Aladdin & Co.

A Romance of Yankee Magic

Herbert Quick

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ALADDIN & CO.

A ROMANCE OF YANKEE MAGIC

BY
HERBERT QUICK

Author of
“Virginia of the Air Lanes,” “Double Trouble,” etc.

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The Persons of the Story.

James Elkins, the “man who made Lattimore,” known as “Jim.”

Albert Barslow, who tells the tale; the friend and partner of Jim.

Alice Barslow, his wife; at first, his sweetheart.

William Trescott, known as “Bill,” a farmer and capitalist.

Josephine Trescott, his daughter.

Mrs. Trescott, his wife.

Mr. Hinckley, a banker of Lattimore.

Mrs. Hinckley, his wife; devoted to the emancipation of woman.

Antonia, their daughter.

Aleck Macdonald, pioneer and capitalist.

General Lattimore, pioneer, soldier, and godfather of Lattimore.

Miss Addison, the general’s niece.

Captain Marion Tolliver, Confederate veteran and Lattimore boomer.

Mrs. Tolliver, his wife.

Will Lattimore, a lawyer.

Mr. Ballard, a banker.

J. Bedford Cornish, a speculator, who with Elkins, Barslow, and Hinckley make up the great Lattimore “Syndicate.”

Clifford Giddings, editor and proprietor of the Lattimore Herald.

De Forest Barr-Smith, an Englishman “representing capital.”

Cecil Barr-Smith, his brother.

Avery Pendleton, of New York, a railway magnate; head of the “Pendleton System.”

Allen G. Wade, of New York; head of the Allen G. Wade Trust Co.

Halliday, a railway magnate; head of the “Halliday System.”

Watson, a reporter.

SCHWARTZ, a locomotive engineer on the Lattimore & Great Western.

HEGVOLD, a fireman.

CITIZENS OF LATTIMORE, Politicians, Live-stock Merchants, Railway Clerks and Officials, etc.

SCENE: Principally in the Western town of Lattimore, but partly in New York and Chicago.

TIME: Not so very long ago.

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CHAPTER I.

Which is of Introductory Character.

Our National Convention met in Chicago that year, and I was one of the delegates. I had looked forward to it with keen expectancy. I was now, at five o'clock of the first day, admitting to myself that it was a bore.

The special train, with its crowd of overstimulated enthusiasts, the throngs at the stations, the brass bands, bunting, and buncombe all jarred upon me. After a while my treason was betrayed to the boys by the fact that I was not hoarse. They punished me by making me sing as a solo the air of each stanza of "Marching Through Georgia," "Tenting To-night on the Old Camp-ground," and other patriotic songs, until my voice was assimilated to theirs. But my gorge rose at it all, and now, at five o'clock of the first day, I was seeking a place of retirement where I could be alone and think over the marvelous event which had suddenly raised me from yesterday's parity with the fellows on the train to my present state of exaltation.

I should have preferred a grotto in Vau Vau or some south-looking mountain glen; but in the absence of any such retreat in Chicago, I turned into the old art-gallery in Michigan Avenue. As I went floating in space past its door, my eye caught through the window the gleam of the white limbs of statues, and my being responded to the soul vibrations they sent out. So I paid my fee, entered,

and found the tender solitude for which my heart longed. I sat down and luxuriated in thoughts of the so recent marvelous experience. Need I explain that I was young and the experience was one of the heart?

I was so young that my delegateship was regarded as a matter to excite wonder. I saw my picture in the papers next morning as a youth of twenty-three who had become his party's leader in an important agricultural county. Some, in the shameless laudation of a sensational press, compared me to the younger Pitt. As a matter of fact, I had some talent for organization, and in any gathering of men, I somehow never lacked a following. I was young enough to be an honest partisan, enthusiastic enough to be useful, strong enough to be respected, ignorant enough to believe my party my country's safeguard, and I was prominent in my county before I was old enough to vote. At twenty-one I conducted a convention fight which made a member of Congress. It was quite natural, therefore, that I should be delegate to this convention, and that I had looked forward to it with keen expectancy. The remarkable thing was my falling off from its work now by virtue of that recent marvelous experience which as I have admitted was one of the heart. Do not smile. At three-and-twenty even delegates have hearts.

My mental and sentimental state is of importance in this history, I think, or I should not make so much of it. I feel sure that I should not have behaved just as I did had I not been at that moment in the iridescent cloudland of newly-reciprocated love. Alice had accepted me not an hour before my departure for Chicago. Hence my loathing for such things as nominating speeches and the report of the Committee on Credentials, and my yearning for the Vau Vau grotto. She had yielded herself up to me with such manifold sweetnesses, uttered and unutterable (all of which had to be gone over in my mind constantly to make sure of their reality), that the contest in Indiana, and the cause of our own State's Favorite Son, became sickening burdens to me, which rolled away as I gazed upon the canvases in the gallery. I lay back upon a seat, half closed my eyes, and looked at the pictures. When one comes to consider the matter, an art gallery is a wonderfully different thing from a national convention!

As I looked on them, the still paintings became instinct with life. Yonder shepherdess shielding from the thorns the little white lamb was Alice, and back behind the clump of elms was myself, responding to her silvery call. The cottage on the mountain-side was ours. That lady waving her handkerchief from the promontory was Alice, too; and I was the dim figure on the deck of the passing ship. I was the knight and she the wood-nymph; I the gladiator in the circus, she

the Roman lady who agonized for me in the audience; I the troubadour who twanged the guitar, she the princess whose fair shoulder shone through the lace at the balcony window. They lived and moved before my very eyes. I knew the unseen places beyond the painted mountains, and saw the secret things the artists only dreamed of. Doves cooed for me from the clumps of thorn; the clouds sailed in pearly serenity across the skies, their shadows mottling mountain, hill, and plain; and out from behind every bole, and through every leafy screen, glimpsed white dryads and fleeing fays.

Clearly the convention hall was no place for me. “Hang the speech of the temporary chairman, anyhow!” thought I; “and as for the platform, let it point with pride, and view with apprehension, to its heart’s content; it is sure to omit all reference to the overshadowing issue of the day—Alice!”

All the world loves a lover, and a true lover loves all the world,—especially that portion of it similarly blessed. So, when I heard a girl’s voice alternating in intimate converse with that of a man, my sympathies went out to them, and I turned silently to look. They must have come in during my reverie; for I had passed the place where they were sitting and had not seen them. There was a piece of grillwork between my station and theirs, through which I could see them plainly. The gallery had seemed deserted when I went in, and still seemed so, save for the two voices.

Hers was low and calm, but very earnest; and there was in it some inflection or intonation which reminded me of the country girls I had known on the farm and at school. His was of a peculiarly sonorous and vibrant quality, its every tone so clear and distinct that it would have been worth a fortune to a public speaker. Such a voice and enunciation are never associated with any mind not strong in the qualities of resolution and decision.

On looking at her, I saw nothing countrified corresponding to the voice. She was dressed in something summery and cool, and wore a sort of flowered blouse, the presence of which was explained by the easel before which she sat, and the palette through which her thumb protruded. She had laid down her brush, and the young man was using her mahlstick in a badly-directed effort to smear into a design some splotches of paint on the unused portion of her canvas.

He was by some years her senior, but both were young—she, very young. He was swarthy of complexion, and his smoothly-shaven, square-set jaw and full red lips were bluish with the subcutaneous blackness of his beard. His dress was so distinctly late in style as to seem almost foppish; but there was nothing of the

exquisite in his erect and athletic form, or in his piercing eye.

She was ruddily fair, with that luxuriant auburn-brown hair which goes with eyes of amberish-brown and freckles. These latter she had, I observed with a renewal of the thought of the country girls and the old district school. She was slender of waist, full of bust, and, after a lissome, sylph-like fashion, altogether charming in form. With all her roundness, she was slight and a little undersized.

So much of her as there was, the young fellow seemed ready to absorb, regarding her with avid eyes—a gaze which she seldom met. But whenever he gave his attention to the mahlstick, her eyes sought his countenance with a look which was almost scrutiny. It was as if some extrinsic force drew her glance to his face, until the stronger compulsion of her modesty drove it away at the return of his black orbs. My heart recognized with a throb the freemasonry into which I had lately been initiated, and, all unknown to them, I hailed them as members of the order.

Their conversation came to me in shreds and fragments, which I did not at all care to hear. I recognized in it those inanities with which youth busies the lips, leaving the mind at rest, that the interplay of magnetic discharges from heart to heart may go on uninterruptedly. It is a beautiful provision of nature, but I did not at that time admire it. I pitied them. Alice and I had passed through that stage, and into the phase marked by long and eloquent silences.

"I was brought up to think," I remember to have heard the fair stranger say, following out, apparently, some subject under discussion between them, "that the surest way to make a child steal jam is to spy upon him. I should feel ashamed."

"Quite right," said he, "but in Europe and in the East, and even here in Chicago, in some circles, it is looked upon as indispensable, you know."

"In art, at least," she went on, "there is no sex. Whoever can help me in my work is a companion that I don't need any chaperon to protect me from. If I wasn't perfectly sure of that, I should give up and go back home."

"Now, don't draw the line so as to shut me out," he protested. "How can I help you with your work?"

She looked him steadily in the face now, her intent and questioning regard shading off into a somewhat arch smile.

"I can't think of any way," said she, "unless it would be by posing for me."

"There's another way," he answered, "and the only one I'd care about."

She suddenly became absorbed in the contemplation of the paints on her palette, at which she made little thrusts with a brush; and at last she queried, doubtfully, "How?"

"I've heard or read," he answered, "that no artist ever rises to the highest, you know, until after experiencing some great love. I—can't you think of any other way besides the posing?"

She brought the brush close to her eyes, minutely inspecting its point for a moment, then seemed to take in his expression with a swift sweeping glance, resumed the examination of the brush, and finally looked him in the face again, a little red spot glowing in her cheek, and a glint of fire in her eye. I was too dense to understand it, but I felt that there was a trace of resentment in her mien.

"Oh, I don't know about that!" she said. "There may be some other way. I haven't met all your friends, and you may be the means of introducing me to the very man."

I did not hear his reply, though I confess I tried to catch it. She resumed her work of copying one of the paintings. This she did in a mechanical sort of way, slowly, and with crabbed touches, but with some success. I thought her lacking in anything like control over the medium in which she worked; but the results promised rather well. He seemed annoyed at her sudden accession of industry, and looked sometimes quizzically at her work, often hungrily at her. Once or twice he touched her hand as she stepped near him; but she neither reproved him nor allowed him to retain it.

I felt that I had taken her measure by this time. She was some Western country girl, well supplied with money, blindly groping toward the career of an artist. Her accent, her dress, and her occupation told of her origin and station in life, and of her ambitions. The blindness I guessed,—partly from the manner of her work, partly from the inherent probabilities of the case. If the young man had been eliminated from this problem with which my love-sick imagination was busying itself, I could have followed her back confidently to some rural neighborhood, and to a year or two of painting portraits from photographs, and landscapes from "studies," and exhibiting them at the county fair; the teaching of some pupils, in an unnecessary but conscientiously thrifty effort to get back some of the money invested in an "art education" in Chicago; and a final reversion to type after her marriage with the village lawyer, doctor or banker, or the owner of the adjoining farm. I was young; but I had studied people, and had already seen such things happen.

But the young man could not be eliminated. He sat there idly, his every word and look surcharged with passion. As I wondered how long it would be until they were as happy as Alice and I, the thought grew upon me that, however familiar might be the type to which she belonged, he was unclassified. His accent was Eastern—of New York, I judged. He looked like the young men in the magazine illustrations—interesting, but outside my field of observation. And I could not fail to see that girl must find herself similarly at odds with him. "But," thought I, "love levels all!" And I freshly interrogated the pictures and statues for transportation to my own private Elysium, forgetful of my unconscious neighbors.

My attention was recalled to them, however, by their arrangements for departure, and a concomitant slightly louder tone in their conversation.

"It's just a spectacular show," said he; "no plot or anything of that sort, you know, but good music and dancing; and when we get tired of it we can go. We'll have a little supper at Auriccio's afterward, if you'll be so kind. It's only a step from McVicker's."

"Won't it be pretty late?" she queried.

"Not for Chicago," said he, "and you'll find material for a picture at Auriccio's about midnight. It's quite like the Latin Quarter, sometimes."

"I want to see the real Latin Quarter, and no imitation," she answered. "Oh, I guess I'll go. It'll furnish me with material for a letter to mamma, however the picture may turn out."

"I'll order supper for the Empress," said he, "and—"

"And for the illustrious Sir John," she added. "But you mustn't call me that any more. I've been reading her history, and I don't like it. I'm glad he died on St. Helena, now: I used to feel sorry for him."

"Transfer your pity to the downtrodden Sir John," he replied, "and make a real living man happy."

They passed out and left me to my dreams. But visions did not return. My idyl was spoiled. Old-fashioned ideas emerged, and took form in the plain light of every-day common-sense. I knew the wonderfully gorgeous spectacle these two young people were going to see at the play that night, with its lights, its music, its splendidly meretricious Orientalism. And I knew Auriccio's,—not a disreputable place at all, perhaps; but free-and-easy, and distinctly Bohemian. I wished that this little girl, so arrogantly and ignorantly disdainful (as Alice

would have been under the same circumstances) of such European conventions as the chaperon, so fresh, so young, so full of allurement, so under the influence of this smooth, dark, and passionate wooer with the vibrant voice, could be otherwise accompanied on this night of pleasure than by himself alone.

“It’s none of your business,” said the voice of that cold-hearted and slothful spirit which keeps us in our groove, “and you couldn’t do anything, anyhow. Besides, he’s abjectly in love with her: would there be any danger if it were you and your Alice?”

“I’m not at all sure about him or his abjectness,” replied my uneasy conscience. “He knows better than to do this.”

“What do you know of either of them?” answered this same Spirit of Routine. “What signify a few sentences casually overheard? She may be something quite different; there are strange things in Chicago.”

“I’ll wager anything,” said I hotly, “that she’s a good American girl of the sort I live among and was brought up with! And she may be in danger.”

“If she’s that sort of girl,” said the Voice, “you may rely upon her to take care of herself.”

“That’s pretty nearly true,” I admitted.

“Besides,” said the Voice illogically, “such things happen every night in such a city. It’s a part of the great tragedy. Don’t be Quixotic!”

Here was where the Voice lost its case: for my conscience was stirred afresh; and I went back to the convention-hall carrying on a joint debate with myself. Once in the hall, however, I was conscripted into a war which was raging all through our delegation over the succession in our membership in the National Committee. I thought no more of the idyl of the art-gallery until the adjournment for the night.

CHAPTER II.

Still Introductory.

The great throng from the hall surged along the streets in an Amazonian network of streams, gathering in boiling lakes in the great hotels, dribbling off into the boarding-house districts in the suburbs, seeping down into the slimy fens of vice. Again I found myself out of touch with it all. I gave my companions the slip, and started for my hotel.

All at once it occurred to me that I had not dined, and with the thought came the remembrance of my pair of lovers, and their supper together. With a return of the feeling that these were the only people in Chicago possessing spirits akin to mine, I shaped my course for Auriccio's. My country dazedness led me astray once or twice, but I found the place, retreated into the farthest corner, sat down, and ordered supper.

It was not one of the places where the out-of-town visitors were likely to resort, and it was in fact rather quieter than usual. The few who were at the tables went out before my meal was served, and for a few minutes I was alone. Then the Empress and Sir John entered, followed by half a dozen other playgoers. The two on whom my sentimental interest was fixed came far down toward my position, attracted by the quietude which had lured me, and seated themselves at a table in a sort of alcove, cut off from the main room by columns and palms, secluded enough for privacy, public enough, perhaps, for propriety. So far as I was concerned I could see them quite plainly, looking, as I did, from my gloomy corner toward the light of the restaurant; and I was sufficiently close to be within easy earshot. I began to have the sensation of shadowing them, until I recalled the fact that, so far, it had been a case of their following me.

I thought his manner toward her had changed since the afternoon. There was now an openness of wooing, an abandonment of reserve in glance and attitude, which should have admonished her of an approaching crisis in their affairs. Yet she seemed cooler and more self-possessed than before. Save for a little flutter in her low laugh, I should have pronounced her entirely at ease. She looked very sweet and girlish in her high-necked dress, which helped make up a costume that she seemed to have selected to subdue and conceal, rather than to display, her charms. If such was her plan, it went pitifully wrong: his advances went on from approach to approach, like the last manœuvres of a successful siege.

"No," I heard her say, as I became conscious that we three were alone again; "not here! Not at all! Stop!"

When I looked at them they were quietly sitting at the table; but her face was pale, his flushed. Pretty soon the waiter came and served champagne. I felt sure

that she had never seen any before.

“How funny it looks,” said she, “with the bubbles coming up in the middle like a little fountain; and how pretty! Why, the stem is hollow, isn’t it?”

He laughed and made some foolish remark about love bubbling up in his heart. When he set his glass down, I could see that his hands were trembling as with palsy,—so much so that it was tipped over and broken.

“I’ll fill another,” said he. “Aren’t you sorry you broke it?”

“I?” she queried. “You’re not going to lay that to me, are you?”

“You’re the only one to blame!” he replied. “You must hold it till it’s steady. I’ll hold your glass with the other. Why, you don’t take any at all! Don’t you like it, dear?”

She shrank back, looked toward the door, and then took the hand in both of hers, holding it close to her side, and drank the wine like a child taking medicine. His arm, his hand still holding the glass, slipped about her waist, but she turned swiftly and silently freed herself and sat down by the chair in which he had meant that both should sit, holding his hands. Then in a moment I saw her sitting on the other side of the table, and he was filling the glasses again. The guests had all departed. The well-disciplined waiters had effaced themselves. Only we three were there. I wondered if I ought to do anything.

They sat and talked in low tones. He was drinking a good deal of the champagne; she, little; and neither seemed to be eating anything. He sat opposite to her, leaning over as if to consume her with his eyes. She returned his gaze often now, and often smiled; but her smile was drawn and tremulous, and, to my mind, pitifully appealing. I no longer wondered if I ought to do anything; for, once, when I partly rose to go and speak to them, the impossibility of the thing overcame my half resolve, and I sat down. The anti-quixotic spirit won, after all.

At last a waiter, returning with the change for the bill with which I had paid my score, was hailed by Sir John, and was paid for their supper. I looked to see them as they started for home. The girl rose and made a movement toward her wrap. He reached it first and placed it about her shoulders. In so doing, he drew her to him, and began speaking softly and passionately to her in words I could not hear. Her face was turned upward and backward toward him, and all her resistance seemed gone. I should have been glad to believe this the safe and triumphant surrender to an honest love; but here, after the dances and Stamboul spectacles, hidden by the palms, beside the table with its empty bottles and its broken glass,

how could I believe it such? I turned away, as if to avoid the sight of the crushing of some innocent thing which I was powerless to aid, and strode toward the door.

Then I heard a little cry, and saw her come flying down the great hall, leaving him standing amazedly in the archway of the palm alcove.

She passed me at the door, her face vividly white, went out into the street, like a dove from the trap at a shooting tournament, and sprang lightly upon a passing street-car. I could act now, and I would see her to a place of safety; so I, too, swung on by the rail of the rear car. She never once turned her face; but I saw Sir John come to the door of the restaurant and look both ways for her, and as he stood perplexed and alarmed, our train turned the curve at the next corner, we were swept off toward the South Side, and the dark young man passed, as I supposed, “into my dreams forever.” I made my way forward a few seats and saw her sitting there with her head bowed upon the back of the seat in front of her. I bitterly wished that he, if he had a heart, might see her there, bruised in spirit, her little ignorant white soul, searching itself for smutches of the uncleanness it feared. I wished that Alice might be there to go to her and comfort her without a word. I paid her fare, and the conductor seemed to understand that she was not to be disturbed. A drunken man in rough clothes came into the car, walked forward and looked at her a moment, and as I was about to go to him and make him sit elsewhere, he turned away and came back to the rear, as if he had some sort of maudlin realization that the front of the train was sacred ground.

At last she looked about, signalled for the car to stop, and alighted. I followed, rather suspecting that she did not know her way. She walked steadily on, however, to a big, dark house with a vine-covered porch, close to the sidewalk. A stout man, coatless, and in a white shirt, stood at the gate. He wore a slouch hat, and I knew him, even in that dim light, for a farmer. She stopped for a moment, and without a word, sprang into his arms.

“Wal, little gal, ain’t yeh out purty late?” I heard him say, as I walked past. “Didn’t expect yer dad to see yeh, did yeh? Why, yeh ain’t a-cryin’, be yeh?”

“O pa! O pa!” was all I heard her say; but it was enough. I walked to the corner, and sat down on the curbstone, dead tired, but happy. In a little while I went back toward the street-car line, and as I passed the vine-clad porch, heard the farmer’s bass voice, and stopped to listen, frankly an eavesdropper, and feeling, somehow, that I had earned the right to hear.

“Why, o’ course, I’ll take yeh away, ef yeh don’t like it here, little gal,” he was

saying. “Yes, we’ll go right in an’ pack up now, if yeh say so. Only it’s a little suddent, and may hurt the Madame’s feelin’s, y’ know—”

At the hotel I was forced by the crowded state of the city to share the bed of one of my fellow delegates. He was a judge from down the state, and awoke as I lay down.

“That you, Barslow?” said he. “Do you know a fellow by the name of Elkins, of Cleveland?”

“No,” said I, “why?”

“He was here to see you, or rather to inquire if you were Al Barslow who used to live in Pleasant Valley Township,” the Judge went on. “He’s the fellow who organized the Ohio flambeau brigade. Seems smart.”

“Pleasant Valley Township, did he say? Yes, I know him. It’s Jimmie Elkins.”

And I sank to sleep and to dreams, in which Jimmie Elkins, the Empress, Sir John, Alice, and myself acted in a spectacular drama, like that at McVicker’s. And yet there are those who say there is nothing in dreams!

CHAPTER III.

Reminiscentially Autobiographical.

This Jimmie Elkins was several years older than I; but that did not prevent us, as boys, from being fast friends. At seventeen he had a coterie of followers among the smaller fry of ten and twelve, his tastes clinging long to the things of boyhood. He and I played together, after the darkening of his lip suggested the razor, and when the youths of his age were most of them acquiring top buggies, and thinking of the long Sunday-night drives with their girls. Jim preferred the boys, and the trade of the fisher and huntsman.

Why, in spite of parental opposition, I loved Jimmie, is not hard to guess. He had an odd and freakish humor, and talked more of Indian-fighting, filibustering in gold-bearing regions, and of moving accidents by flood and field, than of crops,

live-stock, or bowery dances. He liked me just as did the older men who sent me to the National Convention,—in spite of my youth. He was a ne'er-do-weel, said my father, but I snared gophers and hunted and fished with him, and we loved each other as brothers seldom do.

At last, I began teaching school, and working my way to a better education than our local standard accepted as either useful or necessary, and Jim and I drifted apart. He had always kept up a voluminous correspondence with that class of advertisers whose black-letter "Agents Wanted" is so attractive to the farmer-boy; and he was usually agent for some of their wares. Finally, I heard of him as a canvasser for a book sold by subscription,—a "Veterinarians' Guide," I believe it was,—and report said that he was "making money." Again I learned that he had established a publishing business of some kind; and, later, that reverses had forced him to discontinue it,—the old farmer who told me said he had "failed up." Then I heard no more of him until that night of the convention, when I had the adventure with the Empress and Sir John, all unknown to them; and Jim made the ineffectual attempt to find me. His family had left the old neighborhood, and so had mine; and the chances of our ever meeting seemed very slight. In fact it was some years later and after many of the brave dreams of the youthful publicist had passed away, that I casually stumbled upon him in the smoking-room of a parlor-car, coming out of Chicago.

I did not know him at first. He came forward, and, extending his hand, said, "How are you, Al?" and paused, holding the hand I gave him, evidently expecting to enjoy a period of perplexity on my part. But with one good look in his eyes I knew him. I made him sit down by me, and for half an hour we were too much engrossed in reminiscences to ask after such small matters as business, residence, and general welfare.

"Where all have you been, Jim, and what have you been doing, since you followed off the 'Veterinarians' Guide,' and I lost you?" I inquired at last.

"I've been everywhere, and I've done everything, almost," said he. "Put it in the 'negative case,' and my history'll be briefer."

"I should regard organizing a flambeau brigade," said I, "as about the last thing you would engage in."

"Ah!" he replied, "His Whiskers at the hotel told you I called that time, did he? Well, I didn't think he had the sense. And I doubted the memory on your part, and I wasn't at all sure you were the real Barslow. But about the flambeaux. The fact is, I had some stock in the flambeau factory, and I was a rabid partisan of

flambeaux. They seemed so patriotic, you know, so sort of ennobling, and so convincing, as to the merits of the tariff controversy!”

It was the same old Jim, I thought.

“We used to have a scheme,” I remarked, “our favorite one, of occupying an island in the Pacific,—or was it somewhere in the vicinity of the Spanish Main—”

“If it was the place where we were to make slaves of all the natives, and I was to be king, and you Grand Vizier,” he answered, as if it were a weighty matter, and he on the witness-stand, “it was in the Pacific—the South Pacific, where the whale-oil comes from. A coral atoll, with a crystal lagoon in the middle for our ships, and a fringe of palms along the margin—coco-palms, you remember; and the lagoon was green, sometimes, and sometimes blue; and the sharks never came over the bar, but the porpoises came in and played for us, and made fireworks in the phosphorescent waves....”

His eyes grew almost tender, as he gazed out of the window, and ceased to speak without finishing the sentence,—which it took me some minutes to follow out to the end, in my mind. I was delighted and touched to find these foolish things so green in his memory.

“The plan involved,” said I soberly, “capturing a Spanish galleon filled with treasure, finding two lovely ladies in the cabin, and offering them their liberty. And we sailed with them for a port; and, as I remember it, their tears at parting conquered us, and we married them; and lived richer than oil magnates, and grander than Monte Cristos forever after: do you remember?”

“Remember! Well, I should smile!”—he had been laughing like a boy, with his old frank laugh. “Them’s the things we don’t forget.... Did you ever gather any information as to what a galleon really was? I never did.”

“I had no more idea than I now have of the Rosicrucian Mysteries; and I must confess,” said I, “that I’m a little hazy on the galleon question yet. As to piracy, now, and robbers and robbery, actual life fills out the gaps in the imagination of boyhood, doesn’t it, Jim?”

“Apt to,” he assented, “but specifically? As to which, you know?”

“Well, I’ve had my share of experience with them,” I answered, “though not so much in the line of rob-or, as we planned, but more as rob-ee.”

Jim looked at me quizzically.

“Board of Trade, faro, or ... what?” he ventured.

“General business,” I responded, “and ... politics.”

“Local, state, or national?” he went on, craftily ignoring the general business.

“A little national, some state, but the bulk of it local. I’ve been elected County Treasurer, down where I live, for four successive terms.”

“Good for you!” he responded. “But I don’t see how that can be made to harmonize with your remark about rob-or and rob-ee. It’s been your own fault, if you haven’t been on the profitable side of the game, with the dear people on the other. And I judge from your looks that you eat three meals a day, right along, anyhow. Come, now, b’lay this rob-ee business (as Sir Henry Morgan used to say) till you get back to Buncombe County. As a former partner in crime, I won’t squeal; and the next election is some ways off, anyhow. No concealment among pals, now, Al, it’s no fair, you know, and it destroys confidence and breeds discord. Many a good, honest, piratical enterprise has been busted up by concealment and lack of confidence. Always trust your fellow pirates,—especially in things they know all about by extrinsic evidence,—and keep concealment for the great world of the unsophisticated and gullible, and to catch the sucker vote with. But among ourselves, my beloved, fidelity to truth, and openness of heart is the first rule, right out of Hoyle. With dry powder, mutual confidence, and sharp cutlasses, we are invincible; and as the poet saith,

> “‘Far as the tum-te-tum the billows foam
> Survey our empire and behold our home,’

or words to that effect. And to think of your trying to deceive me, your former chieftain, who doesn’t even vote in your county or state, and moreover always forgets election! Rob-ee indeed! rats! Al, I’m ashamed of you, by George, I am!“

This speech he delivered with a ridiculous imitation of the tricks of the elocutionist. It was worthy of the burlesque stage. The conductor, passing through, was attracted by it, and notified us that the solitude of the smoking-room had been invaded, by a slight burst of applause at Jim’s peroration, followed by the vanishing of the audience.

“No need for any further concealment on my part, so far as elections are concerned,” said I, when we had finished our laugh, “for I go out of office January first, next.”

“Oh, well, that accounts for it, then,” said he. “I notice, say, three kinds of retirement from office: voluntary (very rare), post-convention, and post-election.

Which is yours?”

“Post-convention, I’m sorry to say. I wish it had been voluntary.”

“It *is* the cheapest; but you’re in great luck not to get licked at the polls. Altogether, you’re in great luck. You’ve been betting on a game in which the percentage is mighty big in favor of the house, and you’ve won three or four consecutive turns out of the box. You’ve got no kick coming: you’re in big luck. Don’t you know you are?”

I did not feel called upon to commit myself; and we smoked on for some time in silence.

“It strikes me, Jim,” said I, at last, “that you’ve done all the cross-examination, and that it is time to listen to your report. How about you and your conduct?”

“As for my conduct,” was the prompt answer, “it’s away up in the neighborhood of G. I’ve managed to hold the confounded world up for a living, ever since I left Pleasant Valley Township. Some of the time the picking has been better than at others; but my periods of starvation have been brief. By practicing on the ‘Veterinarians’ Guide’ and other similar fakes, I learned how to talk to people so as to make them believe what I said about things, with the result, usually, of wooing the shrinking and cloistered dollar from its lair. When a fellow gets this trick down fine, he can always find a market for his services. I handled hotel registers, city directories, and like literature, including county histories—”

“Sh-h-h!” said I, “somebody might hear you.”

“—and at last, after a conference with my present employers, the error of my way presented itself to me, and I felt called to a higher and holier profession. I yielded to my good angel, turned my better nature loose, and became a missionary.”

“A what!” I exclaimed.

“A missionary,” he responded soberly. “That is, you understand, not one of these theological, India’s-coral-strand guys; but one who goes about the United States of America in a modest and unassuming way, doing good so far as in him lies.”

“I see,” said I, punning horribly, “‘in him lies.’”

“Eh?... Yes. Have another cigar. Well, now, you can’t defend this foreign-mission business to me for a minute. The hills, right in this vicinity, are even now white to the harvest. Folks here want the light just as bad as the foreign heathen; and so I took up my burden, and went out to disseminate truth, as the soliciting agent of

the Frugality and Indemnity Life Association, which presented itself to me as the capacity in which I could best combine repentance with its fruits."

"I perceive," said I.

"Perfectly plain, isn't it, to the seeing eye?" he went on. "You see it was like this: Charley Harper and I had been together in the Garden City Land Company, years ago, during the boom—by the way, I didn't mention that in my report, did I? Well, of course, that company went up just as they all did, and neither Charley nor I got to be receiver, as we'd sort of laid out to do, and we separated. I went back to my literature—hotel registers, with an advertising scheme, with headquarters at Cleveland. That's how I happened to be an Ohio man at that national convention. Charley always had a leaning toward insurance, and went down into Illinois, and started a mutual-benefit organization, which he kept going a few years down on the farm—Springfield, or Jacksonville, or somewhere down there; and when I ketched up with him again, he was just changing it to the old-line plan, and bringing it to the metropolis. Well, I helped him some to enlist capital, and he offered me the position of Superintendent of Agents. I accepted, and after serving awhile in the ranks to sort of get onto the ropes, here I am, just starting out on a trip which will take me through a number of states."

"How does it agree with you?" I inquired.

"Not well," said he, "but the good I accomplish is a great comfort to me. On this trip, now, I expect to do much in the way of stimulating the boys up to their great work of spreading the light of the gospel of true insurance. Sometimes, in these days of apathy and error, I find my burden a heavy one; and notwithstanding the quiet of conscience I gain, if it weren't for the salary, I'd quit to-morrow, Al, danged if I wouldn't. It makes me tired to have even you sort of hint that I'm actuated by some selfish motive, when, in truth and in fact, I live but to gather widows and orphans under my wing, so to speak, and give second husbands a good start, by means of policies written on the only true plan, combining participation in profits with pure mutuality, and—"

"Never mind!" said I with a silence-commanding gesture. "I've heard all that before. You're onto the ropes thoroughly; but don't practice your infernal arts on me! I hope the salary is satisfactory?"

"Fairish; but not high, considering what they get for it."

"You used to be more modest," said I. "I remember that you once nearly broke your heart because you couldn't summon up courage to ask Creeshy Hammond

to go to the ‘Fourth’ with you; d’ye remember?”

“Well, I guess, yes!” he replied. “Wasn’t I a miserable wretch for a few days! And I’ve never been able to ask any woman I cared about, the fateful question, yet.”

We went into the parlor-car, and talked over old times and new for an hour. I told him of my marriage and my home, and I studied him. I saw that he still preserved his humorous, mock-serious style of conversation, and that his hand-to-hand battle with the world had made him good-humoredly cynical. He evinced a knowledge of more things than I should have expected; and had somehow acquired an imposing manner, in spite of his rather slangy, if expressive, vocabulary. He had the power of making statements of mere opinion, which, from some vibration of voice or trick of expression, struck the hearer as solid facts, thrice buttressed by evidence. He bore no marks of dissipation, unless the occasional use of terms traceable to the turf or the gaming-table might be considered such; but these expressions, I considered, are so constantly before every reader of the newspapers that the language of the pulpit, even, is infected by them. Their evidential value being thus destroyed, they ought not to be weighed at all, as against firm, wholesome flesh, a good complexion, and a clear eye, all of which Mr. Elkins possessed.

“It’s funny,” said I, “how seldom I meet any of the old neighbor-boys. Do you see any of them in your travels?”

“Not often,” he answered, “but you remember little Ed Smith, who lived on the Hayes place for a while, and brought the streaked snake into the schoolhouse while Julia Fanning was teaching? Well, he was an architect at Garden City, and lives in Chicago now. We sort of chum together: saw him yesterday. He left Garden City when the land company went up. I tell you, that was a hot town for a while! Railroads, and factories, and irrigation schemes, and prices scooting toward the zenith, till you couldn’t rest. If I’d got into that push soon enough, I shouldn’t have made a thing but money; as it was, I didn’t lose only what I had. A good many of the boys lost a lot more. But I tell you, Al, a boom properly boomed is a sure thing.”

“You’re a constant source of surprise to me, Jim,” said I. “I should have thought them sure to lose.”

“They’re sure to win,” said he earnestly.

I demurred. “I don’t see how that can possibly be,” said I, “for of all things, booms seem to me the most fickle and incalculable.”

“They seem so,” said he, smiling, but still in earnest, “to your rustic and untaught mind, and to most others, because they haven’t been studied. The comet, likewise, doesn’t seem very stable or dependable; but to the eye of the astronomer its orbit is plain, and the time of its return engagement pretty certain. It’s the same with seventeen-year locusts—and booms; their visits are so far apart that the masses forget their birthmarks and the W’s on their backs. But if you’ll follow their appearances from place to place, as I’ve done, putting up my ante right along for the privilege, you’ll become an accomplished boomist; and from the first gentle stirrings of boom-sprouts in the soil, so to speak, you can forecast their growth, maturity, and collapse.”

“I must be permitted to doubt it,” said I.

“It’s easy, my son,” he resumed, “dead easy, and it’s psychology on the hugest scale; and among the results of its study is constant improvement of the mind, going on coincidentally with the preparation of the way to the ownership of steam-yachts and racing-stables, or any other similar trifles you hanker for.”

“Great brain, Jim! Massive intellect!” said I, laughing at the fantastic absurdity of his assertion. “Why, such knowledge as you possess is better than straight tips on all the races ever to be run. It’s better than our tropical island and Spanish galleons. You get richer, and you don’t have to look out for men-of-war. Do I hold my job as Grand Vizier?”

“You hold any job you’ll take: I’ll make out the appointment with the position and salary blank, and you can fill it up. And if you get dissatisfied with that, the old grand hailing-sign of distress will catch the speaker’s eye, any old time. But, I tell you, Al, in all seriousness, I’m right about this boom business. They’re all alike, and they all have the same history. With the conditions right, one can be started anywhere in a growing country. I’ve had my ear to the ground for a while back, and I’ve heard things. I’m sure I detect some of the premonitory symptoms: money piling up in the financial centers; property away down, but strengthening, in the newer regions; and, lately, a little tendency to take chances in investments, forgetting the scorching of ten or twelve years ago. A new generation of suckers is gettin’ ready to bite. Look into this thing, Al, and don’t be a chump.”

“The same old Jim,” said I; “you were manipulating a corner in tobacco-tags while I was learning my letters.”

“Do you ever forget anything?” he inquired. “I have about forgotten that myself. How was that tobacco-tag business, Al?”

Then with the painstaking circumstantiality of two old schoolmates luxuriating in memories, we talked over the tobacco-tag craze which swept through our school one winter. Everything in life takes place in school, and the "tobacco-tag craze" has quite often recurred to me as showing boys acting just as men act, and Jimmie Elkins as the born stormy petrel of financial seas.

It all came back to our minds, and we reconstructed this story. The manufacturers of "Tomahawk Plug" had offered a dozen photographs of actresses and dancers to any one sending in a certain number of the tin hatchets concealed in their tobacco. The makers of "Broad-axe Navy" offered something equally cheap and alluring for consignments of their brass broad-axes. The older boys began collecting photographs, and a market for tobacco-tags of certain kinds was established. We little fellows, though without knowledge of the mysterious forces which had given value to these bits of metal, began to pick up stray tags from sidewalk, foot-path, and floor. A marked upward tendency soon manifested itself. Boys found their "Broad-axe" or "Door-key" tags, picked up at night, doubled in value by morning. The primary object in collecting tags was forgotten in the speculative mania which set in. Who would exchange "Tomahawk" tags for the counterfeit presentment of décolleté dancers, when by holding them he could make cent-per-cent on his investment of hazel-nuts and slate-pencils?

The playground became a Board of Trade. We learned nothing but mental arithmetic applied to deals in "Door-keys," "Arrow-heads," and other tag properties. We went about with pockets full of tags.

Jim, not yet old enough to admire the beauties of the photographs, came forward in a week as the Napoleon of tobacco-tag finance. He acquired tags in the slumps, and sold them in the bulges. He raided particular brands with rumors of the vast supply with which the village boys were preparing to flood us. He converted his holdings into marbles and tops. Finally, he planned his master-stroke. He dropped mysterious hints regarding some tag considered worthless. He asked us in whispers if we had any. Others followed his example, and "Door-key" tags went above all others and were scarce at any price. Then Jimmie Elkins brought out the supply which he had "cornered," threw it on the market, and before it had time to drop took in a large part of the playground currency. I lost to him a good drawing-slate and a figure-4 trap.

Jimmie pocketed his winnings, but the trouble attracted the attention of the teacher, and under adverse legislation a period of liquidation set in. The distress was great. Many found themselves with property which was not convertible into

photographs or anything else. To make matters worse, the discovery was made that the big boys had left school to begin the spring’s work, and no one wanted the photographs. Bankrupt and disillusioned, we returned to the realities of kites, marbles, and knives, most of which we had to obtain from Jimmie Elkins.

“Yes,” said he, “it’s a good deal the same with booms. But if you understand ’em ... eh, Al?”

“Well,” said I, really impressed now, “I’ll look into it. And when you get ready to sow your boom-seed, let me know. I change cars in a few minutes, and you go on. Come down and see me sometimes, can’t you? We haven’t had our talk half out yet. Doesn’t your business ever bring you down our way?”

