

FICTION

Hamlin Garland

**Other
Main-Travelled
Roads**

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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FICTION



DADDY DEERING

OTHER
MAIN-TRAVELLED
ROADS

HAMLIN GARLAND
SUNSET EDITION



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PRAIRIE FOLKS

PIONEERS.

They rise to mastery of wind and snow;
They go like soldiers grimly into strife,
To colonize the plain; they plow and sow,
And fertilize the sod with their own life
As did the Indian and the buffalo.

SETTLERS.

Above them soars a dazzling sky,
In winter blue and clear as steel,
In summer like an Arctic sea
Wherein vast icebergs drift and reel
And melt like sudden sorcery.

Beneath them plains stretch far and fair,
Rich with sunlight and with rain;
Vast harvests ripen with their care
And fill with overplus of grain
Their square, great bins.

Yet still they strive! I see them rise
At dawn-light, going forth to toil:
The same salt sweat has filled my eyes,
My feet have trod the self-same soil
Behind the snarling plough.

PREFACE

Nearly all the stories in this volume were written at the same time and under the same impulse as those which compose

its companion volume, *Main-Travelled Roads*--and the entire series was the result of a summer-vacation visit to my old home in Iowa, to my father's farm in Dakota, and, last of all, to my birthplace in Wisconsin. This happened in 1887. I was living at the time in Boston, and had not seen the West for several years, and my return to the scenes of my boyhood started me upon a series of stories delineative of farm and village life as I knew it and had lived it. I wrote busily during the two years that followed, and in this revised definitive edition of *Main-Travelled Roads* and its companion volume, *Other Main-Travelled Roads* (compiled from other volumes which now go out of print), the reader will find all of the short stories which came from my pen between 1887 and 1889.

It remains to say that, though conditions have changed somewhat since that time, yet for the hired man and the renter farm life in the West is still a stern round of drudgery. My pages present it--not as the summer boarder or the young lady novelist sees it--but as the working farmer endures it.

Not all the scenes of *Other Main-Travelled Roads* are of farm life, though rural subjects predominate; and the village life touched upon will be found less forbidding in color. In this I am persuaded my view is sound; for, no matter how hard the villager works, he is not lonely. He suffers in company with his fellows. So much may be called a gain. Then, too, I admit youth and love are able to transform a bleak prairie town into a poem, and to make of a barbed-wire lane a highway of romance.

HAMLIN GARLAND.

Contents

WILLIAM BACON'S MAN

I

The yellow March sun lay powerfully on the bare Iowa prairie, where the ploughed fields were already turning warm and brown, and only here and there in a corner or on the north side of the fence did the sullen drifts remain, and they were so dark and low that they hardly appeared to break the mellow brown of the fields.

There passed also an occasional flock of geese, cheerful harbingers of spring, and the prairie-chickens had set up their morning symphony, wide-swalling, wonderful with its prophecy of the new birth of grass and grain and the springing life of all breathing things. The crow passed now and then, uttering his resonant croak, but the crane had not yet sent forth his bugle note.

Lyman Gilman rested on his axe-helve at the woodpile of Farmer Bacon to listen to the music around him. In a vague way he was powerfully moved by it. He heard the hens singing their weird, raucous, monotonous song, and saw them burrowing in the dry chip-dust near him. He saw the young colts and cattle frisking in the sunny space around the straw-stacks, absorbed through his bare arms and uncovered head the heat of the sun, and felt the soft wooing of the air so deeply that he broke into an unwonted exclamation:--

"Glory! we'll be seeding by Friday, sure."

This short and disappointing soliloquy was, after all, an expression of deep emotion. To the Western farmer the very word "seeding" is a poem. And these few words, coming from Lyman Gilman, meant more and expressed more than many a large and ambitious springtime song.

But the glory of all the slumbrous landscape, the stately beauty of the sky with its masses of fleecy vapor, were swept away by the sound of a girl's voice humming, "Come to the Saviour," while she bustled about the kitchen near by. The windows were open. Ah! what suggestion to these dwellers in a rigorous climate was in the first unsealing of the windows! How sweet it was to the pale and weary women after their long imprisonment!

As Lyman sat down on his maple log to hear better, a plump face appeared at the window, and a clear, girl-voice said:--

"Smell anything, Lime?"

He snuffed the air. "Cookies, by the great horn spoons!" he yelled, leaping up. "Bring me some, an' see me eat; it'll do ye good."

"Come an' get 'm," laughed the face at the window.

"Oh, it's nicer out here, Merry Etty. What's the rush? Bring me out some, an' set down on this log."

With a nod Marietta disappeared, and soon came out with a plate of cookies in one hand and a cup of milk in the other.

"Poor little man, he's all tired out, ain't he?"

Lime, taking the cue, collapsed in a heap, and said feebly, "Bread, bread!"

"Won't milk an' cookies do as well?"

He brushed off the log and motioned her to sit down beside him, but she hesitated a little and colored a little.

"Oh, Lime, s'pose somebody should see us?"

"Let 'em. What in thunder do we care? Sit down an' gimme a holt o' them cakes. I'm just about done up. I couldn't 'a stood it another minute."

She sat down beside him with a laugh and a pretty blush. She was in her apron, and the sleeves of her dress were rolled to her elbows, displaying the strong, round arms. Wholesome and sweet she looked and smelled, the scent of the cooking round her. Lyman munched a couple of the cookies and gulped a pint of milk before he spoke.

"Whadda we care who sees us sittin' side b' side? Ain't we goin' t' be married soon?"

"Oh, them cookies in the oven!" she shrieked, leaping up and running to the house. She looked back as she reached the kitchen door, however, and smiled with a flushed face. Lime slapped his knee and roared with laughter at his bold stroke.

"Ho! ho!" he laughed. "Didn't I do it slick? Ain't nothin' green in *my* eye, I guess." In an intense and pleasurable abstraction he finished the cookies and the milk. Then he yelled:--

"Hey! Merry--Merry Etty!"

"Whadda ye want?" sang the girl from the window, her face still rosy with confusion.

"Come out here and git these things."

The girl shook her head, with a laugh.

"Come out an' git 'm, 'r, by jingo, I'll throw 'em at ye! Come on, now!"

The girl looked at the huge, handsome fellow, the sun falling on his golden hair and beard, and came slowly out to him--came creeping along with her hand outstretched for the plate which Lime, with a laugh in his sunny blue eyes, extended at the full length of his bare arm. The girl made a snatch at it, but his left hand caught her by the wrist, and away went cup and plate as he drew her to him and kissed her in spite of her struggles.

"My! ain't you strong!" she said, half ruefully and half admiringly, as she shrugged her shoulders. "If you'd use a little more o' *that* choppin' wood, Dad wouldn't 'a' lost s' much money by yeh."

Lime grew grave.

"There's the hog in the fence, Merry; what's yer dad goin' t' say--"

"About what?"

"About our gitt'n married this spring."

"I guess you'd better find out what *I'm* a-goin' t' say, Lime Gilman, 'fore you pitch into Dad."

"I *know* what you're a-goin' t' say."

"No, y' don't."

"Yes, but I *do*, though."

"Well, ask me, and see, if you think you're so smart. Jest as like 's not, you'll slip up."

"All right; here goes. Marietty Bacon, ain't you an' Lime Gilman goin' t' be married?"

"No, sir, we ain't," laughed the girl, snatching up the plate and darting away to the house, where she struck up "Weevily Wheat," and went busily on about her cooking. Lime threw a kiss at her, and fell to work on his log with startling energy.

Lyman looked forward to his interview with the old man with as much trepidation as he had ever known, though commonly he had little fear of anything--but a girl.

Marietta was not only the old man's only child, but his housekeeper, his wife having at last succumbed to the ferocious toil of the farm. It was reasonable to suppose, therefore, that he would surrender his claim on the girl reluctantly. Rough as he was, he loved Marietta strongly, and would find it exceedingly hard to get along without her.

Lyman mused on these things as he drove the gleaming axe into the huge maple logs. He was something more than the usual hired man, being a lumberman from the Wisconsin pineries, where he had sold out his interest in a camp not three weeks before the day he began work for Bacon. He had a nice "little wad o' money" when he left the camp and started for La Crosse, but he had been robbed in his hotel the first night in the city, and was left nearly penniless. It was a great blow to him, for, as he said, every cent of that money "stood fer hard knocks an' poor feed. When I smelt of it I could jest see the cold, frosty mornin's and the late nights. I could feel the hot sun on my back like it was when I worked in the harvest-field. By jingo! It kind o' made my toes curl up."

But he went resolutely out to work again, and here he was chopping wood in old man Bacon's yard, thinking busily on the talk which had just passed between Marietta and himself.

"By jingo!" he said all at once, stopping short, with the axe on his shoulder. "If I hadn't 'a' been robbed I wouldn't 'a' come here--I never'd met Merry. Thunder and jimson root! Wasn't that a narrow escape?"

And then he laughed so heartily that the girl looked out of the window again to see what in the world he was doing. He had his hat in his hand and was whacking his thigh with it.

"Lyman Gilman, what in the world ails you to-day? It's perfectly ridiculous the way you yell and talk t' y'rself out there on the chips. You beat the hens, I declare if you don't."

Lime put on his hat and walked up to the window, and, resting his great bare arms on the sill, and his chin on his arms, said:--

"Merry, I'm goin' to tackle 'Dad' this afternoon. He'll be sittin' up the new seeder, and I'm goin' t' climb right on the back of his neck. He's jest *got* t' give me a chance."

Marietta looked sober in sympathy.

"Well! P'raps it's best to have it over with, Lime, but someway I feel kind o' scary about it."

Lime stood for a long time looking in at the window, watching the light-footed girl as she set the table in the middle of the sun-lighted kitchen floor. The kettle hissed, the meat sizzled, sending up a delicious odor; a hen stood in the open door and sang a sort of cheery half-human song, while to and fro moved the sweet-faced, lithe, and powerful girl, followed by the smiling eyes at the window.

"Merry, you look purty as a picture. You look just like the wife I be'n a-huntin' for all these years, sure's shootin'!"

Marietta colored with pleasure.

"Does Dad pay you to stand an' look at me an' say pretty things t' the cook?"

"No, he don't. But I'm willin' t' do it without pay. I could just stand here till kingdom come an' look at you. Hello! I hear a wagon. I guess I better hump into that woodpile."

"I think so too. Dinner's most ready, and Dad 'll be here soon."

Lime was driving away furiously at a tough elm log when Farmer Bacon drove into the yard with a new seeder in his wagon. Lime whacked away busily while Bacon stabled the team, and in a short time Marietta called, in a long-drawn, musical fashion:--

"Dinner-r-r!"

After sozzling their faces at the well the two men went in and sat down at the table. Bacon was not much of a talker at any time, and at meal-time, in seeding, eating was the main business in hand; therefore the meal was a silent one, Marietta and Lime not caring to talk on general topics. The hour was an anxious one for her, and an important one for him.

"Wal, now, Lime, seedun' 's the nex' thing," said Bacon, as he shoved back his chair and glared around from under his bushy eyebrows. "We can't do too much this afternoon. That seeder's got t' be set up an' a lot o' seed-wheat cleaned up. You unload the machine while I feed the pigs."

Lime sat still till the old man was heard outside calling "Oo-ee, poo-ee" to the pigs in the yard; then he smiled at Marietta, but she said:--

"He's got on one of his fits, Lime; I don't b'lieve you'd better tackle him t'-day."

"Don't you worry; I'll fix him. Come, now, give me a kiss."

"Why, you great thing! You--took--"

"I know, but I want you to *give* 'em to me. Just walk right up to me an' give me a smack t' bind the bargain."

"I ain't made any bargain," laughed the girl. Then, feeling the force of his tender tone, she added: "Will you behave, and go right off to your work?"

"Jest like a little man--hope t' die!"

"*Lime!*" roared the old man from the barn.

"Hello!" replied Lime, grinning joyously and winking at the girl, as much as to say, "This would paralyze the old man if he saw it."

He went out to the shed where Bacon was at work, as serene as if he had not a fearful task on hand. He was apprehensive that the father might "gig back" unless rightly approached, and so he awaited a good opportunity.

The right moment seemed to present itself along about the middle of the afternoon. Bacon was down on the ground under the machine, tightening some burrs. This was a good chance for two reasons. In the first place, the keen, almost savage eyes were no longer where they could glare on him, and in spite of his cool exterior Lime had just as soon not have the old man looking at him.

Besides, the old farmer had been telling about his "river eighty," which was without a tenant; the man who had taken it, having lost his wife, had grown disheartened and had given it up.

"It's an almighty good chance for a man with a small family. Good house an' barn, good land. A likely young feller with a team an' a woman could do tiptop on that eighty. If he wanted more, I'd let him have an eighty j'inun'--"

"I'd like t' try that m'self," said Lime, as a feeler. The old fellow said nothing in reply for a moment.

"Ef you had a team an' tools an' a woman, I'd jest as lief you'd have it as anybody."

"Sell me your blacks, and I'll pay half down--the balance in the fall. I can pick up some tools, and as for a woman, Merry Etty an' me have talked that over to-day. She's ready to--ready to marry me whenever you say go."

There was an ominous silence under the seeder, as if the father could not believe his ears.

"What's--what's that!" he stuttered. "Who'd you say? What about Merry Etty?"

"She's agreed to marry me."

"The hell you say!" roared Bacon, as the truth burst upon him. "So that's what you do when I go off to town and leave you to chop wood. So you're goun' to git married, hey?"

He was now where Lime could see him, glaring up into his smiling blue eyes. Lime stood his ground.

"Yes, sir. That's the calculation."

"Well, I guess I'll have somethin' t' say about that," said Bacon, nodding his head violently.

"I rather expected y' would. Blaze away. Your privilege--my bad luck. Sail in ol' man. What's y'r objection to me fer a son-in-law?"

"Don't you worry, young feller. I'll come at it soon enough," went on Bacon, as he turned up another burr in a very awkward corner. In his nervous excitement the wrench slipped, banging his knuckle.

"Ouch! Thunder--m-m-m!" howled and snarled the wounded man.

"What's the matter? Bark y'r knuckle?" queried Lime, feeling a mighty impulse to laugh. But when he saw the old savage straighten up and glare at him he sobered. Bacon was now in a frightful temper. The veins in his great, bare, weather-beaten neck swelled dangerously.

"Jest let me say right here that I've had enough o' you. You can't live on the same acre with my girl another day."

"What makes ye think I can't?" It was now the young man's turn to draw himself up, and as he faced the old man, his arms folded and each vast hand grasping an elbow, he looked like a statue of red granite, and the hands resembled the paws of a crouching lion; but his eyes smiled.

"I don't *think*, I know ye won't."

"What's the objection to me?"

"Objection? Hell! What's the inducement? My hired man, an' not three shirts to yer back!"

"That's another; I've got four. Say, old man, did you ever work out for a living?"

"That's none o' your business," growled Bacon a little taken down. "I've worked an' scraped, an' got t'gether a little prop'ty here, an' they ain't no sucker like you goun' to come 'long here, an' live off me, an' spend my prop'ty after I'm dead. You can jest bet high on that."

"Who's goin' t' live on ye?"

"You're aimun' to."

"I ain't, neither."

"Yes, y'are. You've loafed on me ever since I hired ye."

"That's a--" Lime checked himself for Marietta's sake, and the enraged father went on:--

"I hired ye t' cut wood, an' you've gone an' fooled my daughter away from me. Now you just figger up what I owe ye, and git out o' here. Ye can't go too soon t' suit *me*."

Bacon was renowned as the hardest man to handle in Cedar County, and though he was getting old, he was still a terror to his neighbors when roused. He was honest, temperate, and a good neighbor until something carried him off his balance; then he became as cruel as a panther and as savage as a grisly. All this Lime knew, but it did not keep his anger down so much as did the thought of Marietta. His silence infuriated Bacon, who yelled hoarsely:--

"Git out o' this!"

"Don't be in a rush, ol' man--"

Bacon hurled himself upon Lime, who threw out one hand and stopped him, while he said in a low voice:--

"Stay right where you are, ol' man. I'm dangerous. It's for Merry's sake--"

The infuriated old man struck at him. Lime warded off the blow, and with a sudden wrench and twist threw him to the ground with frightful force. Before Bacon could rise, Marietta, who had witnessed the scene, came flying from the house.

"Lime! Father! What are you doing?"

"I--couldn't help it, Merry. It was him 'r me," said Lime, almost sadly.

"Dad, ain't you got no sense? What 're you thinking of? You jest stop right now. I won't have it."

He rose while she clung to him; he seemed a little dazed. It was the first time he had ever been thrown, and he could not but feel a certain respect for his opponent, but he could not give way.

"Pack up yer duds," he snarled, "an' git off'n my land. I'll have the money fer ye when ye come back. I'll give ye jest five minutes to git clear o' here. Merry, you stay here."

The young man saw it was useless to remain, as it would only excite the old man; and so, with a look of apology, not without humor, at Marietta, he went to the house to get his valise. The girl wept silently while the father raged up and down. His mood frightened her.

"I thought ye had more sense than t' take up with such a dirty houn'!"

"He ain't a houn'," she blazed forth, "and he's just as good and clean as you are."

"Shut up! Don't let me hear another word out o' your head. I'm boss here yet, I reckon."

Lime came out with his valise in his hand.

"Good-by, Merry," he said cheerily. She started to go to him, but her father's rough grasp held her.

"Set *down*, an' stay there."

Lime was going out of the gate.

"Here! Come and get y'r money," yelled the old man, extending some bills. "Here's twenty--"

"Go to thunder with your money," retorted Lime. "I've had my pay for my month's work." As he said that, he thought of the sunny kitchen and the merry girl, and his throat choked. Good-by to the sweet girl whose smile was so much to him, and to the happy noons and nights her eyes had made for him. He waved his hat at her as he stood in the open gate, and the sun lighted his handsome head into a sort of glory in her eyes. Then he turned and walked rapidly off down the road, not looking back.

The girl, when she could no longer see him, dashed away, and, sobbing violently, entered the house.

II

There was just a suspicion of light in the east, a mere hint of a glow, when Lyman walked cautiously around the corner of the house and tapped at Marietta's window. She was sleeping soundly and did not hear, for she had been restless during the first part of the night. He tapped again, and the girl woke without knowing what woke her.

Lyman put the blade of his pocket-knife under the window and raised it a little, and then placed his lips to the crack, and spoke in a sepulchral tone, half groan, half whisper:--

"Merry! Merry ETTY!"

The dazed girl sat up in bed and listened, while her heart almost stood still.

"Merry, it's me--Lime. Come to the winder." The girl hesitated, and Lyman spoke again.

"Come, I hain't got much time. This is your last chance t' see me. It's now 'r never."

The girl slipped out of bed, and, wrapping herself in a shawl, crept to the window.

"Boost on that winder," commanded Lyman. She raised it enough to admit his head, which came just above the sill; then she knelt on the floor by the window.

Her eyes stared wide and dark.

"Lime, what in the world do you mean--"

"I mean business," he replied. "I ain't no last year's chicken; I know when the old man sleeps the soundest." He chuckled pleasantly.

"How 'd y' fool old Rove?"

"Never mind about that now; they's something more important on hand. You've got t' go with me."

She drew back, "Oh, Lime, I can't!"

He thrust a great arm in and caught her by the wrist.

"Yes, y' can. This is y'r last chance. If I go off without ye t'night, I never come back. What makes ye gig back? Are ye 'fraid o' me?"

"N-no; but--but--"

"But what, Merry Etty?"

"It ain't right to go an' leave Dad all alone. Where y' goin' t' take me, anyhow?"

"Milt Jennings let me have his horse an' buggy; they're down the road a piece, an' we'll go right down to Rock River and be married by sun-up."

The girl still hesitated, her firm, boyish will unwontedly befogged. Resolute as she was, she could not at once accede to his demand.

"Come, make up your mind soon. The old man 'll fill me with buck-shot if he catches sight o' me." He drew her arm out of the window and laid his bearded cheek to it. "Come, little one, we're made for each other; God knows it. Come! It's him'r me."

The girl's head dropped, consented.

"That's right! Now a kiss to bind the bargain. There! What, cryin'? No more o' that, little one. Now I'll give you jest five minutes to git on your Sunday-go-t'-meetin' clo'es. Quick, there goes a rooster. It's gittin' white in the east."

The man turned his back to the window and gazed at the western sky with a wealth of unuttered and unutterable exultation in his heart. Far off a rooster gave a long, clear blast--would it be answered in the barn? Yes; some wakeful ear had caught it, and now the answer came faint, muffled, and drowsy. The dog at his feet whined uneasily as if suspecting something wrong. The wind from the south was full of the wonderful odor of springing grass, warm, brown earth, and oozing sap. Overhead, to the west, the stars were shining in the cloudless sky, dimmed a little in brightness by the faint silvery veil of moisture in the air. The man's soul grew very tender as he stood waiting for his bride. He was rough, illiterate, yet there was something fine about him after all, a kind of simplicity and a gigantic, leonine tenderness.

He heard his sweetheart moving about inside, and mused: "The old man won't hold out when he finds we're married. He can't get along without her. If he does, why, I'll rent a farm here, and we'll go to work housekeepin'. I can git the money. She shan't always be poor," he ended, and the thought was a vow.

The window was raised again, and the girl's voice was heard low and tremulous:--

"Lime, I'm ready, but I wish we didn't--"

He put his arm around her waist and helped her out, and did not put her down till they reached the road. She was completely dressed, even to her hat and shoes, but she mourned:--

"My hair is every-which-way; Lime, how can I be married so?"

They were nearing the horse and buggy now, and Lime laughed. "Oh, we'll stop at Jennings's and fix up. Milt knows what's up, and has told his mother by this time. So just laugh as jolly as you can."

Soon they were in the buggy, the impatient horse swung into the road at a rattling pace, and as Marietta leaned back in the seat, thinking of what she had done, she cried lamentably, in spite of all the caresses and pleadings of her lover.

But the sun burst up from the plain, the prairie-chickens took up their mighty chorus on the hills, robins met them on the way, flocks of wild geese, honking cheerily, drove far overhead toward the north, and, with these sounds of a golden spring day in her ears, the bride grew cheerful, and laughed.

III

At about the time the sun was rising, Farmer Bacon, roused from his sleep by the crowing of the chickens on the dry knolls in the fields as well as by those in the barn-yard, rolled out of bed wearily, wondering why he should feel so drowsy. Then he remembered the row with Lime and his subsequent inability to sleep with thinking over it. There was a dull pain in his breast, which made him uncomfortable.

As was his usual custom, he went out into the kitchen and built the fire for Marietta, filled the tea-kettle with water, and filled the water-bucket in the sink. Then he went to her bedroom door and knocked with his knuckles as he had done for years in precisely the same fashion.

Rap--rap--rap. "Hello, Merry! Time t' git up. Broad daylight, an' birds asingun."

Without waiting for an answer he went out to the barn and worked away at his chores. He took such delight in the glorious morning and the turbulent life of the farmyard that his heart grew light and he hummed a tune which sounded like the merry growl of a lion. "Poo-ee, poo-ee," he called to the pigs as they swarmed across the yard.

"Ahrr! you big, fat rascals, them hams o' yourn is clear money. One of ye shall go t' buy Merry a new dress," he said as he glanced at the house and saw the smoke pouring out the stovepipe. "Merry's a good girl; she's stood by her old pap when other girls 'u'd 'a' gone back on 'im."

While currying horses he went all over the ground of the quarrel yesterday, and he began to see it in a different light. He began to see that Lyman was a good man and an able man, and that his own course was a foolish one.

"When I git mad," he confessed to himself, "I don't know any thin'. But I won't give her up. She ain't old 'nough t' marry yet--and, besides, I need her."

After finishing his chores, as usual, he went to the well and washed his face and hands, then entered the kitchen--to find the tea-kettle boiling over, and no signs of breakfast anywhere, and no sign of the girl.

"Well, I guess she felt sleepy this mornin'. Poor gal! Mebbe she cried half the night."

"Merry!" he called gently, at the door.

"Merry, m' gal! Pap needs his breakfast."

There was no reply, and the old man's face stiffened into a wild surprise. He knocked heavily again and got no reply, and, with a white face and shaking hand, he flung the door open and gazed at the empty bed. His hand dropped to his side; his head turned slowly from the bed to the open window; he rushed forward and looked out on the ground, where he saw the tracks of a man.

He fell heavily into the chair by the bed, while a deep groan broke from his stiff and twitching lips.

"She's left me! She's left me!"

For a long half-hour the iron-muscled old man sat there motionless, hearing not the songs of the hens or the birds far out in the brilliant sunshine. He had lost sight of his farm, his day's work, and felt no hunger for food. He did not doubt that her going was final. He felt that she was gone from him forever. If she ever came back it would not be as his daughter, but as the wife of Gilman. She had deserted him, fled in the night like a thief; his heart began to harden again, and he rose stiffly. His native stubbornness began to assert itself, the first great shock over, and he went out to the kitchen, and prepared, as best he could, a breakfast, and sat down to it. In some way his appetite failed him, and he fell to thinking over his past life, of the death of his wife, and the early death of his only boy. He was still trying to think what his life would be in the future without his girl, when two carriages drove into the yard. It was about the middle of the forenoon, and the prairie-chickens had ceased to boom and squawk; in fact, that was why he knew, for he had been sitting two hours at the table. Before he could rise he heard swift feet and a merry voice and Marietta burst through the door.

"Hello, Pap! How you makin' out with break--" She saw a look on his face that went to her heart like a knife. She saw a lonely and deserted old man sitting at his cold and cheerless breakfast, and with a remorseful cry she ran across the floor and took him in her arms, kissing him again and again, while Mr. John Jennings and his wife stood in the door.

"Poor ol' Pap! Merry couldn't leave you. She's come back to stay as long as he lives."

The old man remained cold and stern. His deep voice had a relentless note in it as he pushed her away from him, noticing no one else.

"But how do you come back t' me?"

The girl grew rosy, but she stood proudly up.

"I come back the wife of a *man*, Pap; a wife like my mother, an' this t' hang beside hers;" and she laid down a rolled piece of parchment.

"Take it an' go," growled he; "take yer lazy lubber an' git out o' my sight. I raised ye, took keer o' ye when ye was little, sent ye t' school, bought ye dresses,--done everythin' fer ye I could, 'lowin' t' have ye stand by me when I got old,--but no, ye must go back on yer ol' pap, an' go off in the night with a good-fr-nothin' houn' that nobuddy knows anything about--a feller that never done a thing fer ye in the world--"

"What did you do for mother that she left *her* father and mother and went with you? How much did you have when you took her away from her good home an' brought her away out here among the wolves an' Indians? I've heard you an' her say a hundred times that you didn't have a chair in the house. Now, why do you talk so t' me when I want t' git--when Lime comes and asks for me?"

The old man was staggered. He looked at the smiling face of John Jennings and the tearful eyes of Mrs. Jennings, who had returned with Lyman. But his heart hardened again as he caught sight of Lime looking in at him. His absurd pride would not let him relent. Lime saw it, and stepped forward.

"Ol' man, I want t' take a little inning now. I'm a fair, square man. I asked ye fer Merry as a man should. I told you I'd had hard luck, when I first came here. I had five thousand dollars in clean cash stole from me. I hain't got a thing now except credit, but that's good fer enough t' stock a little farm with. Now, I wan' to be fair and square in this thing. You wan' to rent a farm; I need one. Let me have the river eighty, or I'll take the whole business on a share of a third, an' Merry Etty and I to stay here with you jest as if nothin' 'd happened. Come, now, what d' y' say?"

There was something winning in the sturdy bearing of the man as he stood before the father, who remained silent and grim.

"Or if you don't do that, why, there's nothin' left fer Merry an' me but to go back to La Crosse, where I can have my choice of a dozen farms. Now this is the way things is standin'. I don't want to be underhanded about this thing--"

"That's a fair offer," said Mr. Jennings in the pause which followed. "You'd better do it, neighbor Bacon. Nobuddy need know how things stood; they were married in my house--I thought that would be best. You can't live without your girl," he went on, "any more 'n I could without my boy. You'd better--"

The figure at the table straightened up. Under his tufted eyebrows his keen gray eyes flashed from one to the other. His hands knotted.

"Go slow!" went on the smooth voice of Jennings, known all the country through as a peacemaker. "Take time t' think it over. Stand out, an' you'll live here alone without chick 'r child; give in, and this house 'll bubble over with noise and young ones. Now is short, and forever's a long time to feel sorry in."

The old man at the table knitted his eyebrows, and a distorted, quivering, ghastly smile broke out on his face. His chest heaved; then he burst forth:--

"Gal, yank them gloves off, an' git me something to eat--breakfus 'r dinner, I don't care which. Lime, you infernal idiot, git out there and gear up them horses. What in thunder you foolun' round about hyere in seed'n'? Come, hustle, all o' ye!"

And they all shouted in laughter, while the old man strode unsteadily but resolutely out toward the barn, followed by the bridegroom, who was still laughing--but silently.

ELDER PILL, PREACHER

I

Old man Bacon was pinching forked barbs on a wire fence one rainy day in July, when his neighbor Jennings came along the road on his way to town. Jennings never went to town except when it rained too hard to work outdoors, his neighbors said; and of old man Bacon it was said he *never* rested *nights* nor Sundays.

Jennings pulled up. "Good morning, neighbor Bacon."

"Mornin'," rumbled the old man without looking up.

"Taking it easy, as usual, I see. Think it's going to clear up?"

"May, an' may not. Don't make much differunce t' me," growled Bacon, discouragingly.

"Heard about the plan for a church?"

"Naw."

"Well, we're goin' to hire Elder Pill from Douglass to come over and preach every Sunday afternoon at the schoolhouse, an' we want help t' pay him--the laborer is worthy of his hire."

"Sometimes he is an' then agin he ain't. Y' needn't look t' me fr a dollar. I ain't got no intrust in y'r church."

"Oh, yes, you have--besides, y'r sister--"

"She ain't got no more time 'n I have t' go t' church. We're obleeged to do 'bout all we c'n stand t' pay our debts, let alone tryun' to support a preacher." And the old man shut the pinchers up on a barb with a vicious grip.

Easy-going Mr. Jennings laughed in his silent way. "I guess you'll help when the time comes," he said, and, clucking to his team, drove off.

"I guess I won't," muttered the grizzled old giant as he went on with his work. Bacon was what is called land poor in the West, that is, he had more land than money; still he was able to give if he felt disposed. It remains to say that he was *not* disposed, being a sceptic and a scoffer. It angered him to have Jennings predict so confidently that he would help.

The sun was striking redly through a rift in the clouds, about three o'clock in the afternoon, when he saw a man coming up the lane, walking: on the grass at the side of the road, and whistling merrily. The old man looked at him from under his huge eyebrows with some curiosity. As he drew near, the pedestrian ceased to whistle, and, just as the farmer expected him to pass, he stopped and said, in a free and easy style:--

"How de do? Give me a chaw t'baccer. I'm Pill, the new minister. I take fine-cut when I can get it," he said, as Bacon put his hand into his pocket. "Much obliged. How goes it?"

"Tollable, tollable," said the astounded farmer, looking hard at Pill as he flung a handful of tobacco into his mouth.

"Yes, I'm the new minister sent around here to keep you fellows in the traces and out of hell-fire. Have y' fled from the wrath?" he asked, in a perfunctory way.

"You are, eh?" said Bacon, referring back to his profession.

"I am, just! How do you like that style of barb fence? Ain't the twisted wire better?"

"I s'pose they be, but they cost more."

"Yes, costs more to go to heaven than to hell. You'll think so after I board with you a week. Narrow the road that leads to light, and broad the way that leads--how's your soul anyway, brother?"

"Soul's all right. I find more trouble to keep m' body go'n."

"Give us your hand; so do I. All the same we must prepare for the next world. We're gettin' old; lay not up your treasures where moth and rust corrupt and thieves break through and steal."

Bacon was thoroughly interested in the preacher, and was studying him carefully. He was tall, straight, and superbly proportioned; broad-shouldered, wide-lunged, and thewed like a Chippewa. His rather small steel-blue eyes twinkled, and his shrewd face and small head, set well back, completed a remarkable figure. He wore his reddish beard in the usual way of Western clergymen, with mustache chopped close.

Bacon spoke slowly:--

"You look like a good, husky man to pitch in the barn-yard; you've too much muscle fr preachun'."

"Come and hear me next Sunday, and if you say so then, I'll quit," replied Mr. Pill, quietly. "I give ye my word for it. I believe in preachers havin' a little of the flesh and the devil; they can sympathize better with the rest of ye." The sarcasm was lost on Bacon, who continued to look at him. Suddenly he said, as if with an involuntary determination:--

"Where ye go'n' to stay t'night?"

"I don't know; do you?" was the quick reply.

"I reckon ye can hang out with me, 'f ye feel like ut. We ain't very purty, at our house, but we eat. You go along down the road and tell 'em I sent yeh. Ye'll find an' ol' dusty Bible round some'rs--I s'pose ye spend y'r spare time read'n' about Joshua an' Dan!--"

"I spend more time reading men. Well, I'm off! I'm hungrier 'n a gray wolf in a bear-trap." And off he went as he came. But he did not whistle; he chewed.

Bacon felt as if he had made too much of a concession, and had a strong inclination to shout after him, and retract his invitation; but he did not, only worked on, with an occasional bear-like grin. There was something captivating in this fellow's free and easy way.

When he came up to the house an hour or two later, in singular good humor for him, he found the Elder in the creamery, with his niece Eldora, who was not more won by him than was his sister Jane Buttles, he was so genial and put on so few religious frills.

Mrs. Buttles never put on frills of any kind. She was a most frightful toiler, only excelled (if excelled at all) by her brother. Unlovely at her best, when about her work in her faded calico gown and flat shoes, hair wisped into a slovenly knot, she was depressing. But she was a good woman, of sterling integrity, and ambitious for her girl. She was very glad of the chance to take charge of her brother's household after Marietta married.

Eldora was as attractive as her mother was depressing. She was very young at this time and had the physical perfection--at least as regards body--that her parents must have had in youth. She was above the average height of woman, with strong swell of bosom and glorious, erect carriage of head. Her features were coarse, but regular and pleasing, and her manner boyish.

Elder Pill was on the best terms with them as he watched the milk being skimmed out of the "submerged cans" ready for the "caaves and hawks," as Mrs. Buttles called them.

"Uncle told you t' come here 'nd stay t' supper, did he? What's come over him?" said the girl, with a sort of audacious humor.

"Bill has an awful grutch agin preachers," said Mrs. Buttles, as she wiped her hands on her apron. "I declare, I don't see how--"

"*Some* preachers, not *all* preachers," laughed Pill, in his mellow nasal. "There are preachers, and then again preachers. I'm one o' the t'other kind."

"I sh'd think y' was," laughed the girl.

"Now, Eldory, you run right t' the pig-pen with that milk, whilst I go in an' set the tea on."

Mr. Pill seized the can of milk, saying, with a twang: "Show me the way that I may walk therein," and, accompanied by the laughing girl, made rapid way to the pig-pen just as the old man set up a ferocious shout to call the hired hand out of the corn-field.

"How'd y' come to send *him* here?" asked Mrs. Buttles, nodding toward Pill.

"Damfino! I kind o' liked him--no nonsense about him," answered Bacon, going into temporary eclipse behind his hands as he washed his face at the cistern.

At the supper table Pill was "easy as an old shoe"; ate with his knife, talked about fattening hogs, suggested a few points on raising clover, told of pioneer experiences in Michigan, and soon won them--hired man and all--to a most favorable opinion of himself. But he did not trench on religious matters at all.

The hired man in his shirt-sleeves, and smelling frightfully of tobacco and sweat (as did Bacon), sat with open mouth, at times forgetting to eat, in his absorbing interest in the minister's yarns.

"Yes, I've got a family, too much of a family, in fact--that is, I think so sometimes when I'm pinched. Our Western people are so indigent--in plain terms, poor--they *can't* do any better than they do. But we pull through--we pull through! John, you look like a stout fellow, but I'll bet a hat I can *down* you three out of five."

"I bet you can't," grinned the hired man. It was the climax of all, that bet.

"I'll take y' in hand an' flop y' both," roared Bacon from his lion-like throat, his eyes glistening with rare good-nature from the shadow of his gray brows. But he admired the minister's broad shoulders at the same time. If this fellow panned out as he promised, he was a rare specimen.

After supper the Elder played a masterly game of croquet with Eldora, beating her with ease; then he wandered out to the barn and talked horses with the hired man, and finished by stripping off his coat and putting on one of Mrs. Buttles's aprons to help milk the cows.

But at breakfast the next morning, when the family were about pitching into their food as usual without ceremony, the visitor spoke in an imperious tone and with lifted hand. "*Wait!* Let us look to the Lord for His blessing."

They waited till the grace was said, but it threw a depressing atmosphere over the group; evidently they considered the trouble begun. At the end of the meal the minister asked:--

"Have you a Bible in the house?"

"I reckon there's one around somewhere. Elly, go 'n see 'fy' can't raise one," said Mrs. Buttles, indifferently.

"Have you any objection to family devotion?" asked Pill, as the book was placed in his hands by the girl.

"No; have all you want," said Bacon, as he rose from the table and passed out the door.

"I guess I'll see the thing through," said the hand.

"It ain't just square to leave the women folks to bear the brunt of it."

It was shortly after breakfast that the Elder concluded he'd walk up to Brother Jennings's and see about church matters.

"I shall expect you, Brother Bacon, to be at the service at 2.30."

"All right, go ahead expectun'," responded Bacon, with an inscrutable sidewise glance.

"You promised, you remember?"

"The--devil--I did!" the old man snarled.

The Elder looked back with a smile, and went off whistling in the warm, bright morning.

II

The schoolhouse down on the creek was known as "Hell's Corners" all through the county, because of the frequent rows that took place therein at "corkuses" and the like, and also because of the number of teachers that had been "ousted" by the boys. In fact, it was one of those places still to be found occasionally in the West, far from railroads and schools, where the primitive ignorance and ferocity of men still prowl, like the panthers which are also found sometimes in the deeps of the Iowa timber lands.

The most of this ignorance and ferocity, however, was centred in the family of Dixons, a dark-skinned, unsavory group of Missourians. It consisted of old man Dixon and wife, and six sons, all man-grown, great, gaunt, sinewy fellows, with no education, but superstitious as savages. If anything went wrong in "Hell's Corners" everybody knew that the Dixons were "on the rampage again." The school-teachers were warned against the Dixons, and the preachers were besought to convert the Dixons.

In fact, John Jennings, as he drove Pill to the schoolhouse next day, said:--

"If you can convert the Dixon boys, Elder, I'll give you the best horse in my barn."

"I work not for such hire," said Mr. Pill, with a look of deep solemnity on his face, belied, indeed, by a twinkle in his small, keen eye--a twinkle which made Milton Jennings laugh candidly.

There was considerable curiosity, expressed by a murmur of lips and voices, as the minister's tall figure entered the door and stood for a moment in a study of the scene before him. It was a characteristically Western scene. The women sat on one side of the schoolroom, the men on the other; the front seats were occupied by squirming boys and girls in their Sunday splendor.

On the back, to the right, were the young men, in their best vests, with paper collars and butterfly neckties, with their coats unbuttoned, their hair plastered down in a fascinating wave on their brown foreheads. Not a few were in their shirt-sleeves. The older men sat immediately between the youths and boys, talking in hoarse whispers across the aisles about the state of the crops and the county ticket, while the women in much the same way conversed about the children and raising onions and strawberries. It was their main recreation, this Sunday meeting.

"Brethren!" rang out the imperious voice of the minister, "let us pray."

The audience thoroughly enjoyed the Elder's prayer. He was certainly gifted in that direction, and his petition grew genuinely eloquent as his desires embraced the "ends of the earth and the uttermost parts of the seas thereof." But in the midst of it a clatter was heard, and five or six strapping fellows filed in with loud thumpings of their brogans.

Shortly after they had settled themselves with elaborate impudence on the back seat, the singing began. Just as they were singing the last verse, every individual voice wavered and all but died out in astonishment to see William Bacon come in--an unheard-of thing! And with a clean shirt, too! Bacon, to tell the truth, was feeling as much out of place as a cat in a bath-tub, and looked uncomfortable, even shamefaced, as he sidled in, his shapeless hat gripped nervously in both hands; coatless and collarless, his shirt open at his massive throat. The girls tittered, of course, and the boys hammered each other's ribs, moved by the unusual sight. Milton Jennings, sitting beside Bettie Moss, said:--

"Well! may I jump straight up and never come down!"

And Shep Watson said: "May I never see the back o' my neck!" Which pleased Bettie so much that she grew quite purple with efforts to conceal her laughter; she always enjoyed a joke on her father.

But all things have an end, and at last the room became quiet as Mr. Pill began to read the Scripture, wondering a little at the commotion. He suspected that those dark-skinned, grinning fellows on the back seat were the Dixon boys, and knew they were bent on fun. The physique of the minister being carefully studied, the boys began whispering among themselves, and at last, just as the sermon opened, they began to push the line of young men on the long seat over toward the girls' side, squeezing Milton against Bettie. This pleasantry encouraged one of them to whack his neighbor over the head with his soft hat, causing great laughter and disturbance. The preacher stopped. His cool, penetrating voice sounded strangely unclerical as he said:--

"There are some fellows here to-day to have fun with me. If they don't keep quiet, they'll have more fun than they can hold." (At this point a green crab-apple bounded up the aisle.) "I'm not to be bulldozed."

He pulled off his coat and laid it on the table before him, and, amid a wondering silence, took off his cuffs and collar, saying:--

"I can preach the word of the Lord just as well without my coat, and I can throw rowdies out the door a little better in my shirt-sleeves."

Had the Dixon boys been a little shrewder as readers of human character, or if they had known why old William Bacon was there, they would have kept quiet; but it was not long before they began to push again, and at last one of them gave a squeak, and a tussle took place. The preacher was in the midst of a sentence:--

"An evil deed, brethren, is like unto a grain of mustard seed. It is small, but it grows steadily, absorbing its like from the earth and air, sending out roots and branches, till at last--"

There was a scuffle and a snicker. Mr. Pill paused, and gazed intently at Tom Dixon, who was the most impudent and strongest of the gang; then he moved slowly down on the astonished young savage. As he came his eyes seemed to expand like those of an eagle in battle, steady, remorseless, unwavering, at the same time that his brows shut down over them--a glance that hushed every breath. The awed and astonished ruffians sat as if paralyzed by the unuttered yet terribly ferocious determination of the preacher's eyes. His right hand was raised, the other was clenched at his waist. There was a sort of solemnity in his approach, like a tiger creeping upon a foe.

At last, after what seemed minutes to the silent, motionless congregation, his raised hand came down on the shoulder of the leader with the exact, resistless precision of the tiger's paw, and the ruffian was snatched from his seat to the floor sprawling. Before he could rise, the steel-like grip of the roused preacher sent him halfway to the door, and then out into the dirt of the road.

Turning, Pill strode down the aisle once more. The half-risen congregation made way for him, curiously. When he came within reach of Dick, the fellow struck savagely out at the preacher, only to have his blow avoided by a lithe, lightning-swift movement of the body above the hips (a trained boxer's trick), and to find himself lying bruised and dazed on the floor.

By this time the other brothers had recovered from their stupor, and, with wild curses, leaped over the benches toward the fearless preacher.

But now a new voice was heard in the sudden uproar--a new but familiar voice. It was the mighty voice of William Bacon, known far and wide as a terrible antagonist, a man who had never been whipped. He was like a wild beast excited to primitive savagery by the smell of blood.

"Stand *back*, you hell-hounds!" he said, leaping between them and the preacher. "You know me. Lay another hand on that man an', by the livun' God, you answer t' me. Back thear!"

Some of the men cheered, most stood irresolute. The women crowded together, the children began to scream with terror, while through it all Pill dragged his last assailant toward the door.

Bacon made his way down to where the Dixons had halted, undecided what to do. If the preacher had the air and action of the tiger, Bacon looked the grisly bear--his eyebrows working up and down, his hands clenched into frightful bludgeons, his breath rushing through his hairy nostrils.

"Git out o' hyare," he growled. "You've run things here jest about long enough. Git out!"

His hands were now on the necks of two of the boys and he was hustling them toward the door.

"If you want 'o whip the preacher, meet him in the public road--one at a time; he'll take care o' himself. Out with ye," he ended, kicking them out. "Show your faces here agin, an' I'll break ye in two."

The non-combative farmers now began to see the humor of the whole transaction, and began to laugh; but they were cut short by the calm voice of the preacher at his desk:--

"But a *good* deed, brethren, is like unto a grain of wheat planted in good earth, that bringeth forth fruit in due season an hundred fold."

III

Mr. Pill, with all his seeming levity, was a powerful hand at revivals, as was developed at the "protracted" meetings at the Grove during December. Indeed, such was the pitiless intensity of his zeal that a gloom was cast over the whole township; the ordinary festivities stopped or did not begin at all.

The lyceum, which usually began by the first week in December, was put entirely out of the question, as were the spelling-schools and "exhibitions." The boys, it is true, still drove the girls to meeting in the usual manner; but they all wore a furtive, uneasy air, and their laughter was not quite genuine at its best, and died away altogether when they came near the schoolhouse, and they hardly recovered from the effects of the preaching till a mile or two had been spun behind the shining runners. It took all the magic of the jingle of the bells and the musical creak of the polished steel on the snow to win them back to laughter.

As for Elder Pill, he was as a man transformed. He grew more intense each night, and strode back and forth behind his desk and pounded the Bible like an assassin. No more games with the boys, no more poking the girls under the chin! When he asked for a chew of tobacco now it was with an air which said: "I ask it as sustenance that will give me strength for the Lord's service," as if the demands of the flesh had weakened the spirit.

Old man Bacon overtook Milton Jennings early one Monday morning, as Milton was marching down toward the Seminary at Rock River. It was intensely cold and still, so cold and still that the ring of the cold steel of the heavy sleigh, the snort of the horses, and the old man's voice came with astonishing distinctness to the ears of the hurrying youth, and it seemed a very long time before the old man came up.

"Climb on!" he yelled, out of his frosty beard. He was seated on the "hind bob" of a wood-sleigh, on a couple of blankets. Milton clambered on, knowing well he'd freeze to death there.

"Reckon I heerd you prowln' around the front door with my girl last night," Bacon said at length. "The way you both 'tend out t' meetun' ought 'o sanctify yeh; must 'a' stayed to the after-meetun', didn't yeh?"

"Nope. The front part was enough for--"

"Danged if I was any more fooled with a man in m' life. I b'lieve the whole thing is a little scheme on the bretheren t' raise a dollar."

