick's face deepened. "Are you as anxious to see him win this election as you were a week ago?"

"Of course, even more so. Why not?" She raised her eyes in some surprise.

"Then there is no reason why I should not seriously regard the conditional promise you offered me the night we went to Theal? You said that if Johnston won the election you would promise to marry me. You have not forgotten?"

"I have not forgotten," faintly. "But—"

"If you do not love him it should still hold good?"

"As you have said," proudly. "It should still hold good."

"Then Johnston shall win this election." No words can give the intensity of purpose in Dick's tone.

CHAPTER XV.

THE Dollinger household was early astir the following morning, but not early enough to see Dick before he started across the county bent on an interview with Mr. Culverson.

Mr. Dollinger, who never made Sunday an excuse for lying late in bed, frowned when he saw that Dick's horse was gone from its stall and the light buggy from the driving-shed. The frown relaxed when a farm hand told him that Dick had gone to Culverson's. Later it was with a degree of pride that he said to his wife, "It is likely Richard had intelligence of some importance to communicate to Mr. Culverson." Pompous as usual, but quite correct.

Meanwhile Dick, neither stopping nor staying, reached the home of Middleworth's representative in the Provincial Legislature. Mr. Culverson, among whose shortcomings meagre hospitality would never be reckoned, came forth in shirt sleeves and baggy trousers to extend a welcoming hand.

"How are things looking out Orran way? Anything new?" he asked, when Dick had somewhat constrainedly taken the most comfortable seat.

"Not yet," said Dick, jerkily, "but there is going to be something new."

Culverson was pouring something out of a bottle. "Oh, bearing on the election?"

"Yes."

"Let us hear about it."

Dick impatiently pushed back the glass that his host set before him. "Mr. Culverson, it is not an easy matter for me to say that which I came here to say. I want you to believe that it is not. I want you to believe that no other condition of affairs, my affairs or the affairs of others concerned in this matter, could exist which would cause me to do the thing I intend doing."

Culverson placed the bottle on the table. His small grey eyes began to twinkle with awakened interest. Leaning back in his chair, with his thumbs caught in the armholes of his vest, he bestowed on Dick a keen, steady look.

"Well, out with it."

"I am going to do everything that one man can do to destroy your chance of election."

"What!"

With a slight frown Dick repeated his words.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Culverson, gruffly.

"There is nothing the matter with me; personally, I have not changed toward you in the slightest degree. My desire is not to see you defeated, but to see Johnston elected. My reason for so desiring you would not guess in a thousand years, and as I do not intend telling it, you may as well lay that part of the business over. Speculate on it when you have nothing else to do."

"You might have told me of this a little earlier since you troubled yourself to tell me at all."

"Scarcely, in view of the fact that I had been working for your election till within the past twenty-four hours."

Culverson's face wrinkled into a broad smile. "Considering that only one day remains between us and the day of election, you are a little late in making a change."

The smile nettled Dick; there was in it an intimation that he could do nothing now to mar Culverson's prospects or make Johnston's.

"Not too late," he answered sharply. "There has not been much money spent yet; and I am going to convince you that it will be wisdom on your part to spend no more."

"For fear of coming into collision with you and your new desire for Johnston's election?" Culverson's smile widened.

"That, of course; but first let me show you that it will be better for your interests to discontinue bribery. If you remain unconvinced we will then discuss the matter briefly from my standpoint. Johnston's share in this campaign is being conducted so that when it is over no charges can be laid against him. If you defeat him, he and his friends intend entering a protest against your election, and they expect to find it an easy matter to gather up the necessary charges. There are men in Orran who, under Dr. Bevis's guidance, will take your money and be ready to swear that they did when it comes to a court of law. I know of a dozen such. I know their votes are for sale, but I wouldn't dare offer them a dollar. In past elections we had nothing to fear, because the Tories were not courting exposure any more than we were. This time things are different. Johnston is fighting for his election, but he is doing it all above board, and he intends that you shall do the same or suffer the consequences."

For some moments Culverson sat in silence, his thick brows knit in a heavy frown. Finally he said, "I'd like to follow Johnston's lead and fool the hungry dogs that yelp for money at election time and then bite the hand that gives it to them."

"Then why not follow it? Even then you have all the best of it. The county shows a Liberal majority of four hundred."

"Yes, but what about those d—— temperance cranks? There are a lot of sore heads among them this time, and—"

"Pshaw! the temperance Liberals never went back on you yet. What makes you think they are going to do it this time?"

Culverson shook his head. "I don't know exactly, but I know that it's coming."

Dick's strong young mouth curved into a contemptuous smile. "It's your guilty conscience, man. Brace up. Throw over all the old dirty trickery and traffic, and for once stand or fall by a clean election."

The dark color rushed up to Culverson's face. He brought his fist down heavily on the table. "No, sir, it's too late for that now. The people who talk purity wouldn't believe in me if I did, and the others would laugh at me and vote for Johnston. I was a fool for taking the nomination again; but now that I have, I'll not be bluffed out of winning the election if money will do it. There are plenty of divisions in the county where money can be used with safety, divisions where they haven't a Dr. Bevis to put them wise. Trust me, I've been in this game too long to be caught now."

Culverson bit the end off a cigar with a vicious click of his teeth and scratched a match on the sole of his boot. Dick waited till he had sent forth a dense cloud of smoke, and again the shrewd look of his father crept over his face. "When you spoke of divisions where money could be used with safety, you meant—?"

Culverson named over divisions in Theal and other outlying townships.

"I suppose you have already given the money to those who are entrusted to distribute it?" Dick's voice was encouraging.

"All but Theal. There are two men coming from Theal to-night for their share of boodle." And Culverson laughed shortly, as a man laughs who is being driven by the whip he himself had made.

Dick rose and took a turn about the room. Stopping abruptly in front of Culverson, he said, "I must request that you send those two men back empty-handed and with the understanding that they are to let the purchasable vote in their respective divisions go as inclination leads it. I must also request that you will give me a written order to those men who have already received money, to the effect that the aforesaid money must be returned to you instead of being used for the purpose for which it is intended."

While Dick was speaking, Culverson's face changed from surprise to anger. He made as if to speak.