“It hasn’t yet, but I’m coming down into that neck of the woods within six weeks, and I guess I can fix it so’s to stop off,—mingling pleasure and business. It’s the only way the hustling philanthropist of my style ever gets any recreation.”

“Do it,” said I; “I’ll have plenty of time at my disposal; for I go out of office before that time; and I may want to go into your boom-hatchery.”

“On the theory that the great adversary of mankind runs an employment agency for ex’s? There’s the whistle for your junction. By George, Al, I can’t tell you how glad I am to have ketched up with you again! I’ve wondered about you a million times. Don’t let’s lose track of each other again.”

“No, no, Jim, we won’t!” The train was coming to a stop. “Don’t allow anything to side-track you and prevent that visit.”

“Well, I should say not,” he answered, following me out upon the platform of the station. “We’ll have a regular piratical reunion—a sort of buccaneers’ camp-fire. I’ve a curiosity to see some of the fellows who acted the part of rob-or to your rob-ee. I want to hear their side of the story. Good-by, Al. Confound it, I wish you were going on with me!”

He wrung my hand at parting, reminding me of the old Jim who studied from the same geography with me, more than at any time since we met. He stayed with me until after his train had started, caught hold of the hand-rail as the rear car went by, and passed out of view, waving his hand to me.

I sat down on a baggage-truck waiting for my train, thinking of my encounter with Jim. All the way home I was busy pondering over a thousand things thus suddenly recalled to me. I could see every fence-corner and barn, every hill and stream of our old haunts; and after I got home I told Alice all about it.

“He seems quite a remarkable fellow,” said I, “and a perfect specimen of the pusher and hustler—a quick-witted man of affairs. If he is ever put down, he can’t be kept down.”

“I think I prefer a more refined type of man,” said Alice.

“In the sixteenth century,” I went on with that excessive perspicacity which our wives have to put up with, “he’d have been a Drake or a Dampier; in the seventeenth, the commander of a privateer or slaver; in this age, I shall not be at all surprised if he turns out a great railway or financial magnate. It’s like a whiff of boyhood to talk with him; though he’s a greatly different sort of man from what I should have expected to find him. I think you’ll like him.”

She seemed dubious about this. Our wives instinctively disapprove of people we used to know prior to that happy meeting which led to marriage. This prejudice, for some reason, is stronger against our feminine acquaintances than the others. I am not analytical enough to do more than point out this feeling, which will, I think, be admitted by all husbands to exist.

“That sort of man,” said she, “lacks the qualities of bravery and intrepidity which make up a Drake or a Dampier. They are so a-scheming and calculating!”

“The last time I saw Jim until to-day,” said I, “he did something which seems to show that he had those more admirable qualities.”

Then I told her that story of Jim and the mad dog, which is remembered in Pleasant Valley to this day. Some say the dog was not mad; but I, who saw his terrible, insane look as he came snapping and frothing down the road, believe that he was. Jim had left the school for a year or so, and I was a “big boy” ready to leave it. It was at four one afternoon, and as the children filed into the road, there met them the shouts of men and cries of “Run! Run! Mad dog!”

The children scattered like a covey of quail; but a pair of little five-year-olds, forgotten by the others, walked on hand in hand, looking into each other’s faces, right toward the poor crazed, hunted brute, which trotted slowly toward the children, gnashing its frothing jaws at sticks and weeds, at everything it met, ready to bury its teeth in the first baby to come within reach.

A young man with a canvasser’s portfolio stood behind a fence over which he had jumped to avoid the dog. Suddenly he saw the children, knew their danger, and leaped back into the road. It was like a bull-fighter vaulting the barriers into the perils of the arena,—only it was to save, not to destroy. The dog had passed him and was nearer the children than he was. I wondered what he expected to do

as I saw him running lightly, swiftly, and yet quietly behind the terrible beast. As he neared the animal, he stooped, and my blood froze as I saw him seize the dog with both hands by the hinder legs. The head curled sidewise and under, and the teeth almost grazed the young man's hands with a vicious, metallic snap. Then we saw what the contest was. The young man, with a powerful circling sweep of his arms, whirled the dog so swiftly about his head that the lank frame swung out in a straight line, and the snap could not be repeated. But what of the end? No muscles could long stand such a strain, and when they yielded, then what?

Then we saw that as he swung his loathsome foe, the young man was gradually approaching the schoolhouse. We saw the horrible snapping head whirl nearer and nearer at every turn to the corner of the building. Then we saw the young man strike a terrible blow at the stone wall, using the dog as a club; and in a moment I saw the stones splashed with red, and the young man lying on the ground, where the violence of his effort had thrown him, and by him lay the quivering form of what we had fled from. And the young man was James Elkins.

Alice breathed hard as I finished, and stood straight with her chin held high.

"That was fine!" said she. "I want to see that man!"

CHAPTER IV.

Jim Discovers his Coral Island.

There has long been abroad in the world a belief that events which bear some controlling relation to one's destiny are announced by premonition, some spiritual trepidation, some movement of that curtain which cuts off our view of the future. I believe this notion to be false, but feel that it is true; and the manner in which that adventure of mine in the old art gallery and at Auriccio's impressed my mind, and the way in which my memory clung to it, seem to justify my feeling rather than my belief. Whenever I visited Chicago, I went to the gallery, more in the hope of seeing the girl whose only name to me was "the Empress" than to gratify my cravings for art. I felt a boundless pity for her—and laughed at myself for taking so seriously an incident which, in all likelihood, she herself dismissed with a few tears, a few retrospective burnings of heart and cheek. But I never saw her. Once I loitered for an hour about the boarding-house with the vine-clad porch, while the boarders (mostly students, I judged) came and went; but though I saw many young girls, the Empress was not among them. And all this time the years were rolling on, and I was permitting my once bright political career to blight and wither by my own neglect, as a growth not worth caring for.

I became a private citizen in due time, but found no comfort in leisure. I was in those doldrums which beset the politician when rivals justle him from his little eminence. One who, for years, is annually or biennially complimented by the suffrages of even a few thousands of his fellow citizens, and is invited into the penetralia of a great political party, is apt to regard himself, after a while, as peculiarly deserving of the plaudits of the humble and the consideration of the powerful. Then comes the inevitable hour when pussy finds himself without a corner. The deep disgust for party and politics which then takes possession of him demands change of scene and new surroundings. Any flagging in partisan enthusiasm is sure to be attributed to sore-headedness, and leads to charges of perfidy and thanklessness. Yet, for him, the choice lies between abated zeal and hypocrisy, inasmuch as no man can normally be as zealous for his party as the fanatic into which the candidate or incumbent converts himself.

Underlying my whole frame of mind was the knowledge that, so far as making a career was concerned, I had wasted several years of my life, and had now to

begin anew. Add to this a slight sense of having played an unworthy part in life (although here I was unable to particularize), and a new sense of aloofness from the people with whom I had been for so long on terms of hearty and back-slapping familiarity, and no further reason need be sought for a desire which came mightily upon me to go away and begin life over again in a new *milieu*. In spite of the mild opposition of my wife, this desire grew to a resolve; and I came to look upon myself as a temporary sojourner in my own home.

Such was the state of our affairs, when a letter came from Mr. Elkins (in lieu of the promised visit) urging me to remove to the then obscure but since celebrated town of Lattimore.

"I got to be too rich for Charley Harper's blood," said the letter, among other things. "I wanted as much in the way of salary as I could earn, working for myself, and Charley kicked—said the directors wouldn't consent, and that such a salary list would be a black eye for the Frugality and Indemnity if it showed up in its statements. So I quit. I am loan agent for the company here, which gives me a visible means of support, and keeps me from being vagged. But, in confidence, I want to tell you that my main graft here is the putting in operation of my boom-hatching scheme. Come out, and I'll enroll you as a member of the band once more; for this is the coral atoll for me. You ought to get out of that stagnant pond of yours, and come where the natatory medium is fresh, clean, and thickly peopled with suckers, and a new run of 'em coming on right soon. In other words, get into the swim."

After reading this letter and considering it as a whole, I was so much impressed by it that Lattimore was added to the list of places I meant to visit, on a tour I had planned for myself.

In the West, all roads run to or from Chicago. It is nearer to almost any place by the way of Chicago than by any other route: so Alice and I went to the city by the lake, as the beginning of our prospecting tour. I took her to the art gallery and showed her just where my two lovers had stood,—telling her the story for the first time. Then she wanted to eat a supper at Auriccio's; and after the play we went there, and I was forced to describe the whole scene over again.

"Didn't she see you at all?" she asked.

"Not at all," said I.

"You are a good boy," said my wife, judging me by one act which she approved. "Kiss me."

This occurred after we reached our lodgings. I suggested as a change of subject that my next day's engagements took me to the Stock Yards, and I assumed that she would scarcely wish to accompany me.

"I think I prefer the stores," said she, "and the pictures. Maybe *I* shall have an adventure."

At the big Exchange Building, I found that the acquaintance whom I sought was absent from his office, and I roamed up and down the corridors in search of him. As usual the gathering here was intensely Western. There were bronzed cattlemen from every range from Amarillo to the Belle Fourche, sturdy buyers of swine from Iowa and Illinois, sombreroed sheepmen from New Mexico, and vikingesque Swedes from North Dakota. Men there were wearing thousand-dollar diamonds in red flannel shirts, solid gold watch-chains made to imitate bridle-bits, and heavy golden bullocks sliding on horse-hair guards. It pleased me, as such a crowd always does. The laughter was loud but it was free, and the hunted look one sees on State Street and Michigan Avenue was absent.

"I wish Alice had come," said I, noting the flutter of skirts in a group of people in the corridor; and then, as I came near, the press divided, and I saw something which drew my eyes as to a sight in which lay mystery to be unraveled.

Facing me stood a stout farmer in a dark suit of common cut and texture. He seemed, somehow, not entirely strange; but the petite figure of the girl whose back was turned to me was what fixed my attention.

She wore a smart traveling-gown of some pretty gray fabric, and bore herself gracefully and with the air of dominating the group of commission men among whom she stood. I noted the incurved spine, the deep curves of the waist, and the liberal slope of the hips belonging to a shapely little woman in whom slimness was mitigated in adorable ways, which in some remote future bade fair to convert it into matronliness. Under a broad hat there showed a wealth of red-brown hair, drawn up like a sunburst from a slender little neck.

"I have provided a box at Hooley's," said the head of a great commission firm. "Mrs. Johnson will be with us. We may count upon you?"

"I think so," said the girl, "if papa hasn't made any engagements."

The stout farmer blushed as he looked down at his daughter.

"Engagements, eh? No, sir!" he replied. "She runs things after the steers is unloaded. Whatever the little gal says goes with me."

They turned, and as they came on down the hall, still chatting, I saw her face, and knew it. It was the Empress! But even in that glimpse I saw the change which years had brought. Now she ruled instead of submitting; her voice, still soft and low, had lost its rustic inflections; and in spite of the change in the surroundings,—the leap from the art gallery to the Stock Yards,—there was more of the artist now, and less of the farmer’s lass. They turned into a suite of offices and disappeared.

“Well, Mr. Barslow,” said my friend, coming up. “Glad to see you. I’ve been hunting for you.”

“Who is that girl and her father?” I asked.

“One of the Johnson Commission Company’s Shippers,” said he, “Prescott, from Lattimore; I wish I could get his shipments.”

“No!” said I, “Not Lattimore!”

“Prescott of Lattimore,” he repeated. “Know anything of him?”

“N-no,” said I. “I have friends in that town.”

“I wish I had,” was the reply; “I’d try to get old Prescott’s business.”

“There’s destiny in this,” said Alice, when I told her of my encounter with the Empress and her father. “Her living in Lattimore is not an accident.”

“I doubt,” said I, “if anybody’s is.”

“She looked nice, did she?” Alice went on, “and dressed well?” and without waiting for an answer added: “Let’s leave Chicago. I’m anxious to get to Lattimore!”

CHAPTER V.

We Reach the Atoll.

So we journeyed on to Duluth, to St. Paul and Minneapolis, and to the cities on the Missouri. It was at one of those recurrent periods when the fever of material

and industrial change and development breaks out over the whole continent. The very earth seemed to send out tingling shocks of some occult stimulus; the air was charged with the ozone of hope; and subtle suggestions seemed to pass from mind to mind, impelling men to dare all, to risk all, to achieve all. In every one of these young cities we were astonished at the changes going on under our very eyes. Streets were torn up for the building of railways, viaducts, and tunnels. Buildings were everywhere in course of demolition, to make room for larger edifices. Excavations yawned like craters at street-corners. Steel pillars, girders, and trusses towered skyward,—skeletons to be clothed in flesh of brick and stone.

Suburbs were sprouting, almost daily, from the mould of the market-gardens in the purlieus. Corporations were contending for the possession of the natural highway approaches to each growing city. Street-railway companies pushed their charters to passage at midnight sessions of boards of aldermen, seized streets in the night-time, and extended their metallic tentacles out into the fields of dazed farmers.

On the frontiers, counties were organized and populated in a season. Every one of them had its two or three villages, which aped in puny fashion the achievements of the cities. New pine houses dotted prairies, unbroken save for the mile-long score of the delimiting plow. Long trains of emigrant-cars moved continually westward. The world seemed drunk with hope and enthusiasm. The fulfillment of Jim's careless prophecy had burst suddenly upon us.

Such things as these were fresh in our memories when we reached Lattimore. I had wired Elkins of our coming, and he met us at the station with a carriage. It was one sunny September afternoon when he drove us through the streets of our future home to the principal hotel.

"We have supper at six, dinner at twelve-thirty, breakfast from seven to ten," said Jim, as we alighted at the hotel. "That's the sort of bucolic municipality you've struck here; we'll shove all these meals several hours down, when we get to doubling our population. You'll have an hour to get freshened up for supper. Afterwards, if Mrs. Barslow feels equal to the exertion, we'll take a drive about the town."

Lattimore was a pretty place then. Low, rounded hills topped with green surrounded it. The river flowed in a broad, straight reach along its southern margin. A clear stream, Brushy Creek, ran in a miniature canyon of limestone, through the eastern edge of the town. On each side of this brook, in lawns of

vivid green, amid natural groves of oak and elm, interspersed with cultivated greenery, stood the houses of the well-to-do. Trees made early twilight in most of the streets.

People were out in numbers, driving in the cool autumnal evening. As a handsome girl, a splendid blonde, drove past us, my wife spoke of the excellent quality of the horseflesh we saw. Jim answered that Lattimore was a center of equine culture, and its citizens wise in breeders' lore. The appearance of things impressed us favorably. There was an air of quiet prosperity about the place, which is unusual in Western towns, where quietude and progress are apt to be thought incompatible. Jim pointed out the town's natural advantages as we drove along.

"What do you think of that, now?" said he, waving his whip toward the winding gorge of Brushy Creek.

"It's simply lovely!" said Alice, "a little jewel of a place."

"A bit of mountain scenery on the prairie," said Jim. "And more than that, or less than that, just as you look at it, it's the source from which inexhaustible supplies of stone will be quarried when we begin to build things."

"But won't that spoil it?" said Alice.

"Well, yes; and down on that bottom we've found as good clay for pottery, sewer-pipes, and paving-brick as exists anywhere. Back there where you saw that bluff along the river—looks as if it's sliding down into the water—remember it? Well, there's probably the only place in the world where there's just the juxtaposition of sand and clay and chalk to make Portland cement. Supply absolutely unlimited! Why, there ought to be a thousand men employed right now in those cement works. Oh, I tell you, things'll hum here when we get these schemes working!"

We laughed at him: his visualization of the cement works was so complete.

"I suppose you know where all the capital is coming from," said I, "to do all these things? For my part, I see no way of getting it except our old plan of buccaneering."

"Exactly my idea!" said he. "Didn't I write you that I'd enroll you as a member of the band? Has Al ever told you, Mrs. Barslow, of our old times, when we, as individuals, were passing through our sixteenth-century stage?"

"Often," Alice replied. "He looks back upon his pirate days as a time of

Arcadian simplicity, ‘Untouched by sorrow, and unsoiled by sin.’”

“I can easily understand,” said Jim reflectively, “how piracy might appear in that roseate light after a few years of practical politics. Now from the moral heights of a life-insurance man’s point of view it’s different.”

So we rode on chatting and chaffing, now of the old time, now of the new; and all the time I felt more and more impressed by the dissolving views which Jim gave us of different parts of his program for making Lattimore the metropolis of “the world’s granary,” as he called the surrounding country. As we topped a low hill on our way back, he pulled up, to give us a general view of the town and suburbs, and of the great expanse of farming country beyond. Between us and Lattimore was a mile stretch of gently descending road, with grain-fields and farm-houses on each side.

“By the way,” said he, “do you see that white house and red barn in the maple grove off to the right? Well, you remember Bill Trescott?”

Neither of us could call such a person to mind.

“Well, it’s all right, I suppose,” he went on in a tone implying injury forgiven, “but you mustn’t let Bill know you’ve forgotten him. The Trescotts used to live over by the Whitney schoolhouse in Greenwood Township,—right on the Pleasant Valley line, you know. He remembers you folks, Al. I’ll drive over that way.”

There were beds of petunias and four-o’clocks to be seen dimly glimmering in the dusk, as we drove through the broad gate. Men and women were gathered in a group about the base of the windmill, as Jim’s loud “whoa” announced our arrival. The women melted away in the direction of the house. The men stood at gaze.

“Hello, Bill!” shouted Jim. “Come out here!”

“Oh, it’s you, is it, Mr. Elkins,” said a deep voice. “I didn’t know yeh.”

“Thought it was the sheriff with a summons, eh? Well, I guess hardly!” said Jim. “Mr. Trescott, I want you to shake hands with our old friend Mr. Barslow.”

A heavy figure detached itself from the group, and, as it approached, developed indistinctly the features of a brawny farmer, with a short, heavy, dark beard.

“Wal, I declare, I’m glad to see yeh!” said he, as he grasped my hand. “I’d a’most forgot yeh, till Mr. Elkins told me you remembered my whalin’ them Dutch boys at a scale onct.”

I had had no recollection of him; yet form and voice seemed vaguely familiar. I assured him that my memory for names and faces was excellent. After being duly presented to Mrs. Barslow, he urged us to alight and come in. We offered as an excuse the lateness of the hour.

“Why, you hain’t seen my family yet, Mr. Barslow,” said he. “They’ll be disappointed if yeh don’t come in.”

I suggested that we were staying for a few days at the Centropolis; and Alice added that we should be glad to see himself and Mrs. Trescott there at any time during our stay. Elkins promised that we should all drive out again.

“Wal, now, you must,” said Mr. Trescott. “We must talk over ol’ times and—”

“Fight over old battles,” replied Jim. “All the battles were yours, though, eh, Bill?”

“Huh, huh!” chuckled Bill; “fightin’s no credit to any man; but I ’spose I fit my sheer when I was a boy—when I was a boy, y’ know, Mrs. Barslow, and had more sand than sense. Here, Josie, here’s Mr. Elkins and some old friends of mine. Mr. and Mrs. Barslow, my daughter.”

She was a little slim slip of a thing, in white, and emerged from the shrubbery at Mr. Trescott’s call. She bowed to us, and said she was sorry that we could not stop. Her voice was sweet, and there was something unexpectedly cool and self-possessed in her intonation. It was not in the least the speech of the ordinary neat-handed Phyllis or Neæra; nor was her attitude at all countrified as she stood with her hand on her father’s arm. The increasing darkness kept us from seeing her features.

“Josie’s my right-hand man,” said her father. “Half the business of the farm stops when Josie goes away.”

My wife expressed her admiration for Lattimore and its environs, and especially for so much of the Trescott farm as could be seen in the deepening gloaming. The flowers, she said, took her back to her childhood’s home.

“Let me give you these,” said the girl, handing Alice a great bunch of blossoms which she had been cutting when her father called, and had held in her hands as we talked. My wife thanked her, and buried her face in them, as we bade the Trescotts good-night and drove home.

“That girl,” said Jim, as we spun along the road in the light of the rising moon, “is a crackerjack. Bill thinks the world of her, and she certainly gives him a

mother’s care!”

“She seems nice,” said Alice, “and so refined, apparently.”

“Been well educated,” said Jim, “and got a head, besides. You’ll like her; she knows Europe better than some folks know their own front yard.”

“I was surprised at the vividness of my memory of Bill’s youthful combats,” said I.

Jim’s laugh rang out heartily through the Brushy Creek gorge.

“Well, I supposed you remembered those things, of course,” said he, “and so I insinuated some impression of the delight with which you dwell upon the stories of his prowess. It made him feel good.... I’m spoiling Bill, I guess, with these tales. He’ll claim to have a private graveyard next. As harmless a fellow as you ever saw, and the best cattle-feeder hereabouts. Got a good farm out there, Bill has; we may need it for stock yards or something, later on.”

“Why not hire a corps of landscape-gardeners, and make a park of it?” I inquired sarcastically. “We’ll certainly need breathing-spaces for the populace.”

“Good idea!” he returned gravely. And as he halted the equipage at the hotel, he repeated meditatively: “A mighty good idea, Al; we must figure on that a little.”

We were tired to silence when we reached our rooms; so much so that nothing seemed to make a defined and sharp impression upon my mind. I kept thinking all the time that I must have been mistaken in my first thought that I had never known the Trescotts.

“Their voices seem familiar to me,” said I, “and yet I can’t associate them with the old home at all. It’s very odd!”

As Alice stood before the mirror shaking down and brushing her hair, she said: “Do you suppose he thought you in earnest about that absurd park?”

“No,” I answered, “he understood me well enough; but what puzzles me is the question, was *he* in earnest?”

In the middle of the night I woke with a perfectly clear idea as to the identity of the Trescotts! Prescott, Trescott! Josie, Josephine the “Empress”! And then the voice and figure!

“Why are you sitting up in bed?” inquired Alice.

“I have made a discovery,” said I. “That man at the Stock Yards meant Trescott,

not Prescott.”

“I don’t understand,” said she sleepily.

“In a word,” said I, “the girl who gave you the flowers is the Empress!”

“Albert Barslow!” said Alice. “Why—”

My wife was silent for a long time.

“I knew we’d meet her,” she said at last. “It is fate.”

CHAPTER VI.

I am Inducted into the Cave, and Enlist.

“Here’s the cave,” said Jim, at the door of his office, next morning. “As prospective joint-proprietor and co-malefactor, I bid you welcome.”

The smiles with which the employees resumed their work indicated that the extraordinary character of this welcome was not lost upon them. The office was on the ground-floor of one of the more pretentious buildings of Lattimore’s main street. The post-office was on one side of it, and the First National Bank on the other. Over it were the offices of lawyers and physicians. It was quite expensively fitted up; and the plate-glass front glittered with gold-and-black sign-lettering. The chairs and sofas were upholstered in black leather. On the walls hung several decorative advertisements of fire-insurance companies, and maps of the town, county, and state. Rolls of tracing-paper and blueprints lay on the flat-topped tables, reminding one of the office of an architect or civil engineer. A thin young man worked at books, standing at a high desk; and a plump young woman busily clicked off typewritten matter with an up-to-date machine.

“You’ll find some books and papers on the table in the next room,” said Jim, as I finished my first look about. “I’ll ask you to amuse yourself with ’em for a little while, until I can dispose of my morning’s mail; after which we’ll resume our hunt for resources. We haven’t any morning paper yet, and the evening *Herald* is

shipped in by freight and edited with a saw. But it’s the best we’ve got—yet.”

He read his letters, ran his eyes over his newspapers and a magazine or two, and dictated some correspondence, interrupted occasionally by callers, some of whom he brought into the room where I was whiling away the time, examining maps, and looking over out-of-date copies of the local papers. One of these callers was Mr. Hinckley, the cashier of the bank, who came to see about some insurance matters. He was spare, aquiline, and white-mustached; and very courteously wished Lattimore the good fortune of securing so valuable an acquisition as ourselves. It would place Lattimore under additional obligations to Mr. Elkins, who was proving himself such an effective worker in all public matters.

“Mr. Elkins,” said he, “has to a wonderful degree identified himself with the material progress of the city. He is constantly bringing here enterprising and energetic business men; and we could better afford to lose many an older citizen.”

I asked Mr. Hinckley as to the length of his own residence in Lattimore.

“I helped to plat the town, sir,” said he. “I carried the chain when these streets were surveyed,—a boy just out of Bowdoin College. That was in ’55. I staged it for four hundred miles to get here. Aleck Macdonald and I came together, and we’ve both staid from that day. The Indians were camped at the mouth of Brushy Creek; and except for old Pierre Lacroix, a squaw-man, we were for a month the only white men in these parts. Then General Lattimore came with a party of surveyors, and by the fall there was quite a village here.”

Jim came in with another gentleman, whom he introduced as Captain Tolliver. The Captain shook my hand with profuse politeness.

“I am delighted to see you, suh,” said he. “Any friend of Mr. Elkins I shall be proud to know. I heah that Mrs. Barslow is with you. I trust, suh, that she is well?”

I informed him that my wife was in excellent health, being completely recovered from the fatigue of her journey.

“Ah! this aiah, this aiah, Mr. Barslow! It is like wine in its invigorating qualities, like wine, suh. Look at Mr. Hinckley, hyah, doing the work of two men fo’ a lifetime; and younge’ now than any of us. Come, suh, and make yo’ home with us. You nevah can regret it. Delighted to have you call at my office, suh. I am proud to have met you, and hope to become better acquainted with you. I hope

Mrs. Tulliver and Mrs. Barslow may soon meet. Good-morning, gentlemen." And he hurried out, only to reappear as soon as Mr. Hinckley was gone.

"By the way, Mr. Barslow," he whispered, "should you come to Lattimore, as I have no doubt you will, I have some of the choicest residence property in the city, which I shall be mo' than glad to show you. Title perfect, no commissions to pay, city water, gas, and electric light in prospect. Cain't yo' come and look it ovah now, suh?"

"Who is this Captain Tolliver, Jim," I asked as we went out of the office together, "and what is he?"

"In other words, 'Who and what art thou, execrable shape?' Well, now, don't ask me. I've known him for years; in fact, he suggested to me the possibilities of this burg. In a way, the city is indebted to him for my presence here. But don't ask me about him—study him. And don't buy lots from him. The Captain has his failings, but he has also his strong points and his uses; and I'll be mistaken if he isn't cast for a fairly prominent part in the drama we're about to put on here. But don't spoil your enjoyment by having him described to you. Let him dawn on you by degrees."

That day I met most of the prominent men of the town. Jim took me into the banks, the shops, and the offices of the leading professional gentlemen. He informed them that I was considering the matter of coming to live among them; and I found them very friendly, and much interested in our proposed change of residence. They all treated Jim with respect, and his manner toward them had a dignity which I had not looked for. Evidently he was making himself felt in the community.

When we returned to the Centropolis at noon, we found Mrs. Trescott and her daughter chatting with my wife. The elder woman was ill-groomed, as are all women of her class in comparison with their town sisters, and angular. I knew the type so well that I could read the traces of farm cares in her face and form. The serving of gangs of harvesters and threshers, the ever-recurring problems of butter, eggs, and berries, the unflagging fight, without much domestic help, for neatness and order about the house, had impressed their stamp upon Mrs. Trescott. But she was chatting vivaciously, and assuring Mrs. Barslow that such a thing as staying longer in town that morning was impossible.

"I can feel in my bones," said she, "that there's something wrong at the farm."

"You always have that feeling," said her daughter, "as soon as you pass outside the gate."

"And I'm usually right about it," said Mrs. Trescott. "It isn't any use. My system has got into that condition in which I'm in misery if I'm off that farm. Josie drags me away from it sometimes; and I do enjoy meeting people! But I like to meet 'em out there the best; and I want to urge you to come often, Mrs. Barslow, while you're here. And in case you move here, I hope you'll like us and the farm well enough so that we'll see a good deal of you."

I was presented to Mrs. Trescott, and reintroduced to the young lady, with whom Alice seemed already on friendly terms. I was surprised at this, for she was not prone to sudden friendships. There was something so attractive in the girl, however, that it went far to explain the phenomenon. For one thing, there was in her manner that same steadiness and calm which I had noticed in her voice in the dusk last night. It gave one the impression that she could not be surprised or startled, that she had seen or thought out all possible combinations of events, and knew of their sequences, or adjusted herself to things by some all-embracing rule, by which she attained that repose of hers. The surprising thing about it, to my mind, was to find this exterior in Bill Trescott's daughter. I had seen the same thing once or twice in people to whom I thought it had come as the fruit of wide experience in the world.

While Miss Trescott was slim, and rather below the medium in height, she was not at all thin; and had the great mass of ruddy dark hair and fine brown eyes which I remembered so well, and a face which would have been pale had it not been for the tan—the only thing about her which suggested those occupations by which she became her father's "right-hand man." There was intelligence in her face, and a grave smile in her eyes, which rarely extended to her handsome mouth. If mature in face, form, and manner, she was young in years—some years younger than Alice. I hoped that she might stay to dinner; but she went away with her mother. In her absence, I devoted some time to praising her. Jim failed to join in my pæans further than to give a general assent; but he grew unaccountably mirthful, as if something good had happened to him of which he had not yet told us.

"I have invited a few people to my parlors this evening," said he, "and, of course, you will be the guests of honor."

My wife demurred. She had nothing to wear, and even if she had, I was without evening dress. The thing seemed out of the question.

"Oh, we can't let that stand in the way," said he. "So far as your own toilet is concerned, I have nothing to say except that you are known to be making a

hurried visit, and I have an abiding faith, based on your manner of stating your trouble, that it can be remedied. I saw your eye take on a far-away look as you planned your costume, even while you were declaring that you couldn't do it. Didn't I, now?"

"You certainly did not," said Alice; and then I noticed the absorbed look myself. "But even if I can manage it, how about Albert?"

"I'll tell you about Albert. I'll bet two to one there won't be a suit of evening clothes worn. The dress suit may come in here with street cars and passenger elevators, but it lacks a good deal of being here yet, except in the most sporadic and infrequent way. And this thing is to be so absolutely informal that it would make the natives stare. You wouldn't wear it if you had it, Al."

"Who will come?" said Mrs. Barslow.

"Oh, a couple of dozen ladies and gentlemen, business men and doctors and lawyers and their women-folks. They'll stray in from eight to ten and find something to eat on the sideboard. They'll have the happiness of meeting you, and you can see what the people you are thinking of living among and doing business with are like. It's a necessary part of your visit; and you can't get out of it now, for I've taken the liberty of making all the arrangements. And, as a matter of fact, you don't want to do so, do you, now?"

Thus appealed to, Alice consented. Nothing was said to me about it, my willingness being presumed.

The guests that evening were almost exclusively men whom I had met during the day, and members of their families. In the absence of any more engaging topic, we discussed Lattimore as our possible future home.

"I have always felt," said Mr. Hinckley, who was one of the guests, "that this is the natural site of a great city. These valleys, centering here like the spokes of a wheel, are ready-made railway-routes. In the East there is a city of from fifty thousand to three times that, every hundred miles or so. Why shouldn't it be so here?"

"Suh," said Captain Tolliver, "the thing is inevitable. Somewhah in this region will grow up a metropolis. Shall it be hyah, o' at Fairchild, o' Angus Falls? If the people of Lattimore sit supinely, suh, and let these country villages steal from huh the queenship which God o'dained fo' huh when He placed huh in this commandin' site, then, suh, they ah too base to be wo'thy of the suhvices of gentlemen."

“I’ve always been taught,” said Mrs. Trescott, “that the credit of placing her in this site belonged to either Mr. Hinckley or General Lattimore.”

“Really,” said Miss Addison to me, “I don’t see how they can laugh at such irreverence!”

“I think,” said Miss Hinckley in my other ear, “that Mr. Elkins expressed the whole truth in the matter of the rivalry of these three towns, when he said that when two ride on a horse, one must ride behind. Aren’t his quotations so—so—illuminating?”

I looked about at the company. There were Mr. Hinckley, Mrs. Hinckley, their daughter, whom I recognized as the splendid blonde whose pacers had passed us when we were out driving, Mrs. Trescott and her daughter, and Captain and Mrs. Tolliver. Those present were plainly of several different sets and cliques. Mrs. Hinckley hoped that my wife would join the Equal Rights Club, and labor for the enfranchisement of women. She referred, too, to the eloquence and piety of her pastor, the Presbyterian minister, while Mrs. Tolliver quoted Emerson, and invited Alice to join, as soon as we removed, the Monday Club of the Unitarian Church, devoted to the study of his works. Mr. Macdonald, red-whiskered, weather-beaten, and gigantic, fidgeted about the punch-bowl a good deal; and replying to some chance remark made by Alice, ventured the opinion that the grass was gettin’ mighty short on the ranges. Miss Addison, who came with her cousins the Lattimores, looked with disapproval upon the punch, and disclosed her devotion to the W. C. T. U. and the Ladies’ Aid Society of the Methodist Church. The Lattimores were Will Lattimore and his wife. I learned that he was the son of the General, and Jim’s lawyer; and that they went rarely into society, being very exclusive. This was communicated to me by Mrs. Ballard, who brought Miss Ballard with her. She asked in tones of the intensest interest if we played whist; while Miss Ballard suggested that about the only way we could find to enjoy ourselves in such a little place would be to identify ourselves with the dancing-party and card-club set. I began to suspect that life in Lattimore would not be without its complexities.

Mr. Trescott came in for a moment only, for his wife and daughter. Miss Trescott was not to be found at first, but was discovered in the bay-window with Jim and Miss Hinckley, looking over some engravings. Mr. Elkins took her down to her carriage, and I thought him a long time gone, for the host. As soon as he returned, however, the conversation again turned to the dominant thought of the gathering, municipal expansion. And I noted that the points made were Jim’s. He had already imbued the town with his thoughts, and filled the mouths of its

citizens with his arguments.

After they left, we sat with Jim and talked.

“Well, how do you like ’em?” said he.

“Why,” said Alice, “they’re very cordial.”

“Heterogeneous, eh?” he queried.

“Yes,” said she, “but very cordial. I am surprised to feel how little I dislike them.”

As for me, I began to look upon Lattimore with more favor. I began to catch Jim’s enthusiasm and share his confidence. As we smoked together in his rooms that evening, he made me the definite proposal that I go into partnership with him. We talked about the business, and discussed its possibilities.

“I don’t ask you to believe all my prophecies,” said he; “but isn’t the situation fairly good, just as it is?”

“I think well of it,” I answered, “and it’s mighty kind of you to ask me to come. I’ll go as far as to say that if it depends solely on me, we shall come. As for these prophecies of yours, I am in candor bound to say that I half believe them.”

“Now you *are* shouting,” said he. “Never better prophecies anywhere. But consider the matter aside from them. Then all we clean up in the prophecy department will be velvet, absolute velvet!”

“I can add something to the output of the prophecy department,” said Alice, when I repeated the phrase; “and that is that there will be some affairs of the heart mingled with the real estate and insurance before long. I can see them in embryo now.”

“If it’s Jim and Miss Trescott you mean, I wish the affair well,” said I. “I’m quite charmed with her.”

“Well,” said Alice, “from the standpoint of most men, Miss Hinckley isn’t to be left out of the reckoning in such matters. What a face and figure she has! Miss Addison is too prudish and churchified; but I like Miss Hinckley.”

“Yes,” said I; “but Miss Trescott seems, somehow, to have been known to one, in some tender and touching relation. There’s that about her which appeals to one, like some embodiment of the abstract idea of woman. That’s why one feels as if he had risked his life for her, and protected her, and seen her suffer wrong, and all that—”

“That’s only because of that affair you told me of,” said my wife. “Since I’ve seen her, I’ve made up my mind that you misconstrued the matter utterly. There was really nothing to it.”

In a week I wrote to Mr. Elkins, accepting his proposal, and promising to close up my affairs, remove to Lattimore, and join with him.

“I do not feel myself equal to playing the part of either Romulus or Remus in founding your new Rome,” I wrote; “but I think as a writer of fire-insurance policies, and keeping the office work up, I may prove myself not entirely a deadhead. My wife asks how the breathing-spaces for the populace are coming on?”

And the die was cast!

CHAPTER VII.

We make our Landing.

Had I known how cordially our neighbors would greet our return, or how many of them would view our departure with apparently sincere regret, I might have been slower in giving Jim my promise. I proceeded, however, to carry it out; but it was nearly six months before I could pull myself and my little fortune out of the place into which we had grown.

Mr. Elkins kept me well informed regarding Lattimore affairs; and the *Herald* followed me home. Jim’s letters were long typewritten communications, dictated at speed, and mailed, sometimes one a day, at other times at intervals of weeks.

“This is a sure-enough ‘winter of our discontent,’” one of these letters runs, “but the scope of our operations will widen as the frost comes out of the ground. We’re now confined to the psychical field. Subjectively speaking, though, the plot thickens. Captain Tolliver is in the secondary stages of real-estate dementia, and spreads the contagion daily. There’s no quarantine regulation to cover the case, and Lattimore seems doomed to the acme of prosperity. This is the age of great cities, saith the Captain, and that Lattimore is not already a town of

150,000 people is one of the strangest, one of the most inexplicable things in the world, in view of the distance we are lag of the country about us, so far as development is concerned. And as our beginning has been tardy, so will our progress be rapid, even as waters long dammed up rush out to devour the plains, etc., etc.

"In this we are all agreed. We want a good, steady, natural growth—and no boom.

"When a boom recognizes itself as such, it's all over, and the stuff off. The time for letting go of a great wheel is when it starts down hill. But our wheels are all going up—even if they are all in our heads, as yet.

"You will remember the railway connection of which I spoke to you? Well, that thing has assumed, all of a sudden, a concreteness as welcome as it is unexpected. Ballard showed me a telegram yesterday from lower Broadway (the heart of Darkest N. Y.) which tends to prove that people there are ready to finance the deal. It would have amused you to see the horizontality of the coat-tails of the management of the Lattimore & Great Western, as they flaxed round getting up a directors' meeting, so as to have a real, live directorate of this great transcontinental line for the wolves of Wall Street to do business with! Things like this are what you miss by hibernating there, instead of dropping everything and applying here for your pro rata share of the gayety of nations and the concomitant scads.

"I was elected president of the road, and as soon as we get a little track, and an engine, I expect to obtain an exchange of passes with all my fellow monopolists in North America. I at once fired back an answer to Ballard's telegram, which must have produced an impression upon the Gould and Vanderbilt interests—if they got wind of it. If the L. & G. W. should pass the paper stage next summer, it will do a whole lot towards carrying this burg beyond the hypnotic period of development.

"The Angus Falls branch is going to build in next summer, I am confident, and that means another division headquarters and, probably, machine-shops. I'm working with some of the trilobites here to form a pool, and offer the company grounds for additional yards and a roundhouse and shops. Captain Tolliver interviewed General Lattimore about it, and got turned down.

"'He told me, suh,' reported the Captain, in a fine white passion, 'that if any railway system desiahs to come to Lattimore, it has his puhmission! That the Injuns didn't give him any bonus when he came; and that he had to build his

own houses and yahds, by gad, at his own expense, and defend ’em, too, and that if any railroad was thinkin’ of comin’ hyah, it was doubtless because it was good business fo’ ’em to come; and that if they wanted any of his land, were willing to pay him his price, there wouldn’t be any difficulty about theiah getting it. And that if there should arise any difference, which he should deeply regret, but would try to live through, the powah of eminent domain with which railways ah clothed will enable the company to get what land is necessary by legal means.’

“‘I could take these observations,’ said the Captain, ‘as nothing except a gratuitous insult to one who approached him, suh, in a spirit of pure benevolence and civic patriotism. It shows the kind of tyrants who commanded the oppressors of the South, suh! Only his gray hairs protected him, suh, only his gray hairs!’”