"Why so?"

"Waal, y' see, Pill ain't got much out o' the app'intment thus fur, and he ain't likely to, if he don't shake 'em up a leetle. Borrud ten dollars o' me t'other day."

Well, thought Milton, whatever his real motive is, Elder Pill is earning all he gets. Standing for two or three hours in his place night after night, arguing, pleading, even commanding them to be saved.

Milton was describing the scenes of the meeting to Bradley Talcott and Douglas Radbourn the next day, and Radbourn, a young law student, said:--

"I'd like to see him. He must be a character."

"Let's make up a party and go out," said Milton, eagerly.

"All right; I'll speak to Lily Graham."

Accordingly, that evening a party of students, in a large sleigh, drove out toward the schoolhouse, along the drifted lanes and through the beautiful aisles of the snowy woods. A merry party of young people, who had no sense of sin to weigh them down. Even Radbourn and Lily joined in the songs which they sang to the swift clanging of the bells, until the lights of the schoolhouse burned redly through the frosty air.

Not a few of the older people present felt scandalized by the singing and by the dancing of the "town girls," who could not for the life of them take the thing seriously. The room was so little, and hot, and smoky, and the men looked so queer in their rough coats and hair every-which-way.

But they took their seats demurely on the back seat, and joined in the opening songs, and listened to the halting prayers of the brethren and the sonorous prayers of the Elder, with commendable gravity. Miss Graham was a devout Congregationalist, and hushed the others into gravity when their eyes began to dance dangerously.

However, as Mr. Pill warmed to his work, the girls grew sober enough. He awed them, and frightened them with the savagery of his voice and manner. His small gray eyes were like daggers unsheathed, and his small, round head took on a cat-like ferocity, as he strode to and fro, hurling out his warnings and commands in a hoarse howl that terrified the sinner, and drew "amens" of admiration from the saints.

"Atavism; he has gone back to the era of the medicine man," Radbourn murmured.

As the speaker went on, foam came upon his thin lips; his lifted hand had prophecy and threatening in it. His eyes reflected flames; his voice had now the tone of the implacable, vindictive judge. He gloated on the pictures that his words called up. By the power of his imagination the walls widened, the floor was no longer felt, the crowded room grew still as death, every eye fixed on the speaker's face.

"I tell you, you must repent or die. I can see the great judgment angel now!" he said, stopping suddenly and pointing above the stovepipe. "I can see him as he stands weighing your souls as a man 'ud weigh wheat and chaff. Wheat goes into the Father's garner; chaff is blown to hell's devouring flame! I can see him *now*! He seizes a poor, damned, struggling soul by the *neck*, he holds him over the flaming forge of *hell* till his bones melt like wax; he shrivels like thread in the flame of a candle; he is nothing but a charred husk, and the angel flings him back into *outer darkness*; life was not in him."

It was this astonishing figure, powerfully acted, that scared poor Tom Dixon into crying out for mercy. The effect upon others was painful. To see so great a sinner fall terror-stricken seemed like a providential stroke of confirmatory evidence, and nearly a dozen other young people fell crying, whereat the old people burst out into amens of spasmodic fervor, while the preacher, the wild light still in his eyes, tore up and down, crying above the tumult:--

"The Lord is come with *power*! His hand is visible *here*. Shout *aloud* and spare *not*. Fall before him as *dust* to his feet! Hypocrites, vipers, scoffers! the *lash* o' the *Lord* is on ye!"

In the intense pause which followed as he waited with expectant, uplifted face--a pause so deep even the sobbing sinners held their breath--a dry, drawling, utterly matter-of-fact voice broke the intense hush.

"S-a-y, Pill, ain't you a-bearun' down on the boys a *leetle too* hard?"

The preacher's extended arm fell as if life had gone out of it. His face flushed and paled; the people laughed hysterically, some of them with the tears of terror still on their cheeks; but Radbourn said, "Bravo, Bacon!"

Pill recovered himself.

"Not hard enough for *you*, neighbor Bacon."

Bacon rose, retaining the same dry, prosaic tone:--

"I ain't bitin' that kind of a hook, an' I ain't goin' to be *yanked* into heaven when I c'n *slide* into hell. Waal! I must be goin'; I've got a new-milk's cow that needs tendin' to."

The effect of all this was very great. From being at the very mouth of the furnace, quivering with fear and captive to morbid imaginings, Bacon's dry intonation brought them all back to earth again. They perceived something of the absurdity of the whole situation.

Pill was beaten for the first time in his life. He had been struck below the belt by a good-natured giant. The best he could do, as Bacon shuffled calmly out, was to stammer: "Will some one please sing?" And while they sang, he stood in deep thought. Just as the last verse was quivering into silence, the full, deep tones of Radbourn's voice rose above the bustle of feet and clatter of seats:--

"And all *that* he preaches in the name of Him who came bringing peace and good-will to men."

Radbourn's tone had in it reproach and a noble suggestion. The people looked at him curiously. The deacons nodded their heads together in counsel, and when they turned to the desk Pill was gone!

"Gee whittaker! That was tough," said Milton to Radbourn; "knocked the wind out o' him like a cannon-ball. What'll he do now?"

"He can't do anything but acknowledge his foolishness."

"You no business t' come here an' 'sturb the Lord's meetin'," cried old Daddy Brown to Radbourn. "You're a sinner and a scoffer."

"I thought Bacon was the disturbing ele--"

"You're just as bad!"

"He's all *right*," said William Council. "I've got sick, m'self, of bein' *scared* into religion. I never was so fooled in a man in my life. If I'd tell you what Pill said to me the other day, when we was in Robie's store, you'd fall in a fit. An' to hear him talkin' here t'night, is enough to make a horse laugh."

"You're all in league with the devil," said the old man, wildly; and so the battle raged on.

Milton and Radbourn escaped from it, and got out into the clear, cold, untainted night.

"The heat of the furnace doesn't reach as far as the horses," Radbourn moralized, as he aided in unhitching the shivering team. "In the vast, calm spaces of the stars, among the animals, such scenes as we have just seen are impossible." He lifted his hand in a lofty gesture. The light fell on his pale face and dark eyes. The girls were a little indignant and disposed to take the preacher's part. They thought Bacon had no right to speak out that way, and Miss Graham uttered her protest, as they whirled away on the homeward ride with pleasant jangle of bells.

"But the secret of it all was," said Radbourn in answer, "Pill knew he was acting a part. I don't mean that he meant to deceive, but he got excited, and his audience responded as an audience does to an actor of the first class, and he was for the time in earnest; his imagination *did* see those horrors,--he was swept away by his own words. But when Bacon spoke, his dry tone and homely words brought everybody, preacher and all, back to the earth with a thump! Everybody saw, that after weeping and wailing there for an hour, they'd go home, feed the calves, hang up the lantern, put out the cat, wind the clock, and go to bed. In other words, they all came back out of their barbaric *powwow* to their natural modern selves."

This explanation had palpable truth, but Lily perceived that it had wider application than to the meeting they had just left.

"They'll be music around this clearing to-morrow," said Milton, with a sigh; "wish I was at home this week."

"But what'll become of Mr. Pill?"

"Oh, he'll come out all right," Radbourn assured her, and Milton's clear tenor rang out as he drew Eileen closer to his side:--

"O silver moon, O silver moon,
You set, you set too soon--
The morrow day is far away,
The night is but begun."

IV

The news, grotesquely exaggerated, flew about the next day, and at night, though it was very cold and windy, the house was jammed to suffocation. On these lonely prairies life is so devoid of anything but work, dramatic entertainments are so few, and appetite so keen, that a temperature of twenty degrees below zero is no bar to a trip of ten miles. The protracted meeting was the only recreation for many of them. The gossip before and after service was a delight not to be lost, and this last sensation was dramatic enough to bring out old men and women who had not dared to go to church in winter for ten years.

Long before seven o'clock, the schoolhouse blazed with light and buzzed with curious speech. Team after team drove up to the door, and as the drivers leaped out to receive the women, they said in low but eager tones to the bystanders:--

"Meeting begun yet?"

"Nope!"

"What kind of a time y' havin' over here, any way?"

"A mighty solumn time," somebody would reply with a low laugh.

By seven o'clock every inch of space was occupied; the air was frightful. The kerosene lamps gave off gas and smoke, the huge stove roared itself into an angry red on its jack-oak grubs, and still people crowded in at the door.

Discussion waxed hot as the stove; two or three Universalists boldly attacked everybody who came their way. A tall man stood on a bench in the corner, and, thumping his Bible wildly with his fist, exclaimed, at the top of his voice:--

"There is *no* hell at *all!* The Bible says the *wicked* perish *utterly*. They are *consumed* as *ashes* when they die. They *perish* as *dogs!*"

"What kind o' docterin' is that?" asked a short man of Councill.

"I d'know. It's ol' Sam Richards. Calls himself a Christian--Christadelphian 'r some new-fangled name."

At last people began to inquire, "Well, ain't he comin'?"

"Most time fr the Elder to come, ain't it?"

"Oh, I guess he's preparin' a sermon."

John Jennings pushed anxiously to Daddy Brown.

"Ain't the Elder comin'?"

"I d'know. He didn't stay at my house."

"He didn't?"

"No. Thought he went home with you."

"I ain't see 'im't all. I'll ask Councill. Brother Councill, seen anything of the Elder?"

"No. Didn't he go home with Bensen?"

"I d'n know. I'll see."

This was enough to start the news that "Pill had skipped."

This the deacons denied, saying "he'd come or send word."

Outside, on the leeward side of the house, the young men who couldn't get in stood restlessly, now dancing a jig, now kicking their huge boots against the underpinning to warm their toes. They talked spasmodically as they swung their arms about their chests, speaking from behind their huge buffalo-coat collars.

The wind roared through the creaking oaks; the horses stirred complainingly, the bells on their backs crying out querulously; the heads of the fortunates inside were shadowed outside on the snow, and the restless young men amused themselves betting on which head was Bensen and which Councill.

At last some one pounded on the desk inside. The suffocating but lively crowd turned with painful adjustment toward the desk, from whence Deacon Bensen's high, smooth voice sounded:--

"Brethren an' sisters, Elder Pill hain't come--and, as it's about eight o'clock, he probably won't come to-night. After the disturbances last night, it's--a--a--we're all the more determined to--the--a--need of reforming grace is more felt than ever. Let us hope nothing has happened to the Elder. I'll go see to-morrow, and if he is unable to come--I'll see Brother Wheat, of Cresco. After prayer by Brother Jennings, we will adjourn till to-morrow night. Brother Jennings, will you lead us in prayer?" (Some one snickered.) "I hope the disgraceful--a--scenes of last night will not be repeated."

"Where's Pill?" demanded a voice in the back part of the room. "That's what I want to know."

"He's a bad pill," said another, repeating a pun already old.

"I guess so! He borrowed twenty dollars o' me last week," said the first voice.

"He owes me for a pig," shouted a short man, excitedly. "I believe he's skipped to get rid o' his debts."

"So do I. I allus said he was a mighty queer preacher."

"He'd bear watchin' was my idee fust time I ever see him."

"Careful, brethren--*careful*. He may come at any minute."

"I don't care if he does. I'd bone him fr pay fr that shote, preacher 'r no preacher," said Bartlett, a little nervously.

High words followed this, and there was prospect of a fight. The pressure of the crowd, however, was so great it was well-nigh impossible for two belligerents to get at each other. The meeting broke up at last, and the people, chilly, soured, and disappointed at the lack of developments, went home saying Pill was *scaly*; no preacher who chawed terbacker was to be trusted, and when it was learned that the horse and buggy he drove he owed Jennings and Bensen for, everybody said, "He's a fraud."

V

In the meantime, Andrew Pill was undergoing the most singular and awful mental revolution.

When he leaped blindly into his cutter and gave his horse the rein, he was wild with rage and shame, and a sort of fear. As he sat with bent head, he did not hear the tread of the horse, and did not see the trees glide past. The rabbit leaped away under the shadow of the thick groves of young oaks; the owl, scared from its perch, went fluttering off into the cold, crisp air; but he saw only the contemptuous, quizzical face of old William Bacon--one shaggy eyebrow lifted, a smile showing through his shapeless beard.

He saw the colorless, handsome face of Radbourn, and his look of reproach and note of suggestion--Radbourn, one of the best thinkers in Rock River, and the most generally admired young man in Rock County.

When he saw and heard Bacon, his hurt pride flamed up in wrath, but the calm voice of Radbourn, and the look in his stern, accusing eyes, made his head fall in thought. As he rode, things grew clearer. As a matter of fact, his whole system of religious thought was like the side of a shelving sand-bank--in unstable equilibrium--needing only a touch to send it slipping into a shapeless pile at the river's edge. That touch had been given, and he was now in the midst of the motion of his falling faith. He didn't know how much would stand when the sloughing ended.

Andrew Pill had been a variety of things, a farmer, a dry-goods merchant, and a travelling salesman, but in a revival quite like this of his own, he had been converted and his life changed. He now desired to help his fellow-men to a better life, and willingly went out among the farmers, where pay was small. It was not true, therefore, that he had gone into it because there was little work and good pay. He was really an able man, and would have been a success in almost anything he undertook; but his reading and thought, his easy intercourse with men like Bacon and Radbourn, had long since undermined any real faith in the current doctrine of retribution, and to-night, as he rode into the night, he was feeling it all and suffering it all, forced to acknowledge at last what had been long moving.

The horse took the wrong road, and plodded along steadily, carrying him away from his home, but he did not know it for a long time. When at last he looked up and saw the road leading out upon the wide plain between the belts of timber, leading away to Rock River, he gave a sigh of relief. He could not meet his wife then; he must have a chance to think.

Over him, the glittering, infinite sky of winter midnight soared, passionless, yet accusing in its calmness, sweetness, and majesty. What was he that he could dogmatize on eternal life and the will of the Being who stood behind that veil? And then would come rushing back that scene in the schoolhouse, the smell of the steaming garments, the gases from the lamps, the roar of the stove, the sound of his own voice, strident, dominating, so alien to his present mood, he could only shudder at it.

He was worn out with thinking when he drove into the stable at the Merchants' House and roused up the sleeping hostler, who looked at him suspiciously and demanded pay in advance. This seemed right in his present mood. He was not to be trusted.

When he flung himself face downward on his bed, the turmoil in his brain was still going on. He couldn't hold one thought or feeling long; all seemed slipping like water from his hands.

He had in him great capacity for change, for growth. Circumstances had been against his development thus far, but the time had come when growth seemed to be defeat and failure.

VI

Radbourn was thinking about him, two days after, as he sat in his friend Judge Brown's law office, poring over a volume

of law. He saw that Bacon's treatment had been heroic; he couldn't get the pitiful confusion of the preacher's face out of his mind. But, after all, Bacon's seizing of just that instant was a stroke of genius.

Some one touched him on the arm and he turned.

"Why--Elder--Mr. Pill, how de do? Sit down. Draw up a chair."

There was trouble in the preacher's face. "Can I see you, Radbourn, alone?"

"Certainly; come right into this room. No one will disturb us there."

"Now, what can I do for you?" he said, as they sat down.

"I want to talk to you about--about religion," said Pill, with a little timid pause in his voice.

Radbourn looked grave. "I'm afraid you've come to a dangerous man."

"I want you to tell me what you think. I know you're a student. I want to talk about my case," pursued the preacher, with a curious hesitancy. "I want to ask a few questions on things."

"Very well; sail in. I'll do the best I can," said Radbourn.

"I've been thinking a good deal since that night. I've come to the conclusion that I don't believe what I've been preaching. I thought I did, but I didn't. I don't know *what* I believe. Seems as if the land had slid from under my feet. What am I to do?"

"Say so," replied Radbourn, his eyes kindling. "Say so, and get out of it. There's nothing worse than staying where you are. What have you saved from the general land-slide?"

Pill smiled a little. "I don't know."

"Want me to cross-examine you and see, eh? Very well, here goes." He settled back with a smile. "You believe in square dealing between man and man?"

"Certainly."

"You believe in good deeds, candor, and steadfastness?"

"I do."

"You believe in justice, equality of opportunity, and in liberty?"

"Certainly I do."

"You believe, in short, that a man should do unto others as he'd have others do unto him; think right and live out his thoughts?"

"All that I steadfastly believe."

"Well, I guess your land-slide was mostly imaginary. The face of the eternal rock is laid bare. You didn't recognize it at first, that's all. One question more. You believe in getting at truth?"

"Certainly."

"Well, truth is only found from the generalizations of facts. Before calling a thing true, study carefully all accessible facts. Make your religion practical. The matter-of-fact tone of Bacon would have had no force if you had been preaching an earnest morality in place of an antiquated terrorism."

"I know it, I know it," sighed Pill, looking down.

"Well, now go back and tell 'em so. And then, if you can't keep your place preaching what you do believe, get into something else. For the sake of all morality and manhood, don't go on cursing yourself with hypocrisy."

Mr. Pill took a chew of tobacco rather distractedly, and said:--

"I'd like to ask you a few questions."

"No, not now. You think out your present position yourself. Find out just what you have saved from your land-slide."

The elder man rose; he hardly seemed the same man who had dominated his people a few days before. He turned with

still greater embarrassment.

"I want to ask a favor. I'm going back to my family. I'm going to say something of what you've said, to my congregation--but--I'm in debt--and the moment they know I'm a backslider, they're going to bear down on me pretty heavy. I'd like to be independent."

"I see. How much do you need?" mused Radbourn.

"I guess two hundred would stave off the worst of them."

"I guess Brown and I can fix that. Come in again to-night. Or no, I'll bring it round to you."

The two men parted with a silent pressure of the hand that meant more than any words.

When Mr. Pill told his wife that he could preach no more, she cried, and gasped, and scolded till she was in danger of losing her breath entirely. "A guinea-hen sort of a woman" Councilll called her. "She can talk more an' say less 'n any woman I ever see," was Bacon's verdict, after she had been at dinner at his house. She was a perpetual irritant.

Mr. Pill silenced her at last with a note of impatience approaching a threat, and drove away to the Corners to make his confession without her. It was Saturday night, and Elder Wheat was preaching as he entered the crowded room. A buzz and mumble of surprise stopped the orator for a few moments, and he shook hands with Mr. Pill dubiously, not knowing what to think of it all, but as he was in the midst of a very effective oratorical scene, he went on.

The silent man at his side felt as if he were witnessing a burlesque of himself as he listened to the pitiless and lurid description of torment which Elder Wheat poured forth,--the same figures and threats he had used a hundred times. He stirred uneasily in his seat, while the audience paid so little attention that the perspiring little orator finally called for a hymn, saying:--

"Elder Pill has returned from his unexpected absence, and will exhort in his proper place."

When the singing ended, Mr. Pill rose, looking more like himself than since the previous Sunday. A quiet resolution was in his eyes and voice as he said:--

"Elder Wheat has more right here than I have. I want 'o say that I'm going to give up my church in Douglass and--" A murmur broke out, which he silenced with his raised hand. "I find I don't believe any longer what I've been believing and preaching. Hold on! let me go on. I don't quite know where I'll bring up, but I think my religion will simmer down finally to about this: A full half-bushel to the half-bushel and sixteen ounces to the pound." Here two or three cheered. "Do unto others as you'd have others do unto you." Applause from several, quickly suppressed as the speaker went on, Elder Wheat listening as if petrified, with his mouth open.

"I'm going out of preaching, at least for the present. After things get into shape with me again, I may set up to teach people how to live, but just now I can't do it. I've got all I can do to instruct myself. Just one thing more. I owe two or three of you here. I've got the money for William Bacon, James Bartlett, and John Jennings. I turn the mare and cutter over to Jacob Bensen, for the note he holds. I hain't got much religion left, but I've got some morality. That's all I want to say now."

When he sat down there was a profound hush; then Bacon arose.

"That's *man's* talk, that is! An' I jest want 'o say, Andrew Pill, that you kin jest forgit you owe me anything. An' if ye want any help come to me. Y're jest gittun' ready to preach, 'n' I'm ready to give ye my support."

"That's the talk," said Councilll. "I'm with ye on that."

Pill shook his head. The painful silence which followed was broken by the effusive voice of Wheat:--

"Let us pray--and remember our lost brother."

The urgings of the people were of no avail. Mr. Pill settled up his affairs and moved to Cresco, where he went back into trade with a friend, and for three years attended silently to his customers, lived down their curiosity, and studied anew the problem of life. Then he moved away, and no one knew whither.

One day last year Bacon met Jennings on the road.

"Heerd anything o' Pill lately?"

"No, have you?"

"Waal, yes. Brown told me he ran acrost him down in Eelinoy, doun' well, too."

"In dry goods?"

"No, preachun'."

"Preachun'?"

"So Brown said. Kind of a free-fr-all church, I reckon, from what Jedge told me. Built a new church; fills it twice a Sunday. I'd like to hear him, but he's got t' be too big a gun fr us. Ben studyun', they say; went t' school."

Jennings drove sadly and thoughtfully on.

"Rather stumps Brother Jennings," laughed Bacon, in a good-humored growl.

A DAY OF GRACE

Sunday is the day for courtship on the prairie. It has also the piety of cleanliness. It allows the young man to get back to a self-respecting sweetness of person, and enables the girls to look as nature intended, dainty and sweet as posies.

The change from everyday clothing on the part of young workmen like Ben Griswold was more than change; it approached transformation. It took more than courage to go through the change,—it required love.

Ben arose a little later on Sunday morning than on weekdays, but there were the chores to do as usual. The horses must be watered, fed, and curried, and the cows were to milk, but after breakfast Ben threw off the cares of the hired hand. When he came down from the little garret into which the hot August sun streamed redly, he was a changed creature. Clean from tip to toe, newly shaven, wearing a crackling white shirt, a linen collar and a new suit of store clothes, he felt himself a man again, fit to meet maidens.

His partner, being a married man, was slouching around in his tattered and greasy brown denim overalls. He looked at Ben and grinned.

"Got a tag on y'rself?"

"No, why?"

"Nobod'y know ye, if anything happened on the road. There's thirty dollars gone to the dogs." He sighed. "Oh, well, you'll get over that, just as I did."

"I hope I won't get over liking to be clean," Ben said a little sourly. "I won't be back to milk."

"Didn't expect ye. That's the very time o' day the girls are purtiest,—just about sundown. Better take Rock. I may want the old team myself."

Ben hitched up and drove off in the warm bright morning, with wonderful elation, clean and self-respecting once more. His freshly shaven face felt cool, and his new suit fitted him well. His heart took on a great resolution, which was to call upon Grace.

The thought of her made his brown hands shake, and he remembered how many times he had sworn to visit her, but had failed of courage, though it seemed she had invited him by word and look to do so.

He overtook Milton Jennings on his way along the poplar-lined lane.

"Hello, Milt, where you bound?"

Milton glanced up with a curious look in his laughing eyes. From the pockets of his long linen duster he drew a handful of beautiful scarlet and yellow Siberian crab-apples.

"See them crabs?"

"Yes, I see 'em."

Milton drew a similar handful out of his left pocket. "See those?"

"What y' going to do with 'em?"

"Take 'em home again."

Something in Milton's voice led him to ask soberly:--

"What did you intend doing with 'em?"

"Present 'em to Miss Cole."

"Well, why didn't y' do it?"

Milton showed his white teeth in a smile that was frankly derisive of himself.

"Well, when I got over there I found young Conley's sorrel hitched to one post and Walt Brown's gray hitched to the other. I went in, but I didn't stay long; in fact, I didn't sit down. I was afraid those infernal apples would roll out o' my pockets. I was afraid they'd find out I brought 'em over there for Miss Cole, like the darn fool I was."

They both laughed heartily. Milton was always as severe upon himself as upon any one else.

"That's tough," said Ben, "but climb in, and let's go to Sunday-school."

Milton got in, and they ate the apples as they rode along.

The Grove schoolhouse was the largest in the township, and was the only one with a touch of redeeming grace. It was in a lovely spot; great oaks stood all about, and back of it the woods grew thick, and a clear creek gurgled over its limestone bed not far away.

To Ben and Milton there was a wondrous charm about the Grove schoolhouse. It was the one place where the boys and girls met in garments disassociated from toil. Sundays in summer, and on winter nights at lyceums or protracted meetings, the boys came to see the girls in their bright dresses, with their clear and (so it seemed) scornful bright eyes.

All through the service Ben sat where he could see Grace by turning his head, but he had not the courage to do so. Once or twice he caught a glimpse of the curve of her cheek and the delicate lines of her ear, and a suffocating throb came into his throat.

He wanted to ask her to go with him down to Cedarville to the Methodist camp-meeting, but he knew it was impossible. He could not even say "good day" when she took pains to pass near him after church. He nodded like a great idiot, all ease and dignity lost, his throat too dry and hot to utter a sound.

He cursed his shyness as he went out after his horse. He saw her picking her dainty way up the road with Conrad Sieger walking by her side. What made it worse for Ben was a dim feeling that she liked him, and would go with him if he had the courage to ask her.

"Well, Ben," said Milton, "it's settled, we go to Rock River to-night to the camp-meeting. Did you ask Grace?"

"No, she's going with Con. It's just my blasted luck."

"That's too bad. Well, come with us. Take Maud."

As he rode away Ben passed Grace on the road.

"Going to the camp-meeting, Con?" asked Milton, in merry voice.

"I guess so," said Conrad, a handsome, but slow-witted German.

As they went on Ben could have wept. His keener perception told him there was a look of appeal in Grace's upturned eyes.

He made a poor companion at dinner, and poor plain Maud knew his mind was elsewhere. She was used to that and accepted it with a pathetic attempt to color it differently.

They got away about five o'clock.

Ben drove the team, driving took his mind off his weakness and failure; while Milton in the seclusion of the back seat of the carryall was happy with Amelia Turner.

It was growing dark as they entered upon the curving road along the river which was a relief from the rectangular and sun-smitten roads of the prairie. They lingered under the great oaks and elms which shaded them. It would have been perfect Ben thought, if Grace had been beside him in Maud's place.

He wondered how he should manage to speak to Grace. There was a time when it seemed easier. Now the consciousness of his love made the simplest question seem like the great question of all.

Other teams were on the road, some returning, some going. A camp-meeting had come to be an annual amusement, like a circus, and young people from all over the country drove down on Sundays, as if to some celebration with fireworks.

"There's the lane," said Milton. "See that team goin' in?"

Ben pulled up and they looked at it doubtfully. It looked dangerously miry. It was quite dark now and Ben said:--

"That's a scaly piece of road."

"Oh, that's all right. Hark!"

As they listened they could hear the voice of the exhorter nearly a mile away. It pushed across the cool spaces with a wild and savage sound. The young people thrilled with excitement.

Insects were singing in the grass. Frogs with deepening chorus seemed to announce the coming of night, and above these peaceful sounds came the wild shouts of the far-off preacher, echoing through the cool green arches of the splendid grove.

The girls became silent, as the voice grew louder.

Lights appeared ahead, and the road led up a slight hill to a gate. Ben drove on under a grove of oaks, past dimly lighted tents, whose open flaps showed tumbled beds and tables laden with crockery. Heavy women were moving about inside, their shadows showing against the tent walls like figures in a pantomime.

The young people alighted in curious silence. As they stood a moment, tying the team, the preacher lifted his voice in a brazen, clanging, monotonous reiteration of worn phrases.

"Come to the *Lord!* Come *now!* Come to the *light!* Jesus will give it! *Now* is the appointed time,--come to the *light!*"

From a tent near by arose the groaning, gasping, gurgling scream of a woman in mortal agony.

"O my God!"

It was charged with the most piercing distress. It cut to the heart's palpitating centre like a poniard thrust. It had murder and outrage in it.

The girls clutched Ben and Milton. "Oh, let's go home!"

"No, let's go and see what it all is."

The girls hung close to the arms of the young men and they went down to the tent and looked in.

It was filled with a motley throng of people, most of them seated on circling benches. A fringe of careless or scoffing onlookers stood back against the tent wall. Many of them were strangers to Ben.

Occasionally a Norwegian farm-hand, or a bevy of young people from some near district, lifted the flap and entered with curious or laughing or insolent faces.

The tent was lighted dimly by kerosene lamps, hung in brackets against the poles, and by stable lanterns set here and there upon the benches.

Ben and Milton ushered the girls in and seated them a little way back. The girls smiled, but only faintly. The undertone of women's cries moved them in spite of their scorn of it all.

"What cursed foolishness!" said Ben to Milton.

Milton smiled, but did not reply. He only nodded toward the exhorter, a man with a puffy jumble of features and the form of a gladiator, who was uttering wild and explosive phrases.

"Oh, my friends! I bless the Lord for the *SHALL* in the word. You *SHALL* get light. You *SHALL* be saved. Oh, the *SHALL* in the word! You *SHALL* be redeemed!"

As he grew more excited, his hoarse voice rose in furious screams, as if he were defying hell's legions. Foam lay on his lips and flew from his mouth. At every repetition of the word "shall" he struck the desk a resounding blow with his great palm.

"He's a hard hitter," said Milton.

At length he leaped, apparently in uncontrollable excitement, upon the mourners' bench, and ran up and down close to the listening, moaning audience. He walked with a furious rhythmic, stamping action, like a Sioux in the war dance. Wild cries burst from his audience, antiphonal with his own.

"He 'SHALL' send light!"

"*Send Thy arrows, O Lord.*"

"O God, come!"

"He 'SHALL' keep His word!"

One old negro woman, fat, powerful, and gloomy, suddenly arose and uttered a scream that had the dignity and savagery of a mountain lion's cry. It rang far out into the night.

The exhorter continued his mad, furious, thumping, barbaric walk.

Behind him a row of other exhorters sat, a relay ready to leap to his aid. They urged on the tumult with wild cries.

"A-men, brother."

"YES, brother, YES!" clapping their hands in rhythm.

The exhorter redoubled his fury. He was like a jaded actor rising at applause, carried out of his self-command.

Out of the obscure tumult of faces and tossing hands there came at last certain recognizable features. The people were mainly farming folks of the more ignorant sort, rude in dress and bearing, hard and bent with toil. They were recognizably of a class subject to these low forms of religious excitement which were once well-nigh universal.

The outer fringe continued to smile scornfully and to jest, yet they were awed, in a way, by this suddenly revealed deep of barbaric emotion.

The girls were appalled by the increasing clangor. Milton was amused, but Ben grew bitter. Something strong came out in him, too. His lip curled in disgust.

Suddenly, out of the level space of bowed shoulders, tossing hands, and frenzied, upturned faces, a young girl leaped erect. She was strong and handsome, powerful in the waist and shoulders. Her hair was braided like a child's, and fell down her back in a single strand. Her head was girlish, but her face looked old and drawn and tortured.

She moaned pitifully; she clapped her hands with wild gestures, ending in a quivering motion. The action grew to lightning-like quickness. Her head seemed to set in its socket. Her whole body stiffened. Gasping moans came from her clenched teeth as she fell to the ground and rolled under the seats, wallowing in the muddy straw and beating her feet upon the ground like a dying partridge.

The people crowded about her, but the preacher, roared above the tumult:--

"Si' down! Never mind that party. She's all right; she's in the hands of the Lord!"

The people settled into their seats, and the wild tumult went on again. Ben rose to go over where the girl was and the others followed.

A young man seated by the struggling sinner held her hand and fanned her with his hat, while some girl friends, scared and sobbing, kept the tossing limbs covered. She rolled from side to side restlessly, thrusting forth her tongue as if her throat were dry. She looked like a dying animal.

Maud clung to Milton.

"Oh, can't something be done?"

"Her soul is burdened for *you!*" cried a wild old woman to the impassive youth who clung to the frenzied girl's hand.

A moment later, as the demoniacal chorus of yells, songs, incantations, shrieks, groans, and prayers swelled high, a farmer's wife on the left uttered a hoarse cry and stiffened and fell backward upon the ground. She rolled her head from

side to side. Her eyes turned in; her lips wore a maniac's laugh, and her troubled brow made her look like the death mask of a tortured murderer, the hell horror frozen on it.

She sank at last into a hideous calm, with her strained and stiffened hands pointing weirdly up. She was like marble. She did not move a hair's breadth during the next two hours.

Over to the left a young man leaped to his feet with a scream:--

"Jesus, *Jesus*, JESUS!"

The great negress caught him in her arms as he fell, and laid him down, then leaped up and down, shrieking:--

"O Jesus, come. Come, God's Lamb!"

Around her a dozen women took up her cry. Most of them had no voices. Their horrifying screams had become hoarse hisses, yet still they strove. Scores of voices were mixed in the pandemonium of prayer.

All order was lost. Three of the preachers now stood shouting before the mourners' bench, two were in the aisles.

One came down the aisle toward the girl with the braided hair. As he came he prayed. Foam was on his lips, but his eyes were cool and calculating; they betrayed him.

As he came he fixed his gaze upon a woman seated near the prostrate girl, and with a horrible outcry the victim leaped into the air and stiffened as if smitten with epilepsy. She fell against some scared boys, who let her fall, striking her head against the seats. She too rolled down upon the straw and lay beside her sister. Both had round, pretty, but childish faces.

Milton's party retreated. They smiled no more; they were horror-stricken.

Squads of "workers" now moved down the aisles; in one they surrounded two people, a tall, fair girl and a young man.

"Why, it's Grace!" exclaimed Maud.

Ben turned quickly, "Where?"

They pointed her out.

"She can't get away. See! Oh, boys, don't let them--"

Ben pushed his way toward her, his face set in a fierce frown, bitter, desperate.

Grace stood silently beside one of the elders; a woman exhorter stood before her. Conrad, overawed, had fallen into a trembling stupor; Grace was defenseless.

The elder's hand hovered over her head, on her face a deadly pallor had settled, her eyes were cast down, she breathed painfully and trembled from head to foot. She was about to fall, when Ben set his eyes upon her.

"Get out o' my way," he shouted, shouldering up the aisle. His words had oaths, his fists were like mauls.

"Grace!" he cried, and she heard. She looked up and saw him coming; the red flamed over her face.

The power of the preacher was gone.

"Let me go," she cried, trying to wring herself loose.

"You are going to hell. You are lost if you do not--"

"God damn ye. Get out o' way. I'll kill ye if you lay a hand on her."

With one thrust Ben cleared her tormentor from her arm. For one moment the wordless young man looked into her eyes; then she staggered toward him. He faced the preacher.

"I'd smash hell out o' you for a leather cent," he said. In the tumult his words were lost, but the look on his face was enough. The exhorter fell away.

Their retreat was unnoted in the tumult. At the door they looked back for an instant at the scene.

At the mourners' bench were six victims in all stages of induced catalepsy, one man with head flung back, one with his hands pointing, fixed in furious appeal. Another with bowed head was being worked upon by a brother of hypnotic appeal. He struck with downward, positive gestures on either side of the victim's head.

Over another the negress towered, screaming with panther-like ferocity:--

"Git under de blood! Git under de blood!"

As she screamed she struck down at the mourner with her clenched fist. On her face was the grin of a wildcat.

Out under the cool, lofty oaks, the outcry was more inexpressibly hellish, because overhead the wind rustled the sweet green leaves, crickets were chirping, and the scent of flowering fields of buckwheat was in the air.

Grace grew calmer, but she clung with strange weakness to her lover. She felt he had saved her from something, she did not know what, but it was something terrifying to look back upon.

Conrad was forgotten--set aside. Ben bundled him into the carryall and took his place with Grace. He no longer hesitated, argued, or apologized. He had claimed his own.

On the long ride home, Grace lay within his right arm, and the young man's tongue was unchained. He talked, and his spirit grew tender and manly and husbandlike, as he told his plans and his hopes. Hell was very far away, and Heaven was very near.

LUCRETIA BURNS

I

Lucretia Burns had never been handsome, even in her days of early girlhood, and now she was middle-aged, distorted with work and child-bearing, and looking faded and worn as one of the boulders that lay beside the pasture fence near where she sat milking a large white cow.

She had no shawl or hat and no shoes, for it was still muddy in the little yard, where the cattle stood patiently fighting the flies and mosquitoes swarming into their skins, already wet with blood. The evening was oppressive with its heat, and a ring of just-seen thunderheads gave premonitions of an approaching storm.

She rose from the cow's side at last, and, taking her pails of foaming milk, staggered toward the gate. The two pails hung from her lean arms, her bare feet slipped on the filthy ground, her greasy and faded calico dress showed her tired and swollen ankles, and the mosquitoes swarmed mercilessly on her neck and bedded themselves in her colorless hair.

The children were quarrelling at the well, and the sound of blows could be heard. Calves were querulously calling for their milk, and little turkeys, lost in a tangle of grass, were piping plaintively.

The sun just setting struck through a long, low rift, like a boy peeping beneath the eaves of a huge roof. Its light brought out Lucretia's face as she leaned her sallow forehead on the top bar of the gate and looked toward the west.

It was a pitifully worn, almost tragic face--long, thin, sallow, hollow-eyed. The mouth had long since lost the power to shape itself into a kiss, and had a droop at the corners which seemed to announce a breaking-down at any moment into a despairing wail. The collarless neck and sharp shoulders showed painfully.

She felt vaguely that the night was beautiful. The setting sun, the noise of frogs, the nocturnal insects beginning to pipe--all in some way called her girlhood back to her, though there was little in her girlhood to give her pleasure. Her large gray eyes grew round, deep, and wistful as she saw the illimitable craggy clouds grow crimson, roll slowly up, and fire at the top. A childish scream recalled her.

"Oh, my soul!" she half groaned, half swore, as she lifted her milk and hurried to the well. Arriving there, she cuffed the children right and left with all her remaining strength, saying in justification:--

"My soul! can't you--you young'uns, give me a minute's peace? Land knows, I'm almost gone up; washin', an' milkin' six cows, and tendin' you, and cookin' fr *him*, ought 'o be enough fr one day! Sadie, you let him drink now 'r I'll slap your head off, you hateful thing! Why can't you behave, when you know I'm jest about dead?" She was weeping now, with nervous weakness. "Where's y'r pa?" she asked after a moment, wiping her eyes with her apron.

One of the group, the one cuffed last, sniffed out, in rage and grief:--

"He's in the corn-field; where'd ye s'pose he was?"

"Good land! why don't the man work all night? Sile, you put that dipper in that milk agin, an' I'll whack you till your head'll swim! Sadie, le' go Pet, an' go 'n get them turkeys out of the grass 'fore it gits dark! Bob, you go tell y'r dad if he wants the rest o' them cows milked he's got 'o do it himself. I jest can't, and what's more, I *won't*," she ended, rebelliously.

Having strained the milk and fed the children, she took some skimmed milk from the cans and started to feed the calves bawling strenuously behind the barn. The eager and unruly brutes pushed and struggled to get into the pails all at once, and in consequence spilt nearly all of the milk on the ground. This was the last trial; the woman fell down on the damp grass and moaned and sobbed like a crazed thing. The children came to seek her and stood around like little partridges, looking at her in scared silence, till at last the little one began to wail. Then the mother rose wearily to her feet, and walked slowly back toward the house.

She heard Burns threshing his team at the well, with the sound of oaths. He was tired, hungry, and ill-tempered, but she was too desperate to care. His poor, overworked team did not move quickly enough for him, and his extra long turn in the corn had made him dangerous. His eyes gleamed wrathfully from his dust-laid face.

"Supper ready?" he growled.

"Yes, two hours ago."

"Well, I can't help it!" he said, understanding her reproach. "That devilish corn is gettin' too tall to plough again, and I've got 'o go through it to-morrow or not at all. Cows milked?"

"Part of 'em."

"How many left?"

"Three."

"Hell! Which three?"

"Spot, and Brin, and Cherry."

"*Of* course, left the three worst ones. I'll be damned if I milk a cow to-night. I don't see why you play out jest the nights I need ye most." Here he kicked a child out of the way. "Git out o' that! Hain't you got no sense? I'll learn ye--"

"Stop that, Sim Burns," cried the woman, snatching up the child. "You're a reg'lar ol' hyeny,--that's what you are," she added defiantly, roused at last from her lethargy.

"You're a--beauty, that's what *you* are," he said, pitilessly. "Keep your brats out fum under my feet." And he strode off to the barn after his team, leaving her with a fierce hate in her heart. She heard him yelling at his team in their stalls: "Git around there, damn yeh."

The children had had their supper; so she took them to bed. She was unusually tender to them, for she wanted to make up in some way for her previous harshness. The ferocity of her husband had shown up her own petulant temper hideously, and she sat and sobbed in the darkness a long time beside the cradle where little Pet slept.

She heard Burns come growling in and tramp about, but she did not rise. The supper was on the table; he could wait on himself. There was an awful feeling at her heart as she sat there and the house grew quiet. She thought of suicide in a vague way; of somehow taking her children in her arms and sinking into a lake somewhere, where she would never more be troubled, where she could sleep forever, without toil or hunger.

Then she thought of the little turkeys wandering in the grass, of the children sleeping at last, of the quiet, wonderful stars. Then she thought of the cows left unmilked, and listened to them stirring uneasily in the yard. She rose, at last, and stole forth. She could not rid herself of the thought that they would suffer. She knew what the dull ache in the full breasts of a mother was, and she could not let them stand at the bars all night moaning for relief.

The mosquitoes had gone, but the frogs and katydids still sang, while over in the west Venus shone. She was a long time milking the cows; her hands were so tired she had often to stop and rest them, while the tears fell unheeded into the pail. She saw and felt little of the external as she sat there. She thought in vague retrospect of how sweet it seemed the first time Sim came to see her; of the many rides to town with him when he was an accepted lover; of the few things he had given her--a coral breastpin and a ring.

She felt no shame at her present miserable appearance; she was past personal pride. She hardly felt as if the tall, strong girl, attractive with health and hope, could be the same soul as the woman who now sat in utter despair listening to the heavy breathing of the happy cows, grateful for the relief from their burden of milk.

She contrasted her lot with that of two or three women that she knew (not a very high standard), who kept hired help, and who had fine houses of four or five rooms. Even the neighbors were better off than she, for they didn't have such quarrels. But she wasn't to blame--Sim didn't--Then her mind changed to a dull resentment against "things." Everything seemed against her.

She rose at last and carried her second load of milk to the well, strained it, washed out the pails, and, after bathing her tired feet in a tub that stood there, she put on a pair of horrible shoes, without stockings, and crept stealthily into the house. Sim did not hear her as she slipped up the stairs to the little low unfinished chamber beside her oldest children. She could not bear to sleep near *him* that night,--she wanted a chance to sob herself to quiet.

As for Sim, he was a little disturbed, but would as soon have cut off his head as acknowledged himself in the wrong. As he went to bed, and found her still away, he yelled up the stairway:--

"Say, old woman, ain't ye comin' to bed?" Upon receiving no answer he rolled his aching body into the creaking bed. "Do as y' damn please about it. If y' want to sulk y' can." And in such wise the family grew quiet in sleep, while the moist, warm air pulsed with the ceaseless chime of the crickets.

II

When Sim Burns woke the next morning he felt a sharper twinge of remorse. It was not a broad or well-defined feeling--just a sense that he had been unduly irritable, not that on the whole he was not in the right. Little Pet lay with the warm June sunshine filling his baby eyes, curiously content in striking at flies that buzzed around his little mouth.

The man thrust his dirty, naked feet into his huge boots, and, without washing his face or combing his hair, went out to the barn to do his chores.

He was a type of the average prairie farmer, and his whole surrounding was typical of the time. He had a quarter-section of fine level land, bought with incredible toil, but his house was a little box-like structure, costing, perhaps, five hundred dollars. It had three rooms and the ever-present summer kitchen at the back. It was unpainted and had no touch of beauty,--a mere box.

His stable was built of slabs and banked and covered with straw. It looked like a den, was low and long, and had but one door in the end. The cow-yard held ten or fifteen cattle of various kinds, while a few calves were bawling from a pen near by. Behind the barn, on the west and north, was a fringe of willows forming a "wind-break." A few broken and discouraged fruit trees, standing here and there among the weeds, formed the garden. In short, he was spoken of by his neighbors as "a hard-working cuss, and to'ably well fixed."

No grace had come or ever could come into his life. Back of him were generations of men like himself, whose main business had been to work hard, live miserably, and beget children to take their places when they died.

His courtship had been delayed so long on account of poverty that it brought little of humanizing emotion into his life. He never mentioned his love-life now, or if he did, it was only to sneer obscenely at it. He had long since ceased to kiss his wife or even speak kindly to her. There was no longer any sanctity to life or love. He chewed tobacco and toiled on from year to year without any very clearly defined idea of the future. His life was mainly regulated from without.

He was tall, dark, and strong, in a flat-chested, slouching sort of way, and had grown neglectful of even decency in his dress. He wore the American farmer's customary outfit of rough brown pants, hickory shirt, and greasy wool hat. It differed from his neighbors' mainly in being a little dirtier and more ragged. His grimy hands were broad and strong as the clutch of a bear, and he was a "terrible feller to turn off work," as Councill said. "I'd ruther have Sim Burns work for me one day than some men three. He's a linger." He worked with unusual speed this morning, and ended by milking all the cows himself as a sort of savage penance for his misdeeds the previous evening, muttering in self-defence:--

"Seems 's if ever' cussid thing piles on to me at once. That corn, the road-tax, and hayin' comin' on, and now *she* gits her back up--"

When he went back to the well he sloshed himself thoroughly in the horse-trough and went to the house. He found breakfast ready, but his wife was not in sight. The older children were clamoring around the uninviting breakfast table, spread with cheap ware and with boiled potatoes and fried salt pork as the principal dishes.

"Where's y'r ma?" he asked, with a threatening note in his voice, as he sat down by the table.

"She's in the bedroom."

He rose and pushed open the door. The mother sat with the babe in her lap, looking out of the window down across the superb field of timothy, moving like a lake of purple water. She did not look around. She only grew rigid. Her thin neck throbbled with the pulsing of blood to her head.

"What's got into you *now*?" he said, brutally. "Don't be a fool. Come out and eat breakfast with me, an' take care o' y'r young ones."

She neither moved nor made a sound. With an oath he turned on his heel and went out to the table. Eating his breakfast in his usual wolfish fashion, he went out into the hot sun with his team and riding-plough, not a little disturbed by this new phase of his wife's "cantankerousness." He ploughed steadily and sullenly all the forenoon, in the terrific heat and dust. The air was full of tempestuous threats, still and sultry, one of those days when work is a punishment. When he came in at noon he found things the same--dinner on the table, but his wife out in the garden with the youngest child.

"I c'n stand it as long as *she* can," he said to himself, in the hearing of the children, as he pushed back from the table and went back to work.