"Wait till I have finished," said Dick. "I will be as brief as possible. I told you in the beginning of this interview that I intended doing all that is possible for one man to do in the time remaining to keep you from winning this election. I want Johnston to win it. I intend that he *shall* win it. I believe he has a good fighting chance if your money is kept under lock and key. I know all that you would say," as Culverson broke in with an oath. "In fact, I know that all you could say would not begin to express your feelings toward me at this moment; but that does not alter the case in the least. You will do as I have said, or accept the alternative."

Dick's eyes narrowed till they were two small points of flame, and he measured his words slowly. Culverson watched him like one hypnotized.

"What is the alternative?" he said in almost a whisper.

"I shall go on the platform to-morrow night, when Johnston holds his meeting in Orran, and I shall tell them, not my real reason for turning against you, but other reasons which will be of much greater interest to the general public. For instance, I shall tell them where you were, and whom you were with, when you were intoxicated last Monday night."

"Hush, for—" The rest of Culverson's words were lost in a hoarse, inarticulate murmur. "Who told you of it?"

Dick felt a touch of sorrow for the man. His face had paled and his coarse lips were trembling.

"One of my father's farm hands. It was a stupid blunder on your part that put him in possession of such knowledge. I bought his silence."

Notwithstanding all that had been said, Culverson gave Dick a look which was almost grateful.

In a half hour's time Dick was on the road again. He had in his possession a paper written and signed by Mr. Culverson, recalling the money which had been given into the hands of certain trusted Liberal workers to make easy the way to the polls for those who were halting between two opinions, or those who frankly had no opinion, and that on a subject of which every man worthy of the name should have a good understanding.

As he drove along Dick's eyes looked sombrely ahead and his lips were set in a determined line.

He was planning, planning, always with one object in view, the strengthening of Johnston's chance of election. There were two men in possession of a goodly sum of Mr. Culverson's money whom he was afraid he would not be able to reach. Mr. Culverson declared that he did not know the exact part of the county they were operating in, and Dick thought it very likely that he did not. They were not county men, but had been in Middleworth on the occasion of a former election, and might be described as part of "the machine."

In this instance they had been furnished with a list containing the names of those who were considered not quite safe for local workers to handle. Dick's chance of locating them and stopping the work they were engaged in was not very sure; nevertheless, he knew that he had accomplished a great deal, and a grim smile broke up the gravity of his face as he thought of the consternation he would create in certain quarters on the morrow.

CHAPTER XVI.

It was now Orran's turn to hear Johnston on the public platform. It was the closing speech of his campaign; the following day would witness his acceptance or rejection at the polls. Before the hour arrived the hall was densely packed. Sheds and convenient tying places were filled with the horses and vehicles of the men who had come from a distance. Gregory made an acceptable presiding officer, and precisely at the hour appointed called the meeting to order and introduced the first speaker. He was a sanguine individual, who assured his audience that Mr. Johnston was going to be elected and offered a great many reasons why such should be the case. In the brief space allotted to him he said a good deal, too much in fact to carry weight. There was nothing, indeed, that he did not take a flying shot at. At the close of his speech he alluded slightingly to Mr. Culverson's moral character, an offence which caused Johnston's brows to come together in a quick frown. He had requested those who assisted him at his meetings to refrain from indulging in personalities.

Next followed, for the space of half an hour, on

Mr. Culverson's behalf, a keen-tongued young lawyer. He made a clever speech and swept many of his predecessor's carelessly disposed arguments to the winds. The crowd drew a long breath; they liked it, it was real fighting. Even the personalities in which the speaker indulged, although distasteful to Johnston's friends, gave them an added thrill and a feeling that such pin-pricks would serve to goad him to a more crushing reply.

When Johnston rose to his feet he was met with a cheer which threatened to expand the walls of the hall. He appeared, to those who had seen him when he first came to Orran, to have undergone a change. He was thinner and older looking, a finer looking man, Mrs. Bevis thought.

"I wish," he said, "before beginning my speech to the electors, to address a few words chiefly to the gentleman who has just spoken. During the weeks I have spent in Middleworth I have carefully refrained, as you know, from dragging personalities into the light of the public platform, sparing even a retort in kind when my opponent deemed it worthy of his manhood to indulge in such style of warfare. As to-night, however, is my last appearance before the electors shall have given their decision at the polls, I shall reply to a few of the charges this and other gentlemen have been pleased to make against me. You have just heard the gentleman say, 'We are not afraid of Mr. Johnston, but we are afraid of his money.' When he says 'we,' I infer that he means the Liberals of

Middleworth. Regarding the sentiment he ascribes to them, although not flattering to myself, it is not to be wondered at. They have discovered in the possession of the enemy the counterpart of the weapon they have always found most effective in fighting an election, therefore the one most to be feared. Let me at once allay your fears, my dear sir; not one dollar of my money shall ever stand between you and the electors of Middleworth. Can you or the gentleman you represent say as much, sir?"

The "sir" thus addressed feigned to smile sarcastically.

"Again, you have made it a point to impress upon your auditors that I should be classed as a rank outsider, that I do not own property in Middleworth, and therefore should not be considered a legitimate representative of the county. It is true that I am not a Middleworth ratepayer; it is also true that I have not lived in Middleworth for a number of years, more than I care to count; but lest my friend who has just addressed you continues to deplore the fact, I hasten to assure him that in the event of becoming his and your representative in the Provincial Legislature I shall at once take measures to ensure my presence among you for at least part of the time."

This announcement was received by a quick burst of applause.

"Furthermore," the speaker continued, "I shall hasten to become a ratepayer of Middleworth; but," smiling, "in view of the cost of the large public building which has just been erected in the adjoining township, I shall not be able to give Mr. Culverson the contract for the building of a house."

This caused a good deal of laughter. Culverson had secured from the Government the contract for the building referred to, at a cost which the Tories thought was outrageous. The Grits may have had similar thoughts, but if so they skilfully concealed their thoughts with language.

There was no denying either by friend or foe that Johnston was in great fighting fettle that night. He went at once to the heart of his subject, the devious ways by which a tottering Government kept itself in power and attained its ends, and from the opening sentence he had his audience with him, heart and soul. The indictment was terrible. In a masterly way he summed up the charges and the proof as a general marshals his forces for battle, and his listeners, so clear were his words and so convincing his arguments, could see them marching in order like battalions and brigades toward the exposed centre of the enemy.