“It’s a little hard to separate the General from the Captain, in this report of the committee on railway extensions,” said my wife.

“The only thing that’s clear about it,” said I, “is that Jim is having a good deal of fun with the Captain.”

This became clearer as the correspondence went on.

“Tolliver thinks,” said he, in another letter, “that the Angus Falls extension can be pulled through. However, I recall that only yesterday the Captain, in private, denounced the citizens of Lattimore as beneath the contempt of gentlemen of breadth of view. ‘I shall dispose of my holdin’s hyah,’ said he, with a stately sweep indicative of their extent, ‘at any sacrifice, and depaht, cuhsin’ the day I devoted myself to the redemption of such cattle.’

“But, at that particular moment, he had just failed in an attempt to sell Bill Trescott a bunch of choice outlying gold bricks, and was somewhat heated with wine. This to the haughty Southron was ample excuse for confiding to me the round, unvarnished truth about us mudsills.

“Josie and I often talk of you and your wife. I don’t know what I’d do out here if it weren’t for Josie. She refuses to enthuse over our ‘natural, healthy growth,’ which we look for; but I guess that’s because she doesn’t care for the things that the rest of us are striving for. But she’s the only person here with whom one can really converse. You’d be astonished to see how pretty she is in her furs, and set like a jewel in my new sleigh; but I’m becoming keenly aware of the fact.”

We were afterwards told that the trilobites had shaken off their fossilhood, and that the Angus Falls extension, with the engine-house and machine-shops, had been “landed.”

“This,” he wrote, “means enough new families to make a noticeable increase in our population. Things will be popping here soon. Come on and help shake the popper; hurry up with your moving, or it will all be over, including the shouting.”

We were not entirely dependent upon Jim’s letters for Lattimore news. Mrs. Barslow kept up a desultory correspondence with Miss Trescott, begun upon some pretext and continued upon none at all. In one of these letters Josie (for so we soon learned to call her) wrote:

“Our little town is changing so that it no longer seems familiar. Not that the change is visible. Beyond an unusual number of strangers or recent comers, there is nothing new to strike the eye. But the talk everywhere is of a new railroad and other improvements. One needs only to shut one’s eyes and listen, to imagine that the town is already a real city. Mr. Elkins seems to be the center of this new civic self-esteem. The air is full of it, and I admit that I am affected by it. I have

> “‘A feeling, as when eager crowds await,
> Before a palace gate,
> Some wondrous pageant.’

“You are indebted to Captain Tolliver for the quotation, and to Mr. Elkins for the idea. The Captain induced me to read the book in which I found the lines. He stigmatizes the preference given to the Northern poets—Longfellow, for instance—over Timrod as ‘the crowning infamy of American letters.’ He has taken the trouble to lay out a course of study for me, the object of which is to place me right in my appreciation of the literary men of the South. It includes Pollard’s ‘Lost Cause’ and the works of W. G. Simms. I have not fully promised to follow it to the end. Timrod, however, is a treat.”

That last quiet winter will always be set apart in my memory, as a time like no other. It was a sitting down on a milestone to rest. Back of us lay the busy past—busy with trivial things, it seemed to me, but full of varied activity nevertheless. A boy will desire mightily to finish a cob-house; and when it is done he will smilingly knock it about the barn floor. So I was tearing down and leaving the fabric of relationship which I had once prized so highly.

The life upon which I expected to enter promised well. In fact, to a man of medium ability, only, and no training in large affairs, it promised exceedingly well. I knew that Jim was strong, and that his old regard for me had taken new life and a firm hold upon him. But when, removed from his immediate influence, I looked the situation in the face, the future loomed so mysteriously bizarre that I

shrank from it. All his skimble-skamble talk about psychology and hypnotism, and that other rambling discourse of pirate caves and buccaneering cruises, made me feel sometimes as if I were about to form a partnership with Aladdin, or the King of the Golden Mountain. If he had asked me, merely, to come to Lattimore and go into the real estate and insurance business with him, I am sure I should have had none of this mental vertigo. Yet what more had he done?

As to the boom, I had, as yet, not a particle of objective confidence in it; but, subconsciously, I felt, as did the town "doomed to prosperity," a sense of impending events. In spite of some presentiments and doubts, it was, on the whole, with high hopes that we, on an aguish spring day, reached Lattimore with our stuff (as the Scriptures term it), and knew that, for weal or woe, it was our home.

Jim was again at the station to meet us, and seemed delighted at our arrival. I thought I saw some sort of absent-mindedness or absorbedness in his manner, so that he seemed hardly like himself. Josie was there with him, and while she and Alice were greeting each other, I saw Jim scanning the little crowd at the station as if for some other arrival. At last, his eye told me that whatever it was for which he was looking, he had found it; and I followed his glance. It rested on the last person to alight from the train—a tall, sinewy, soldierly-built youngish man, who wore an overcoat of black, falling away in front, so as to reveal a black frock coat tightly buttoned up and a snowy shirt-front with a glittering gem sparkling from the center of it. On his head was a shining silk hat—a thing so rare in that community as to be noticeable, and to stamp the wearer as an outsider. His beard was clipped close, and at the chin ran out into a pronounced Vandyke point. His mustaches were black, heavy, and waxed. His whole external appearance betokened wealth, and he exuded mystery. He had not taken two steps from the car before the people on the platform were standing on tiptoe to see him.

"Bus to the Centropolis?" queried the driver of the omnibus.

The stranger looked at the conveyance, filled as it was with a load of traveling men and casuals; and, frowning darkly, turned to the negro who accompanied him, saying, "Haven't you any carriage here, Pearson?"

"Yes, sah," responded the servant, pointing to a closed vehicle. "Right hyah, sah."

My wife stood looking, with a little amused smile, at the picturesque group, so out of the ordinary at the time and place. Miss Trescott was gazing intently at the

stranger, and at the moment when he spoke she clutched my wife’s arm so tightly as to startle her. I heard Alice make some inquiry as to the cause of her agitation, and as I looked at her, I could see in the one glance her face, gone suddenly white as death, and the dark visage of the tall stranger. And it seemed to me as if I had seen the same thing before.

Then, the negro pointing the way to the closed carriage, the group separated to left and right, the stranger passed through to the carriage, and the picture, and with it my odd mental impression, dissolved. The negro lifted two or three heavy bags to the coachman, gave the transfer man some baggage-checks, and the equipage moved away toward the hotel. All this took place in a moment, during which the usual transactions on the platform were suspended. The conductor failed to give the usual signal for the departure of the train. The engineer leaned from the cab and gazed.

Jim’s eye rested on the stranger and his servant for an instant only; but during that time he seemed to take an observation, come to a conclusion, and dismiss the whole matter.

“Here, John,” said he to the drayman, “take these trunks to the Centropolis. We’d like ’em this week, too. None of that old trick of yours of dumping ’em in the crick, you know!”

“They’ll be up there in five minutes all right, Mr. Elkins,” said John, grinning at Jim’s allusion to some accident, the knowledge of which appeared to be confined to himself and Mr. Elkins, and to constitute a bond of sympathy between them. Jim turned to us with redoubled heartiness, all his absent-mindedness gone.

“I’ll drive you to the hotel,” said Jim. “You’ll—”

“Miss Trescott is ill—” said Alice.

“Not at all,” said Josie; “it has passed entirely! Only, when you have taken Mr. and Mrs. Barslow to the hotel, will you please take me home? Our little supper-party—I don’t feel quite equal to it, if you will excuse me!”

CHAPTER VIII.

A Welcome to Wall Street and Us.

“Welcome!” intoned Captain Tolliver, with his hat in his hand, bowing low to Mrs. Barslow. “Welcome, Madam and suh, in the capacity of Lattimoreans! That we shall be the bettah fo’ yo’ residence among us the’ can be no doubt. That you will be prospahed beyond yo’ wildest dreams I believe equally cehtain. Welcome!”

This address was delivered within thirty seconds of the time of our arrival at our old rooms in the Centropolis. The Captain saluted us in a manner extravagantly polite, mysteriously enthusiastic. The air of mystery was deepened when he called again to see Mr. Elkins in the evening and was invited in.

“Did you-all notice that distinguished and opulent-looking gentleman who got off the train this evening?” said he in a stage whisper. “Mahk my words, the coming of such men, *his* coming, is fraught with the deepest significance to us all. All my holdin’s ah withdrawn from mahket until fu’the’ developments!”

“Seems to travel in style,” said Jim; “all sorts of good clothes, colored body-servant, closed carriage ordered by wire—it does look juicy, don’t it, now?”

“He has the entiah second flo’ front suite. The niggah has already sent out fo’ a bahbah,” said the Captain. “Lattimore has at last attracted the notice of adequate capital, and will now assume huh true place in the bright galaxy of American cities. Mr. Barslow, I shall ask puhmission to call upon you in the mo’nin’ with reference to a project which will make the fo’tunes of a dozen men, and that within the next ninety days. Good evenin’, suh; good evenin’, Madam. I feel that you have come among us at a propitious moment!”

“The Captain merely hints at the truth which struggles in him for utterance,” said Jim. “I prove this by informing you that I couldn’t get you a house. This shows, too, that the census returns are a calumny upon Lattimore. You’ll have to stay at the Centropolis until something turns up or you can build.”

“Oh, dear!” said Alice. “Hotel life isn’t living at all. I hope it won’t be long.”

“It will have its advantages for Al,” said Mr. Elkins. “This financial maelstrom, which will draw everything to Lattimore, will have its core right in this hotel—a

mighty good place to be. Things of all kinds have been floating about in the air for months; the precipitation is beginning now. The psychological moment has arrived—you have brought it with you, Mrs. Barslow. The moon-flower of Lattimore's 'gradual, healthy growth' is going to burst, and that right soon."

"Has Captain Tolliver infected you?" inquired Alice. "He told us the same thing, with less of tropes and figures."

"On any still morning," said Jim, "you can hear the wheels go round in the Captain's head; but his instinct for real-estate conditions is as accurate as a pocket-gopher's. The Captain, in a hysterical sort of way, is right: I consider that a cinch. Good-night, friends, and pleasant dreams. I expect to see you at breakfast; but if I shouldn't, Al, you'll come aboard at nine, won't you, and help run up the Jolly Roger? I think I smell pieces-of-eight in the air! And, by the way, Miss Trescott says for me to assure you that her vertigo, which she had for the first time in her life, is gone, and she never felt better."

As Mr. Elkins passed from our parlor, he let in a bell-boy with the card of Mr. Clifford Giddings, representing the Lattimore Morning *Herald*.

"See him down in the lobby," said Alice.

"I want a story," said he as we met, "on the city and its future. The *Herald* readers will be glad of anything from Mr. Barslow, whose coming they have so long looked forward to, as intimately connected with the city's development."

"My dear sir," I replied, somewhat astonished at the importance which he was pleased to attach to my arrival, "abstractly, my removal to Lattimore is my best testimony on that; concretely, I ought to ask information of you."

We sat down in a corner of the lobby, our chairs side by side, facing opposite ways. He lighted a cigar, and gave me one. In looks he was young; in behavior he had the self-possession and poise of maturity. He wore a long mackintosh which sparkled with mist. His slouch hat looked new and was carefully dinted. His dress was almost natty in an unconventional way, and his manners accorded with his garb. He acted as if for years we had casually met daily. His tone and attitude evinced respect, was entirely free from presumption, equally devoid of reserve, carried with it no hint of familiarity, but assumed a perfect understanding. The barrier which usually keeps strangers apart he neither broke down, which must have been offensive, nor overleaped, which would have been presumptuous. He covered it with that demeanor of his, and together we sat down upon it.

“I thought the *Herald* was an evening paper,” said I.

“It was, in the days of yore,” he replied; “but Mr. Elkins happened to see me in Chicago one day, and advised me to come out and look the old thing over with a view to purchasing the plant. You observe the result. As fellow immigrants, I hope there will be a bond of sympathy between us. You think, of course, that Lattimore is a coming city?”

“Yes.”

“Its geographical situation seems to render its development inevitable, doesn’t it? And,” he went on, “the railway conditions seem peculiarly promising just now?”

“Yes,” said I, “but the natural resources of the city and the surrounding country appeal most strongly to me.”

“They are certainly very exceptional, aren’t they?” said he, as if the matter had never occurred to him before. Then he went on telling me things, more than asking questions, about the jobbing trades, the brick and tile and associated industries, the cement factory, which he spoke of as if actually *in esse*, the projected elevators, the flouring-mills, and finally returned to railway matters.

“What is your opinion of the Lattimore & Great Western, Mr. Barslow?” he asked.

“I cannot say that I have any,” I answered, “except that its construction would bring great good to Lattimore.”

“It could scarcely fail,” said he, “to bring in two or three systems which we now lack, could it?”

I very sincerely said that I did not know. After a few more questions concerning our plans for the future, Mr. Giddings vanished into the night, silently, as an autumn leaf parting from its bough. I thought of him no more until I unfolded the *Herald* in the morning as we sat at breakfast, and saw that my interview was made a feature of the day’s news.

“Mr. Albert F. Barslow,” it read, “of the firm of Elkins & Barslow, is stopping at the Centropolis. He arrived by the 6:15 train last evening, and with his family has taken a suite of rooms pending the erection of a residence. They have not definitely decided as to the location of their new home; but it may confidently be stated that they will build something which will be a notable addition to the architectural beauties of Lattimore—already proud of her title, the City of

Homes.”

“I am very glad to know about this,” said Alice.

“Your man Giddings has nerve, whatever else he may lack,” said I to the smiling Elkins across the table. “Am I obliged to make good all these representations? I ask, that I may know the rules of the game, merely.”

“One rule is that you mustn’t deny any accusations of future magnificence, for two reasons: they may come true, and they help things on. You are supposed to have left your modesty in cold storage somewhere. Read on.”

“Mr. Barslow,” I read, “has long been a most potent political factor in his native state, but is, first of all, a business man. He brings his charming young wife—”

“Really, a most discriminating journalist,” interjected Alice.

“—and social circles, as well as the business world, will find them a most desirable accession to Lattimore’s population.”

“Why this is absolute, slavish devotion to facts,” said Jim; “where does the word-painting come in?”

“Here it is,” said I.

“Mr. Barslow is some years under middle age, and looks the intense modern business man in every feature. His mind seems to have already become saturated with the conception of the enormous possibilities of Lattimore. He impresses those who have met him as one of the few men capable of pulling his share in double harness with James R. Elkins.”

“The fellow piles it on a little strong at times, doesn’t he, Mrs. Barslow?” said Jim.

“He brings to our city,” I read on, “his vigorous mind, his fortune, and a determination never to rest until the city passes the 100,000 mark. To a *Herald* representative, last night, he spoke strongly and eloquently of our great natural resources.”

Then followed a skillfully handled expansion of our *tête-à-tête* talk in the lobby.

“Mr. Barslow,” the report went on, “very courteously declined to discuss the L. & G. W. situation. It seems evident, however, from remarks dropped by him, that he regards the construction of this road as inevitable, and as a project which, successfully carried out, cannot fail to make Lattimore the point to which all the Western and Southwestern systems of railways must converge.”

“You’re doing it like a veteran!” cried Jim. “Admirable! Just the proper infusion of mystery; I couldn’t have done better myself.”

“Credit it all to Giddings,” I protested. “And note that the center of the stage is reserved to our mysterious fellow lodger and co-arrival.”

“Yes, I saw that,” said Jim. “Isn’t Giddings a peach? Let Mrs. Barslow hear it.”

“She ought to be able to hear these headlines,” said I, “without any reading: ‘J. Bedford Cornish arrives! Wall Street’s Millions On the Ground in the Person of One of Her Great Financiers! Bull Movement in Real Estate Noted Last Night! Does He Represent the Great Railway Interests?’”

“Real estate and financial circles,” ran the article under these headlines, “are thrown into something of a fever by the arrival, on the 6:15 express last evening, of a gentleman of distinguished appearance, who took five rooms *en suite* on the second floor of the Centropolis, and registered in a bold hand as J. Bedford Cornish, of New York. Mr. Cornish consented to see a *Herald* representative last night, but was very reticent as to his plans and the objects of his visit. He simply says that he represents capital seeking investment. He would not admit that he is connected with any of the great railway interests, or that his visit has any relation to the building of the Lattimore & Great Western. The *Herald* is able to say, however, that its New York correspondent informs it that Mr. Cornish is a member of the firm of Lusch, Carskaddan & Mayer, of Wall Street. This firm is well known as one of the concerns handling large amounts of European capital, and said to be intimately associated with the Rothschilds. Financial journals have recently noted the fact that these concerns are becoming embarrassed by the plethora of funds seeking investment, and are turning their attention to the development of railway systems and cities in the United States. Their South American and Australian investments have not proven satisfactory, especially the former, owing to the character of the people of Latin America. It has been pointed out that no real-estate investment can be more than moderately profitable in climates which render the people content with a mere living, and that the restless and unsatisfied vigor of the Anglo-Saxon alone can make lands and railways permanently remunerative. Mr. Cornish admitted these facts when they were pointed out to him, and immediately changed the subject.

“Mr. Cornish is a very handsome and opulent-looking gentleman, and seems to live in a style somewhat luxurious for the Occident. He has a colored body-servant, who seems to reflect the mystery of his master; but if he has any other reflections, the *Herald* is none the wiser for them. Admittance to the suite of

rooms was obtained by sending in the reporter's card, which vanished into a sybaritic gloom, borne on a golden salver. Mr. Cornish seems to be very exclusive, his meals being served in his rooms; and even his barber has instructions to call upon him each morning. One wonders why the barber is called in so frequently, until one marks the smooth-shaven cheeks above the close-clipped, pointed, black, Vandyke beard. He is withal very cordial and courtly in his manners.

"James R. Elkins, when seen last evening, refused to talk, except to say that, in financial circles, it has been known for some days that important developments may be now momently expected, and that some such thing as the visit of Mr. Cornish was imminent. Captain Marion Tolliver expressed himself freely, and to the effect that this mysterious visit is of the utmost importance to Lattimore, and a thing of national if not world-wide importance."

"Now, that justifies my confidence in Giddings," said Mr. Elkins, "fulfilling at the same time the requirements of journalism and hypnotism. Come, Al, our bark is on the sea, our boat is on the shore. The Spanish galleons are even now hiding in the tall grass, in expectation of our cruise. Let us hence to the office!"

CHAPTER IX.

I Go Aboard and We Unfurl the Jolly Roger.

"We must act, and act at once!" said the Captain, his voice thrilling with intensity. "This piece of property will be gone befo' night! All it takes is a paltry three thousand dolla's, and within ninety days—no man can say what its value will be. We can plat it, and within ten days we may have ouah money back. Allow me to draw on you fo' three thou—"

"But," said I, "I can make no move in such a matter at this time without conference with Mr.—"

"Very well, suh, very well!" said the Captain, regarding me with a look that showed how much better things he had expected of me. "Opportunity, suh, knocks once—By the way, excuse me, suh!"

And he darted from the office, took the trail of Mr. Macdonald, whom he had seen passing, brought him to bay in front of the post-office, and dragged him away to some doom, the nature of which I could only surmise.

This took place on the morning of my first day with Elkins & Barslow. I was to take up the office work.

“That will be easy for you from the first,” said Jim. “Your experience as rob-ee down there in Posey County makes you a sort of specialist in that sort of thing; and pretty soon all other things shall be added unto it.”

The Captain’s onslaught in the first half-hour admonished me that a good deal was already added to it. On that very day, too, we had our first conference with Mr. Hinckley. We wanted to handle securities, said Mr. Elkins, and should have a great many of them, and that was quite in Mr. Hinckley’s line. To carry them ourselves would soon absorb all our capital. We must liberate it by floating the commercial paper which we took in. Mr. Hinckley’s bank was known to be strong, his standing was of the highest, and a trust company in alliance with him could not fail to find a good market for its paper. With an old banker’s timidity, Hinckley seemed to hesitate; yet the prospects seemed so good that I felt that this consent was sure to be given. Jim courted him assiduously, and the intimacy between him and the Hinckley family became noticeable.

“Jim,” said I, one day, “you have an unerring eye for the pleasant things of life. I couldn’t help thinking of this to-day when I saw you for the twentieth time spinning along the street in Miss Hinckley’s carriage, beside its owner. She’s one of the handsomest girls, in her flaxen-haired way, that I know of.”

“Isn’t she a study in curves and pink and white?” said Jim. “And she understands this trust company business as well as her father.”

The trust company’s stock, he went on to explain, ignoring Antonia, seemed to be already oversubscribed. Our firm, Hinckley, and Jim’s Chicago and New York friends, including Harper, all stood ready to take blocks of it, and there was no reason for requiring Hinckley to put much actual money in for this. He could pay for it out of his profits soon, and make a fortune without any outlay. Good credit was the prime necessity, and that Mr. Hinckley certainly had. So the celebrated Grain Belt Trust Company was begun—a name about which such mighty interests were to cluster, that I know I should have shrunk from the responsibility had I known what a gigantic thing we were creating.

As the days wore on, Captain Tolliver’s dementia spread and raged virulently. The dark-visaged Cornish, with his air of mystery, his habits so at odds with the

society of Lattimore, was in the very focus of attention.

For a day or so, the effect which Mr. Giddings's report attributed to his invasion failed to disclose itself to me. Then the delirium became manifest, and swept over the town like a were-wolf delusion through a medieval village.

Its immediate occasion seemed to be a group of real-estate conveyances, announced in the *Herald* one morning, surpassing in importance anything in the history of the town. Some of the lands transferred were acreage; some were waste and vacant tracts along Brushy Creek and the river; one piece was a suburban farm; but the mass of it was along Main Street and in the business district. The grantees were for the most part strange names in Lattimore, some individuals, some corporations. All the sales were at prices hitherto unknown. It was to be remarked, too, that in most cases the property had been purchased not long before, by some of the group of newer comers and at the old modest prices. Our firm seemed to have profited heavily in these transactions, as had Captain Tolliver also. We of the "new crowd" had begun our mock-trading to "establish the market." Prices were going up, up; and all one had to do was to buy to-day and sell to-morrow. Real values, for actual use, seemed to be forgotten.

The most memorable moment in this first, acutest stage in our development was one bright day, within a week or so of our coming. The lawns were taking on their summer emerald, robins were piping in the maples, and down in the cottonwoods and lindens on the river front crows and jays were jargoning their immemorial and cheery lingo. Surveyors were running lines and making plats in the suburbs, peeped at by gophers, and greeted by the roundelays of meadow-larks. But on the street-corners, in the offices of lawyers and real-estate agents, and in the lobbies of the hotels, the trading was lively.

Then for the first time the influx of real buyers from the outside became noticeable. The landlord of the Centropolis could scarcely care for his guests. They talked of blocks, quarter-blocks, and the choice acreage they had bought, and of the profits they had made in this and other cities and towns (where this same speculative fever was epidemic), until Alice fled to the Trescott farm—as she said, to avoid the mixture of real estate with her meals. The telegraph offices were gorged with messages to non-resident property owners, begging for prices on good inside lots. Staid, slow-going lot-owners, who had grown old in patiently paying taxes on patches of dog-fennel and sand-burrs, dazedly vacillated between acceptance and rejection of tempting propositions, dreading the missing of the chance so long awaited, fearing misjudgment as to the height of the wave, dreading a future of regret at having sold too low.

One of these, an old woman, toothless and bent, hobbled to our office and asked for Mr. Elkins. He was busy, and so I received her.

“It’s about that quarter-block with the Donegal ruin on it,” said Jim; “the one I showed you yesterday. Offer her five thousand, one-fourth down, balance in one, two, and three years, eight per cent.”

“I wanted to ask Mr. Elkins about me home,” said she. “I tuk in washin’ to buy it, an’ me son, poor Patsy, God rist ’is soul, he helped wid th’ bit of money from the Brotherhood, whin he was kilt betune the cars. It was sivin hundred an’ fifty dollars, an’ now Thronson offers me four thousan’. I told him I’d sell, fer it’s a fortune for a workin’ woman; but befure I signed papers, I wanted to ask Mr. Elkins; he’s such a fair-spoken man, an’ knowin’ to me min-folks in Peoria.”

“If you want to sell, Mrs. Collins,” said I, “we will take your property at five thousand dollars.”

She started, and regarded me, first in amazement, then with distrust, shading off into hostility.

“Thank ye kindly, sir,” said she; “I’ll be goin’ now. I’ve med up me moind, if that bit of land is wort all that money t’ yees, it’s wort more to me. Thank ye kindly!” and she fled from the presence of the tempter.

“The town is full of Biddy Collinses,” commented Jim. “Well, we can’t land everything, and couldn’t handle the catch if we did. In fact, for present purposes, isn’t it better to have her refuse?”

This incident was the hint upon which our “Syndicate,” as it came to be called, acted from time to time, in making fabulous offers to every Biddy Collins in town. “Offer twenty thousand,” Jim would say. “The more you bid the less apt is he to accept; he’s a Biddy Collins.” And whatever Mr. Elkins advised was done.

There were eight or ten of us in the “Syndicate,” dubbed by Jim “The Crew,” among whom were Tolliver, Macdonald, and Will Lattimore. But the inner circle, now drawing closer and closer together, were Elkins, our ruling spirit; Hinckley, our great force in the banking world; and myself. Soon, I was given to understand, Mr. Cornish was to take his place as one of us. He and Jim had long known each other, and Mr. Elkins had the utmost confidence in Mr. Cornish’s usefulness in what he called “the thought-transference department.”

Elkins & Barslow kept their offices open night and day, almost, and the number of typewriters and bookkeepers grew astoundingly. I became almost a stranger to my wife. I got hurried glimpses of Miss Trescott and her mother at the hotel, and

knew that she and Alice were becoming fast friends; but so far the social prominence which the *Herald* had predicted for us had failed to arrive.

This, to be sure, was our own fault. Miss Addison soon gave us up as not available for the church and Sunday-school functions to which she devoted herself. Her family connections would have made her *the* social leader had it not been for the severity of her views and her assumption of the character of the devotee—in spite of which she protestingly went almost everywhere. Antonia Hinckley, however, was frankly fond of a good time, and with her dashing and almost hoydenish character easily took the leadership from Miss Addison; and Miss Hinckley sought diligently for means by which we could be properly launched. As I left the office one day, a voice from the curb called my name. It was Miss Hinckley in a smart trap, to which was harnessed a beautiful horse, standard bred, one could see at a glance. I obeyed the summons, and stepped beside the equipage.

“I want to scold you,” said she. “Society is being defrauded of the good things which your coming promised. Have you taken a vow of seclusion, or what?”

“I’ve been spinning about in the maelstrom of business,” I replied. “But do not be uneasy; some time we shall take up the matter of inflicting ourselves, and pursue it as vigorously as we now follow our vocation.”

“Wouldn’t you like to get into the trap, and take a spin of another sort?” said she. “I’ll deposit you safely with Mrs. Barslow in time for tea.”

I got in, glad of the drive, and for ten minutes her horse was sent at such a pace that conversation was difficult. Then he was slowed down to a walk, his head toward home. We chatted of casual things—the scenery, the horse, the splendid color of the sunset. I was becoming interested in her.

“I had almost forgotten that there were such things in Lattimore,” said I, referring to the topics of our talk. “I have become so saturated with lands and lots.”

“I don’t know much about business,” said she, “and I think I’ll improve my opportunity by learning something. And, first, aren’t men sometimes losers by the dishonesty of those who act for them—agents, they are called, aren’t they?”

Such, I admitted, was unfortunately the case.

“I should be sorry for—any one I liked—to be injured in such a way.... Now you must understand how the things you men are interested in permeate the society of us women. Why, mamma has almost forgotten the enslavement of our sex, in

these new things which have changed our old town so much; so you mustn't wonder if I have heard something of a purely business nature. I heard that Captain Tolliver was about to sell Mr. Elkins the land where the old foundry is, over there, for twenty thousand dollars. Now, papa says it isn't worth it; and I know—Sadie Allen and I were in school together, and she comes over from Fairchild several times a year to see me, and I go there, you know; and that land is in her father's estate—I know that the executor has told Captain Tolliver to sell it for ever so much less than that. And it seemed so funny, as the Captain was doing the business for both sides—isn't it odd, now?"

"It does seem so," said I, "and it is very kind of you. I'll talk with Mr. Elkins about it. Please be careful, Miss Hinckley, or you'll drop the wheel in that washout!"

She reined up her horse and began speeding him again. I could see that this conversation had embarrassed her somehow. Her color was high, and her grip of the reins not so steady as at starting. This attempt to do Jim a favor was something she considered as of a good deal of consequence. I began to note more and more what a really splendid woman she was—tall, fair, her tailor-made gown rounding to the full, firm curves of her figure, her fearless horsemanship hinting at the possession of large and positive traits of character.

"We women," said she, "might as well abandon all the things commonly known as feminine. What good do they do us?"

"They gratify your sense of the beautiful," suggested I.

"You know, Mr. Barslow," said she, "that it's not our own sense of the beautiful, mainly, that we seek to gratify; and if the eyes for which they are intended are looking into ledgers and blind to everything except dollar-signs, what's the use?"

"Go down to the seashore," said I, "where the people congregate who have nothing to do."

"Not I," said she; "I'll go into real estate, and become as blind as the rest!"

Jim paid no attention to my chaffing when I spoke of his conquest, as I called Antonia. In fact, he seemed annoyed, and for a long time said nothing.

"You can see how the Allen estate proposition stands," said he, at last. "To let that sell for less than twenty thousand might cost us ten times that amount in lowering the prevailing standard of values. The old rule that we should buy in the cheapest market and sell in the dearest is suspended. Base is the slave who pays—less than the necessary and proper increase."

CHAPTER X.

We Dedicate Lynhurst Park.

The Hindu adept sometimes suspends before the eyes of his subject a bright ball of carnelian or crystal, in the steady contemplation of which the sensitive swims off into the realms of subjectivity—that mysterious bourn from whence no traveler brings anything back. J. Bedford Cornish was Mr. Elkins's glittering ball; his psychic subject was the world in general and Lattimore in particular. Scientific principles, confirmed by experience, led us to the conclusion that the attitude of fixed contemplation carried with it some nervous strain, ought to be of limited duration, and hence that Mr. Cornish should remove from our midst the glittering mystery of his presence, lest familiarity should breed contempt. So in about ten days he went away, giving to the *Herald* a parting interview, in which he expressed unbounded delight with Lattimore, and hinted that he might return for a longer stay. Editorially, the *Herald* expressed the hope that this characteristically veiled allusion to a longer sojourn might mean that Mr. Cornish had some idea of becoming a citizen of Lattimore. This would denote, the editorial continued, that men like Mr. Cornish, accustomed to the mighty world-pulse of New York, could find objects of pursuit equally worthy in Lattimore.

“Which is mixed metaphor,” Mr. Giddings admitted in confidence; “but,” he continued, “if metaphors, like drinks, happen to be more potent mixed, the *Herald* proposes to mix ’em.”

All these things consumed time, and still our life was one devoted to business exclusively. At last Mr. Elkins himself, urged, I feel sure, by Antonia Hinckley, gave evidence of weariness.

“Al,” said he one day, “don’t you think it’s about time to go ashore for a carouse?”

“Unless something in the way of a let-up comes soon,” said I, “the position of lieutenant, or first mate, or whatever my job is piratically termed, will become vacant. The pace is pretty rapid. Last night I dreamed that the new Hotel Elkins

was founded on my chest; and I have had troubles enough of the same kind before to show me that my nervous system is slowly ravelling out."

"I have arrangements made, in my mind, for a sort of al fresco function, to come off about the time Cornish gets back with our London visitor," he replied, "which ought to knit up the ravelled sleeve better than new. I'm going to dedicate Lynhurst Park to the nymphs and deities of sport—which wrinkled care derides."

"I hadn't heard of Lynhurst Park," I was forced to say. "I'm curious to know, first, who named it, and, second, where it is."

"Didn't I show you those blueprints?" he asked. "An oversight I assure you. As for the scheme, you suggested it yourself that night we first drove out to Trescott's. Don't you remember saying something about 'breathing space for the populace'? Well, I had the surveys made at once; contracted for the land, all but what Bill owns of it, which we'll have to get later; and had a landscapist out from Chicago to direct us as to what we ought to admire in improving the place. As for the name, I'm indebted to kind nature, which planted the valley in basswood, and to Josie, who contributed the philological knowledge and the taste. That's the street-car line," said he, unrolling an elaborate plat and pointing. "We may throw it over to the west to develop section seven, if we close for it. Otherwise, that line is the very thing."

Our street-railway franchise had been granted by the Lattimore city council—they would have granted the public square, had we asked for it in the potent name of "progress"—and Cornish was even now making arrangements for placing our bonds. The impossible of less than a year ago was now included in the next season's program, as an inconsiderable feature of a great project for a street-railway system, and the "development" of hundreds of acres of land.

The place so to be named Lynhurst Park was most agreeably reached by a walk up Brushy Creek from Lattimore. Such a stroll took one into the gorge, where the rocks shelved toward each other, until their crowning fringes of cedar almost interlocked, like the eyelashes of drowsiness. Down there in the twilight one felt a sense of being defrauded, in contemplation of the fact that the stream was troutless: it was such an ideal place for trout. The quiet and mellow gloom made the gorge a favorite trysting-place, and perhaps the cool-blooded stream-folk had fled from the presence of the more fervid dwellers on the banks. In the crevices of the rocks were the nests of the village pigeons. The combined effects of all these causes was to make this a spot devoted to billing and cooing.

Farther up the stream the rock walls grew lower and parted wider, islanding a rich bottom of lush grass-plot, alternating with groves of walnut, linden, and elm. This was the Lynhurst Park of the blueprints and plats. Trescott's farm lay on the right bank, and others on either side; but the houses were none of them near the stream, and the entire walk was wild and woodsy-looking. None but nature-lovers came that way. Others drove out by the road past Trescott's, seeing more of corn and barn, but less of rock, moss, and fern.

Mr. Cornish was to return on Friday with the Honorable De Forest Barr-Smith, who lived in London and "represented English capital." To us Westerners the very hyphen of his name spoke eloquently of £ s. d. Through him we hoped to get the money to build that street railway. Cornish had written that Mr. Barr-Smith wanted to look the thing over personally; and that, given the element of safety, his people would much prefer an investment of a million to one of ten thousand. Cornish further hinted that the London gentleman acted like a man who wanted a side interest in the construction company; as to which he would sound him further by the way.

"He'll expect something in the way of birds and bottles," observed Elkins; "but they won't mix with the general society of this town, where the worm of the still is popularly supposed to be the original Edenic tempter. And he'll want to inspect Lynhurst Park. I want him to see our beauty and our chivalry,—meaning the ladies and Captain Tolliver,—and the rest of our best people. I guess we'll have to make it a temperate sort of orgy, making up in the spectacular what it lacks in spirituousness."

Mr. Cornish came, gradually moulting his mystery; but still far above the Lattimore standard in dress and style of living. In truth, he always had a good deal of the swell in his make-up, and can almost be acquitted of deceit in the impressions conveyed at his coming. The Honorable De Forest Barr-Smith fraternized with Cornish, as he could with no one else. No one looking at Mr. Cornish could harbor a doubt as to his morning tub; and his evening dress was always correct. With Jim, Mr. Barr-Smith went into the discussion of business propositions freely and confidentially. I feel sure that had he greatly desired a candid statement of the very truth as to local views, or the exact judgment of one on the spot, he would have come to me. But between him and Cornish there was the stronger sympathy of a common understanding of the occult intricacies of clothes, and a view-point as to the surface of things, embracing manifold points of agreement. Cornish's unerring conformity of vogue in the manner and as to the occasion of wearing the tuxedo or the claw-hammer coat was clearly restful

to Mr. Barr-Smith, in this new and strange country, where, if danger was to be avoided, things had to be approached with distended nostril and many preliminary snuffings of the wind.

There came with these two a younger brother of Mr. Barr-Smith, Cecil—a big young civil engineer, just out of college, and as like his brother in accent and dress as could be expected of one of his years; but national characteristics are matters of growth, and college boys all over the world are a good deal alike. Cecil Barr-Smith, with his red mustache, his dark eyes, and his six feet of British brawn, was nearer in touch with our younger people that first day than his honorable brother ever became. To Antonia, especially, he took kindly, and respectfully devoted himself.

“At this distance,” said Mr. Barr-Smith, as he saw his brother sitting on the grass at Miss Hinckley’s feet, “I’d think them brother and sister. She resembles sister Gritty remarkably; the same complexion and the same style, you know. Quite so!”

The Lynhurst function was the real introduction of these three gentlemen to Lattimore society. I knew nothing of the arrangements, except what I could deduce from Jim’s volume of business with caterers and other handicraftsmen; and I looked forward to the fête with much curiosity. The weather, that afternoon, made an outing quite the natural thing; for it was hot. The ladies in their most summery gowns fluttered like white dryads from shade to shade, uttering bird-like pipings of surprise at the preparations made for their entertainment.

The ravine had been transformed. At an available point in its bed Jim had thrown a dam across the stream, and a beautiful little lake rippled in the breeze, bearing on its bosom a bright-colored boat, which in our ignorance of things Venetian we mistakenly dubbed a gondola. At the upper end of this water the canvas of a large pavilion gleamed whitely through the greenery, displaying from its top the British and American flags, their color reflected in a particolored streak on the wimpling face of the lake. The groves, in the tops of which the woodpeckers, warblers, and vireos disturbedly carried on the imperatively necessary work of rearing their broods, were gay with festoons of Chinese lanterns in readiness for the evening. Hammocks were slung from tree to tree, cushions and seats were arranged in cosy nooks; and when my wife and I stepped from our carriage, all these appliances for the utilization of shade and leisure were in full use. The “gondola” was making, trips from the cascade (as the dam was already called) to the pavilion, carrying loads of young people from whom came to our ears those

peals of merriment which have everywhere but one meaning, and that a part of the world-old mystery of the way of a man with a maid.

Jim was on the ground early, to receive the guests and keep the management in hand. Josie Trescott and her mother walked down through the Trescott pasture, and joined Alice and me under one of the splendid lindens, where, as we lounged in the shade, the sound of the little waterfall filled the spaces in our talk. Long before any one else had seen them coming through the trees, Mr. Elkins had spied them, and went forward to meet them with something more than the hospitable solicitude with which he had met the others. In fact, the principal guests of the day had alighted from their carriage before Jim, ensconced in a hammock with Josie, was made aware of their arrival. I am not quick to see such things; but to my eyes, even, the affair had assumed interest as a sort of public flirtation. I had not thought that Josie would so easily fall into deportment so distinctly encouraging. She was altogether in a surprising mood,—her eyes shining as with some stimulant, her cheeks a little flushed, her lips scarlet, her whole appearance suggesting suppressed excitement. And when Jim rose to meet his guests, she dismissed him with one of those charmingly inviting glances and gestures with which such an adorable woman spins the thread by which the banished one is drawn back,—and then she disappeared until the dinner was served.

The green crown of the western hill was throwing its shadow across the valley, when Mr. Hinckley came with Mr. Cornish and Mr. Barr-Smith in a barouche; followed by Antonia, who brought Mr. Cecil in her trap—and a concomitant thrill to the company. Mr. Cornish, in his dress, had struck a happy medium between the habiliments of business and those of sylvan recreation. Mr. Barr-Smith on the other hand, was garbed cap-a-pie for an outing, presenting an appearance with which the racket, the bat, or even the alpenstock might have been conjoined in perfect harmony. As for the men of Lattimore, any one of them would as soon have been seen in the war-dress of a Sioux chief as in this entirely correct costume of our British visitor. We walked about in the every-day vestments of the shops, banks, and offices, illustrating the difference between a state of society in which apparel is regarded as an incident in life, and one rising to the height of realizing its true significance as a religion. Mr. Barr-Smith bowed not the knee to the Baal of western clothes-monotone, but daily sent out his sartorial orisons, keeping his windows open toward the Jerusalem of his London tailor, in a manner which would have delighted a Teufelsdröckh.