When he had finished the field of corn it was after sundown, and he came up to the house, hot, dusty, his shirt wringing wet with sweat, and his neck aching with the work of looking down all day at the corn-rows. His mood was still stern. The multitudinous lift, and stir, and sheen of the wide, green field had been lost upon him.

"I wonder if she's milked them cows," he muttered to himself. He gave a sigh of relief to find she had. But she had done so not for his sake, but for the sake of the poor, patient dumb brutes.

When he went to the bedroom after supper, he found that the cradle and his wife's few little boxes and parcels--poor, pathetic properties!--had been removed to the garret, which they called a chamber, and he knew he was to sleep alone again.

"She'll git over it, I guess." He was very tired, but he didn't feel quite comfortable enough to sleep. The air was oppressive. His shirt, wet in places, and stiff with dust in other places, oppressed him more than usual; so he rose and removed it, getting a clean one out of a drawer. This was an unusual thing for him, for he usually slept in the same shirt which he wore in his day's work; but it was Saturday night, and he felt justified in the extravagance.

In the meanwhile poor Lucretia was brooding over her life in a most dangerous fashion. All she had done and suffered for Simeon Burns came back to her till she wondered how she had endured it all. All day long in the midst of the glorious summer landscape she brooded.

"I hate him," she thought, with a fierce blazing up through the murk of her musing. "I hate t' live. But they ain't no hope. I'm tied down. I can't leave the children, and I ain't got no money. I couldn't make a living out in the world. I ain't never seen anything an' don't know anything."

She was too simple and too unknowing to speculate on the loss of her beauty, which would have brought her competency once--if sold in the right market. As she lay in her little attic bed, she was still sullenly thinking, wearily thinking of her life. She thought of a poor old horse which Sim had bought once, years before, and put to the plough when it was too old and weak to work. She could see her again as in a vision, that poor old mare, with sad head drooping, toiling, toiling, till at last she could no longer move, and lying down under the harness in the furrow, groaned under the whip,--and died.

Then she wondered if her own numbness and despair meant death, and she held her breath to think harder upon it. She concluded at last, grimly, that she didn't care--only for the children.

The air was frightfully close in the little attic, and she heard the low mutter of the rising storm in the west. She forgot her troubles a little, listening to the far-off gigantic footsteps of the tempest.

Boom, boom, boom, it broke nearer and nearer, as if a vast cordon of cannon was being drawn around the horizon. Yet she was conscious only of pleasure. She had no fear. At last came the sweep of cool, fragrant storm-wind, a short and sudden dash of rain, and then in the cool, sweet hush which followed, the worn and weary woman fell into a deep sleep.

III

When she woke the younger children were playing about on the floor in their night-clothes, and little Pet was sitting in

a square of sunshine, intent on one of his shoes. He was too young to know how poor and squalid his surroundings were,—the patch of sunshine flung on the floor glorified it all. He—little animal—was happy.

The poor of the Western prairies lie almost as unhealthily close together as do the poor of the city tenements. In the small hut of the peasant there is as little chance to escape close and tainting contact as in the coops and dens of the North End of proud Boston. In the midst of oceans of land, floods of sunshine and gulfs of verdure, the farmer lives in two or three small rooms. Poverty's eternal cordon is ever round the poor.

"Ma, why didn't you sleep with Pap last night?" asked Bob, the seven-year-old, when he saw she was awake at last. She flushed a dull red.

"You hush, will yeh? Because—I—it was too warm—and there was a storm comin'. You never mind askin' such questions. Is he gone out?"

"Yup. I heerd him callin' the pigs. It's Sunday, ain't it, ma?"

The fact seemed to startle her.

"Why, yes, so it is! Wal! Now, Sadie, you jump up an' dress quick 's y' can, an' Bob an' Sile, you run down an' bring s'm' water," she commanded, in nervous haste, beginning to dress. In the middle of the room there was scarce space to stand beneath the rafters.

When Sim came in for his breakfast he found it on the table, but his wife was absent.

"Where's y'r ma?" he asked, with a little less of the growl in his voice.

"She's upstairs with Pet."

The man ate his breakfast in dead silence, till at last Bob ventured to say:--

"What makes ma ac' so?"

"Shut up!" was the brutal reply. The children began to take sides with the mother—all but the oldest girl, who was ten years old. To her the father turned now for certain things to be done, treating her in his rough fashion as a housekeeper, and the girl felt flattered and docile accordingly.

They were pitiably clad; like many farm-children, indeed, they could hardly be said to be clad at all. Sadie had on but two garments, a sort of undershirt of cotton and a faded calico dress, out of which her bare, yellow little legs protruded, lamentably dirty and covered with scratches.

The boys also had two garments, a hickory shirt and a pair of pants like their father's, made out of brown denim by the mother's never-resting hands—hands that in sleep still sewed, and skimmed, and baked, and churned. The boys had gone to bed without washing their feet, which now looked like toads, calloused, brown, and chapped.

Part of this the mother saw with her dull eyes as she came down, after seeing the departure of Sim up the road with the cows. It was a beautiful Sunday morning, and the woman might have sung like a bird if men had been as kind to her as Nature. But she looked dully out upon the seas of ripe grasses, tangled and flashing with dew, out of which the bobolinks and larks sprang. The glorious winds brought her no melody, no perfume, no respite from toil and care.

She thought of the children she saw in the town,—children of the merchant and banker, clean as little dolls, the boys in knickerbocker suits, the girls in dainty white dresses,—and a vengeful bitterness sprang up in her heart. She soon put the dishes away, but felt too tired and listless to do more.

"Taw-bay-wies! Pet want ta-aw-bay-wies!" cried the little one, tugging at her dress.

Listlessly, mechanically she took him in her arms, and went out into the garden, which was fragrant and sweet with dew and sun. After picking some berries for him, she sat down on the grass under the row of cottonwoods, and sank into a kind of lethargy. A kingbird chattered and shrieked overhead, the grasshoppers buzzed in the grasses, strange insects with ventriloquistic voices sang all about her—she could not tell where.

"Ma, can't I put on my clean dress?" insisted Sadie.

"I don't care," said the brooding woman, darkly. "Leave me alone."

Oh, if she could only lie here forever, escaping all pain and weariness! The wind sang in her ears; the great clouds, beautiful as heavenly ships, floated far above in the vast, dazzling deeps of blue sky; the birds rustled and chirped around her; leaping insects buzzed and clattered in the grass and in the vines and bushes. The goodness and glory of

God was in the very air, the bitterness and oppression of man in every line of her face.

But her quiet was broken by Sadie, who came leaping like a fawn down through the grass.

"Oh, ma, Aunt Maria and Uncle William are coming. They've jest turned in."

"I don't care if they be!" she answered in the same dully irritated way. "What're they comin' here to-day for, I wan' to know." She stayed there immovably, till Mrs. Councilll came down to see her, piloted by two or three of the children. Mrs. Councilll, a jolly, large-framed woman, smiled brightly, and greeted her in a loud, jovial voice. She made the mistake of taking the whole matter lightly; her tone amounted to ridicule.

"Sim says you've been having a tantrum, Creeshy. Don't know what for, he says."

"He don't," said the wife, with a sullen flash in her eyes. "*He* don't know why! Well, then, you just tell him what I say. I've lived in hell long enough. I'm done. I've slaved here day in and day out fr twelve years without pay,--not even a decent word. I've worked like no nigger ever worked 'r could work and live. I've given him all I had, 'r ever expect to have. I'm wore out. My strength is gone, my patience is gone. I'm done with it,--that's a *part* of what's the matter."

"My sakes, Lucreeshy! You mustn't talk that way."

"But I *will*!" said the woman, as she supported herself on one palm and raised the other. "I've *got* to talk that way." She was ripe for an explosion like this. She seized upon it with eagerness. "They ain't no use o' livin' this way, anyway. I'd take poison if it wa'n't fr the young ones."

"Lucreeshy Burns!"

"Oh, I mean it."

"Land sakes alive, I b'lieve you're goin' crazy!"

"I shouldn't wonder if I was. I've had enough t' drive an Indian crazy. Now you jest go off an' leave me 'lone. I ain't no mind to visit,--they ain't no way out of it' and I'm tired o' trying to *find* a way. Go off an' let me be."

Her tone was so bitterly hopeless that the great, jolly face of Mrs. Councilll stiffened into a look of horror such as she had not known for years. The children, in two separate groups, could be heard rioting. Bees were humming around the clover in the grass, and the kingbird chattered ceaselessly from the Lombardy poplar tip. Both women felt all this peace and beauty of the morning dimly, and it disturbed Mrs. Councilll because the other was so impassive under it all. At last, after a long and thoughtful pause, Mrs. Councilll asked a question whose answer she knew would decide it all--asked it very kindly and softly:--

"Creeshy, are you comin' in?"

"No," was the short and sullenly decisive answer. Mrs. Councilll knew that was the end, and so rose with a sigh, and went away.

"Wal, good-by," she said, simply.

Looking back, she saw Lucretia lying at length, with closed eyes and hollow cheeks. She seemed to be sleeping, half buried in the grass. She did not look up nor reply to her sister-in-law, whose life was one of toil and trouble also, but not so hard and helpless as Lucretia's. By contrast with most of her neighbors, she seemed comfortable.

"Sim Burns, what you ben doin' to that woman?" she burst out, as she waddled up to where the two men were sitting under a cottonwood tree, talking and whittling after the manner of farmers.

"Nawthin' 's fur 's I know," answered Burns, not quite honestly, and looking uneasy.

"You needn't try t' git out of it like that, Sim Burns," replied his sister. "That woman never got into that fit fr *nawthin*!"

"Wal, if you know more about it than I do, whadgy ask *me* fur?" he replied, angrily.

"Tut, tut!" put in Councilll, "hold y'r horses! Don't git on y'r ear, children! Keep cool, and don't spile y'r shirts. Most likely you're all t' blame. Keep cool an' swear less."

"Wal, I'll bet Sim's more to blame than she is. Why, they ain't a harder-workin' woman in the hull State of Ioway than she is--"

"Except Marm Councilll."

"Except nobody. Look at her, jest skin and bones."

Councill chuckled in his vast way. "That's so, mother; measured in that way, she leads over you. You git fat on it."

She smiled a little, her indignation oozing away. She never "*could* stay mad," her children were accustomed to tell her. Burns refused to talk any more about the matter, and the visitors gave it up, and got out their team and started for home, Mrs. Councill firing this parting shot:--

"The best thing you can do to-day is t' let her alone. Mebbe the children 'll bring her round ag'in. If she does come round, you see 't you treat her a little more 's y' did when you was a-courtin' her."

"This way," roared Councill, putting his arm around his wife's waist. She boxed his ears, while he guffawed and clucked at his team.

Burns took a measure of salt and went out into the pasture to salt the cows. On the sunlit slope of the field, where the cattle came running and bawling to meet him, he threw down the salt in handfuls, and then lay down to watch them as they eagerly licked it up, even gnawing a bare spot in the sod in their eagerness to get it all.

Burns was not a drinking man; he was hard-working, frugal; in fact, he had no extravagances except his tobacco. His clothes he wore until they all but dropped from him; and he worked in rain and mud, as well as dust and sun. It was this suffering and toiling all to no purpose that made him sour and irritable. He didn't see why he should have so little after so much hard work.

He was puzzled to account for it all. His mind--the average mind--was weary with trying to solve an insoluble problem. His neighbors, who had got along a little better than himself, were free with advice and suggestion as to the cause of his persistent poverty.

Old man Bacon, the hardest-working man in the county, laid it to Burns's lack of management. Jim Butler, who owned a dozen farms (which he had taken on mortgages), and who had got rich by buying land at government price and holding for a rise, laid all such cases as Burns's to "lack of enterprise, foresight."

But the larger number, feeling themselves in the same boat with Burns, said:--

"I d' know. Seems as if things get worse an' worse. Corn an' wheat gittin' cheaper 'n' cheaper. Machinery eatin' up profits--got to *have* machinery to harvest the cheap grain, an' then the machinery eats up profits. Taxes goin' up. Devil to pay all round; I d' know what in thunder *is* the matter."

The Democrats said protection was killing the farmers; the Republicans said no. The Grangers growled about the middle-men; the Greenbackers said there wasn't circulating medium enough, and, in the midst of it all, hard-working, discouraged farmers, like Simeon Burns, worked on, unable to find out what really was the matter.

And there, on this beautiful Sabbath morning, Sim sat and thought and thought, till he rose with an oath and gave it up.

IV

It was hot and brilliant again the next morning as Douglas Radbourn drove up the road with Lily Graham, the teacher of the school in the little white schoolhouse. It was blazing hot, even though not yet nine o'clock, and the young farmers ploughing beside the fence looked longingly and somewhat bitterly at Radbourn seated in a fine top-buggy beside a beautiful creature in lace and cambric.

Very beautiful the town-bred "schoolma'am" looked to those grimy, sweaty fellows, superb fellows too, physically, with bare red arms and leather-colored faces. She was as if builded of the pink and white clouds soaring far up there in the morning sky. So cool, and sweet, and dainty.

As she came in sight, their dusty and sweaty shirts grew biting as the poisoned shirt of the Norse myth, their bare feet in the brown dirt grew distressingly flat and hoof-like, and their huge, dirty, brown, chapped and swollen hands grew so repulsive that the mere remote possibility of some time in the far future standing a chance of having an introduction to her, caused them to wipe their palms on their trousers' legs stealthily.

Lycurgus Banks swore when he saw Radbourn: "That cuss thinks he's ol' hell this morning. He don't earn his living. But he's just the kind of cuss to get holt of all the purty girls."

Others gazed with simple, sad wistfulness upon the slender figure, pale, sweet face, and dark eyes of the young girl, feeling that to have talk with such a fairylike creature was a happiness too great to ever be their lot. And when she had

passed they went back to work with a sigh and feeling of loss.

As for Lily, she felt a pang of pity for these people. She looked at this peculiar form of poverty and hardship much as the fragile, tender girl of the city looks upon the men laying a gas-main in the streets. She felt, sympathetically, the heat and grime, and, though but the faintest idea of what it meant to wear such clothing came to her, she shuddered. Her eyes had been opened to these things by Radbourn, a classmate at the Seminary.

The young fellow knew that Lily was in love with him, and made distinct effort to keep the talk upon impersonal subjects. He liked her very much, probably because she listened so well.

"Poor fellows," sighed Lily, almost unconsciously, "I hate to see them working there in the dirt and hot sun. It seems a hopeless sort of life, doesn't it?"

"Oh, but this is the most beautiful part of the year," said Radbourn. "Think of them in the mud, in the sleet; think of them husking corn in the snow, a bitter wind blowing; think of them a month later in the harvest; think of them imprisoned here in winter!"

"Yes, it's dreadful! But I never felt it so keenly before. You have opened my eyes to it. Of course, I've been on a farm but not to live there."

"Writers and orators have lied so long about 'the idyllic' in farm life, and said so much about the 'independent American farmer,' that he himself has remained blind to the fact that he's one of the hardest-working and poorest-paid men in America. See the houses they live in,—hovels."

"Yes, yes, I know," said Lily; a look of deeper pain swept over her face. "And the fate of the poor women; oh, the fate of the women!"

"Yes, it's a matter of statistics," went on Radbourn, pitilessly, "that the wives of the American farmers fill our insane asylums. See what a life they lead, most of them; no music, no books. Seventeen hours a day in a couple of small rooms—dens. Now there is Sim Burns! What a travesty of a home! Yet there are a dozen just as bad in sight. He works like a fiend—so does his wife—and what is their reward? Simply a hole to hibernate in and to sleep and eat in in summer. A dreary present and a well-nigh hopeless future. No, they have a future, if they knew it, and we must tell them."

"I know Mrs. Burns," Lily said, after a pause; "she sends several children to my school. Poor, pathetic little things, half-clad and wistful-eyed. They make my heart ache; they are so hungry for love, and so quick to learn."

As they passed the Burns farm, they looked for the wife, but she was not to be seen. The children had evidently gone up to the little white schoolhouse at the head of the lane. Radbourn let the reins fall slack as he talked on. He did not look at the girl; his eyebrows were drawn into a look of gloomy pain.

"It isn't so much the grime that I abhor, nor the labor that crooks their backs and makes their hands bludgeons. It's the horrible waste of life involved in it all. I don't believe God intended a man to be bent to plough-handles like that, but that isn't the worst of it. The worst of it is, these people live lives approaching automata. They become machines to serve others more lucky or more unscrupulous than themselves. What is the world of art, of music, of literature, to these poor devils,—to Sim Burns and his wife there, for example? Or even to the best of these farmers?"

The girl looked away over the shimmering lake of yellow-green corn. A choking came into her throat. Her gloved hand trembled.

"What is such a life worth? It's all very comfortable for us to say, 'They don't feel it.' How do we know what they feel? What do we know of their capacity for enjoyment of art and music? They never have leisure or opportunity. The master is very glad to be taught by preacher, and lawyer, and novelist, that his slaves are contented and never feel any longings for a higher life. These people live lives but little higher than their cattle—are *forced* to live so. Their hopes and aspirations are crushed out, their souls are twisted and deformed just as toil twists and deforms their bodies. They are on the same level as the city laborer. The very religion they hear is a soporific. They are taught to be content here that they may be happy hereafter. Suppose there isn't any hereafter?"

"Oh, don't say that, please!" Lily cried.

"But I don't *know* that there is," he went on remorselessly, "and I do know that these people are being robbed of something more than money, of all that makes life worth living. The promise of milk and honey in Canaan is all very well, but I prefer to have mine here; then I'm sure of it."

"What can we do?" murmured the girl.

"Do? Rouse these people for one thing; preach *discontent*, a noble discontent."

"It will only make them unhappy."

"No, it won't; not if you show them the way out. If it does, it's better to be unhappy striving for higher things, like a man, than to be content in a wallow like swine."

"But what *is* the way out?"

This was sufficient to set Radbourn upon his hobbyhorse. He outlined his plan of action: the abolition of all indirect taxes, the State control of all privileges the private ownership of which interfered with the equal rights of all. He would utterly destroy speculative holdings of the earth. He would have land everywhere brought to its best use, by appropriating all ground rents to the use of the state, etc., etc., to which the girl listened with eager interest, but with only partial comprehension.

As they neared the little schoolhouse, a swarm of midgets in pink dresses, pink sun-bonnets, and brown legs, came rushing to meet their teacher, with that peculiar devotion the children in the country develop for a refined teacher.

Radbourn helped Lily out into the midst of the eager little scholars, who swarmed upon her like bees on a lump of sugar, till even Radbourn's gravity gave way, and he smiled into her lifted eyes,—an unusual smile, that strangely enough stopped the smile on her own lips, filling her face with a wistful shadow, and her breath came hard for a moment, and she trembled.

She loved that cold, stern face, oh, so much! and to have him smile was a pleasure that made her heart leap till she suffered a smothering pain. She turned to him to say:—

"I am very thankful, Mr. Radbourn, for another pleasant ride," adding in a lower tone, "it was a very great pleasure; you always give me so much. I feel stronger and more hopeful."

"I'm glad you feel so. I was afraid I was prosy with my land doctrine."

"Oh, no! Indeed no! You have given me a new hope; I am exalted with the thought; I shall try to think it all out and apply it."

And so they parted, the children looking on and slyly whispering among themselves. Radbourn looked back after a while, but the bare white hive had absorbed its little group, and was standing bleak as a tombstone and hot as a furnace on the naked plain in the blazing sun.

"America's pitiful boast!" said the young radical, looking back at it. "Only a miserable hint of what it might be."

All that forenoon, as Lily faced her noisy group of barefooted children, she was thinking of Radbourn, of his almost fierce sympathy for these poor, supine farmers, hopeless and in some cases content in their narrow lives. The children almost worshipped the beautiful girl who came to them as a revelation of exquisite neatness and taste,—whose very voice and intonation awed them.

They noted, unconsciously of course, every detail. Snowy linen, touches of soft color, graceful lines of bust and side, the slender fingers that could almost speak, so beautifully flexile were they. Lily herself sometimes, when she shook the calloused, knotted, stiffened hands of the women, shuddered with sympathetic pain to think that the crowning wonder and beauty of God's world should be so maimed and distorted from its true purpose.

Even in the children before her she could see the inherited results of fruitless labor, and, more pitiful yet, in the bent shoulders of the older ones she could see the beginnings of deformity that would soon be permanent; and as these thoughts came to her, she clasped the wondering children to her side, with a convulsive wish to make life a little brighter for them.

"How is your mother to-day?" she asked of Sadie Burns, as she was eating her luncheon on the drab-colored table near the open window.

"Purty well," said Sadie, in a hesitating way.

Lily was looking out, and listening to the gophers whistling as they raced to and fro. She could see Bob Burns lying at length on the grass in the pasture over the fence, his heels waving in the air, his hands holding a string which formed a snare. It was like fishing to young Izaak Walton.

It was very still and hot, and the cheep and trill of the gophers and the chatter of the kingbirds alone broke the silence. A cloud of butterflies were fluttering about a pool near; a couple of big flies buzzed and mumbled on the pane.

"What ails your mother?" Lily asked, recovering herself and looking at Sadie, who was distinctly ill at ease.

"Oh, I dunno," Sadie replied, putting one bare foot across the other.

Lily insisted.

"She 'n' pa's had an awful row--"

"Sadie!" said the teacher, warningly, "what language!"

"I mean they quarrelled, an' she don't speak to him any more."

"Why, how dreadful!"

"An' pa, he's awful cross; and she won't eat when he does, an' I haf to wait on table."

"I believe I'll go down and see her this noon," said Lily to herself, as she divined a little of the state of affairs in the Burns family.

V

Sim was mending the pasture fence as Lily came down the road toward him. He had delayed going to dinner to finish his task, and was just about ready to go when Lily spoke to him.

"Good morning, Mr. Burns. I am just going down to see Mrs. Burns. It must be time to go to dinner,--aren't you ready to go? I want to talk with you."

Ordinarily he would have been delighted with the idea of walking down the road with the schoolma'am, but there was something in her look which seemed to tell him that she knew all about his trouble, and, besides, he was not in good humor.

"Yes, in a minnit--soon's I fix up this hole. Them shotes, I b'lieve, would go through a keyhole, if they could once get their snoots in."

He expanded on this idea as he nailed away, anxious to gain time. He foresaw trouble for himself. He couldn't be rude to this sweet and fragile girl. If a *man* had dared to attack him on his domestic shortcomings, he could have fought. The girl stood waiting for him, her large, steady eyes full of thought, gazing down at him from the shadow of her broad-brimmed hat.

"The world is so full of misery anyway, that we ought to do the best we can to make it less," she said at last, in a musing tone, as if her thoughts had unconsciously taken on speech. She had always appealed to him strongly, and never more so than in this softly uttered abstraction--that it was an abstraction added to its power with him.

He could find no words for reply, but picked up his hammer and nail-box, and slouched along the road by her side, listening without a word to her talk.

"Christ was patient, and bore with his enemies. Surely we ought to bear with our--friends," she went on, adapting her steps to his. He took off his torn straw hat and wiped his face on his sleeve, being much embarrassed and ashamed. Not knowing how to meet such argument, he kept silent.

"How *is* Mrs. Burns!" said Lily at length, determined to make him speak. The delicate meaning in the emphasis laid on *is* did not escape him.

"Oh, she's all right--I mean she's done her work jest the same as ever. I don't see her much--"

"I didn't know--I was afraid she was sick. Sadie said she was acting strangely."

"No, she's well enough--but--"

"But what is the trouble? Won't you let me help you, *won't* you?" she pleaded.

"Can't anybody help us. We've got 'o fight it out, I s'pose," he replied, a gloomy note of resentment creeping into his voice. "She's ben in a devil of a temper fr a week."

"Haven't you been in the same kind of a temper too?" demanded Lily, firmly but kindly. "I think most troubles of this kind come from bad temper on both sides. Don't you? Have you done your share at being kind and patient?"

They had reached the gate now, and she laid her hand on his arm to stop him. He looked down at the slender gloved

hand on his arm, feeling as if a giant had grasped him; then he raised his eyes to her face, flushing a purplish red as he remembered his grossness. It seemed monstrous in the presence of this girl-advocate. Her face was like silver; her eyes seemed pools of tears.

"I don't s'pose I have," he said at last, pushing by her. He could not have faced her glance another moment. His whole air conveyed the impression of destructive admission. Lily did not comprehend the extent of her advantage or she would have pursued it further. As it was she felt a little hurt as she entered the house. The table was set, but Mrs. Burns was nowhere to be seen. Calling her softly, the young girl passed through the shabby little living-room to the oven-like bedroom which opened off it, but no one was about. She stood for a moment shuddering at the wretchedness of the room.

Going back to the kitchen, she found Sim about beginning on his dinner. Little Pet was with him; the rest of the children were at the schoolhouse.

"Where is she?"

"I d' know. Out in the garden, I expect. She don't eat with me now. I never see her. She don't come near *me*. I ain't seen her since Saturday."

Lily was shocked inexpressibly and began to see more clearly the magnitude of the task she had set herself to do. But it must be done; she felt that a tragedy was not far off. It must be averted.

"Mr. Burns, what have you done? What *have* you done?" she asked in terror and horror.

"Don't lay it all to *me*! She hain't done nawthin' but complain fr ten years. I couldn't do nothin' to suit her. She was always naggin' *me*."

"I don't think Lucretia Burns would nag anybody. I don't say you're *all* to blame, but I'm afraid you haven't acknowledged you were *any* to blame. I'm afraid you've not been patient with her. I'm going out to bring her in. If she comes, will you *say* you were *part* to blame? You needn't beg her pardon--just say you'll try to be better. Will you do it? Think how much she has done for you! Will you?"

He remained silent, and looked discouragingly rude. His sweaty, dirty shirt was open at the neck, his arms were bare, his scraggly teeth were yellow with tobacco, and his uncombed hair lay tumbled about on his high, narrow head. His clumsy, unsteady hands played with the dishes on the table. His pride was struggling with his sense of justice; he knew he ought to consent, and yet it was so hard to acknowledge himself to blame. The girl went on in a voice piercingly sweet, trembling with pity and pleading.

"What word can I carry to her from you? I'm going to go and see her. If I could take a word from *you*, I know she would come back to the table. Shall I tell her you feel to blame?"

The answer was a long time coming; at last the man nodded an assent, the sweat pouring from his purple face. She had set him thinking; her victory was sure.

Lily almost ran out into the garden and to the strawberry patch, where she found Lucretia in her familiar, colorless, shapeless dress, picking berries in the hot sun, the mosquitoes biting her neck and hands.

"Poor, pathetic, dumb sufferer!" the girl thought as she ran up to her.

She dropped her dish as she heard Lily coming, and gazed up into the tender, pitying face. Not a word was spoken, but something she saw there made her eyes fill with tears, and her throat swell. It was pure sympathy. She put her arms around the girl's neck and sobbed for the first time since Friday night. Then they sat down on the grass under the hedge, and she told her story, interspersed with Lily's horrified comments.

When it was all told, the girl still sat listening. She heard Radbourn's calm, slow voice again. It helped her not to hate Burns; it helped her to pity and understand him.

"You must remember that such toil brutalizes a man; it makes him callous, selfish, unfeeling, necessarily. A fine nature must either adapt itself to its hard surroundings or die. Men who toil terribly in filthy garments day after day and year after year cannot easily keep gentle; the frost and grime, the heat and cold, will soon or late enter into their souls. The case is not all in favor of the suffering wives and against the brutal husbands. If the farmer's wife is dulled and crazed by her routine, the farmer himself is degraded and brutalized."

As well as she could Lily explained all this to the woman, who lay with her face buried in the girl's lap. Lily's arms were about her thin shoulders in an agony of pity.

"It's hard, Lucretia, I know,--more than you can bear,--but you mustn't forget what Sim endures too. He goes out in the storms and in the heat and dust. His boots are hard, and see how his hands are all bruised and broken by his work! He was tired and hungry when he said that--he didn't really mean it."

The wife remained silent.

"Mr. Radbourn says work, as things go now, *does* degrade a man in spite of himself. He says men get coarse and violent in spite of themselves, just as women do when everything goes wrong in the house,--when the flies are thick, and the fire won't burn, and the irons stick to the clothes. You see, you both suffer. Don't lay up this fit of temper against Sim--will you?"

The wife lifted her head and looked away. Her face was full of hopeless weariness.

"It ain't this once. It ain't that 't all. It's having no let-up. Just goin' the same thing right over 'n' over--no hope of anything better."

"If you had hope of another world--"

"Don't talk that. I don't want that kind o' comfert. I want a decent chance here. I want 'o rest an' be happy *now*." Lily's big eyes were streaming with tears. What should she say to the desperate woman? "What's the use? We might jest as well die--all of us."

The woman's livid face appalled the girl. She was gaunt, heavy-eyed, nerveless. Her faded dress settled down over her limbs, showing the swollen knees and thin calves; her hands, with distorted joints, protruded painfully from her sleeves. All about her was the ever recurring wealth and cheer of nature that knows no favor,--the bees and flies buzzing in the sun, the jay and the kingbird in the poplars, the smell of strawberries, the motion of lush grass, the shimmer of corn-blades tossed gayly as banners in a conquering army.

Like a flash of keener light, a sentence shot across the girl's mind: "Nature knows no title-deed. The bounty of her mighty hands falls as the sunlight falls, copious, impartial; her seas carry all ships; her air is for all lips, her lands for all feet."

"Poverty and suffering such as yours will not last." There was something in the girl's voice that roused the woman. She turned her dull eyes upon the youthful face.

Lily took her hand in both hers as if by a caress she could impart her own faith.

"Look up, dear. When nature is so good and generous, man must come to be better, surely. Come, go in the house again. Sim is there; he expects you; he told me to tell you he was sorry." Lucretia's face twitched a little at that, but her head was bent. "Come; you can't live this way. There isn't any other place to go to."

No, that was the bitterest truth. Where on this wide earth, with its forth-shooting fruits and grains, its fragrant lands and shining seas, could this dwarfed, bent, broken, middle-aged woman go? Nobody wanted her, nobody cared for her. But the wind kissed her drawn lips as readily as those of the girl, and the blooms of clover nodded to her as if to a queen.

Lily had said all she could. Her heart ached with unspeakable pity and a sort of terror.

"Don't give up, Lucretia. This may be the worst hour of your life. Live and bear with it all for Christ's sake,--for your children's sake. Sim told me to tell you he was to blame. If you will only see that you are both to blame and yet neither to blame, then you can rise above it. Try, dear!"

Something that was in the girl imparted itself to the wife, electrically. She pulled herself together, rose silently, and started toward the house. Her face was rigid, but no longer sullen. Lily followed her slowly, wonderingly.

As she neared the kitchen door, she saw Sim still sitting at the table; his face was unusually grave and soft. She saw him start and shove back his chair, saw Lucretia go to the stove and lift the tea-pot, and heard her say, as she took her seat beside the baby:--

"Want some more tea?"

She had become a wife and mother again, but in what spirit the puzzled girl could not say.

DADDY DEERING

I

They were threshing on Farmer Jennings's place when Daddy made his very characteristic appearance. Milton, a boy of thirteen, was gloomily holding sacks for the measurer, and the glory of the October day was dimmed by the suffocating dust, and poisoned by the smarting beads and chaff which had worked their way down his neck. The bitterness of the dreaded task was deepened also by contrast with the gambols of his cousin Billy, who was hunting rats with Growler amid the last sheaves of the stack bottom. The piercing shrieks of Billy, as he clapped his hands in murderous glee, mingled now and again with the barking of the dog.

The machine seemed to fill the world with its snarling boom, which became a deafening yell when the cylinder ran empty for a moment. It was nearly noon, and the men were working silently, with occasional glances toward the sun to see how near dinner-time it was. The horses, dripping with sweat, and with patches of foam under their harness, moved round and round steadily to the cheery whistle of the driver.

The wild, imperious song of the bell-metal cog-wheel had sung into Milton's ears till it had become a torture, and every time he lifted his eyes to the beautiful far-off sky, where the clouds floated like ships, a lump of rebellious anger rose in his throat. Why should he work in this choking dust and deafening noise while the hawks could sail and sweep from hill to hill with nothing to do but play?

Occasionally his uncle, the feeder, smiled down upon him, his face black as a negro, great goggles of glass and wire-cloth covering his merry eyes. His great good-nature shone out in the flash of his white teeth, behind his dusky beard, and he tried to encourage Milton with his smile. He seemed tireless to the other hands. He was so big and strong. He had always been Milton's boyish hero. So Milton crowded back the tears that came into his eyes, and would not let his uncle see how childish he was.

A spectator riding along the road would have remarked upon the lovely setting for this picturesque scene--the low swells of prairie, shrouded with faint, misty light from the unclouded sky, the flaming colors of the trees, the faint sound of cow-bells, and the cheery sound of the machine. But to be a tourist and to be a toiler in a scene like this are quite different things.

They were anxious to finish the setting by noon, and so the feeder was crowding the cylinder to its limit, rolling the grain in with slow and apparently effortless swaying from side to side, half buried in the loose yellow straw. But about eleven o'clock the machine came to a stand, to wait while a broken tooth was being replaced, and Milton fled from the terrible dust beside the measuring spout, and was shaking the chaff out of his clothing, when he heard a high, snappy, nasal voice call down from the straw-pile. A tall man, with a face completely masked in dust, was speaking to Mr. Jennings:--

"Say, young man, I guess you'll haf to send another man up here. It's poorty stiff work fr two; yes, sir, poorty stiff."

"There, there! I thought you'd cry 'cavy,'" laughed Mr. Jennings. "I told you it wasn't the place for an old man."

"Old man," snarled the figure in the straw. "I ain't so old but I can daown you, sir,--yessir, condemmit, yessir!"

"I'm your man," replied Jennings, smiling up at him.

The man rolled down the side of the stack, disappearing in a cloud of dust and chaff. When he came to light, Milton saw a tall, gaunt old man of sixty years of age, or older. Nothing could be seen but a dusty expanse of face, ragged beard, and twinkling, sharp little eyes. His color was lost, his eyes half hid. Without waiting for ceremony, the men clenched. The crowd roared with laughter, for though Jennings was the younger, the older man was a giant still, and the struggle lasted for some time. He made a gallant fight, but his breath gave out, and he lay at last flat on his back.

"I wish I was your age, young man," he said ruefully, as he rose. "I'd knock the heads o' these young scamps t'gether,--yessir!--I could do it, too!"

"Talk's a good dog, uncle," said a young man.

The old man turned on him so ferociously that he fled.

"Run, condemn yeh! I own y' can beat me at that."

His face was not unpleasant, though his teeth were mainly gone, and his skin the color of leather and wrinkled as a pan of cream. His eyes had a certain sparkle of fun that belied his rasping voice, which seemed to have the power to lift a boy clean off his feet. His frame was bent and thin, but of great height and breadth, bony and tough as hickory. At some far time vast muscles must have rolled on those giant limbs, but toil had bent and stiffened him.

"Never been sick a day 'n my life; no, sir!" he said, in his rapid, rasping, emphatic way, as they were riding across the stubble to dinner. "And, by go! I c'n stand as long at the tail of a stacker as any man, sir. Dummed if I turn my hand for any man in the state; no, sir; no, sir! But if I do two men's works, I am goin' to have two men's pay--that's all, sir!"

Jennings laughed and said: "All right, uncle. I'll send another man up there this afternoon."

The old man seemed to take a morbid delight in the hard and dirty places, and his endurance was marvellous. He could stand all day at the tail of a stacker, tirelessly pushing the straw away with an indifferent air, as if it were all mere play.

He measured the grain the next day, because it promised to be a noisier and dustier job than working in the straw, and it was in this capacity that Milton came to know and to hate him, and to associate him with that most hated of all tasks, the holding of sacks. To a twelve-year-old boy it seems to be the worst job in the world.

All day, while the hawks wheel and dip in the glorious air, and the trees glow like banks of roses; all day, while the younger boys are tumbling about the sunlit straw, to be forced to stand holding sacks, like a convict, was maddening. Daddy, whose rugged features, bent shoulders, and ragged cap loomed through the suffocating, blinding dust, necessarily came to seem like the jailer who held the door to freedom.

And when the dust and noise and monotony seemed the very hardest to bear, the old man's cackling laugh was sure to rise above the howl of the cylinder.

"Nem mind, sonny! Chaff ain't pizen; dust won't hurt ye a mite." And when Milton was unable to laugh, the old man tweaked his ear with his leathery thumb and finger.

Then he shouted long, disconnected yarns, to which Milton could make neither head nor tail, and which grew at last to be inaudible to him, just as the steady boom and snarl of the great machine did. Then he fell to studying the old man's clothes, which were a wonder to him. He spent a good deal of time trying to discover which were the original sections of the coat, and especially of the vest, which was ragged and yellow with age, with the cotton batting working out; and yet Daddy took the greatest care of it, folding it carefully and putting it away during the heat of the day out of reach of the crickets.

One of his peculiarities, as Mrs. Jennings learned on the second day, was his habit of coming to breakfast. But he always earned all he got, and more too; and, as it was probable that his living at home was frugal, Mrs. Jennings smiled at his thrift, and quietly gave him his breakfast if he arrived late, which was not often.

He had bought a little farm not far away, and settled down into a mode of life which he never afterward changed. As he was leaving at the end of the third day, he said:--

"Now, sir, if you want any bootcherin' done, I'm y'r man. I don't turn m' hand over fr any man in the state; no, sir! I c'n git a hawg on the gambrials jest a leetle quicker'n any other man I ever see; yes, sir; by gum!"

"All right, uncle; I'll send for you when I'm ready to kill."

II

Hog-killing was one of the events of a boy's life on a Western farm, and Daddy was destined to be associated in the minds of Shep and Milton with another disagreeable job, that of building the fire and carrying water.

It was very early on a keen, biting morning in November when Daddy came driving into the yard with his rude, long-runnerd sled, one horse half his length behind the other in spite of the driver's clucking. He was delighted to catch the boys behind in the preparation.

"A-a-h-h-r-r-h-h!" he rasped out, "you lazy vagabon's? Why ain't you got that fire blazin'? W^{HAT} the devil do y' mean, you rascals! Here it is broad daylight, and that fire not built. I vum, sir, you need a thrashin', the whole kit an bilun' of ye; yessir! Come, come, come! hustle now, stir your boots! hustle y'r boots--ha! ha! ha!"

It was of no use to plead cold weather and damp chips.

"What has that got to do with it, sir? I vum, sir, when I was your age, I could make a fire of green red-oak; yessir! Don't talk to me of colds! Stir your stumps and get warm, sir!"

The old man put up his horses (and fed them generously with oats), and then went to the house to ask for "a leetle something hot--mince pie or sassidge." His request was very modest, but, as a matter of fact, he sat down and ate a very hearty breakfast, while the boys worked away at the fire under the big kettle.

The hired man, under Daddy's direction, drew the bob-sleighs into position on the sunny side of the corn-crib, and arranged the barrel at the proper slant, while the old man ground his knives, Milton turning the grindstone--another hateful task, which Daddy's stories could not alleviate.

Daddy never finished a story. If he started in to tell about a horse trade, it infallibly reminded him of a cattle trade, and talking of cattle switched him off upon logging, and logging reminded him of some heavy snow-storm he had known. Each parenthesis outgrew its proper limits, till he forgot what should have been the main story. His stories had some compensation, for when he stopped to try to recollect where he was, the pressure on the grindstone was released.

At last the water was hot, and the time came to seize the hogs. This was the old man's great moment. He stood in the pen and shrieked with laughter while the hired men went rolling, one after the other, upon the ground, or were bruised against the fence by the rush of the burly swine.

"You're a fine lot," he laughed. "Now, then, sir, *grab 'im!* Why don't ye nail 'im? I vum, sir, if I couldn't do better'n that, sir, I'd sell out; I would, sir, by gol! Get out o' the way!"

With a lofty scorn he waved aside all help and stalked like a gladiator toward the pigs huddled in one corner of the pen. And when the selected victim was rushing by him, his long arm and great bony hand swept out, caught him by the ear, and flung him upon his side, squealing with deafening shrillness. But in spite of his smiling concealment of effort, Daddy had to lean against the fence and catch his breath even while he boasted:--

"I'm an old codger, sir, but I'm worth--a dozen o' you--spindle-legged chaps; dum me if I ain't, sir!"

His pride in his ability to catch and properly kill a hog was as genuine as the old knight-errant's pride in his ability to stick a knife into another steel-clothed brigand like himself. When the slain shote was swung upon the planking on the sled before the barrel, Daddy rested, while the boys filled the barrel with water from the kettle.

There was always a weird charm about this stage of the work to the boys. The sun shone warm and bright in the lee of the corn-crib; the steam rose up, white and voluminous, from the barrel; the eaves dropped steadily; the hens ventured near, nervously, but full of curiosity, while the men laughed and joked with Daddy, starting him off on long stories, and winking at each other when his back was turned.

At last he mounted his planking, selecting Mr. Jennings to pull upon the other handle of the hog-hook. He considered he conferred a distinct honor in this selection.

"The time's been, sir, when I wouldn't thank any man for his help. No, sir, wouldn't thank 'im."

"What do you do with these things?" asked one of the men, kicking two iron candlesticks which the old man laid conveniently near.

"Scrape a hawg with them, sir. What do y' s'pose, you numskull?"

"Well, I never saw anything--"

"You'll have a chance mighty quick, sir. Grab ahold, sir! Swing 'im around--there! Now easy, easy! Now then, one, two; one, two--that's right."

While he dipped the porker in the water, pulling with his companion rhythmically upon the hook, he talked incessantly, mixing up scraps of stories and boastings of what he could do, with commands of what he wanted the other man to do.

"The best man I ever worked with. *Now turn 'im, turn 'im!*" he yelled, reaching over Jennings's wrist. "Grab under my wrist. There! won't ye never learn how to turn a hawg? *Now out with 'im!*" was his next wild yell, as the steaming hog was jerked out of the water upon the planking. "Now try the hair on them ears! Beautiful scald," he said, clutching his hand full of bristles and beaming with pride. "Never see anything finer. Here, Bub, a pail of hot water, quick! Try one of them candlesticks! They ain't no better scraper than the bottom of an old iron candlestick; no, sir! Dum your new-fangled scrapers! I made a bet once with old Jake Ridgeway that I could scrape the hair off'n two hawgs, by gum, quicker'n he could one. Jake was blowin' about a new scraper he had...."

"Yes, yes, yes, dump it right into the barrel. Condemmit! Ain't you got no gumption?... So Sim Smith, he held the watch. Sim was a mighty good hand t' work with; he was about the only man I ever sawed with who didn't ride the saw. He could jerk a crosscut saw.... Now let him in again, now, *he-ho*, once again! *Rool him over now*; that foreleg needs a tech

o' water. Now out with him again; that's right, that's right! By gol, a beautiful scald as ever I see!"

Milton, standing near, caught his eye again. "Clean that ear, sir! What the devil you standin' there for?" He returned to his story after a pause. "A--n--d Jake, he scraped away--*hyare!*" he shouted suddenly, "don't ruggle the skin like that! Can't you see the way I do it? Leave it smooth as a baby, sir--yessir!"

He worked on in this way all day, talking unceasingly, never shirking a hard job, and scarcely showing fatigue at any moment.

"I'm short o' breath a leetle, that's all; never git tired, but my wind gives out. Dum cold got on me, too."

He ate a huge supper of liver and potatoes, still working away hard at an ancient horse trade, and when he drove off at night, he had not yet finished a single one of the dozen stories he had begun.

III

But pitching grain and hog-killing were on the lower levels of his art, for above all else Daddy loved to be called upon to play the fiddle for dances. He "officiated" for the first time at a dance given by one of the younger McTurgs. They were all fiddlers themselves,--had been for three generations,--but they seized the opportunity of helping Daddy and at the same time of relieving themselves of the trouble of furnishing the music while the rest danced.

Milton attended this dance, and saw Daddy for the first time earning his money pleasantly. From that time on the associations around his personality were less severe, and they came to like him better. He came early, with his old fiddle in a time-worn white-pine box. His hair was neatly combed to the top of his long, narrow head, and his face was very clean. The boys all greeted him with great pleasure, and asked him where he would sit.

"Right on that table, sir; put a chair up there."

He took his chair on the kitchen-table as if it were a throne. He wore huge moccasins of moose-hide on his feet, and for special occasions like this added a paper collar to his red woollen shirt. He took off his coat and laid it across his chair for a cushion. It was all very funny to the young people, but they obeyed him laughingly, and while they "formed on," he sawed his violin and coaxed it up to concert pitch, and twanged it and banged it into proper tunefulness.

"A-a-a-ll ready there!" he rasped out, with prodigious force. "Everybody git into his place!" Then, lifting one huge foot, he put the fiddle under his chin, and, raising his bow till his knuckles touched the strings, he yelled, "Already, GLANG!" and brought his foot down with a startling bang on the first note. *Rye doodle duo, doodle doo.*

As he went on and the dancers fell into rhythm, the clatter of heavy boots seemed to thrill him with old-time memories, and he kept boisterous time with his foot, while his high, rasping nasal rang high above the confusion of tongues and heels and swaying forms.

"*Ladies' gran' change! Four hands round! Balance all! Elly-man left! Back to play-cis.*"

His eyes closed in a sort of intoxication of pleasure, but he saw all that went on in some miraculous way.

"*First lady lead to the right--toodle rum rum! Gent foller after (step along thar)! Four hands round--*"

The boys were immensely pleased with him. They delighted in his antics rather than in his tunes, which were exceedingly few and simple. They seemed never to be able to get enough of one tune which he called "Honest John," and which he played in his own way, accompanied by a chant which he meant, without a doubt, to be musical.

"*HON-ers tew your pardners--tee teedle deedle dee dee dee dee! Stand up straight an' put on your style! Right an' left four--*"

The hat was passed by the floor-manager during the evening, and Daddy got nearly three dollars, which delighted Milton very much.

At supper he insisted on his prerogative, which was to take the prettiest girl out to supper.

"Look-a-here, Daddy, ain't that crowdin' the mourmers?" objected the others.

"What do you mean by that, sir? No, sir! Always done it, in Michigan and Yark State both; yes, sir."

He put on his coat ceremoniously, while the tittering girls stood about the room waiting. He did not delay. His keen eyes had made selection long before, and, approaching Rose Watson with old-fashioned, elaborate gallantry, he said: "*May I have the pleasure?*" and marched out triumphantly, amidst shouts of laughter.

His shrill laugh rang high above the rest at the table, as he said: "I'm the youngest man in this crowd, sir! Demmit, I bet a hat I c'n dance down any man in this crowd; yes, sir. The old man can do it yet."

They all took sides in order to please him.