Again and again at the close of a sentence the cheers of the audience rose and fell. Even those who had heard Johnston before were surprised at his strength of invective that evening. He had proved the guilt, the overwhelming guilt, of the party too long in power, and was describing the punishment which was sure to come, although many might think it impossible. "And when the day of exile comes, when the new administration takes the place of the old, my hope for the sake of the people of this Province will be that the new order will keep itself free of the methods that have made notorious the closing days of its predecessor. If it fail, if it begin to show signs of falseness to the trust imposed in it, may the electors, the sensible, reasonable electors, who deal fairly with their fellow-men and would in turn be fairly dealt by, may they, profiting by what has been, hasten with one accord to make their judgment felt; not waiting till a long course of office has again filled the Province with a set of political hirelings whose hold it is well-nigh impossible to shake ourselves free of. That there are corrupt men in the Conservative party of this Province, as well as in the Liberal party, no sane man denies. We cannot keep them from being there, but we can and we will keep them from controlling the party and making all other members of it subservient to their wishes. There has lately been a great deal said regarding political corruption going on in our midst. Our newspapers and platforms reek with it, which, of course, is unavoidable if we would purify ourselves of it. To be dragged forth and subjected to the severe light of adverse criticism is the surest way of curing the disease germ, which, if left undisturbed, eats its way into and makes rotten the heart of our political life. But nearly all that is being said is being said from a political standpoint, one party cavilling at the other. I would condemn it on higher ground, the evil, the hurt it is to our young nationality. Grit and Tory partizans may differ as to their respective share of responsibility for the origin of the disease in Ontario. Meanwhile patriots note with alarm the ravages of a disease which has become so widespread that here—even here, in Middleworth—freeholders cultivating their own two hundred-acre farms have been known to refuse to go out and vote unless well paid for the trouble of doing so. I cry *shame* on such men. They are not worthy of common liberty. They are fit to be only slaves and bondsmen. As a gentleman living in this vicinity remarked to me since I came among you, 'We expect to be a powerful nation; we expect to be a rich nation, but are we going to be a noble and a good nation? To do so, we must individually be such that men of other nations will say in speaking of us "He is an honest man and a just. *He is a Canadian.*"' "

CHAPTER XVII.

When Johnston's meeting was over, a dozen, perhaps, of the men who were in attendance met at Dr. Bevis's. They had many minor arrangements to make for the morrow, which would see the final act of the drama that had occupied their thoughts and time for many days. "It's pretty much all over but the shouting for some one," said one, doubtfully smiling.

"It seems to me a good deal like trying to storm a fort without ammunition," said another.

"Well, the walls of Jericho succumbed to faith and a vocal attack," said Johnston, "and, for my part, I feel as though I had used up an entire magazine of that sort of ammunition."

"Sorry I can't stay and talk with you, boys," said the doctor. "I must drive all the way to Pinnock's yet to-night. I promised Ezra that if I did not see him before the meeting I would drive out afterwards."

"Too bad, doctor; you'll be out all night."

"True, but after to-morrow the political mill will cease to grind. Indeed, after to-day," glancing at his watch. "It is already past midnight. Oh, by the way, before I go let me give you the surprise of your lives. Dick Dollinger has faced clean around and is working like a tiger on our side. He announced to-night in the hotel, in the presence of a dozen men, that he was working and voting for Johnston."

"You don't say," said one of the men in an awed tone. "I wonder how it came about?"

"Haven't had time to find a reason for it," said the doctor. "There must have been powerful pressure brought to bear on him from some quarter," he continued, as he hurried away.

Truth to tell, he had several traps set about the country, which would require sharp looking after if he would catch the wary game he was after. Driving Beeline rapidly eastward, he dimly saw at one of the crossroads a couple of men who were also driving. Their errand abroad the doctor was well aware of. They were the men whom Dick had failed to locate.

"Good-night," called the doctor.

"Good-night," one of the men answered; then, "Is Beeline in good shape to-night?"

"First-rate, and attending to legitimate business, which is more than can be said of Orran Boy."

"No use trying to keep dark when you're 'round, eh, doctor?"

The doctor smiled. He knew the horse was not Orran Boy, nor the man Orran Boy's owner. He only wanted to make it appear that he thought so. Wheeling Beeline sharply, he turned into the road the other horse had just travelled. This he followed to the first lane on the right, a lane leading up to a group of farm buildings. The house showed a light burning dimly in a lower window.

The doctor tapped lightly on the door. It was immediately opened, and as quickly closed again as the doctor stepped inside. "Have they been here yet?" he asked.

"No, not yet," answered the man, a middle-aged German, "but they will pe. I tole them after twelve."

"Good, I saw them crossing the Orran road. They're under the impression now that they're watching me. Here, Bob," as a youth stepped out of another room, "put my coat and hat on." Suiting the action to the word, the doctor put his gray fedora on the boy's head and helped him into his light overcoat. "Now, take my horse and cart down to the corner and then down the Orran road. Watch for a light in the upper window and when you see it come back again. You understand?"

"Sure, doctor," and the boy slipped out, well pleased with his share in the game.

Five, ten, fifteen minutes passed. The doctor and the Dutchman sat in unbroken silence, a fact which did not at all inconvenience the latter. Silence was his forte. The doctor was on the rack. Twenty minutes, half an hour; one man stirred impatiently, his companion grunted. At last there were sounds outside as of a horse approaching. Was it the boy who, becoming weary of waiting, had returned." The two men listened intently, and at last a soft rap sounded on the door. The doctor slipped into an adjoining room, leaving the door ajar, while the Dutchman shuffled noisily across the floor to answer the summons.

"Good evening."

"Good evening. Won't you come in?"

"Sure, that's what we're here for," responded the voice that had hailed the doctor at the cross-roads.

"Dr. Bevis got here ahead of us, I believe," continued the same voice, when the men had seated themselves.

"Dr. Bevis?" said the Dutchman, who had a way of lapsing into density and broken English. "Why should he pe here? We none of us are seek."

"Come now, John, the doctor was here We saw him come and we saw him go away again. How much, now, did he pay you to vote for Johnston?"

"The doctor gif me no money, no money at all. No," shaking his head sadly; "no money this time."

The men regarded him doubtfully. "Old liar," said one of them in an undertone.

"That's a very fine deerskin," said the spokesman, pointing to one which lay before the kitchen table. It was a skin upon which Mrs. John was wont to place her ample feet when engaged in culinary duties.