He was a short man, with protruding cheeks, and a nose ending in an amorphous

flare of purple and scarlet. His mustache, red like that of his brother, and constituting the only point of physical resemblance between them, grew down over a receding chin, being forced thereto by the bulbous overhang of the nose. He had rufous side-whiskers, clipped moderately close, and carroty hair mixed with gray. His erect shoulders and straight back were a little out of keeping with the rotundity of his figure in other respects; but the combination, hinting, as it did, of affairs both gastronomic and martial, taken with a manner at once dignified, formal, and suave, constituted the most intensely respectable appearance I ever saw. To the imagination of Lattimore he represented everything of which, Cornish fell short, piling Lombard upon Wall Street.

The arrival of these gentlemen was the signal for gathering in the pavilion where dinner was served. The tables were arranged in a great L, at the apex of which sat Jim and the distinguished guests. On one side of him sat Mr. Barr-Smith, who listened absorbedly to the conversation of Mrs. Hinckley, filling every pause with a husky “Quite so!” On the other sat Josie Trescott, who was smiling upon a very tall and spare old man who wore a beautiful white mustache and imperial. I had never met him, but I knew him for General Lattimore. His fondness for Josie was well known; and to him Jim attributed that young lady’s lack of enthusiasm over our schemes for city-building. His presence at this gathering was somewhat of a surprise to me.

Antonia and Cecil Barr-Smith, the Tollivers, Mr. Hinckley and Alice, myself, Mr. Giddings, and Miss Addison sat across the table from the host. Mrs. Trescott, after expressing wonder at the changes wrought in the ravine, and confiding to me her disapproval of the useless expense, had returned to the farm, impelled by that habitual feeling that something was wrong there. Mr. Giddings was exceedingly attentive to Miss Addison.

“I know why you’re trying to look severe,” said he to her, as the consommé was served; “and it’s the only thing I can imagine you making a failure of, unless it would be looking anything but pretty. But you are trying it, and I know why. You think they ought to have had some one say grace before pulling this thing off.”

“I’m not trying to look—anyhow,” she answered. “But you are right in thinking that I believe such duties should not be transgressed, for fear that the world may call us provincial or old-fashioned.”

And she shot a glance at Cornish and Barr-Smith as the visible representatives of the “world.”

“Don’t listen to that age-old clash between fervor and unregeneracy,” said Josie

across the narrow table, her remarks made possible by the music of the orchestra, “but tell us about Mr. Barr-Smith and—the other gentlemen.”

“I wanted to ask you about the Britons,” said I; “are they good specimens of the men you saw in England?”

“An art-student, with a consciousness of guilt in slowly eating up the year’s shipment of steers, isn’t likely to know much more of the Barr-Smiths’ London than she can see from the street. But I think them fine examples of not very rare types. I should like to try drawing the elder brother!”

“Before he goes away, I predict—” I began, when my villainous pun was arrested in mid-utterance by the voice of Captain Tolliver, suddenly becoming the culminating peak in the table-talk.

“The Anglo-Saxon, suh,” he was saying, “is found in his greatest purity of blood in ouah Southe‘n states. It is thah, suh, that those qualities of virility and capacity fo’ rulership which make the race what is ah found in theiah highest development—on this side of the watah, suh, on this side!”

“Quite so! I dare say, quite so!” responded Mr. Barr-Smith. “I hope to know the people of the South better. In fact, I may say, really, you know, an occasion like this gives one the desire to become acquainted with the whole American people.”

General Lattimore, whose nostrils flared as he leaned forward listening, like an opponent in a debate, to the remarks of Captain Tolliver, subsided as he heard the Englishman’s diplomatic reply.

“What’s the use?” said he to Josie. “He may be nearer right than I can understand.”

“We hope,” said Mr. Elkins, “that this desire may be focalized locally, and grow to anything short of a disease. I assure you, Lattimore will congratulate herself.”

Mr. Barr-Smith’s fingers sought his glass, as if the impulse were on him to propose a toast; but the liquid facilities being absent, he relapsed into a conversation with Mrs. Hinckley.

“I’d say those things, too, if I were in his place,” came the words of Giddings, overshooting their mark, the ear of Miss Addison; “but it’s all rot. He’s disgusted with the whole barbarous outfit of us.”

“I am becoming curious,” was the *sotto voce* reply, “to know upon what model you found your conduct, Mr. Giddings.”

“I know what you mean,” said Mr. Giddings. “But I have adopted Iago.”

“Why, Mr. Giddings! How shocking! Iago—”

“Now, don’t be horrified,” said Giddings, with an air of candor, “but look at it from a practical standpoint. If Othello hadn’t been such a fool, Iago would have made his point all right. He had a right to be sore at Othello for promoting Cassio over his head, and his scheme was a good one, if Othello hadn’t gone crazy. Iago is dominated by reason and the principle of the survival of the fittest. He is an agreeable fellow—”

Miss Addison, with a charming mixture of tragedy and archness, suppressed this blasphemy by a gesture suggestive of placing her hand over the editor’s mouth.

“Ah, Mrs. Hinckley, you shouldn’t do us such an injustice!” It was Mr. Cornish, who took the center of the stage now. “You seem to fail to realize the fact that, in any given gathering, the influence of woman is dominant; and as the entire life of the nation is the sum total of such gatherings, woman is already in control. Now how can you fail to admit this?”

I missed the rather extended reply of Mrs. Hinckley, in noting the evident impression made upon the company by this first utterance of the mysterious Cornish. It was not what he said: that was not important. It was the dark, bearded face, the jetty eyes, and above all, I think, the voice, with its clear, carrying quality, combining penetrativeness with a repression of force which gave one the feeling of being addressed in confidence. Every man, and especially every woman, in the company, looked fixedly upon him, until he ceased to speak—all except Josie. She darted at him one look, a mere momentary scrutiny, and as he discoursed of woman and her power, she seemed to lose herself in contemplation of her plate. The blush upon her cheek became more rosy, and a little smile, with something in it which was not of pleasure, played about the corners of her mouth. I was about to offer her the traditional bargain-counter price for her thoughts, when my attention was commanded by Jim’s voice, answering some remark of Antonia’s.

“This is the merest curtain-riser, just a sort of kick-off,” he was saying. “In a year or two this valley will be *the* pleasure-ground of all the countryside, a hundred miles around. This tent will be replaced by a restaurant and auditorium. The conventions and public gatherings of the state will be held here—there is no other place for ’em; and our railway will bring the folks out from town. There will be baseball grounds, and facilities for all sorts of sports; and outings and games will center here. I promise you the next regatta of the State Rowing

Association, and a street-car line landing passengers where we now sit.”

“Hear, hear!” said Mr. Barr-Smith, and the company clapped hands in applause.

Mr. Hinckley was introduced by Jim as “one who had seen Lynhurst Park when it was Indian hunting-ground”; and made a speech in which he welcomed Mr. Cornish as a new citizen who was already prominent. Dining in this valley, he said, reminded him of the time when he and two other guests now present had, on almost the identical spot, dined on venison dressed and cooked where it fell. Then Lattimore was a trading-post on the frontier, surrounded by the tepees of Indians, and uncertain as to its lease of life. General Lattimore, who shot the deer, or Mr. Macdonald, who helped eat it, could either of them tell more about it. Mr. Barr-Smith and our other British guest might judge of the rapidity of development in this country, where a man may see in his lifetime progress which in the older states and countries could be discerned by the student of history only.

Mr. Cornish very briefly thanked Mr. Hinckley for his words of welcome; but begged to be excused from making any extended remarks. Deeds were rather more in his line than words.

“Title-deeds,” said Giddings under his breath, “as the real-estate transfers show!”

General Lattimore verified Mr. Hinckley’s statement concerning the meal of venison; and, politely expressing pleasure at being present at a function which seemed to be regarded as of so much importance to the welfare of the town in which he had always taken the pride of a godfather, resumed his seat without adding anything to the oratory of the boom.

“In fact,” said Captain Tolliver to me, “I wahned Mr. Elkins against having him hyah. In any mattah of progress he’s a wet blanket, and has proved himself such by these remahks.”

Mr. Barr-Smith, in response to the allusions to him, assured us that the presence of people such as he had had the pleasure of meeting in Lattimore was sufficient in itself to account for the forward movement in the community, which the visitor could not fail to observe.

“In a state of society where people are not averse to changing their abodes,” he said, “and where the social atom, if I may so express myself, is in a state of mobility, the presence of such magnets as our toastmaster, and the other gentlemen to whose courteous remarks I am responding, must draw ’em to themselves, you may be jolly well assured of that! And if the gentlemen should

fail, the thing which should resist the attractive power of the American ladies must be more fixed in its habits than even the conservative English gentleman, who prides himself upon his stability, er—ah—his taking a position and sticking by it, in spite of the—of anything, you know.”

As his only contribution to the speechmaking, Mr. Cecil Barr-Smith greeted this sentiment with a hearty “Hear, hear!” He fell into step with Antonia as we left the pavilion. Then he went back as if to look for something; and I saw Antonia summon Mr. Elkins to her side so that she might congratulate him on the success of this “carouse.”

Everything seemed going well. There was, however, in that gathering, as in the day, material for a storm, and I, of all those in attendance, ought to have seen it, had my memory been as unerring as I thought it.

CHAPTER XI.

The Empress and Sir John Meet Again.

The company emerged from the tent into the enchanted outdoors of the star-dotted valley. The moon rode high, and flooded the glades with silvery effulgency. The heat of the day had bred a summer storm-cloud, which, all quivery with lightning, seemed sweeping around from the northwest to the north, giving us the delicious experience of enjoying calm, in view of storm.

The music of the orchestra soon told that the pavilion had been cleared for dancing. I heard Giddings urging upon Miss Addison that it would be much better for them to walk in the moonlight than to encourage by their presence such a worldly amusement, and one in which he had never been able to do anything better than fail, anyhow. Sighing her pain at the frivolity of the world, she took his arm and strolled away. I noticed that she clung closely to him, frightened, I suppose, at the mysterious rustlings in the trees, or something.

They made up the dances in such a way as to leave me out. I rather wanted to dance with Antonia; but Mr. Cecil was just leaving her in disappointment, in the possession of Mr. Elkins, when I went for her. I decided that a cigar and solitude were rather to be chosen than anything else which presented itself, and accordingly I took possession of one of the hammocks, in which I lay and smoked, and watched the towering thunder-head, as it stood like a mighty and marvelous mountain in the northern sky, its rounded and convoluted summits serenely white in the moonlight, its mysterious caves palpitant with incessant lightning. The soothing of the cigar; the new-made lake reflecting the gleam of hundreds of lanterns; the illuminated pavilion, its whirling company of dancers seen under the uprolled walls; the night, with its strange contrast of a calm southern sky on the one hand pouring down its flood of moonlight, and in the north the great mother-of-pearl dome with its core of vibrant fire; the dance-music throbbing through the lindens; and all this growing out of the unwonted and curious life of the past few months, bore to me again that feeling of being yoked with some thaumaturge of wondrous power for the working of enchantments. Again I seemed in a partnership with Aladdin; and fairy pavilions, sylvan paradises, bevies of dancing girls, and princes bearing gifts of gold and jewels, had all obeyed our conjuration. I could have walked down to

the naphtha pleasure-boat and bidden the engineer put me down at Khorassan, or some dreamful port of far Cathay, with no sense of incongruity.

Two figures came from the tent and walked toward me. As I looked at them, myself in darkness, they in the light, I had again that feeling of having seen them in some similar way before. That same old sensation, thought I, that the analytic novelist made trite ages ago. Then I saw that it was Mr. Cornish and Miss Trescott. I could hear them talking; but lay still, because I was loth to have my reveries disturbed. And besides, to speak would seem an unwarranted assumption of confidential relations on their part. They stopped near me.

“Your memory is not so good as mine,” said he. “I knew you at once. Knew you! Why—”

“I’m not very good at keeping names and faces in mind,” she replied, “unless they belong to people I have known very well.”

“Indeed!” his voice dropped to the ‘cello-like undertone now; “isn’t that a little unkind? I fancied that *we* knew each other very well! My conceit is not to be pandered to, I perceive.”

“Ye-e-s—does it seem that way?” said she, ignoring the last remark. “Well, you know it was only for a few days, and you kept calling yourself by some ridiculous alias, and scarcely used your surname at all, and I believe they called you Johnny—and you can’t think what a disguise such a beard is! But I remember you now perfectly. It quite brings back those short months, when I was so young—and was finding things out! I can see the vine-covered porch, and Madame Lamoreaux’s boarding-house on the South Side—”

“And the old art gallery?”

“Why, there was one, wasn’t there?” said she, “somewhere along the lake front, wasn’t it?... Such a pleasant meeting, and so odd!”

I sat up in the hammock, and stared at them as they went on their promenade. The old art gallery, the vine-covered porch, the young man with the smooth-shaven dark face and the thrilling, vibrant voice, and the young, young girl with the ruddy hair, and the little, round form! She seemed taller now, and there was more of maturity in the figure; but it was the same lissome waist and petite gracefulness which had so fully explained to me the avid eyes of her lover on that day when I had fled from the report of the Committee on Permanent Organization. It was the Empress Josephine, I had known that—and her Sir John!

Then I thought of her flying from him into the street, and the little bowed head on the street-car; and the old pity for her, the old bitterness toward him, returned upon me. I wondered how he could speak to her in this nonchalant way; what they were saying to each other; whether they would ever refer to that night at Auriccio's; what Alice would think of him if she ever found it out; whether he was a villain, or only erred passionately; what was actually said in that palm alcove that night so long ago; whether this man, with the eyes and voice so fascinating to women, would renew his suit in this new life of ours; what Jim would think about it; and, more than all, how Josie herself would regard him.

"She ought never to have spoken to him again!" I hear some one say.

Ah, Madam, very true. But do you remember any authentic case of a woman who failed to forgive the man whose error or offense had for its excuse the irresistible attraction of her own charms?

They were coming back now, still talking.

"You dropped out of sight, like a partridge into a thicket," said he. "Some of them said you had gone back to—to—"

"To the farm," she prompted.

"Well, yes," he conceded; "and others said you had left Chicago for New York; and some, even Paris."

"I fail to see the warrant," said Josie, as they approached the limit of earshot, "for any of the people at Madame Lamoreux's giving themselves the trouble to investigate."

"So far as that is concerned," said he, "I should think that I—" and his voice quite lost intelligibility.

My cigar had gone out, and the cessation of the music ought to have apprised me of the breaking up of the dance, and still I lay looking at the sky and filled with my thoughts.

"Here he is," said Alice, "asleep in the hammock! For shame, Albert! This would not have occurred, once!"

"I am free to admit that," said I, "but why am I now disturbed?"

"We're going on a cruise in the gondola," said Antonia, "and Mr. Elkins says you are lieutenant, and we can't sail without you. Come, it's perfectly beautiful out there."

“We’re going to the head of navigation and back,” said Jim, “and then our revels will be ended. —Hang it!” to me, “they left the skull and crossbones off all the flags!”

Mr. Barr-Smith at once engaged the engineer in conversation, and seemed worming from him all his knowledge of the construction of the boat. The rest of us lounged on cushions and seats. We threaded our way up the new pond, winding between clumps of trees, now in broad moonlight, now in deepest shade. The shower had swept over to the northeast, just one dark flounce of its skirt reaching to the zenith. A cool breeze suddenly sprang up from the west, stirred by the suction of the receding storm, and a roar came from the trees on the hilltops.

“Better run for port,” said Jim; “I’d hate to have Mr. Barr-Smith suffer shipwreck where the charts don’t show any water!”

As we ran down the open way, the remark seemed less and less of a joke. The gale poured over the hills, and struck the boat like the buffet of a great hand. She heeled over alarmingly, bumped upon a submerged stump, righted, heeled again, this time shipping a little sea, and then the sharp end of a hidden oak-limb thrust up through the bottom, and ripped its way out again, leaving us afloat in the deepest part of the lake, with a spouting fountain in the middle of the vessel, and the chopping waves breaking over the gunwale. All at once, I noticed Cecil Barr-Smith, with his coat off, standing near Antonia, who sat as cool as if she had been out on some quiet road driving her pacers. The boat sank lower in the water, and I had no doubt that she was sinking. Antonia rose, and stretched her hands towards Jim. I do not see how he could avoid seeing this; but he did, and, as if abandoning her to her fate, he leaped to Josie’s side. Cornish had seized *her* by the arm, and seemed about to devote himself to her safety, when Jim, without a word, lifted her in his arms, and leaped lightly upon the forward deck, the highest and driest place on the sinking craft. Then, as everything pointed to a speedy baptism in the lake for all of us, we saw that the very speed of the wind had saved us, and felt the gondola bump broadside upon the dam. Jim sprang to the abutment with Josie, and Cecil Barr-Smith half carried and half led Antonia to the shore. Alice and I sat calmly on the windward rail; and Barr-Smith, laughing with delight, helped us across, one at a time, to the masonry.

“I’m glad it turned out no worse,” said Jim. “I hope you will all excuse me if I leave you now. I must see Miss Trescott to a safe and dry place. Here’s the carriage, Josie!”

“Are you quite uninjured?” said Cecil to Antonia, as Mr. Elkins and Josie drove away.

“Oh, quite so!” said Antonia, unwittingly adopting Barr-Smith’s phrase. “But for a moment I was awfully frightened!”

“It looked a little damp, at one time, for farce-comedy,” said Cornish. “I wonder how deep it was out there!”

“Miss Trescott was quite drenched,” said Mr. Barr-Smith, as we got into the carriages. “Too bad, by Jove!”

“You may write home,” said Antonia, “an account of being shipwrecked in the top of a tree!”

“Good, good!” said Cecil, and we all joined in the laugh, until we were suddenly sobered by the fact that Antonia had bowed her head on Alice’s lap, and was sobbing as if her heart was broken.

CHAPTER XII.

In which the Burdens of Wealth Begin to Fall upon Us.

If the town be considered as a quiescent body pursuing its unluminous way in space, Mr. Elkins may stand for the impinging planet which shocked it into vibrant life. I suggested this nebular-hypothesis simile to Mr. Giddings, one day, as the germ of an editorial.

“It’s rather seductive,” said he, “but it won’t do. Carry your interplanetary collision business to its logical end, and what do you come to? Gaseousness. And that’s just what the Angus Falls *Times*, the Fairchild Star, and the other loathsome sheets printed in prairie-dog towns around here accuse us of, now. No; much obliged; but as a field for comparisons the tried old solar system is good enough for the *Herald*.”

I couldn’t help thinking, however, that the thing had some illustrative merit. There was Jim’s first impact, felt locally, and jarring things loose. Then came the

atomic vivification, the heat and motion, which appeared in the developments which we have seen taking form. After the visit of the Barr-Smiths, and the immigration of Cornish, the new star Lattimore began to blaze in the commercial firmament, the focus of innumerable monetary telescopes, pointed from the observatories of counting-rooms, banks, and offices, far and wide.

There was a shifting of the investment and speculative equilibrium, and things began coming to us spontaneously. The Angus Falls railway extension was won only by strenuous endeavor. Captain Tolliver's interviews with General Lattimore, in which he was so ruthlessly "turned down," he always regarded as a sort of creative agony, marking the origin of the roundhouse and machine-shops, and our connection with the great Halliday railway system of which it made us a part. The street-car project went more easily; and, during the autumn, the geological and manufacturing experts sent out to report on the cement-works enterprise, pronounced favorably, and gangs of men, during the winter, were to be seen at work on the foundations of the great buildings by the scarped chalk-hill.

The tension of my mind just after the Lynhurst Park affair was such as to attune it to no impulses but the financial vibrations which pulsated through our atmosphere. True, I sometimes felt the wonder return upon me at the finding of the lovers of the art-gallery together once more, in Josie and Cornish; and at other times Antonia's agitation after our escape from shipwreck recurred to me in contrast with her smiling self-possession while the boat was drifting and filling; but mostly I thought of nothing, dreamed of nothing, but trust companies, additions, bonds and mortgages.

Mr. Barr-Smith returned to London soon, giving a parting luncheon in his rooms, where wine flowed freely, and toasts of many colors were pushed into the atmosphere. There was one to the President and the Queen, proposed by the host and drunk in bumpers, and others to Mr. Barr-Smith, his brother, and the members of the "Syndicate." The enthusiasm grew steadily in intensity as the affair progressed. Finally Mr. Cecil solemnly proposed "The American Woman." In offering this toast, he said, he was taking long odds, as it was a sport for which he hadn't had the least training; but he couldn't forego the pleasure of paying a tribute where tribute was due. The ladies of America needed no encomiums from him, and yet he was sure that he should give no offense by saying that they were of a type unknown in history. They were up to anything, you know, in the way of intellectuality, and he was sure that in a certain queenly, blonde way they were—

“Hear, hear!” said his brother, and burst into a laugh in which we all joined, while Cecil went on talking, in an uproar which drowned his words, though one could see that he was trying to explain something, and growing very hot in the process.

Pearson announced that their train would soon arrive, and we all went down to see them off. Barr-Smith assured us at parting that the tram-road transaction might be considered settled. He believed, too, that his clients might come into the cement project. We were all the more hopeful of this, for the knowledge that he carried somewhere in his luggage a bond for a deed to a considerable interest in the cement lands. Things were coming on beautifully; and it seemed as if Elkins and Cornish, working together, were invincible.

We still lived at the hotel, but our architect, “little Ed. Smith, who lived over on the Hayes place” when we were boys, and who was once at Garden City with Jim, was busy with plans for a mansion which we were to build in the new Lynhurst Park Addition the next spring. Mr. Elkins was preparing to erect a splendid house in the same neighborhood.

“Can I afford it?” said I, in discussing estimates.

“Afford it!” he replied, turning on me in astonishment. “My dear boy, don’t you see we are up against a situation that calls on us to bluff to the limit, or lay down? In such a case, luxury becomes a duty, and lavishness the truest economy. Not to spend is to go broke. Lay your Poor Richard on the shelf, and put a weight on him. Stimulate the outgo, and the income’ll take care of itself. A thousand spent is five figures to the good. No, while we’ve as many boom-irons in the fire as we’re heating now, to be modest is to be lost.”

“Perhaps,” said I, “you may be right, and no doubt are. We’ll talk it over again some time. And your remark about irons in the fire brings up another matter which bothers me. It’s something unusual when we don’t open up a set of books for some new corporation, during the working day. Aren’t we getting too many?”

“Do you remember Mule Jones, who lived down near Hickory Grove?” said he, after a long pause. “Well, you know, in our old neighborhood, the mule was regarded with a mixture of contempt, suspicion, and fear, the folks not understanding him very well, and being especially uninformed as to his merits. Therefore, Mule Jones, who dealt in mules, bought, sold, and broke ’em, was a man of mark, and identified in name with his trade, as most people used to be before our time. I was down there one Sunday, and asked him how he managed

to break the brutes. ‘It’s easy,’ said he, ‘when you know how. I never hook up less’n six of ’em at a time. Then they sort o’ neutralize one another. Some on ’em’ll be r’arin’ an’ pitchin’, an’ some tryin’ to run; but they’ll be enough of ’em down an’ a-draggin’ all the time, to keep the enthusiastic ones kind o’ suppressed, and give me the castin’ vote. It’s the only right way to git the bulge on mules.’ Whenever you get to worrying about our various companies, think of the Mule Jones system and be calm.”

“I’m a little shy of being ruled by one case, even though so exactly in point,” said I.

“Well, it’s all right,” he continued, “and about these houses. Why, we’d have to build them, even if we preferred to live in tents. Put the cost in the advertising account of Lynhurst Park Addition, if it worries you. Let me ask you, now, as a reasonable man, how can we expect the rest of the world to come out here and spring themselves for humble dwellings with stationary washtubs, conservatories, and *porte cochères*, if we ourselves haven’t any more confidence in the deal than to put up Jim Crow wickiups costing not more than ten or fifteen thousand dollars apiece? That addition has got to be the Nob Hill of Lattimore. Nothing in the ‘poor but honest’ line will do for Lynhurst; and we’ve got to set the pace. When you see my modest bachelor quarters going up, you’ll cease to think of yours in the light of an extravagance. By next fall you’ll be infested with money, anyhow, and that house will be the least of your troubles.”

Alice and I made up our minds that Jim was right, and went on with our plans on a scale which sometimes brought back the Aladdin idea to my mind, accustomed as I was to rural simplicity. But Alice, notwithstanding that she was the daughter of a country physician of not very lucrative practice, rose to the occasion, and spent money with a spontaneous largeness of execution which revealed a genius hitherto unsuspected by either of us. Jim was thoroughly delighted with it.

“The Republic,” he argued, “cannot be in any real danger when the modest middle classes produce characters of such strength in meeting great emergencies!”

Jim was at his best this summer. He revelled in the work of filling the morning paper with scare-heads detailing our operations. He enjoyed being It, he said. Cornish, after the first few days, during which, in spite of inside information as to his history, I felt that he would make good the predictions of the *Herald*, ceased to be, in my mind, anything more than I was—a trusted aide of Jim, the general. Both men went rather frequently out to the Trescott farm—Jim with the

bluff freedom of a brother, Cornish with his rather ceremonious deference. I distrusted the dark Sir John where women were concerned, noting how they seemed charmed by him; but I could not see that he had made any headway in regaining Josie’s regard, though I had a lurking feeling that he meant to do so. I saw at times in his eyes the old look which I remembered so well.

Josie, more than ever this season, was earning her father’s commendation as his “right-hand man.” She insisted on driving the four horses which drew the binder in the harvest. In the haying she operated the horse-rake, and helped man the hay-fork in filling the barns. She grew as tanned as if she had spent the time at the seashore or on the links; and with every month she added to her charm. The scarlet of her lips, the ruddy luxuriance of her hair, the arrowy straightness of her carriage, the pulsing health which beamed from her eye, and dyed cheek and neck, made their appeal to the women, even.

“How sweet she is!” said Alice, as she came to greet us one day when we drove to the farm, and waited for her to come to us. “How sweet she is, Albert!”

Her father came up, and explained to us that he didn’t ask any of his women folks to do any work except what there was in the house. He was able to hire the outdoors work done, but Josie he couldn’t keep out of the fields.

“Why, pa,” said she, “don’t you see you would spoil my chances of marrying a fairy prince? They absolutely never come into the house; and my straw hat is the only really becoming thing I’ve got to wear!”

“Don’t give a dum if yeh never marry,” said Bill. “Hain’t seen the man yit that was good enough fer yeh, from my standpoint.”

Bill’s reputation was pretty well known to me by this time. He had been for years a successful breeder and shipper of live-stock, in which vocation he had become well-to-do. On his farm he was forceful and efficient, treading his fields like an admiral his quarter-deck. About town he was given to talking horses and cattle with the groups which frequented the stables and blacksmith-shops, and sometimes grew a little noisy and boisterous with them. Whenever her father went with a shipment of cattle to Chicago or other market, Josie went too, taking a regular passenger train in time to be waiting when Bill’s stock train arrived; and after the beeves were disposed of, Bill became her escort to opera and art-gallery; on such a visit I had seen her at the Stock Yards. She was fond of her father; but this alone did not explain her constant attendance upon him. I soon came to understand that his prompt return from the city, in good condition, was apt to be dependent upon her influence. It was one of those cases of weakness,

associated with strength, the real mystery of which does not often occur to us because they are so common.

He came into our office one day with a tremor in his hand and a hunted look in his eye. He took a chair at my invitation, but rose at once, went to the door, and looked up and down the street, as if for pursuers. I saw Captain Tolliver across the street, and Bill's air of excitement was explained. I was relieved, for at first I had thought him intoxicated.

"What's the matter, Bill?" said I, after he had looked at me earnestly, almost pantingly, for a few moments. "You look nervous."

"They're after me," he answered in repressed tones, "to sell; and I'll be blasted if I know what to do! Wha' d'ye' 'spose they're offerin' me for my land?"

"The fact is, Bill," said I, "that I know all about it. I'm interested in the deal, somewhat."

"Then you know they've bid right around a thousand dollars an acre?"

"Yes," said I, "or at least that they intended to offer that."

"An' you're one o' the company," he queried, "that's doin' it?"

"Yes," I admitted.

"Wal," said he, "I'm kinder sorry you're in it, becuz I've about concluded to sell; an' it seems to me that any concern that buys at that figger is a-goin' to bust, sure. W'y, I bought that land fer two dollars and a haff an acre. But, see here, now; I 'xpect you know your business, an' see some way of gittin' out in the deal, 'r you wouldn't pay that. But if I sell, I've got to have help with my folks."

"Ah," said I, scenting the usual obstacle in such cases, "Mrs. Trescott a little unwilling to sign the deeds?"

"No," answered he, "strange as it may seem, ma's kinder stuck on comin' to town to live. How she'll feel after she's tried it fer a month 'r so, with no chickens 'r turkeys 'r milk to look after, I'm dubious; but jest now she seems to be all right."

"Well, what's the matter then?" said I.

"Wal, it's Josie, to tell the truth," said he. "She's sort o' hangin' back. An' it's for her sake that I want to make the deal! I've told her an' told her that there's no dum sense in raisin' corn on thousand-dollar land; but it's no use, so fur; an' here's the only chanst I'll ever hev, mebbe, a-slippin' by. She ortn't to live her

life out on a farm, educated as she is. W'y, did you ever hear how she's been educated?"

I told him that in a general way I knew, but not in detail.

"W'l, I want yeh to know all about it, so's yeh c'n see this movin' business as it is," said he. "You know I was allus a rough cuss. Herded cattle over there by yer father's south place, an' never went to school. Ma, Josie's ma, y' know, kep' the Greenwood school, an' crossed the prairie there where I was a-herdin', an' I used to look at her mighty longin' as she went by, when the cattle happened to be clost along the track, which they right often done. You know how them things go. An' fin'ly one morning a blue racer chased her, as the little whelps will, an' got his dummed little teeth fastened in her dress, an' she a-hyperin' around haff crazy, and a-screamin' every jump, so's't I hed to just grab her, an' hold her till I could get the blasted snake off,—harmless, y' know, but got hooked teeth, an' not a lick o' sense,—an' he kinder quirled around my arm, an' I nacherally tore him to ribbins a-gittin' of him off. An' then she sort o' dropped off, an' when she come to, I was a-rubbin' her hands an' temples. Wa'n't that a funny interduction?"

"It's very interesting," said I; "go on."

"W'l you remember ol' Doc Maxfield?" said Bill, well started on a reminiscence. "Wal, he come along, an' said it was the worst case of collapse, whatever that means, that he ever see—her lips an' hands an' chin all a-tremblin', an' flighty as a loon. Wal, after that I used to take her around some, an' her folks objected becuz I was ignorant, an' she learnt me some things, an' bein' strong an' a good dancer an' purty good-lookin' she kind o' forgot about my failin's, an' we was married. Her folks said she'd throwed herself away; but I could buy an' sell the hull set of 'em now!"

This seemed conclusive as to the merits of the case, and I told him as much.

"W'l Josie was born an' growed up," continued Bill, "an' it's her I started to tell about, wa'n't it? She was allus a cute little thing, an' early she got this art business in her head. She'd read about fellers that had got to be great by paintin' an' carvin', an' it made her wild to do the same thing. Wa'n't there a feller that pulled hair outer the cat to paint Injuns with? Yes, I thought they was; I allus thought they could paint theirselves good enough; but that story an' some others she read an' read when she was a little gal, an' she was allus a-paintin' an' makin' things with clay. She took a prize at the county fair when she was fourteen, with a picter of Washin'ton crossin' the Delaware—three dollars, by gum! An' then we hed to give her lessons; an' they wasn't any one thet knew

anything around here, she said, an’ she went to Chicago. An’ I went in to visit her when she hedn’t ben there more’n six weeks, on an excursion one convention time, an’ I found her all tore up, a good deal as her ma was with the blue racer,—I don’t think she’s ever ben the same light-hearted little gal sence,—an’ from there I took her to New York; an’ there she fell in with a nice woman that was awful good to her, an’ they went to Europe, an’ it cost a heap. An’ you may’ve noticed thet Josie knows a pile more’n the other women here?”

I admitted that this had occurred to me.

“W’l, she was allus apt to take her head with her,” said Bill, “but this travelin’ has fixed her like a hoss thet’s ben druv in Chicago: nothin’ feazes her, street-cars, brass bands, circuses, overhead trains—it’s all the same to her, she’s seen ’em all. Sometimes I git the notion that she’d enjoy things more if she hadn’t seen so dum many of ’em an’ so much better ones, y’ know! Wal, after she’d ben over there a long time, she wrote she was a-comin’ home; an’ we was tickled to death. Only I was surprised by her writin’ that she wanted us to take all them old picters of hern, and put ’em out of sight! An’ if you’ll b’lieve it, she won’t talk picters nor make any sence she got back—only, jest after she got back, she said she didn’t see any use o’ her goin’ on dobbin’ good canvas up with good paint, an’ makin’ nothin’ but poor picters; an’ she cried some.... I thought it was sing’lar that this art business that she thought was the only thing thet’d ever make her happy was the only thing I ever see her cry about.”

“It’s the way,” said I, “with a great many of our cherished hopes.”

“W’l, anyhow, you can see thet it’s the wrong thing to put as much time an’ money into fixin’ a child up f’r a different kind o’ life as we hev, an’ then keep her on a farm out here. An’ thet’s why I want you to help this sale through, an’ bring influence to bear on her. I give up; I’m all in.”

To me Bill seemed entirely in the right. The new era made it absurd for the Trescotts to use their land longer as a farm. Lattimore was changing daily. The streets were gashed with trenches for gas- and water-mains; piled-up materials for curbing, paving, office buildings, new hotels, and all sorts of erections made locomotion a peril; but we were happy.

The water company was organized in our office, the gas and electric-light company in Cornish’s; but every spout led into the same bin.

Mr. Hinckley had induced some country dealers who owned a line of local grain-houses to remove to Lattimore and put up a huge terminal elevator for the handling of their trade. Captain Tolliver had been for a long time working upon a

project for developing a great water-power, by tunneling across a bend in the river, and utilizing the fall. The building of the elevator attracted the attention of a company of Rochester millers, and almost before we knew it their forces had been added to ours, and the tunnel was begun, with the certainty that a two-thousand-barrel mill would be ready to grind the wheat from the elevator as soon as the flume began carrying water. This tunnel cut through an isthmus between the Brushy Creek valley and the river, and brought to bear on our turbines the head from a ten-mile loop of shoals and riffles. It opened into the gorge near the southern edge of Lynhurst Park, and crossed the Trescott farm. So it was that Bill awoke one day to the fact that his farm was coveted by divers people, who saw in his fields and feed-yards desirable sites for railway tracks, mills, factories, and the cottages of a manufacturing suburb. This it was that had put the Captain, like a blood-hound, on his trial, to the end that he was run to earth in my office, and made his appeal for help in managing Josie.

“There she comes now,” said he. “Labor with her, won’t yeh?”

“Bring her with us to the hotel,” said I, “to take dinner. If my wife and Elkins can’t fix the thing, no one can.”

So we five dined together, and after dinner discussed the Trescott crisis. Bill put the case, with all a veteran dealer’s logic, in its financial aspects.

“But we don’t want to be rich,” said Josie.

“What’ve we ben actin’ all these years like we have for, then?” inquired Bill. “Seem’s if I’d been lab’rin’ under a mistake f’r some time past. When your ma an’ me was a-roughin’ it out there in the old log-house, an’ she a-lookin’ out at the Feb’uary stars through the holes in the roof, a-holdin’ you, a little baby in bed, we reckoned we was a-doin’ of it to sort o’ better ourselves in a property way. Wouldn’t you ’a’thought so, Jim?”

“Well,” said Mr. Elkins, with an air of judicial perpension, “if you had asked me about it, I should have said that, if you wanted to stay poor, you could have held your own better by staying in Pleasant Valley Township as a renter. This was no place to come to if you wanted to conserve your poverty.”

“But, pa, we’re not adapted to town life and towns,” urged Josie. “I’m not, and you are not, and as for mamma, she’ll never be contented. Oh, Mr. Elkins, why did you come out here, making us all fortunes which we haven’t earned, and upsetting everything?”

“Now, don’t blame me, Josie,” Jim protested. “You ought to consider the fallacy

of the *post hoc*, *propter hoc* argument. But to return to the point under discussion. If you could stay there, a rural Amaryllis, sporting in Arcadian shades, having seen you doing it once or twice, I couldn't argue against it, it's so charmingly becoming."

"If that were all the argument—" began Josie.

"It's the most important one—to my mind," said Jim, resuming the discussion, "and you fail on that point; for you can't live in that way long. If you don't sell, the Development Company will condemn grounds for railway tracks and switch-yards; you'll find your fields and meadows all shot to pieces; and your house will be surrounded by warehouses, elevators, and factories. Your larks and bobolinks will be scared off by engines and smokestacks, and your flowers spoiled with soot. Don't parley with fate, but cash in and put your winnings in some safe investment."

"Once I thought I couldn't stay on the old farm a day longer; but I feel otherwise now! What business has this 'progress' of yours to interfere?"

"It pushes you out of the nest," answered Jim. "It gives you the chance of your lives. You can come out into Lynhurst Park Addition, and build your house near the Barslow and Elkins dwellings. We've got about everything there—city water, gas, electric light, sewers, steam heat from the traction plant, beautiful view, lots on an established grade—"

"Don't, don't!" said Josie. "It sounds like the advertisements in the *Herald*."

"Well, I was just leading up to a statement of what we lack," continued Jim. "It's the artistic atmosphere. We need a dash of the culture of Paris and Dresden and the place where they have the dinky little windmills which look so nice on cream-pitchers, but wouldn't do for one of our farmers a minute. Come out and supply our lack. You owe it to the great cause of the amelioration of local savagery; and in view of my declaration of discipleship, and the effective way in which I have always upheld the standard of our barbarism, I claim that you owe it to me."

"I've abandoned the brush."

"Take it up again."

"I have made a vow."

"Break it!"

She refused to yield, but was clearly yielding. Alice and I showed Trescott, on a

plat, the place for his new home. He was quite taken with the idea, and said that ma would certainly be tickled with it.

Josie sat apart with Mr. Elkins, in earnest converse, for a long time. She looked frequently at her father, Jim constantly at her. Mr. Cornish dropped in for a little while, and joined us in presenting the case for removal. While he was there the girl seemed constrained, and not quite so fully at her ease; and I could detect, I thought, the old tendency to scrutinize his face furtively. When he went away, she turned to Jim more intimately than before, and almost promised that she would become his neighbor in Lynhurst. After the Trescotts' carriage had come and taken them away, Jim told us that it was for her father, and the temptations of idleness in the town, that Miss Trescott feared.

"This fairy-godmother business," said he, "ain't what the prospectus might lead one to expect. It has its drawbacks. Bill is going to cash in all right, and I think it's for the best; but, Al, we've got to take care of the old man, and see that he doesn't go up in the air."

CHAPTER XIII.

A Sitting or Two in the Game with the World and Destiny.

Our game at Lattimore was one of those absorbing ones in which the sunlight of next morning sifts through the blinds before the players are aware that midnight is past. Day by day, deal by deal, it went on, card followed card in fateful fall upon the table, and we who sat in, and played the World and Destiny with so pitifully small a pile of chips at the outset, saw the World and Destiny losing to us, until our hands could scarcely hold, our eyes hardly estimate, the high-piled stacks of counters which were ours.