"I'll bet he can," said Hugh McTurg; "I'll bet a dollar on Daddy."

"I'll take the bet," said Joe Randall, and with great noise the match was arranged to come the first thing after supper.

"All right, sir; any time, sir. I'll let you know the old man is on earth yet."

While the girls were putting away the supper dishes, the young man lured Daddy out into the yard for a wrestling-match, but some others objected.

"Oh, now, that won't do! If Daddy was a young man--"

"What do you mean, sir? I am young enough for you, sir. Just let me get ahold o' you, sir, and I'll show you, you young rascal! you dem jackanapes!" he ended, almost shrieking with rage, as he shook his fist in the face of his grinning tormentors.

His friends held him back with much apparent alarm, and ordered the other fellows away.

"There, there, Daddy, I wouldn't mind him! I wouldn't dirty my hands on him; he ain't worth it. Just come inside, and we'll have that dancing-match now."

Daddy reluctantly returned to the house, and, having surrendered his violin to Hugh McTurg, was ready for the contest. As he stepped into the middle of the room he was not altogether ludicrous. His rusty trousers were bagged at the knee, and his red woollen stockings showed between the tops of his moccasins and his pantaloon legs, and his coat, utterly characterless as to color and cut, added to the stoop in his shoulders; and yet there was a rude sort of grace and a certain dignity about his bearing which kept down laughter. They were to have a square dance of the old-fashioned sort.

"*Farrm* on," he cried, and the fiddler struck up the first note of the Virginia Reel. Daddy led out Rose, and the dance began. He straightened up till his tall form towered above the rest of the boys like a weather-beaten pine tree, as he balanced and swung and led and called off the changes with a voice full of imperious command.

The fiddler took a malicious delight toward the last in quickening the time of the good old dance, and that put the old man on his mettle.

"Go it, ye young rascal!" he yelled. He danced like a boy and yelled like a demon, catching a laggard here and there, and hurling them into place like tops, while he kicked and stamped, wound in and out and waved his hands in the air with a gesture which must have dated back to the days of Washington. At last, flushed, breathless, but triumphant, he danced a final breakdown to the tune of "Leather Breeches," to show he was unsubdued.

IV

But these rare days passed away. As the country grew older it lost the wholesome simplicity of pioneer days, and Daddy got a chance to play but seldom. He no longer pleased the boys and girls--his music was too monotonous and too simple. He felt this very deeply. Once in a while he broke forth in protest against the changes.

"The boys I used to trot on m' knee are gittin' too high-toned. They wouldn't be found dead with old Deering, and then the preachers are gittin' thick, and howlin' agin dancin', and the country's filling up with Dutchmen, so't I'm left out."

As a matter of fact, there were few homes now where Daddy could sit on the table, in his ragged vest and rusty pantaloons, and play "Honest John," while the boys thumped about the floor. There were few homes where the old man was even a welcome visitor, and he felt this rejection keenly. The women got tired of seeing him about, because of his uncleanly habits of spitting, and his tiresome stories. Many of the old neighbors died or moved away, and the young people went West or to the cities. Men began to pity him rather than laugh at him, which hurt him more than their ridicule. They began to favor him at threshing or at the fall hog-killing.

"Oh, you're getting old, Daddy; you'll have to give up this heavy work. Of course, if you feel able to do it, why, all right! Like to have you do it, but I guess we'll have to have a man to do the heavy lifting, I s'pose."

"I s'pose not, sir! I am jest as able to yank a hawg as ever, sir; yes, sir, demmit--demmit! Do you think I've got one foot in the grave?"

Nevertheless, Daddy often failed to come to time on appointed days, and it was painful to hear him trying to explain, trying to make light of it all.

"M' caught wouldn't let me sleep last night. A goldum leetle, nasty, ticklin' caught, too; but it kept me awake, fact was, an'--well, m' wife, she said I hadn't better come. But don't you worry, sir; it won't happen again, sir; no, sir."

His hands got stiffer year by year, and his simple tunes became practically a series of squeaks and squalls. There came a time when the fiddle was laid away almost altogether, for his left hand got caught in the cog-wheels of the horse-power, and all four of the fingers on that hand were crushed. Thereafter he could only twang a little on the strings. It was not long after this that he struck his foot with the axe and lamed himself for life.

As he lay groaning in bed, Mr. Jennings went in to see him and tried to relieve the old man's feelings by telling him the number of times he had practically cut his feet off, and said he knew it was a terrible hard thing to put up with.

"Gol dummit, it ain't the pain," the old sufferer yelled, "it's the dum awkwardness. I've chopped all my life; I can let an axe in up to the maker's name, and hew to a hair-line; yes, sir! It was jest them dum new mittens my wife made; they was s' slippery," he ended with a groan.

As a matter of fact, the one accident hinged upon the other. It was the failure of his left hand, with its useless fingers, to do its duty, that brought the axe down upon his foot. The pain was not so much physical as mental. To think that he, who could hew to a hair-line, right and left hand, should cut his own foot like a ten-year-old boy--that scared him. It brought age and decay close to him. For the first time in his life he felt that he was fighting a losing battle.

A man like this lives so much in the flesh, that when his limbs begin to fail him everything else seems slipping away. He had gloried in his strength. He had exulted in the thrill of his life-blood and in the swell of his vast muscles; he had clung to the idea that he was strong as ever, till this last blow came upon him, and then he began to think and to tremble.

When he was able to crawl about again, he was a different man. He was gloomy and morose, snapping and snarling at all that came near him, like a wounded bear. He was alone a great deal of the time during the winter following his hurt. Neighbors seldom went in, and for weeks he saw no one but his hired hand, and the faithful, dumb little old woman, his wife, who moved about without any apparent concern or sympathy for his suffering. The hired hand, whenever he called upon the neighbors, or whenever questions were asked, said that Daddy hung around over the stove most of the time, paying no attention to any one or anything. "He ain't dangerous 't all," he said, meaning that Daddy was not dangerously ill.

Milton rode out from school one winter day with Bill, the hand, and was so much impressed with his story of Daddy's condition that he rode home with him. He found the old man sitting bent above the stove, wrapped in a quilt, shivering and muttering to himself. He hardly looked up when Milton spoke to him, and seemed scarcely to comprehend what he said.

Milton was much alarmed at the terrible change, for the last time he had seen him he had towered above him, laughingly threatening to "warm his jacket," and now here he sat, a great hulk of flesh, his mind flickering and flaring under every wind of suggestion, soon to go out altogether.

In reply to questions he only muttered with a trace of his old spirit: "I'm all right. Jest as good a man as I ever was, only I'm cold. I'll be all right when spring comes, so 't I c'n git outdoors. Somethin' to warm me up, yessir; I'm cold, that's all."

The young fellow sat in awe before him, but the old wife and Bill moved about the room, taking very little interest in what the old man said or did. Bill at last took down the violin. "I'll wake him up," he said. "This always fetches the old feller. Now watch 'im."

"Oh, don't do that!" Milton said in horror. But Bill drew the bow across the strings with the same stroke that Daddy always used when tuning up.

He lifted his head as Bill dashed into "Honest John," in spite of Milton's protest. He trotted his feet after a little and drummed with his hands on the arms of his chair, then smiled a little in a pitiful way. Finally he reached out his right hand for the violin and took it into his lap. He tried to hold the neck with his poor, old, mutilated left hand, and burst into tears.

"Don't you do that again, Bill," Milton said. "It's better for him to forget that. Now you take the best care of him you can to-night. I don't think he's going to live long; I think you ought to go for the doctor right off."

"Oh, he's been like this for the last two weeks; he ain't sick, he's jest old, that's all," replied Bill, brutally.

And the old lady, moving about without passion and without speech, seemed to confirm this; and yet Milton was unable to get the picture of the old man out of his mind. He went home with a great lump in his throat.

The next morning, while they were at breakfast, Bill burst wildly into the room.

"Come over there, all of you; we want you."

They all looked up much scared. "What's the matter, Bill?"

"Daddy's killed himself," said Bill, and turned to rush back, followed by Mr. Jennings and Milton.

While on the way across the field Bill told how it all happened.

"He wouldn't go to bed, the old lady couldn't make him, and when I got up this morning I didn't think nothin' about it. I s'posed, of course, he'd gone to bed all right; but when I was going out to the barn I stumbled across something in the snow, and I felt around, and there he was. He got hold of my revolver someway. It was on the shelf by the washstand, and I s'pose he went out there so 't we wouldn't hear him. I dassn't touch him," he said, with a shiver; "and the old woman, she jest slumped down in a chair an' set there--wouldn't do a thing--so I come over to see you."

Milton's heart swelled with remorse. He felt guilty because he had not gone directly for the doctor. To think that the old sufferer had killed himself was horrible and seemed impossible.

The wind was blowing the snow, cold and dry, across the yard, but the sun shone brilliantly upon the figure in the snow as they came up to it. There Daddy lay. The snow was in his scant hair and in the hollow of his wide, half-naked chest. A pistol was in his hand, but there was no mark upon him, and Milton's heart leaped with quick relief. It was delirium, not suicide.

There was a sort of majesty in the figure half buried in the snow. His hands were clenched, and there was a frown of resolution on his face, as if he had fancied Death coming, and had gone defiantly forth to meet him.

A STOP-OVER AT TYRE

I

Albert Lohr was studying the motion of the ropes and lamps, and listening to the rumble of the wheels and the roar of the ferocious wind against the pane of glass that his head touched. It was the midnight train from Marion rushing toward Warsaw like some savage thing unchained, creaking, shrieking, and clattering through the wild storm which possessed the whole Mississippi Valley.

Albert lost sight of the lamps at last, and began to wonder what his future would be. "First I must go through the university at Madison; then I'll study law, go into politics, and perhaps some time I may go to Washington."

In imagination he saw that wonderful city. As a Western boy, Boston to him was historic, New York was the great metropolis, but Washington was the great American city, and political greatness the only fame.

The car was nearly empty: save here and there the wide-awake Western drummer, and a woman with four fretful children, the train was as deserted as it was frightfully cold. The engine shrieked warningly at intervals, the train rumbled hollowly over short bridges and across pikes, swung round the hills, and plunged with wild warnings past little towns hid in the snow, with only here and there a light shining dimly.

One of the drummers now and then rose up from his cramped bed on the seats, and swore cordially at the railway company for not heating the cars. The woman with the children inquired for the tenth time, "Is the next station Lodi?"

"Yes, ma'am, it is," snarled the drummer, as he jerked viciously at the strap on his valise; "and darned glad I am, too, I can tell yeh! I'll be stiff as a car-pin if I stay in this infernal ice-chest another hour. I wonder what the company think--"

At Lodi several people got on, among them a fat man with a pretty daughter, who appeared to be abnormally wide awake--considering the time of night. She saw Albert for the same reason that he saw her--they were both young and

good-looking.

The student began his musings again, modified by this girl's face. He had left out the feminine element; obviously he must recapitulate. He'd study law, yes; but that would not prevent going to sociables and church fairs. And at these fairs the chances were good for a meeting with a girl. Her father must be influential--county judge or district attorney. Marriage would open new avenues--

He was roused by the sound of his own name.

"Is Albert Lohr in this car?" shouted the brakeman, coming in, enveloped in a cloud of fine snow.

"Yes, here!" called Albert.

"Here's a telegram for you."

Albert snatched the envelope with a sudden fear of disaster at home; but it was dated "Tyre":

"Get off at Tyre. I'll be there.

HARTLEY

"Well, now, that's fun!" said Albert, looking at the brakeman. "When do we reach there?"

"About 2.20."

"Well, by thunder! A pretty time o' night!"

The brakeman grinned sympathetically. "Any answer?" he asked, at length.

"No; that is, none that will do the matter justice."

"Hartley friend o' yours?"

"Yes; know him?"

"Yes; he boarded where I did in Warsaw."

When he came back again, the brakeman said to Albert, in a hesitating way:

"Ain't going t' stop off long, I s'pose?"

"May an' may not; depends on Hartley. Why?"

"Well, I've got an aunt there that keeps boarders, and I kind o' like t' send her one when I can. If you should happen to stay a few days, go an' see her. She sets up first-class grub, an' it wouldn't kill anybody, anyhow, if you went up an' called."

"Course not. If I stay long enough to make it pay I'll look her up sure. I'm no Vanderbilt. I can't afford to stop at two-dollar-a-day hotels."

The brakeman sat down opposite, encouraged by Albert's smile.

"Y' see, my division ends at Warsaw, and I run back and forth here every other day, but I don't get much chance to see them, and I ain't worth a cuss fr letter-writin'. Y' see, she's only aunt by marriage, but I like her; an' I guess she's got about all she can stand up under, an' so I like t' help her a little when I can. The old man died owning nothing but the house, an' that left the old lady t' rustle fr her livin'. Dummed if she ain't sandy as old Sand. They're gitt'n' along purty--"

The whistle blew for brakes, and, seizing his lantern, the brakeman slammed out on the platform.

"Tough night for twisting brakes," suggested Albert, when he came in again.

"Yes--on the freight."

"Good heavens! I should say so. They don't run freight such nights as this?"

"Don't they? Well, I guess they don't stop for a storm like this if they's any money to be made by sending her through. Many's the night I've broke all night on top of the old wooden cars, when the wind was sharp enough to shear the hair off a cast-iron mule--*wo-o-o!* There's where you need grit, old man," he ended, dropping into familiar speech.

"Yes; or need a job awful bad."

The brakeman was struck with this idea. "There's where you're right. A fellow don't take that kind of a job for the fun of it. Not much! He takes it because he's got to. That's as sure's you're a foot high. I tell you, a feller's got t' rustle these days if he gits any kind of a job--"

"*Toot, too-o-o-o-t, toot!*"

The station passed, the brakeman did not return, perhaps because he found some other listener, perhaps because he was afraid of boring this pleasant young fellow.

Albert shuddered with a sympathetic pain as he thought of the heroic fellows on the tops of icy cars, with hands straining at frosty brakes, the wind cutting their faces like a sand-blast. Oh, those tireless hands at the wheel and throttle!--

He looked at his watch; it was two o'clock; the next station was Tyre. As he began to get his things together, the brakeman again addressed him:

"Oh, I forgot to say that the old lady's name is Welsh--Mrs. Robert Welsh. Say I sent yeh, and it'll be all right."

"Sure! I'll try her in the morning--that is, if I find out I'm going to stay."

Albert clutched his valise, and pulled his cap firmly down on his head.

"Here goes!" he muttered.

"Hold y'r breath!" shouted the brakeman. Albert swung himself to the platform before the station--a platform of planks along which the snow was streaming like water.

"Good-night!" shouted the brakeman.

"*Good-night!*"

"All-I abo-o-o-ard!" called the conductor somewhere in the storm. The brakeman swung his lantern, the train drew off into the blinding whirl, and its lights were soon lost in the clouds of snow.

No more desolate place could well be imagined. A level plain, apparently bare of houses, swept by a ferocious wind; a dingy little den called a station--no other shelter in sight; no sign of life save the dull glare of two windows to the left, alternately lost and found in the storm.

Albert's heart contracted with a sudden fear; the outlook was appalling.

"Where's the town?" he asked of a dimly seen figure with a lantern--a man evidently locking the station door, his only refuge.

"Over there," was the surly reply.

"How far?"

"Bout a mile."

"A mile!"

"That's what I said--a mile."

"Well, I'll be blanked!"

"Well, y' better be doing something besides standing here, 'r y' 'll freeze t' death. I'd go over to the Arteeshun House an' go t' bed if I was in your fix."

"Well, where *is* the Artesian House?"

"See them lights?"

"I see them lights."

"Well, they're it."

"Oh, wouldn't your grammar make Old Grammaticuss curl up, though!"

"What say?" queried the man bending his head toward Albert, his form being almost lost in the snow that streamed against them both.

"I said I guessed I'd try it," grinned the youth, invisibly.

"Well, I would if I was in your fix. Keep right close after me; they's some ditches here, and the foot-bridges are none too wide."

"The Artesian is owned by the railway, eh?"

"Yup."

"And you're the clerk?"

"Yup; nice little scheme, ain't it?"

"Well, it'll do," replied Albert.

The man laughed without looking around.

In the little bar-room, lighted by a vilely smelling kerosene lamp, the clerk, hitherto a shadow and a voice, came to light as a middle-aged man with a sullen face slightly belied by a sly twinkle in his eyes.

"This beats all the winters I ever *did* see. It don't do nawthin' but blow, *blow*. Want to go to bed, I s'pose. Well, come along."

He took up one of the absurd little lamps and tried to get more light out of it.

"Dummed if a white bean wouldn't be better."

"Spit on it!" suggested Albert.

"I'd throw the whole business out o' the window for a cent!" growled the man.

"Here's y'r cent," said the boy.

"You're mighty frisky fr a feller gitt'n' off'n a midnight train," replied the man, as he tramped along a narrow hallway. He spoke in a voice loud enough to awaken every sleeper in the house.

"Have t' be, or there'd be a pair of us."

"You'll laugh out o' the other side o' y'r mouth when you saw away on one o' the bell-collar steaks this house puts up," ended the clerk, as he put the lamp down.

"Sufficient unto the morn is the evil thereof," called Albert after him.

He was awakened the next morning by the cooks pounding steak down in the kitchen and wrangling over some division of duty. It was a vile place at any time, but on a morning like this it was appalling. The water was frozen, the floor like ice, the seven-by-nine glass frosted so that he couldn't see to comb his hair.

"All that got me out of bed," he remarked to the clerk, "was the thought of leaving."

The breakfast was incredibly bad--so much worse than he expected that Albert was forced to admit he had never seen its like. He fled from the place without a glance behind, and took passage in an omnibus for the town, a mile away. It was terribly cold, the thermometer registering twenty below zero; but the sun was very brilliant, and the air still.

The driver pulled up before a very ambitious wooden hotel entitled "The Eldorado," and Albert dashed in at the door and up to the stove, with both hands covering his ears.

As he stood there, frantic with pain, kicking his toes and rubbing his hands, he heard a chuckle--a slow, sly, insulting chuckle--turned, and saw Hartley standing in the doorway, visibly exulting over his misery.

"Hello, Bert! that you?"

"What's left of me. Say, you're a good one, you are? Why didn't you telegraph me at Marion? A deuce of a night I've had of it!"

"Do ye good," laughed Hartley, a tall, alert, handsome fellow nearly thirty years of age.

After a short and vigorous "blowing up," Albert asked: "Well, now, what's the meaning of all this, anyhow? Why this change from Racine?"

"Well, you see, I got wind of another fellow going to work this county for a *Life of Logan*, and thinks I, 'By jinks! I'd

better drop in ahead of him with Blaine's *Twenty Tears*. 'I telegraphed fr territory, got it, and telegraphed to stop you.'

"You did it. When did you come down?"

"Last night, six o'clock."

Albert was getting warmer and better-natured.

"Well, I'm here; what are you going t' do with me?"

"I'll use you some way. First thing is to find a boarding-place where we can work in a couple o' books on the bill."

"Well, I don't know about that, but I'm going to look up a place a brakeman gave me a pointer on."

"All right; here goes!"

Scarcely any one was stirring on the streets. The wind was pitilessly cold, though not strong. The snow under their feet cried out with a note like glass and steel. The windows of the stores were thick with frost, and Albert shivered with a sense of homelessness. He had never experienced anything like this before. "I don't want much of this," he muttered, through his scarf.

Mrs. Welsh lived in a large frame house standing on the edge of a bank, and as the young men waited at the door they could look down on the meadow-land, where the river lay blue and hard as steel.

A pale little girl, ten or twelve years of age, opened the door.

"Is this where Mrs. Welsh lives?"

"Yes, sir."

"Will you ask her to come here a moment?"

"Yes, sir," piped the little one. "Won't you come in and sit down by the fire?" she added, with a quaint air of hospitality.

The room was the usual village sitting-room. A cylinder heater full of wood stood at one side of it. A rag carpet, much faded, covered the floor. The paper on the wall was like striped candy, and the chairs were nondescript; but everything was clean--worn more with brushing than with use.

A slim woman of fifty, with hollow eyes and a patient smile, came in, wiping her hands on her apron.

"How d'ye do? Did you want to see me?"

"Yes," said Hartley, smiling. "The fact is, we're book agents, and looking for a place to board."

"Well--a--I--yes, I keep boarders."

"I was sent here by a brakeman on the midnight express," put in Bert,

"Oh, Tom," said the woman, her face clearing. "Tom's always sending us people. Why, yes; I've got room for you, I guess--this room here." She pushed open a folding door leading into what had been her parlor.

"You can have this."

"And the price?"

"Four dollars."

"Eight dollars fr the two of us. All right; we'll be with you a week or two if we have luck."

Mrs. Welsh smiled. "Excuse me, won't you? I've got to be at my baking; make y'rselves at home."

Bert remarked how much she looked like his own mother in the back. She had the same tired droop in the shoulders, the same colorless dress, characterless with much washing.

"Certainly. I feel at home already," replied Bert. "Now, Jim," he said, after she left the room, "I'm going t' stay right here while you go and order our trunks around--just t' pay you off fr last night."

"All right," said Hartley cheerily, going out.

After getting warm, Bert returned to the sitting-room, and sat down at the parlor organ and played a gospel hymn or

two from the Moody and Sankey hymnal. He was in the midst of the chorus of *Let Your Lower Lights*, etc., when a young woman entered the room. She had a whisk-broom in her hand, and stood a picture of gentle surprise. Bert wheeled about on his stool.

"I thought it was Stella," she began.

"I'm a book agent," Bert explained. "I might as well out with it. There are two of us. Come here to board."

"Oh!" said the girl, with some relief. She was very fair and very slight, almost frail. Her eyes were of the sunniest blue, her face pale and somewhat thin, but her lips showed scarlet, and her teeth were fine. Bert liked her and smiled.

"A book agent is the next thing to a burglar, I know; but still--"

"Oh, I didn't mean that, but I *was* surprised. When did you come?"

"Just a few moments ago. Am I in your way?" he inquired, with elaborate solicitude.

"Oh no! Please go on. You play very well. It is seldom young men play at all."

"I had to at college; the other fellows all wanted to sing. You play, of course."

"When I have time." She sighed. There was a weary droop in her voice; she seemed aware of it, and said more brightly:

"You mean Madison, I suppose?"

"Yes; I'm in my second year."

"I went there two years. Then I had to quit and come home to help mother."

"Did you? That's why I'm out here on this infernal book business--to get money to go on with."

She looked at him with interest now, noticing his fine eyes and waving brown hair.

"It's dreadful, isn't it? But you've got a hope to go back. I haven't." She ended with a sigh, a far-off expression in her eyes. "It almost killed me to give it up. I don't s'pose I'd know any of the scholars you know. Even the teachers are not the same. Oh, yes--Sarah Shaw; I think she's back for the normal course."

"Oh yes!" exclaimed Bert, "I know Sarah. We boarded on the same street; used t' go home together after class. An awful nice girl, too."

"She's a worker. She teaches school. I can't do that, for mother needs me at home." There was another pause, broken by the little girl, who called:

"Maud, mamma wants you."

Maud rose and went out, with a tired smile on her face that emphasized her resemblance to her mother. Bert couldn't forget that smile, and he was still thinking about the girl, and what her life must be, when Hartley came in.

"By jinks! It's *snifty*, as dad used to say. You can't draw a long breath through your nostrils without freezing y'r nose solid as a bottle," he announced, throwing off his coat. "By-the-way, I've just found out why you was so anxious to get into this house. Another case o' girl, hey?"

Bert blushed; he couldn't help it, notwithstanding his innocence in this case. "I didn't know it myself till about ten minutes ago," he protested.

Hartley winked prodigiously.

"Don't tell me! Is she pretty?"

The girl returned at this moment with an armful of wood.

"Let *me* put it in," cried Hartley, springing up. "Excuse me. My name is Hartley, book agent: Blaine's *Twenty Years*, plain cloth, sprinkled edges, three dollars; half calf, three fifty. This is my friend Mr. Lohr, of Marion; German extraction, soph at the university."

The girl bowed and smiled, and pushed by him toward the door of the parlor. Hartley followed her in, and Bert could hear them rattling away at the stove.

"Won't you sit down and play for us?" asked Hartley, after they returned to the sitting-room. The persuasive music of

the book agent was in his fine voice.

"Oh no! It's nearly dinner-time, and I must help about the table."

"Now make yourselves at home," said Mrs. Welsh, appearing at the door leading to the kitchen; "if you want anything, just let me know."

"All right. We will," replied Hartley.

By the time the dinner-bell rang they were feeling at home in their new quarters. At the table they met the usual group of village boarders: the Brann brothers, newsdealers; old man Troutt, who ran the livery-stable--and smelled of it; and a small, dark, and wizened woman who kept the millinery store. The others, who came in late, were clerks in the stores near by.

Maud served the dinner, while Stella and her mother waited upon the table. Albert admired the hands of the girl, which no amount of work could quite rob of their essential shapeliness. She was not more than twenty, he decided, but she looked older, so wistful was her face.

"They's one thing ag'in' yeh," Troutt, the liveryman, remarked to Hartley: "we've jest been worked for one o' the goldingedest schemes you *ever* see! 'Bout six munce ago s'm' fellers come all through here claimin' t' be after information about the county and the leadin' citizens; wanted t' write a history, an' wanted all the pitchers of the leading men, old settlers, an' so on. You paid ten dollars, an' you had a book an' your pitcher in it."

"I know the scheme," grinned Hartley.

"Wal, sir, I s'pose them fellers roped in every man in this town. I don't s'pose they got out with a cent less'n one thousand dollars. An' when the book come--wal!" Here he stopped to roar. "I don't s'pose you ever see a madder lot o' men in your life. In the first place, they got the names and the pitchers mixed so that I was Judge Ricker, an' Judge Ricker was ol' man Daggett. Didn't the judge swear--oh, it was awful!"

"I should say so."

"An the pitchers that wa'n't mixed was so goldinged *black* you couldn't tell 'em from niggers. You know how kind o' lily-livered Lawyer Ransom is? Wal, he looked like ol' black Joe; he was the maddest man of the hull b'lin'. He threwed the book in the fire, and tromped around like a blind bull."

"It wasn't a success, I take it, then. Why, I should 'a' thought they'd 'a' nabbed the fellows."

"Not much! They was too keen for that. They didn't deliver the books theirselves; they hired Dick Bascom to do it fr them. 'Course, Dick wa'n't t' blame."

"No; I never tried it before," Albert was saying to Maud, at their end of the table. "Hartley offered me a job, and as I needed money, I came. I don't know what he's going to do with me, now I'm here."

Albert did not go out after dinner with Hartley; it was too cold. He had brought his books with him, planning to keep up with his class, if possible, and was deep in "Caesar" when a timid knock came upon the door.

"Come!" he called, student fashion,

Maud entered, her face aglow.

"How natural that sounds!" she said.

Albert sprang up to take the wood from her arms. "I wish you'd let me do that," he said, pleadingly, as she refused his aid.

"I wasn't sure you were in. Were you reading?"

"Caesar," he replied, holding up the book. "I am conditioned on Latin. I'm going over the 'Commentaries' again."

"I thought I knew the book," she laughed.

"You read Latin?"

"Yes, a little--Vergil."

"Maybe you can help me out on these *oratia obliqua*. They bother me yet. I hate these 'Caesar said.' I like Vergil better."

She stood at his shoulder while he pointed out the knotty passage. She read it easily, and he thanked her. It was amazing how well acquainted they felt after this.

The wind roared outside in the bare maples, and the fire boomed in its pent place within, but these young people had forgotten time and place. The girl sank into a chair almost unconsciously as they talked of Madison--a great city to them--of the Capitol building, of the splendid campus, of the lakes, and the gay sailing there in summer and ice-boating in winter.

"Oh, it makes me homesick!" cried the girl, with a deep sigh. "It was the happiest, sunniest time of all my life. Oh, those walks and talks! Those recitations in the dear, chalky old rooms! Oh, *how* I would like to go back over that hollow door-stone again!"

She broke off, with tears in her eyes, and he was obliged to cough two or three times before he could break the silence.

"I know just how you feel. The first spring when I went back on the farm it seemed as if I couldn't stand it. I thought I'd go crazy. The days seemed forty-eight hours long. It was so lonesome, and so dreary on rainy days! But of course I expected to go back; that's what kept me up. I don't think I could have stood it if I hadn't had hope."

"I've given it up now," she said, plaintively; "it's no use hoping."

"Why don't you teach?" he asked, deeply affected by her voice and manner.

"I did teach here for a year, but I couldn't endure the strain; I'm not very strong, and the boys were so rude. If I could teach in a seminary--teach Latin and English--I should be happy, I think. But I can't leave mother now."

She was a wholly different girl in Albert's eyes as she said this. Her cheap dress, her check apron, could not hide the pure intellectual flame of her spirit. Her large, blue eyes were deep with thought, and the pale face, lighted by the glow of the fire, was as lovely as a rose. Almost before he knew it, he was telling her of his life.

"I don't see how I endured it as long as I did," he went on. "It was nothing but work, work, and dust or mud the whole year round; farm-life, especially on a dairy farm, is slavery."

"Yes," she agreed, "that is true. Father was a carpenter, and I've always lived here; but we have people who are farmers, and I know how it is with them."

"Why, when I think of it now it makes me crawl! To think of getting up in the morning before daylight, and going out to the barn to do chores, to get ready to go into the field to work! Working, wasting y'r life on dirt. Waiting and tending on cows seven hundred times a year. Goin' round and round in a circle, and never getting out. You needn't talk to me of the poetry of a farmer's life."

"It's just the same for us women," she corroborated. "Think of us going around the house day after day, and doing just the same things over an' over, year after year! That's the whole of most women's lives. Dishwashing almost drives me crazy."

"I know it," said Albert; "but somebody has t' do it. And if a fellow's folks are workin' hard, why, of course he can't lay around and study. They're not to blame. I don't know that anybody's to blame."

"I don't suppose anybody is, but it makes me sad to see mother going around as she does, day after day. She won't let me do as much as I would." The girl looked at her slender hands. "You see, I'm not very strong. It makes my heart ache to see her going around in that quiet, patient way; she's so good."

"I know, I know! I've felt just like that about my mother and father, too."

There was a long pause, full of deep feeling, and then the girl continued in a low, hesitating voice:

"Mother's had an awful hard time since father died. We had to go to keeping boarders, which was hard--very hard for mother." The boy felt a sympathetic lump in his throat as the girl went on again: "But she doesn't complain, and she didn't want me to come home from school; but of course I couldn't do anything else."

It didn't occur to either of them that any other course was open, nor that there was any special heroism or self-sacrifice in the act; it was simply *right*.

"Well, I'm not going to drudge all my life," said Albert, at last. "I know it's kind o' selfish, but I can't live on a farm. I've made up my mind to study law and enter the bar. Lawyers manage to get hold of enough to live on decently, and that's more than you can say of the farmers. And they live in town, where something is going on once in a while, anyway."

In the pause which followed, footsteps were heard on the walk outside, and the girl sprang up with a beautiful blush.

"My stars! I didn't think--I forgot--I must go."

Hartley burst into the room shortly after she left it, in his usual breeze.

"Hul-lo! Still at the Latin, hey?"

"Yes," said Bert, with ease. "How goes it?"

"Oh, I'm whooping 'er up! I'm getting started in great shape. Been up to the court-house and roped in three of the county officials. In these small towns the big man is the politician or the clergyman. I've nailed the politicians through the ear; now you must go for the ministers to head the list--that's your lay-out."

"How 'm I t' do it?" asked Bert, in an anxious tone. "I can't sell books if they don't want 'em."

"Why, cert! That's the trick. Offer a big discount. Say full calf, two fifty; morocco, two ninety. Regular discount to the clergy, ye know. Oh, they're on to that little racket--no trouble. If you can get a few of these leaders of the flock, the rest will follow like lambs to the slaughter. Tra-la-la--who-o-o-ish, wish!"

Albert laughed at Hartley as he plunged his face into the ice-cold water, puffing and wheezing.

"Jeemimy Crickets! but ain't that water cold! I worked Rock River this way last month, and made a boomin' success. If you take hold here in the--"

"Oh, I'm all ready to stand anything short of being kicked out."

"No danger of that if you're a real book agent. It's the snide that gets kicked. You've got t' have some savvy in this, just like any other business." He stopped in his dressing to say, "We've struck a great boarding-place, hey?"

"Looks like it."

"I begin t' cotton to the old lady a'ready. Good 'eal like mother used t' be 'fore she broke down. Didn't the old lady have a time of it raisin' me? Phewee! Patient! Job wasn't a patchin'. But the test is goin' t' come on the biscuit; if her biscuit comes up t' mother's I'm hern till death."

He broke off to comb his hair, a very nice bit of work in his case.

II

There was no discernible reason why the little town should have been called Tyre, and yet its name was as characteristically American as its architecture. It had the usual main street lined with low brick or wooden stores--a street which developed into a road running back up a wide, sandy valley away from the river. Being a county town, it had a court-house in a yard near the centre of the town, and a big summer hotel. Curiously shaped and oddly distributed hills rose abruptly out of the valley sand, forming a sort of amphitheatre in which the village lay. These square-topped hills ended at a common level, showing that they were not the result of an upheaval, but were the remains of the original stratification formations left standing after the scooping action of the post-glacial floods had ceased.

Some of them looked like ruined walls of castles ancient as hills, on whose massive tops time had sown sturdy oaks and cedars. They lent a distinct air of romance to the landscape at all times; but when in summer graceful vines clambered over their rugged sides, and underbrush softened their broken lines, it was not at all difficult to imagine them the remains of an unrecorded and very war-like people.

Even now, in winter, with yellow-brown and green cedars standing starkly upon their summits, these towers possessed a distinct charm, and in the early morning when the trees glistened with frost, or at evening when the white light of the sun was softened and violet shadows lay along the snow, the whole valley was a delight to the eye, full of distinct and lasting charm.

In the campaign which Hartley began, Albert did his best, and his best was done unconsciously; for the simplicity of his manner--all unknown to himself--was the most potent factor in securing consideration.

"I'm not a book agent," he said to one of the clergymen to whom he first appealed; "I'm a student trying to sell a good book and make a little money to help me to complete my course at the university."

In this way he secured three clergymen to head the list, much to the delight and admiration of Hartley.

"Good! Now corral the alumni of the place. Work the fraternal racket to the bitter end. Oh, say! there's a sociable to-

morrow night; I guess we'd better go, hadn't we?"

"Go alone?"

"Alone? No! Take some girls. I'm going to take neighbor Pickett's daughter; she's homely as a hedge fence, but I'll take her for business reasons."

"Hartley, you're an infernal fraud!"

"Nothing of the kind--I'm a salesman," ended Hartley, with a laugh.

After supper the following day, as Albert was still lingering at the table with the girls and Mrs. Welsh, he said to Maud:

"Are you going to the sociable?"

"No; I guess not."

"Would you go if I asked you?"

"Try me and see!" answered the girl, with a laugh, her color rising.

"All right. Miss Welsh, will you attend the festivity of the evening under my guidance and protection?"

"Yes, thank you; but I must wash the dishes first."

"I'll wash the dishes; you go get ready," said Mrs. Welsh.

Albert felt that he had one of the loveliest girls in the room as he led Maud down the floor of the vestry of the church. Her cheeks were glowing, and her eyes shining with maidenly delight as they took seats at the table to sip a little coffee and nibble a bit of cake.

Maud introduced him to a number of young people who had been students at the university. They received him cordially, and in a very short time he was enjoying himself very well indeed. He was reminded rather disagreeably of his office, however, by seeing Hartley surrounded by a laughing crowd of the more frolicsome young people. He winked at Albert, as much as to say, "Good stroke of business."

The evening passed away with songs, games, and recitations, and it was nearly eleven o'clock when the young people began to wander off toward home in pairs. Albert and Maud were among the first of the young folks to bid the rest good-night.

The night was clear and keen but perfectly still, and the young people, arm in arm, walked slowly homeward under the bare maples, in delicious companionship. Albert held Maud's arm close to his side.

"Are you cold?" he asked, in a low voice.

"No, thank you; the night is lovely," she replied; then added, with a sigh, "I don't like sociables so well as I used to--they tire me out."

"We stayed too long."

"It wasn't that; I'm getting so they seem kind o' silly."

"Well, I feel a little that way myself," he confessed.

"But there is so little to see here in Tyre at any time--no music, no theatres. I like theatres, don't you?"

"I can't go half enough."

"But nothing worth seeing ever comes into these little towns--and then we're all so poor, anyway."

The lamp, turned low, was emitting a terrible odor as they entered the sitting-room.

"My goodness! it's almost twelve o'clock! Good-night!" She held out her hand.

"Good-night!" he said, taking it, and giving it a cordial pressure which she remembered long.

"Good-night!" she repeated, softly, going up the stairs.

Hartley, who came in a few minutes later, found his partner sitting thoughtfully by the fire, with his coat and shoes off, evidently in deep abstraction.

"Well, I got away at last--much as ever. Great scheme, that sociable, eh? I saw your little girl introducing you right and left."

"Say, Hartley, I wish you'd leave her out of this thing; I don't like the way you speak of her when--"

"Phew! You don't? Oh, all right! I'm mum as an oyster--only keep it up! Get into all the church sociables you can; there's nothing like it."

Hartley soon had canvassers out along the country roads, and was working every house in town. The campaign promised to lengthen into a month--perhaps longer. Albert especially became a great favorite. Every one declared there had never been such book agents in the town. "They're such gentlemanly fellows. They don't press anybody to buy. They don't rush about and 'poke their noses where they're not wanted.' They are more like merchants with books to sell." The only person who failed to see the attraction in them was Ed Brann, who was popularly supposed to be engaged to Maud. He grew daily more sullen and repellent, toward Albert noticeably so.

One evening about six, after coming in from a long walk about town, Albert entered his room without lighting his lamp, lay down on the bed, and fell asleep. He had been out late the night before with Maud at a party, and slumber came almost instantly.

Maud came in shortly, hearing no response to her knock, and after hanging some towels on the rack went out without seeing the sleeper. In the sitting-room she met Ed Brann. He was a stalwart young man with curling black hair, and a heavy face at its best, but set and sullen now. His first words held a menace:

"Say, Maud, I want t' talk to you."

"Very well; what is it, Ed?" replied the girl, quietly.

"I want to know how often you're going to be out till twelve o'clock with this book agent?"

Perhaps it was the derisive inflection on "book agent" that woke Albert. Brann's tone was brutal--more brutal even than his words, and the girl turned pale and her breath quickened.

"Why, Ed, what's the matter?"

"Matter is just this: you ain't got any business goin' around with that feller with my ring on your finger, that's all." He ended with an unmistakable threat in his voice.

"Very well," said the girl, after a pause, curiously quiet; "then I won't; here's your ring."

The man's bluster disappeared instantly. Bert could tell by the change in his voice, which was incredibly great, as he pleaded:

"Oh, don't do that, Maud; I didn't mean to say that; I was mad--I'm sorry."

"I'm *glad* you did it *now*, so I can know you. Take your ring, Ed; I never 'll wear it again."

Albert had heard all this, but he did not know how the girl looked as she faced the man. In the silence which followed she scornfully passed him and went out into the kitchen. Brann went out and did not return at supper.

Young people of this sort are not self-analysts, and Maud did not examine closely into causes. She was astonished to find herself more indignant than grieved. She broke into an angry wail as she went to her mother's bosom:

"Mother! mother!"

"Why, what's the matter, Maudie? Tell me. There, there! don't cry, pet! Who's been hurtin' my poor little bird?"

"Ed has; he said--he said--"

"There, there! poor child! Have you been quarrelling again? Never mind; it'll come out all right."

"No, it won't--not the way you mean," the girl declared. "I've given him back his ring, and I'll never wear it again."

The mother could not understand with what wounding brutality the man's tone had fallen upon the girl's spirit, and Maud could not explain sufficiently to justify herself. Mrs. Welsh consoled herself with the idea that it was only a lover's quarrel--one of the little jars sure to come when two natures are settling together--and that all would be mended in a day or two.

Albert, being no more of a self-analyst than Maud, simply said, "Served him right," and dwelt no more upon it for the time.

At supper, however, he was extravagantly gay, and to himself unaccountably so. He joked Troutt till Maud begged him to stop, and after the rest had gone he remained seated at the table, enjoying the indignant color in her face and the flash of her infrequent smile, which it was such a pleasure to provoke. He volunteered to help wash the dishes.

"Thank you, but I'm afraid you'd be more bother than help," she replied.

"Thank *you*, but you don't know me. I ain't so green as I look by no manner o' means. I've been doing my own housekeeping for four terms."

"I know all about that," laughed the girl. "You young men rooming do precious little cooking and no dish-washing at all."

"That's a base calumny! I made it a point to wash every dish in the house, except the spider, once a week; had a regular cleaning-up day."

"And about the spider?"

"I wiped that out nicely with a newspaper every time I wanted to use it."

"Oh, horrors!--Mother, listen to that!"

"Why, what more could you ask? You wouldn't have me wipe it *six* times a day, would you?"

"I wonder it didn't poison you," commented Mrs. Welsh.

"Takes more'n that to poison a student," laughed Albert, as he went out.

The next afternoon he came bursting into the kitchen, where Maud stood with her sleeves rolled up, deep in the dishpan.

"Don't you want a sleigh-ride?" he asked, boyishly eager.

She looked up with shining eyes.

"Oh, wouldn't I! Can you get along, mother?"

"Certainly, child. Go on. The air will do you good."

"W'y, Maud!" said the little girl, "you said you didn't want to when Ed--"

Mrs. Welsh silenced her, and said:

"Run right along, dear; it's just the nicest time o' day. Are there many teams out?"

"They're just beginning to come out," said Albert. "I'll have a cutter around here in about two jiffies; be on hand, sure."

Troutt was standing in the sunny doorway of his stable when the young fellow dashed up to him.

"Hullo, Uncle Troutt! Harness your fastest nag into your swellest outfit instanter."

"Aha! Goin' t' take y'r girl out, hey?"

"Yes; and I want to do it in style."

"I guess ol' Dan's the horse for you. Gentle as a kitten and as knowin' as a fox. Drive him with one hand--left hand." The old man laughed till his long, faded beard flapped up and down and quivered with the stress of his enjoyment of his joke. He ended by hitching a vicious-looking sorrel to a gay, duck-bellied cutter, saying, as he gave up the reins:

"Now, be keerful. Dan's foxy; he's all right when he sees you've got the reins, but don't drop 'em."

"Don't you worry about me; I grew up with horses," said the over-confident youth, leaping into the sleigh and gathering up the lines. "Stand aside, my lord, and let the cortege pass. Hoop-la!"

The brute gave a tearing lunge, and was out of the doorway before the old man could utter another word. Albert thrilled with pleasure as he felt the reins stiffen in his hands, and saw the traces swing slack beside the thills.

"If he keeps this up he'll do," he said aloud.

As he turned up at the gate Maud came gayly down the path, muffled to the eyes.

"Oh, what a nice cutter! But the horse--is he gentle?" she asked, as she climbed in.

"As a cow," Albert replied.--"Git out o' this, Bones!"

The main street was already filled with wood sleighs, bob-sleds filled with children, and men in light cutters, out for a race. Laughter was on the air, and the jingle-jangle of bells. The sun was dazzling in its brightness, and the gay wraps and scarfs lighted up the scene with flecks of color. Loafers on the sidewalks fired familiar phrases at the teams as they passed:

"Step up, Bones!"

"Let 'er go, Gallagher!"

"Get there, Eli," and the like.

But what cared the drivers? If the shouts were insolent they laid them to envy, and if they were pleasant they smiled in reply.

Albert and Maud had made two easy turns up and down the street when a man driving a span of large Black Hawk horses dashed up a side street and whirled in just before them. The man was a superb driver, and sat with the reins held carelessly but securely in his left hand, guiding the team more by his voice than by the bit.

"*Hel-lo!*" cried Bert; "that looks like Brann."

"It is," said Maud.

"Cracky! that's a fine team--Black Hawks, both of them. I wonder if ol' sorrel can pass 'em?"

"Oh, please don't try!" pleaded the girl.

"Why not?"

"Because--because I'm afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"Afraid something 'll happen."

"Something *is* sure to happen; I'm goin' to pass him if old Bones has any *git* to him."

"It'll make him mad."

"Who mad? Brann?"

"Yes."

"Well, s'pose it does, who cares?"

There were a dozen similar rigs moving up or down the street, and greetings passed from sleigh to sleigh. Everybody except Brann welcomed Albert with sincere pleasure, and exchanged rustic jokes with him. As they slowed up at the upper end of the street and began to turn, a man on the sidewalk said, confidentially:

"Say, cap', if you handle that old rack o' bones just right, he'll distance anything on this road. When you want him to do his best let him have the rein; don't pull a pound. I used to own 'im--I know 'im."

The old sorrel came round "gauming," his ugly head thrown up, his great red mouth open, his ears laid back. Brann and the young doctor of the place were turning together, a little farther up the street. The blacks, responding to their driver's word, came down with flying hoofs, their great glossy breasts flecked with foam, their jaws champing.

"Come on, crow-bait!" yelled Brann, insultingly, as he came down past the doctor, and seemed about to pass Albert and Maud. There was hate in the glare of his eyes.

But he did not pass. The old sorrel seemed to lengthen; to the spectators his nose appeared to be glued to the glossy side of Brann's off black.

"See them blacks trot!" shouted Albert, in ungrammatical enthusiasm.

"See that old sorrel shake himself!" yelled the loafers.

The doctor came tearing down with a spirited bay, a magnificent stepper. As he drew along so that Bert could catch a glimpse of the mare's neck, he thrilled with delight. There was the thoroughbred's lacing of veins; the proud fling of her knees and the swell of her neck showed that she was far from doing her best. There was a wild light in her eyes.

These were the fast teams of the town. All interest was centred in them.

"Clear the track!" yelled the loafers.

"The doc's good fr 'em."

"If she don't break."

Albert was pulling at the sorrel heavily, absorbed in seeing, as well as he could for the flung snowballs, the doctor's mare draw slowly, foot by foot, past the blacks. Suddenly Brann gave a shrill yell and stood up in his sleigh. The gallant little bay broke and fell behind; Brann laughed, the blacks trotted on, their splendid pace unchanged.

"Let the sorrel out!" yelled somebody.

"Let him loose!" yelled Troutt on the corner, quivering with excitement. "Let him go!"

Albert, remembering what the fellow had said, let the reins loose. The old sorrel's teeth came together with a snap; his head lowered and his tail rose; he shot abreast of the blacks. Maud, frightened into silence, covered her head with the robe to escape the flying snow. The sorrel drew steadily ahead and was passing the blacks when Brann turned.