"Yes," said John. "My son Tony, he shoot von leetle deer in Muskoka."

"Supposing I give you twenty-five dollars for it, will you as an obligement promise to vote, you and your two sons, for Culverson?"

John's eyes twinkled. "Twenty-five dollars, is it?" Then doubtfully looking at the deerskin, "That is a very goot skin."

"Make it thirty, then. Come, out with it, that is the best I can do."

"Well, if you tink it wouldn't pe found out."

"Found out nothing," snapped the man. "I'm paying you for the skin, not for your vote, see."

"Yes, I see. Putt the money—"

"Is here." And the man counted it out on the kitchen table, three ten dollar bills.

"Me and my son Tony, and my son Frank, yes, ve vill all come out and vote. Three ten dollar pills on the Bank of Montreal. I like to make me sure they are goot." And John smoothed them out and laid them in his pocket-book.

"Oh, they're genuine," laughed the man. "They're doubly backed by the Government."

"Glad to hear you say so. I shouldn't like to see my worthy friend buncoed;" and the doctor stepped out, carelessly lighting a cigar.

"The devil!"

"Not yet; it is customary for the doctor to precede the gentleman you mention."

"And a good many you've sent to him, no doubt," said the man, with an ugly sneer.

"That you are here is sufficient proof that he has not come into his own yet," was the reply.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" The man was evidently controlling himself with an effort. His face, villainous at the best, was not improved by the sudden gleam of rage that crossed it.

"What are *you* going to do about it?" The doctor's tone was mildness itself.

"I'm going to make that old Dutchy give back that money, for one thing."

"Not the three ten-dollar pills," and John began edging towards the door.

"Yes, sir," and the man sprang after him.

Instantly the door towards which John was moving flew open, and in it appeared an enormously stout woman, arrayed in a costume which betokened a hasty adjustment of whatever came handiest in the line of a covering.

"You dare to touch my Schon? Tony! Frank!" she screamed, making a ponderous rush forward. Meanwhile Tony and Frank could be heard falling out of bed in a room overhead. The man halted, evidently in doubt as to what he had better do next.

"Madam, your husband has just taken thirty dollars from me on the understanding that he should vote for Culverson. If you will be good enough to get it and give it back again, I will say no more about it. If you keep it I'll have you jailed before you're a day older."

"Whew!" the doctor whistled. This was taking things with a high hand. The man was presuming on the supposed ignorance of the Dutchman and his family.

"Back?" John grinned slowly; "gif back the three ten-dollar pills? Nefer!" His wife walked majestically to the door and threw it open wide.

"Leaf this house, and nefer you come back. We vill keep the money and vote for Mr. Johnston. The doctor, he haf paid for the votes in this house ofer and ofer many times. This time you pay, and he gets the votes all the same. Go!"

They went.

"You are forgetting your purchase," said the doctor, politely. "Allow me," and with the toe of his boot he sent the deerskin whirling after them.

"No, no," said Mrs. John, as she saw her beloved deerskin thus ejected. "Nefer! not for a fifty-tollar pill," and she gathered it up against her ample bosom and brought it back to the spot where it had rested.

The doctor laughed till his sides grew sore. "Mother John, you will certainly be the death of me," he gasped.

Wholly unconscious of having said anything mirth-provoking, and quite indifferent as to her appearance, Mother John regarded him with half-wondering, wholly friendly eyes, and then waddled off to resume her broken slumbers.

"Be careful of that man not catch you," said John, as he saw the doctor depart.

“No danger,” was the reply. “He is far mor likely to come back for those ten-dollar bills.”

“Them he vill nefer get,” and John slapped hi pocket, well satisfied with its contents.

From there the way to Pinnock's was not long and in less than half an hour Dr. Bevis was standing at Ezra's bedside. It was the sick man's restless time, between midnight and dawn, and he wa doubly glad to see his visitor. Ezra looked badly his eyes were leaden and his skin of a bluish tint His whole appearance was that of a man whos diseased and enfeebled heart is being kept in actio by powerful stimulants. He had become irritable and the meekness Mrs. Pinnock displayed in attending to his exactions showed the true woman underneath less attractive qualities. “Well,” he said querulously, “I suppose you Tories were all ou to-night to hear that man Johnston?”

“There were a goodly number of us,” said the doctor, “and a fair sprinkling of Grits besides I'm sorry you were not able to be present yourself.”

“Not able!” Ezra's tone was scornful. “ never went to a Tory meeting nor read a Tor newspaper in my life. Lies, all lies.”

“Think so?” The doctor was dealing out minute doses of powder. He lifted his head, impelle to make a sarcastic reply to a speech so provocativ of one. One look at the sick man and he close his lips again.

Ezra continued. “I know it. I tell you, doctor, a man can't be a Christian and be a Tory.”

The doctor thought this a feeble attempt at a joke, but soon discovered that Ezra was never more serious in his life.

"The Liberals have made this country what it is, and the present Government is the best government in the world."

"Drink this," and the doctor held a quieting potion to Ezra's lips. He took it obediently.

"I've always said your one fault was your politics, doctor."

"Egad, Ezra," and the doctor smiled genially at the little man in the bed. "I sometimes think that my politics are my misfortune rather than my fault. If I had worked as hard for the Grits as I have for the Tories, my path would be dropping fatness by this time."

"Indeed it would," agreed Ezra, with childlike simplicity.

Suddenly he dropped off to sleep, and the doctor gathered up his things in readiness to leave. As he was going Ezra opened his eyes and said, "Doctor, I'm going out to vote to-morrow. I'm going to cast one more vote for the best Government on earth."

"Nonsense," was the reply. "You mustn't think of it."

"I'm going," Ezra persisted stubbornly. "If it comes to dying, I may as well die on the road as in bed."

Thinking it better not to oppose him, the doctor passed out to where Mrs. Pinnock was waiting for him.

“It's a fact, doctor,” she said, tearfully. “I. had the man up to-day, and arranged to have th horse and buggy ready to take him to Orran t morrow afternoon.”

The doctor thought a moment, and then r turned to the sick room. He understood in pa Ezra's obstinacy on this point. His politics we the little man's last ditch, and that he held it mea a good deal in view of the fact that Mrs. Pinnoc came of a Tory family of the violently partisa variety. Long ago he had given up his churc and gone with his wife to another, but his politi remained inviolate.