We saw the yellowing groves and brown fields of our first autumn; we heard the long-drawn, wavering, mounting, falling, persistent howl of the thresher among the settings of hive-shaped stacks; we saw the loads of red and yellow corn at the corn-cribs,—as men at the board of the green cloth hear the striking of the hours. And we heeded them as little. The cries of southing wild-fowl heralded the

snow; winter came for an hour or so, and melted into spring; and some of us looked up from our hands for a moment, to note the fact that it was the anniversary of that aguish day when three of us had first taken our seats at the table: and before we knew it, the dust and heat and summer clouds, like that which lightened over the fete in the park, admonished us that we were far into our second year. And still shuffle, cut, deal, trick, and hand followed each other, and with draw and bluff and showdown we played the World and Destiny, and playing won, and saw our stacks of chips grow higher and higher, as our great and absorbing game went on.

Moreover, while we won and won, nobody seemed to lose. Josie spoke that night of fortunes which people had not earned; but surely they were created somehow; and as the universe, when the divine fiat had formed the world, was richer, rather than poorer, so, we felt, must these values so magically growing into our fortunes be good, rather than evil, and honestly ours, so far as we might be able to secure them to ourselves. I said as much to Jim one day, at which he smiled, and remarked that if we got to monkeying with the ethics of the trade, piracy would soon be a ruined business.

“Better, far better keep the lookout sweeping the horizon for sails,” said he, “and when one appears, serve out the rum and gunpowder to the crew, and stand by to lower away the boats for a boarding-party!”

I am afraid I have given the impression that our life at this time was solely given over to cupidity and sordidness; and that idea I may not be able to remove. Yet I must try to do so. We were in the game to win; but our winnings, present and prospective, were not in wealth only. To surmount obstacles; to drive difficulties before us like scattering sparrows; to see a town marching before us into cityhood; to feel ourselves the forces working through human masses so mightily that, for hundreds of miles about us, social and industrial factors were compelled to readjust themselves with reference to us; to be masters; to create—all these things went into our beings in thrilling and dizzying pulsations of a pleasure which was not ignoble.

For instance, let us take the building of the Lattimore & Great Western Railway. Before Mr. Elkins went to Lattimore this line had been surveyed by the coöperation of Mr. Hinckley, Mr. Ballard, the president of the opposition bank, and some others. It was felt that there was little real competition among the railways centering there, and the L. & G.W. was designed as a hint to them of a Lattimore-built connection with the Halliday system, then a free-lance in the transportation field, and ready to make rates in an independent and competitive

way. The Angus Falls extension brought this system in, but too late to do the good expected; for Mr. Halliday, in his dealings with us, convinced us of the truth of the rumors that he had brought the other roads to terms, and was a free-lance no longer. Month by month the need of real competition in our carrying trade grew upon us. Rates accorded to other cities on our commercial fighting line we could not get, in spite of the most persistent efforts. In the offices of presidents and general managers, in St. Louis, Chicago, St. Paul and Minneapolis, Kansas City, Omaha and New York we were received by suave princes of the highways, who each blandly assured us that his road looked with especial favor upon our town, and that our representations should receive the most solicitous attention. But the word of promise was ever broken to the hope.

After one of these embassies the syndicate held a meeting in Cornish's elegant offices on the ground-floor of the new "Hotel Elkins" building. We sent Giddings away to prepare an optimistic news-story for to-morrow's *Herald*, and an editorial leader based upon it, both of which had been formulated among us before going into executive session on the state of the nation. Hinckley, who had an admirable power of seeing the crux of a situation, was making a rather grave prognosis for us.

"If we can't get rates which will let us into a broader territory, we may as well prepare for reverses," said he. "Foreign cement comes almost to our doors, in competition with ours. Wheat and live-stock go from within twenty miles to points five hundred miles away. Who is furnishing the brick and stone for the new Fairchild court-house and the big normal-school buildings at Angus Falls? Not our quarries and kilns, but others five times as far away. If you want to figure out the reason of this, you will find it in nothing else in the world but the freight rates."

"It's a confounded outrage," said Cornish. "Can't we get help from the legislature?"

"I understand that some action is expected next winter," said I; "Senator Conley had in here the other day a bill he has drawn; and it seems to me we should send a strong lobby down at the proper time in support of it."

"Ye-e-s," drawled Jim, "but I believe in still stronger measures; and rather than bother with the legislature, owned as it is by the roads, I'd favor writing cuss-words on the water-tanks, or going up the track a piece and makin' faces at one of their confounded whistling-posts or cattle-guards—or something real drastic like that!"

Cornish, galled, as was I, by this irony, flushed crimson, and rose.

“The situation,” said he, “instead of being a serious one, as I have believed, seems merely funny. This conference may as well end. Having taken on things here under the impression that this was to be a city; it seems that we are to stay a village. It occurs to me that it’s time to stand from under! Good-evening!”

“Wait!” said Hinckley. “Don’t go, Cornish; it isn’t as bad as that!”

As he spoke he laid his hand on Cornish’s arm, and I saw that he was pale. He felt more keenly than did I the danger of division and strife among us.

“Yes, Mr. Hinckley,” said Jim, as Cornish sat down again, “it *is* as bad as that! This thing amounts to a crisis. For one, I don’t propose to adopt the ‘stand-from-under’ tactics. They make an unnecessary disaster as certain as death; but if we all stand under and lift, we can win more than we’ve ever thought. In the legislature they hold the cards and can beat us. It’s no use fooling with that unless we seek martyrs’ deaths in the bankruptcy courts. But there is a way to meet these men, and that is by bringing to our aid their greatest rival.”

“Do you mean—” said Hinckley.

“I mean Avery Pendleton and the Pendleton system,” replied Elkins. “I mean that we’ve got to meet them on their own ground. Pendleton won’t declare war on the Halliday combination by building in here, but there is no reason why we can’t build to him, and that’s what I propose to do. We’ll take the L. & G. W., swing it over to the east from the Elk Fork up, make a junction with Pendleton’s Pacific Division, and, in one week after we get trains running, we’ll have the freight combine here shot so full of holes that it won’t hold corn-stalks! That’s what we’ll do: we’ll do a little rate-making ourselves; and we’ll make this danger the best thing that ever happened to us. Do you see?”

Cornish saw, sooner than any one else. As he spoke, Jim had unrolled a map, and pointed out the places as he referred to them, like a general, as he was, outlining the plan of a battle. He began this speech in that quiet, convincing way of his, only a little elevated above the sarcasm of a moment before. As he went on, his voice deepened, his eye gleamed, and in spite of his colloquialisms, which we could not notice, his words began to thrill us like potent oratory. We felt all that ecstasy of buoyant and auspicious rebellion which animated Hotspur the night he could have plucked bright honor from the pale-faced moon. At Jim’s final question, Cornish, forgetting his pique, sprang to the map, swept his finger along the line Elkins had described, followed the main ribs of Pendleton’s great gridiron, on which the fat of half a dozen states lay frying, on to terminals on

lakes and rivers; and as he turned his black eyes upon us, we knew from the fire in them that he saw.

"By heavens!" he cried, "you've hit it, Elkins! And it can be done! From to-night, no more paper railroads for us; it must be grading-gangs and ties, and steel rails!"

So, also, there was good fighting when Cornish wired from New York for Elkins and me to come to his aid in placing our Lattimore & Great Western bonds. Of course, we never expected to build this railway with our own funds. For two reasons, at least: it is bad form to do eccentric things, and we lacked a million or two of having the money. The line with buildings and rolling stock would cost, say, twelve thousand dollars per mile. Before it could be built we must find some one who would agree to take its bonds for at least that sum. As no one would pay quite par for bonds of a new and independent road, we must add, say, three thousand dollars per mile for discount. Moreover, while the building of the line was undertaken from motives of self-preservation, there seemed to be no good reason why we should not organize a construction company to do the actual work of building, and that at a profit. That this profit might be assured, something like three thousand dollars per mile more must go in. Of course, whoever placed the bonds would be asked to guarantee the interest for two or three years; hence, with two thousand more for that and good measure, we made up our proposed issue of twenty thousand dollars per mile of first-mortgage bonds, to dispose of which "the former member of the firm of Lusch, Carskaddan & Mayer" was revisiting the glimpses of Wall Street, and testing the strength of that mighty influence which the *Herald* had attributed to him.

"You've just *got* to win," said Giddings, who was admitted to the secret of Cornish's embassy, "not only because Lattimore and all the citizens thereof will be squashed in the event of your slipping up; but, what is of much more importance, the *Herald* will be laid in a lie about your Wall Street pull. Remember that when foes surround thee!"

When we joined him, Cornish admitted that he was fairly well "surrounded." He had failed to secure the aid of Barr-Smith's friends, who said that, with the street-car system and the cement works, they had quite eggs enough in the Lattimore basket for their present purposes. In fact, he had felt out to blind ends nearly all the promising burrows supposedly leading to the strong boxes of the investing public, of which he had told us. He accounted for this lack of success on the very natural theory that the Halliday combination had found out about his mission, and was fighting him through its influence with the banks and trust

companies. So he had done at last what Jim had advised him to do at first—secured an appointment with the mighty Mr. Pendleton; and, somewhat humbled by unsuccess, had telegraphed for us to come on and help in presenting the thing to that magnate.

Whom, being fenced off by all sorts of guards, messengers, clerks, and secretaries, we saw after a pilgrimage through a maze of offices. He had not the usual features which make up an imposing appearance; but command flowed from him, and authority covered him as with a mantle. We knew that he possessed and exerted the power to send prosperity in this channel, or inject adversity into that, as a gardener directs water through his trenches, and this knowledge impressed us. He was rather thin; but not so much so as his sharp, high nose, his deep-set eyes, and his bony chin at first sight seemed to indicate. Whenever he spoke, his nostrils dilated, and his gray eyes said more than his lips uttered. He was courteous, with a sort of condensed courtesy—the shorthand of ceremoniousness. He turned full upon us from his desk as we entered, rose and met us as his clerk introduced us.

"Mr. Barslow, I'm happy to meet you; and you also, Mr. Cornish. Mr. Wilson 'phoned about your enterprise just now. Mr. Elkins," as he took Jim's hand, "I have heard of you also. Be seated, gentlemen. I have given you a time appropriation of thirty minutes. I hope you will excuse me for mentioning that at the end of that period my time will be no longer my own. Kindly explain what it is you desire of me, and why you think that I can have any interest in your project."

And, with a judgment trained in the valuing of men, he turned to Jim as our leader.

"If our enterprise doesn't commend itself to your judgment in twenty minutes," said Jim, with a little smile, and in much the same tone that he would have used in discussing a cigar, "there'll be no need of wasting the other ten; for it's perfectly plain. I'll expedite matters by skipping what we desire, for the most part, and telling you why we think the Pendleton system ought to desire the same thing. Our plan, in a word, is to build a hundred and fifty miles of line, and from it deliver two full train-loads of through east-bound freight per day to your road, and take from you a like amount of west-bound tonnage, not one pound of which can be routed over your lines at present."

Mr. Pendleton smiled.

"A very interesting proposition, Mr. Elkins," said he; "my business is

railroading, and I am always glad to perfect myself in the knowledge of it. Make it plain just how this can be done, and I shall consider my half-hour well expended.”

Then began the fateful conversation out of which grew the building of the Lattimore & Great Western Railway. Jim walked to the map which covered one wall of the room, and dropped statement after statement into the mind of Pendleton like round, compact bullets of fact. It was the best piece of expository art imaginable. Every foot of the road was described as to gradients, curves, cuts, fills, trestles, bridges, and local traffic. Then he began with Lattimore; and we who breathed in nothing but knowledge of that city and its resources were given new light as to its shipments and possibilities of growth. He showed how the products of our factories, the grain from our elevators, the live-stock from our yards, and the meats from our packing-houses could be sent streaming over the new road and the lines of Pendleton.

Then he turned to our Commercial Club, and showed that the merchants, both wholesale and retail, of Lattimore were welded together in its membership, in such wise that their merchandise might be routed from the great cities over the proposed track. He piled argument on argument. He hammered down objection after objection before they could be suggested. He met Mr. Pendleton in the domain of railroad construction and management, and showed himself familiar with the relative values of Pendleton’s own lines.

“Your Pacific Division,” said he, “must have disappointed some of the expectations with which it was built. Its earnings cannot, in view of the distance they fall below those of your other lines, be quite satisfactory to you. Give us the traffic agreement we ask; and your next report after we have finished our line will show the Pacific Division doing more than its share in the great showing of revenue per mile which the Pendleton system always makes. I see that my twenty minutes is about up. I hope I have made good our promises as to showing cause for coming to you with our project.”

Mr. Pendleton, after a moment’s thought, said: “Have you made an engagement for lunch?”

We had not. He turned to the telephone, and called for a number.

“Is this Mr. Wade’s office?... Yes, if you please.... Is this Mr. Wade?... This is Pendleton talking to you.... Yes, Pendleton.... There are some gentlemen in my office, Mr. Wade, whom I want you to meet, and I should be glad if you could join us at lunch at the club.... Well, can’t you call that off, now?... Say, at one-

thirty.... Yes.... Very kind of you.... Thanks! Good-by.”

Having made his arrangements with Mr. Wade, he hung up the telephone, and pushed an electric button. A young man from an outer office responded.

“Tell Mr. Moore,” said Pendleton to him, “that he will have to see the gentlemen who will call at twelve—on that lake terminal matter—he will understand. And see that I am not disturbed until after lunch.... And, say, Frank! See if Mr. Adams can come in here—at once, please.”

Mr. Adams, who turned out to be some sort of a freight expert, came in, and the rest of the interview was a bombardment of questions, in which we all took turns as targets. When we went to lunch we felt that Mr. Pendleton had possessed himself of all we knew about our enterprise, and filed the information away in some vast pigeon-hole case with his own great stock of knowledge.

We met Mr. Wade over an elaborate lunch. He said, as he shook hands with Cornish, that he believed they had met somewhere, to which Cornish bowed a frigid assent. Mr. Wade was the head of The Allen G. Wade Trust Company, and seemed in a semi-comatose condition, save when cakes, wine, or securities were under discussion. He addressed me as “Mr. Corning,” and called Cornish “Atkins,” and once in a while opened his mouth to address Jim by name, but halted, with a distressful look, at the realization of the fact that he could not remember names enough to go around. He made an appointment with me for the party for the next morning.

“If you will come to my office before you call on Mr. Wade,” said Mr. Pendleton, “I will have a memorandum prepared of what we will do with you in the way of a traffic agreement: it may be of some use in determining the desirability of your bonds. I’m very glad to have met you, gentlemen. When Lattimore gets into my world—by which I mean our system and connections—I hope to visit the little city which has so strong a business community as to be able to send out such a committee as yourselves; good-afternoon!”

“Well,” said I, as we went toward our hotel, “this looks like progress, doesn’t it?”

“I sha’n’t feel dead sure,” said Jim, “until the money is in bank, subject to the check of the construction company. But doesn’t it look juicy, right now! Why, boys, with that traffic agreement we can get the money anywhere—on the prairie, out at sea—anywhere under the shining sun! They can’t beat us. What do you say, Cornish? Will, your friend Wade jar loose, or shall we have to seek further?”

“He’ll snap at your bonds now,” said Cornish, rather glumly, I thought, considering the circumstances; “but don’t call him a friend of mine! Why, damn him, not a week ago he turned me out of his office, saying that he didn’t want to look into any more Western railway schemes! And now he says he believes we’ve met before!”

This seemed to strike Mr. Elkins as the best practical joke he had ever heard of; and Cornish suggested that for a man to stop in Homeric laughter on Broadway might be pleasant for him, but was embarrassing to his companions. By this time Cornish himself was better-natured. Jim took charge of our movements, and commanded us to a dinner with him, in the nature of a celebration, with a theater-party afterward.

“Let us,” said he, “hear the chimes at midnight, or even after, if we get buncoed doing it. Who cares if we wind up in the police court! We’ve done the deed; we’ve made our bluff good with Halliday and his gang of highwaymen; and I feel like taking the limit off, if it lifts the roof! Al, hold your hand over my mouth or I shall yell!”

“Come into my parlor, and yell for me,” said Cornish, “and you may do my turn in police court, too. Come in, and behave yourself!”

I began writing a telegram to my wife, apprising her of our good luck. The women in our circle knew our hopes, ambitions, and troubles, as the court ladies know the politics of the realm, and there were anxious hearts in Lattimore.

“I’m going down to the telegraph-office with this,” said I; “can I take yours, too?”

When I handed the messages in, the man who received them insisted on my reading them over with him to make sure of correct transmission. There was one to Mr. Hinckley, one to Mr. Ballard, and two to Miss Josephine Trescott. One ran thus, “Success seems assured. Rejoice with me. J. B. C.” The other was as follows: “In game between Railway Giants and Country Jakes here to-day, visiting team wins. Score, 9 to 0. Barslow, catcher, disabled. Crick in neck looking at high buildings. Have Mrs. B. prepare porous plaster for Saturday next. Sell Halliday stock short, and buy L. & G. W. And in name all things good and holy don’t tell Giddings! J. R. E.”

CHAPTER XIV.

In which we Learn Something of Railroads, and Attend Some Remarkable Christenings.

And so, in due time, it came to pass that, our Aladdin having rubbed the magic ring with which his Genius had endowed him, there came, out of some thunderous and smoky realm, peopled with swart kobolds, and lit by the white fire of gushing cupolas and dazzling billets, a train of carriages, drawn by a tamed volcanic demon, on a wonderful way of steel, armed strongly to deliver us from the Castle Perilous in which we were besieged by the Giants. The way was marvelously prepared by theodolite and level, by tented camps of men driving, with shouts and cracking whips, straining teams in circling mazes, about dark pits on grassy hillsides, and building long, straight banks of earth across swales; by huge machines with iron fists thrusting trunks of trees into the earth; by mighty creatures spinning great steel cobwebs over streams.

At last, a short branch of steel shot off from Pendleton's Pacific Division, grew daily longer and longer, pushed across the level earth-banks, the rows of driven tree-trunks, and the spun steel cobwebs, through the dark pits, nearer and nearer to Lattimore, and at last entered the beleaguered city, amid rejoicings of the populace. Most of whom knew but vaguely the facts of either siege or deliverance; but who shouted, and tossed their caps, and blew the horns and beat the drums, because the *Herald* in a double-leaded editorial assured them that this was *the* event for which Lattimore had waited to be raised to complete parity with her envious rivals. Furthermore, Captain Tolliver, magniloquently enthusiastic, took charge of the cheering, artillery, and band-music, and made a tumultuous success of it.

"He told me," said Giddings, "that when the people of the North can be brought for a moment into that subjection which is proper for the masses, 'they make devilish good troops, suh, devilish good troops!'"

And so it also happened that Mr. Elkins found himself the president of a real railway, with all the perquisites that go therewith. Among these being the power to establish town-sites and give them names. The former function was exercised according to the principles usually governing town-site companies, and with ends purely financial in view. The latter was elevated to the dignity of a

ceremony. The rails were scarcely laid, when President Elkins invited a choice company to go with him over the line and attend the christening of the stations. He convinced the rest of us of the wisdom of this, by showing us that it would awaken local interest along the line, and prepare the way for the auction sales of lots the next week.

"It's advertising of the choicest kind," said he. "Giddings will sow it far and wide in the press dispatches, and it will attract attention; and attention is what we want. We'll start early, run to the station Pendleton has called Elkins Junction, at the end of the line, lie over for a couple of hours, and come home, bestowing names as we come. Help me select the party, and we'll consider it settled."

As the train was to be a light one, consisting of a buffet-car and a parlor-car, the party could not be very large. The officers of the road, Mr. Adams, who was general traffic manager, and selected by the bondholders, and Mr. Kittrick, the general manager, who was found in Kansas City by Jim, went down first as a matter of course. Captain Tolliver and his wife, the Trescotts, the Hinckleys, with Mr. Cornish and Giddings, were put down by Jim; and to these we added the influential new people, the Alexanders, who came with the cement-works, of which Mr. Alexander was president, Mr. Densmore, who controlled the largest of the elevators, and Mr. Walling, whose mill was the first to utilize the waters of our power-tunnel, and who was the visible representative of millions made in the flouring trade. Smith, our architect, was included, as was Cecil Barr-Smith, sent out by his brother to be superintendent of the street-railway, and looking upon the thing in the light of an exile, comforted by the beautiful native princess Antonia. We left Macdonald out, because he always called the young man "Smith," and could not be brought to forget an early impression that he and the architect were brothers; besides, said Jim, Macdonald was afraid of the cars as he was of the hyphen, being most of the time on the range with the cattle belonging to himself and Hinckley. Which, being interpreted, meant that Mr. Macdonald would not care to go.

Mr. Ballard was invited on account of his early connection with the L. & G. W. project, although he was holding himself more and more aloof from the new movements, and held forth often upon the value of conservatism. Miss Addison, who was related to the Lattimore family, was commissioned to invite the old General, who very unexpectedly consented. His son Will, as solicitor for the railway company and one of the directors, was to be one of us if he could. These with their wives and some invited guests from near-by towns made up the party.

We were well acquainted with each other by this time, so that it was quite like a

family party or a gathering of old friends. Captain Tolliver was austerely polite to General Lattimore, whose refusal to concern himself with the question as to whether our city grew to a hundred thousand or shrunk to five he accounted for on the ground that a man who had led hired ruffians to trample out the liberty of a brave people must be morally warped.

The General came, tall and spare as ever, wearing his beautiful white moustache and imperial as a Frenchman would wear the cross of the Legion of Honor. He was quite unable to sympathize with our lot-selling, our plenitude of corporations, or our feverish pushing of "developments." But the building of the railway attracted him. He looked back at the new-made track as we flew along; and his eyes flashed under the bushy white brows. He sat near Josie, and held her in conversation much of the outward trip; but Jim he failed to appreciate, and treated indifferently.

"He is History incarnate," said Mrs. Tolliver, "and cannot rejoice in the passing of so much that is a part of himself."

Giddings said that this was probably true; and under the circumstances he couldn't blame him. He, Giddings, would feel a little sore to see things which were a part of *himself* going out of date. It was a natural feeling. Whereupon Mrs. Tolliver addressed her remarks very pointedly elsewhere; and Antonia Hinckley privately admonished Giddings not to be mean; and Giddings sought the buffet and smoked. Here I joined him, and over our cigars he confessed to me that life to him was an increasing burden, rapidly becoming intolerable.

We had noticed, I informed him, an occasional note of gloom in his editorials. This ought not to be, now that the real danger to our interests seemed to be over, and we were going forward so wonderfully. To which he replied that with the gauds of worldly success he had no concern. The editorials I criticised were joyous and ebulliently hilarious compared with those which might be expected in the future. If we could find some blithesome ass to pay him for the *Herald* enough money to take him out of our scrambled Bedlam of a town, bring the idiot on, and he (Giddings) would arrange things so we could have our touting done as we liked it!

Now the *Herald* had become a very valuable property, and of all men Giddings had the least reason to speak despitefully of Lattimore; and his frame of mind was a mystery to me, until I remembered that there was supposed to be something amiss between him and Laura Addison. Craftily leading the conversation to the point where confidences were easy, I was rewarded by a

passionate disclosure on his part, which would have amounted to an outburst, had it not been restrained by the presence of Cornish, Hinckley, and Trescott at the other end of the compartment.

“Oh, pshaw!” said I, “you’ve no cause for despair. On your own showing, there’s every reason for you to hope.”

“You don’t know the situation, Barslow,” he insisted, shaking his head gloomily, “and there’s no use in trying to tell you. She’s too exalted in her ideals ever to accept me. She’s told me things about the qualities she must have in the one who should be nearest to her that just simply shut me out; and I haven’t called since. Oh, I tell you, Barslow, sometimes I feel as if I could—Yes, sir, it’ll be accepted as the best piece of railroad building for years!”

I was surprised at the sudden transition, until I saw that our fellow passengers were crowding to our end of the car in response to the conductor’s announcement that we were coming into Elkins Junction. I made a note of Giddings’s state of mind, as the subject of a conference with Jim. The *Herald* was of too much importance to us for this to be neglected. The disciple of Iago must in some way be restored to his normal view of things. I could not help smiling at the vast difference between his view of Laura and mine. I, wrongly perhaps, thought her affectedly pietistic, with ideals likely to be yielding in spirit if the letter were preserved.

Elkins Junction was a platform, a depot, an eating-house, and a Y; and it was nothing else.

“We’ve come up here,” said Jim, “to show you probably the smallest town in the state, and the only one in the world named after me. We wanted to show you the whole line, and Mr. Schwartz felt as if he’d prefer to turn his engine around for the return trip. The last two towns we came through, and hence the first two going back, are old places. The third station is a new town, and Conductor Corcoran will take us back there, where we’ll unveil the name of the station, and permit the people to know where they live. While we’re doing the sponsorial act, lunch will be prepared and ready for us to discuss during the next run.”

On the way back there was a stir of suppressed excitement among the passengers.

“It’s about this name,” said Miss Addison to her seat-mate. “The town is on the shore of Mirror Lake, and they say it will be an important one, and a summer resort; and no one knows what the name is to be but Mr. Elkins.”

“Really, a very odd affair!” said Miss Allen, of Fairchild, Antonia’s college friend. “It makes a social function of the naming of a town!”

“Yes,” said Mr. Elkins, “and it is one of the really enduring things we can do. Long after the memory of every one here is departed, these villages will still bear the names we give them to-day. If there’s any truth in the belief that some people have, that names have an influence for good or evil, the naming of the towns may be important as building the railroad.”

I was sitting with Antonia. Miss Allen and Captain Tolliver were with us, our faces turned toward one another. General Lattimore, with Josie and her father, was on the opposite side of the car. Most of the company were sitting or standing near, and the conversation was quite general.

“Oh, it’s like a romance!” half whispered Antonia to us. “I envy you men who build roads and make towns. Look at Mr. Elkins, Sadie, as he stands there! He is master of everything; to me he seems as great as Napoleon!”

She neither blushed nor sought to conceal from us her adoration for Jim. It was the day of his triumph, and a fitting time to acknowledge his kinghood; and her admission that she thought him the greatest, the most excellent of men did not surprise me. Yet, because he was older than she, and had never put himself in a really loverlike attitude toward her, I thought it was simply an exalted girlish regard, and not at all what we usually understand by an affair of the heart. Moreover, at that time such praise as she gave him would not have been thought extravagant in almost any social gathering in Lattimore. Let me confess that to me it does not now seem so ... Cecil Barr-Smith walked out and stood on the platform.

General Lattimore was apparently thinking of the features of the situation which had struck Antonia as romantic.

“You young men,” said he, “are among the last of the city-builders and road-makers. My generation did these things differently. We went out with arms in our hands, and hewed out spaces in savagery for homes. You don’t seem to see it; but you are straining every nerve merely to shift people from many places to one, and there to exploit them. You wind your coils about an inert mass, you set the dynamo of your power of organization at work, and the inert mass becomes a great magnet. People come flying to it from the four quarters of the earth, and the first-comers levy tribute upon them, as the price of standing-room on the magnet!”

“I nevah hea’d the real merit and strength and safety of ouah real-estate

propositions bettah stated, suh!" said Captain Tolliver ecstatically.

Jim stood looking at the General with sober regard.

"Go on, General," said he.

"Not only that," went on the General, "but people begin forestalling the standing-room, so as to make it scarcer. They gamble on the power of the magnet, and the length of time it will draw. They buy to-day and sell to-morrow; or cast up what they imagine they might sell for, and call the increase profit. Then comes the time when the magnet ceases to draw, or the forestallers, having, in their greed, grasped more than they can keep, offer too much for the failing market, and all at once the thing stops, and the dervish-dance ends in coma, in cold forms and still hands, in misery and extinction!"

There was a pause, during which the old soldier sat looking out of the widow, no one else finding aught to say. Elkins remained standing, and once or twice gave that little movement of the head which precedes speech, but said nothing. Cornish smiled sardonically. Josie looked anxiously at Jim, apprehensive as to how he would take it. At last it was Ballard the conservative who broke silence.

"I hope, General," said he, "that our little movement won't develop into a dervish-dance. Anyhow, you will join in our congratulations upon the completion of the railroad. You know you once did some railroad-building yourself, down there in Tennessee—I know, for I was there. And I've always taken an interest in track-laying ever since."

"So have I," said the General; "that's what brought me out to-day."

"Oh, tell us about it," said Josie, evidently pleased at the change of subject; "tell us about it, please."

"No, no!" he protested, "you may read it better in the histories, written by young fellows who know more about it than we who were there. You'll find, when you read it, that it was something like this: Grant's host was over around Chattanooga, starving for want of means for carrying in provisions. We were marching eastward to join him, when a message came telling us to stop at Decatur and rebuild the railroad to Nashville. So, without a thought that there was such a thing as an impossibility, we stopped—we seven or eight thousand common Americans, volunteer soldiers, picked at random from the legions of heroes who saved liberty to the world—and without an engineering corps, without tools or implements, with nothing except what any like number of our soldiers had, we stopped and built the road. That is all. The rails had been

heated, and wound about trees and stumps. The cross-ties were burned to heat the rails. The cars had been destroyed by fire, and their warped ironwork thrown into ditches. The engines lay in scrap-heaps at the bottoms of ravines and rivers. The bridges were gone. Out of the chaos to which the structure had been resolved, there was nothing left but the road-bed.

"When I think of what we did, I know that with liberty and intelligence men with their naked hands could, in short space, re-create the destroyed wealth of the world. We made tools of the scraps of iron and steel we found along the line. We felled trees. We impressed little sawmills and sawed the logs into timbers for bridges and cars. Out of the battle-scarred and march-worn ranks came creative and constructive genius in such profusion as to astound us, who thought we knew them so well. Those blue-coated fellows, enlisted and serving as food for powder, and used to destruction, rejoiced in once more feeling the thrill there is in making things."

"Out of the ranks came millers, and ground the grain the foragers brought in; came woodmen, and cut the trees; came sawyers, and sawed the lumber. We asked for blacksmiths; and they stepped from the ranks, and made their own tools and the tools of the machinists. We called for machinists; and out of the ranks they stepped, and rebuilt the engines, and made the cars ready for the carpenters. When we wanted carpenters, out of the same ranks of common soldiers they walked, and made the cars. From the ranks came other men, who took the twisted rails, unwound them from the stumps and unsnarled them from one another, as women unwind yarn, and laid them down fit to carry our trains. And in forty days our message went back to Grant that we had 'stopped and built the road,' and that our engines were even then drawing supplies to his hungry army. Such was the incomparable army which was commanded by that silent genius of war; and to have been one of such an army is to have lived!"

The withered old hand trembled, as the great past surged back through his mind. We all sat in silence; and I looked at Captain Tolliver, doubtful as to how he would take the old Union general's speech. What the Captain's history had been none of us knew, except that he was a Southerner. When the general ceased, Tolliver was sitting still, with no indication of being conscious of anything special in the conversation, except that a red spot burned in each dark cheek. As the necessity for speech grew with the lengthening silence, he rose and faced General Lattimore.

"Suh," said he, "puhmit a man who was with the victohs of Manasses; who chahged with mo' sand than sense at Franklin; and who cried like a child aftah

Nashville, and isn't ashamed of it, by gad! to offah his hand, and to say that he agrees with you, suh, in youah tribute to the soldiers of the wah, and honahs you, suh, as a fohmah foe, and a worthy one, and he hopes, a future friend!"

Somehow, the Captain's swelling phrases, his sonorous allusions to himself in the third person, had for the moment ceased to be ridiculous. The environment fitted the expression. The general grasped his hand and shook it. Then Ballard claimed the right, as one of the survivors of Franklin, to a share in the reunion, and they at once removed the strain which had fallen upon us with the General's first speech, by relating stories and fraternizing soldierwise, until Conductor Corcoran called in at the door, "Mystery Number One! All out for the christening!"

As we gathered on the platform, we saw that the signboard on the station-building, for the name of the town, had been put up, but was veiled by a banner draped over it. Tents were pitched near, in which people lived waiting for the lot-auction, that they might buy sites for shops and homes. The waters of the lake shone through the trees a few rods away; and in imagination I could see the village of the future, sprinkled about over the beautiful shore. The future villagers gathered near the platform; and when Jim stepped forward to make the speech of the occasion, he had a considerable audience.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said he, "our visit is for the purpose of showing the interest which the Lattimore & Great Western takes and will continue to take in the towns on its line, and to add a name to what, I notice, has already become a local habitation. In conferring that name, we are aware that the future citizens of the place have claims upon us. So one has been selected which, as time passes, will grow more and more pleasant to your ears; and one which the person bestowing it regards as an honor to the town as high as could be conferred in a name. No station on our lines could have greater claims upon our regard than the possession of this name. And now, gentlemen—"

Mr. Elkins removed his hat, and we all followed his example. Some one pulled a cord, the banner fell away, and the name was revealed. It was "Josephine." The women looked at it, and turned their eyes on Josie, who blushed rosily, and shrank back behind her father, who burst into a loud laugh of unalloyed pleasure.

"I propose three cheers for the town of Josephine," went on Mr. Elkins, "and for the lady for whom it is named!"

They were real cheers—good hearty ones; followed by an address, in the name of the town, by a bright young man who pushed forward and with surprising

volubility thanked President Elkins for his selection of the name, and closed with flowery compliments to the blushing Miss Trescott, whose identity Jim had disclosed by a bow. He was afterwards a thorn in our flesh in his practice as a personal-injury lawyer. At the time, however, we warmed to him, as under his leadership the dwellers in the tents and round about the waters of Mirror Lake all shook hands with Jim and Josie.

Cornish stood with a saturnine smile on his face, and glared at some of the more pointed hits of the young lawyer. Cecil Barr-Smith beamed radiant pleasure, as he saw the evident linking in this public way of Jim's name and Josie's. Antonia stood close to Cecil's side, and chatted vivaciously to him—not with him; for her words seemed to have no correlation with his.

"Quite like the going away of a bridal party!" said she with exaggerated gayety, and with a little spitefulness, I thought. "Has any one any rice?"

"All aboard!" said Corcoran; and the joyful and triumphant party, with their outward intimacy and their inward warfare of passions and desires, rolled on toward "Mystery Number Two," which was duly christened "Cornish," and celebrated in champagne furnished by its godfather.

"Don't you ever drink champagne?" said Cornish, as Josie declined to partake.

"Never," said she.

"What, *never*?" he went on, Pinaforically.

"My God!" thought I, "the assurance of the man!" And the palm-encircled alcove at Auriccio's, as it was wont so often to do, came across my vision, and shut out everything but the Psyche face in its ruddy halo, speeding by me into the street, and the vexed young man in the faultless attire slowly following.

Mystery Number Three was "Antonia," a lovely little place in embryo; "Barslow" came next, followed by "Giddings" and "Tolliver." We were tired of it when we reached "Hinckley," platted on a farm owned by Antonia's father, and where we ceased to perform the ceremony of unveiling. It was a memorable trip, ending with sunset and home. Captain Tolliver assisted General Lattimore to alight from the train, and they went arm in arm up to the old General's home.

That night, according to his wont, Jim came to smoke with me in the late evening. "Let's take a car," said he, "and go up and have a look at the houses."

These were our new mansions up in Lynhurst Park Addition, now in process of erection. In the moonlight we could see them dimly, and at a little distance they

looked like masses of ruins—the second childhood of houses. A stranger could have seen, from the polished columns and the piles of carved stone, that they were to be expensive and probably beautiful structures.

“What do you think of the General in the rôle of Cassandra?” asked Jim, as we sat in the skeleton room which was to be his library.

“It struck me,” said I, “as a particularly artistic bit of croaking!”

“The Captain says frequently,” said Jim, his cigar glowing like a variable star, “that opportunity knocks once. The General, I’m afraid, knocks all the time. But if it should turn out that he’s right about the—the—dervish-dance ... it would be ... to put it mildly ... a horse on us, Al, wouldn’t it?”

I had no answer to this fanciful speech, and made none. Instead, I told him of Giddings’s love-sickness.

“The philosophy of Iago has broken down,” said he, “and the boy is sort of short-circuited. Antonia can take him in hand, and turn him out full of confidence; and with that, I’ll answer for the lady. That can be fixed easy, and ought to be. Let’s walk back.”

“What was it he said?” he asked, as we parted. “‘Coma, cold forms, still hands, and extinction.’ Well, if the dervish-dance does wind up in that sort of thing, it’s only a short-cut to the inevitable. Those are pretty houses up there; we’d have been astounded over them when we used to fish together on Beaver Creek;—but suppose they are?

> “‘They say the Lion and the Lizard keep
> The Courts where Jamshyd gloried and drank deep;
> And Bahram, that great hunter—the Wild Ass
> Stamps o’er his Head, but cannot break his Sleep!’

Good-night, Al!“

CHAPTER XV.

Some Affairs of the Heart Considered in their Relation to Dollars Cents.

Antonia was sitting in a hammock. Josie and Alice were not far away watching Cecil Barr-Smith, who was wading into the lake to get water-lilies for them, contrary to the ordinances of the city of Lattimore in such cases made and provided. The six were dawdling away our time one fine Sunday in Lynhurst Park. I forgot to say Mr. Elkins and myself were discussing affairs of state with Miss Hinckley.

"He's such a ninny," said Antonia.

"Aren't all people when in his forlorn condition?" asked Jim.

Antonia looked away at the clouds, and did not reply.

"But if he had a morsel of the cynical philosophy he boasts of," said she, "he could see."

"I don't know about that," said Jim lazily, looking over at the other group; "a woman can conceal her feelings in such a case pretty completely."

"I don't know about that," echoed Antonia. "I wish I did; it would simplify things."

"I believe," said I, "that it's a simple enough matter for you to solve and manage as it is."

"But it's so absurd to bother with!" said she; "and what's the use?"

"Doesn't it seem that way?" said Jim. "And yet you know we brought him here for a definite purpose; and in his present state he can't make good. Just read his editorial this morning: it would add gloom to the proceedings, read at a funeral. We want things whooped up, and he wants to whoop 'em; but long screeds on 'The Sacred Right of Self-destruction' hurt things, and bring the paper into disrepute, and crowd out optimistic matter that we desire. And as long as both families want the thing brought about, and there is good reason to think that Laura will not prove eternally immovable, I take it to be an important enough matter, from the standpoint of dollars and cents, for the exercise of our diplomacy."

"Well, then," said Antonia, "get the people together on some social occasion, and we'll try."

"I've thought," said Jim, "of having a house-warming—as soon as the weather gets so that the very name of the function won't keep folks away. My house is

practically done, you know."

"Just the thing," said Antonia. "There are cosy nooks and deep retreats enough to make it a sort of labyrinth for the ensnaring of our victims."

"Isn't it a queer thing in language," said Jim, "that these retreats are the places where advances are made!"

"Not when you consider," said Antonia, "that retreats follow repulses."

"We ought to have the Captain and the General here, if this military conversation is to continue," said I. "And here comes Cecil. Stop before he comes, or we shall never get through with the explanation of the jokes."

This remark elicited the laughter which the puns failed to provoke; for Cecil was color-blind in all things relating to the American joke. The humor of *Punch* appealed to him, and the wit of Sterne and Dean Swift; but the funny column and the paragrapher's niche of our newspapers he regarded as purely pathological phenomena. I sometimes feel that Cecil was right about this. Can the mind which continues to be charmed by these paragraphic strainings be really sound?—but this is not a dissertation. Cecil reconciled himself to his position as the local exemplification of the traditional Englishman whose trains of ideas run on the freight schedule—and was one of the most popular fellows in Lattimore. He gloried in his slavery to Antonia, and seemed to glean hope from the most sterile circumstances.