"Durn y'r old horse!" he yelled through his shut teeth, and laid the whip across the sorrel's hips. The blacks broke wildly, but, strange to say, the old sorrel increased his speed. Again Brann struck, but the lash fell on Bert's outstretched wrists. He did not see that the blacks were crowding him to the gutter, but he heard a warning cry.

"Look *out*, there!"

Before he could turn to look, the cutter seemed to be blown up by a bomb. He rose in the air like a vaulter, and when he fell the light went out.

The next that he heard was a curious soft murmur of voices, out of which a sweet, agonized girl-voice broke:

"Oh, where's the doctor? He's dead--oh, he's dead! *Can't* you hurry?"

Next came a quick, authoritative voice, still far away, and a hush followed it; then an imperative order:

"Stand out o' the way! What do you think you can do by crowding on top of him?"

"Stand back! stand back!" other voices called.

Then he felt something cold on his scalp: they were taking his cap off and putting snow on his head; then the doctor--he knew him now--said:

"Let me take him!"

A dull, throbbing ache came into his head, and as this grew the noise of voices became more distinct, and he could hear sobbing. Then he opened his lids, but the glare of the sunlight struck them shut again; he saw only Maud's face, agonized, white, and wet with tears, looking down into his.

They raised him a little more, and he again opened his eyes on the circle of hushed and excited men thronging about him. He saw Brann, with wild, scared face, standing in his cutter and peering over the heads of the crowd.

"How do you feel now?" asked the doctor.

"Can you hear us? Albert, do you know me?" called the girl.

His lips moved stiffly, but he smiled a little, and at length whispered slowly, "Yes; I guess--I'm all--right."

"Put him into my cutter; Maud, get in here, too," the doctor commanded. The crowd opened as the doctor and Troutt helped the wounded man into the sleigh. The pain in his head grew worse, but Albert's perception of things sharpened in proportion; he closed his eyes to the sun, but in the shadow of Maud's breast opened them again and looked up at her. He felt a vague, child-like pleasure in knowing that she was holding him in her arms; he thought of his mother--"how it would frighten her if she knew."

"Hello!" called a breathless, hearty voice, "what the deuce y' been doing with my pardner? Bert, old fellow, are you there?" Hartley asked, clinging to the edge of the moving cutter, and peering into his friend's face. Albert smiled.

"I'm here--what there is left of me," he replied, faintly.

"Glory! How did it happen?" he asked of the girl.

"I don't know--I couldn't see--we ran into a culvert," replied Maud.

"Weren't you hurt?"

"Not a bit. I stayed in the cutter."

Albert groaned, and tried to rise, but the girl gently yet firmly restrained him. Hartley was walking beside the doctor, talking loudly. "It was a devilish thing to do; the scoundrel ought to be juggled!"

Albert tried again to rise. "I'm bleeding yet; I'm soaking you; let me get up!"

The girl shuddered, but remained firm.

"No; we're 'most home."

She felt no shame, but a certain exaltation as she looked into the faces about her. She gazed unrecognizingly upon her nearest girl friends, and they, gazing upon her white face and unresponsive eyes, spoke in awed whispers.

At the gate the crowd gathered and waited with deepest interest. It was enthralling romance to them.

"Ed Brann done it," said one.

"How?" asked another.

"With the butt end of his whip."

"That's a lie! His team ran into Lohr's rig."

"Not much; Ed crowded him into the ditch."

"What fer?"

"Cause Bert cut him out with Maud."

"Come, get out of the way! Don't stand there gabbing," yelled Hartley, as he took Albert in his arms and, together with the doctor, lifted him out of the sleigh.

"Goodness sakes alive! Ain't it terrible! How is he?" asked an old lady, peering at him as he passed.

On the porch stood Mrs. Welsh, supported by Ed Brann.

"She's all right, I tell you. He ain't hurt much, either; just stunned a little, that's all."

"Maud! child!" cried the mother, as Maud appeared, followed by a bevy of girls.

"*I'm* all right, mother," she said, running into the trembling arms outstretched toward her; "but, oh, poor Albert!"

After the wounded man disappeared into the house the crowd dispersed. Brann went off by the way of the alley; he was not prepared to meet the questions of his accusers.

"Now, what in ---- you been up to?" was the greeting of his brother, as he re-entered the shop.

"Nothing."

"Welting a man on the head with a whip-stock ain't anything, hey?"

"I didn't touch him. We was racing, and he run into the culvert."

"Hank says he saw you strike him."

"He lies! I was strikin' the horse to make him break!"

"Oh, yeh was!" sneered the older man. "Well, I hope you understand that this'll ruin you in this town. If you didn't strike him, they'll say you run him into the culvert, 'n' every man, woman, 'n' child'll be down on you, and *me* fr bein' related to you. They all know how you feel toward him for cuttin' you out with Maud Welsh."

"Oh, don't bear down on him too hard, Joe. He didn't mean t' do any harm," said Troutt, who had followed Ed down to

the store. "I guess the young feller 'll come out all right. Just go kind o' easy till we see how he turns out. If he dies, why, it'll haf t' be looked into."

Ed turned pale and swallowed hastily. "If he should die I'll be a murderer," he thought. He acknowledged that hate was in his heart, and he shivered as he remembered the man's white face with the bright red stream flowing down behind his ear and over his cheek. It almost seemed to him that he *had* struck him, so close had the accident followed upon the fall of his whip.

III

Albert sank into a feverish sleep that night, with a vague perception of four figures in the room--Maud, her mother, Hartley, and the young doctor. When he awoke fully in the morning his head felt prodigiously hot and heavy.

It was early dawn, and the lamp was burning brightly. Outside, a man's feet could be heard on the squealing snow--a sound which told how still and cold it was. A team passed with a jingle of bells.

Albert raised his head and looked about. Hartley was lying on the sofa, rolled up in his overcoat and some extra quilts. He had lain down at last, worn with watching. Albert felt a little weak, and fell back on his pillow, thinking about the strange night he had passed--a night more filled with strange happenings than the afternoon.

As the light grew in the room his mind cleared, and lifting his muscular arm he opened and shut his hand, saying aloud, in his old boyish manner:

"I guess I'm all here."

"What's that?" called Hartley, rolling out of bed. "Did you ask for anything?"

"Give me some water, Jim; my mouth is dry as a powder-mill."

"How yeh feelin', anyway, pardner?" said Hartley, as he brought the water.

"First-rate, Jim; I guess I'll be all right."

"Well, I guess you'd better keep quiet."

He threw on his coat next, and went out into the kitchen, returning soon with some hot water, with which he began to bathe his partner's face and hands as tenderly as a woman.

"There; now I guess you're in shape fr grub--feel any like grub?--Come in," he called, in answer to a knock on the door.

Mrs. Welsh entered.

"How is he?" she whispered, anxiously.

"Oh, I'm all right," replied Albert.

"I'm glad to find you so much better," she said, going to his bedside. "I've hardly slep', I was so much worried about you. Your breakfast is ready, Mr. Hartley. I've got something special for Albert."

A few minutes later Maud entered with a platter, followed closely by her mother.

The girl came forward timidly, but when Albert turned his eyes on her and called, cheerily, "Good morning!" she flamed out in rosy color and recoiled. She had expected to see him pale, dull-eyed, and with a weak voice, but there was little to indicate invalidism in his firm greeting. She gave place to Mrs. Welsh, who prepared his breakfast. She was smitten dumb by his tone, and hardly dared look at him as he sat propped up in bed.

However, though he was feeling absurdly well, there was a good deal of bravado in his tone and manner, for he ate but little, and soon sank back on the bed.

"I feel better when my head is low," he explained, in a faint voice.

"Can't I do something?" asked the girl, her courage reviving as she perceived how ill and faint he really was.

"I guess you better write to his folks," said Mrs. Welsh.

"No, don't do that," he protested, opening his eyes; "it will only worry them, and do me no good. I'll be all right in a few days. You needn't waste your time on me; Hartley will wait on me."

"Don't mind him," said Mrs. Welsh. "I'm his mother now, and he's goin' to do just as I tell him to--aren't you, Albert?"

He dropped his eyelids in assent, and went off into a doze. It was all very pleasant to be thus waited upon. Hartley was devotion itself, and the doctor removed his bandages with the care and deliberation of a man with a moderate practice; besides, he considered Albert a personal friend.

Hartley, after the doctor had gone, said with some hesitation:

"Well, now, pard, I *ought* to go out and see a couple o' fellows I promised t' meet this morning."

"All right, Jim; all right. You go right ahead on business; I'm goin' t' sleep, anyway, and I'll be all right in a day or two."

"Well, I will; but I'll run in every hour 'r two and see if you don't want something. You're in good hands, anyway, when I'm gone."

"Won't you read to me?" pleaded Albert, one afternoon, when Maud came in with her mother to brush up the room. "It's getting rather slow business layin' here like this."

"Shall I, mother?"

"Why, of course, Maud."

So Maud got a book, and sat down over by the stove, quite distant from the bed, and read to him from *The Lady of the Lake*, while the mother, like a piece of tireless machinery, moved about the house at the never-ending succession of petty drudgeries which wear the heart and soul out of so many wives and mothers, making life to them a pilgrimage from stove to pantry, from pantry to cellar, and from cellar to garret--a life that deadens and destroys, coarsens and narrows, till the flesh and bones are warped to the expression of the wronged and cheated soul.

Albert's selfishness was in a way excusable. He enjoyed beyond measure the sound of the girl's soft voice and the sight of her graceful head bent over the page. He lay, looking and listening dreamily, till the voice and the sunlit head were lost in a deep, sweet sleep.

The girl sat with closed book, looking at his face as he slept. It was a curious study to her, a young man--*this* young man, asleep. His brown lashes lay on his cheek as placid as those of a child. As she looked she gained courage to go over softly and peer down on him. How boyish he seemed! How little to be feared! A boy outside uttered a shout, and she hurried away, pale and breathless. As she paused in the door and looked back at the undisturbed sleeper, she smiled, and the pink came back into her thin face.

Albert's superb young blood began to assert itself, and on the afternoon of the fifth day he was able to sit in his rocking-chair before the fire and read a little, though he professed that his eyes were not strong, in order that Maud should read for him. This she did as often as she could leave her other work, which was "not half often enough," the invalid grumbled.

"More than you deserve," she found courage to say.

Hartley let nothing interfere with the book business. "You take it easy," he repeated. "Don't you worry--your pay goes on just the same. You're doing well right where you are. By jinks! biggest piece o' luck," he went on, half in earnest. "Why, I can't turn around without taking an order--fact! Turned in a book on the livery bill, so that's all fixed. We'll make a clear hundred dollars out o' that little bump o' yours."

"Little bump! Say, now, that's--"

"Keep it up--put it on! Don't hurry about getting well. I don't need you to canvass, and I guess you enjoy being waited on." He ended with a sly wink and cough.

Yes, convalescence was delicious, with Maud reading to him, bringing his food, and singing for him; all that marred his peace was the stream of people who came to inquire how he was getting along. The sympathy was largely genuine, as Hartley could attest, but it bored the invalid. He had rather be left in quiet with Walter Scott and Maud. In the light of common day the accident was hurrying to be a dream.

At the end of a week he was quite himself again, though he still had difficulty in wearing his hat. It was not till the second Sunday after the accident that he appeared in the dining-room for the first time, with a large travelling-cap concealing the suggestive bandages. He looked pale and thin, but his eyes danced with joy.

Maud's eyes dilated with instant solicitude. The rest sprang up in surprise, with shouts of delight, as hearty as

brethren.

"Ginger! I'm glad t' see yeh!" said Troutt, so sincerely that he looked almost winning to the boy. The rest crowded around, shaking hands.

"Oh, I'm on deck again."

Ed Brann came in a moment later with his brother, and there was a significant little pause--a pause which grew painful till Albert turned and saw Brann, and called out:

"Hello, Ed! How are you? Didn't know you were here."

As he held out his hand, Brann, his face purple with shame and embarrassment, lumbered heavily across the room and took it, muttering some poor apology.

"Hope y' don't blame me."

"Of course not--fortunes o' war. Nobody to blame; just my carelessness.--Yes; I'll take turkey," he said to Maud, as he sank into the seat of honor.

The rest laughed, but Brann remained standing near Albert's chair. He had not finished yet.

"I'm mighty glad you don't lay it up against me, Lohr; an' I want to say the doctor's bill is all right; you un'erstand, it's *all right*."

Albert looked at him a moment in surprise. He understood that this, coming from a man like Brann, meant more than a thousand prayers from a ready apologist. It was a terrible victory, and he was disposed to make it as easy for his rival as he could.

"Oh, all right, Ed; only I'd calculated to cheat him out o' part of it--I'd planned to turn in a couple o' Blaine's *Twenty Years* on the bill."

Hartley roared, and the rest joined in, but not even Albert perceived all that it meant. It meant that the young savage had surrendered his claim in favor of the man he had all but killed. The struggle had been prodigious, but he had snatched victory out of defeat; his better nature had conquered.

No one ever gave him credit for it; and when he went West in the spring, people said his passion for Maud had been superficial. In truth, he had loved the girl as sincerely as he had hated his rival. That he could rise out of the barbaric in his love and his hate was heroic.

When Albert went to ride again, it was on melting snow, with the slowest horse Troutt had. Maud was happier than she had been since she left school, and fuller of color and singing. She dared not let a golden moment pass now without hearing it ring full, and she dared not think how short this day of happiness might be.

IV

At the end of the fifth week of their stay in Tyre a suspicion of spring was in the wind as it swept the southern exposure of the valley. March was drawing to a close, and there was more than a suggestion of April in the rapidly melting snow which still lay on the hills and under the cedars and tamaracks in the swamps. Patches of green grass, appearing on the sunny side of the road where the snow had melted, led to predictions of spring from the loafers beginning to sun themselves on the salt-barrels and shoe-boxes outside the stores.

A group sitting about the blacksmith shop were discussing it.

"It's an early seedin'--now mark my words," said Troutt, as he threw his knife into the soft ground at his feet. "The sun is crossing the line earlier this spring than it did last."

"Yes; an' I heard a crow to-day makin' that kind of a--a spring noise that sort o'--I d' know what--kind o' goes all through a feller."

"And there's Uncle Sweeney, an' that settles it; spring's comin' sure!" said Troutt, pointing at an old man, much bent, hobbling down the street. "When *he* gits out the frogs ain't fur behind."

"We'll be gittin' on to the ground by next Monday," said Sam Dingley to a crowd who were seated on the newly painted harrows and seeders which Svend & Johnson had got out ready for the spring trade. "Svend & Johnson's Agricultural Implement Depot" was on the north side of the street, and on a spring day the yard was one of the pleasantest loafing-

places that could be imagined, especially if one wished company.

Albert wished to be alone. Something in the touch and tone of this spring afternoon made him restless and inclined to strange thoughts. He took his way out along the road which followed the river-bank, and in the outskirts of the village threw himself down on a bank of grass which the snows had protected, and which had already a tinge of green because of its wealth of sun.

The willows had thrown out their tiny light-green flags, though their roots were under the ice, and some of the hardwood twigs were tinged with red. There was a faint but magical odor of uncovered earth in the air, and the touch of the wind was like a caress from a moist, magnetic hand.

The boy absorbed the light and heat of the sun as some wild thing might. With his hat over his face, his hands folded on his breast, he lay as still as a statue. He did not listen at first, he only felt; but at length he rose on his elbow and listened. The ice cracked and fell along the bank with a long, hollow, booming crash; a crow cawed, and a jay answered it from the willows below. A flight of sparrows passed, twittering innumerable. The boy shuddered with a strange, wistful longing, and a realization of the flight of time.

He could have wept, he could have sung, but he only shuddered and lay silent under the stress of that strange, sweet passion which quickened his heart, deepened his eyes, and made his breath come and go with a quivering sound. Across the dazzling blue arch of the sky the crow flapped, sending down his prophetic, jubilant note; the breeze, as soft and sweet as April, stirred in his hair; the hills, deep in their dusky blue, seemed miles away; and the voices of the care-free skaters on the melting ice of the river below came to the ear subdued to a unity with the scene.

Suddenly a fear seized upon the boy--a horror! Life, life was passing! Life that can be lived only once, and lost, is lost forever! Life, that fatal gift of the Invisible Powers to man--a path, with youth and joy and hope at its eastern gate, and despair, regret, and death at its low western portal!

The boy caught a momentary glimpse of his real significance. "I am only a gnat, a speck in the sun, a youth facing the millions of great and wise and wealthy!" He leaped up in a frenzy. "Oh, I mustn't stay here! I must get back to my studies. Life is slipping by me, and I am doing nothing, being nothing!"

His face, as pale as death, shone with passionate resolution, and his hands were clinched in silent vow.

But on his way back he met the jocund party of skaters going home from the river, and with the easy shift and change of youth joined in their ringing laughter. The weird power of the wind's voice was gone, and he sank to the level of the unthinking boy again. However, the problem was only put off, not solved.

That night Hartley said: "Well, pardner, we're getting 'most ready to pull out. Someways I always get restless when these warm days begin." This was as sentimental as Hartley ever got; or, if he ever felt more sentiment, he concealed it carefully.

"I s'pose it must 'a' been in spring that those old chaps, on their steeds and in their steel shirts, started out for to rescue some damsel, hey?" he ended, with a grin. "Now, that's the way I feel--just like striking out for, say, Oshkosh. That little piece of lofty tumbling of yours was a big boom, and no mistake. Why, your share o' this campaign will be a hundred and twenty dollars sure."

"More'n I've earned," replied Bert.

"No, it ain't. You've done your duty like a man. Done as much in your way as I have. Now, if you want to try another county with me, say so. I'll make a thousand dollars this year out o' this thing."

"I guess I'll go back to school."

"All right; I don't blame you for wanting to do that."

"I guess, with what I can earn for father, I can pull through the year. I *must* get back. I'm awfully obliged to you, Jim."

"That'll do on that," said Hartley, shortly; "you don't owe me anything. We'll finish delivery to-morrow, and be ready to pull out on Friday or Sat."

There was an acute pain in Albert's breast somewhere; he had not analyzed his case at all, and did not now, but the idea of going affected him strongly. It had been so pleasant, that daily return to a lovely girlish presence.

"Yes, sir," Hartley was going on, "I'm going to just quietly leave a book on her centre-table. I don't know as it'll interest her much, but it'll show we appreciate the grub, and so on. By jinks! you don't seem to realize what a worker that woman is! Up five o'clock in the morning--By-the-way, you've been going around with the girl a good deal, and she's

introduced you to some first-rate sales; now, if you want to leave her a little something, make it a morocco copy, and charge it to the firm."

Albert knew that he meant well, but he couldn't, somehow, help saying, ironically:

"Thanks, but I guess *one* copy of Blaine's *Twenty Years* will be enough in the house, especially--"

"Well, give her anything you please, and charge it up to the firm. I don't insist on Blaine; only suggested that because--"

"I guess I can stand the expense of a present."

"I didn't say you couldn't, man! But *I* want a hand in this thing. Don't be so turrible keen t' snap a feller up," complained Hartley, turning on him. "What the thunder is the matter of you, anyway? I like the girl, and she's been good to us all round; she tended you like an angel--"

"There, there! That's enough o' that," put in Albert, hastily. "For God's sake, don't whang away on that string forever, as if I didn't know it!"

Hartley stared at him as he turned away.

"Well, by jinks! What *is* the matter o' you?"

He was too busy to dwell upon it much, but concluded his partner was homesick.

Albert was beginning to have a vague underconsciousness of his real feeling toward the girl, but he fought off the acknowledgment of it as long as possible. His mind moved in a circle, coming back to the one point ceaselessly--a dreary prospect, in which that slender girl-figure had no place--and each time the prospect grew more intolerably blank, and the pain in his heart more acute and throbbing.

When he faced her that night, after they had returned from a final walk down by the river, he was as far from a solution as ever. He had avoided all reference to their separation, and now he stood as a man might at the parting of the ways, saying: "I will not choose; I cannot choose. I will wait for some sign, some chance thing, to direct me."

They stood opposite each other, each feeling that there was more to be said: the girl tender, her eyes cast down, holding her hands to the fire; he shivering, but not with cold. He had a vague knowledge of the vast importance of the moment, and he hesitated to speak.

"It's almost spring again, isn't it? And you've been here"--she paused and looked up with a daring smile--"seems as if you'd been here always."

It was about half-past eight. Mrs. Welsh was setting her bread in the kitchen; they could hear her moving about. Hartley was down-town finishing up his business. They were almost alone in the house. Albert's throat grew dry and his limbs trembled. His pause was ominous. The girl's smile died away as he took a seat without looking at her.

"Well, Maud, I suppose you know--we're going away to-morrow."

"Oh, must you? But you'll come back?"

"I don't expect to--I don't see how I can. I may never see you again."

"Oh, don't say that!" cried the girl, her face as white as silver, her clasped hands straining.

"I must go--I must!" he muttered, not daring to look upon her face.

"Oh, what can I do--*we* do--without you! I can't bear it!"

She stopped, and sank back into a chair, her breath coming heavily from her twitching lips, the unnoticed tears falling from her staring, pitiful, wild, appealing eyes, her hands nervously twisting her gloves.

There was a long silence. Each was undergoing a self-revelation; each was trying to face a future without the other.

"I must go!" he repeated, aimlessly, mechanically. "What can I do here?"

The girl's heavy breathing deepened into a wild little moaning sound, inexpressibly pitiful, her hungry eyes fixed on his face. She gave way first, and flung herself down upon her knees at his side, her hands seeking his neck.

"Albert, I can't *live* without you now! Take me with you! Don't leave me!"

He stooped suddenly and took her in his arms, raised her, and kissed her hair.

"I didn't mean it, Maud; I'll never leave you--never! Don't cry!"

She drew his head down and kissed his lips, then turned her face to his breast--then joy and confidence came back to her.

"I know now what you meant," she cried, gayly, raising herself and looking into his face; "you were trying to scare me; trying to make me show how much I--cared for you--first!" There was a soft smile on her lips and a tender light in her eyes. "But I don't mind it."

"I guess I didn't know myself what I meant," he answered, with a grave smile.

When Mrs. Welsh came in, they were sitting on the sofa, talking in low voices of their future. He was grave and subdued, while she was radiant with love and hope. The future had no terrors for her, but the boy unconsciously felt the gravity of life somehow deepened by the revelation of her love.

"Why, Maud!" Mrs. Welsh exclaimed, "what are you doing?"

"Oh, mother, I'm so happy--just as happy as a bird!" she cried, rushing into her mother's arms.

"Why, why!--what is it? You're crying, dear!"

"No, I'm not; I'm laughing--see!"

Mrs. Welsh turned her dim eyes on the girl, who shook the tears from her lashes with the action of a bird shaking water from its wings. She seemed to shake off her trouble at the same moment.

Mrs. Welsh understood perfectly. "I'm very glad, too, dearie," she said, simply, looking at the young man with motherly love irradiating her worn face. Albert went to her, and she kissed him, while the happy girl put her arms about them both in an ecstatic hug.

"Now you've got a son, mother."

"But I've lost a daughter--my first-born."

"Oh, wait till you hear our plans! He's going to settle down here--aren't you, Albert?"

Then she went away and left the young people alone. They had a sweet, intimate talk of an hour, full of plans and hopes and confidences, and then he kissed his radiant love good-night, and, going into his own room, sat down by the stove and there pondered on the change that had come into his life.

Already he sighed with the stress of care, the press of thought, which came upon him. The longing uneasiness of the boy had given place to another unrest--the unrest of the man who must face the world in earnest now, planning for food and shelter. To go back to school was out of the question. To expect help from his father, overworked and burdened with debt, was impossible. He must go to work, and go to work to aid *her*. A living must be wrung from this town. All the home and all the property Mrs. Welsh had were here, and wherever Maud went the mother must follow.

He was in the midst of his mental turmoil when Hartley came in, humming the *Mulligan Guards*.

"In the dark, hey?"

"Completely in the dark."

"Well, light up, light up!"

"I'm trying to."

"What the deuce do you mean by that tone? What's been going on here since my absence?"

Albert did not reply, and Hartley shuffled about after a match, lighted the lamp, threw his coat and hat in the corner, and then said:

"Well, I've got everything straightened up. Been freezing out old Daggett; the old skeesix has been promisin' fr a week, and I just said, 'Old man, I'll camp right down with you here till you fork over,' and he did. By-the-way, everybody I talked with to-day about leaving said, 'What's Lohr going to do with that girl?' I told 'em I didn't know; do you? It seems you've been thicker'n I supposed."

"I'm going to marry her," said Albert, calmly, but his voice sounded strained and hoarse.

"What's that?" yelled Hartley.

"Sh! don't raise the neighbors. I'm going to marry her."

"Well, by jinks! When? Say, looky here! Well, I swanny!" exclaimed Hartley, helplessly. "When?"

"Right away; some time this summer--June, maybe."

Hartley thrust his hands into his trousers pockets, stretched out his legs, and stared at his friend in vast amaze.

"You're givin' me guff!"

"I'm in dead earnest."

"I thought you was going through college all so fast?"

"Well, I've made up my mind it isn't any use to try," replied Albert, listlessly.

"What y' goin' t' do here, or are y' goin' t' take the girl away with yeh?"

"She can't leave her mother. We'll run this boarding-house for the present. I'll try for the principalship of the school here. Raff is going to resign, they say. If I can't get that, I'll go into a law office. Don't worry about me."

"But why go into this so quick? Why not put it off fifteen or twenty years?" asked Hartley, trying to get back to cheerful voice.

"What would be the use? At the end of a year I'd be just about as poor as I am now."

"Can't y'r father step in and help you?"

"No. There are three boys and two girls, all younger than I, to be looked out for, and he has all he can carry. Besides, *she* needs me right here and right now, and if I can do anything to make life easier for her I'm going t' do it. Besides," he ended, in a peculiar tone, "we don't feel as if we could live apart much longer."

"But, great Scott! man, you can't--"

"Now, hold on, Jim! I've thought this thing all over, and I've made up my mind. It ain't any use to go on talking about it. What good would it do me to go to school another year? I'd come out without a dollar, and no more fitted for earning a living for her than I am now! And, besides all that, I couldn't draw a free breath thinking of her workin' away here to keep things moving, liable at any minute to break down."

Hartley gazed at him in despair, and with something like awe. It was a tremendous transformation in the young, ambitious student.

Like most men in America, and especially Western men, he still clung to the idea that a man was entirely responsible for his success or failure in life. He had not admitted that conditions of society might be so adverse that only men of most exceptional endowments, and willing and able to master many of the best and deepest and most sacred of their inspirations and impulses, could succeed.

Of the score of specially promising young fellows who had been with him at school, seventeen had dropped out and down. Most of them had married and gone back to farming, or to earn a precarious living in the small, dull towns where farmers trade and traders farm. Conditions were too adverse; they simply weakened and slipped slowly back into dulness and an ox-like or else a fretful patience. Thinking of these men, and thinking their failure due to themselves alone, Hartley could not endure the idea of his friend adding one more to the list of failures. He sprang up at last.

"Say, Bert, you might just as well hang y'rself, and done with it! Why, it's suicide! I can't allow it. I started in at college bravely, and failed because I'd let it go too long. I couldn't study--couldn't get down to it; but you--why, old man, I'd *bet* on you!" He had a tremor in his voice. "I hate like thunder to see you give up your plans. Say, you can't afford to do this; it's too much to pay."

"No, it isn't."

"I say it is--and, besides, you'd get over this in a week--"

"Jim!" called Albert, warningly, sharply.

"All right," said Jim, in the tone of a man who knows it's all wrong--"all right; but the time 'll come when you'll wish I'd-- You ain't doin' the girl enough good to make up for the harm you're doin' yourself." He broke off again, and said in a

tone of finality: "I'm done. I'm all through, and I c'n see you're through with Jim Hartley. All right!"

"Dam curious," he muttered to himself, "that boy should get caught just at this time, and not with some o' those girls in Marion. Well, it's none o' my funeral," he ended, with a sigh; for it had stirred him to the bottom of his sunny nature, after all. A dozen times, as he lay there beside his equally sleepless companion, he started to say something more in deprecation of the step, but each time stifled the opening word into a groan.

It would not be true to say that love had come to Albert Lohr as a relaxing influence, but it had changed the direction of his energies so radically as to make his whole life seem weaker and lower. As long as his love-dreams went out toward a vague and ideal woman, supposedly higher and grander than himself, he was spurred on to face the terrible sheer escarpment of social eminence; but when he met, by accident, the actual woman who was to inspire his future efforts, the difficulties he faced took on solid reality. His aspirations fell to the earth, their wings clipped, and became, perforce, submissive beasts at the plough. The force that moved so much of his thought was transformed into other energy.

The table was very gay at dinner next day. Maud was standing at the highest point of her girlhood dreams. Her flushed cheeks and shining eyes made her seem almost a child, and Hartley wondered at her, and relented a little in the face of such happiness.

"They're gay as larks now," thought Hartley to himself, as he joined in the laughter; "but that won't help 'em any ten years from now."

He could hardly speak next day as he shook hands at the station with his friend.

"Good-by, ol' man; I hope it'll come out all right, but I'm afraid--But there! I promised not to say anything about it. Good-by till we meet in Congress," he ended, in a resolute attempt to conceal his dismay.

"Can't you come to the wedding, Jim? We've decided on June. You see, they need a man around the house, so we-- You'll come, won't you, old fellow? And don't mind my being a little crusty last night."

"Oh yes; I'll come," Jim said, in a tone which concealed a desire to utter one more protest, but to himself he said:

"That ends him! He's jumped into a hole and pulled the hole in after him. A man can't marry a family like that at his age, and pull out of it. He *may*, but I doubt it. Well, as I remarked before, it's none o' my funeral so long as *he's* satisfied."

But he said it with a painful lump in his throat, and he could not bring himself to feel that Albert's course was right, and felt himself to be somehow culpable in the case.

A DIVISION IN THE COOLLY

A funeral is a depressing affair under the best circumstances, but a funeral in a lonely farm-house in March, the roads full of slush, the ragged gray clouds leaping the sullen hills like eagles, is tragic.

The teams arrived splashed with mud, the women blue with cold under their scanty cotton-quilt lap robes, their hats set awry by the wind. They scurried into the house, to sit and shiver in the best room, where all the chairs that could contrive to stand erect, and all of any sort that could be borrowed, were crammed in together to seat the women folks.

The men drove out to the barn, and having blanketed their teams with lap robes, picked their way through the slush of the yard over to the lee side of the haystack, where the pale sun occasionally shone.

They spoke of "diseased" Williams, as if Diseased were his Christian name. They whittled shingles or stalks of straw as they talked.

Sooner or later, after each new arrival, they branched off upon politics, and the McKinley Bill was handled gingerly. If any one, in his zeal, raised his voice above a certain pitch, some one said "Hish!" and the newcomer's voice sank again to that abnormal quiet which falls now and again on these loud-voiced folk of the wind and open spaces.

The boys hung around the kitchen and smoke-house, playing sly jokes upon each other in order to provoke that explosion of laughter so thoroughly enjoyed by those who can laugh noiselessly.

A snort of this sort brought Deacon Williams out to reprimand them, "Boys, boys, you should have more respect for the dead."

The preacher came. The choir raised a wailing chant for the dead, but the group by the haystack did not move.

Occasionally they came back, after talking about seeding and the price of hogs, to the discussion of the dead man's affairs.

"I s'pose his property will go to Emmy and Serry, half and half."

"I expect' so. He always said so, an' John wa'n't a man to whiffle about every day."

"Well, Emmy won't make no fuss, but if Ike don't git more'n his half, I'll eat the greaser."

"Who's *ex-ecutor*?"

"Deacon Williams, I expect."

"Well, the Deacon's a slick one," some one observed, as if that were an excellent quality in an executor.

"They ain't no love lost between Bill Gray and Harkey, I don't expect."

"No, I don't think they is."

"Ike don't seem to please people. It's queer, too. He tries awful hard."

The voice of the preacher within, raised to a wild shout, interrupted them.

"The Elder's gettin' warmed up," said one of the story-tellers, pausing in his talk. "And so I told Bill if he wanted the cord-wood--"

The sun shone warmer, and the chickens *caw-cawed* feebly. The colts whinnied, and a couple of dogs rolled and tumbled in wild frolic, while the voice of the preacher sounded dolefully or in humming monotone.

Meanwhile, in the house, in the best room and in the best seats near the coffin, the women, in their black, worn dresses, with wrinkled, sallow faces and gnarled hands, sat shivering. Theirs was to be the luxury of the ceremony.

The carpet was damp and muddy, the house was chill, and the damp wind filled them all with ague; but they had so much to see and talk about, that time passed rapidly. Each one entering was studied critically to see whether dress and deportment were proper to the occasion or not, and if one of the girls smiled a little as she entered, some one was sure to whisper:--

"Heartless thing, how *can* she?"

There were a few young men, only enough to help out on the singing, and they remained mainly in the kitchen where they were seen occasionally in anxious consultation with Deacon Williams.

The girls looked serious, but a little sly, as if they could smile if the boys looked their way or if one of the old women should cough her store teeth out.

Upstairs the family were seated in solemn silence, the two nieces, Emma and Sarah, and Emma's husband, Harkey, and Sarah's children--deceased Williams had no wife. These people sat in stony immobility, except when Harkey looked at his watch, and said:--

"Seem slow gitten here."

Occasionally women came up the stairway and flung themselves upon the necks of the mourning nieces, who submitted to it without apparent disgust or astonishment, and sank back into the same icy calm after their visitors had "straightened their things," and retired to the reserved seats below.

Deacon Williams, small, quick, with sunny blue-gray eyes belying the gloomy curve of his mouth, was everywhere; arranging for bearers, selecting hymns, conferring with the family, keeping abstracted old women off the seats reserved for the mourners, and maintaining an anxious lookout for the minister.

The Deacon was a distant relative of the dead man, and it was generally admitted that he "would have a time of it" in administering upon the estate.

At last the word was whispered about that the Elder was coming. Word was sent to the smoke-house and to the haystack to call the stragglers in. They came slowly, and finding the rooms all filled considered themselves absolved

from a disagreeable duty, and went back to the sunny side of the haystack, where they smoked their pipes in ruminative enjoyment.

The Elder, upon entering, took his place beside the coffin, the foot of which he used for a pulpit on which to lay his Bible and his hymn-book. A noise of whispering, rustling, scraping of feet arose as some old men crowded in among the women, and then the room became silent.

The Elder took his seat and glanced round upon them all with solemn unrecognizing severity, while the mourners came down the creaking pine stairway in proper order of procedure.

Everybody noticed the luxury of new dresses on the nieces and the new suits on the children. Everybody knew the feeling which led to these extravagances. Death, after all, was a majestic visitor, and money was not to stand in the way of a decent showing. Some of the girls smiled slyly at Isaac's gloves, which were too small and would go only halfway on, a fact he tried to conceal by keeping his hands folded. Each boy was provided with a large new stiff cotton handkerchief, which occupied immense space in outside pockets, crumpled as they were into a rustling ball with cruel salient angles like a Chinese puzzle.

The Elder had attended two funerals that week, and like a jaded actor came lamely to his work. His prayer was not entirely satisfactory to the older people, they had expected a "little more power."

He was a thin-faced man, with weak brown eyes and a mouth like a gopher, that is, with very prominent upper teeth. His black coat was worn and shiny, and hung limply, as if at some other period he had been fatter, or as if it had belonged to some other man.

The choir with instinctive skill had selected a wailing hymn, only slightly higher in development than the chant of the Indians, sweet, plaintive at times, barbaric in its moving cadences. They sang it well, in meditative march, looking out of the windows during its interminable length.

Then the Elder read some passages of the Scripture in his "funeral voice," which was entirely different from his "marriage voice" and his "Sunday voice." It had deep cadences in it and chanting inflections, not unlike the negro preachers or the keeners at Irish wakes.

Then he gave out the hymn, which all joined in singing, rising to their feet with much trouble. After they had settled down again he took out a large carefully ironed handkerchief and laid it on the coffin as who should say, "If you have tears, prepare to shed them now."

The absurdity of all this did not appear to his listeners, though they well knew he cared very little about the dead man, who was a very retiring person.

The Elder on his part understood that his audience was before him for the pleasure of weeping, for the delight of seeing agonized faces and hearing wild grief-laden wailing. They were there to feel the delicious creeping thrill of horror and fear, roused by the presence of the corpse and the near shadow of the hovering angel of death.

The Elder led off by some purely perfunctory remarks about the deceased, about his kindness, and his honesty. This caused the nieces to wipe away a sparse tear or two, and he was encouraged as if by slight applause. He developed as usual the idea that in the midst of life we are in death, that no man can tell when his time will come. He told two or three grewsome stories of sudden death. His voice now rose in a wild chant now sank to a hoarse whisper.

The blowing of noses, low sobbings, and fervent amens from the old men thickened encouragingly, and he entered upon more impassioned flights. His voice, naturally sonorous, deepened in powerful song till the men seated comfortably on their haunches out by the haystack could plainly hear his words. "Oh, my brethren, what will you do in that last day?"

Sarah's boys, without in the least understanding what it all meant, began to weep also and to use their handkerchiefs, so smooth and shining they were useless as so much legal-cap writing paper.

Their misery would have been enhanced had they known that out in the wagon-shed under cover of the Elder's voice the other boys were having a game of mummelly peg in the warm, dry ground. Their fresh young souls laughed at death as the early robins out in the hedge near by defied the winds of March.

Having harrowed the poor sensation-loving souls as thoroughly as could be desired, the Elder began the process of "letting them down easy." He remembered that the Lord was merciful; that the deceased could approach him with confidence; that there was a life beyond the tomb, a life of eternal rest (the allurements of all hard-working humanity).

Slowly the snuffling and sobbing ceased, the handkerchiefs took longer and longer intervals of rest, and when in

conclusion the preacher said, "Let us pray," the old men looked at each other with fervent satisfaction. "It's been a blessed time--a blessed time!"

The pretty girl who sang the soprano looked very interesting with her wet eyelashes, the tears stopped halfway in their course down her rounded cheek. The closing hymn promised endless peace and rest, but was voiced in the same tragic and hopeless music with which the service opened.

Deacon Williams came out to say, "All parties desiring to view the *remains*, will now have an opportunity." He had the hospitable tone of a host inviting his guests in to dinner.

Viewing the remains was considered a religious duty, and the men from outside, and even the boys from behind the smoke-house, felt constrained to come in and pass in shuddering horror before the still face whose breath did not dim the glass above it. Most of them hurried by the box with only a swift side glance down at the strange thing within.

Then the bearers lifted the coffin and slipped it into the platform-spring wagon, which was backed up to the door. The other teams loaded up, and the procession moved off, down the perilously muddy road toward the village burying-ground.

In this way was John Williams, a hard-working, honorable Welshman, buried. His death furnished forth a sombre, dramatic entertainment such as he himself had ceremoniously attended many times. The funeral trotters whom he had seen at every funeral in the valley were now in at his death, and would be at each other's death, until the black and yellow earth claimed them all.

A ceremony almost as interesting to the gossips as the burial was the reading of the will, to which only the family were invited. After the return of Emma, her husband, and Sarah from the cemetery, Deacon Williams read the dead man's bequests, seated in the best room, which was still littered with chairs and damp with mud.

The will was simple and not a surprise to any one. It gave equal division of all the property to the nieces.

"Well, now, when'll we have the settlement?" asked the Deacon.

"Just's you say, Deacon," said Emma, meekly.

"Suit yourself," said Harkey; "only it 'ad better come soon. Sooner the better--seedin's coming on."

"Well, to-morrow is Friday, why not Saturday?"

"All right, Saturday." All agreed.

As Harkey drove off down the road he said to his wife: "The sooner we have it, the fewer things 'll git carried off. The Deacon don't favor me none, and Bill Gray is sweet on Serry, and he'll bear watchin'."

The Deacon on his part took his chin in his fist and looked after Harkey. "Seemed a little bit anxious, 'cordin' to *my* notion," he said, with a smile.

II

Saturday was deliciously warm and springlike, the hens woke in the early dawn with a jocund note in their throats, and the young cattle frisked about the barn-yard, moved to action by the electrical influences of the south wind.

"Clear as a bell overhead," Deacon Williams said.

But Jack Dunlap, Sarah's hand, said, "Nobody travels that way."

Long before dawn the noise of the melting water could be heard running with musical tinkle under the ice. The ponds crashed and boomed in long reverberating explosions, as the sinking water heaved it up and let it fall with crackling roar; flights of ducks flashed over, cackling breathlessly as they scurried straight into the north.

Deacon and Sarah arrived early and took possession, for Sarah was to have the eighty which included the house. They were busy getting things ready for the partition. The Deacon, assisted by Jack, the hired man, was busy hauling the machinery out of the shed into the open air, while Sarah and a couple of neighbors' girls, with skirts tucked up and towels on their heads, were scouring up pots and pans and dusting furniture in the kitchen.

The girls, strong and handsome in their unsapped animal vigor, enjoyed the innocent display of their bare arms and petticoats.

People from Sand Lake passing by wondered what was going on. Gideon Turner had the courage to pull up and call out, for the satisfaction of his wife:--

"What's going on here this fine morning?"

"Oh, we're goin' to settle up the estate!" said Sarah. "Why! how de do, Mrs. Turner?"

"W'y, it's you, is it, Serry?"

"Yes; it's me,--what they is left of me. I been here sence six o'clock. I'm getting things ready for the division. Deacon Williams is the ex-ecutor, you know."

"Aha! Less see, you divide equally, I hear."

"Near's we can get at it. Uncle left me the house eighty, and the valley eighty to Emmy. Deacon's goin' to parcel out the belongin's."

Turner looked sly. "How'd Harkey feel?"

Sarah smiled. "I don't know and care less. He'll make trouble if he can, but I don't see how he can. He agreed to have the Deacon do the dividin', and he'll have to stand by it so far as I can see."

Mrs. Turner looked dubious. "Well, you know Ike Harkey. He looks as though sugar wouldn't melt in his mouth, but I tell you I'd hate to have dealin's with him."

Turner broke in: "Well, we must be movin'. I s'pose you'll move right in?"

"Yes. Just as soon's as this thing's settled."

"Well, good-by. Come up."

"You come down."

Sarah was a heavy, good-natured woman, a widow with "a raft of children." Probably for that reason her uncle had left her the house, which was large and comfortable. As she stood looking down the road, one of the girls came out to the gate. She was a plump, strong creature, a neighbor's girl who had volunteered to help.

"Anybody coming?"

"Yes. I guess--no, it's going the other way. Ain't it a nice day?"

That was as far as she could carry the utterance of her feeling, but all the morning she had felt the wonderful power of the air. The sun had risen incredibly warm. The wind was in the south, and the crackling, booming roar of ice in the ponds and along the river was like winter letting go its iron grip upon the land. Even the old cows shook their horns, and made comical attempts to frisk with the yearlings. Sarah knew it was foolish, but she felt like a girl that morning--and Bill was coming up the road.

In the midst of the joy of the spring day stood the house, desolate and empty, out of which its owner had been carried to a bed in the cold, clinging clay of the little burying-ground.

The girls and Sarah worked swiftly, brushing, cleaning, setting aside, giving little thought to even the beauty of the morning, which entered their blood unconsciously.

"Well, how goes it?" asked a quick, jovial voice.

The girls gave screams of affected fright.

"Why, Deacon! You nearly scared the life out of us."

Deacon Williams was always gallant.

"I didn't know I was given to scaring the ladies," he said. "Well, who's here?"

"Nobody but us so far."

"Hain't seen nothing o' Harkey?"

"Not a thing. He sent word he'd be on hand, though."

"M--, well, we've got the machinery invoiced. Guess I'll look around and kind o' get the household things in my mind's

eye," said the Deacon, taking on the air of a public functionary.

"All right. We'll have everything ready here in a few minutes."

They returned to work, dusting and scrubbing. The girls with their banter put death into the background as an obscure and infrequent incident of old age.

Sarah again studied the road down the Coolly.

"Well there! I see a team coming up the Coolly now; wonder if it's Emmy."

"Looks more like Bill Gray's team," said one of the girls, looking slyly at Sarah, who grew very red.

"Oh, you're too sharp, ain't you?"

It was perfectly ridiculous (to the young people) to see these middle-aged lovers courting like sixteen-year-olds, and they had no mercy on either Bill or Sarah.

Bill drove up in leisurely way, his horses steaming, his wagon-wheels loaded with mud. Mrs. Gray was with him, her jolly face shining like the morning sun.

"Hello, folkses, are you all here?"

"Good morning, Mrs. Gray," said the Deacon, approaching to help her out. "Hello, Bill, nice morning."

Bill looked at Sarah for a moment. "Bully good," he said, leaving his mother to scramble down the wagon-wheel alone--at least so far as he was concerned, but the Deacon stood below courageously.

Mrs. Gray cried out in her loud good humor: "Look out, Deacon, don't git too near me--if I should fall on you there wouldn't be a grease spot left. *There!* I'm all right now," she said, having reached ground without accident. She shook her dress and looked briskly around. "Wal, what you done, anyway? Emmy's folks come yet?"

"No, but I guess that's them comin' now. I hope Ike won't come, though."

Mrs. Gray stared at the Deacon. "Why not?"

"Well, he's just sure to make a fuss," said Jack, "he's so afraid he won't get his share."

Bill chewed on a straw and looked at Sarah abstractedly.

"Well, what's t' be done?" inquired Mrs. Gray, after a pause.

"Can't do much till Emmy gets here," said Sarah.

"Oh, I guess we can. Bill, you put out y'r team, we won't get away 'fore dinner."

The men drove off to the barn, leaving the women to pick their way on chips and strips of board laid in the mud, to the safety of the chip-pile, and thence to the kitchen, which was desolately littered with utensils.

Deacon assumed command with the same alertness, and with the same sunny gleam in his eye, with which he directed the funeral a few days before.

"Now, Bill, put out your team and help Jack and me pen them hogs. Women folks 'll git things ready here."

Emma came at last, driven by Harkey's brother and his hired man. They were both brawny fellows, rude and irritable, and the Deacon lifted his eyebrows and whistled when he saw them drive in with a lumber wagon.

The women swarmed out to greet Emma, who was a thin, irritable, feeble woman.

"Better late than never. Where's Ike?" inquired Mrs. Gray.

"Well, he--couldn't git away very well--he's got t' clean up some seed-oats," she answered nervously. After the men drove off, however, she added: "He thought he hadn't ought to come; he didn't want to cause no aidgewise feelin's, so he thought he hadn't better come--he'd just leave it to you, Deacon."