“If you are determined to do this, Ezra, I sha come and take you to the polling-place myself.”

“Will you, though?” He looked incredulou first, and then well pleased. “At what time wi you come, doctor?”

“Well, it will be probably well on in the afte noon; but don't get uneasy if I'm a little late. shall get you there in plenty of time to balance m vote. Good-night.”

“Good-night, doctor; I'll rest easier now, an right well I know it isn't every one that would hav offered as much.”

The doctor hastened away, this time to see ho Gregory had managed certain matters laid dow for him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MEANWHILE the men who had followed Johnston to Bevis's went to their homes, and Johnston, feeling a great fatigue stealing over him, sought his room. All the work and excitement of the past weeks, capped by the evening's enervating effort, seemed to have gathered and descended on him like a leaden weight. Without even waiting to undress he threw himself on the bed, and in the space of half a dozen deep breaths was sleeping the sleep of mental and bodily exhaustion.

The short hours between midnight and dawn of a summer morning passed swiftly, and while yet it was only pale gray in the east, Johnston rose up, suddenly possessed with the idea that some one had called to him. His thoughts flew to Prue. During the weeks that had passed since he first saw her his thoughts had been with her persistently. Lately it had been a matter of difficulty to concentrate them elsewhere. He knew now that his love for Margaret Ainslie was not love, because it was such a poor thing compared with that which he had in his heart for Prue. The feelings each aroused differed in effect, as a stately minuet danced in a crowded ball-room beneath brilliant lights, in company with admired beauty dressed in silk and jewels, differs from some rare moment when you have floated away to a tender waltz strain, with no light above but the light of the stars, and in your arms a white-clad girl whom you love, and who shyly refuses to meet your eyes, but whose heart you half suspect is beating wildly for love of you. Nevertheless, he was in honor bound to offer himself to Margaret if he won the Middleworth election.

All was quiet in and about the doctor's house. He wearily lay down again, but only to find it was useless to try to gain more sleep. Every pulse and nerve was crying to be up and out. Making a hasty toilet, and careful not to rouse the family, he slipped out of the house and by back ways sought the fields. It was the time of day when young blood thrills and normal spirits rise. Evening has its charm for those who are older, who have journeyed longer and who value rest. But dawn, the beginning of another day, brings to youth renewed hope and rose-tinged possibilities. Feeling thus, Johnston stood watching Nature, the great scene-shifter, setting the stage whereon man would for another day strut and act his little part.

Here a group of trees took form, in which twittering birds awoke and prepared to do their little turn of song and labor; there a small herd of cattle got heavily to their feet, the spot whereon they had lain showing darkly green in the surrounding silvery dew-drenched grass. As the lingering shadows were swept aside, distant farm buildings came into view and far off against the sky waved a line of hilltops. Turning sharply to his left, Johnston discovered that he was at the foot of the slope which marked the boundary of Mr. Stainsby's garden. Looking upward, his eyes sought a window round which a climbing rose had thrown protecting arms, making a frame of tender green and jewelled crimson, in which there now appeared a dark head and slender neck.

In a moment Johnston had found an opening in the cedar fence, had crossed the foot-bridge, and was standing beneath the window. Prue looked down at him, but found no words to say. She dare not ask him why he came; to treat his presence as a mere matter of course seemed equally impossible. She smiled, and then in sheer confusion blushed till the rose at her window paled in comparison.

"Prue!" The little name came from Johnston's lips weighted with anxiety, for she had withdrawn from reach of his eyes.

She ventured to look forth again.

"I believe, Prue, you wanted to see me." Bold words, but spoken in the tone of one who hopes rather than believes in the truth of what he is saying. "I woke with the impression that you were calling me."

Suddenly Prue's eyes filled with tears. If impulse had been allowed to guide her at that moment she would have answered "yes," and "yes," and going down to him they would have gone away hand in hand to that land of dreams which is reserved for lovers; but the moment passed, and with composure regained she said, "I was thinking of you, and wondering what the day would bring you, success or defeat."

"You really care?"

"I really care."

"Then do not wish for my election," he said. "Wish instead for what is best for you and fo me. Then if I am defeated I shall feel that tha was best, and," in a lower tone, "may I come an tell you so?" Nothing more; but the love of hi life spoke in his voice and in his eyes.

Only yesterday Prue had said that she did no love him; yet, like the young birds just awakening her heart fluttered timidly, then rapturously. He eyes faltered and then refused outright to meet th steady eyes that were looking up at her. Slowl she detached a rose from the branch above her head and with a pretty outward motion of the hand sen it fluttering down, all dewy and heavy with a thousand promises enfolded in its perfumed heart, t the hand awaiting it. "Yes, come. And now, with a tremulous little smile, "after all that I hav done to help the 'ideals' into Parliament, I sha be hoping for your defeat."

"Darling!"

And yet neither understood the full import o the other's words. Each was so wrapt in th thought of what would follow Johnston's succes at the polls, that the fact of defeat being made the basis by both upon which they were to meet again escaped their attention entirely.

Meanwhile the sun's disc rose above the hilltop over which the road to Orran winds. It made a sudden dazzling light against which appeared Dr. Bevis and Beeline, looking at a distance like a huge spider against the brilliant light of an electric globe. Beeline travelled lightly on the soft bed of the road, and his driver had ample time to note the little scene being enacted below him.

"Johnston, as I live!" he exclaimed. "What in—whew!"

When alone with his wife he said to her, "Do you know, I believe that Johnston has been making love to Prue."

"Dear old thing, did it never strike you until this moment?"

"Well, no," said the doctor, somewhat loath to acknowledge it, now that it seemed so patent to his better half. "I thought she was in love with Dick."

"She probably would have thought so herself if Johnston had not arrived on the scene. Besides, it is quite possible for a woman to love one man and like another very much."

"But what of the rumor regarding Johnston's engagement?" persisted the doctor. "If he is engaged he should not—"

"No, of course not," irritably, "but how could he help it?"

The doctor said no more. It was one of th admirable traits of his character that he seldo speculated on what was entirely another man business.