It was easy to hope, in Lattimore, then. It was not many days after our talk in the park before I noticed a change for the better in Giddings, even. Just before Jim's house-warming, he came to me with something like optimism in his appearance. I started to cheer him up, and went wrong.

"I'm glad to see by your cheerful looks," said I, "that the philosophy of Iago—"

"Say, now!" cried he, "don't remind me of that, for Heaven's sake!"

"Why, certainly not," said I, "if you object."

"I do object," said he most earnestly; "why, that damned-fool philosophy may have ruined my life, you know."

"Of course I know what you mean," said I; "but I'm convinced, and so are all your friends, that if you fail, it'll be your own lack of nerve, and nothing else, that you'll owe the disaster to. You should—"

"I should have refrained from trampling under foot the dearest ideals of the only

girl— However, I can’t talk of these things to any one, Barslow. But I have some hope now. Antonia and Josie have both been very kind lately—and say, Barslow, I see now how little foundation there is for that old gag about the women hating each other!”

“I’ve always felt,” said I, anxious to draw him out so that I might see what the conspirators had been doing, “that there’s nothing in *that* idea. But what has changed your view?”

“Antonia, and Josie, and even your wife,” said he, “have been keeping up a regular lobby in my behalf with Laura. They think they’ve got the deal plugged up now, so that she’ll give me a show again, and—”

“Why, surely,” said I; “in my opinion, there never was any need for you to feel downcast.”

“Barslow,” he said, with the air of a man who has endured to the limit, “you are a good fellow, but you make me tired when you talk like that. Why, four weeks ago I had no more show than a snowball in—in the crater of Vesuvius. But now I’m encouraged. These girls have been doing me good, as I just said, and I’m convinced that my series of editorials on ‘The Influence of Christianity on Civilization,’ in which I’ve given the Church the credit of being the whole thing, has helped some.”

“They ought to do good somewhere,” said I, “they certainly haven’t boomed Lattimore any.”

“Damn Lattimore!” said he bitterly. “When a man’s very life—But see here, Barslow, I know you’re not in earnest about this. And I’ll be all right in a day or two, or I’ll be eternally wrong. I’m going to make one final cast of the die. I may go down to bottomless perdition, or I may be caught up to the battlements of heaven; but such a mass of doubts and miseries as I’ve been lately, I’ll no longer be! Pray for me, Barslow, pray for me!”

This despairing condition of Giddings’s was a sort of continuing sensation with us at that time. We discussed it quite freely in all its aspects, humorous and tragic. It was so unexpected a development in the young man’s character, and, with all due respect to the discretion and resisting powers of Miss Addison, so entirely gratuitous and factitious.

“He has ability as a writer,” said the Captain; “but in such a mattah anybody but a fool ought to see that the thing to do is to chahge the intrenchments. I trust that I may not be misunde’stood when I say that, in my opinion, a good rattling

chahge would not be a fo’lo’n hope!”

“It bothers,” said Jim; “and if it weren’t for that, I’d feel conscience-stricken at doing anything to rob the idiot of a most delicious grief.”

The coolness of early autumn was in the air the night of Jim’s house-warming. To describe his dwelling, in these days when fortunes are spent on the details of a stairway, and a king’s ransom for the tapestries of a salon, all of which luxuries are spread before the eyes of the public in the columns of Sunday papers and magazines, would be to court an anticlimax. But this was before the multimillionaire had made the need for an augmentative of the word “luxury”; and Jim’s house was noteworthy for its beauty: its cunningly wrought iron and wood; and columned halls and stairways; and wide-throated fireplaces, each a picture in tile, wood, and metalwork; and vistas like little fairylands through silken portières; and carven chairs and couches, reminiscent of royal palaces; and chambers where lovely color-schemes were worked out in rug, and bed, and canopy. There were decorations made by men whose names were known in London and Paris. From out-of-the-way places Mr. Elkins had brought collections of queer and interesting and pretty things which, all his life, he had been accumulating; and in his library were broad areas of well-worn book-backs. Somehow, people looked upon the Mr. Elkins who was master of all these as a more important man than the Elkins who had blown into the town on some chance breeze of speculation, and taken rooms at the Centropolis.

It was all light and color, that night. Even the formal flower-beds of the grounds and the fountain spouting on the lawn were like scenery in the lime-light. Only, back in the shrubbery there were darker nooks in summer-houses and arbors for those who loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds, to the common mind, were likely to seem foolish. I remember thinking that if Mr. Giddings really wanted a chance to take the high dive of which he had spoken to me, the opportunity was before him.

His Laura was there, her devotee-like expression striving with an exceedingly low-cut dress to sound the distinguishing note of her personality. Giddings was at the punch-bowl as on their arrival she swept past with the General. When he saw the nun-like glance over the swelling bosom, the poor stricken cynic blushed, turned pale, and wheeled to flee. But Cecil, as if following orders, arrested him and began plying him with the punch—from which Giddings seemed to draw courage: for I saw him, soon, gravitate to her whom he loved and so mysteriously dreaded.

“It’s a pe’fect jewel-case of a house!” said the Captain, as he moved with the trooping company through the mansion.

“Indeed, indeed it is,” said Mrs. Tolliver to Alice; “the jewel, whoever it may be, is to be envied.”

“I hope,” said Jim to Josie, “that you agree with Mrs. Tolliver?”

“Oh, yes,” said Josie, “but you attach far too much importance to my judgment. If it is any comfort to you, however, I want to praise—everything—unreservedly.”

“I won’t know, for a while,” said Jim, “whether it is to be my house only, or home in the full sense of the word.”

“One doesn’t know about that, I fancy,” said Cecil; “for a long time—”

“I mean to know soon,” said Jim.

Josie was looking intently at the carving on one of the chairs, and paid no heed, though the remark seemed to be addressed to her.

“What I mean, you know,” said Cecil, “is that, no matter how well the house may be built and furnished, it’s the associations, the history of the place, the things that are in the air, that makes ’Ome!”

There was in the manner of his capitalizing the word as he uttered it, and in the unwonted elision of the H, that tribute to his dear island which the exiled Briton (even when soothed by the consolation offered by street-car systems to superintend, and rose-pink blondes to serve), always pays when he speaks of Home.

“Associations,” said Jim, “may be historical or prophetic. In the former case, we have to take them on trust; but as to those of the future, we are sure of them.”

“Yahs,” said Cecil, using the locution which he always adopted when something subtle was said to him, “I dare say! I dare say!”

“Well, then,” Jim went on, “I have this matter of the atmosphere or associations under my own control.”

“Just so,” said Cecil. “Clever conceit, Miss Trescott, isn’t it, now?”

But Miss Trescott had apparently heard nothing of Jim’s speech, and begged pardon; and wouldn’t they go and show her the bronzes in the library?

“This mansion, General,” said the Captain, “takes one back, suh, to the halcyon

days of American history. I refeh, suh, to those times when the plantahs of the black prairie belt of Alabama lived like princes, in the heart of an enchanted empire!"

"A very interesting period, Captain," said the General. "It is a pity that the industrial basis was one which could not endure!"

"In the midst of fo'ests, suh," went on the Captain, "we had ouah mansions, not inferio' to this—each a little kingdom with its complete wo'ld of amusements, its cote, and its happy populace, goin' singin' to the wo'k which supported the estate!"

"Yes," said the General, "I thought, when we were striking down that state of things, that we were doing a great thing for that populace. But I now see that I was only helping the black into a new slavery, the fruits of which we see here, around us, to-night."

"I hahdly get youah meaning, suh—"

"Well," said the General, looking about at the little audience. (It was in the smoking-room, and those present were smokers only.) "Well, now, take my case. I have some pretty valuable grounds down there where I live. When I got them, they were worthless. I could build as good a mansion as this or any of your ante-bellum Alabama houses for what I can get out of that little tract. What is that value? Merely the expression in terms of money of the power of excluding the rest of mankind from that little piece of ground. I make people give me the fruits of their labor, myself doing nothing. That's what builds this house and all these great houses, and breeds the luxury we are beginning to see around us; and the consciousness that this slavery exists, and is increasing, and bids fair to grow greatly, is what is making men crazy over these little spots of ground out here in the West! It is this slavery—"

"Suh," exclaimed the Captain, rising and grasping the General's hand, "you have done me the favo' of making me wisah! I nevah saw so cleahly the divine decree which has fo'eo'dained us to this opulence. Nothing so satisfactory, suh, as a basis and reason foh investment, has been advanced in my hearing since I have been in the real-estate business! Let us wo'k this out a little mo' in detail, if you please, suh—"

"Let us escape while there is yet time!" said Cornish; and we fled.

After supper there was a cotillion. The spacious ballroom, with its roof so high that the lights up there were as stars, was a sight which could scarcely be

reconciled with the village community which he had found and changed. The palms, and flowers, and lights which decorated the room; the orchestra's river of dance-music; the men, all in the black livery which—on the surface—marks the final conquest of civilization over barbarism; the beautiful gowns, the sparkling jewels, and the white shoulders and arms of the ladies—all these made me wonder if I had not been transported to some Mayfair or Newport, so pictorial, so decorative, so charged with art, it seemed to be. The young people, carrying on their courtships in these unfamiliar halls, their disappearances into the more remote and tenebrous outskirts of the assembly—all seemed to me to be taking place on the stage, or in some romance.

I told Alice about this as we walked home—it was only across the street—to our own new house.

"Don't tell any one about this feeling of yours," said she. "It betrays your provincialism, my dear. You should feel, for the first time in your life, perfectly at home. 'Armor, rusting on his walls, On the blood of Clifford calls,' you know."

"Mine didn't hear the call," said I; "I'm probably the first of my race to wear this—But I enjoyed it."

"Well, I am too full of something that took place to discuss the matter," said she, as we sat down at home. "I am perplexed. You know about Mr. Cornish and Josie, don't you?"

She startled me, for I had never told her a word.

"Know about them!" I cried, a little dramatically. "What do you mean? No, I don't!"

"Why, what's the matter, Albert?" she queried. "I haven't charged them with midnight assassination, or anything like that! Only, it seems that he has been making love to her, for some time, in his cool and self-contained way. I've known it, and she's been perfectly conscious, that I knew; but never said anything to me of it, and seemed unwilling even to approach the subject. But to-night Cecil and I found her out in the canopied seat by the fountain, and I knew something was the matter, and sent Cecil away. Something told me that Mr. Cornish was concerned in it, and I asked her at once where he went.

"'He is gone!' said she. 'I don't know where he is, and I don't care! I wish I might never see him any more!'

"You may imagine my surprise. When a young woman uses such language about

a man, it is a certainty that she isn't voicing her true feelings, or that it isn't a normal love affair. So I wormed out of her that he had made her an offer."

"'Well,' said I, 'if, as I infer from your conversation, you have refused him, there's an end of the matter; and you need not worry about seeing him any more.'

"'But,' said she, 'Alice, I haven't refused him!'

"That took me aback a little," went on Alice, "for I had other plans for her; so I said: 'You haven't accepted the fellow, have you?'

"'Oh, no, no!' said she, in a sort of quivery way, 'but what right have you to speak of him in that way?' And that is all I could get out of her. She was so unreasonable and disconnected in her talk, and the others came out, and I tell you what, Albert Barslow, that man Cornish will do evil yet, among us! I have always thought so!"

"I don't see any ground for any such prediction," said I, "in anything you have told me. Her inability to make up her mind—"

"Means that there's something wrong," said my wife dogmatically. "It means that he has some sinister influence over her, as he has over almost everybody, with those coal-black eyes of his and his satanic ways. And worse than all else, it means that he'll finally get her, in spite of herself!"

"Pshaw!" said I.

"Go away, Albert!" said she, "or we shall quarrel. Go back and find my fan—I left it on the mantel in the library. The house is lighted yet; and I was going to send you back anyhow. Kiss me, and go, please."

I felt that if Alice had had in her memory my vision of the supper at Auriccio's, she would have been confirmed in her fears; but to me, in spite of the memory, they seemed absurd. My only apprehension was that she might be right as to the final outcome, to the wreck of Jim's hopes. I did not take the matter at all seriously, in fact. I think we men must usually have such an affair worked out to some conclusion, for weal or woe, before we regard it otherwise than lightly. That was the reason that Giddings's distraught condition was only a matter of laughter to all of us. And as something like this passed through my mind, Giddings himself collared me as I crossed the street.

"Old man!" said he, "congratulate me! It's all right, Barslow, it's all right."

"Up on the battlements, are you?" said I. "Well, I congratulate you, Giddings;

and don’t make such an ass of yourself, please, any more. I never noticed until this evening what a fine girl Laura is. You’re really a very fortunate fellow indeed!”

“You never noticed it!” said he with utter scorn. “Well, if—”

“It’s late,” said I. “Come and see me in the morning! Good-night.”

I went in at the front door of the house. It stood wide open, as if the current of guests passing out had removed its tendency to swing shut. It seemed lonely now, inside, with all the decorations of the assembly still in place in the empty hall. I passed into the library, and found Jim sitting idly in a great leather chair. He seemed not to see me; or if he did, he paid no attention. I went to the mantel, picked up Alice’s fan, and turned to Jim.

“Sit down,” said he.

“Having a sort of ‘oft in the stilly night’ experience, Jim, or a case of William the Conqueror on the Field of Hastings?”

“Yes,” said he. “Something like that.”

“Well, your house-warming has been a success, Jim,” said I, “though a fellow wouldn’t think so to look at you. And the house is faultless. I envy you the house, but the ability to plan and furnish it still more. I didn’t think it was in you, old man! Where did you learn it all?”

“You may have the house, if you want it, Al,” said he. “I don’t think it’s going to be of any use to me.”

“Why, Jim,” said I, seeing that it was something more than a mere mood with him, “what is it? Has anything gone wrong?”

“Nothing that I’ve any right to complain of,” said he. “Of course, no man puts as much of his life into such a thing as I have into this—without thinking of more than living in it—alone. I’ve never had what you can really call a home—not since I was a little chap, when it was home wherever there were trees and mother. I’ve filled this—with those associations I spoke to Barr-Smith about—to-night—a little more than I seem to have had any warrant to do. I tried to make sure about the jewel for the jewel-case to-night, and it went wrong, Al; and that’s all there is of it. I don’t think I shall need the house, and if you like it you can have it.”

“Do you mean that Josie has refused you?” said I.

“She didn’t put it that way,” said he, “but it amounts to that.”

“Nothing that isn’t a refusal,” said I, “ought to be accepted as such. What did she say?”

“Nothing definite,” he answered wearily, “only that it couldn’t be ‘yes,’ and when I urged her to make it ‘yes’ or ‘no,’ she refused to say either; and asked me to forget that I had ever said anything to her about the matter. There have been some things which—led me to hope—for a different answer; and I’m a good deal taken down, Al ... I wouldn’t like to talk this way—with any one else.”

There seemed to be no reason for abandonment of hope, I urged upon him, and after a cigar or so I left him, evidently impressed with this view of the case, but nevertheless bitterly disappointed. It meant delay and danger to his hopes; and Jim was not a man to brook delay, or suffer danger to go unchallenged. I dared not tell him of Cornish’s offer, and of its fate, so similar to his.

“I wonder if it is coquetry on her part,” thought I, as I went back with the fan. “I wonder if it will cause things to go wrong in our business affairs. I wonder if it is possible for her to be sincerely unable to make up her mind, or if there is anything in Alice’s malign-influence theory. Anyhow, in the department of Cupid business certainly is picking up!”

CHAPTER XVI.

Some Things which Happened in Our Halcyon Days.

If there was any tension among us just after the house-warming, it was not noticeable. Mr. Cornish and Mr. Elkins seemed unaware of their rivalry. Had either of the two been successful, it might have made mischief; but as it was, neither felt that his rejection was more than temporary. Neither knew much of the other's suit, and both seemed full of hope and good spirits.

Altogether, these were our halcyon days. It seemed to crew and captain a time for the putting off of armor, and the donning of the garlands of complacent respite from struggle. The work we had undertaken seemed accomplished—our village was a city. The great wheel we had set whirling went spinning on with power. Long ago we had ceased to treat the matter jocularly; and to regard our operations as applied psychology only, or as a piratical reunion, no longer occurred to us. There is such a thing, I believe, as self-hypnotism; but if we knew it, we made no application of our knowledge to our own condition. This great, scattered, ebullient town, grown from the drowsy Lattimore of a few years ago, must surely be, even now, what we had willed it to be: and therefore, could we not pause and take our ease?

There was the General, of course. He, Jim said, "'knocked' so constantly as to be sort of ex-officio President of the Boiler-makers' Union," and talked of the inevitable collapse. But who ever heard of a city built by people of his way of thinking? And there was Josie Trescott, with her agreement on broad lines with the General, and her deprecation of the giving of fortunes to people who had not earned them; but Josie was only a woman, who, to be sure, knew more of most matters than the rest of us, but could not have any very valuable knowledge of the prospects for commercial prosperity.

That we were in the midst of an era of the most wonderful commercial prosperity none denied. How could they? The streets, so lately bordered with low stores, hotels, and banks, were now craggy with tall office buildings and great hostelries, through which the darting elevators shot hurrying passengers. Those trees which made early twilight in the streets that night when Alice, Jim, and I first rode out to the Trescott farm were now mostly cut down to make room for "improvements."

Brushy Creek gorge was no longer dark and cool, with its double sky-line of trees drowsing toward one another, like eyelashes, from the friendly cliffs. The cooing of the pigeons was gone forever. The muddied water from the great flume raced down through the ravine, turning many wheels, but nowhere gathering in any form or place which seemed good for trout. On either side stood shanties, and ramshackle buildings where such things as stonecutting and blacksmithing were done. Along the waterside ran the tracks of our Terminal and Belt Line System, on which trains of flat-cars always stood, engaged in the work of carrying away the cliffs, in which they were aided and abetted by giant derricks and the fiends of dynamite and nitro-glycerin. Limekilns burned all the time, turning the companionable gray ledges into something offensive and corrosive. One must now board a street-car, and ride away beyond Lynhurst Park before one could find the good and pure little Brushy Creek of yore.

The dwellers in the houses which stood in their lawns of vivid green had gone away into the new "additions," to be in the fashion, and to escape from the smoke and clang of engine and factory. Their old houses were torn away, or converted, by new and incongruous extensions, into cheap boarding-houses. Only the Lattimore house kept faith with the past, and stood as of old, in its five acres of trees and grass, untouched of the fever for platting and subdivision, its very skirts drawn up from the asphalt by austere retaining-walls. And here went on the preparation for the time when Laura and Clifford were to stand up and declare their purposes and intentions with reference to each other. The first wedding this was to be, in all our close-knit circle.

"I am glad," said I, "that they are all so sensible as not to permit rivalries to breed discord among us. It might be disastrous."

"There is time," said Alice, "for that to develop yet."

Not that everything happened as we wished. Indeed, some things gave us much anxiety. Bill Trescott, for instance, began at last to show signs of that going up in the air which Jim had said we must keep him from. Even Captain Tolliver complained that Bill's habits were getting bad: and he was the last person in the world to censure excess in the vices which he deemed gentlemanly. His own idea of morning, for instance, was that period of the day when the bad taste in the mouth so natural to a gentleman is removed by a stiff toddy, drunk just before prayers. He would, no doubt, have conceded to the inventor of the alphabet a higher place among men than that of the discoverer of the mint julep, had the matter been presented to him in concrete form; but would have qualified the admission by adding, with a seriousness incompatible with the average

conception of a joke: “But the question is sutt’nly one not entiahly free from doubt, suh; not entiahly free from doubt!”

However, the Captain had his standards, and prescribed for himself limits of time, place, and degree, to which he faithfully conformed. But he had been for a long time doing business under a sort of partnership arrangement with Bill, and their affairs had become very much interwoven. So he came to us, one day, in something like a panic, on finding that Bill had become a frequenter of one of the local bucket-shops, and had been making maudlin boasts of the profitable deals he had made.

“This means, gentlemen,” said the Captain, “that influences entiahly fo’eign to ouah investments hyah ah likely to bring a crash, which will not only wipe out Mr. Trescott, but, owin’ to ouah association in the additions we have platted, cyah’y me down also! You can see that with sev’al hundred thousand dolla’s of deferred payments on what we have sold, most of which have been rediscounted in the East by the G. B. T., Mr. Trescott’s condition becomes something of serious conce’n fo’ you-all, as well as fo’ me. Nothing else, I assuah you, gentlemen, could fo’ce me to call attention to a mattah so puahly pussonal as a diffe’nce between gentlemen in theiah standahds of inebriety! Nothing else, believe me!”

By the G. B. T. the Captain meant the Grain Belt Trust Company, and anything which affected its solvency or welfare was, as he said, a matter of serious concern for all of us. In fact, at that very moment there were in Lattimore two officers of New England banks with whom we had placed a rather heavy line of G. B. T. securities, and who had made the trip for the purpose of looking us up. Suppose that they found out that the notes and mortgages of William S. Trescott & Co. really had back of them only some very desirable suburban additions, and the personal responsibility of a retired farmer, who was daily handing his money to board-of-trade gamblers, with whom he was getting an education in the great strides we are making in the matter of mixed drinks? This thought occurred to all of us at once.

“Well,” said Cornish, stating the point of agreement after the Captain’s trouble had been fully discussed, “unfortunately ‘the right to be a cussed fool is safe from all devices human,’ and there doesn’t seem to be any remedy.”

It all came, thought I, as Jim and I sat silent after Cornish and the Captain went out, from the fact that Bill’s present condition in life gave those tendencies to which he had always been prone to yield, a chance for unrestricted growth. He

ought to have staid with his steers. Cattle and corn were the only things in which he could take an interest sufficiently keen to keep him from drink. These habits of his were enacting the old story of the lop-eared rabbits in Australia—overrunning the country. Bill had been as sober a citizen as one could desire, as long as his house-building occupied his time; and he and Josie had worked together as companionably as they used to do in the hay and wheat. But now he was drifting away from her. Her father should have staid on the farm.

“Do you know,” said I, “that Giddings is making about as great a fool of himself as Bill?”

“Yes,” said Jim, “but that’s because he’s in a terrible state of mind about his marriage. If we can keep him from delirium tremens until after the wedding, he’ll be all right. Some Italian brain-sharp has written up cases like his, and he’ll be all right. But with Bill it’s different.... Do you remember our old Shep?”

“No,” I returned wonderingly, almost impatiently. “What about him?”

“Well,” he mused, “I’ve been picking up knowledge of men for a while along back; and I’ve come to prize more highly the personal history of dogs; and Shep was worth a biography for its own sake, to say nothing of the value of a typical case. He was a woolly collie, who would cheerfully have given up his life for the cows and sheep. Anything in his line, that a dog could grasp, Shep knew, and he was busier than a cranberry-merchant the year around, and the happiest thing on the farm. Then our folks moved to Mayville, and took him along. He wasn’t fitted for town life at all. He’d lie on the front piazza, and search the street for cows and sheep, and when one came along he’d stick his sharp nose through the fence, and whine as if some one was whipping him. In less than six weeks he bit a baby; in two months he was the most depraved dog in Mayville, and in three ... he died.”

I had no answer for the apologue—not even for the self-condemnatory tone in which he told it. Presently he rose to go, and said that he would not be back.

“Don’t forget our date at the club this evening,” said he, as he passed out. “Your style of diplomacy always seems to win with these down-East bankers. Your experience as rob-ee gives you the right handshake and the subscribed-and-sworn-to look that does their business for ’em every time. Good-by until then.”

Our club was the terminal bud of our growth, and was housed in a building of which we were enormously proud. It was managed by a steward imported from New York, whose salary was made large to harmonize with his manners—that being the only way in which the majority of our members felt equal to living up

to them. So far as money could make a club, ours was of high rank. There were meat-cooks and pastry-cooks in incredible numbers, under the command of a French chef, who ruled the house committee with a rod of iron. We were all members as a matter of public duty. I have often wondered what the servants, brought from Eastern cities, thought of it all. To see Bill Trescott and Aleck Macdonald going in through the great door, noiselessly swung open for them by an attendant in livery, was a sight to be remembered. The chief ornament of the club was Cornish, who lived there.

“I want to see Mr. Cornish,” said I to the servant who took my overcoat, that evening.

“Right this way, sir,” said he. “Mr. Giddings is with him. He gave orders for you to be shown up.”

Cornish sat at a little round table on which there were some bottles and glasses. The tipple was evidently ale, and Mr. Giddings was standing opposite, lifting a glass in one hand and pointing at it with the other, in evident imitation of the attitude in which the late Mr. Gough loved to have himself pictured; but the sentiments of the two speakers were quite different.

“‘Turn out more ale; turn up the light!’”

Giddings glanced at the electric light-fixtures, and then looked about as if for a servant to turn them up.

> “‘I will not go to bed to-night!
> For, of all foes that man should dread,
> The first and worst one is a bed!
> Friends I have had, both old and young;
> Ale have we drunk, and songs we’ve sung.
> Enough you know when this is said,
> That, one and all, they died in bed!’”

Here Giddings’s voice broke with grief, and he stopped to drink the rest of the glassful, and went on:

> “‘In bed they died, and I’ll not go
> Where all my friends have perished so!
> Go, ye who fain would buried be;
> But not to-night a bed for me!’”

“Do you often have these Horatian fits?” I inquired.

“Base groveler!” said he, “if you can’t rise to the level of the occasion, don’t butt in.”

“‘For me to-night no bed prepare,
But set me out my oaken chair,
And bid me other guests beside
The ghosts that shall around me glide!’”

“You will, of course,” said Cornish, “permit us to withdraw for the purpose of having our conference with our Eastern friends? If I take your meaning, you’ll not be alone.”

“Not by a jugful, I’ll not be alone!” said Giddings, tossing off another glass:

“‘In curling smoke-wreaths I shall see
A fair and gentle company.
Though silent all, fair revelers they,
Who leave you not till break of day!
Go, ye who would not daylight see;
But not to-night a bed for me!
For I’ve been born, and I’ve been wed,
And all man’s troubles come of bed!’”

Here Giddings sank down in his chair and began weeping.

“The divinest attribute of poetry,” said he, “is that of bringing tears. Let me weep awhile, fellows, and then I’ll give you the last stanza. Last stanza’s the best—”

And in the midst of his critique he went to sleep, thereby breaking his rule adopted in “*Dum Vivemus Vigilemus*.”

“Is he this way often?” said I to Cornish, as we went down to meet Jim and the bankers.

“Pretty often,” said Cornish. “I don’t know how I’d amuse my evenings if it weren’t for Giddings. He’s too far gone to-night, though, to be entertaining. Gets worse, I think, as the wedding-day approaches. Trying to drown his apprehensions, I suspect. Funny fellow, Giddings. But he’s all right from noon to nine P.M.”

“I think we’ll have to organize a dipsomaniacs’ hospital for our crowd,” said I, “if things keep going on as they are tending now! I didn’t think Giddings was so many kinds of an ass!”

My complainings were cut short by our entrance into the presence of Mr. Elkins

and the New England bankers. I asked to be excused from partaking of the refreshments which were served. I had seen and heard enough to spoil my appetite. I was agreeably surprised to find that their independent investigations of conditions in Lattimore had convinced them of the safety of their investments. Really, they said, were it not for the pleasure of meeting us here at our home, they should feel that the time and expense of looking us up were wasted. But, handling, as they did, the moneys of estates and numerous savings accounts, their customers were of a class in whom timidity and nervousness reach their maximum, and they were obliged to keep themselves in position to give assurances as to the safety of their investments from their personal investigations.

Mr. Hinckley, who was with us, assured them that his life as a banker enabled him fully to realize the necessity of their carefulness, which we, for our own parts, were pleased to know existed. We were only too glad to exhibit our books to them, make a complete showing as to our condition generally, and even take them to see each individual piece of property covered by our paper. Mr. Hinckley went with them to their hotel, having proposed enough work in the way of investigation to keep them with us for several months. They were to leave on the evening of the next day.

“But,” said Jim, as we put on our overcoats to go home, “it shows our good will, you see.”

At that moment the steward, with an anxious look, asked Mr. Elkins for a word in private.

“Ask Mr. Barslow if he will kindly step over here,” I heard Jim say; and I joined them at once.

“I was just saying, sir, to Mr. Elkins,” said the steward, “that ordinarily I’d not think of mentioning such a thing as a gentleman’s being indisposed but should see that he was cared for here. But Mr. Trescott being in such a state, I felt it was a case for his friends or the hospital. He’s been—a—seeing things this afternoon; and while he’s better now in that regard, his—”

“Have a closed carriage brought at once,” said Mr. Elkins. “Al, you’d better go up to the house, and let them know we’re coming. I’ll take him home!”

I shrank from the meeting with Mrs. Trescott and Josie, more, I think, than if it had been Bill’s death which I was to announce. As I approached the house, I got from it, somehow, the impression that it was a place of night-long watchfulness; and I was not surprised by the fact that before I had time to ring or knock at the

door Mrs. Trescott herself opened it, with an expression on her face which spoke of long vigils, and of fear passing on to certainty. She peered past me for an expected Something on the street. Her leisure and its new habits had assimilated her in dress and make-up to the women of the wealthier sort in the city; but there was an immensity of trouble in the agonized eye and the pitiful droop of her mouth, which I should have rejoiced to see exchanged again for the ill-groomed exterior and the old fret of the farm. Her first question ignored all reference to the things leading to my being there, "in the dead vast and middle of the night," but went past me to the core of her trouble, as her eye had gone on from me to the street, in the search for the thing she dreaded.

"Where is he, Mr. Barslow?" said she, in a hushing whisper; "where is he?"

"He is a little sick," said I, "and Mr. Elkins is bringing him home. I came on to tell you." "Then he is not—" she went on, still in that hushed voice, and searching me with her gaze.

"No, I assure you!" I answered. "He is in no immediate danger, even."

Josie came quietly forward from the dusk of the room beyond, where I saw she had been listening, reminding me, in spite of the incongruity of the idea, of that time when she emerged from the obscurity of her garden, and stood at the foot of the windmill tower, leaning on her father's arm, her hands filled with petunias, the night we first visited the Trescott farm. And then my mind ran back to that other night when she had thrown herself into his arms and begged him to take her away; and he had said, "W'y, yes, little gal, of course I'll take yeh away, if yeh don't like it here!" I think that I, perhaps, was more nearly able than any one else in the world beside herself to gauge her grief at this long death in which she was losing him, and he himself.

She took my hand, pressed it silently, and began caressing her mother and whispering to her things which I could not hear. Mrs. Trescott sat upon a sort of divan, shaking with terrible, soundless sobs, and clasping and unclasping her hands, but making no other gesture. I stood helpless at the hidden abyss of woe so suddenly uncovered before me and until this very moment screened by the conventions which keep our souls apart like prisoners in the cells in some great prison. These two women had been bearing this for a long time, and we, their nearest friends, had stood aloof from them. As I stood thinking of this, the carriage-wheels ground upon the pavement in the *porte cochère*; and a moment later Jim came in, his face graver than I had ever seen it. He sat down by Mrs. Trescott, and gently took one of her hands.

“Dr. Aylesbury has given him a morphia injection,” said he, “and he is sound asleep. The doctor thinks it best for us to carry him right to his room. There is a man here from the hospital, who will stay and nurse him; and the doctor came, too.”

Mrs. Trescott started up, saying that she must arrange his room. Soon the four of us had placed him in bed, where he lay, puffy and purple, with a sort of pasty pallor overspreading his face. His limbs occasionally jerked spasmodically; but otherwise he was still under the spell of the opiate. His wife, now that there was something definite to do, was self-possessed and efficient, taking the physician’s instructions with ready apprehension. The fact that Bill had now assumed the character of a patient rather than that of a portent seemed to make the trouble, somehow, more normal and endurable. The wife and daughter insisted upon assuming the care of him, but assented to the nurse’s remaining as a help in emergencies. It was nearing dawn when I took my leave. As I approached the door, I saw Jim and Josie in the hall, and heard him making some last tenders of aid and comfort before his departure. He put out his hand, and she clasped it in both of hers.

“I want to thank you,” said she, “for what you have done.”

“I have done nothing,” he replied. “It is what I wish to do that I want you to think of. I do not know whether I shall ever be able to forgive myself—”

“No, no!” said she. “You must not talk—you must not allow yourself to feel in that way. It is unjust—to yourself and to—me—for you to feel so!”

I advanced to them, but she still stood looking into his face and holding his hand clasped in hers. There was something of appeal, of an effort to express more than the words said, in her look and attitude. He answered her regard by a gaze so pathetically wistful that she averted her face, pressed his hand, and turned to me.

“Good-night to you both, and thank you both, a thousand times!” said she.

“I wonder if old Shep’s relations and friends,” said Jim, as we stood under the arc light in front of my house, “ever came to forgive the people who took him away from his flocks and herds.”

“After what I’ve seen in the last few minutes,” said I, “I haven’t the least doubt of it.”

“Al,” said he, “these be troublous times, but if I believed all that what you say implies, I’d go home happy, if not jolly. And I almost believe you’re right.”

“Well,” said I, assuming for once the rôle of the mentor, “I think that you are foolish to worry about it. We have enough actual, well-defined, surveyed and platted grief on our hands, without any mooning about hunting for the speculative variety. Go home, sleep, and bring down a clear brain for to-morrow’s business.”

“To-day’s,” said he gaily. “Tear off yesterday’s leaf from the calendar, Al. For, look! the morn, dressed as usual, ‘walks o’er the dew of yon high eastern hill.’”

CHAPTER XVII.

Relating to the Disposition of the Captives.

It was not later than the next day but one, that I met Giddings, alert, ingratiating, and natty as ever.

“When am I to have the third stanza?” I inquired, “the one that’s ‘the best of all.’”

This question he seemed to take as a rebuke; for he reddened, while he tried to laugh.

“Barslow,” said he, “there isn’t any use in our discussing this thing. You couldn’t understand it. A man like you, who can calculate to a hair just how far he is going and just where to turn back, and—Oh, damn! There’s no use!”

I sympathize with Giddings, at this present moment, in his despair of making people understand; for I doubt, sometimes, whether it is possible for me to make the reader understand the conditions with us in Lattimore at the time when poor Trescott lay there in his fine house, fighting for life, and for many things more important, and while the wedding preparations were going forward at the General’s house.

To the steady-going, stationary, passionless community these conditions approach the incomprehensible. No one seemed to doubt the city’s future now. Sometimes the abnormal basis upon which our great new industries had been established struck the stranger with distrust, if he happened to have the insight to

notice it; but the concerns *were there* most undeniably, and had shifted population in their coming, and were turning out products for the markets of the world.

That they had been evolved magically, and set in operation, not by any slow process of meeting a felt want, but for this sole purpose of shifting population, might be, and undoubtedly was, unusual; but given the natural facilities for carrying the business on, and how did this forced genesis adversely affect their prospects?

I, for one, could see no reason for apprehension. Yet when the story of Trescott's maudlin plunging came to our ears, and the effect of his possible failure received consideration, or I thought of the business explosion which would follow any open breach between Jim and Cornish (though this seemed too remote for serious consideration), I began to ponder on the enormously complex system of credits we had built up.

Besides the regular line of bonds and mortgages growing out of debts due us on our real-estate sales, and against which we had issued the debentures and the guaranteed rediscounts of the Grain Belt Trust Company, the factories, stock yards, terminals, street-car system, and most of our other properties were pretty heavily bonded. Some of them were temporarily unproductive, and funds had from time to time to be provided, from sources other than their own earnings, for the payment of their interest-charges. On the whole, however, we had been able to carry the entire line forward from position to position with such success that the people were kept in a fever, and accessions to our population kept pouring in which, of their own force, added fuel to the fire of expectancy.

This one thing began to make me uneasy—there was no place to stop. A failure among us would quench this expectancy, and values would no longer increase. And everything was organized on the basis of the continued crescendo. That was the reason why every uplift in prices had been followed by a new and strenuous effort on our part to hoist them still higher. For that reason, we, who had become richer than we had ever hoped to be, kept toiling on to rear to greater and greater heights an edifice which the eternal forces of nature itself clutched, to drag down.

I was the first to suggest this feature in conference. The Trescott scare had made me more thoughtful. True, outwardly things were more than ever booming. The very signs on the streets spoke of the boom. It was "Lumber, Coal, and Real Estate"; "Burbank's Livery, Feed, and Sale Stable. Office of Burbank Realty

Co.”; or “Thronson & Larson, Grocers. Choice Lots in Thronson’s Addition.” Even Giddings had platted the “*Herald* Addition,” and was offering a choice quarter-block as a prize to the person who could guess nearest to the average monthly increase in values in the addition, as shown by the record of sales. Real estate appeared as a part of the business of hardware stores and milliners’ shops, so that one was constantly reminded of the heterogeneous announcements on the signboard of Mr. Wegg. But while all this went on, and transactions “in dirt” were larger than ever, one could see indications that there was in them a larger and larger element of credit, and less and less cash. So one day, at a syndicate conference, I sought to ease my mind by asking where this thing was to stop, and when we could hope for a time when the town would not have to be held up by main strength.

“Why, that’s a very remarkable question!” said Mr. Hinckley. “We surely haven’t reached the point where we can think of stopping. Why, with the history before us of the cities of America which, without half our natural advantages, have grown to so many times the size of this, I’m surprised that such a thing should be thought of! Just think of what Chicago was in ’54 when I came through. A village without a harbor, built along the ditches of a frog-pond! And see it now; see it now!”

There was a little quiver in Mr. Hinckley’s voice, a little infirmity of his chin, which told of advancing years. His ideas were becoming more fixed. It was plain that the notion of Lattimore’s continued and uninterrupted progress was one to which he would cling with the mild and unreasoning stubbornness of gentlemanly senility. But Cornish welcomed the discussion with something like eagerness.

“I’m glad the matter has come up,” said he. “We’ve had a few good years here; but, in the nature of things, won’t the time come when things will be—slower? We’ve got our first plans pretty well worked out. The mills, factories, and live-stock industries are supporting population, and making tonnage which the railroad is carrying. But what next? We can’t expect to build any more railroads soon. No line of less than five hundred miles will do any good, strategically speaking, and sending out stubs just to annex territory for our shippers is too slow and expensive business for this crowd. Things are booming along now; but the Eastern banks are getting finicky about paper, and—I think things are going to be—slower—and that we ought to act accordingly.”

There was a long silence, broken only by a dry laugh from Hinckley, and the remark that Barslow and Cornish must be getting dyspeptic from high living.

“Well,” said Elkins at last, ignoring Hinckley and facing Cornish, “get down to brass nails! What policy would you adopt?”

“Oh, our present policy is all right,” answered he of the Van Dyke beard—

“Yes, yes!” interjected Hinckley. “My view exactly. A wonderfully successful policy!”

“—and,” Cornish continued, “I would only suggest that we cease spreading out —not cease talking it, but only just sort of stop doing it—and begin to realize more rapidly on our holdings. Not so as to break the market, you understand; but so as to keep the demand fairly well satisfied.”

Mr. Elkins was slow in replying, and when the reply came it was of the sort which does not answer.

“A most important, not to say momentous question,” said he. “Let’s figure the thing over and take it up again soon. We’ll not begin to disagree at this late day. Mr. Hinckley has warned us that he has an engagement in thirty minutes. It seems to me we ought to dispose of the matter of the appropriation for the interest on those Belt Lines bonds. Wade’s mash on ‘Atkins, Corning & Co.’ won’t last long in the face of a default.”

Mr. Hinckley staid his thirty minutes and withdrew. Mr. Cornish went to the telephone and ordered his dog-cart.