The Deacon said, "All right, all right! We'll fix it up!" but he didn't feel so sure of it after that, though he set to work bravely.

The sun, growing warmer, fell with pleasant gleam around the kitchen door and around the chip-pile where the hens were burrowing. The men worked in their shirt-sleeves.

"Well, now, we'll share the furniture an' stuff next," said the Deacon, looking around upon his little interested semicircle of spectators. "Now, put Emmy's things over there and Serry's things over here. I'll call 'em off, and, if they's no objection, you girls can pass 'em over."

He cleared his throat and began in the voice of one in authority:--

"Thirteen pans, six to Emmy, seven to Serry;" then hastened to add: "I'll balance that by giving the biggest of the two kittles to Emmy. Rollin' pin and cake board to Serry, two flat-irons to Emmy, small tub to Emmy, large one to Serry, balanced by the tin water pail. Dozen clo'se-pins; half an' half, six o' one, half-dozen t'other," he said with a smile at his own joke, while the others actively placed the articles in separate piles.

"Stove to Serry, because she has the house, bureau to Emmy."

At this point Mrs. Gray said, "I guess that ain't quite even, Deacon; the bureau ain't worth much."

"Oh, no, no, that's all right! Let her have it," Emma protested nervously.

"Give her an extry tick, anyway," said Sarah, not to be outdone in magnanimity.

"Settle that between ye," said the Deacon.

He warmed to his work now, and towels, pans, crockery, brooms, mirrors, pillows, and bedticks were rapidly set aside in two groups on the soft soil. The poverty of the home could best be seen in the display of its pitiful furniture.

The two nieces looked on impassively, standing side by side. The men came to move the bureau and other heavy things and looked on, while the lighter things were being handed over by Mrs. Gray and the girls.

At noon they sat down in the empty kitchen and ate a cold snack--at least, the women took seats, the men stood around and lunched on hunks of boiled beef and slices of bread. There was an air of constraint upon the male portion of the party not shared by Mrs. Gray and the girls.

"Well, that settles things in the house," beamed the Deacon as he came out with the women trailing behind him; "an' now in about two jerks of a dead lamb's tail, we'll git at the things out in the barn."

"Wal, we don't know much about machines and things, but I guess we'd better go out and keep you men from fightin'," said Mrs. Gray, shaking with fun; "Ike didn't come because he didn't want to make any trouble, but I guess he might just as well 'a' come as send two such critters as Jim 'n' Hank."

The women laughed at her frankness, and in very good humor they all went out to the barn-yard.

"Now, these things can't be laid out fast as I call 'em off, but we'll do the best we can."

"Let's try the stawk first," said Jim.

The women stood around with shawls pinned over their heads while the division of the stock went forward. The young men came often within chaffing distance of the girls.

There were nine shotes nearly of a size, and the Deacon said, "I'll give Serry the odd shote."

"Why so?" asked Jim Harkey, a sullen-faced man of thirty.

"Because a shote is hard to carry off and I can balance--"

"Well, I guess you can balance fr Em 'bout as well as fr Serry."

The Deacon was willing to yield a point. "Any objection, Bill? If not, why--"

"Nope, let her go," said Bill.

"What 'ave *you* got to say 'bout it?" asked Jim, insolently.

Bill turned his slow bulk. "I guess I've a good 'eal to say--haven't I, Serry?"

Sarah reddened, but stood beside him bravely. "I guess you have, Bill, about as much as *I* have." There was a moment of dramatic tension and the girls tingled with sympathy.

"Let 'er go," said Bill, splitting a straw with his knife. He had not proposed to Sarah before and he felt an unusual exaltation to think it came so easy after all.

When they reached the cattle, Jim objected to striking a balance with a "farrer cow," and threw the Deacon's nice calculation all out of joint.

"Let it go, Jim," pleaded Emma.

"I won't do it," Ike said--"I mean I know he don't want no farrer cow, he's got two now."

The Deacon was a little nettled. "I guess that's going to stand," he said sharply.

Jim swore a little but gave in, and came back with an access of ill humor on a division of the horses.

"But I've give you the four heavy horses to balance the four others and the two-year-old," said the Deacon.

"I'll be damned if I stand that," said Jim.

"I guess you'll have to," said the Deacon.

Emma pleaded, "Let it go, Jim, don't make a fuss."

Jim raged on, "I'll be cawn-demmed if I'll stand it. I don't--Ike don't want them spavined old crows; they're all ring-boned and got the heavens." His long repressed ill-nature broke out.

"Toh, toh!" said the Deacon, "Don't kick over the traces now. We'll fix it up some way."

Emma tried to stop Jim, but he shook her off and continued to walk back and forth behind the horses munching on quietly, unconscious of any dispute about their value.

Bill sat on the oat box in his hulking way, his heels thumping a tune, his small gray eyes watching the angry man.

"Don't make a dam fool of yourself," he said placidly.

Jim turned, glad of the chance for a row, "You better keep out of this."

Bill continued to thump, the palms of his big hands resting on the edge of the box. "I'm in it," he said conclusively.

"Well, you git out of it! I ain't goin' to be bulldozed--that ain't what I come here for."

"No, I see it ain't," said Bill. "If you're after a row you can have it right here. You won't find a better place."

"There, there," urged the Deacon. "What's the use? Keep cool and don't tear your shirts."

Mrs. Gray went up to Jim and took him by the arm. "You need a good spankin' to make you good-natured," she said. "I think the Deacon has done first rate, and you ought 'o--"

"Let go o' me," he snarled, raising his hand as if to strike her.

Bill's big boot lunged out, catching Harkey in the ribs, and if the Deacon had not sprung to his assistance Jim would have been trampled to pieces by the scared horse under whose feet he found himself. He was wild with dizzy, breathless rage.

"Who hit me?" he demanded.

Bill's shapeless hulk straightened up and stood beside him as if his pink flesh had suddenly turned to oak. Out of his fat cheeks his gray eyes glared.

"I did. Want another?"

The Deacon and Jack came between and prevented the encounter which would have immediately followed. Bill went on:--

"They cain't no man lay a hand on my mother and live long after it." He was thoroughly awake now. There was no slouch to his action at that moment, and Jim was secretly pleased to have the encounter go by.

"You come here for a fuss and you can have it, both of you," Bill went on in unusual eloquence. "Deacon's tried to do the square thing, Emmy's tried to do the square thing, and Serry's kep' quiet, but you've been sour and ugly the whole time, and now it's goin' to stop."

"This ain't the last of this thing," said Jim.

"You never'll have a better time," said Bill.

Mrs. Gray and the Deacon turned in now to quiet Bill, and the settlement went on. Jim kept close watch on the proceedings, and muttered his dissent to his friends, but was careful not to provoke Bill further.

In dividing the harnesses they came upon a cow-bell hanging on a nail. The Deacon jingled it as he passed. "Goes with the bell-cow," he said, and nothing further was said of it. Jim apparently did not consider it worth quarrelling about.

At last the work was done, a terribly hard day's work. The machines and utensils were piled in separate places, the cattle separated, and the grain measured. As they were about to leave, the Deacon said finally:--

"If there's any complaint to make, let's have it right now. I want this settlement to *be* a settlement. Is everybody satisfied?"

"I am," said Emmy. "Ain't you, Serry?"

"Why, of course," said Sarah, who was a little slower of speech. "I think the Deacon has done first rate. I ain't a word of fault to find, have you, Bill?"

"Nope, not an ioty," said Bill, readily.

Jim did not agree in so many words, but, as he said nothing, the Deacon ended:--

"Well, that settles it. It ain't goin' to rain, so you can leave these things right here till Monday. I guess I'll be gettin' out for home. Good evening, everybody."

Emma drove away down the road with Jim, but Sarah remained to straighten up the house. Harkey's hired hand went home with Dade Walker who considered that walk the pleasant finish to a very interesting day's work. She sympathized for the time with the Harkey faction.

Sunday forenoon, when Bill and Sarah drove up to the farm to put things in order in the house, they found Ike Harkey walking around with that queer side glance he had, studying the piles of furniture, and mentally weighing the pigs.

He greeted them smoothly: "Yes, yes, I'm *purr*fickly satisfied, *purr*fickly! Not a word to say--better'n I expected," he added.

Bill was not quite keen enough to perceive the insult which lay in that final clause, and Sarah dared not inform him for fear of trouble.

As Harkey drove away, however, Bill had a dim feeling of dissatisfaction with him.

"He's too gol-dang polite, that feller is; I don't like such butter-mouth chaps--they'd steal the cents off'n a dead nigger's eyes."

III

The second Sunday after the partition of goods the entire Coolly turned out to church in spite of the muddy road. The men, after driving up to the door of the little white church and helping the women to alight, drove out to the sheds along the fence and gathered in knots beside their wagons in the warm spring sun. It was very pleasant there, and the men leaned with relaxed muscles upon the wagon-wheels, or sat on the fence with jack-knives in hand. The horses, weary with six days seeding, slept with closed eyes and drooping lips. Generally the talk was upon spring work, each man bragging of the number of acres he had sown during the week, but this morning the talk was all about the division which had come between the nieces of "deceased Williams." They discussed it slowly as one might eat a choice pudding in order to extract the flavor from each spoonful.

"What is it all about, anyhow?" asked Jim Cranby. "I ain't heard nothing about it." He had stood in open-mouthed perplexity trying to catch a clew. Coming late, he found it baffling.

"That shows where he lives; a man might as well live in a well as up in Molasses Gap," said one of the younger men, pointing up to the Coolly. "Why, Ike Harkey is kicking about the six shotes the Deacon put off on him."

"No, it wasn't the shotes, it was a farrer cow," put in Clint Stone.

"Well, I heard it was a shote."

"So did I," said another.

"Well, Bill Gray told Jinks Ike had stole a cow-bell that belonged to the black farrer cow," said another late comer.

"Stole a cow-bell," and they all drew closer together. This was really worth while!

"Yes, sir; Jinks told me he heard Bill say so yesterday. That's the way I heard it."

"Well, I'll be cussed, if that ain't small business for Ike Harkey!"

"How did it happen?" asked Cranby, with sharpened appetite.

"Well, I didn't hear no p'rtic'lars, but it seems the bell was hangin' on a peg in the barn, and when they got home from church it was gone, hide an' hair. Bill is dead sure Ike took it."

"Say, there'll be fun over that yet, won't they," said one of the fellows, with a grin.

"Well, Ike better keep out of Bill's way, that's all."

"Well--I ain't takin' sides. Some young'un may have took it."

"Well, let's go in, boys; I see the Elder's come. By gum, there's Harkey!" They all looked toward Harkey, who had just driven up to the door.

Harkey came into church holding his smooth, serious face a little one side, in his usual way, quiet and dignified, as if he were living up to his Sunday suit of clothes. He seemed to be unconscious of the attitude in which he stood toward most of his neighbors.

Bill and Sarah were not present, and that gave additional color to the story of trouble between the sisters.

After the sermon Deacon Harkey led the Sunday School, and the critics of his action were impressed more than usual with his smooth and quiet utterance. Emma seemed more than ordinarily worn and dispirited.

It was perfectly natural that Mrs. Gray should be the last person to know of the division which had slowly set in between the two sisters and their factions. Charitable and guileless herself, it was difficult for her to conceive of slander and envy.

Nevertheless, a division had come about, slowly, but decisively. The entire Coolly was involved in the discussion before Mrs. Gray gave it any serious attention, but one day, when Sarah came in upon her and poured out a mingled flood of sorrow and invective, the good soul was aghast.

"Well, well, I swan! There, there! I wouldn't make so much fuss over it!" she said, stripping her hands out of the biscuit dough in order to go over and pat Sarah on the shoulder. "After all that to-do gettin' settled, seems 's if you ought 'o *stay* settled. Good land! It ain't anything to have a fuss over, anyway!"

"But it is *our* cow-bell. It belonged on the black farrer cow, that Jim turned his nose up at, and he sneaked around and got it just to spite us."

"Oh, I guess not," she replied incredulously.

"Well, he did; and Emmy put him up to it, and I know she did," said Sarah in a lamentable voice.

"Sary Ann," said Mrs. Gray, as sharply as any one ever heard her speak, "that's a pretty way to talk about your sister, ain't it?"

"Well, Mrs. Jim Harkey said--"

"You never mind what Mrs. Jim Harkey said; she's a *snoop* and everybody knows it."

"But she wouldn't tell that, if it weren't so."

"Well, I tell you, I wouldn't pay no attention to what she said, and I wouldn't make such a fuss over an old cow-bell, anyway."

"But the cow-bell is only the starting point; she ain't been near the house since, and she says all kinds of mean, nasty things about us."

"All comes through Mrs. Jim, I suppose," said Mrs. Gray, with some sarcasm.

"No, it don't. She told Dade Walker that I got all the biggest flat-irons, when she knows I offered her the bureau. I did everything I could to make her feel satisfied."

"I know you did, and now you must just keep cool till I see Emmy myself."

When Mrs. Gray started out on her mission of pacification, she found it to be entirely out of her control. The Coolly was actively partisan. One party stood by the Harkeys, and another took Sarah's part, while the *tertium quid* said it was "all dam foolishness."

Mrs. Gray was appalled at the state of affairs, but struggled to maintain a neutral position. In May, when Bill and Sarah were married, things had reached such a stage that Emma was not invited to the wedding supper. Nothing could have cut deeper than this neglect, and thereafter adherents of the third remove declined to speak when passing; some even refused to nod. The Harkey faction also condemned the early marriage of Bill and Sarah as unseemly.

Soon after, Emma came again to see Mrs. Gray, salty with tears, and crushed with the slight Sarah had put upon her. She was a plain pale woman, anyway, and weeping made her pitiable. She explained the situation with her head on Mrs. Gray's lap:--

"She never has been to see me since that day, and--but I hoped she'd come and see me, but she never sent me any invitation to her wedding." She choked with sobs at the memory of it.

Mrs. Gray realized the enormity of the offence, and she could only put her arms around Emma's back and say, "There, there, I wouldn't take on so about it." As a matter of fact, she had striven to have Bill send an invitation to his brother-in-law, but Bill was inflexible on that point. With the sound of the stolen cow-bell ringing in his ears, he could not bring himself to ask Ike Harkey into his house.

After Emma grew a little calmer, Mrs. Gray tried again to bridge the chasm. "Now, I just believe if you would go to Sarah--"

"I can't do that! She'd slam the door in my face. Jim's wife says Sarah said I shouldn't pick a single currant out of the garden this year!"

"I don't go much on what Jim's wife says," put in Mrs. Gray, guardedly. She had begun to feel that Jim's wife was the main disturbing element.

The sisters really suffered from their separation. They had been so used to running in at all times of the day that each missed the other wofully. It had been their habit whenever they needed each other to help cook, or cut a dress, to hang a cloth out of the chamber window, a sign which was sure to bring help post-haste; but now nothing would induce either of them to make the first concession.

Two or three times when Emma, feeling especially lonely, was on the point of hanging out the signal, she was prevented by the thought of some cruel message Mrs. Jim had brought. Jim lived on Ike's farm in a small house that had been Emma's first home, and Mrs. Jim was almost as much in her house as in her own. She had no children, and was a mischief-maker, not so much from ill will as from a love of dramatic situations; it was her life, this dramatic play of loves and hates among her friends and neighbors.

Emma feared her husband, too; he was so self-contained, and so inexorably moral, at least in appearance. He sweetly said he bore no ill will toward the Grays, but he must insist that his wife should not visit them until they apologized. He took the matter very serenely, however.

The sound of the cow-bell was a constant daily irritation to Bill; he was slow to wrath, but the bell seemed to rasp on his tenderest nerve; it had a curiously exultant sound heard in the early morning--it seemed to voice Harkey's triumph. Bill's friends were astonished at the change in him. He grew dark and thunderous with wrath whenever Harkey's name was mentioned.

One day Ike's cattle broke out of the pasture into Bill's young oats, and though Ike hurried after them, it seemed to Bill he might have got them out a little quicker than he did. He said nothing then, however, but when a few days later they broke in again, he went over there in very bad humor.

"I want this thing stopped," he said.

Ike was mending the fence. He smiled in his sweet way, and said smoothly, "I'm sorry, but when they once git a taste of grain it's pretty hard to keep 'em--"

"Well, there ought to be a new fence here," said Bill. "That fence is as rotten as a pumpkin."

"I s'pose they had; yes, sir, that's so," Harkey assented quickly. "I'm ready to build my half, you know," he said, "any time--any time you are."

"Well, I'll build mine to-morrow," said Bill. "I can't have your cattle pasturing on my oats."

"All right, all right. I'll have mine done as quick as yourn."

"Well, see't you do; I don't want my grain all tramped into the ground and I ain't a-goin' to have it."

Harkey hastily gathered up his tools, saying, "Yes, yes, all right."

"You might send home that cow-bell of mine while you're about it," Bill called after him, but Harkey did not reply or turn around.

IV

The line fence ran up the bluff toward the summit of the ridge to the east. On each side it was set with smooth green slopes of pasture and pleasant squares of wheat, until it reached the woods and ran under the oaks and walnuts and birches to the cliffs of lichen-spotted stone which topped the summit.

Bill walked the full length of the fence to see how much of the old material could be used. He recognized the bell on one of Harkey's cattle, and he grew wrathful at the sight of another cow peacefully gnawing the fresh, green grass, with the bell, which belonged to the black cow, on her neck.

It was mid-spring. Everywhere was the vivid green of the Wisconsin landscape; the slopes were like carefully tended lawns, without stumps or stones; the groves rose up the hills, pink and gray and green in softly rounded billows of cherry bloom and tender oak and elm foliage. Here and there under the forest tender plants and flowers had sprung up, slender and succulent like all productions of a rich and shadowed soil.

Early the next morning Bill and his two hands began to work in the meadow, working toward the ridge; Harkey and his brother and their hands began at the ridge and worked down toward the meadow; each party could hear the axes of the other ringing in the still, beautiful spring air.

Bill's hired hand, on his way to the spring about the middle of the forenoon, met Jim Harkey, who said wickedly in answer to a jocular greeting:--

"Don't give me none of your lip now; we'll break your necks for two cents."

The hand came to Bill with the story. "Bill, they're on the fight."

"Oh, I guess not."

"Well, they be. We better not run up against them to-day if we don't want trouble."

"Well, I ain't goin' to dodge 'em," said Bill; "I ain't in that business; if they want fight, we'll accommodate 'em with the best we've got in the shop."

At noon, Harkey's gang went to dinner a little earlier, and, as they came down the path quite near, Jim said with a sneer:--

"You managed to git the easiest half of the fence, didn't yeh?"

"We took the half that belongs to us," said Bill. "*We* don't take what don't belong to us."

"Cow-bells, for instance," put in Bill's hired hand, with a provoking intonation.

Jim stopped and his face twisted with rage; Ike paused a little farther on down the path. Jim came closer.

"Say, I know what you're driving at and you're a liar, and for a leather cent I'd lick you like hell!"

"You can't do it. You don't weigh enough."

"Oh, shut up, Jack," called Bill. "Go about y'r business," he said to Jim, "or I'll take a hand."

Jim's face flamed into a wild wrath. His lips lifted at the corners like a wolf's as he leaped the fence with a wild spring and lunged against Bill's breast. The larger man went down, but his great arms closed about his assailant's neck with a bear-like grip. Jim could neither rise nor strike; with a fury no animal could equal he pressed his hands upon Bill's throat and thrust his elbow into his mouth in the attempt to strangle him. He meant murder.

Jack faced the other men, who came running up. Ike seized a stake, and was about to leap over, when Jack raised an axe in the air.

"Stand off!" he yelled, and his voice rang through the woods; he noticed how harsh and wild it sounded in the silence.

He heard a grunting sound, and gave one glance at the two men writhing amid the ferns silent as grappling bull-dogs.

Bill had fallen in the brake and seemed wedged in. At last there came into his heart a terrible shiver, a blind desperation that uncoiled all the strength in his great bulk. Then he seemed to bound from the ground, as he twisted the other man under him, and shook himself free.

He dragged one great Maul of a fist free and drove it at the face beneath him. Jim saw it coming and turned his head. The blow fell on his neck and his carnivorous grin smoothed out as if sleep had suddenly fallen upon him. He drew a long, shuddering breath, his muscles quivered, and his clenched hands fell open.

Bill rose upon his knees and looked at him. A deep awe fell upon him. In the pause he heard the robins rioting from the trees in the lower valley, and the woodpecker cried resoundingly.

"You've killed him!" cried Ike, as he climbed hastily over the fence.

Bill did not reply. The men faced each other in solemn silence, all wish for murder going out of their hearts. The sobbing cry of the mourning dove, which they had been hearing all day, suddenly assumed new meaning.

"*Ah, woe, woe is me!*" it cried.

"Bring water!" shouted Ike, kneeling beside his brother.

Bill knelt there with him, while the rest dashed water upon Jim's face.

At last he began to breathe like a fretful, waking child, and looking up into the scared faces above him, motioned the water away from him. The angry look came back into his face, but it was mixed with perplexity.

He touched his hand to his face and brought it down covered with blood. "How much am I hurt?" he said fiercely.

"Oh, nothing much," Ike hastened to say; "it's just a scratch."

Jim struggled to his elbow and looked around him. It all seemed to come back to him. "Did he do it fair?" he demanded of his companions.

"Oh, yes; it was fair enough," said Ike.

Jim looked at Jack. "That *thing* didn't hit me with his axe, did he?"

Jack grinned. "No, but I was just a-goin' to when Bill belted you one," was the frank and convincing reply.

Jim got up slowly and faced Bill. "Well, that settles it; it's all right! You're a better man than I am. That's all I've got to say."

He climbed back over the fence and led the way down to dinner without looking back.

"What give ye that lick on the side o' the head, Jim?" his wife asked, when he sat down at the dinner-table.

"Never you mind," he replied surlily, but he added, "Ike's axe come off, and give me a side-winder."

Bill carefully removed all marks of his struggle and walked into dinner shamefacedly, all muscle gone out of his bulk of fat. His sudden return to primeval savagery grew monstrous in the cheerful kitchen, with its noise of hearty children, sizzling meat, and the clatter of dishes.

The stove was not drawing well and Sarah did not notice anything out of the way with Bill.

"I never see such a hateful thing in all my life," she said, referring to the stove. "That rhubarb duff won't be fit for a hog to eat; the undercrust ain't baked the least bit yet, and I have had it in there since fifteen minutes after 'leven."

Bill said generously, "Oh, well, never mind, Serry; we'll worry it down some way."

V

All through July and August Mrs. Jim Harkey seemed to renew her endeavors to keep the sisters apart; she still carried spiteful tales to and fro, amplifying them with an irresistible histrionic tendency. It had become a matter of self-exoneration with her then. She could not stop now without seeming to admit she had been mischief-making in the past. If the sisters should come together, her lies would instantly appear.

Emma grew morose, irritable, and melancholy; she was suffering for her sister's wholesome presence, and yet, being

under the dominion of the mischief-maker, dared not send word or even mention the name of her sister in the presence of the Harkeys.

Mrs. Jim came up to the house to stay as Emma got too ill to work, and took charge of the house. The children hated her fiercely, and there were noisy battles in the kitchen constantly wearing upon the nerves of the sick woman who lay in the restricted gloom of the sitting room bed-chamber, within hearing of every squall.

There were moments of peace only when Ike was in the house. Smooth as he was, Jim's wife was afraid of him. There was something compelling in his low-toned voice; his presence subdued but did not remove strife.

His silencing of the tumult hardly arose out of any consideration for his wife, but rather from his inability to enjoy his paper while the clamor of war was going on about him.

He was not a tender man, and yet he prided himself on being a very calm and even-tempered man. He kept out of Bill's way, and considered himself entirely justified in his position regarding the cow-bell. It is doubtful if he would have accepted an apology.

Emma suffered acutely from Mrs. Harkey's visits. Something mean and wearying went out from her presence, and her sharp, bold face was a constant irritation. Sometimes when she thought herself alone, Emma crawled to the window which looked up the Coolly, toward Sarah's home, and sat there silently longing to send out a cry for help. But at the sound of Jane Harkey's step she fled back into bed like a frightened child.

She became more and more childish and more flighty in her thoughts as her time of trial drew near, and she became more subject to her jailer. She grew morbidly silent, and her large eyes were restless and full of pleading.

One day she heard Mrs. Smith talking out in the kitchen.

"How is Emmy to-day, Mrs. Jim?"

"Well, not extry. She ain't likely to come out as well as usual this time, I don't think," was the brutally incautious reply; "she's pretty well run down, and I wouldn't be surprised if she had some trouble."

"I suppose Sarah will be down to help you," said Mrs. Smith.

"Well, I guess not--not after what she's told."

"What has she told?" asked Mrs. Smith, in her sweet and friendly voice.

"Why, she said she wouldn't set foot in this house if we all *died*."

"I never heard her say that, and I don't believe she ever *did* say it," said Mrs. Smith, firmly.

Emma's heart glowed with a swift rush of affection toward her sister and Mrs. Smith; she wanted to cry out her faith in Sarah, but she dared not.

Mrs. Harkey slammed the oven door viciously. "Well, you can believe it or not, just as you like; I heard her say it."

"Well, I didn't, so I can't believe it."

When Mrs. Smith came in, Emma was ready to weep, so sweet and cheery was her visitor's face.

She found no chance to talk with her, however, for Mrs. Harkey kept near them during her visit. Once, while Mrs. Jim ran out to look at the pies, Mrs. Smith whispered: "Don't you believe what they say about Sarah. She's just as kind as can be--I know she is. She's looking down this way every day, and I know she'd come down instanter if you'd send for her. I'm going up that way, and--"

She found no further chance to say anything, but from that moment Emma began to think of letting Sarah know how much she needed her. She planned to hang out the cloth as she used to. She exaggerated its importance in the way of an invalid, until it attained the significance of an act of treason. She felt like a criminal even in thinking about it.

Several times in the night she dreamed she had put the cloth out and that Jim and his wife had seen it and torn it down. She awoke two or three times to find herself sitting up in bed staring out of the window, through which the moon shone and the multitudinous sounds of the mid-summer insects came sonorously.

Once her husband said, "What's the matter? It seems to me you'd rest better if you'd lay down and keep quiet." His voice was low enough, but it had a peculiar inflection, which made her sink back into bed by his side, shivering with fear and weeping silently.

The next day Jim and her husband both went off to town, and Jim's wife, after about ten o'clock, said:--

"Now, Emmy, I'm going down to Smith's to get a dress pattern, and I want you to keep quiet right here in bed. I'll be right back; I'll set some water here, and I guess you won't want anything else until I get back. I'll run right down and right back."

After hearing the door close, Emma lay for a few minutes listening, waiting until she felt sure Mrs. Harkey was well out of the yard, then she crept out of bed and crawled to the window. Mrs. Jim was far down the road; she could see her blue dress and her pink sunbonnet.

The sick woman seized the sheet and pulled it from the bed; the clothes came with it, but she did not mind that. She pulled herself painfully up the stairway and across the rough floor of the chamber to the window which looked toward her sister's house, and with a wild exultation flung the sheet far out and dropped on her knees beside the open window.

She moaned and cried wildly as she waved the sheet. The note of a scared child was in her voice.

"Oh, Serry, come quick! Oh, I *need* you, Serry! I didn't mean to be mean; I want to see you *so*! Oh, dear, oh, dear! Oh, Serry, come quick!"

Then space and the world slipped away, and she knew nothing of time again until she heard the anxious voice of Sarah below.

"Emmy, where *are* you, Emmy?"

"Here I be, Serry."

With swift, heavy tread Sarah hurried up the stairs, and the dear old face shone upon her again; those kind gray eyes full of anxiety and of love.

Emma looked up like a child entreating to be lifted. Her look so pitifully eager went to the younger sister's maternal heart.

"You poor, dear soul! Why didn't you send for me before?"

"Oh, Serry, don't leave me again, will you?"

When Mrs. Harkey returned she found Sarah sitting by Emma's side in the bed-chamber. Sarah looked at her with all the grimness her jolly fat face could express.

"You ain't needed *here*," she said coldly. "If you want to do anything, find a man and send him for the Doctor--quick. If she dies you'll be her murderer."

Mrs. Harkey was subdued by the bitterness of accusation in Sarah's face as well as by Emma's condition. She hurried down the Coolly and sent a boy wildly galloping toward the town. Then she went home and sat down by her own hearthstone feeling deeply injured.

When the Doctor came he found a poor little boy baby crying in Sarah's arms. It was Emma's seventh child, but the ever sufficing mother-love looked from her eyes undimmed, limitless as the air.

"Will it live, Doctor? It's so little," she said, with a sigh.

"Oh, yes, I suppose so!" said the Doctor, as if its living were not entirely a blessing to itself or others. "Yes, I've seen lots of lusty children begin life like that. But," he said to Sarah at the door, "she needs better care than the babe!"

"She'll git it," said Sarah, with deep solemnity, "if I have to move over here--and live."

A FAIR EXILE

The train was ambling across the hot, russet plain. The wind, strong and warm and dry, sweeping up from the south, carried with it the subtle odor of September grass and gathered harvests. Out of the unfenced roads the dust arose in long lines, like smoke from some hidden burning which the riven earth revealed. The fields were tenanted with

thrashing crews, the men diminished by distance to pygmies, the long belt of the engine flapping and shining like a ribbon in the flaming sunlight.

The freight-cars on the accommodation train jostled and rocked about and heaved up laterally till they resembled a long line of awkward, frightened, galloping buffaloes. The one coach was scantily filled with passengers, mainly poorly clothed farmers and their families.

A young man seated well back in the coach was looking dreamily out of the window, and the conductor, a keen-eyed young fellow, after passing him several times, said, in a friendly way:

"Going up to Boomtown, I imagine."

"Yes--if we ever get there."

"Oh, we'll get there. We won't have much more switching. We've only got an empty car or two to throw in at the junction."

"Well, I'm glad of that. I'm a little impatient, because I've got a case coming up in court, and I'm not exactly fixed for it."

"Your name is Allen, I believe."

"Yes; J. H. Allen, of Sioux City."

"I thought so. I've heard you speak."

The young lawyer was a tall, slender, dark-eyed man, rather sombre in appearance. He did not respond to the invitation in the conductor's voice.

"When do you reach the junction?"

"Next stop. We're only a few minutes late. Expect to meet friends there?"

"No; thought I'd get a lunch, that's all."

At the junction the car became pretty well filled with people. Two or three Norwegian families came clattering in, the mothers clothed in heavy shawls and cheap straw hats, the flaxen-haired children in faded cottonade and blue denims. They filled nearly half the seats. Several drummers came in, laughing loudly, bearing heavy valises. Then Allen heard, above the noise, the shrill but sweet voice of a girl, and caught the odor of violets as two persons passed him and took a seat just before him.

The man he knew by sight and reputation as a very brilliant young lawyer--Edward Benson, of Heron Lake. The girl he knew instantly to be utterly alien to this land and people. She was like a tropic bird seen amid the scant foliage of northern hills. There was evidence of great care and taste in every fold of her modish dress. Her hat was simple but in the latest city fashion, and her gloves were spotless. She gave off an odor of cleanliness and beauty.

She was very young and slender. Her face was piquant but not intellectual, and scarcely beautiful. It pleased rather by its life and motion and oddity than by its beauty. She looked at her companion in a peculiar way--trustfully, almost reverently--and yet with a touch of coquetry which seemed perfectly native to every turn of her body or glance of her eyes.

Her companion was a fine Western type of self-made man. He was tall and broad-shouldered, but walked a little stooping, like a man of fifty. He wore a long Prince Albert frock-coat, hanging loosely from his rather square shoulders. His white vest was noticeably soiled by his watch chain, and his tie was disarranged.

His face was very fine and good. His eyes were gray-blue, deep and quiet, but slightly smiling, as were his lips, which his golden-brown mustache shaded but did not hide. He was kept smiling in this quizzical way by the nervous chatter of the girl beside him. His profile, which was the view Allen had of him, was striking. His strong, straight nose and abrupt forehead formed a marked contrast to the rather characterless nose and retreating forehead of the girl.

The first words that Allen distinguished out of the merry war in which they seemed engaged were spoken in the tone of pretty petulance such women use--a coquette's defence.

"You did! you did! you *did!* Now! You know you did! You told me that! You told me you despised girls like me!"

"I said I despised women who had no object in life but dress," he replied, rather soberly.

"But you were hopping on me; you meant me, now! You can't deny it! You despise me, I know you do!" She challenged

his flattery in her pouting self-depreciation.

The young man tried to stop her in her course, to change her mood, which was descending to real feeling. His low words were lost in the rumble of the car.

"Yes, yes, try to smooth it over; but you can't fool me any more. But I don't want you to flatter me and lie to me the way Judge Stearns did," she added, with a sudden change of manner. "I like you because you're straight."

The phrase with which she ended seemed to take on a new meaning, uttered by those red lips in childish pout.

"Now, why are you down on the judge? I don't see," said the man, as if she had gone back to an old attack.

"Well, if you'd seen what I have, you'd understand." She turned away and looked out of the window. "Oh, this terrible country! I'd die out here in six weeks. I know I should."

The young lawyer was not to be turned aside.

"Of course, I'm pleased to have you throw the judge over and employ me, but, all the same, I think you do him an injustice. He's a good, square man."

"Square man!" she said, turning to him with a sudden fury in her eyes. "Do you call it square for a man--married, and gray-haired, too--to take up with a woman like Mrs. Shellberg? Say, do you, now?"

"Well, I don't quite believe--"

"Oh, I *lie*, do I?" she cried, with another swift change to reproach. "You can't take my word for Mrs. Shellberg's visits to his office."

"But he was her lawyer."

"But you know what kind of a woman she is! She didn't need to go there every day or two, did she? What did he always receive her in his private office for? Come, now, tell me that!"

"I don't know that he did," persisted the lawyer.

A sort of convulsion passed over her face, her little hands clinched, and the tears started into her eyes. Her voice was very quiet.

"You think I lie, then?"

"I think you are mistaken, just as other jealous women have--"

"You think I'm jealous, do you?"

"You act like a jeal--"

"Jealous of that gray-haired old wretch? No, sir! I--I--" She struggled to express herself. "I liked him, and I hated to lose all my faith in men. I thought he was good and honest when he prayed--Oh, I've seen him pray in church, the old hypocrite!" Her fury returned at the recollection.

Her companion's face grew grave. The smile went out of his eyes, leaving them dark and sorrowful.

"I understand you now," he said, at last. She turned to look at him. "My practice in the divorce business out here has almost destroyed my faith in women. If it weren't for my wife and sister--"

She broke in eagerly: "Now I *know* you know what I mean. Sometimes I think men are--devils!" She thrust this word forth, and her little face grew dark and strained. "But the judge kept me from thinking--I never loved my father; he didn't care for me; all he wanted to do was to make ten thousand barrels of beer a year and sell it; and the judge seemed like a father to me till *she* came and destroyed my faith in him."

"But--well, let Mrs. S. go. There are lots of good men and pure women in the world. It's dangerous to think there aren't--especially for a handsome young woman like you. You can't afford to keep in that kind of a mood long."

She looked at him curiously. "That's what I like about you," she said, soberly. "You talk to me as if I had some sense--as if I were a human being. If you were to flatter me, now, and make love to me, I never would believe in any man again."

He smiled again in his frank, good way, and drew a picture from his pocket. It was a picture of a woman bending down over a laughing, naked child, sprawling frogwise in her lap. The woman's face was broad and intellectual and handsome. The look of splendid maternity was in her eyes. They both looked at the picture in silence. The girl sighed.

"I wish I was as good as that woman looks."

"You can be if you try."

"Not with a big Chicago brewer for a father, and a husband that beats you whenever the mood takes him."

"I admit that's hard. I think the atmosphere of that Heron Lake hotel isn't any great help to you."

"Oh, they're a gay lot there! We fight like cats and dogs." A look of slyness and boldness came over her face. "Mrs. Shellberg hates me as hard as I do her. She used to go around telling: 'It's very peculiar, you know'"--she imitated her rival's voice--"but no matter which end of the dining-room I sit, all the men look that way!"

The young lawyer laughed at her in spite of himself.

And she went on: "But they don't, now. That's the reason she hates me," she said, in conclusion. "The men don't notice her when I'm around."

To hear her fresh young lips utter those words with their vile inflections was like taking a sudden glimpse into the underworld, where harlots dwell and the spirits of unrestrained lusts dance in the shadowy recesses of the human heart.

Allen, hearing this fragmentary conversation, fascinated yet uneasy, looked at the pair with wonder. They seemed quite unconscious of their public situation.

The young lawyer looked straight before him, while the girl, swept on by her ignoble rage, displayed still more of the moral ulceration which had been injected into her young life.

"I don't see what men find about her to like--unless it is her eyes. She's got beautiful eyes. But she's vulgar--ugh! The stories she tells--right before men, too! She'd kill any one that got ahead of her, that woman would! And yet she'll come into my room and cry and cry, and say: 'Don't take him away from me! Leave him to me!' Ugh! It makes me sick." She stamped her foot, then added, irrelevantly: "She wears a wig, too. I suppose that old fool of a judge thinks it's her own hair."

The lawyer sat in stony silence. His grave face was accusing in its set expression, and she felt it, and was spurred on to do still deeper injustice to herself--an insane perversity.

"Not that I care a cent--I'm not jealous of her. I ain't so bad off for company as she is. She can't take anybody away from me, but she must go and break down my faith in the judge."

She bit her lips to keep from crying out. She looked out of the window again, seeking control.

The "divorce colony" never appeared more sickening in its inner corruptions than when delineated by this dainty young girl. Allen could see the swarming men about the hotels; he could see their hot, leering eyes and smell their liquor-laden breaths as they named the latest addition to the colony or boasted of their associations with those already well known.

The girl turned suddenly to her companion.

"How do those people live out here on their farms?"

She pointed at a small shanty where the whole family stood to watch the train go by.

"By eating boiled potatoes and salt pork."

"Salt pork!" she echoed, as if salt pork were old boot-heels or bark or hay. "Why, it takes four hours for salt pork to digest!"

He laughed again at her childish irrelevancy. "So much the better for the poor. Where'd you learn all that, anyway?"

"At school. Oh, you needn't look so incredulous! I went to boarding-school. I learned a good deal more than you think."

"Well, so I see. Now, I should have said pork digested in three hours, speaking from experience."

"Well, it don't. What do the women do out here?"

"They work like the men, only more so."

"Do they have any new things?"

"Not very often, I'm afraid."

She sighed. After a pause, she said:

"You were raised on a farm?"

"Yes. In Minnesota."

"Did you do work like that?" She pointed at a thrashing-machine in the field.

"Yes, I ploughed and sowed and reaped and mowed. I wasn't on the farm for my health."

"You're very strong, aren't you?" she asked, admiringly.

"In a slab-sided kind of a way--yes."

Her eyes grew abstracted.

"I like strong men. Ollie was a little man, not any taller than I am, but when he was drunk he was what men call a--a holy terror. He struck me with the water-pitcher once--that was just before baby was born. I wish he'd killed me." She ended in a sudden reaction to hopeless bitterness. "It would have saved me all these months of life in this terrible country."

"It might have saved you from more than you think," he said, quietly, tenderly.

"What do you mean?"

"You've been brought up against women and men who have defiled you. They've made your future uncertain."

"Do you think it's so bad as that? Tell me!" she insisted, seeing his hesitation.

"You're on the road to hell!" he said, in a voice that was very low, but it reached her. It was full of pain and grave reprimand and gentleness. "You've been poisoned. You're in need of a good man's help. You need the companionship of good, earnest women instead of painted harlots."

Her voice shook painfully as she replied:

"You don't think I'm *all* bad?"

"You're not bad at all--you're simply reckless. *You* are not to blame. It depends upon yourself now, though, whether you keep a true woman or go to hell with Mrs. Shellberg."

The conductor eyed them, as he passed, with an unpleasant light in his eyes, and the drummers a few seats ahead turned to look at them. The tip had passed along from lip to lip. They were like wild beasts roused by the presence of prey. Their eyes gleamed with relentless lust. They eyed the little creature with ravening eyes. Her helplessness was their opportunity.

Allen, sitting there, entered into the terror and the tragedy of the girl's life. He imagined her reckless, prodigal girlhood; the coarse, rich father; the marriage, when a thoughtless girl, with a drunken, dissolute boy; the quarrels, brutal beatings; the haste to secure a divorce; the contamination of the crowded hotels in Heron Lake, where this slender young girl--naturally pure, alert, quick of impulse--was like a lamb among lustful wolves. His heart ached for her.

The deep, slow voice of the lawyer sounded on. His eyes, turned toward her, had no equivocal look. He was a brother speaking to a younger sister. The tears fell down her cheeks, upon her folded hands. Her widely opened eyes seemed to look out into a night of storms.

"Oh, what shall I do?" she moaned. "I wish I was dead--and baby, too!"

"Live for the baby--let him help you out."

"Oh, he can't! I don't care enough for him. I wish I was like other mothers, but I'm not. I can't shut myself up with a baby. I'm too young."

He saw that. She was seeking the love of a man, not the care of a child. She had the wifely passion, but not the mother's love. He was silent; the case baffled him.

"Oh, I wish you could help me! I wish I had you to help me all the time! I do! I don't care what you think--*I do! I do!*"

"Our home is open to you and baby, too," he said, slowly. "My wife knows about you, and--"

"Who told her--did you?" she flashed out again, angrily, jealously.

"Yes. My wife is my other self," he replied, quietly.

She stared at him, breathing heavily, then looked out of the window again. At last she turned to him. She seemed to refer to his invitation.

"Oh, this terrible land! Oh, I couldn't stay here! I'd go insane. Perhaps I'm going insane, anyway. Don't you think so?"

"No, I think you're a little nervous, that's all."

"Oh! Do you think I'll get my divorce?"

"Certainly, without question."

"Can I wait and go back with you?"

"I shall not return for several days. Perhaps you couldn't bear to wait in this little town; it's not much like the city."

"Oh, dear! But I can't go about alone. I hate these men, they stare at me so! I wish I was a man. It's awful to be a woman, don't you think so? Please don't laugh."

The young lawyer was far from laughing, but this was her only way of defending herself. These pert, bird-like ways formed her shield against ridicule and misprision.

He said, slowly, "Yes, it's an awful thing to be a woman, but then it's an awful responsibility to be a man."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that we are responsible, as the dominant sex, for every tragic, incomplete woman's life."

"Don't you blame Mrs. Shellberg?" she said, forcing him to a concrete example with savage swiftness.

"No. She had a poor father and a poor husband, and she must earn her own living some way."

"She could cook, or nurse, or something like that."

"It isn't easy to find opportunity to cook or nurse. If it were as easy to earn a living in a pure way as it is in a vicious way, all men would be rich and virtuous. But what had you planned to do after your divorce?"

"Oh, I'm going to travel for two years. Then I'll try to settle down."

"What you need is a good husband, and a little cottage where you'd have to cook your own food--and tend the baby."

"I wouldn't cook for any man living," she broke in, to express her bitterness that he could so coldly dispose of her future. "Oh, this terrible train! Can't it go faster? If I'd realized what a trip this was, I wouldn't have started."

"This is the route you all go," he replied, with grim humor, and his words pictured a ceaseless stream of divorcees.

She resented his classing her with the rest, but she simply said: "You despise me, don't you? But what can we do? You can't expect us to live with men we hate, can you? That would be worse than Mrs. Shellberg."

"No, I don't expect that of you. I'd issue a divorce coupon with every marriage certificate, and done with it," he said, in desperate disgust. "Then this whole cursed business would be done away with. It isn't a question of our laxity of divorce laws," he said, after a pause, "it's a question of the senseless severity of the laws in other States. That's what throws this demoralizing business into our hands here."

"It pays, don't it? I know I've paid for everything I've had."

"Yes, that's the demoralizing thing. It draws a gang of conscienceless attorneys here, and it draws us who belong here off into dirty work, and it brings us into contact with men and women--I'm sick of the whole business."

She had hardly followed him in his generalizations. She brought him back to the personal.

"You're sick of me, I know you are!" She leaned her head on the window-pane. Her eyes closed. "Oh, I wish my heart would stop beating!" she said, in a tense, profoundly significant tone.

Allen, sitting so close behind them, was forced to overhear, so piercingly sweet was her voice. He trembled for fear some one else might hear her. It seemed like profanation that any one but God should listen to this outcry of a quivering, writhing soul.

She faced her companion again. "You're the only man I know, now, that I respect, and you despise me."

"No, I don't; I pity you."

"That's worse. I want you to help me. Oh, if you could go with me, or if I could be with you!" Her gloved hands strained together in the agony of her desire.

His calm lips did not waver. He did not smile, even about the eyes. He knew her cry sprang from her need of a brother, not from the passion of a woman.

"Our home is yours just as long as you can bear the monotony of our simple lives," he said, in his quiet way, but it was deep-throated and unmistakable in its sincerity.

She laid her hand on his arm and clasped it hard, then turned away her head, and they rode in silence.

After they left the car Allen sat, with savage eyes and grimly set mouth, going over the problem again and again. He saw that young and helpless creature walking the gantlet between endless ranks of lustful, remorseless men, snatching at her in selfish, bestial desire.

It made him bitter and despairing to think that women should be helpless--that they should need some man to protect them against some other man. He cursed the laws and traditions that had kept women subordinate and trivial and deceptive and vacillating. He wished they could be raised to the level of the brutes till, like the tigress or she-wolf, they could not only defend themselves, but their young.

He tried to breathe a sigh of relief that she had gone out of his life, but he could not. It was not so easy to shake off the shadow of his responsibility. He followed her in imagination on her downward path till he saw her stretching out her hands in pitiful need to casual acquaintances--alone and without hope; still petite, still dainty in spite of all, still with flashes of wit, and then--

He shuddered. "O my God! Upon whom does the burden of guilt lie?"

On the night of his return he sat among his romping babes, debating whether he should tell the story to his wife or not. As the little ones grew weary the noise of the autumn wind--the lonely, woful, moaning prairie wind--came to his ears, and he shuddered. His wife observed it.

"What is it, Joe? Did you get a chill?"

"Oh no. The wind sounds a little lonesome to-night, that's all." But he took his little girl into his arms and held her close.

AN ALIEN IN THE PINES

I

A man and a woman were pacing up and down the wintry station platform, waiting for a train. On every side the snow lay a stained and crumpled blanket, with here and there a light or a chimney to show the village sleeping beneath.

The sky was a purple-black hemisphere, out of which the stars glittered almost white. The wind came out of the west, cold but amiable; the cracked bell of a switch-engine gurgled querulously at intervals, followed by the bumping of coupling freight-cars; roosters were crowing, and sleepy train-men were assembling in sullen silence.