Soon after breakfast Johnston started on a driv across the county, purposing to call at as many c the polling places as time would allow. At nigl he would meet the doctor in Garric Sound, ther to learn the result of the struggle. As soon as th Orran polling booth was opened Dr. Bevis marke his ballot. "The first one for Johnston, for luck, he remarked. From that time until the pollin booth closed he worked steadily and systematicall

It was plainly evident that things were no as they once were with Culverson's friends There was an uncertainty, a hesitancy, abou his committee which proved the fact that the were not very sure of their ground. It was not th men who habitually sell their vote who were causing this uneasiness; they were remarkably scarc about the polling place. It was the honorable men such as John Ronan, for instance, who walked ir with the grim, determined air of one who has pu his hand to the plough and will not be turned aside Silently such as he came and marked their ballot and silently departed for their homes again Thank God for such men! Would there were more of them, for there never was a time in Canada's history when the people's representatives in Parliament were as completely in slavery to party and to self as they are to-day.

Noting one of the Liberal workers growing rather gloomy as the day wore on, Dr. Bevis gave him a resounding slap on the back. "The time for a change has come at last, old boy. I can feel it in my very bones."

"Oh, hang you and your bones," growled the other, walking away. It was not long until he was back again conversing amicably. Curiously, the doctor's best friends were among the Liberals.

At three o'clock the doctor drove out to Pinnock's. Ezra was waiting for him; in fact, had been straining his eyes toward the distant hilltop for a full hour in expectation of his coming. After one look at him the doctor would have done his best to dissuade him had he thought it would have been of the slightest use. He almost lifted Ezra into the buggy, and they drove swiftly back to Orran. Excitement braced the sick man's waning energy; he seemed almost like his old self again by the time he had marked his ballot and chatted with some of his old friends.

When the doctor took Ezra home again the little man sank into a chair with a happy smile on his face. "I feel better than I've done for weeks," he said. "It did me a world of good to cast one more vote for the best government on earth. Don't come out to see me to-night, doctor; I'll be all right, and you'll be feeling pretty blue by the time you've heard from the county."

At the end of the short lane the doctor glanced back at Ezra, whose seat was in the open door.

The latter in response raised his stick, made an effort to wave it, shouting as he did so, "The best government on—" His head suddenly fell to one side and the stick dropped from his hand, clattering loudly on the kitchen floor. The doctor sprang from his buggy and ran back. Already Mrs. Pinnock was on her knees supporting Ezra's head and shoulders in her arms. Endearing names mingled with sobs and heart-broken cries smote the stillness which seemed suddenly to have settled on the farmhouse. Ezra was dead, but surely his spirit lingered yet a moment in response to his wife's lamentations, for his thin lips curved into the delicately ironical smile with which he was wont to meet that which he did not believe, but was powerless to combat. For a moment the smile lingered, then passed like breath on a mirror, and peace and rest settled on the tired dead face.

It was night, and Garric Sound was a blaze of electric lights. Crowds thronged the streets and gathered in solid masses before the newspaper offices. The doctor was late in reaching town; he had waited to hear the result of the votes polled in Orran. Orran gave Johnston a majority of forty, the biggest vote the Conservatives had ever polled in the division. They were jubilant. "Why, it is going to be a walk-over!" one of them exclaimed. The doctor shook his head. "We may thank Dick Dollinger for a good bit of it. I only wish I could believe it was going this way all over the county.

To see Culverson's finish to-night would be a sight worth going across a continent to see; but pshaw! four hundred of a majority and *money!*" and the doctor made a gesture of despair.

When he reached town he found Johnston in an upper room of the Conservative newspaper building. "We have given you forty in Orran," he confided in a cheerful tone. "And Gregory and I have sufficient proof of bribery on the part of Culverson's agents to hang him, if hanging were the penalty." And he rapidly ran over for Johnston's benefit his experience of the past night.

While they talked a sudden deafening cheer rose in the streets and rolled forth like the incoming tide. Johnston and the gentlemen who were with him went to the window. The returns had been rapidly coming in, and now on a sheet stretched across one side of the tall building opposite appeared waveringly, then boldly, the face of the man who had won the county adjoining Middleworth, a Conservative and a well-known business man. When his picture was withdrawn the group at the window waited with bated breath for what was to follow. Because of an outlying township Middleworth returns were delayed. The next moment might see them completed, and victory or defeat writ large on that square of white towards which all eyes were turned.

Johnstor's gaze wandered to the street below him. Among the crowd of upturned faces his eye suddenly fell upon Prue and her father; and while he looked they were joined by Dick Dollinger Johnston noticed that Prue answered Dick's greeting without turning her eyes away from the blank sheet upon the wall. She was watching it with feverish intensity.

Suddenly the sheet wavered, darkened, then grew bright. Johnston watched it with steady, unwinking eyes.

The doctor suddenly clutched him by the arm. "Look!" he cried.

The screen held the face of the member for Middleworth.

"Culverson, after all!" said the doctor.

"Culverson, after all," Johnston repeated. His tone had lost none of its dominating quality; in fact, there was a ring in it which bespoke the victor rather than the vanquished. "Don't look so dismayed, old man," he continued. "Our success is merely deferred. It will grow to greater fulness between now and the day we shall possess it."

"And only by a majority of twenty," groaned the doctor, reading the words beneath Culverson's rotund countenance, which seemed to grin appreciation of the dismay its appearance had caused among Johnston's friends. "Only twenty," he repeated; "I should have bought the beggars last night."

Johnston laughed. "You mean if the votes Culverson bought had been less that number victory would be ours without further effort?"

"Yes, that is what I mean," answered the doctor, with a wry smile. "When I spoke the old method of attack had just appealed to me. When Culverson finds the evidence in our possession arrayed against him he will think his majority dearly bought." And the possibilities yet in sight caused the doctor's eyes to snap.

Johnston's friends crowded around him, eager to show him that as an eventual winner their faith in him remained unshaken. They had been used to former candidates losing heart completely at this stage. Indeed, Perkins had grown tearful, and required stimulating before he could be presented to his sympathizers. It was good to see Johnston cool and courageous, with that in his appearance which indicated that the game was not played out yet by any means, and that he had nothing to fear from friend or foe in the protest which they all knew would speedily be entered against Culverson's election. In the midst of it a telegram was handed in, addressed to Johnston. He read it, and a perplexed frown gathered between his eyes. "I am sorry, boys, to appear as if I were running away, but it must be so. The chief" (meaning his senior partner) "is ill; and he wishes me to come to the city at once because of urgent business which I alone can attend to. This gives me barely time to catch the train."