“Immediately,” he instructed, “over here at the Grain Belt Trust Building.”

“Make it in half an hour, can’t you, Cornish?” said Jim. “There are some more things we ought to go over.”

“Say!” shouted Cornish into the transmitter. “Make that in half an hour instead of at once.”

He hung up the telephone, and turned to Elkins inquiringly. Jim was walking up and down on the rug, his hands clasped behind him.

“Since we’ve spread out into that string of banks,” said he, still keeping up his walk, “and made Mr. Hinckley the president of each of ’em, he’s reverting to his old banker’s timidity. Which consists, in all cases, in an aversion to any change in conditions. To suggest any change, even from an old, dangerous policy to a new safe one, startles a ‘conservative’ banker. If we had gone on a little longer with our talk about shutting off steam and taking the nigger off the safety-valve, you’d have seen him scared into a numbness. But, now that the question has been brought up, let’s talk it over. What’s your notion about it, anyhow, Al?”

“I’m seeking light,” said I. “The people are rushing in, and the town’s doing splendidly. But prices, there’s no denying it, are beginning to sort of strangle things. They prevent doing, any more, what we did at first. Kreuger Brothers’ failure yesterday was small; but it’s a clear case of a retailer’s being eaten up with fixed charges—or so Macdonald told me this morning; and I know that frontage on Main Street is demanding fully as much as the traffic will bear. And then our fright over Trescott’s gambling gave me some bad dreams over our securities. It has bothered me to see how to adjust our affairs to a stationary condition of things; that’s all.”

“Of course,” said Cornish, “we must keep boosting. Fortunately society here is now thoroughly organized on the principle of whooping it up for Lattimore. I could get up a successful lynching-party any time to attend to the case of any miscreant who should suggest that property is too high, or rents unreasonable, or anything but a steady up-grade before us. But I think we ought to stop buying—except among ourselves, and keep the transfers from falling off—and begin salting down.”

“If you can suggest any way to do that, and still take care of our paper,” said Jim, “I shall be with you.”

“I’ve never anticipated,” said Cornish, “that such a mass of business could be carried through without some losses. Investors can’t expect it.”

“The first loss in the East through our paper,” said Jim, “means a taking up of the Grain Belt securities everywhere, and no market for more. And you know what that spells.”

“It mustn’t be allowed to happen—yet awhile,” answered Cornish. “As I just now said, we must keep on boosting.”

“You know where the Grain Belt debentures and other obligations are mostly held, of course?” asked Mr. Elkins.

“When a bond or mortgage is sold,” was the answer, “my interest in it ceases. I conclusively presume that the purchaser himself personally looked to the security, or accepted the guaranty of the negotiating trust company. *Caveat emptor* is my rule.”

Mr. Elkins looked out of the window, as if he had forgotten us.

“We should push the sale of the Lattimore & Great Western,” said he, “and the Belt Line System.”

“I concur,” said Cornish. “Our interest in those properties is a two-million-dollar cash item.”

“It wouldn’t be two million cents,” said Jim, “if our friends on Wall Street could hear this talk. They’d wait to buy at receiver’s sale after some Black Friday. Of course, that’s what Pendleton and Wade have been counting on from the first.”

“You ought to see Halliday and Pendleton at once,” said I.

“Yes, I think so, too,” he rejoined. “Pendleton’ll pay us more than our price, rather than see the Halliday system get the properties. They’re deep ones; but we ought to be able to play them off against each other, so long as we can keep strong at home. I’ll begin the flirtation at once.”

Cornish, assuming that Jim had fully concurred in his views, bade us a pleasant good-day, and went out.

“My boy,” said Jim, “cheer up. If gloom takes hold of you like this while we’re still running before a favoring wind, it’ll bother you to keep feeling worse and worse, as you ought, as we approach the real thing. Cheer up!”

“Oh, I’m all right!” said I. “I was just trying to make out Cornish’s position.”

“Let’s make out our own,” he replied, “that’s the first thing. Bear in mind that this is a buccaneering proposition, and you’re first mate: remember? Well, Al, we’ve had the merriest cruise in the books. If any crew ever had doubloons to throw to the birds, we’ve had ’em. But, you know, we always draw the line somewhere, and I’m about to ask you to join me in drawing the line, and see just what moral level piracy has risen or sunk to.”

He still walked back and forth, and, as he spoke of drawing the line, he drew an imaginary one with his fingers on the green baize of the flat-topped desk.

“You remember what those fellows, Dorr and Wickersham, said the other night, about having invested the funds of estates, and savings accounts in our obligations?” he went on. “But I never told you what Wickersham said privately to me. The infernal fool has more of our paper than his bank’s whole capital stock, with the surplus added, amounts to! And he calls himself a ‘conservative New England banker’! It wouldn’t be so bad if the states back East weren’t infested with the same sort of idiots—I’ve had Hinckley make me a report on it since that night. It means that women and children and sweaty breadwinners have furnished the money for all these things we’re so proud of having built, including the Mt. Desert cottages and the Wyoming hunting-lodge. It means that we’ve got to be able to read our book of the Black Art backwards as well as

forwards, or the Powers we've conjured up will tear piecemeal both them and us. God! it makes me crawl to think of what would happen!"

He sat down on the flat-topped desk, and I saw the beaded pallor of a fixed and digested anxiety on his brow. He went on, in a lighter way:

"These poor people, scattered from the Missouri to the Atlantic, are our prisoners, Al. I think Cornish is ready to make them walk the plank. But, Al, you know, in our bloodiest days, down on the Spanish Main, we used to spare the women and children! What do you say now, Al?"

The way in which he repeated the old nickname had an irresistible appeal in it; but I hope no appeal was needed. I said, and said truly, that I should never consent to any policy which was not mindful of the interests of which he spoke; and that I knew Hinckley would be with us. So, if Cornish took any other view, there would be three to one against him.

"I knew you'd be with me," he continued. "It would have been a sure-enough case of *et tu, Brute*, if you hadn't been. But don't let yourself think for a minute that we can't fight this thing to a finish and come off more than conquerors. We'll look back at this talk some time, and laugh at our fears. The troublous times that come every so often are nearer than they were five years ago, but they're some ways off yet, and forewarned is insured."

"But the hard times always catch people unawares," said I.

"They do," he admitted, "but they never tried to stalk a covey of boom specialists before.... You remember all that rot I used to talk about the mind-force method, and psychological booms? We've been false to that theory, by coming to believe so implicitly in our own preaching. Why, Al, this work we've begun here has got to go on! It must go on! There mustn't be any collapse or failure. When the hard times come, we must be prepared to go right on through, cutting a little narrower swath, but cutting all the same. Stand by the guns with me, and, in spite of all, we'll win, and save Lattimore—and spare the captives, too!"

There was the fire of unconquerable resolution in his eye, and a resonance in his voice that thrilled me. After all he had done, after the victories we had won under his leadership, the admiration and love I felt for him rose to the idolatry of a soldier for his general, as I saw him stiffening his limbs, knotting his muscles, and, with teeth set and nostrils dilated, rising to the load which seemed falling on him alone.

“I’ll make the turn with these railroad properties,” he went on. “We must make Pendleton and Halliday bid each other up to our figure. And there’ll be no ‘salting down’ done, either—yet awhile. I hope things won’t shrink too much in the washing; but the real-estate hot air of the past few years must cause some trouble when the payments deferred begin to make the heart sick. The Trust Company will be called on to make good some of its guaranties—and must do it. The banks must be kept strong; and with two millions to sweeten the pot we shall be with ’em to the finish. Why, they can’t beat us! And don’t forget that right now is the most prosperous time Lattimore ever saw; and put on a look that will corroborate the statement when you go out of here!”

“Bravo, bravo!” said a voice from near the door. “I don’t understand any of it, but the speech sounded awfully telling! Where’s papa?”

It was Antonia, who had come in unobserved. She wore a felt hat with one little feather on it, driving-gloves, and a dark cloth dress. She stood, rosy with driving, her blonde curls clustering in airy confusion about her forehead, a tailor-gowned Brunhilde.

“Why, hello, Antonia!” said Jim. “He went away some time ago. Wasn’t that a corking good speech? Ah! You never know the value of an old friend until you use him as audience at the dress rehearsal of a speech! Pacers or trotters?”

“Pacers,” said she, “Storm and The Friar.”

“If you’ll let me drive,” he stipulated, “I’d like to go home with you.”

“Nobody but myself,” said she, “ever drives this team. You’d spoil The Friar’s temper with that unyielding wrist of yours; but if you are good, you may hold the ends of the lines, and say ‘Dap!’ occasionally.”

And down to the street we went together, our cares dismissed. Jim handed Antonia into the trap, and they spun away toward Lynhurst, apparently the happiest people in Lattimore.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Going Away of Laura and Clifford, and the Departure of Mr.

“Thet little quirly thing there,” said Mr. Trescott, spreading a map out on my library table and pointing with his trembling and knobby forefinger, “is Wolf Nose Crick. It runs into the Cheyenne, down about there, an’ ’s got worlds o’ water fer any sized herds, an’ carries yeh back from the river fer twenty-five miles. There’s a big spring at the head of it, where the ranch buildin’s is; an’ there’s a clump o’ timber there—box elders an’ cottonwoods, y’ know. Now see the advantage I’ll have. Other herds’ll hev to traipse back an’ forth from grass to water an’ from water to grass, a-runnin’ theirselves poor; an’ all the time I’ll hev livin’ water right in the middle o’ my range.”

His wife and daughter had carefully nursed him through the fever, as Dr. Aylesbury called it, and for two weeks Mr. Trescott was seen by no one else. Then from our windows Alice and I could see him about his grounds, at work amongst his shrubbery, or busying himself with his horses and carriages. Josie had transformed herself into a woman of business, and every day she went to her father’s office, opened his mail, and held business consultations. Whenever it was necessary for papers to be executed, Josie went with the lawyer and notary to the Trescott home for the signing.

The Trescott and Tolliver business brought her into daily contact with the Captain. He used to open the doors between their offices, and have the mail sorted for Josie when she came in. There was something of homage in the manner in which he received her into the office, and laid matters of business before her. It was something larger and more expansive than can be denoted by the word courtesy or politeness.

“Captain,” she would say, with the half-amused smile with which she always rewarded him, “here is this notice from the Grain Belt Trust Company about the interest on twenty-five thousand dollars of bonds which they have advanced to us. Will you please explain it?”

“Sutt’nly, Madam, sutt’nly,” replied he, using a form of address which he adopted the first time she appeared as Bill’s representative in the business, and which he never cheapened by use elsewhere. “Those bonds ah debentures, which —”

“But what *are* debentures, Captain?” she inquired.

“Pahdon me, my deah lady,” said he, “fo’ not explaining that at fuhst! Those ah

the debentures of the Trescott Development Company, fawmed to build up Trescott's Addition. We sold those lands on credit, except fo' a cash payment of one foath the purchase-price. This brought to us, as you can see, Madam, a lahge amount of notes, secured by fuhst mortgages on the Trescott's Addition properties. These notes and mortgages we deposited with the Grain Belt Trust Company, and issued against them the bonds of the Trescott Development Company—debentures—and the G. B. T. people floated these bonds in the East and elsewhah. This interest mattah was an ovahsight; I should have looked out fo' it, and not put the G. B. T. to the trouble of advancing it; but as we have this mawnin' on deposit with them several thousand dollahs from the sale of the Tolliver's Subdivision papah, the thing becomes a mattah of no impo'tance whatevah!"

"But," went on Josie, "how shall we be able to pay the next installment of interest, and the principal, when it falls due?"

"Amply provided foh, my deah Madam," said the Captain, waving his arm; "the defe'ed payments and the interest on them will create an ample sinking fund!"

"But if they don't?" she inquired.

"That such a contingency can possibly arise, Madam," said the Captain in his most impressive orotund, and with his hand thrust into the bosom of his Prince Albert coat, "is something which my loyalty to Lattimore, my faith in my fellow citizens, my confidence in Mr. Elkins and Mr. Barslow, and my regahd fo' my own honah, pledged as it is to those to whom I have sold these properties on the representations I have made as to the prospects of the city, will not puhmit me to admit!"

This seemed to him entirely conclusive, and cut off the investigation. Conversation like this, in which Josie questioned the Captain and seemed ever convinced by his answers, gave her high rank in the Captain's estimation.

"Like most ladies," said he, "Miss Trescott is a little inclined to ovah-conservatism; but unlike most people of both sexes, she is quite able to grasp the lahgest views when explained to huh, and huh mental processes ah unerring. I have nevah failed to make the most complicated situation cleah to huh—nevah!"

And all this time Mr. Trescott was safeguarded at home, looking after his horses, carriages, and grounds, and at last permitted to come over to our house and pass the evening with me occasionally. It was on one of these visits that he spread out the map on the table and explained to me the advantages of his ranch on Wolf Nose Creek. The very thought of the open range and the roaming herds seemed

to strengthen him.

“You talk,” said I, “as if it were all settled. Are you really going out there?”

“Wal,” said he, after some hesitation, “it kind o’ makes me feel good to lay plans f’r goin’. I’ve made the deal with Aleck Macdonald f’r the water front—it’s a good spec if I never go near it—an’ I guess I’ll send a bunch o’ steers out to please Josie an’ her ma. They’re purtendin’ to be stuck on goin’, an’ I’ve made the bargain to pacify ’em; but, say, do you know what kind of a place it is out on one o’ them ranches?”

“In a general way, yes,” said I.

“W’l, a general way wun’t do,” said he. “You’ve got to git right down to p’ticklers t’ know about it, so’s to know. It’s seventy-five miles from a post-office an’ twenty-five to the nearest house. How would you like to hev a girl o’ yourn thet you’d sent t’ Chicago an’ New York and the ol’ country, an’ spent all colors o’ money on so’s t’ give her all the chanst in the world, go out to a place like that to spend her life?”

“I don’t know,” said I, for I was in doubt; “it might be all right.”

“You wouldn’t say that if it was up to you to decide the thing,” said he. “W’y it would mean that this girl o’ mine, that’s fit for to be—wal, you know Josie—would hev to leave this home we’ve built—that she’s built—here, an’ go out where there hain’t nobody to be seen from week’s end to week’s end but cowboys, an’ once in a while one o’ the greasy women o’ the dugouts. Do you know what happens to the nicest girls when they don’t see the right sort o’ men—at all, y’ know?”

I nodded. I knew what he meant. Then I shook my head in denial of the danger.

“I don’t b’lieve it nuther,” said he; “but is it any cinch, now? An’ anyhow, she’ll be where she wun’t ever hear a bit o’ music, ’r see a picter, ’r see a friend. She’ll swelter in the burnin’ sun an’ parch in the hot winds in the summer, an’ in the winter she’ll be shet in by blizzards an’ cold weather. She’ll see nothin’ but kioats, prairie-dogs, sage-brush, an’ cactus. An’ what fer! Jest for nothin’ but me! To git me away from things she’s afraid’ve got more of a pull with me than what she’s got. An’ I say, by the livin’ Lord, I’ll go under before I’ll give up, an’ say I’ve got as fur down as that!”

It is something rending and tearing to a man like Bill, totally unaccustomed to the expression of sentiment, to give utterance to such depths of feeling. Weak and trembling as he was, the sight of his agitation was painful. I hastened to say

to him that I hoped there was no necessity for such a step as the one he so strongly deprecated.

“I d’ know,” said he dubiously. “I thought one while that I’d never want to go near town, ’r touch the stuff agin. But I’ll tell yeh something that happened yisterday!”

He drew up his chair and looked behind him like a child preparing to relate some fearsome tale of goblin or fiend, and went on:

“Josie had the team hitched up to go out ridin’, an’ I druv around the block to git to the front step. An’ somethin’ seemed to pull the nigh line when I got to the cawner! It wa’n’t that I wanted to go—and don’t you say anything about this thing, Mr. Barslow; but somethin’ seemed to pull the nigh line an’ turn me toward Main Street; an’ fust thing I knew, I was a-drivin’ hell-bent for O’Brien’s place! Somethin’ was a-whisperin’ to me, ‘Go down an’ see the boys, an’ show ’em that yeh can drink ’r let it alone, jest as yeh see fit!’ And the thought come over me o’ Josie a-standin’ there at the gate waitin’ f’r me, an’ I set my teeth, an’ jerked the hosses’ heads around, an’ like to upset the buggy a-turnin’. ‘You look pale, pa,’ says Josie. ‘Maybe we’d better not go.’ ‘No,’ says I, ‘I’m all right.’ But what ... gits me ... is thinkin’ that, if I’ll be hauled around like that when I’m two miles away, how long would I last ... if onst I was to git right down in the midst of it!”

I could not endure the subject any longer; it was so unutterably fearful to see him making this despairing struggle against the foe so strongly lodged within his citadel. I talked to him of old times and places known to us both, and incidentally called to his mind instances of the recovery of men afflicted as he was. Soon Josie came after him, and Jim dropped in, as he was quite in the habit of doing, making one of those casual and informal little companies which constituted a most distinctive feature of life in our compact little Belgravia.

Josie insisted that life in the cow country was what she had been longing for. She had never shot any one, and had never painted a cowboy, an Indian, or a coyote—things she had always longed to do.

“You must take me out there, pa,” said she. “It’s the only way to utilize the capital we’ve foolishly tied up in the department of the fine arts!”

“I reckon we’ll hev to do it, then, little gal,” said Bill.

“My mind,” said Jim, “is divided between your place up on the headwaters of Bitter Creek and Paris. Paris seems to promise pretty well, when this fitful fever

of business is over and we’ve cleaned up the mill run.”

Art, he went on, seemed to be a career for which he was really fitted. In the foreground, as a cowboy, or in the middle distance, in his proper person as a tenderfoot, it seemed as if there was a vocation for him. Josie made no reply to this, and Jim went away downcast.

The Addison-Giddings wedding drew on out of the future, and seemed to loom portentously like doom for the devoted Clifford. It may have suggested itself to the reader that Mr. Giddings was an abnormally timid lover. The eternal feminine at this time seemed personified in Laura, and worked upon him like an obsession. I have never seen a case quite like his. The manner in which the marriage was regarded, and the extent to which it was discussed, may have had something to do with this.

The boom period anywhere is essentially an era in which public events dominate those of a private character, and publicity and promotion, hand in hand, occupy the center of the stage. Giddings, as editor and proprietor of the *Herald,* was one of the actors on whom the lime-light was pretty constantly focussed. Miss Addison, belonging to the Lattimore family, and prominent in good works, was more widely known than he among Lattimoreans of the old days, sometimes referred to by Mr. Elkins as the trilobites, who constituted a sort of ancient and exclusive caste among us, priding themselves on having become rich by the only dignified and purely automatic mode, that of sitting heroically still, and allowing their lands to rise in value. These regarded Laura as one of themselves, and her marriage as a sacrament of no ordinary character.

Giddings, on the other hand, as the type of the new crowd who had done such wonders, and as the embodiment of its spirit, was dimly sensed by all classes as a sort of hero of obscure origin, who by strong blows had hewed his way to the possession of a princess of the blood. So the interest was really absorbing. Even the *Herald’s* rival, the *Evening Times*, dropped for a time the normal acrimony of its references to the *Herald*, and sent a reporter to make a laudatory write-up of the wedding.

On the night before the event, deep in the evening, Giddings and a bibulous friend insisted on having refreshments served to them in the parlor of the clubhouse. This was a violation of rules. Moreover, they had involuntarily assumed sitting postures on the carpet, rendering waiting upon them a breach of decorum as well. At least this was the view of Pearson, who was now attached to the club.

“You must excuse me, gentlemen,” he said, “but Ah’m bound to obey rules.”

“Bring us,” said Giddings, “two cocktails.”

“Can’t do it, sah,” said Pearson, “not hyah, sah!”

“Bring us paper to write resignations on!” said Giddings. “We won’t belong to a club where we are bullied by niggers.”

Pearson brought the paper.

“They’s no rule, suh,” said he, “again’ suhvin’ resignation papah anywhah in the house. But let me say, Mistah Giddings, that Ah wouldn’t be hasty: it’s a heap hahder to get inter this club now than what it was when you-all come in!”

This suggestion of Pearson’s was in every one’s mouth as the most amusing story of the time. Even Giddings laughed about it. But all his laughter was hollow.

Some bets were offered that one of two things would happen on the wedding-day: either Giddings (who had formerly been of abstemious habits) would overdo the attempt to nerve himself up to the occasion and go into a vinous collapse, or he would stay sober and take to his heels. Thus, in fear and trembling, did the inexplicable disciple of Iago approach his happiness; but, like most soldiers, when the battle was actually on, he went to the fighting-line dazed into bravery.

It was quite a spectacular affair. The church was a floral grotto, and there were, in great abundance, the adjuncts of ribbon barriers, special electric illuminations, special music, full ritual, ushers, bridesmaids, and millinery. Antonia was chief bridesmaid, and Cornish best man. The severe conformity to vogue, and preservation of good form, were generally attributed to his management. It was a great success.

There was an elaborate supper, of which Giddings partook in a manner which tended to prove that his sense of taste was still in his possession, whatever may have been the case with his other senses. Josie was there, and Jim was her shadow. She was a little pale, but not at all sad; her figure, which had within the past year or so acquired something of the wealth commonly conceded to matronliness, had waned to the slenderness of the day I first saw her in the art-gallery, but now, as then, she was slim, not thin. To two, at least, she was a vision of delight, as one might well see by the look of adoration which Jim poured into her eyes from time to time, and the hungry gaze with which Cornish took in the ruddy halo of her hair, the pale and intellectual face beneath it, and

the sensuous curves of the compact little form. For my own part, my vote was for Antonia, for the belle of the gathering; but she sailed through the evening, “like some full-breasted swan,” accepting no homage except the slavish devotion of Cecil, whose constant offering of his neck to her tread gave him recognition as entitled to the reward of those who are permitted only to stand and wait.

Mr. Elkins had furnished a special train over the L. & G. W. to make the run with the bridal party to Elkins Junction, connecting there with the east-bound limited on the Pendleton line, thence direct to Elysium.

Laura, rosy as a bride should be, and actually attractive to me for the first time in her life, sat in her traveling-dress trying to look matter-of-fact, and discussing time-tables with her bridegroom, who seemed to find less and less of dream and more of the actual in the situation,—calm returning with the cutaway. Cecil and the coterie of gilded youth who followed him did their share to bring Giddings back to earth by a series of practical jokes, hackneyed, but ever fresh. The largest trunk, after it reached the platform, blossomed out in a sign reading: “The Property of the Bride and Groom. You can Identify the Owners by that Absorbed Expression!” Divers revelatory incidents were arranged to eventuate on the limited train. Precipitation of rice was produced, in modes known to sleight-of-hand only. So much of this occurred that Captain Tolliver showed, by a stately refusal to see the joke, his disapproval of it—a feeling which he expressed in an aside to me.

“Hoss-play of this so’t, suh,” said he, “ought not to be tolerated among civilized people, and I believe is not! In the state of society in which I was reahed such niggah-shines would mean pistols at ten paces, within fo’ty-eight houahs, with the lady’s neahest male relative! And propahly so, too, suh; quite propahly!”

“Shall we go to the train, Albert?” said Alice, as the party made ready to go.

“No,” said I, “unless you particularly wish it; we shall go home.”

“Mr. Barslow,” said one of the maids, “you are wanted at the telephone.”

“Is this you, Al?” said Jim’s voice over the wire. “I’m up here at Josie’s, and I am afraid there’s trouble with her father. When we got here we found him gone. Hadn’t you better go out and look around for him?”

“Have you any idea where I’m likely to find him?” I asked. I saw at once the significance of Bill’s absence. He had taken advantage of the fact of his wife and daughter’s going to the wedding, and had yielded to the thing which drew him away from them.

“Try the Club, and then O’Brien’s,” answered Jim. “If you don’t find him in one place or the other, call me up over the ’phone. Call me up anyhow; I’ll wait here.”

The *Times* man heard my end of the conversation, saw me hastily give Alice word as to the errand which kept me from going home with her, observed my preparations for leaving the company, and, scenting news, fell in with me as I was walking toward the Club.

“Any story in this, Mr. Barslow?” he asked.

“Oh, is that you, Watson?” I answered. “I was going on an errand which concerns myself. I was going alone.”

“If you’re looking for any one,” he said, trotting along beside me, “I can find him a good deal quicker than you can, probably. And if there’s news in it, I’ll get it anyhow; and I’ll naturally know it more from your standpoint, and look at it more as you do, if we go together. Don’t you think so?”

“See here, Watson,” said I, “you may help if you wish. But if you print a word without my consent, I can and will scoop the *Times* every day, from this on, with every item of business news coming through our office. Do you understand, and do you promise?”

“Why, certainly,” said he. “You’ve got the thing in your own hands. What is it, anyhow?”

I told him, and found that Trescott’s dipsomania was as well known to him as myself.

“He’s been throwing money to the fowls for a year or two,” he remarked. “It’s better than two to one you don’t find him at the Club: the atmosphere won’t be congenial for him there.”

At the Club we found Watson’s forecast verified. At O’Brien’s our knocking on the door aroused a sleepy bartender, who told us that no one was there, but refused to let us in. Watson called him aside, and they talked together for a few minutes.

“All right,” said the reporter, turning away from him, “much obliged, Hank; I believe you’ve struck it.”

Watson was leader now, and I followed him toward Front Street, near the river. He said that Hank, the barkeeper, had told him that Trescott had been in his saloon about nine o’clock, drinking heavily; and from the company he was in, it

was to be suspected that he would be steered into a joint down on the river front. We passed through an alley, and down a back basement stairway, came to a door, on which Watson confidently knocked, and which was opened by a negro who let us in as soon as he saw the reporter. The air was sickening with an odor which I then perceived for the first time, and which Watson called the dope smell. There was an indefinable horror about the place, which so repelled me that nothing but my obligation could have held me there. The lights were dim, and at first I could see nothing more than that the sides of the room were divided into compartments by dull-colored draperies, in a manner suggesting the sections of a sleeping-car. There were sounds of dreadful breathings and inarticulate voices, and over all that sickening smell. I saw, flung aimlessly from the crepuscular and curtained recesses, here the hairy brawn of a man's arm, there a woman's leg in scarlet silk stocking, the foot half withdrawn from a red slipper with a high French heel. The Gate of a Hundred Sorrows had opened for me, and I stood as if gazing, with eyes freshly unsealed to its horrors, into some dim inferno, sibilant with hisses, and enwrapped in indeterminate dragon-folds—and I in quest of a lost soul.

"He wouldn't go with his pal, boss," I heard the negro say. "Ah tried to send him home, but he said he had some medicine to take, an' he 'nsisted on stayin'."

As he ceased to speak, I knew that Watson had been interrogating him, and that he was referring to the man we sought.

"Show me where he is," I commanded.

"Yes, boss! Right hyah, sah!"

In an inner room, on a bed, not a pallet like those in the first chamber, was Trescott, his head lying peacefully on a pillow, his hands clasped across his chest. Somehow, I was not surprised to see no evidence of life, no rise and fall of the breast, no sound of breathing. But Watson started forward in amazement, laid his hand for a moment on the pallid forehead, lifted for an instant and then dropped the inert hand, turned and looked fixedly in my face, and whispered, "My God! He's dead!"

As if at some great distance, I heard the negro saying, "He done said he hed ter tek some medicine, boss. Ah hopes you-all won't make no trouble foh me, boss—!"

"Send for a doctor!" said I. "Telephone Mr. Elkins, at Trescott's home!"

Watson darted out, and for an eternity, as it seemed to me, I stood there alone.

There was a scurrying of the vermin in the place to snatch up a few valuables and flee, as if they had been the crawling things under some soon-to-be-lifted stone, to whom light was a calamity. I was left with the Stillness before me, and the dreadful breathings and inarticulate voices outside. Then came the clang and rattle of ambulance and patrol, and in came a policeman or two, a physician, a *Herald* man and Watson, who was bitterly complaining of Bill for having had the bad taste to die on the morning paper's time.

And soon came Jim, in a carriage, whirled along the street like a racing chariot—with whom I rode home, silent, save for answering his questions. Now the wife, gazing out of her door, saw in the street the Something for which she had peered past me the other night.

The men carried it in at the door, and laid it on the divan. Josie, her arms and shoulders still bare in the dress she had worn to the wedding, broke away from Cornish, who was bending over her and saying things to comfort her, and swept down the hall to the divan where Bill lay, white and still, and clothed with the mystic majesty of death. The shimmering silk and lace of her gown lay all along the rug and over the divan, like drapery thrown there to conceal what lay before us. She threw her arms across the still breast, and her head went down on his.

"Oh, pa! Oh, pa!" she moaned, "you never did any one any harm!... You were always good and kind!... And always loving and forgiving.... And why should they come to you, poor pa ... and take you from the things you loved ... and ... murder you ... like this!"

Jim fell back, as if staggering from a blow. Cornish came forward, and offered to raise up the stricken girl, whose eyes shone in her grief like the eyes of insanity. Alice stepped before Cornish, raised Josie up, and supported her from the room.

Again it was morning, when we—Alice, Jim, and I—sat face to face in our home. An untasted breakfast was spread before us. Jim's eyes were on the cloth, and nothing served to rouse him. I knew that the blow from which he had staggered still benumbed his faculties.

"Come," said I, "we shall need your best thought down at the Grain Belt Building in a couple of hours. This brings things to a crisis. We shall have a terrible dilemma to face, it's likely. Eat and be ready to face it!"

"God!" said he, "it's the old tale over again, Al: throw the dead and wounded overboard to clear the decks, and on with the fight!"

CHAPTER XIX.

In Which Events Resume their Usual Course—at a Somewhat Accelerated Pace.

The death of Mr. Trescott was treated with that consideration which the affairs of the locally prominent always receive in towns where local papers are in close financial touch with the circle affected. Nothing was said of suicide, or of the place where the body was found; and in fact I doubt if the family ever knew the real facts; but the property matters were looked upon as a legitimate subject for comment.

“Yesterday,” said, in due time, the *Herald*, “the Trescott estate passed into the hands of Will Lattimore, as administrator. He was appointed upon the petition of Martha D. Trescott, the widow. His bond, in the sum of $500,000, was signed by James R. Elkins, Albert F. Barslow, J. Bedford Cornish, and Marion Tolliver, as sureties, and is said to be the largest in amount ever filed in our local Probate Court.

“Mr. Lattimore is non-committal as to the value of the estate. The bond is not to be taken as altogether indicative of this value, as additional bonds may be called for at any time, and the individual responsibility of the administrator is very large. He will at once enter upon the work of settling up the estate, receiving and filing claims, and preparing his report. He estimates the time necessary to a full understanding of the extent and condition of his trust at weeks and even months.

“The petition states that the deceased died intestate, leaving surviving him the petitioner and an only child, a daughter, Josephine. As Miss Trescott has attained her majority, she will at once come into the possession of the greater part of this estate, becoming thereby the richest heiress in this part of the West. This fact of itself would render her an interesting person, an interest to which her charming personality adds zest. She is a very beautiful girl, petite in figure, with splendid brown hair and eyes. She is possessed of a strong individuality, has had the advantages of the best American and Continental schools, and is said to be an artist of much ability. Mrs. Trescott comes of the Dana family, prominent in central Illinois from the earliest settlement of the state.

“President Elkins, of the L. & G. W., who, perhaps, knows more than any other

person as to the situation and value of the various Trescott properties, could not be seen last night. He went to Chicago on Wednesday, and yesterday wired his partner, Mr. Barslow, that business had called him on to New York, where he would remain for some time."

In another column of the same issue was a double-leaded news-story, based on certain rumors that Jim's trip to New York was taken for the purpose of financing extensions of the L. & G. W. which would develop it into a system of more than a thousand miles of line.

"Their past successes have shown," said the *Herald* in editorial comment on this, "that Mr. Elkins and his associates are resourceful enough to bring such an undertaking, gigantic as it is, quite within their abilities. The world has not seen the best that is in the power of this most remarkable group of men to accomplish. Lattimore, already a young giantess in stature and strength, has not begun to grow, in comparison with what is in the future for her, if she is to be made the center of such a vast railway system as is outlined in the news item referred to."

From which one gathers that the young men left by Mr. Giddings in charge of his paper were entirely competent to carry forward his policy.

Jim had gone to Chicago to see Halliday, hoping to rouse in him an interest in the Belt Line and L. & G. W. properties; but on arriving there had telegraphed to me that he must go to New York. This message was followed by a letter of explanation and instructions.

"Halliday spends a good deal of his time in New York now," the letter read, "and is there at present. His understudy here advised me to go on East. I should rather see him there than here, on account of the greater likelihood that Pendleton may detect us: so I'm going. I shall stay as long as I can do any good by it. Lattimore won't get the condition of the estate worked out for a month, and until we know about that, there won't anything come up of the first magnitude, and even if there should, you can handle it. I don't really expect to come back with the two million dollars for the L. & G. W., but I do hope to have it in sight!

"In all your prayers let me be remembered; 'if it don't do no good, it won't do no harm,' and I'll need all the help I can get. I'm going where the lobster à la Newburg and the Welsh rabbit hunt in couples in the interest of the Sure-Thing game; where the bird-and-bottle combine is the stalking-horse for the Frame-up; and where the Flim-flam (I use the word on the authority of Beaumont, Fletcher & Giddings) has its natural habitat. I go to foster the entente cordiale between our friends Pendleton and Halliday into what I may term a mutual cross-lift, of

which we shall be the beneficiaries—in trust, however, for the use and behoof of the captives below decks.

“Giddings and Laura are here. I had them out to a box party last night. They are most insufferably happy. Clifford is not sane yet, but is rallying. He is rallying considerably; for he spoke of plans for pushing the *Herald* Addition harder than ever when he gets home. And you know such a thing as business has never entered his mind for six months—unless it was business to write that ‘Apostrophe to the Heart,’ which he called a poem, and which, I don’t mind admitting now, I hired his foreman to pi after the copy was lost.

“Keep everything as near ship-shape as you can. Watch the papers, or they may do us more harm in a single fool story than can be remedied by wise counter-mendacity in a year. Especially watch the *Times*, although there’s mighty little choice between them. You and Alice ought to spend as much time at the Trescotts’ as you can spare. You’ll hear from me almost daily. Wire anything of importance fully. Keep the L. & G. W. extension story before the people; it may make some impression even in the East, but it’s sure to do good in the local fake market. Don’t miss a chance to jolly our Eastern banks. I should declare a dividend—say 4%—on Cement stock. At Atlas Power Company meeting ask Cornish to move passing earnings to surplus in lieu of dividend, on the theory of building new factories—anyhow, consult with the fellows about it: that money will be handy to have in the treasury before the year is out, unless I am mistaken. Sorry I can’t be at these meetings. Will be back for those of Rapid Transit and Belt Line Companies.

“Yours,
”Jim.

“P. S.—Coming in, I saw a group of children dancing on a bridge, close to a schoolhouse, down near the Mississippi. I guess no one but myself knew what they were doing; but I recognized our old ‘Weevilly Wheat’ dance. I could imagine the ancient Scotch air, which the noise of the train kept me from hearing, and the old words you and I used to sing, dancing on the Elk Creek bridge:

“‘We want no more of your weevilly wheat,
We want no more your barley;
But we want some of your good old wheat,
To make a cake for Charley!’

“You remember it all! How we used to swing the little girls around, and when we

remembered it afterwards, how we would float off into realms of blissful companionship with freckled, short-skirted, bare-legged angels! Things were simpler then, Al, weren't they? And to emphasize that fact, my mind ran along the trail of the 'Weevilly Wheat' into the domain of tickers, margins, puts and calls, and all the cussedness of the Board of Trade, and came bump against poor Bill's bucket-shop deals, and settled down to the chronic wonder as to just how badly crippled he was when he died. If Will gets it figured out soon, at all accurately, wire me.

"J."

The wedding tour came to an end, and the bride and groom returned long before Mr. Elkins did. Giddings dropped into my office the day after their return, and, quite in his old way, began to discuss affairs in general.

"I'm going to close out the *Herald* Addition," said he. "Real estate and newspaper work don't mix, and I shall unload the real estate. What do you say to an auction?"

"How can you be sure of anything like an adequate scale of prices?" said I; "and won't you demoralize things?"

"It'll strengthen prices," he replied, "the way I'll manage it. This is the age of the sensational—the yellow—and you people haven't been yellow enough in your methods of selling dirt. If you say sensationalism is immoral, I won't dispute it, but just simply ask how the fact happens to be material?"

I saw that he was going out of his way to say this, and avoided discussion by asking him to particularize as to his methods.

"We shall pursue a progressively startling course of advertising, to the end that the interest shall just miss acute mania. I'll have the best auctioneer in the world. On the day of the auction we'll have a series of doings which will leave the people absolutely no way out of buying. We'll have a scale of upset prices which will prevent loss. Why, I'll make such a killing as never was known outside of the Fifteen Decisive Battles. I sha'n't seem to do all this personally. I shall turn the work over to Tolliver; but I'll be the power behind the movement. The gestures and stage business will be those of Esau, but the word-painting will be that of Jacob."

"Well," said I, "I see nothing wrong about your plan; and it may be practicable."

"There being nothing wrong about it is no objection from my standpoint," said he. "In fact, I think I prefer to have it morally right rather than otherwise, other

things being equal, you know. As for its practicability, you watch the Captain, and you'll see!"

This talk with Giddings convinced me that he was entirely himself again; and also that the boom was going on apace. It had now long reached the stage where the efforts of our syndicate were reinforced by those of hundreds of men, who, following the lines of their own interests, were powerfully and effectively striving to accomplish the same ends. I pointed this out in a letter to Mr. Elkins in New York.

"I am glad to note," said he in reply, "that affairs are going on so cheerfully at home. Don't imagine, however, that because a horde of volunteers (most of them nine-spots) have taken hold, our old guard is of any less importance. Do you remember what a Prince Rupert's drop is? I absolutely know you don't, and to save you the trouble of looking it up, I'll explain that it is a glass pollywog which holds together all right until you snap off the tip of its tail. Then a job lot of molecular stresses are thrown out of balance, and the thing develops the surprising faculty of flying into innumerable fragments, with a very pleasing explosion. Whether the name is a tribute of Prince Rupert's propensity to fly off the handle, or whether he discovered the drop, or first noted its peculiarities, I leave for the historian of the Cromwellian epoch to decide. The point I make is this. Our syndicate is the tail of the Lattimore Rupert's drop; and the Grain Belt Trust Co. is the very slenderest and thinnest tip of the pollywog's propeller. Hence the writer's tendency to count the strokes of the clock these nights."

Dating from the night of Trescott's death, and therefore covering the period of Jim's absence, I could not fail to notice the renewed ardor with which Cornish devoted himself to the Trescott family. Alice and I, on our frequent visits, found him at their home so much that I was forced to the conclusion that he must have had some encouragement. During this period of their mourning his treatment of both mother and daughter was at once so solicitously friendly, and so delicate, that no one in their place could have failed to feel a sense of obligation. He sent flowers to Mrs. Trescott, and found interesting things in books and magazines for Josie. Having known him as a somewhat cold and formal man, Mrs. Trescott was greatly pleased with this new view of his character. He diverted her mind, and relieved the monotony of her grief. Cornish was a diplomat (otherwise Jim would have had no use for him in the first place), and he skilfully chose this sad and tender moment to bring about a closer intimacy than had existed between him and the afflicted family. It was clearly no affair of mine. Nevertheless, after several experiences in finding Cornish talking with Josie by the Trescott grate, I

considered Jim's interests menaced.

"Well," said Alice, when I mentioned this feeling, "Mr. Cornish is certainly a desirable match, and it can scarcely be expected that Josie will remain permanently unattached."