The couple walked with arms locked like lovers, but the tones of their voices had the quality which comes after marriage. They were man and wife.

The woman's clear voice arose. "Oh, Ed, isn't this delicious? What one misses by not getting up early!"

"Sleep, for instance," laughed her husband.

"Don't drag me down. You know what I mean. Let's get up early every morning while we're up here in the woods."

"Shouldn't wonder if we had to. There'll be a lot to do, and I want to get back to Chicago by the 1st of February."

"This is an experience! Isn't it still? When is our train due?"

"Due now; I think that is our headlight up the track."

As he spoke an engine added its voice to the growing noise of the station, and drew solemnly down the frosty steel.

An eruption of shapeless forms of men from the depot filled the one general coach of the train. They nearly all were dressed in some sort of fur coat, and all had the look of men accustomed to out-door life—powerful, loud-voiced, unrefined. They were, in fact, travelling men, business men, the owners of mills or timber. The stolid or patient ox-like faces of some Norwegian workmen, dressed in gay Mackinac jackets, were sprinkled about.

The young wife was a fine type of woman anywhere, but these surroundings made her seem very dainty and startlingly beautiful. Her husband had the fair skin of a city man, but his powerful shoulders and firm step denoted health and wholesome living. They were both good to look at.

They soon felt the reaction to sleepiness which comes to those not accustomed to early rising, and the wife, soothed by the clank of the train, leaned her head on her husband's shoulder and dozed. He looked out upon the landscape, glad that his wife was not observing it. He did not know such desolation existed in Wisconsin.

On every side were the evidences of a ruined forest land. A landscape of flat wastes, of thinned and burned and uprooted trees. A desolate and apparently useless land.

Here and there a sawmill stood gray and sagging, surrounded by little cabins of unpainted wood, to testify to the time when great pines stood all about, and the ring of the swamper's axe was heard in the intervals of silence between the howls of a saw.

To the north the swells grew larger. Birch and tamarack swamps alternated with dry ridges on which an inferior pine still grew. The swamps were dense tangles of broken and uprooted trees. Slender pike-like stumps of fire-devastated firs rose here and there, black and grim skeletons of trees.

It was a land that had been sheared by the axe, torn by the winds, and blasted by fire.

Off to the west low blue ridges rose, marking the boundaries of the valley which had been washed out ages ago by water. After the floods pine forest had sprung up, and these in their turn had been sheared away by man. It lay now awaiting the plough and seeder of the intrepid pioneer.

Suddenly the wife awoke and sat up. "Why, we haven't had any breakfast!"

He smiled at her childish look of bewilderment. "I've been painfully aware of it for some time back. I've been suffering for food while you slept."

"Why didn't you get into the basket?"

"How could I, with you on my manly bosom?"

She colored up a little. They had not been married long, evidently. "How considerate you are!"

They were soon eating a breakfast with the spirit of picnickers. Occasionally she looked out of the window.

"What a wild country!" she said. He did not emphasize its qualities to her; rather, he distracted her attention from its desolation.

The train roared round its curves, conforming with the general course of the river. On every hand were thickening signs of active lumber industry. They flashed by freight trains loaded with logs or lumber or ties. Mills in operation grew thicker.

The car echoed with the talk of lumber. A brisk man with a red mustache was exhibiting a model of a machine to cut certain parts of machinery out of "two by fours." Another was describing a new shingle-mill he had just built.

A couple of elderly men, one a German, were discussing the tariff on lumber. The workmen mainly sat silent.

"It's all so strange!" the young wife said, again and again.

"Yes, it isn't exactly the Lake Shore Drive."

"I like it. I wish I could smell the pines."

"You'll have all the pines you can stand before we get back to Chicago."

"No, sir, I'm going to enjoy every moment of it; and you're going to let me help, you know--look over papers, and all that. I'm the heiress, you must remember," she added, wickedly.

"Well, we won't quarrel about that until we see how the legacy turns out. It may not be worth my time up here. I shall charge you roundly as your lawyer, depend on that."

The outlook grew more attractive as the train sped on. Old Mosinee rose, a fine rounded blue shape, on the left.

"Why, there's a mountain! I didn't know Wisconsin had such a mountain as that."

"Neither did I. This valley is fine. Now, if your uncle's estates only included that hill!"

The valley made off to the northwest with a bold, large, and dignified movement. The coloring, blue and silver, purple-brown and bronze-green, was harmonious with the grouping of lines. It was all fresh and vital, wholesome and very impressive.

From this point the land grew wilder--that is to say, more primeval. There was more of Nature and less of man. The scar of the axe was here and there, but the forest predominated. The ridges of pine foliages broke against the sky, miles and miles, in splendid sweep.

"This must be lovely in summer," the wife said, again and again, as they flashed by some lake set among the hills.

"It's fine now," he replied, feeling the thrill of the sportsman. "I'd like to shoulder a rifle and plunge into those snowy vistas. How it brings the wild spirit out in a man! Women never feel that delight."

"Oh, yes, we do," she replied, glad that something remained yet unexplained between them. "We feel just like men, only we haven't the strength of mind to demand a share of it with you."

"Yes, you feel it at this distance. You'd come back mighty quick the second night out."

She did not relish his laughter, and so looked away out of the window. "Just think of it--Uncle Edwin lived here thirty years!"

He forebore to notice her inconsistency. "Yes, the wilderness is all right for a vacation, but I prefer Chicago for the year round."

When they came upon Ridgeley, both cried out with delight.

"Oh, what a dear, picturesque little town!" she said.

"Well, well! I wonder how they came to build a town without a row of battlemented stores?"

It lay among and upon the sharp, low, stumpy pine ridges in haphazard fashion, like a Swiss village. A small brook ran through it, smothered here and there in snow. A sawmill was the largest figure of the town, and the railway station was the centre. There was not an inch of painted board in the village. Everywhere the clear yellow of the pine flamed unstained by time. Lumber piles filled all the lower levels near the creek. Evidently the town had been built along logging roads, and there was something grateful and admirable in its irregular arrangement. The houses, moreover, were all modifications of the logging camps; even the drug store stood with its side to the street. All about were stumps and fringes of pines, which the lumbermen, for some good reason, had passed by. Charred boles stood purple-black out of the snow.

It was all green and gray and blue and yellow-white and stern. The sky was not more illimitable than the rugged forest which extended on every hand.

"Oh, this is glorious--glorious!" said the wife. "Do I own some of this town?" she asked, as they rose to go out.

"I reckon you do."

"Oh, I'm so glad!"

As they stepped out on the platform, a large man in corduroy and wolf-skin faced them like a bandit.

"Hello, Ed!"

"Hello, Jack! Well, we've found you. My wife, Mr. Ridgeley. We've come up to find out how much you've embezzled,"

he said, as Ridgeley pulled off an immense glove to shake hands all round.

"Well, come right over to the hotel. It ain't the Auditorium, but then, again, it ain't like sleeping outdoors."

As they moved along they heard the train go off, and then the sound of the saw resumed its domination of the village noises.

"Was the town named after you, or you after the town?" asked Field.

"Named after me. Old man didn't want it named after him; would kill it," he said.

Mr. and Mrs. Field found the hotel quite comfortable and the dinner wholesome. They beamed upon each other.

"It's going to be delightful," they said.

Ridgeley was a bachelor, and made his home at the hotel also. That night he said: "Now we'll go over the papers and records of your uncle's property, and then we'll go out and see if the property is all there. I imagine this is to be a searching investigation."

"You may well think it. My wife is inexorable."

As night fell, the wife did not feel so safe and well pleased. The loud talking in the office below and the occasional whooping of a crowd of mill-hands going by made her draw her chair nearer and lay her fingers in her husband's palm.

He smiled indulgently. "Don't be frightened, my dear. These men are not half so bad as they sound."

II

Mrs. Field sat in the inner room of Ridgeley's office, waiting for the return of her husband with the team. They were going out for a drive.

Ridgeley was working at his books, and he had forgotten her presence.

She could not but feel a deep admiration for his powerful frame and his quick, absorbed action as he moved about from his safe to his desk. He was a man of great force and ready decision.

Suddenly the door opened and a stranger entered. He had a sullen and bitter look on his thin, dark face. Ridgeley's quick eyes measured him, and his hand softly turned the key in his money drawer, and as he faced about he swung shut the door of the safe.

The stranger saw all this with eyes as keen as Ridgeley's. A cheerless and strange smile came upon his face.

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "I'm low, but I ain't as low as that."

"Well, sir, what can I do for you?" asked Ridgeley. Mrs. Field half rose, feeling something tense and menacing in the attitude of the two men.

But the intruder quietly answered, "You can give me a job if you want to."

Ridgeley remained alert. His eyes ran over the man's tall frame. He looked strong and intelligent, although his eyes were fevered and dull.

"What kind of a job?"

"Any kind that will take me out into the woods and keep me there."

There was a self-accusing tone in his voice that Ridgeley felt.

"What's your object? You look like a man who could do something else. What brings you here?"

The man turned with a sudden resolution to punish himself. His voice expressed a terrible loathing.

"Whiskey, that's what. It's a hell of a thing to say, but I can't let liquor alone when I can smell it. I'm no common hand, or I wouldn't be if I--But let that go. I can swing an axe, and I'm ready to work. That's enough. Now the question is, can you find a place for me?"

Ridgeley mused a little. The young fellow stood there, statuesque, rebellious.

Then Ridgeley said, "I guess I can help you out that much." He picked up a card and a pencil. "What shall I call you?"

"Oh, call me Williams; that ain't my name, but it'll do."

"What you been doing?"

"Everything part of the time, drinking the rest. Was in a livery-stable down at Wausau last week. It came over me, when I woke yesterday, that I was gone to hell if I stayed in town. So I struck out; and I don't care for myself, but I've got a woman to look out for--" He stopped abruptly. His recklessness of mood had its limits, after all.

Ridgeley pencilled on a card. "Give this to the foreman of No. 6. The men over at the mill will show you the teams."

The man started toward the door with the card in his hand. He turned suddenly.

"One thing more. I want you to send ten dollars of my pay every two weeks to this address." He took an envelope out of his pocket. "It don't matter what I say or do after this, I want that money sent. The rest will keep me in tobacco and clothing. You understand?"

Ridgeley nodded. "Perfectly. I've seen such cases before."

The man went out and down the walk with a hurried, determined air, as if afraid to trust his own resolution.

As Ridgeley turned toward his desk he met Mrs. Field, who faced him with tears of fervent sympathy in her eyes.

"Isn't it awful?" she said, in a half whisper. "Poor fellow, what will become of him?"

"Oh, I don't know. He'll get along some way. Such fellows do. I've had 'em before. They try it awhile here; then they move. I can't worry about them."

Mrs. Field was not listening to his shifty words. "And then, think of his wife--how she must worry."

Ridgeley smiled. "Perhaps it's his mother or a sister."

"Anyway, it's awful. Can't something be done for him?"

"I guess we've done about all that can be done."

"Oh, I wish I could help him! I'll tell Ed about him."

"Don't worry about him, Mrs. Field; he ain't worth it."

"Oh yes, he is. I feel he's been a fine fellow, and then he's so self-accusing."

Her own happiness was so complete, she could not bear to think of others' misery. She told her husband about Williams, and ended by asking, "Can't we do something to help the poor fellow?"

Field was not deeply concerned. "No; he's probably past help. Such men are so set in their habits, nothing but a miracle or hypnotism can save them. He'll end up as a 'lumber Jack,' as the townsmen call the hands in the camps."

"But he isn't that, Edward. He's finer, some way. You feel he is. Ask Mr. Ridgeley."

Ridgeley merely said: "Yes, he seemed to me to be more than a common hand. But, all the same, it won't be two weeks before he'll be in here as drunk as a wild cat, wanting to shoot me for holding back his money."

In this way Williams came to be to Mrs. Field a very important figure in the landscape of that region. She often spoke of him, and on the following Saturday night, when Field came home, she anxiously asked, "Is Williams in town?"

"No, he hasn't shown up yet."

She clapped her hands in delight. "Good! good! He's going to win his fight."

Field laughed. "Don't bet on Williams too soon. We'll hear from him before the week is out."

"When are we going to visit the camp?" she asked, changing the subject.

"As soon as it warms up a little. It is too cold for you."

She had a laugh at him. "You were the one who wanted to 'plunge into the snowy vistas.'"

He evaded her joke on him by assuming a careless tone. "I'm not plunging as much as I was; the snow is too deep."

"When you go I want to go with you--I want to see Williams."

"Ha!" he snorted, melodramatically. "She scorns me faithful heart. She turns--"

Mrs. Field smiled faintly. "Don't joke about it, Ed. I can't get that wife out of my mind."

III

A few very cold gray days followed, and then the north wind cleared the sky; and, though it was still cold, it was pleasant. The sky had only a small white cloud here and there to make its blueness the more profound.

Ridgeley dashed up to the door with a hardy little pair of broncos hitched to a light pair of bobs, and Mrs. Field was tucked in like a babe in a cradle.

Almost the first thing she asked was, "How is Williams?"

"Oh, he's getting on nicely. He refused to sleep with his bunk-mate, and finally had to lick him, I understand, to shut him up. Challenged the whole camp, then, to let him alone or take a licking. They let him alone, Lawson says. G'lang there, you rats!"

Mrs. Field said no more, for the air was whizzing by her ears, and she hardly dared look out, so keen was the wind; but as soon as they entered the deeps of the forest it was profoundly still.

The ride that afternoon was a glory she never forgot. Everywhere yellow-greens and purple shadows. The sun in a burnished blue sky flooded the forests with light, striking down through even the thickest pines to lay in fleckings of radiant white and gold upon the snow.

The trail (it was not a road) ran like a graceful furrow over the hills, around little lakes covered deep with snow, through tamarack swamps where the tracks of wild things thickened, over ridges of tall pine clear of brush, and curving everywhere amid stumps, where dismantled old shanties marked the site of the older logging camps. Sometimes they met teams going to the store. Sometimes they crossed logging roads--wide, smooth tracks artificially iced, down which mountainous loads of logs were slipping, creaking, and groaning. Sometimes they heard the dry click-clock of the woodmen's axes or the crash of falling trees deep in the wood. When they reached the first camp Ridgeley pulled up the steaming horses at the door and shouted, "Hello, the camp!"

A tall old man with a long red beard came out. He held one bare red arm above his eyes. He wore an apron.

"Hello, Sandy!"

"Hello, Mr. Ridgeley!"

"Ready for company?"

"Am always ready for company," he said, with a Scotch accent.

"Well, we're coming in to get warm."

"Vera weel."

As they went in, under the roofed shed between the cook's shanty and the other and larger shanty, Mrs. Field sniffed. Sandy led them past a large pyramid composed of the scraps of beef bones, egg-shells, cans, and tea grounds left over during the winter. In the shed itself hung great slabs of beef.

It was all as untidy and suggestive of slaughter as the nest of a brood of eagles.

Sandy was beginning dinner on a huge stove spotted with rust and pancake batter. All about was the litter of his preparation. Beef--beef on all sides, and tin dishes and bare benches and huge iron cooking-pans.

Mrs. Field was glad to get out into the sunlight again. "What a horrible place! Are they all like that?"

"No, my camps are not like that--or, I should say, *our* camps," Ridgeley added, with a smile.

"Not a gay place at all," said Field, in exaggerated reserve.

But Mrs. Field found her own camps not much better. True, the refuse was not raised in pyramidal shape before the front door, and the beef was a little more orderly, but the low log huts, the dim cold light, the dingy walls and floors, the lack of any womanly or home touch, the tin dishes, the wholesale cooking, all struck upon her with terrible force.

"Do human beings live here?" she asked Ridgeley, when he opened the door of the main shanty of No. 6.

"Forty creatures of the men kind sleep and house here," he replied.

"To which the socks and things give evidence," said Field, promptly, pointing toward the huge stove which sat like a rusty-red cheese in the centre of the room. Above it hung scores of ragged gray and red socks and Mackinac boots and jackets which had been washed by the men themselves.

Around were the grimy bunks where the forty men slept like tramps in a steamer's hold. The quilts were grimy, and the posts greasy and shining with the touch of hands. There were no chairs--only a kind of rude stool made of boards. There were benches near the stove, nailed to the rough floor. In each bunk, hanging to a peg, was the poor little imitation-leather hand-bag which contained the whole wardrobe of each man, exclusive of the tattered socks and shirts hanging over the stove.

The room was chill and cold and gray. It had only two small windows. Its doors were low. Even Mrs. Field was forced to stoop in entering. This helped to make it seem like a den. There were roller-towels in the corner and wash-basins, and a grindstone which made it seem like a barn. It was, in fact, more cheerless than a barn, and less wholesome.

"Doesn't that hay in the bunks get a--a--sometimes?" asked Field.

"Well, yes, I shouldn't wonder, though the men are pretty strict about that. They keep pretty free from bugs, I think. However, I shouldn't want to run no river chances on the thing myself." Ridgeley smiled at Mrs. Field's shudder of horror.

"Is this the place?" The men laughed. She had asked that question so many times before.

"Yes, *this* is where Mr. Williams hangs out. Say, Field, you'll need to make some new move to hold your end up against Williams."

Mrs. Field felt hurt and angry at his rough joke. In the dim corner a cough was heard, and as a yellow head raised itself over the bunk-board a man presented a ghastly face. His big blue eyes fixed themselves on the lovely woman with a look of childish wonder.

"Hello, Gus--didn't see you! What's the matter--sick?"

"Yah, ai baen hwick two days. Ai tank ai lack to hav doketer."

"All right, I'll send him up. What seems the matter?"

As they talked, Mrs. Field again chilled with the cold gray comfortlessness of it all: to be sick in such a place! The silent appearance of the man out of his grim corner was startling. She was glad when they drove out into the woods again, where the clear sunshine fell and the pines stood against the blazing winter sky motionless as iron trees. Her pleasure in the ride was growing less. To her delicate sense this life was sordid, not picturesque. She wondered how Williams endured it. They arrived at No. 8 just as the men were trailing down the road to work, after eating their dinner. Their gay-colored jackets of Mackinac wool stood out like trumpet notes in the prevailing white and blue and bronze-green.

The boss and the sealer came out and met them, and after introductions they went into the shanty to dinner. The cook was a deft young Norwegian--a clean, quick, gentlemanly fellow with a fine brown mustache. He cleared a place for them at one end of the long table, and they sat down.

It was a large camp, but much like the others. On the table were the same cheap iron forks, the tin plates, and the small tin basins (for tea) which made up the dinner-set. Basins of brown sugar stood about.

"Good gracious! Do people still eat brown sugar? Why, I haven't seen any of that for ages!" cried Mrs. Field.

The stew was good and savory, and the bread fair. The tea was not all clover, but it tasted of the tin. Mrs. Field said:

"Beef, beef--everywhere beef. One might suppose a menagerie of desert animals ate here. Edward, we must make things more comfortable for our men. They must have cups to drink out of; these basins are horrible."

It was humorous to the men, this housewifely suggestion.

"Oh, make it napkins, Allie!"

"You can laugh, but I sha'n't rest after seeing this. If you thought I was going to say, 'Oh, how picturesque!' you're mistaken. I think it's barbarous."

She was getting impatient of their patronizing laughter, as if she were a child. They changed their manner to one of

acquiescence, but thought of her as a child just the same.

After dinner they all went out to see the crew working. It was the biggest crew anywhere in the neighborhood. Ridgeley got out and hitched the team to a tree, and took Field up to the skidway. Mrs. Field remained in the sleigh.

Near her "the swamping team," a span of big, deep-red oxen, came and went among the green tops of the fallen pines. They crawled along their trails in the snow like some strange machinery, and the boy in a blue jacket moved almost as listlessly. Somewhere in the tangle of refuse boughs the swamper's axes click-clocked, saws uttered their grating, rhythmic snarl, and great trees at intervals shivered, groaned, and fell with soft, rushing, cracking sweeps into the deep snow, and the swamper swarmed upon them like Lilliputians attacking a giant enemy.

There was something splendid (though tragic) in the work, but the thought of the homelessness of the men, their terrible beds, and their long hours of toil oppressed the delicate and refined woman. She began to take on culpability. She was partly in authority now, and this system must be changed. She was deep in plans for improvement, in shanties and in sleeping-places, when the men returned.

Ridgeley was saying: "No, we control about thirty thousand acres of pine as good as that. It ain't what it was twenty years ago, but it's worth money, after all."

It was getting near to dark as they reached No. 6 again, and Ridgeley drew up and helped them out and into the cook's shanty.

Mrs. Field was introduced to the cook, a short, rather sullen, but intelligent man. He stood over the red-hot stove, laying great slices of beef in a huge dripping-pan. He had a taffer, or assistant, in the person of a half-grown boy, at whom he jerked rough orders like hunks of stove wood. Some hit the boy and produced noticeable effects, others did not.

Meanwhile a triumphant sunset was making the west one splendor of purple and orange and crimson, which came over the cool green rim of the pines like the *Valhalla March* in Wagner.

Mrs. Field sat there in the dim room by the window, seeing that splendor flush and fade, and thinking how dangerous it was to ask where one's wealth comes from in the world. Outside, the voices of the men thickened; they were dropping in by twos and fours, with teams and on foot.

The assistant arranged the basins in rows, and put one of the iron forks and knives on either side of each plate, and filled the sugar-basins, and dumped in the cold beans, and split the bread into slabs, and put small pots of tea here and there ready for the hands of the men.

At last, when the big pans of toast, the big plates of beef, were placed steaming on the table, the cook called Field and Ridgeley, and said:

"Set right here at the end." He raised his arm to a ring which dangled on a wire. "Now look out; you'll see 'em come--sidewise." He jerked the ring, and disappeared into the kitchen.

A sudden tumult, shouts, trampling, laughter, and the door burst open and they streamed in: Norwegians, French, half-breeds--dark-skinned fellows, all of them, save the Norwegians. They came like a flood, but they fell silent at sight of a woman, so beautiful and strange to them.

All words ceased. They sank into place beside the table with the thump of falling sand-bags. They were all in their shirt-sleeves, but with faces cleanly washed, and the most of them had combed their hair; but they seemed very wild and hairy to Mrs. Field. She looked at her husband and Ridgeley with a grateful pleasure; it was so restful to have them close beside her.

The men ate like hungry dogs. They gorged in silence. Nothing was heard but the clank of knives on tin plates, the drop of heavy platters of food, and the occasional muttered words of some one asking for the bread or the gravy.

As they ate they furtively looked with great curiosity and admiration up at the dainty woman. Their eyes were bright and large, and gleamed out of the obscure brown of their dimly lighted faces with savage intensity--so it seemed to Mrs. Field, and she dropped her eyes before their glare.

Her husband and Ridgeley tried to enter into conversation with those sitting near. Ridgeley seemed on good terms with them all, and ventured a joke or word, at which they laughed with terrific energy, and fell as suddenly silent again.

As Mrs. Field looked up the second time she saw the dark, strange face of Williams a few places down, and opposite her. His eyes were fixed on her husband's hands with a singular intensity. Her eyes followed his, and the beauty of her

husband's hands came to her again with new force. They were perfectly shaped, supple, warm-colored, and strong. Their color and deftness stood out in vivid contrast to the heavy, brown, cracked, and calloused, paw-like hands of the workmen.

Why should Williams study her husband's hands? If he had looked at her she would not have been surprised. The other men she could read. They expressed either frank, simple admiration or furtive desire. But this man looked at her husband, and his eyes fell often upon his own hands, which trembled with fatigue. He handled his knife clumsily, and yet she could see he, too, had a fine hand--a slender, powerful hand, like that people call an artist hand--a craftsman-like hand.

He saw her looking at him, and he flashed one enigmatical glance into her eyes, and rose to go out.

"How you getting on, Williams?" Ridgeley asked.

Williams resented his question. "Oh, I'm all right," he said, sullenly.

The meal was all over in an incredibly short time. One by one, two by two, they rose heavily and lumbered out with one last, wistful look at Mrs. Field. She will never know how seraphic she seemed sitting there amid those rough surroundings--the dim, red light of the kerosene lamp falling across her clear pallor, out of which her dark eyes shone with liquid softness, made deeper and darker by her half-sorrowful tenderness for these homeless fellows.

An hour later, as they were standing at the door, just ready to take to their sleigh, they heard the scraping of a fiddle.

"Oh, some one is going to play!" Mrs. Field cried, with visions of the rollicking good times she had heard so much about, and of which she had seen nothing so far. "Can't I look in?"

Ridgeley was dubious. "I'll go and see," he said, and entered the door. "Boys, Mrs. Field wants to look in a minute. Go on with your fiddling, Sam--only I wanted to see that you weren't sitting around in dishabill."

This seemed a good joke, and they all howled and haw-hawed gleefully.

"So go right ahead with your evening prayers. All but--you understand!"

"All right, captain," said Sam, the man with the fiddle.

When Mrs. Field looked in, two men were furiously grinding axes; several were sewing on ragged garments; all were smoking; some were dressing chapped or bruised fingers. The atmosphere was horrible. The socks and shirts were steaming above the huge stove; the smoke and stench for a moment were sickening, but Ridgeley pushed them just inside the door.

"It's better out of the draught."

Sam jiggled away on the violin. The men kept time with the cranks of the grindstone, and all faces turned with bashful smiles and bold grins at Mrs. Field. Most of them shrank a little from her look, like shy animals.

Ridgeley threw open the window. "In the old days," he explained to Mrs. Field, "we used a fireplace, and that kept the air better."

As her sense of smell became deadened the air seemed a little more tolerable to Mrs. Field.

"Oh, we must change all this," she said. "It is horrible."

"Play us a tune," said Sam, extending the violin to Field. He did not think Field could play. It was merely a shot in the dark on his part.

Field took it and looked at it and sounded it. On every side the men turned face in eager expectancy.

"He can play, that feller."

"I'll bet he can. He handles her as if he knew her."

"You bet your life. Tune up, Cap."

Williams came from the obscurity somewhere, and looked over the shoulders of the men.

"Down in front!" somebody called, and the men took seats on the benches, leaving Field standing with the violin in hand. He smiled around upon them in a frank, pleased way, quite ready to show his skill. He played *Annie Laurie*, and a storm of applause broke out.

"Hoo-ray! Bully for you!"

"Sam, you're out of it!"

"Sam, your name is Mud!"

"Give us another, Cap!"

"It ain't the same fiddle!"

He played again some simple tune, and he played it with the touch which showed the skilled amateur. As he played, Mrs. Field noticed a growing restlessness on Williams' part. He moved about uneasily. He gnawed at his finger-nails. His eyes glowed with a singular fire. His hands drummed and fingered. At last he approached, and said, roughly:

"Let me take that fiddle a minute."

"Oh, cheese it, Williams!" the men cried. "Let the other man play."

"What do *you* want to do with the fiddle--think it's a music-box?" asked Sam, its owner.

"Go to hell!" said Williams. As Field gave the violin over to him, his hands seemed to tremble with eagerness.

He raised his bow, and struck into an imposing, brilliant strain, and the men fell back in astonishment.

"Well, I'll be damned!" gasped the owner of the violin.

"Keep quiet, Sam."

Mrs. Field looked at her husband. "Why, Ed, he is playing *Sarasate!*"

"That's what he is," he returned, slangily, too much astonished to do more than gaze. Williams played on.

There was a faint defect in the high notes, as if his fingers did not touch the strings properly, but his bow action showed cultivation and breadth of feeling. As he struck into one of those difficult octave-leaping movements his face became savage. On the E string a squeal broke forth; he flung the violin into Sam's lap with a ferocious curse, and then, extending his hands, hard, crooked to fit the axe-helve, calloused and chapped, he said to Field:

"Look at my hands! Lovely things to play with, aren't they?"

His voice trembled with passion. He turned and went outside. As he passed Mrs. Field his head was bowed, and he was uttering a groaning cry like one suffering physical pain.

"That's what drink does for a man," Ridgeley said, as they watched Williams disappear down the swamper's trail.

"That man has been a violinist," said Field. "What's he doing up here?"

"Came to get away from himself, I guess," Ridgeley replied.

"I'm afraid he's failed," said Field, as he put his arm about his wife and led her to the sleigh.

The ride home was made mainly in silence. "Oh, the splendid stillness!" the woman kept saying in her heart. "Oh, the splendid moonlight, the marvellous radiance!" Everywhere a heavenly serenity--not a footstep, not a bell, not a cry, not a cracking tree--nothing but vivid light, white snow dappled and lined with shadows, and trees etched against a starlit sky. Unutterable splendor of light and sheen and shadow. Wide wastes of snow so white the stumps stood like columns of charcoal. A night of Nature's making, when she is tired of noise and blare of color.

And in the midst of it stood the camp, with its reek of obscenity, foul odors, and tobacco smoke, to which a tortured soul must return.

IV

The following Saturday afternoon, as Ridgeley and Field entered the office, Williams rose to meet them. He looked different--finer some way, Field imagined. At any rate, he was perfectly sober. He was freshly shaven, and though his clothes were rough, he appeared the man of education he really was. His manner was cold and distant.

"I'd like to be paid off, Mr. Ridgeley," he said. "I guess what's left of my pay will take me out of this."

"Where do you propose to go?" Ridgeley asked, with kindly interest.

Williams must have perceived his kindness, for he answered: "I'm going home to my wife, to my violin. I am going to try living once more."

After he had gone out, Field said, "I wonder if he'll do it?"

"Oh, I shouldn't wonder. I've seen men brace up just as mysteriously as that and stay right by their resolutions. I thought he didn't look like a common lumber Jack when he came in."

"Ed, your playing did it!" Mrs. Field cried, when she heard of Williams' resolution. "Oh, how happy his wife will be! She'll save him yet!"

"Well, I don't know; depends on what kind of a woman she is."

BEFORE THE LOW GREEN DOOR

Matilda Bent was dying; there was no doubt of that now, if there had been before. The gruff old physician--one of the many overworked and underpaid country doctors--shook his head and pushed by Joe Bent, her husband, as he passed through the room which served as dining-room, sitting-room, and parlor. The poor fellow slouched back to his chair by the stove as if dazed, and before he could speak again the doctor was gone.

Mrs. Ridings was just coming up the walk as the doctor stepped out of the door.

"Oh, doctor, how is she?"

"She is a dying woman, madam."

"Oh, don't say that, doctor! What's the matter?"

"Cancer."

"Then the news was true--"

"I don't know anything of the news, Mrs. Ridings, but Mrs. Bent is dying from the effects of a cancer primarily, which she has had for years--since her last child, which died in infancy, you remember."

"But, doctor, she never told me--"

"Neither did she tell me. But no matter now. I have done all I can for her. If you can make death any easier for her, go and do it. You will find some opiate powders there with directions. Keep the pain down at all hazards. Don't let her suffer; that is useless. She is likely to last a day or two; but if any change comes to-night, send for me."

When the good matron entered the dowdy, suffocating little room where Matilda Bent lay gasping for breath, she was sick for a moment with sympathetic pain. There the dying woman lay, her world narrowed to four close walls, propped up on the pillows near the one little window. Her eyes seemed very large and bright, and the brow, made prominent by the sinking away of the cheeks, gave evidence that it was an uncommon woman who lay there quietly waiting the death angel.

She smiled, and lifted her eyebrows in a ghastly way.

"Oh, Marthy!" she breathed.

"Matildy, I didn't know you was so bad or I'd 'a' come before. Why didn't you let me know?" said Mrs. Ridings, kneeling by the bed and taking the ghostly hands of the sufferer in her own warm and soft palms. She shuddered as she kissed the thin lips.

"I think you'll soon be around ag'in," she added, in the customary mockery of an attempt at cheer. The other woman started slightly, turned her head, and gazed on her old friend long and intently. The hollowness of her neighbor's words stung her.

"I hope not, Marthy--I'm ready to go. I want to go. I don't care to live."

The two women communed by looking for a long time in each other's eyes, as if to get at the very secretest desires and hopes of the heart. Tears fell from Martha's eyes upon the cold and nerveless hands of her friend--poor, faithful hands, hacked and knotted and worn by thirty years of ceaseless daily toil. They lay there motionless upon the coverlet, pathetic protest for all the world to see.

"Oh, Matildy, I wish I could do something for you! I want to help you so! I feel so bad that I didn't come before! Ain't they somethin'?"

"Yes, Marthy--jest set there--till I die--it won't be long," whispered the pale lips. The sufferer, as usual, was calmer than her visitor, and her eyes were thoughtful.

"I will! I will! But oh, must you go? Can't somethin' be done? Don't yo' want the minister to be sent for?"

"No, I'm all ready. I ain't afraid to die. I ain't worth savin' now. Oh, Marthy, I never thought I'd come to this--did you? I never thought I'd die--so early in life--and die--unsatisfied."

She lifted her head a little as she gasped out these words with an intensity of utterance that thrilled her hearer--a powerful, penetrating earnestness that burned like fire.

"Are you satisfied?" pursued the steady lips. "My life's a failure, Marthy--I've known it all along--all but my children. Oh, Marthy, what'll become o' them? This is a hard world."

The amazed Martha could only chafe the hands, and note sorrowfully the frightful changes in the face of her friend. The weirdly calm, slow voice began to shake a little.

"I'm dyin', Marthy, without ever gittin' to the sunny place we girls--used to think--we'd git to, by-an'-by. I've been a-gittin' deeper 'n' deeper--in the shade--till it's most dark. They ain't been no rest--n'r hope fr me, Marthy--none. I ain't--"

"There, there, Tillie, don't talk so--don't, dear! Try to think how bright it'll be over there--"

"I don't know nawthin' about over there; I'm talkin' about here. I ain't had no chance here, Marthy."

"He will heal all your care--"

"He can't wipe out my sufferin's here."

"Yes, He can, and He will. He can wipe away every tear and heal every wound."

"No--he--can't. God Himself can't wipe out what has been. Oh, Mattie, if I was only there!--in the past--if I was only young and purty ag'in! You know how tall I was! How we used to run--oh, Mattie, if I was only there! The world was all bright then--wasn't it? We didn't expect--to work all our days. Life looked like a meadow, full of daisies and pinks, and the nicest ones and the sweetest birds were just a little ways on--where the sun was--it didn't look--wasn't we happy?"

"Yes, yes, dear. But you mustn't talk so much." The good woman thought Matilda's mind was wandering. "Don't you want some med'cine? Is your fever risin'?"

"But the daisies and pinks all turned to weeds," she went on, waiting a little, "when we picked 'em. An' the sunny place--has been always behind me, and the dark before me. Oh, if I was only there--in the sun--where the pinks and daisies are!"

"You mustn't talk so, Mattie! Think about your children! You ain't sorry y'had them? They've been a comfort to y'? You ain't sorry you had 'em?"

"I ain't glad," was the unhesitating reply of the failing woman; and then she went on, in growing excitement: "They'll haf to grow old jest as I have--git bent and gray, an' die. They ain't be'n much comfort to me: the boys are like their father, and Julyie's weak. They ain't no happiness--for such as me and them."

She paused for breath, and Mrs. Ridings, not knowing what to say, did better than speak. She fell to stroking the poor face and the hands, getting more restless each moment. It was as if Matilda Fletcher had been silent so long, had borne so much without complaint, that now it burst from her in a torrent not to be stayed. All her most secret doubts and her sweetest hopes seemed trembling on her lips or surging in her brain, racking her poor, emaciated frame for utterance. Now that death was sure, she was determined to rid her bosom of its perilous stuff. Martha was appalled.

"I used to think--that when I got married I'd be perfectly happy; but I never have been happy sence. It was the beginning of trouble to me. I never found things better than they looked; they was always worse. I've gone further an' further from the sunshiny meadow, an' the birds an' flowers--and I'll never git back to 'em again, never!" She ended with a sob and a low wail.

Her face was horrifying with its intensity of pathetic regret. Her straining, wide-open eyes seemed to be seeing those sunny spots in the meadow.

"Mattie, sometimes when I'm asleep I think I am back there ag'in--and you girls are there--an' we're pullin' off the leaves of the wild sunflower--'rich man, poor man, beggar man'--and I hear you all laugh when I pull off the last leaf; and then I come to myself--and I'm an old, dried-up woman, dyin'--unsatisfied!"

"I've felt that way a little myself, Matildy," confessed the watcher, in a scared whisper.

"I knew it, Mattie; I knew you'd know how I felt. Things have been better for you. You ain't had to live in an old log house all your life, an' work yourself to skin an' bone for a man you don't respect nor like."

"Matildy Bent, take that back! Take it back, for mercy sake! Don't you dare die thinkin' that--don't you dare!"

Bent, hearing her voice rising, came to the door, and the wife, recognizing his step, cried out:

"Don't let him in! Don't! I can't bear him--keep him out; I don't want to see him ag'in."

"Who do you mean? Not Joe?"

"Yes! Him!"

Had the dying woman confessed to murder, good Martha could not have been more shocked. She could not understand this terrible revulsion in feeling, for she herself had been absolutely loyal to her husband through all the trials which had come upon them.

But she met Bent at the threshold, and, closing the door, went out with him into the summer kitchen, where the rest of the family were sitting. A gloomy silence fell on them all after the greetings were over. The men were smoking; all were seated in chairs tipped back against the wall. Joe Bent, a smallish man, with a weak, good-natured face, asked, in a hoarse whisper:

"How is she, Mis' Ridings?"

"She seems quite strong, Mr. Bent. I think you had all better go to bed; if I want you, I can call you. Doctor give me directions."

"All right," responded the relieved man. "I'll sleep on the lounge in the other room. If you want me, just rap on the door."

When, after making other arrangements, Martha went back to the bedroom, she was startled to hear the sick woman muttering to herself, or perhaps because she had forgotten Martha's absence.

"But the shadows on the meadow didn't stay; they passed on, and then the sun was all the brighter on the flowers. We used to string sweet-williams on spears of grass--don't you remember?"

Martha gave her a drink of the opiate in the glass, adjusted her on the pillow, and threw open the window, even to the point of removing the screen, and the gibbous moon flooded the room with light. She did not light a lamp, for its flame would heat the room. Besides, the moonlight was sufficient. It fell on the face of the sick woman till she looked like a thing of marble--all but her dark eyes.

"Does the moon hurt you, Tilly? Shall I put down the curtain?"

The woman heard with difficulty, and when the question was repeated, said slowly:

"No, I like it." After a little: "Don't you remember, Mattie, how beautiful the moonlight seemed? It seemed to promise happiness--and love--but it never come for us. It makes me dream of the past now--just as it did of the future then; an' the whip-poor-wills, too--"

The night was perfectly beautiful, such a night as makes dying an infinite sorrow. The summer was at its liberalest. Innumerable insects of the nocturnal sort were singing in unison with the frogs in the pools. A whip-poor-will called, and its neighbor answered like an echo. The leaves of the trees, glossy from the late rain, moved musically to the light west wind, and the exquisite perfume of many flowers came in on the breeze.

When the failing woman sank into silence, Martha leaned her elbow on the window-sill, and, gazing far into the great deeps of space, gave herself up to unwonted musings upon the problems of human life. She sighed deeply at times. She found herself at moments in the almost terrifying position of a human soul in space. Not a wife, not a mother, but just a soul facing the questions which harass philosophers. As she realized her condition of mind she apprehended

something of the thinking of the woman on the bed. Matilda had gone beyond--or far back--of the wife and mother.

The hours wore on; the dying woman stirred uneasily now and then, whispering a word or phrase which related to her girlhood--never to her later life. Once she said:

"Mother, hold me. I'm so tired."

Martha took the thin form in her arms, and, laying her head close beside the sunken cheek, sang, in half breath, a lullaby till the sufferer grew quiet again.

The lustrous moon passed over the house, leaving the room dark, and still the patient watcher sat beside the bed, listening to the slow breathing of the dying one. The cool air grew almost chill; the east began to lighten, and with the coming light the tide of life sank in the dying body. The head, hitherto restlessly turning, ceased to move. The eyes grew quiet and began to soften like a sleeper's.

"How are you now, dear?" asked the watcher several times, bending over the bed, and bathing back the straying hair.

"I'm tired--tired, mother--turn me," she murmured drowsily, with heavy lids drooping.

Martha patted the pillows once again, and turned her friend's face to the wall. The poor, tortured, restless brain slowly stopped its grinding whirl, and the thin limbs, heavy with years of hopeless toil, straightened out in an endless sleep.

Matilda Fletcher had found rest.

A PREACHER'S LOVE STORY

I

The train drew out of the great Van Buren Street depot at 4.30 of a dark day in late October. A tall young man, with a timid look in his eyes, was almost the last passenger to get on, and his pale face wore a worried look as he dropped into an empty seat and peered out at the squalid city reeling past in the mist.

The buildings grew smaller, and vacant lots appeared stretching away in flat spaces, broken here and there by ridges of ugly, squat, little tenement blocks. Over this landscape vast banners of smoke streamed, magnified by the misty rain which was driven in from the lake.

At last there came a swell of land clothed on with trees. It was still light enough for him to see that they were burr oaks, and the young student's heart thrilled at sight of them. His forehead smoothed out, and his eyes grew tender with boyish memories.

He was seated thus, with head leaning against the pane, when another young man came down the aisle from the smoking-car and took a seat beside him with a pleasant word.

He was a handsome young fellow of twenty three or four. His face was large and beardless, and he had a bold and keen look, in spite of the bang of yellow hair which hung over his forehead. Some commonplaces passed between them, and then silence fell on each. The conductor coming through the car, the smooth-faced young fellow put up a card to be punched, and the student handed up a ticket, simply saying, "Kesota."

After a decent pause the younger man said, "Going to Kesota, are you?"

"Yes."

"So am I. I live there, in fact."

"Do you? Then perhaps you can tell me the name of your County Superintendent. I'm looking for a school." He smiled frankly. "I'm just out of Jackson University, and--"

"That so? I'm an Ann Arbor man myself." They took a moment for mutual warming up. "Yes, I know the Superintendent. Why not come right up to my boarding-place, and to-morrow I'll introduce you? Looking for a school,

eh? What kind of a school?"

"Oh, a village school, or even a country school. It's too late to get a good place; but I've been sick, and--"

"Yes, the good positions are all snapped up; still, you might by accident hit on something. I know Mott; he'll do all he can for you. By-the-way, my name's Allen."

The young student understood this hint and spoke. "Mine is Stacey."

The younger man mused a few minutes, as if he had forgotten his new acquaintance. Suddenly he roused up.

"Say, would you take a country school several miles out?"

"I think I would, if nothing better offered."

"Well, in my old district they're without a teacher. It's six miles out, and it isn't a lovely neighborhood! However, they will pay fifty dollars a month; that's ten dollars extra for the scrimmages. They wanted me to teach this winter--my sister tackles it in summer--but, great Peter! I can't waste my time teaching school, when I can run up to Chicago and take a shy at the pit and make a whole term's wages in thirty minutes!"

"I don't understand," said Stacey.

"Wheat Exchange. I've got a lot of friends in the pit, and I can come in any time on a little deal. I'm no Jim Keene, but I hope to get cash enough to handle five thousand. I wanted the old gent to start me up in it, but he said, 'Nix come arouse.' Fact is, I dropped the money he gave me to go through college with." He smiled at Stacey's disapproving look. "Yes, indeedy; there's where the jar came into our tender relations. Oh, I call on the Governor--always when I've got a wad. I have fun with him." He smiled brightly. "Ask him if he don't need a little cash to pay for hog-killin', or something like that." He laughed again. "No, I didn't graduate at Ann Arbor. Funny how things go, ain't it? I was on my way back the third year, when I stopped in to see the pit--it's one o' the sights of Chicago, you know--and Billy Krans saw me looking over the rail, I went in, won, and then took a flyer on December. Come a big slump, and I failed to materialize at school."

"What did you do then?" asked Stacey, to whom this did not seem humorous.

"I wrote a contrite letter to the Governor, stating case, requesting forgiveness--and money. No go! Couldn't raise neither. I then wrote, casting him off. 'You are no longer father of mine.'" He smiled again radiantly. "You should have seen me the next time I went home! Plug hat! Imported suit! Gold watch! Diamond shirt-stud! Cost me \$200 to paralyze the General, but I did it. My glory absolutely turned him white as a sheet. I knew what he thought, so I said: 'Perfectly legitimate, Dad. The walls of Joliet are not gaping for me.' That about half-fetched him--calling him *Dad*, I mean; but he can't get reconciled to my business. 'Too many ups and downs,' he says. Fact is, he thinks it's gambling, and I don't argue the case with him. I'm on my way home now to stay over Sunday."

The train whistled, and Allen looked out into the darkness. "We're coming to the crossing. Now, I can't go up to the boarding-place when you do, but I'll give you directions, and you tell the landlady I sent you, and it'll be all right. Allen, you remember--Herman Allen."

Following directions, Stacey came at length to a two-story frame house situated on the edge of the bank, with its back to the river. It stood alone, with vacant lots all about. A pleasant-faced woman answered the ring.

He explained briefly. "How do you do? I'm a teacher, and I'd like to get board here a few days while passing my examinations. Mr. Herman Allen sent me."

The woman's quick eye and ear were satisfied. "All right. Walk in, sir. I'm pretty full, but I expect I can accommodate you--if you don't mind Mr. Allen for a room-mate."

"Oh, not at all," he said, while taking off his coat.

"Come right in this way. Supper will be ready soon."

He went into a comfortable sitting-room, where a huge open fire of soft coal was blazing magnificently. The walls were papered in florid patterns, and several enlarged portraits were on the walls. The fire was the only adornment; all else was cheap, and some of it was tawdry.

Stacey spread his thin hands to the blaze, while the landlady sat down a moment, out of politeness, to chat, scanning him keenly. She was a handsome woman, strong, well-rounded, about forty years of age, with quick, gray eyes, and a clean, firm-lipped mouth.

"Did you just get in?"

"Yes. I've been on the road all day," he said, on an impulse of communication. "Indeed, I'm just out of college."

"Is that so!" exclaimed Mrs. Mills, stopping her rocking in an access of interest. "What college?"

"Jackson University. I've been sick, and only came West--"

There came a look into her face that transformed and transfigured her. "*My* boy was in Ann Arbor. He was killed on the train on his way home one day." She stopped, for fear of breaking into a quaver, and smiled brightly. "That's why I always like college boys. They all stop here with me." She rose hastily. "Well, you'll excuse me, won't you, and I'll go an' tend to supper."

There was a great deal that was feminine in Stacey, and he felt at once the pathos of the woman's life. He looked a refined, studious, rather delicate young man, as he sat low in his chair and observed the light and heat of the fire. His large head was heavy with learning, and his dark eyes deep with religious fervor.