"You can just do it," said one of the number present.

"All I can say, then, for the present, boys, is good-bye. You will see me soon again, when I shall be in a position to thank you all for your confidence in me and your unfailing kindness. Good-bye."

"Good-bye." They pressed his hand and crowded round him as they rushed him downstairs with kindly haste and into a waiting carriage.

As he was driven away he cast a rapid glance along the upturned faces in the street, but the one he was looking for was not there.

While Prue and her father and Dick Dollinger waited in the crowd to learn the result of the Middleworth election, Mr. Stainsby alone of the three remained normally interested. Prue's small face grew white as the time wore on, and her eyes glowed darkly with suppressed feeling. Dick watched her jealously, his heart filled with sore fretting and misgivings. In vain he argued with himself that Prue intended all along to marry him, that Johnston's success or defeat could make no difference, and that she had attached a condition to her promise in a spirit of coquetry, proving her power over him by causing him to use his influence for Johnston in the face of his avowed intention to do otherwise. She had had her way, and now self-respect declared against being put off any longer. Dick decided that the time had come for a final understanding.

He saw her suddenly close her hands round her father's arm, as if bracing herself to receive a shock. Following her eyes, Dick, too, beheld that which the pushing, swaying crowd bent in one direction to see. Some looked with tolerance in their eyes, some with disgust, and others with something like despair. After the first moment of silence following the appearance of Culverson's face and the announcement that he was again elected, Prue turned sharply away, unconscious herself of the bitter disappointment on her face. For the moment the hurt it gave her to know that Johnston was defeated swallowed up every other consideration. Quickly her eyes searched the windows of the tall building opposite, and if Johnston had looked forth then he would have read in her face all the divine sympathy woman is capable of giving to man in such an hour.

"Come, daddy, let us go home."

The Squire moved with reluctance. There were other counties in which he was interested that had not yet sent in full returns.

"I shall take you home. The Province is evidently going Conservative, and we have heard from the county in which we were most interested." Dick's lips were firm and unsmiling, and his tone one that brooks no opposition. Prue hesitated, but her father had again turned expectantly to wait for another announcement.

"Come." Dick drew her hand over his arm and led her through the throng, and neither spoke again till they were well on their way to Orran. At last, as if he had decided on a course of action, Dick suddenly turned to look at his companion. Her head was bent, and she was making ineffectual efforts to control her tears. Dick had never before seen Prue weep, and now all that he had meant to say to her took sudden flight.

"Don't, Prue! I have been acting like a brute." Dick's old apology when he had unintentionally wounded her feelings. With his handkerchief he gently tried to wipe away the tears. "Why are you crying, dear? Tell me."

"I am crying"—sob—"because of having to hurt and disappoint you, Dick."

"Because of having to hurt and disappoint me!" The reins slackened in Dick's hand, and the horse fell into a quiet walk.

After what seemed a long time Dick spoke again. "By which you mean that you have decided you do not love me." His tone was level and monotonous, all youth and life gone from it.

Prue's tears suddenly ceased and her heart grew sick at the sound. "Dick! oh, Dick, forgive me! I wish it were you; but," in a choking whisper, "I know now that it is not and never can be."

The admission was made; and in silence heavy with unhappiness, and broken only by the muffled beating of their hearts, Dick and Prue reached home.

Dick got down to the ground, and then putting up his arms lifted Prue down beside him. For a moment he stood thus, and she, trembling, feared to say good-bye. Gently he put one strong brown hand beneath her chin and turned her face up to the soft light of a waning moon. It was tremulous and woe-begone, and tears glistened on her lashes. Dick's control almost deserted him. "Poor Prue, poor little Prue! I am sorry I made you cry."

"Stop, Dick, I can't bear it Be angry, anything, but not that." And Prue tried to hide her face on his arm.

"Don't," he said, hoarsely. "Leave me strength to say good-bye. I dare not trust myself to say any more. Good-bye."

She closed her eyes as if to shut out the import of the words.

"Good-bye." Just once she felt his lips touch hers softly, and then, as if in a dream, Dick, her chum,—Dick, whose tenderness and consideration had been as "a rock in a weary land"—was gone, driving through the soft dusk of the summer night like one bereft for the time of reason.

CHAPTER XIX.

The following morning found Johnston at his office at the usual hour. The result of the election had, of course, preceded him; and those who had watched his steady ascendancy in the business world wondered how he would meet an adverse turn. Early in the day they decided there was nothing in his appearance to indicate defeat.

" If you will permit me to say so," one of the men remarked, " I am glad you were not elected. You are needed all the time right here."

Johnston smiled. " Sorry to disturb your satisfaction with present conditions, my dear man, but I shall yet be elected in Middleworth, and that before many months have passed."

The man looked at him curiously. " Yes, I daresay you will."

Towards noon Johnston obeyed a summons to see the chief at his own home. The latter lived on one of the fine residential streets of the city, an old bachelor surrounded only by servants.

Johnston smiled as he thought of the reception he would receive, for the chief had strongly opposed what he called trying an experiment on Middleworth.

"Well, how did your experiment work out?" And a long hand was extended from under the bedclothes. "I told you your quixotic campaigning would land you among the 'also ran.' Sit down, sit down."

Johnston drew a chair to the bedside. "You will allow me some glory, surely, for having reduced the majority in a corrupt stronghold from four hundred to twenty?"

"Certainly, certainly," smiling grimly. "We'll discuss that phase of the question later on. I have been in a fever to see you regarding—" And shortly both men were deep in intricate details concerning a business which they proposed to take over and merge in their own. The course of action they finally decided upon would make it necessary for Johnston to visit a firm in an Eastern city. He would be obliged to leave home that night and be absent for at least three or four days. When he rose to go the chief said, returning to his cynical humor, "I am sorry you can't stay and bask in the glory you claim as yours. Glory is evanescent."

"Especially when it lacks substantial results," Johnston remarked.

The chief smiled at him. "I'll warrant you learned that lesson long ago, lad. Success never lacks friends. By the way,"—and his smile grew a bit malicious; for having a fatherly affection for the young man, he allowed himself liberties, and secretly he was deeply interested in what he regarded as Margaret Ainslie's manœuvring—"your friend, Miss Ainslie, has a new admirer. His yacht has been in the bay for a month, and society has been *en fête* over him. You would know whom I mean if I could recall his name. It is in all the papers at present."

"You mean Sir Thomas Argrave, the recently knighted scientist?"

"Yes, yes, that's the man. He is immensely wealthy, I believe."

"Undoubtedly; and has good taste if he has endeavored to attach himself to Miss Ainslie."

"Humph! Miss Ainslie worships success."

Johnston gave him a quick look. He felt that the old man had described, in a very few words, the quality that ruled her character, and wondered if it were solely that quality in her that had appealed to himself.

When the door closed behind him the chief gave way to a habit he sometimes indulged in of talking to himself. "Well, anyway, I have given him a hint of what he may expect; for unless there was a positive promise between them, John Ainslie's girl will throw the lad over for the honor of becoming Lady Argrave. I have known the Ainslies, three generations of them. Argrave, of course, may not want her, although Dame Rumor insists upon it, and for my part I hope she is right."

Walking down the street, Johnston's mind was full of what the chief had just told him. He felt sure that he had a purpose in doing so. "There is something in it," he mused; "the chief is not given to repeating empty gossip."

It seemed like a prearrangement to bring matters to a climax when at that moment the Ainslie carriage swung into the avenue from an intersecting street. Margaret and her mother were sitting on the back seat, and facing them was a man whom Johnston had never seen.

Margaret saw him and, with the poise and calm which were always hers, took the situation firmly within her grasp She spoke to the coachman and the carriage stopped. Quickly Johnston was at her side standing with bared head. She extended her hand to him, as did also her mother.

"This is Sir Thomas Argrave," said Margaret, "of whom you have lately heard so much. Mr. Johnston," with a smiling glance at Argrave, "is one of my dearest friends." The men exchanged civilities, and Argrave's spectacled eyes returned to Margaret's face. How almost perfectly beautiful she was. Johnston acknowledged it, but without a quickened heart-throb.

Following a moment's conversation she said, "I am so sorry that I shall not be at home to you tomorrow. We are starting on a yachting cruise with Sir Thomas, and as usual I find at the last moment a thousand things to attend to."

"This is good-bye, then?" and Johnston held out his hand.

"This is good-bye," she repeated, firmly. For a moment the color ebbed from her cheeks, and he noticed that her hand was cold even through the glove.

"Good-bye," he said again, and his eyes suddenly took on the sunny blue tone that bespoke in him a heart free from every care. "I may still claim the honor of being one of your dearest friends?"

"Always," she answered.

He said good-bye to Mrs. Ainslie and Sir Thomas Argrave, and with beaming face watched the carriage roll away. Margaret's voice floated back to him as she addressed her companion, "Do finish that interesting account of your latest experiment, Sir Thomas."

A week later and June, sweet, flowery June, had told out all her days, leaving the teeming fields surrounding Orran to be wooed to greater fulness by the warm winds and fiery suns of July.

Outwardly, now the election was over, the people of Middleworth pursued uneventfully the even tenor of their daily lives. But beneath the commonplace trivialities of life the ferment of influence is forever at work, and even in the narrow circle of Orran there was here and there in heart or brain, among the men who mowed and garnered and the women who toiled with head and hands, a change wrought by contact with a hitherto unknown personality which would follow to the end of time.

With something of this in her mind, Mrs. Bevis went one afternoon to see Prue. She found her fresh and dainty at the completion of a simple afternoon toilet, and her surroundings bore evidence of unusual care.

"Goodness, Prue, you're not growing tidy and precise, I hope."

"It won't last," Prue hastened to assure her. "The heat, I think, has driven me into action."

"Restlessness, my dear, induced by a troubled conscience You know, of course, that Dick Dollinger has started for the West?"

"No!" and Prue sank back in her chair.

"Yes. The Dollingers purchased a large block of land out there some time ago, and ostensibly Dick has gone to look after it. He called to see me; and upon my word I never knew before what a really good fellow he is. He wished me to keep a motherly eye over you, and to tell you you were not to let his sudden departure trouble you."

Prue's face saddened, and for the first time Mrs. Bevis noticed that she had lost some of her girlish roundness of outline, and that the wild rose tints had given place to pearly white.

"You are not regretting? You do not think you have made a mistake?"

"No, no, it could not have been otherwise. I care for him as for a very dear brother. The woman Dick marries must love him better than any one else in the world. Even if I were willing, he would not marry me, knowing that I—that—"

Tactfully Mrs. Bevis hastened to say, "Knowing that your affection for him is such as it is."

Mrs. Bevis wondered seriously how it was going to end. She did not know that Prue had a secret; that a wonderful message had come, embodied in a few words. "I'm coming, sweetheart. Your lover, Lawrence Johnston."

A week had gone by, but it did not matter. "I'm coming, sweetheart" was written on the wall by the first dancing sunbeam that crossed her window ledge. It filled the drowsy noon hour and the tender twilight, and painted wondrous pictures by the magic light of the moon. All the world was set to music, and the theme was, "I'm coming, sweetheart."

But Prue meant to be very cool and unapproachable. "If he asks me to marry him, I shall not say yes for a long time. I owe that much to Dick. He takes everything for granted, which is the way of a man when he thinks one is dying for love of him. I shall have to raise no end of obstacles." All these and many more foolish things Prue said to herself every day, and all to no purpose when the very birds were singing, "I'm coming, sweetheart."

But Mrs. Bevis did not know this; and the brooding far-off look in the girl's eyes caused her to feel an odd little strain at the heart.

Presently the Squire came in from the fields, hale and rosy, but a trifle stiff, and glad to seek the depths of his arm-chair. Prue dragged forth his slippers, and ministered in endless little ways to his comfort. In the midst of a laughing rejoinder from Mrs. Bevis a quick, firm knock resounded on the outer door, followed by a manly footstep in the hall.

"See who it is, Prue," the Squire commanded; but Prue seemed unable to move. Her face was flushing and paling by turns and her lips trembling.

"Come along in," called the Squire, and in response a tall form filled the doorway. Prue went slowly forward, and the man in the doorway seemed to see only her. As she drew near he held out his arms, and she, all doubts and fears forgotten, went straight into them, lifting her face to the lips that were seeking hers.

Mrs. Bevis, laughing and crying at once, turned to explain matters to the Squire, and found that already the latter's comprehension had brought him also to the point of laughter and tears.