Several young women entered, and the room was filled with the clatter of tongues. Herman came in a few moments later, his face in a girlish glow of color. Everybody rushed at him with loud outcry. He was evidently a great favorite. He threw his arms about Mrs. Mills, giving her a hearty hug. The girls pretended to be shocked when he reached out for them, but they were not afraid of him. They hung on his arms and besieged him with questions till he cried out, in jolly perplexity:

"Girls, girls! This will never do!"

Mrs. Mills brushed out his damp yellow curls with her hands. "You're all wet."

"Girls, if you'll let me sit down, I'll take one on each knee," he said, pleadingly, and they released him.

Stacey grew red with sympathetic embarrassment, and shrank away into a corner.

"Go get supper ready," commanded Herman. And it was only after they had left him that he said to Stacey: "Oh, you found your way all right." He took a seat by the fire and surveyed his wet shoes. "I took a run up to Mott's house--only a half block out o' the way. He said they'd be tickled to have you at Cyene. By-the-way, you're a theolog, aren't you?" Wallace nodded, and Herman went on: "So I told Mott. He said you might work up a society out there at Cyene."

"Is there a church there?"

"Used to be, but--say, I tell you what you do: you go out with me to-morrow, and I'll give you a history of the township."

The ringing of the bell took them all out into the cheerful dining-room in a good-natured scramble. Mrs. Mills put Stacey at one end of the table, near a young woman who looked like a teacher, and he had full sweep of the table, which was surrounded by bright and happy faces. The station-hand was there, and a couple of grocery clerks, and a brakeman sat at Stacey's right hand. They all seemed very much at home, and called one another by their Christian names, and there was very obvious courtship on the part of several young couples.

Stacey escaped from the table as soon as possible, and returned to his seat beside the fire. He was young enough to enjoy the chatter of the girls, but his timidity made him glad they paid so little attention to him. The rain had changed to sleet outside and hammered at the window viciously, but the blazing fire and the romping young people set it at defiance. The landlady came to the door of the dining-room, dish and cloth in hand, to share in each outburst of laughter, and not infrequently the hired girl peered over her shoulder with a broad smile on her face. A little later, having finished their work, they both came in and took active part in the light-hearted fun.

Herman and one of the girls were having a great struggle over some trifle he had snatched from her hand, and the rest stood about laughing to see her desperate attempts to recover it. This was a familiar form of courtship in Kesota, and an evening filled with such romping was considered a "cracking good time." After the girl, red and dishevelled, had given up, Herman sat down at the organ, and they all sang Moody and Sankey hymns, negro melodies, and college songs till ten o'clock. Then Mrs. Mills called, "Come, now, boys and girls!" and they all said good-night, like obedient children.

Herman and Wallace went up to their bedroom together.

"Say, Stacey, have you got a policy?" Wallace shook his head. "And don't want any, I suppose. Well, I just asked you as a matter of form. You see," he went on, winking at Wallace comically, "nominally I'm an insurance agent, but

practically I'm a 'lamb'--but I get a mouthful o' fur myself occasionally. What I'm working for is to get on that Wheat Exchange. That's where you get life! I'd rather be an established broker in that howling mob than go to Congress."

He rose on his elbow in bed and looked at Wallace, who was rising from a silent prayer.

"Say, why didn't you shout? I forgot all about it--I mean your profession."

Wallace crept into bed beside his communicative bedfellow in silence. He didn't know how to deal with such spirits.

"Say," called Herman suddenly, as Wallace was about dropping off to sleep, "you ain't got no picnic, old man!"

"Why, what do you mean?"

"Wait till you see Cyene Church. Oh, it's a daisy snarl!"

"I wish you'd tell me about it."

"Oh, it's quiet now. The calmness of death," said Herman. "Well, you see, it came this way. The church is made up of Baptists and Methodists, and the Methodists wanted an organ, because, you understand, father was the head centre, and Mattie is the only girl among the Methodists who can play. The old man has got a head like a mule. He can't be switched off, once he makes up his mind. Deacon Marsden, he don't believe in anything above tuning-forks, and he's tighter'n the bark on a bulldog. He stood out like a sore thumb, and Dad wouldn't give an inch.

"You see, they held meetings every other Sunday. So Dad worked up the organ business and got one, and then locked it up when the Baptists held their services. Things went from bad to worse. They didn't speak as they passed by--that is, the old folks; we young folks didn't care a continental whether school kept or not. Well, upshot is, the church died out. The wind blew the horse-sheds down, and there they lie--and the church is standing there empty as an--old boot--and--Say, Stacey--by Jinks!--are you a Baptist?"

"Yes."

"Oh, Peter! ain't that lovely!" He chuckled shamelessly, and went off to sleep without another word.

II

Herman was still sleeping when Stacey rose and dressed and went down to breakfast. Mrs. Mills defended Herman against the charge of laziness: "He's probably been out late all the week."

Stacey found Mott in the county court-house, and a perfunctory examination soon put him in possession of a certificate. There was no question of his attainments.

Herman met him at dinner-time.

"Well, elder, I'm going down to get a rig to go out home in. It's colder'n a blue whetstone, so put on all the clothes you've got. Gimme your check, and I'll get your traps. Have you seen Mott?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, everything's all fixed."

He turned up about three o'clock, seated on the spring seat of a lumber wagon beside a woman, who drove the powerful team. Whether she was young or old could not be told through her wraps. She wore a cap and a thick, faded cloak.

Mrs. Mills hurried to the door. "Why, Mattie Allen! What you doin' out such a day as this? Come in here instanter!"

"Can't stop!" called a clear, boyish voice. "Too late!"

"Well, land o' stars, you'll freeze!"

When Wallace reached the wagon side, Herman said, "My sister, Stacey."

The girl slipped her strong, brown hand out of her huge glove and gave him a friendly grip. "Get right in," she said. "Herman, you're going to stand up behind."

Herman appealed to Mrs. Mills for sympathy. "This is what comes of having plebeian connections."

"Oh, dry up," laughed the girl, "or I'll make you drive."

Stacey scrambled in awkwardly beside her. She was not at all embarrassed, apparently.

"Tuck yourself in tight. It's mighty cold on the prairie."

"Why didn't you come down with the baroosh?" grumbled Herman.

"Well, the corn was contracted for, and father wasn't able to come--he had another attack of neuralgia last night, after he got the corn loaded, so I had to come."

"Sha'n't I drive for you?" asked Wallace.

"No, thank you. You'll have all you can do to keep from freezing." She studied his thin coat and worn gloves with keen glance. He could see only her pink cheeks, strong nose, and dark, smiling eyes.

It was one of those terrible Illinois days when the temperature drops suddenly to zero, and the churned mud of the highways hardens into scoriac rock, which cripples the horses and sends the heavy wagons booming and thundering along like mad things. The wind was keen as a saw-bladed sword, and smote incessantly. The desolate sky was one thick, impenetrable mass of swiftly flying clouds.

When they swung out upon the long pike leading due north, Wallace drew his breath with a gasp, and bent his head to the wind.

"Pretty strong, isn't it?" shouted Mattie.

"Oh, the farmer's life is the life for me, tra-la!" sang Herman, from his shelter behind the seat.

Mattie turned. "What do you think of *Penelope* this month?"

"She's a-gitten there," said Herman, pounding his shoe heels.

"She's too smart for young Corey. She ought to marry a man like Bromfield. My, wouldn't they talk!"

"Did y' get the second bundle of magazines last Saturday?"

"Yes; and Dad found something in the *Popular Science* that made him mad, and he burned it."

"Did 'e? Tum-la-la! Oh, the farmer's life for me!"

"Are you cold?" she asked Wallace.

He turned a purple face upon her. "No--not much."

"I guess you better slip right down under the blankets," she advised.

The wind blew gray out of the north--a wild blast which stopped the young student's blood in his veins. He hated to give up, but he could no longer hold the blankets over his knees, so he slipped down into the corner of the box, with his back to the wind, while Mattie drew the blankets over his head, slapped the reins down on the backs of the snorting horses, and encouraged them with shouts like a man: "Get out o' this, Dan! Hup there, Nellie!"

The wagon boomed and rattled. The floor of the box seemed beaten with a maul. The glimpses Wallace had of the land appalled him, it was so flat and gray and bare.

Herman sang at the top of his voice, and danced, and pounded his feet against the wagon box. "This ends it! If I can't come home without freezing to death, I don't come. I should have hired a rig, irrespective of you--"

The girl laughed. "Oh, you're getting thin-blooded, Herman. Life in the city has taken the starch all out of you."

"Better grow limp in a great city than freeze stiff in the country," he replied.

An hour's ride brought them into a yard before a large, gray-white frame house.

Herman sprang out to meet a tall old man with head muffled up. "Hello, Dad! Take the team. We're just naturally froze solid--at least, I am. This is Mr. Stacey, the new teacher."

"How de do? Run in; I'll take the horses."

Herman and Wallace stumbled toward the house, stiff and bent.

Herman flung his arms about a tall woman in the kitchen door. "Hello, muz!" he said. "This is Mr. Stacey, the new teacher."

Mattie came in soon with a boyish rush, gleeful as a happy babe. She unwound the scarf from her head and neck, and hung up her cap and cloak like a man, but she gave her hair a little touch of feminine care, and came forward with both palms pressed to her burning cheeks.

"Did you suffer, child?" asked Mrs. Allen.

"No; I enjoyed it."

Herman looked at Stacey. "I believe on my life she did."

"Oh, it's fun. I don't get a chance to do anything so exciting very often."

Herman clicked his tongue. "Exciting? Well, well!"

"You must remember things are slower here," Mattie explained.

She came to light much younger than Stacey thought her. She was not eighteen, but her supple and splendid figure was fully matured. Her hair hung down her back in a braid, which gave a distinct touch of childishness to her.

"Sis, you're still a-growin'," Herman said, as he put his arm around her waist and looked up at her.

She seemed to realize for the first time that Stacey was a young man, and her eyes fell.

"Well, now, set up the chairs, child," said Mrs. Allen.

When the young teacher returned from his cold spare room off the parlor the family sat waiting for him. They all drew up noisily, and Allen said:

"Ask the blessing, sir?"

Wallace said grace.

As Allen passed the potatoes he continued:

"My son tells me you are a minister of the gospel."

"I have studied for it."

"What denomination?"

"Tut, tut!" warned Herman. "Don't start any theological rabbits to-night, Dad. With jaw swelled up you won't be able to hold your own."

"I'm a Baptist," Stacey answered.

The old man's face grew grim. It had been ludicrous before with its swollen jaw. "Baptist!" He turned a stern look upon his son, whose smile angered him. "Didn't you know no more'n to bring a Baptist preacher into this house?"

"There, there, father!" began the wife.

"Be quiet. I'm boss of this shanty, and I won't have you bringing--"

Herman struck in: "Don't make a show of yourself, old man. Never mind the old gent, Stacey; he's mumpy to-day, anyhow."

Stacey rose. "I guess I--I'd better not stay--I--"

"Oh no, no! Sit down! It's all right. The old man's a little acid at me. He doesn't mean it."

Stacey got his coat and hat. His heart was swollen with indignation. He felt as if something fine were lost to him, and the land outside was so desolate!

Mrs. Allen was in tears; but the old man, having taken his stand, was going to keep it.

Herman lost his temper a little. "Well, Dad, you're a little the cussedest Christian I ever knew! Stacey, sit down. Don't you be a fool just because he is--"

Stacey was buttoning his coat with trembling hands when Martha went up to him.

"Don't go," she said. "Father's sick and cross. He'll be sorry for this to-morrow."

Wallace looked into her frank, kindly eyes, and hesitated.

Herman said: "Dad, you are a lovely follower of Christ! You'll apologize for this, or I'll never set foot on your threshold again."

Stacey still hesitated. He was hurt and angry, but being naturally of a sweet and gentle nature, he grew sad, and, yielding to the pressure of the girl's hand on his arm, he began to unbutton his overcoat.

She helped him with it, and hung it back on the nail, and her mother and Herman tried to restore something of the brightness which had been lost; but Allen sat grimly eating, his chin pushed down like a hog's snout.

After supper, as his father was about retiring to his bedroom, Herman fixed his bright eyes on him, and something very hard and masterful came into his face.

"Old man, you and I haven't had a settlement on this thing yet. I'll see you later."

Allen shrank before his son's look, but shuffled sullenly off without uttering a word.

Herman turned to Wallace. "Stacey, I want to beg your pardon for getting you into this scrape. I didn't suppose the old gentleman would act like that. The older he gets, the more his New Hampshire granite shows. I hope you won't lay it up against me."

Wallace was too conscientious to say he didn't mind it, but he took Herman's hand in a quick clasp.

"Let's have a song," proposed Herman. "Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast, to charm a rock, and split a cabbage."

They went into the best room, where a fire was blazing, and Mattie and Herman sang hymns and old-fashioned love-songs and college glees wonderfully intermingled. They ended with *Lorena*, a wailing, extra sentimental love-song current in war times, and when they looked around there was a lofty look on the face of the young preacher--a look of exaltation, of consecration and resolve.

III

The next morning, at breakfast, Herman said, as he seized a hot biscuit, "We'll dispense with grace this morning, and till after the war is over." But Wallace blessed his bread in a silent prayer, and Mattie thought it very brave of him to do so.

Herman was full of mockery. "The sun rises just the same, whether it's 'sprinkling' or 'immersion.' It's lucky Nature don't take a hand in these theological contests. She doesn't even referee the scrap; she never seems to care whether you are sparring for points or fighting to a finish. What you theologic middle-weights are really fighting for I can't see--and I don't care, till you fall over the ropes on to my corns."

Stacey listened in a daze to Herman's tirade. He knew it was addressed to Allen, and that it deprecated war, and that it was mocking. The fresh face and smiling lips of the young girl seemed to put other affairs very far away. It was such a beautiful thing to sit at table with a lovely girl.

After breakfast he put on his cap and coat, and went out into the clear, cold November air. All about him the prairie outspread, marked with farm-houses and lined with leafless hedges. Artificial groves surrounded each homestead, and these relieved, to some degree, the desolateness of the fields.

Down the road he saw the spire of a small white church, and as he walked briskly toward it, Herman's description of it came to his mind.

As he drew near, the ruined sheds, the rotting porch, and the windows boarded up told a sorry story, and his face grew sad. He tried one of the doors, and found it open. Some tramp had broken the lock. The inside was even more desolate than the outside. It was littered with rotting straw and plum stones and melon seeds. Obscene words were scrawled on the walls, and even on the pulpit itself.

Taken altogether, it was an appalling picture to the young servant of the Man of Galilee--a blunt reminder of the inherent ferocity and depravity of man.

As he pondered the fire burned, and there rose again the flame of his resolution. He lifted his face and prayed that he might be the one to bring these people into the living union of the Church of Christ.

His blood set toward his heart with tremulous action.

His eyes glowed with zeal like that of the prophets of the Middle Ages. He saw the people united once more in this desecrated hall. He heard the bells ringing, the sound of song, the voices of love and fellowship filling the anterooms where hate had scrawled hideous blasphemy against woman and against God.

As he sat there Herman came in, his keen eyes seeking out every stain and evidence of vandalism.

"Cheerful prospect, isn't it?"

Wallace looked up with the blaze of his resolution still in his eyes. His pale face was sweet and solemn.

"Oh, how these people need Christ!"

Herman turned away. "They need killing--about two dozen of 'em. I'd like to have the job of indicating which ones. I wouldn't miss the old man, you bet!" he added, with cordial resentment.

Wallace was helpless in the face of such reckless thought, and so sat silently watching the handsome young fellow as he walked about.

"Well, now, Stacey, I guess you'll need to move. I had another session with the old man, but he won't give in, so I'm off for Chicago. Mother's brother, George Chapman, who lives about as near the schoolhouse on the other side, will take you in. I guess we'd better go right down now and see about it. I've said good-bye to the old man--for good this time; we didn't shake hands, either," he said, as they started down the road together. He was very stern and hard. Something of the father was hidden under his laughing exterior.

Stacey regretted deeply the necessity which drove him out of Allen's house. Mrs. Allen and Mattie had appealed to him very strongly. For years he had lived far from young women, and there was a magical power in the intimate home actions of this young girl. Her bare head, with simple arrangement of hair, somehow seemed the most beautiful thing he had ever seen.

He thought of her that night, as he sat at the table with Chapman and his aged mother. They lived alone, and their lives were curiously silent. Once in a while a low-voiced question, and that was all. George read the *Popular Science*, *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, and the *Open Court*, and brooded over them with slow intellectual movement. It was wonderful the amount of information he secreted from these periodicals. He was better informed than many college graduates. He had little curiosity about the young stranger. He understood that he was to teach the school; beyond that he did not care to go.

He tried Wallace once or twice on the latest discoveries of John Fiske and Edison, and then gave him up and retired to his seat beside the sitting-room stove.

On the following Monday morning school began, and as Wallace took his way down the lane the wrecked church came again to his eyes. He walked past it with slow feet. His was a deeply religious nature, one that sorrowed easily over sin. Suffering of the poor did not trouble him; hunger seemed a little thing beside losing one's everlasting soul. Therefore, to come from his studies upon such a monument of human depravity as this rotting church was to receive a shock and to hear a call to action.

Approaching the schoolhouse, his thought took a turn toward the scholars and toward Mattie. He had forgotten to ask her if she intended to be one of his pupils.

There were several children already gathered at the weather-beaten door as he came up. It was all very American--the box-like house of white, the slender teacher approaching, the roughly clad urchins waiting.

He said, "Good morning, scholars!"

They chorused a queer croak in reply--hesitating, inarticulate, shy. He unlocked the door and entered the cold, bare room--familiar, unlovely, with a certain power of primitive associations. In such a room he had studied his primer and his Ray's Arithmetic. In such a room he had made gradual recession from the smallest front seat to the back wall seat; and from one side of such a room to the other he had furtively worshipped a graceful, girlish head.

He allowed himself but a moment of such dreaming before assuming command, and with his ready helpers a fire was soon started. Other children came in, timorous as rabbits, slipping by, each with an eye fixed on him like a scared chicken. They pre-empted their seats by putting down books and slates, and there arose sly wars for possession, which he watched with amusement--it was so like his own life at that age.

He assumed control as nearly in the manner of the old-time teachers as he could recall, and the work of his teaching was begun. The day passed quickly, and, as he walked homeward again, there stood that rotting church, and in his

mind there rose a surging emotion larger than he could himself comprehend--a desire to rebuild it by uniting the warring factions, of whose lack of Christianity this deserted chapel was a fatal witness.

IV

Now this mystical thing happened. As this son of a line of preachers brooded on this unlovely strife among men, he lost the equipoise of the scholar and student of modern history. He grew narrower and more intense. The burden of his responsibility as a preacher of Christ grew daily more insupportable.

Toward the end of the week he announced preaching in the schoolhouse on Sunday afternoon, and at the hour set he found the room crowded with people of all ages and sorts.

His heart grew heavy as he looked out over the room--on women nursing querulous children, on the grizzled faces of grim-looking men, who studied him with keen, unsympathetic eyes. He had hard, unfriendly material to work with. There were but few of the opposite camp present, while the Baptist leaders were all there, with more curiosity than sympathy in their faces.

They exulted to think the next preacher to come among them as an evangelist should be a Baptist.

After the singing, which would have dribbled away into failure but for Mattie, Wallace rose, looking very white and weak, and began his prayer. Some of the boys laughed when his voice stuck in his throat, but he went on to the end of an earnest supplication, feeling he had not touched them at all.

While they sang again, he sat looking down at them with dry throat and staring eyes. How hard, how unchristian-like, they all were. What could he say to them? He saw Mattie gazing up at him, and on the front seat sat three beautiful little girls huddled together with hands clasped; inexpressibly dainty by contrast. As he looked at them the thought came to him, What is the goodness of a girl--of a child? It is not partisan--it is not of creeds, of articles--it is goodness of thought, of deeds. His face lighted up with the inward feeling of this idea, and he rose resolutely.

"Friends, with the help of Christ I am come among you to do you good. I shall hold meetings each night here in the schoolhouse until we can unite and rebuild the church again. Let me say now, friends, that I was educated a Baptist. My father was a faithful worker in the Baptist Church, and so was his father before him. I was educated in a Baptist college, and I came here hoping to build up a Baptist Church." He paused.

"But I see my mistake. I am here to build up a Church of Christ, of good deeds and charity and peace, and so I here say I am no longer a Baptist or Methodist. I am only a preacher, and I will not rest until I rebuild the church which stands rotting away there." His voice rang with determination as he uttered those words.

The people listened. There was no movement now. Even the babies seemed to feel the need of being silent. When he began again it was to describe that hideous wreck. He delineated the falling plaster, the litter around the pulpit, the profanation of the walls. "It is a symbol of your sinful hearts!" he cried.

Much more he said, carried out of himself by his passion. It was as if the repentant spirit of his denominational fathers were speaking through him; and yet he was not so impassioned that he did not see, or at least feel, the eyes of the strong young girl fixed upon him; his resolutions were spoken to her, and a swift response seemed to leap from her eyes.

When it was over, some of the Methodists and one of the Baptists came up to shake hands with him, awkwardly wordless, and the pressure of their hands helped him. Many of the Baptist brethren slipped outside to discuss the matter. Some were indignant, others much moved.

Allen went by him with an audible grunt of derision, with a dark scowl on his face, but Mattie smiled at him, with tears still in her eyes. She had been touched by his vibrant voice; she had no sins to repent of.

The skeptics of the neighborhood were quite generally sympathetic. "You've struck the right trail now, parson," said Chapman, as they walked homeward together. "The days of the old-time denominationalism are about played out."

But the young preacher was not so sure of it, now that his inspiration was gone. He remembered his debt to his college, to his father, to the denomination, and it was not easy to set aside the grip of such memories.

He sat late revolving the whole situation in his mind. When he went to bed his problem was still with him, and involved itself with his dreams; but always the young girl smiled upon him with sympathetic eyes and told him to go on--or so it seemed to him.

He was silent at breakfast. He went to school with a feeling that a return to teaching little tow-heads to count and spell was now impossible. He sat at his scarred and dingy desk while they took their places, and his eyes had a passionate intensity of prayer in them which awed his pupils. He had assumed new grandeur and terror in their eyes. When they were seated he bowed his head and uttered a short plea for grace, and then he looked at them again.

On the low front seat, with dangling legs and red, round faces, sat the little ones. Some way he could not call them to his knees and teach them to spell; he felt as if he ought to call them to him, as Christ did, to teach them love and reverence. It was impossible that they should not be touched by this hideous neighborhood strife.

Behind them sat the older children, some of them with rough, hard, sly faces. One or two grinned rudely and nudged each other. The older girls sat with bated breath; they perceived something strange in the air. Most of them had heard his sermon of the night before.

At last he broke silence. "Children, there is something I must say to you this morning. I'm going to have meeting here to-night, and it may be I shall not be your teacher any more--I mean in school. I wish you'd go home to-day and tell your people to come to church here to-night. I wish you'd all come yourselves. I want you to be good. I want you to love God and be good. I want you to go home and tell your people the teacher can't teach children how to read till he has taught the older people to be kind and generous. You may put your books away, and school will be dismissed."

The wondering children obeyed--some with glad promptness, others with sadness, for they had already come to like their teacher very much.

As he sat by the door and watched them file out, it was as if he were a king abdicating a throne, and these his faithful subjects.

Mrs. Allen came over with Mattie to see him that day. She was a good woman, gentle and prayerful, and she said, with much emotion:

"Oh, Mr. Stacey, I do hope you can patch things up here. If you could only touch his heart! He don't mean to do wrong, but he's so set in his ways--if he says a thing he sticks to it."

Stacey turned to Mattie for a word of encouragement, but she only looked away. It was impossible for her to put into words her feeling in the matter, which was more of admiration for his courage than for any part of his religious zeal. He was so different from other men.

It did him good to have these women come, and he repeated his vow:

"By the grace of our Lord, I am going to rebuild the Cyene Church!" and his face paled and his eyes grew luminous.

The girl shivered with emotion. He seemed to recede from her as he spoke, and to grow larger, too. Such nobility of purpose was new and splendid to her.

The revival was wondrously dramatic. The little schoolhouse was crowded to the doors night by night. The reek of stable-stained coats and boots, the smell of strong tobacco, the effluvia of many breaths, the heat, the closeness were forgotten in the fervor of the young evangelist's utterances. His voice took on wild emotional cadences which sounded deep places in the heart. To these people, long unused to religious oratory, it was like the return of John and Isaiah. It was poetry and the drama, and processions and apocalyptic visions. This youth had the histrionic spell, too, and his slender body lifted and dilated, and his head took on majesty and power, and the fling of his white hand was a challenge and an appeal.

A series of stirring events took place on the third night.

On Wednesday Jacob Turner rose and asked the prayers of his neighbors, and was followed by two Baptist spearmen of the front rank. On Thursday the women were weeping on one another's bosoms; only one or two of the men held out--old Deacon Allen and his antagonist, Stewart Marsden. Grim-visaged old figures they were, placed among repentant men and weeping women. They sat like rocks in the rush of the two factions moving toward each other for peaceful union. Granitic, narrow, keen of thrust, they seemed unmoved, while all around them, one by one, skeptics acknowledged the pathos and dignity of the preacher's views of life and death.

Meanwhile the young evangelist lived at high pressure. He grew thinner and whiter each night. He toiled in the daytime to formulate his thoughts for the evening. He could not sleep till far toward morning. The food he ate did him little good, while his heart went out constantly to his people in strenuous supplication. It was testimony of his human quality that he never for one moment lost that shining girl face out of his thought. He looked for it there night after night. It was his inspiration in speaking, as at the first.

On the nights when Mattie was not there his speech was labored (as the elders noticed), but on the blessed nights when she came and sang, her voice, amid all the rest, came to him, and uttered poetry and peace like a rill of cool, sweet water. And afterward, when he walked home under the stars, his mind went with her, she was so strong and lithe and good to see. He did not realize the worshipping attitude the girl took before his divine duties.

At last the great day came--the great night.

In some way, perhaps by the growing mass of rushing emotion set in action by some deep-going phrase, or perhaps by some interior slow weakening of stubborn will, Deacon Allen gave way; and when the preacher called for penitents, the old man struggled to his feet, his seamed, weather-beaten face full of grotesque movement. He broke out:

"Brethren, pray for me; I'm a miserable sinner. I want to confess my sins--here--before ye all." He broke into sobbing terrible to hear. "My heart is made--flesh again--by the blessed power of Christ...."

He struggled to get his voice. One or two cried, "Praise God!" but most of them sat silent, awed into immobility.

The old man walked up the aisle. "I've been rebellious--and now I want to shake hands with you all--and I ask your prayers." He bent down and thrust his hand to Marsden, his enemy, while the tears streamed down his face.

Marsden turned white with a sort of fear, but he rose awkwardly and grasped the outstretched hand, and at the touch of palms every soul rose as if by electric shock. "Amen!" burst forth. The preacher began a fervent prayer, and came down toward the grizzled, weeping old men, and they all embraced, while some old lady with sweet, quavering voice raised a triumphal hymn, in which all joined, and found grateful relief from their emotional tension.

Allen turned to Mattie and his wife. "My boy--send for him--Herman."

It seemed as if the people could not go away. The dingy little schoolhouse was like unto the shining temple of God's grace, and the regenerated seemed to fear that to go home might permit a return to hate and strife. So they clung around the young preacher and would not let him go.

At last he came out, with Allen holding to his arm. "You must come home with us to-night," he pleaded, and the young minister with glad heart consented, for he hoped he might walk beside Mattie; but this was not possible. There were several others in the group, and they moved off two and two up the deep hollows which formed the road in the snow.

The young minister walked with head uplifted to the stars, hearing nothing of the low murmur of talk, conscious only of his great plans, his happy heart, and the strong young girl who walked before him.

In the warm kitchen into which they came he lost something of his spiritual tension, and became more humanly aware of the significance of sitting again with these people. He gave the girl his coat and hat, and then watched her slip off her knitted hood and her cloak. Her eyes shone with returning laughter, and her cheeks were flushed with blood.

Looking upon her, the young evangelist lost his look of exaltation, his eyes grew soft and his limbs relaxed. His silence was no longer rapt--it was the silence of delicious, drowsy reverie.

V

The next morning he did not rise at all. The collapse had come. The bad air, the nervous strain, the lack of sleep, had worn down his slender store of strength, and when the great victory came he fell like a tree whose trunk has been slowly gnawed across by teeth of silent saw. His drowse deepened into torpor.

In the bright winter morning, seated in a gay cutter behind a bay colt strung with slashing bells, Mattie drove to Kesota for the doctor. She felt the discord between the joyous jangle of the bells, the stream of sunlight, and the sparkle of snow crystals, but it only added to the poignancy of her anxiety.

She had not yet reached self-consciousness in her regard for the young preacher--she thought of him as a noble human being, liable to death, and she chirped again and again to the flying colt, whose broad hoofs flung the snow in stinging showers against her face.

A call at the doctor's house set him jogging out along the lanes, while she sent a telegram to Herman. As she whirled bay Tom into the road to go home her heart rose in relief that was almost exaltation. She loved horses. She always sang under her breath, chiming to the beat of their bells, when alone, and now she loosened the rein and hummed an old love-song, while the powerful young horse squared away in a trot which was twelve miles an hour.

In such air, in such sun, who could die? Her good animal strength rose dominant over fear of death.

She came upon the doctor swinging along in his old blue cutter, dozing in country-doctor style, making up for lost sleep.

"Out o' the way, doctor!" she gleefully called.

The doctor roused up and looked around with a smile. He was not beyond admiring such a girl as that. He snapped his whip-lash lightly on old Sofia's back, who looked up surprised, and, seeming to comprehend matters, began to reach out broad, flat, thin legs in a pace which the proud colt respected. She came of illustrious line, did Sofia, scant-haired and ungracious as she now was.

"Don't run over me!" called the doctor, ironically, and, with Sofia still leading, they swung into the yard.

Mattie went in with the doctor, while Allen looked after both horses. They found Chapman attending Wallace, who lay in a dazed quiet--conscious, but not definitely aware of material things.

The doctor looked his patient over carefully. Then he asked, "Who is the yoong mon?"

"He's been teaching here, or, rather, preaching."

"When did this coom on?"

"Last night. Wound up a big revival last night, I believe. Kind o' caved in, I reckon."

"That's all. Needs rest. He'll be wearin' a wood jacket if he doosna leave off preachin'."

"Regular jamboree. I couldn't stop him. One of these periodical neighborhood 'awakenings,' they call it."

"They have need of it here, na doot."

"Well, they need something--love for God--or man."

"M--well! It's lettle I can do. The wumman can do more, if the mon'll be eatin' what they cuke for 'im," said the candid old Scotchman. "Mak' 'im eat! Mak' 'im eat!"

Once more Tom pounded along the shining road to Kesota to meet the six-o'clock train from Chicago.

Herman, magnificently clothed in fur-lined ulster and cap, alighted with unusually grave face, and hurried toward Mattie.

"Well, what is it, Sis? Mother sick?"

"No; it's the teacher. He is unconscious. I've been for the doctor. Oh, we were scared!"

He looked relieved, but a little chagrined. "Oh, well, I don't see why I should be yanked out of my boots by a telegram because the teacher is sick! He isn't kin--yet."

For the first time a feeling of confusion swept over Mattie, and her face flushed.

Herman's keen eyes half closed as he looked into her face.

"Mat--what--what! Now look here--how's this? Where's Ben Holly's claim?"

"He never had any." She shifted ground quickly. "Oh, Herman, we had a wonderful time last night! Father and Uncle Marsden shook hands--"

"What!" shouted Herman, as he fell in a limp mass against the cutter. "Bring a physician--I'm stricken."

"Don't act so! Everybody's looking."

"They'd better look. I'm drowning while they wait."

She untied the horse and came back.

"Climb in there and stop your fooling, and I'll tell you all about it."

He crawled in with tearing groans of mock agony, and then leaned his head against her shoulder. "Well, go on, Sis; I can bear it now."

She nudged him to make him sit up.

"Well, you know we've had a revival."

"So you wrote. Must have been a screamer to fetch Dad and old Marsden. A regular Pentecost of Shinar."

"It was--I mean it was beautiful. I saw father was getting stirred up. He prayed almost all day yesterday, and at night-- Well, I can't tell you, but Wallace talked, oh, so beautiful and tender!"

"She calls him Wallace?" mused Herman, like a comedian. "Hush! And then came the hand-shaking, and then the minister came home with us because father asked him to, and stayed because he liked the chicken."

The girl was hurt, and she showed it. "If you make fun, I won't tell you another word," she said.

"Away Chicago! enter Cyene! Well, come, I won't fool any more."

"Then after Wallace--I mean--"

"Let it stand. Come to the murder."

"Then father came and asked me to send for you, and mother cried, and so did he. And, oh, Hermie, he's so sweet and kind! Don't make fun of him, will you? It's splendid to have him give in, and everybody feels glad that the district will be all friendly again."

Herman did not gibe now. His voice was gentle. The pathos in the scene appealed to him. "So the old man sent for me himself, did he?"

"Yes; he could hardly wait till morning. But this morning, when we came to call the teacher, he didn't answer, and father went in and found him unconscious. Then I went for the doctor."

Bay Tom whirled along in the splendid dusk, his nostrils flaring ghostly banners of steam on the cold, crisp air. The stars overhead were points of green and blue and crimson light, low-hung, changing each moment. Their influence entered the soul of the mocking young fellow. He felt very solemn, almost melancholy, for a moment.

"Well, Sis, I've got something to tell you all. I'm going to tell it to you by degrees. I'm going to be married."

"Oh!" she gasped, with quick, indrawn breath. "Who?"

"Don't be ungrammatical, whatever you do. She's a cashier in a restaurant, and she's a fine girl," he added, steadily, as if combating a prejudice. He forgot for the moment that such prejudices did not exist in Cyene.

Sis was instantly tender, and very, very serious.

"Of course she is, or you wouldn't care for her. Oh, I'd like to see her!"

"I'll take you up some day and show her to you."

"Oh, will you? Oh, when can I go?" She was smitten into gravity again. "Not till the teacher is well."

Herman pretended to be angry. "Dog take the teacher, the old spindle-legs! If I'd known he was going to raise such a ruction in our quiet and peaceful neighborhood, I never would have brought him here."

Mattie did not laugh; she pondered. She never quite understood her brother when he went off on those queer tirades, which might be a joke or an insult. He had grown away from her in his city life.

They rode on in silence the rest of the way, except now and then an additional question from Mattie concerning his sweetheart.

As they neared the farm-house she lost interest in all else but the condition of the young minister. They could see the light burning dimly in his room, and in the parlor and kitchen as well, and this unusual lighting stirred the careless young man deeply. It was associated in his mind with death and birth, and also with great joy. The house was lighted so the night his elder brother died, and it looked so to him when he whirled into the yard with the doctor when Mattie was born.

"Oh, I hope he isn't worse!" said the girl, with deep feeling.

Herman put his arm about her, and she knew he knew.

"So do I, Sis."

Allen came to the door as they drove in, and the careless boy realized suddenly the emotional tension his father was in.

As the old man came to the sleigh-side he could not speak. His fingers trembled as he took the outstretched hand of his boy.

Herman's voice shook a little:

"Well, Dad, Mattie says the war is over."

The old man tried to speak, but only coughed and then he blew his nose. At last he said, brokenly:

"Go right in; your mother's waitin'."

It was singularly dramatic to the youth. To come from the careless, superficial life of his city companions into contact with such primeval passions as these made him feel like a spectator at some new and powerful and tragic play.

His mother fell upon his neck and cried, while Mattie stood by pale and anxious. Inside the parlor could be heard the mumble of men's voices.

In such wise do death and the fear of death fall upon country homes. All day the house had swarmed with people. All day this mother had looked forward to the reconciliation of her husband with her son. All day had the pale and silent minister of God kept his corpse-like calm, while all about the white snow gleamed, and radiant shadows filled every hollow, and the cattle bawled and frisked in the barn-yard, and the fowls cackled joyously, what time the mild, soft wind breathed warmly over the land.

Mattie cried out to her mother, in quick, low voice, "Oh mother, how is he?"

"He ain't no worse. The doctor says there's no immediate danger."

The girl brought her hands together girlishly, and said: "Oh, I'm so glad. Is he awake?"

"No; he's asleep."

"Is the doctor still here?"

"Yes."

"I guess I'll step in," said Herman.

The doctor and George Chapman sat beside the hard-coal heater, talking in low voices. The old doctor was permitting himself the luxury of a story of pioneer life. He arose with automatic courtesy, and shook hands with Herman.

"How's the sick man getting on?"

"Vera well--vera well--consederin' the mon is a complete worn-out--that's all--naethin' more. Thes floom-a-didale bezniss of rantin' away on the fear o' the Laird for sax weeks wull have worn out the frame of a bool-dawg."

Herman and Chapman smiled. "I hope you'll tell him that."

"Na fear, yoong mon," said the grim old warrior. "Weel, now, a'll juist be takin' anither look at him."

Herman went in with the doctor, and stood looking on while the old man peered and felt about. He came out soon, and, leaving a few directions with Herman and Chapman, took his departure. Everything seemed favorable, he said.

There was no longer poignancy of anxiety in Mattie's mind, she was too much of a child to imagine the horror of loss, but she was grave and gay by turns. Her healthy and wholesome nature continually reasserted itself over the power of her newly attained woman's interest in the young preacher. She went to bed and slept dreamlessly, while Herman yawned and inwardly raged at the fix in which circumstances had placed him.

Like many another lover, days away from his sweetheart were lost days. He wondered how she would take all this life in Cyene. It would be good fun to bring her down, anyway, and hear her talk. He planned such a trip, and grew so interested in the thought he forgot his patient.

In the early dawn Wallace rallied and woke. Herman heard the rustle of the pillow, and turned to find the sick man's eyes looking at him fixedly, calm but puzzled. Herman's lips slowly changed into a beautiful boyish smile. "Hello, old man! How do you find yourself?" His hearty, humorous greeting seemed to do the sick man good. Herman approached the bed. "Know where you are?" Wallace slowly put out a hand, and Herman took it. "You're coming on all right. Want some breakfast? Make it bucks?" he said, in Chicago restaurant slang. "White wings--sunny--one up coff."

All this was good tonic for Wallace, and an hour later he sipped broth, while Mrs. Allen and the Deacon and Herman

stood watching the process with apparently consuming interest. Mattie was still soundly sleeping.

Now began delicious days of convalescence, during which Wallace looked peacefully out at the coming and going of the two women, each possessing powerful appeal to him: one the motherly presence which had been denied him for many years, the other something he had never permitted himself to hope for--a sweetheart's daily companionship.

He lay there planning his church, and also his home. Into the thought of a new church came shyly but persistently the thought of a fireside of his own, with this young girl sitting in the glow of it waiting for him. His life possessed little romance. He had earned his own way through school and to college. His slender physical energies had been taxed to their utmost at every stage of his climb, but now it seemed as though some blessed rest and peace were at hand.

Meanwhile, the bitter partisans met each other coming and going out of the gate of the Allen estate, and the goodness of God shone in their softened faces. Herman was skeptical of its lasting quality, but was forced to acknowledge that it was a lovely light. He it was who made the electrical suggestion to rebuild the church as an evidence of good faith. "You say you're regenerated. Well, prove it--go ahead and regenerate the church," he said.

The enthusiasm of the neighborhood took flame. It should be done. A meeting was called. Everybody subscribed money or work. It was a generous outpouring of love and faith.

It was Herman also who counselled secrecy. "It would be a nice thing to surprise him," he said. "We'll agree to keep the scheme from him at home, if you don't give it away."

They set to work like bees. The women came down one day and took possession with brooms and mops and soap, and while the carpenters repaired the windows they fell savagely upon the grime of the seats and floors. The walls of the church echoed with woman's gossip and girlish laughter. Everything was scoured, from the door-hinges to the altar rails. New doors were hung and a new stove secured, and then came the painters to put a new coat of paint on the inside. The cold weather forbade repainting the outside.

The sheds were rebuilt by men whose hearts glowed with old-time fire. It was like pioneer days, when "barn-raisings" and "bees" made life worth while in a wild, stern land. The old men were moved to tears, and the younger rough men shouted cheery, boisterous cries to hide their own deep emotion. Hand met hand in heartiness never shown before. Neighbors frequented one another's homes, and the old times of visiting and brotherly love came back upon them. Nothing marred the perfect beauty of their revival--save the fear of its evanescence. It seemed too good to last.

Meanwhile love of another and merrier sort went on. The young men and maidens turned prayer-meeting into trysts and scrubbing-bees into festivals. They rode from house to house under glittering stars, over sparkling snows, singing:

"Hallelujah! 'tis done:
I believe on the Son;
I am saved by the blood
Of the Crucified One."

And their rejoicing chorus was timed to the clash of bells on swift young horses. Who shall say they did not right? Did the Galilean forbid love and joy?

No matter. God's stars, the mysterious night, the bells, the watchful bay of dogs, the sting of snow, the croon of loving voices, the clasp of tender arms, the touch of parting lips--these things, these joys outweigh death and hell, and all that makes the criminal tremble. Being saved, they must of surety rejoice.

And through it all Wallace crawled slowly back to life and strength. He ate of Mother Allen's chicken-broth and of toast from Mattie's care-taking hand, and gradually reassumed color and heart. His solemn eyes watched the young girl with an intensity which seemed to take her strength from her. She would gladly have given her blood for him, if it had occurred to her, or if it had been suggested as a good thing; instead, she gave him potatoes baked to a nicety, and buttered toast that would melt on the tongue, and, on the whole, they served the purpose.

One day a smartly dressed man called to see Wallace. Mattie recognized him as the Baptist clergyman from Kesota. He came in, and, introducing himself said he had heard of the excellent work of Mr. Stacey, and that he would like to speak with him.

Wallace was sitting in a rocking-chair in the parlor. Herman was in Chicago, and there was no one but Mrs. Allen and Mattie in the house.

The Kesota minister introduced himself to Wallace, and then entered upon a long eulogium upon his work in Cyene. He asked after his credentials, his plans, his connections, and then he said:

"You've done a *fine* work in softening the hearts of these people. We had almost *despaired* of doing anything with them. Yes, you have done a *won-der-ful* work, and now we must reorganize a regular society here. I will be out again when you get stronger, and we'll see about it."

Wallace was too weak to take any stand in the talk, and so allowed him to get up and go away without protest or explanation of his own plans.

When Herman came down on Saturday, he told him of the Baptist minister's visit and the proposition. Herman stretched his legs out toward the fire and put his hands in his pockets. Then he rose and took a strange attitude, such as Wallace had seen in comic pictures--it was, in fact, the attitude of a Bowery tough.

"Say, look here! If you want 'o set dis community by de ears agin, you do dat ting--see? You play dat confidence game and dey'll rat ye--sure! You invite us to come into a non-partisan deal--see?--and den you springs your own platform on us in de joint corkus--and we won't stand it! Dis goes troo de way it began, or we don't play--see?"

Out of all this Wallace deduced his own feeling--that continued peace and good-will lay in keeping clear of all doctrinal debates and disputes--- the love of Christ, the desire to do good and to be clean. These emotions had been roused far more deeply than he realized, and he lifted his face to God in the hope that no lesser thing should come in to mar the beauty of His Church.

There came a day when he walked out in the sunshine, and heard the hens caw-cawing about the yard, and saw the young colts playing about the barn. And the splendor of the winter day dazzled him as if he were looking upon the broad-flung robe of the Lord Most High. Everywhere the snow lay ridged with purple and brown hedges. Smoke rose peacefully from chimneys, and the sound of boys skating on a near-by pond added the human element.

The trouble of concealing the work of the community upon the church increased daily, and Mattie feared that some hint of it had come to him. She had her plan. She wanted to drive him down herself, and let him see the reburnished temple alone. But this was impossible. On the day when he seemed able to go, her father drove them all down. Marsden was there also, and several of his women-folks, putting down a new carpet on the platform. As they drew near the church, Wallace said:

"Why, they've fixed up the sheds!"

Mattie nodded. She was trembling with the delicious excitement of it--she wanted him hurried into the church at once. He had hardly time to think before he was whirled up to the new porch, and Marsden came out, followed by several women. He was bewildered by it all. Marsden helped him out with hearty voice, sounding:

"Careful now! Don't hurry!"

Mattie took one arm, and so he entered the church. Everything repainted! Everything warm and bright and cozy!

The significance of it came to him like a wave of light, and he took his seat in the pulpit chair and stared at them all with a look on his pale face which moved them more than words. He was like a man transfigured by an inward glow. His eyes for an instant flamed with this marvellous fire, then darkened, softened with tears, and his voice came back in a sob of joy, and he could only say:

"Friends--brethren!"

Marsden, after much coughing, said:

"We all united on this. We wanted to have you come to the church and--Well, we couldn't bear to have you see it again the way it was."

He understood it now. It was the sign of a united community. It set the seal of Christ's victory over evil passions, and the young preacher's head bowed in prayer, and they all knelt, while his weak voice returned thanks to the Lord for his gifts.

Then they all rose and shook off the oppressive solemnity, and he had time to look around at all the changes. At last he turned to Mattie and reached out his hand--he had the boldness of a man in the shadow of some mighty event which makes false modesty and conventions shadowy things of little importance. His sharpened interior sense read her clear soul, and he knew she was his, therefore he reached her his hand, and she came to him with a flush on her face, which died out as she stood proudly by his side, while he said:

"And Martha shall help me."

Therefore, this good thing happened--that in the midst of his fervor and his consecration to God's work, the love of

woman found a place.

AN AFTERWORD: OF WINDS, SNOWS AND THE STARS

*O witchery of the winter night
(With broad moon shouldering to the west)!*

*In city streets the west wind sweeps
Before my feet in rustling flight;
The midnight snows in untracked heaps
Lie cold and desolate and white.
I stand and wait with upturned eyes,
Awe'd with the splendor of the skies
And star-trained progress of the moon.*

*The city walls dissolve like smoke
Beneath the magic of the moon,
And age falls from me like a cloak;
I hear sweet girlish voices ring,
Clear as some softly stricken string--
(The moon is sailing to the west.)
The sleigh-bells clash in homeward flight;
With frost each horse's breast is white--
(The big moon sinking to the west.)*

* * * * *

"Good night, Lettie!"

"Good night, Ben!"

*(The moon is sinking at the west.)
"Good night, my sweetheart," Once again
The parting kiss while comrades wait
Impatient at the roadside gate,
And the red moon sinks beyond the west.*

THE END