There was a little resentment in her voice, for which I could see no reason, and therefore protested that, under all circumstances, it was scarcely fair to blame me for the lady's unappropriated state.

"Under other conditions," said I, "I assure you that I should not permit such an anomaly to exist—if I could help it."

The incident was then declared closed.

During this absence of Jim's, which, I think, was the real cause of Alice's displeasure, the *Herald* Addition sale went forward, with all the "yellow" features which the minds of Giddings and Tolliver could invent. It began with flaring advertisements in both papers. Then, on a certain day, the sale was declared open, and every bill-board and fence bore posters puffing it. A great screen was built on a vacant lot on Main Street, and across the street was placed, every night, the biggest magic lantern procurable, from which pictures of all sorts were projected on the screen, interlarded with which were statements of the *Herald* Addition sales for the day, and quotations showing the advance in prices since yesterday. And at all times the coming auction was cried abroad, until the interest grew to something wonderful. Every farmer and country merchant within a hundred miles of the city was talking of it. Tolliver was in his highest feather. On the day of the auction he secured excursion rates on all of the railroads, and made it a holiday. Porter's great military band, then touring the country, was secured for the afternoon and evening. Thousands of people came in on the excursions and it seemed like a carnival. Out at the piece of land platted as the *Herald* Addition, whither people were conveyed in street-cars and carriages during the long afternoon the great band played about the stands erected for the auctioneer, who went from stand to stand, crying off the lots, the precise location of the particular parcel at any moment under the hammer being indicated by the display of a flag, held high by two strong fellows, who lowered the banner and walked to another site in obedience to signals wigwagged by the enthusiastic Captain. The throng bid excitedly, and the clerks who made out the papers worked desperately to keep up with the demands for deeds. It was clear that the sale was a success. As the sun sank, handbills were scattered informing the crowd that in the evening Tolliver & Company, as a slight evidence of their

appreciation of the splendid business of the day, would throw open to their friends the new Cornish Opera House, where Porter's celebrated band would give its regular high-class concert. Tolliver & Company, the bill went on, took pleasure in further informing the public that, in view of the great success of the day's sale, and the very small amount to which their holdings in the *Herald* Addition were reduced, the remainder of this choice piece of property would be sold from the stage to the highest bidder, absolutely without any reservation or restriction as to the price!

I had received a telegram from Jim saying that he would return on a train arriving that evening, and asking that Cornish, Hinckley, and Lattimore be at the office to meet him. I was on the street early in the evening, looking with wonder at the crowds making merry after the dizzy day of speculative delirium. At the opera house, filled to overflowing with men admitted on tickets, the great band was discoursing its music, in alternation with the insinuating oratory of the auctioneer, under whose skilful management the odds and ends of the *Herald* Addition were changing owners at a rate which was simply bewildering.

"Don't you see," said Giddings delightedly, "that this is the only way to sell town lots?"

Jim came into the office, fresh and buoyant after his long trip, his laugh as hearty and mirth-provoking as ever. After shaking hands with all, he threw himself into his own chair.

"Boys," said he, "I feel like a mouse just returning from a visit to a cat convention. But what's this crowd for? It's nearly as bad as Broadway."

We explained what Giddings and Tolliver had been doing.

"But," said he, "do you mean to tell me that he's sold that Addition to this crowd of reubs?"

"He most certainly has," said Cornish.

"Well, fellows," replied Jim, "put away the accounts of this as curiosities! You'll have some difficulty in making posterity believe that there was ever a time or place where town lots were sold with magic lanterns and a brass band! And don't advertise it too much with Dorr, Wickersham and those fellows. They think us a little crazy now. But a brass band! That comes pretty near being the limit."

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Lattimore, "I shall have to leave you soon; and will you kindly make use of me as soon as you conveniently can, and let me go?"

“Have you got the condition of the Trescott estate figured out?” said Mr. Elkins.

“Yes,” said the lawyer.

We all leaned forward in absorbed interest; for this was news.

“Have you told these gentlemen?” Jim went on.

“I have told no one.”

“Please give us your conclusions.”

“Gentlemen,” said Mr. Lattimore, “I am sorry to report that the Trescott estate is absolutely insolvent! It lacks a hundred thousand dollars of being worth anything!”

There was a silence for some moments.

“My God!” said Hinckley, “and our trust company is on all that paper of Trescott’s scattered over the East!”

“What’s become of the money he got on all his sales?” asked Jim.

“From the looks of the check-stubs, and other indications,” said Mr. Lattimore, “I should say the most of it went into Board of Trade deals.”

Cornish was swearing in a repressed way, and above his black beard his face was pale. Elkins sat drumming idly on the desk with his fingers.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “I take it to be conceded that unless the Trescott paper is cared for, things will go to pieces here. That’s the same as saying that it must be taken up at all hazards.”

“Not exactly,” said Cornish, “at *all* hazards.”

“Well,” said Jim, “it amounts to that. Has any one any suggestions as to the course to be followed?”

Mr. Cornish asked whether it would not be best to take time, allow the probate proceedings to drag along, and see what would turn up.

“But the Trust Company’s guaranties,” said Mr. Hinckley, with a banker’s scent for the complications of commercial paper, “must be made good on presentation, or it may as well close its doors.”

“The thing won’t ‘drag along’ successfully,” said Jim. “Have you a schedule of the assets?”

“Yes,” said Mr. Lattimore. “The life-insurance money and the home are exempt

from liability for debts, and I've left them out; but the other properties you'll find listed here."

And he threw down on the desk a folded document in a legal wrapper.

"The family," said Jim gravely, "must be told of the condition of things. It is a hard thing to do, but it must be done. Then conveyances must be obtained of all the property, subject to debts; and we must take the property and pay the debts. That also will be a hard thing to do—in several ways; but it must be done. It must be done—do you all agree?"

"Let me first ask," said Mr. Cornish, turning to Mr. Hinckley, "how long would it be before there would have to be trouble on this paper?"

"It couldn't possibly be postponed more than sixty days," was the answer.

"Is there any prospect," Cornish went on, addressing Mr. Elkins, "of closing out the railway properties within sixty days?"

"A prospect, yes," said Jim.

"Anything like a certainty?"

"No, not in sixty days."

"Then," said Cornish reluctantly, "there seems to be no way out of it, and I agree. But I feel as if I were being held up, and I assent on this ground only: that Halliday and Pendleton will never deal on equal terms with a set of financial cripples, and that any trouble here will seal the fate of the railway transaction. But, lest this be taken as a precedent, I wish it to be understood that I'm not jeopardizing my fortune, or any part of it, out of any sentimental consideration for these supposed claims of any one who holds Lattimore paper, in the East or elsewhere!"

Jim sat drumming on the desk.

"As we are all agreed on what to do," said he drawlingly, "we can skip the question why we do it. Prepare the necessary papers, Mr. Lattimore. And perhaps you are the proper person to apprise the family as to the true condition of things. We'll have to get together to-morrow and begin to dig for the funds. I think we can do no more to-night."

We walked down the street and dropped into the opera house in time to hear the grand finale of the last piece by the band. As the great outburst of music died away, Captain Tolliver radiantly stepped to the footlights, dividing the applause

with the musicians.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” said he, “puhmit me to say, in bidding you-all good-night, that I congratulate the republic on the possession of a citizenship so awake to theiah true interests as you have shown you’selves to-day! I congratulate the puhchasers of propahty in the *Herald* Addition upon the bahgains they have secuahed. Only five minutes’ walk from the cyahs, and well within the three-mile limit, the time must soon come when these lots will be covahed with the mansions of ouah richah citizens. Even since the sales of this afternoon, I am infawmed that many of the pieces have been resold at an advance, netting the puhchasers a nice profit without putting up a cent. Upon all this I congratulate you. Lattimore, ladies and gentlemen, has nevah been cuhsed by a boom, and I pray God she nevah may! This rathah brisk growth of ouahs, based as it is on crying needs of ouah trade territory, is really unaccountably slow, all things considered. But I may say right hyah that things ah known to be in sto’ foh us which will soon give ouah city an impetus which will cyahy us fo’ward by leaps and bounds—by leaps and bounds, ladies and gentlemen—to that highah and still mo’ commandin’ place in the galaxy of American cities which is ouahs by right! And now as you-all take youah leave, I propose that we rise and give three cheers fo’ Lattimore and prosperity.”

The cheers were given thunderously, and the crowd bustled out, filling the street.

“Well, wouldn’t that jar you!” said Jim. “This is a case of ‘Gaze first upon this picture, then on that’ sure enough, isn’t it, Al?”

Captain Tolliver joined us, so full of excitement of the evening that he forgot to give Mr. Elkins the greeting his return otherwise would have evoked.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “it was glorious! Nevah until this moment have I felt true fawgiveness in my breast faw the crime of Appomattox! But to-night we ah truly a reunited people!”

“Glad to know it,” said Jim, “mighty glad, Captain. The news’ll send stocks up a-whooping, if it gets to New York!”

CHAPTER XX.

I Twice Explain the Condition of the Trescott Estate.

Nothing had remained unchanged in Lattimore, and our old offices in the First National Bank edifice had long since been vacated by us. The very building had been demolished, and another and many-storied structure stood in its place. Now we were in the big Grain Belt Trust Company's building, the ground-floor of which was shared between the Trust Company and the general offices of the Lattimore and Great Western. In one corner, and next to the private room of President Elkins, was the office of Barslow & Elkins, where I commanded. Into which entered Mrs. Trescott and her daughter one day, soon after Mr. Lattimore had been given his instructions concerning the offer of our syndicate to pay the debts of their estate and take over its properties.

“Josie and I have called,” said the widow, “to talk with you about the estate matters. Mr. Lattimore came to see us last night and—told us.”

She seemed a little agitated, but in nowise so much cast down as might be expected of one who, considering herself rich, learns that she is poor. She had in her manner that mixture of dignity and constraint which marks the bearing of people whose relations with their friends have been affected by some great grief. A calamity not only changes our own feelings, but it makes us uncertain as to what our friends expect of us.

“What we wish explained,” said Josie, “is just how it comes that our property must be deeded away.”

“I can see,” said I, “that that is a matter which demands investigation on your part. Your request is a natural and a proper one.”

“It is not that,” said she, evidently objecting to the word investigation; “we are not so very much surprised, and we have no doubt as to the necessity of doing it. But we want to know as much as possible about it before we act.”

“Quite right,” said I. “Mr. Elkins is in the next office; let us call him in. He sees and can explain these things as clearly as any one.”

Jim came in response to a summons by one of his clerks. He shook hands gravely with my visitors.

“We are told,” said Mrs. Trescott, “that our debts are a good deal more than we can pay—that we really have nothing.”

“Not quite that,” said Jim; “the law gives to the widow the home and the life

insurance. That is a good deal more than nothing.”

“As to whether we can keep that,” said Josie, “we are not discussing now; but there are some other things we should like cleared up.”

“We don’t understand Mr. Cornish’s offer to take the property and pay the debts,” said Mrs. Trescott.

Jim’s glance sought mine in a momentary and questioning astonishment; then he calmly returned the widow’s look. Josie’s eyes were turned toward the carpet, and a slight blush tinged her cheeks.

“Ah,” said Jim, “yes; Mr. Cornish’s offer. How did you learn of it?”

“I got my understanding of it from Mr. Lattimore,” said Mrs. Trescott, “and told Josie about it.”

“Before we consent to carry out this plan,” said Josie, “we ... I want to know all about the motives and considerations back of it. I want to know whether it is based on purely business considerations, or on some fancied obligation ... or ... or ... on merely friendly sentiments.”

“As to motives,” said Mr. Elkins, “if the purely business requirements of the situation fully account for the proposition, we may waive the discussion of motives, can’t we, Josie?”

“I imagine,” said Mrs. Trescott, finding that Jim’s question remained unanswered, “that none of us will claim to be able to judge Mr. Cornish’s motives.”

“Certainly not,” acquiesced Mr. Elkins. “None of us.”

“This is not what we came to ask about,” said Josie. “Please tell us whether our house and the insurance money would be mamma’s if this plan were not adopted—if the courts went on and settled the estate in the usual way?”

“Yes,” said I, “the law gives her that, and justly. For the creditors knew all about the law when they took those bonds. So you need have no qualms of conscience on that.”

“As none of it belongs to me,” said Josie, “I shall leave all that to mamma. I avoid the necessity of settling it by ceasing to be ‘the richest heiress in this part of the West’—one of the uses of adversity. But to proceed. Mamma says that there is a corporation, or something, forming to pay our debts and take our property, and that it will take a hundred thousand dollars more to pay the debts

than the estate is worth. I must understand why this corporation should do this. I can see that it will save pa's good name in the business world, and save us from public bankruptcy; but ought we to be saved these things at such a cost? And can we permit—a corporation—or any one, to do this for us?"

Mr. Elkins nodded to me to speak.

"My dear," said I, "it's another illustration of the truth that no man liveth unto himself alone—"

She shrank, as if she feared some fresh hurt was about to be touched, and I saw that it was the second part of the text the anticipation of which gave her pain. Quotation is sometimes ill for a green wound.

"The fact is," I went on, "that things in Lattimore are not in condition to bear a shock—general money conditions, I mean, you know."

"I know," she said, nodding assent; "I can see that."

"Your father did a very large business for a time," I continued; "and when he sold lands he took some cash in payment, and for the balance notes of the various purchasers, secured by mortgages on the properties. Many of these persons are mere adventurers, who bought on speculation, and when their first notes came due failed to pay. Now if you had these notes, you could hold them, or foreclose the mortgages, and, beyond being disappointed in getting the money, no harm would be done."

"I understand," said Josie. "I knew something of this before."

"But if we haven't the notes," inquired her mother, "where are they?"

"Well," I went on, "you know how we have all handled these matters here. Mr. Trescott did as we all did: he negotiated them. The Grain Belt Trust Company placed them for him, and his are the only securities it has handled except those of our syndicate. He took them to the Trust Company and signed them on the back, and thus promised to pay them if the first signer failed. Then the trust company attached its guaranty to them, and they were resold all over the East, wherever people had money to put out at interest."

"I see," said Josie; "we have already had the money on these notes."

"Yes," said I, "and now we find that a great many of these notes, which are being sent on for payment, will not be paid. Your father's estate is not able to pay them, and our trust company must either take them up or fail. If it fails, everyone will think that values in Lattimore are unstable and fictitious, and so many

people will try to sell out that we shall have a smashing of values, and possibly a panic. Prices will drop, so that none of our mortgages will be good for their face. Thousands of people will be broken, the city will be ruined, and there will be hard and distressful times, both here and where our paper is held. But if we can keep things as they are until we can do some large things we have in view, we are not afraid of anything serious happening. So we form this new corporation, and have it advance the funds on the notes, so as not to weaken the trust company—and because we can't afford to do it otherwise—and we know you would not permit it anyhow; and we ask you to give to the new corporation all the property which the creditors could reach, which will be held, and sold as opportunity offers, so as to make the loss as small as possible. But we must keep off this panic to save ourselves."

"I must think about this," said Josie. "I don't see any way out of it; but to have one's affairs so wrapped up in such a great tangle that one loses control of them seems wrong, somehow. And so far as I am concerned, I think I should prefer to turn everything over to the creditors—house and all—than to have even so good friends as yourself take on such a load for us. It seems as if we were saying to you, 'Pay our debts or we'll ruin you!' I must think about it."

"You understand it now?" said Jim.

"Yes, in a way."

"Let me come over this evening," said he, "and I think I can remove this feeling from your mind. And by the way, the new corporation is not going to have the ranch out on the Cheyenne Range. The syndicate says it isn't worth anything. And I'm going to take it. I still believe in the headwaters of Bitter Creek as an art country."

"Thank you," said she vaguely.

Somehow, the explanation of the estate affairs seemed to hurt her. Her color was still high, but her eyes were suffused, her voice grew choked at times, and she showed the distress of her recent trials, in something like a loss of self-control. Her pretty head and slender figure, the flexile white hands clasped together in nervous strain to discuss these so vital matters, and, more than all, the departure from her habitual cool and self-possessed manner, was touching, and appealed powerfully to Jim. He walked up to her, as she stood ready to leave, and laid his hand lightly on her arm.

"The way Barslow puts these property matters," said he, "you are called upon to think that all arrangements have been made upon a cold cash basis; and, actually,

that's the fact. But you mustn't either of you think that in dealing with you we have forgotten that you are dear to us—friends. We should have had to act in the same way if you had been enemies, perhaps, but if there had been any way in which our—regard could have shown itself, that way would have been followed."

"Yes," said Mrs. Trescott, "we understand that. Mr. Lattimore said almost the same thing, and we know that in what he did Mr. Cornish—"

"We must go now, mamma," said Josie. "Thank you both very much. It won't do any harm for me to take a day or so for considering this in all its phases; but I know now what I shall do. The thought of the distress that might come to people here and elsewhere as a result of these mistakes here is a new one, and a little big for me, at first."

Jim sat by the desk, after they went away, folding insurance blotters and savagely tearing them in pieces.

"I wish to God," said he, "that I could throw my hand into the deck and quit!"

"What's the matter?" said I.

"Oh—nothing," he returned. "Only, look at the situation. She comes in, filled with the idea that it was Cornish who proposed this plan, and that he did it for her sake. I couldn't very well say, like a boy, ''Twasn't Cornish; 'twas me!', could I? And in showing her the purely mercenary character of the deal, I'm put in the position of backcapping Cornish, and she goes away with that impression! Oh, Al, what's the good of being able to convince and control every one else, if you are always further off than Kamschatka with the only one for whose feelings you really care?"

"I don't think it struck her in that way at all," said I. "She could see how it was, and did, whatever her mother may think. But what possessed Lattimore to tell Mrs. Trescott that Cornish story?"

"Oh, Lattimore never said anything like that!" he returned disgustedly. "He told her that it was proposed by a friend, or one of the syndicate, or something like that; and they are so saturated with the Cornish idea up there lately, that they filled up the blank out of their own minds. Another mighty encouraging symptom, isn't it?"

Not more than a day or two after this, and after the news of the "purchase" of the Trescott estate was being whispered about, my telephone rang, just before my time for leaving the office, and, on answering, I found that Antonia was at the

other end of the wire.

“Is this Mr. Barslow?” said she. “How do you do? Alice is with us this afternoon, and she and mamma have given me authority to bring you home to dinner with us. Do you surrender?”

“Always,” said I, “at such a summons.”

“Then I’ll come for you in ten minutes, if you’ll wait for me. It’s ever so good of you.”

From her way of finishing the conversation, I knew she was coming to the office. So I waited in pleasurable anticipation of her coming, thinking of the perversity of the scheme of things which turned the eyes of both Jim and Cornish to Josie, while this girl coming to fetch me yearned so strongly toward one of them that her sorrow—borne lightly and cheerfully as it was—was an open secret. When she came she made her way past the clerks in the first room and into my private den. Not until the door closed behind her, and we were alone, did I see that she was not in her usual spirits. Then I saw that unmistakable quiver in her lips, so like a smile, so far from mirth, which my acquaintance with the girl, so sensitive and free from secretiveness, had made me familiar with.

“I want to know about some things,” said she, “that papa hints about in a blind sort of a way, but doesn’t tell clearly. Is it true that Josie and her mother are poor?”

“That is something which ought not to be known yet,” said I, “but it is true.”

“Oh,” said she tearfully, “I am so sorry, so sorry!”

“Antonia,” said I, as she hastily brushed her eyes, “these tears do your kind heart credit!”

“Oh, don’t, don’t talk to me like that!” she exclaimed passionately. “My kind heart! Why, sometimes I hate her; and I would be glad if she was out of the world! Don’t look like that at me! And don’t pretend to be surprised, or say you don’t understand me. I think every one understands me, and has for a long time. I think everybody on the street says, after I pass, ‘Poor Antonia!’ I *must* talk to somebody! And I’d rather talk to you because, even though you are a man and can’t possibly know how I feel, you understand *him* better than any one else I know—and *you* love him too!”

I started to say something, but the situation did not lend itself to words. Neither could I pat her on the shoulders, or press her hand, as I might have done with a

man. Pale and beautiful, her jaunty hat a little awry, her blonde ringlets in some disorder, she sat unapproachable in her grief.

"You look at me," said she, with a little gasping laugh, "as if I were a drowning girl, and you chained to the bank. If you haven't pitied me in the past, Albert, don't pity me now; for the mere saying openly to some human being that I love him seems almost to make me happy!"

I lamely murmured some inanity, of which she took not the slightest notice.

"Is it true," she asked, "that Mr. Elkins is to pay their debts, and that they are to be—married?"

"No," said I, glad, for some reason which is not very clear, to find something to deny. "Nothing of the sort, I assure you."

And again, this time something wearily, for it was the second time over it in so short a time, I explained the disposition of the Trescott estate.

"But he urged it?" she said. "He insisted upon it?"

"Yes."

She arose, buttoned her jacket about her, and stood quietly as if to test her mastery of herself, once or twice moving as if to speak, but stopping short, with a long, quivering sigh. I longed to take her in my arms and comfort her; for, in a way, she attracted me strongly.

"Mr. Barslow," said she at last, "I have no apology to make to you; for you are my friend. And I have no feeling toward Mr. Elkins of which, in my secret heart, and so long as he knows nothing of it, I am not proud. To know him ... and love him may be death ... but it is honor!... I am sorry Josie is poor, because it is a hard thing for her; but more because I know he will be drawn to her in a stronger way by her poverty. Shake hands with me, Albert, and be jolly, I'm jollier, away down deep, than I've been for a long, long time; and I thank you for that!"

We shook hands warmly, like comrades, and passed down to her carriage together. At dinner she was vivacious as ever; but I was downcast. So much so that Mrs. Hinckley devoted herself to me, cheering me with a dissertation on "Sex in Mind." I asked myself if the atmosphere in which she had been reared had not in some degree contributed to the attitude of Antonia toward the expression to me of her regard for Jim.

So the Trescott estate matter was arranged. In a few days the boom was strengthened by newspaper stories of the purchase, by heavy financial interests,

of the entire list of assets in the hands of the administrator.

“This immense deal,” said the *Herald*, “is new proof of the desirability of Lattimore property. The Acme Investment Company, which will handle the properties, has bought for investment, and will hold for increased prices. It may be taken as certain that in no other city in the country could so large and varied a list of holdings be so quickly and advantageously realized upon.”

This was cheering—to the masses. But to us it was like praise for the high color of a fever patient. Even while the rehabilitated Giddings thus lifted his voice in pæans of rejoicing, the lurid signals of danger appeared in our sky.

CHAPTER XXI.

Of Conflicts, Within and Without.

I have often wished that some sort of a business weather-chart might be periodically got out, showing conditions all over the world. It seems to me that with such a map one could forecast financial storms and squalls with an accuracy quite up to the weather-bureau standard.

Had we at Lattimore been provided with such a chart, and been reminded of the wisdom of referring to it occasionally, we might have saved ourselves some surprises. We should have known of certain areas of speculative high pressure in Australasia, Argentina, and South Africa, which existed even prior to my meeting with Jim that day in the Pullman smoking-room coming out of Chicago. These we should have seen changing month by month, until at the time when we were most gloriously carrying things before us in Lattimore, each of these spots on the other side of the little old world showed financial disturbances—pronounced “lows.” We should have seen symptoms of storm on the European bourses; and we should have thought of the natural progress of the moving areas, and derived much benefit from such consideration. We should certainly have paid some attention to it, if we could have seen the black isobars drawn about London, when the great banking house of Fleischmann Brothers went down in the wreck of their South African and Argentine investments. But having no such

chart, and being much engrossed in the game against the World and Destiny, we glanced for a moment at the dispatches, seeing nothing in them of interest to us, congratulated ourselves that we were not as other investors and speculators, and played on.

Once in a while we found some over-cautious banker or broker who had inexplicable fears for the future.

"Here is an idiot," said Cornish, while we were placing the paper to float the Trescott deal, "who is calling his loans; and why, do you think?"

"Can't guess," said Jim, "unless he needs the money. How does *he* account for it?"

"Read his letter," said Cornish. "Says the Fleischmann failure in London is making his directors cautious. I'm calling his attention to the now prevailing sun-spots, as bearing on Lattimore property."

Mr. Elkins read the letter carefully, turned it over, and read it again.

"Don't," said he; "he may be one of those asses who fail to see the business value of the *reductio ad absurdum*.... Fellows, we must push this L. & G. W. business with Pendleton. Some of us ought to be down there now."

"That is wise counsel," I agreed, "and you're the man."

"No," said he positively, "I'm not the man. Cornish, can't you go, starting, say, to-morrow?"

"No indeed," said Cornish with equal positiveness; "since my turn-down by Wade on that bond deal, I'm out of touch with the lower Broadway and Wall Street element. It seems clear to me that you are the only one to carry this negotiation forward."

"I can't go, absolutely," insisted Jim. "Al, it seems to be up to you."

I knew that Jim ought to do this work, and could not understand the reasons for both himself and Cornish declining the mission. Privately, I told him that it was nonsense to send me; but he found reasons in plenty for the course he had determined upon. He had better control of the hot air, he said, but as a matter of fact I was more in Pendleton's class than he was, I was more careful in my statements, and I saw further into men's minds.

"And if, as you say," said he, "Pendleton thinks me the whole works here, it will show a self-possession and freedom from anxiety on our part to accredit a

subordinate (as you call yourself) as envoy to the court of St. Scads. Again, affairs here are likely to need me at any time; and if we go wrong here, it's all off. I don't dare leave. Anyhow, down deep in your subconsciousness, you know that in diplomacy you really have us all beaten to a pulp: and this is a matter as purely diplomatic as draw-poker. You'll do all right."

My wife was skeptical as to the necessity of my going.

"Why doesn't Mr. Cornish go, then?" she inquired, after I had explained to her the position of Mr. Elkins. "He is a native of Wall Street, I believe."

"Well," I repeated, "they both say positively that they can't go."

"Your natural specialty may be diplomacy," said she pityingly, "but if you take the reasons they give as the real ones, I must be permitted to doubt it. It's perfectly obvious that if Josie were transferred to New York, the demands of business would take them both there at once."

This remark struck me as very subtle, and as having a good deal in it. Josie had never permitted the rivalry between Jim and Cornish to become publicly apparent; but in spite of the mourning which kept the Trescott's in semi-retirement, it was daily growing more keen. Elkins was plainly anxious at the progress Cornish had seemed to make during his last long absence, and still doubtful of his relations with Josie after that utterance over her father's body. But he was not one to give up, and so, whenever she came over for an evening with Alice, Jim was sure to drop in casually and see us. I believe Alice telephoned him. On the other hand, Cornish was calling at the Trescott house with increasing frequency. Mrs. Trescott was decidedly favorable to him, Alice a pronounced partisan of Elkins; and Josie vibrated between the two oppositely charged atmospheres, calmly non-committal, and apparently pleased with both. But the affair was affecting our relations. There was a new feeling, still unexpressed, of strain and stress, in spite of the familiarity and comradeship of long and intimate intercourse. Moreover, I felt that Mr. Hinckley was not on the same terms with Jim as formerly, and I wondered if he was possessed of Antonia's secret.

It was with a prevision of something out of the ordinary, therefore, that I received through Alice a request from Josie for a private interview with me. She would come to us at any time when I would telephone that I was at home and would see her. Of course I at once decided I would go to her. Which, that evening, my last in Lattimore before starting for the East, I did.

There was a side door to my house, and a corresponding one in the Trescott

home across the street. We were all quite in the habit, in our constant visiting between the households, of making a short cut by crossing the road from one of these doors to the other. This I did that evening, rapped at the door, and imagining I heard a voice bid me come in, opened it, and stepping into the library, found no one. The door between the library and the front hall stood open, and through it I heard the voice of Miss Trescott and the clear, carrying tones of Mr. Cornish, in low but earnest conversation.

“Yes,” I heard him say, “perhaps. And if I am, haven’t I abundant reason?”

“I have told you often,” said she pleadingly, “that I would give you a definite answer whenever you definitely demand it—”

“And that it would in that case be ‘No,’” he added, completing the sentence. “Oh, Josie, my darling, haven’t you punished me enough for my bad conduct toward you in that old time? I was a young fool, and you a strange country girl; but as soon as you left us, I began to feel your sweetness. And I was seeking for you everywhere I went until I found you that night up there by the lake. Does that seem like slighting you? Why, I hope you don’t deem me capable of being satisfied in this hole Lattimore, under any circumstances, if it hadn’t been for the hope and comfort your being here has given me!”

“I thought we were to say no more about that old time,” said she; “I thought the doings of Johnny Cornish were not to be remembered by or of Bedford.”

“The name I’ve asked you to call me by!” said he passionately. “Does that mean —”

“It means nothing,” said she. “Oh, please, please!—Good-night!”

I retired to the porch, and rapped again. She came to the door blushing redly, and so fluttered by their leave-taking that I thanked God that Jim was not in my place. There would have been division in our ranks at once; for it seemed to me that her conduct to Cornish was too complaisant by far.

“I came over,” said I, “because Alice said you wanted to see me.”

I think there must have been in my tone something of the reproach in my thoughts; for she timidly said she was sorry to have given me so much trouble.

“Oh, don’t, Josie!” said I. “You know I’d not miss the chance of doing you a favor for anything. Tell me what it is, my dear girl, and don’t speak of trouble.”

“If you forbid reference to trouble,” said she, smiling, “it will stop this conference. For my troubles are what I want to talk to you about. May I go on?

—You see, our financial condition is awfully queer. Mamma has some money, but not much. And we have this big house. It's absurd for us to live in it, and I want to ask you first, can you sell it for us?"

It was doubtful, I told her. A year or so ago, I went on, it would have been easy; but somehow the market for fine houses was dull now. We would try, though, and hoped to succeed. We talked at length, and I took copious memoranda for my clerks.

"There is another thing," said she when we had finished the subject of the house, "upon which I want light, something upon which depends my staying here or going away. You know General Lattimore and I are friends, and that I place great trust in his conclusions. He says that the most terrible hard times here would result from anything happening to your syndicate. You have said almost the same thing once or twice, and the other day you said something about great operations which you have in view which will, somehow, do away with any danger of that kind. Is it true that you would all be—ruined by a—breaking up—or anything of that sort?"

"Just now," I confessed, "such a thing would be dangerous; but I hope we shall soon be past all that."

I told her, as well as I could, about our hopes, and of my mission to New York.

"You must suspect," said she, "that my presence here is danger to your harmony; and through you, to all these people whose names even we have never heard. Shall I go away? I can go almost anywhere with mamma, and we can get along nicely. Now that pa is gone, my work here is over, and I want to get into the world."

I thought of the parallelism between her discontent and the speech Mr. Cornish had made, referring so contemptuously to Lattimore. I began to see the many things in common between them, and I grew anxious for Jim.

"Of all things," said she, "I want to avoid the rôle of Helen setting a city in flames. It would be so absurd—and so terrible; and rather than do such a hackneyed and harmful thing, I want to go away."

"Do you really mean that?" I asked, "Haven't you a desire to make your choice, and stay?"

"You mustn't ask that question, Albert," said she. "The answer is a secret—from every one. But I will say—that if you succeed in this mission, so as to put people here quite out of danger—I may not go away—not for some time!"

She was blushing again, just as she blushed when she admitted me. I thought once more of the fluttering cry, “Oh, please—please!” and the pause before she added the good-night, and my jealousy for Jim rose again.

“Well,” said I, rising, “all I can say is that I hope all will be safe when I return, and that you will find it quite possible to—remain. My advice is: do nothing looking toward leaving until I return.”

“Don’t be cross with me, Mr. Barslow,” said she, “for really, really—I am in great perplexity.”

“I am not cross,” said I, “but don’t you see how hard it is for me to advise? Things conflict so, and all among your friends!”

“They do conflict,” she assented, “they do conflict, every way, and all the time—and do, do give me a little credit for keeping the conflict from getting beyond control for so long; for there are conflicts within, as well as without! Don’t blame Helen altogether, or me, whatever happens!”

She hung on my arm, as she took me to the door, and seemed deeply troubled. I left her, and walked several times around the block, ruminating upon the extraordinary way in which these dissolving views of passion were displaying themselves to me. Not that the mere matter of outburst of confidences surprised me; for people all my life have bored me with their secret woes. I think it is because I early formed a habit of looking sympathetic. But these concerned me so nearly that their gradual focussing to some sort of climax filled me with anxious interest.

The next day I spent in the sleeping-car, running into Chicago. As the clickety-*clack*, clickety-*clack*, clickety-*clack* of the wheels vibrated through my couch, I pondered on the ridiculous position of that cautious Eastern bank as to the Fleischmann Brothers’ failure; then on the Lattimore & Great Western and Belt Line sale; and finally worked around through the Straits of Sunda, in a suspicious lateen-rigged craft manned by Malays and Portuguese. Finally, I was horrified at discovering Cornish, in a slashed doublet, carrying Josie away in one of the boats, having scuttled the vessel and left Jim bound to the mast.

“Chicago in fifteen minutes, suh,” said the porter, at this critical point. “Just in time to dress, suh.”

And as I awoke, my approach toward New York brought to me a sickening consciousness of the struggle which awaited me there, and the fatal results of failure.

CHAPTER XXII.

In which I Win my Great Victory.

My plan was our old one—to see both Pendleton and Halliday, and, if possible, to allow both to know of the fact that we had two strings to our bow, playing the one off against the other. Whether or not there was any likelihood of this course doing any good was dependent on the existence of the strained personal relations, as well as the business rivalry, generally supposed to prevail between the two Titans of the highways. As conditions have since become, plans like mine are quite sure to come to naught; but in those days the community of interests in the railway world had not reached its present perfection of organization. Men like Pendleton and Halliday were preparing the way for it, but the personal equation was then a powerful factor in the problem, and these builders of their own systems still carried on their private wars with their own forces. In such a war our properties were important.

The Lattimore & Great Western with the Belt Line terminals would make the Pendleton system dominant in Lattimore. In the possession of Halliday it would render him the arbiter of the city's fortunes, and would cut off from his rival's lines the rich business from this feeder. Both men were playing with the patience of Muscovite diplomacy the old and tried game of permitting the little road to run until it got into difficulties, and then swooping down upon it; but either, we thought, and especially Pendleton, would pay full value for the properties rather than see them fall into his opponent's net.

I wired Pendleton's office from home that I was coming. At Chicago I received from his private secretary a telegram reading: "Mr. Pendleton will see you at any time after the 9th inst. Smith."

We had been having some correspondence with Mr. Halliday's office on matters of disputed switching and trackage dues. The controversy had gone up from subordinate to subordinate to the fountain of power itself. A contract had been sent on for examination, embodying a *modus vivendi* governing future relations. I had wired notice of my coming to him also, and his answer, which lay alongside Pendleton's in the same box, was evidently based on the supposition that it was this contract which was bringing me East, and was worded so as to relieve me of the journey if possible.

“Will be in New York on evening of 11th,” it read, “not before. With slight modifications, contract submitted as to L. & G. W. and Belt Line matter will be executed.   Halliday.”

I spent no time in Chicago, but pushed on, in the respectable isolation of a through sleeper on a limited train. Once in a while I went forward into the day coach, to give myself the experience of the complete change in the social atmosphere. On arrival, I began killing time by running down every scrap of our business in New York. My gorge rose at all forms of amusement; but I had a sensation of doing something while on the cars, and went to Boston, and down to Philadelphia, all the time feeling the pulse of business. There was a lack of that confident hopefulness which greeted us on our former visits. I heard the Fleischmann failure spoken of rather frequently. One or two financial establishments on this side of the water were looked at askance because of their supposed connections with the Fleischmanns. Mr. Wade, in hushed tones, advised me to prepare for some little stringency after the holidays.

“Nothing serious, you know, Mr. Borlish,” said he, still paying his mnemonic tribute to the other names of our syndicate; “nothing to be spoken of as hard times; and as for panic, the financial world is too well organized for *that* ever to happen again! But a little tightening of things, Mr. Cornings, to sort of clear the decks for action on lines of conservatism for the year’s business.”

I talked with Mr. Smith, Mr. Pendleton’s private secretary, and with Mr. Carson, who spoke for Mr. Halliday. In fact I went over the L. & G. W. proposition pretty fully with each of them, and each office had a well-digested and succinct statement of the matter for the examination of the magnates when they came back. Once while Mr. Carson and I were on our way to take luncheon together, we met Mr. Smith, and I was glad to note the glance of marked interest which he bestowed upon us. The meeting was a piece of unexpected good fortune.

On the 10th I had my audience with Mr. Pendleton. He had the typewritten statement of the proposition before him, and was ready to discuss it with his usual incisiveness.

“I am willing to say to you, Mr. Barslow,” said he, “that we are willing to take over your line when the propitious time comes. We don’t think that now is such a time. Why not run along as we are?”

“Because we are not satisfied with the railroad business as a side line, Mr. Pendleton,” said I. “We must have more mileage or none at all, and if we begin extensions, we shall be drawn into railroading as an exclusive vocation. We

prefer to close out that department, and to put in all our energies to the development of our city."

"When must you know about this?" he asked.

"I came East to close it up, if possible," I answered. "You are familiar with the situation, and we thought must be ready to decide."

"Two and a quarter millions," he objected, "is out of the question. I can't expect my directors to view half the price with any favor. How can I?"

"Show them our earnings," I suggested.

"Yes," said he, "that will do very well to talk to people who can be made to forget the fact that you've been building a city there from a country village, and your line has been pulling in everything to build it with. The next five years will be different. Again, while I feel sure the business men of your town will still throw things our way, as they have your way—tonnage I mean—there might be a tendency to divide it up more than when your own people were working for the trade. And the next five years will be different anyhow."

"Do you remember," said I, "how skeptical you were as to the past five?"

"I acknowledge it," said he, laughing. "The fact is I didn't give you credit for being as big men as you are. But even a big man, or a big town, can reach only as high as it can. But we can't settle that question. I shouldn't expect a Lattimore boomer ever to adopt my view of it. I shall give this matter some attention to-day, and while I feel sure we are too far apart ever to come together, come in in the morning, and we will look at it again."

"I hope we may come together," said I, rising; "we built the line to bring you into Lattimore, and we want to keep you there. It has made our town, and we prize the connection highly."

"Ah, yes," he answered, countering. "Well, we are spread out a good deal now, you know; and some of our directors look with suspicion upon your sudden growth, and would not feel sorry to withdraw. I don't agree with 'em, you know, but I must defer to others sometimes. Good-morning."

I passed the evening with Carson at the theatre, and supped with him afterward. He gave me every opportunity to indulge in champagne, and evinced a desire to know all about business conditions in Lattimore, and the affairs of the L. & G. W. I suspected that the former fact had some connection with the latter. I went to my hotel, however, in my usual state of ebriety, while Mr. Carson had attained a

degree of friendliness toward me bordering on affection, as a direct result of setting the pace in the consumption of wine. I listened patiently to his complaints of Halliday's ungratefulness toward him in not giving him the General Managership of one of the associated roads; but when he began to confide to me the various pathological conditions of his family, including Mrs. Carson, I drew the line, and broke up the party. I retired, feeling a little resentful toward Carson. His device seemed rather cheap to try on a full-grown man. Yet his entertainment had been undeniably good.

Next morning I was admitted to the presence of the great man with less than half an hour's delay. He turned to me, and plunged at once into the midst of the subject. Evidently some old misunderstanding of the question came up in his mind by association of ideas, as a rejected paper will be drawn with its related files from a pigeon-hole.

"That terminal charge," said he, "has not counted for much against the success of your road, yet; but the contract provides for increasing rentals, and it is already too much. The trackage and depots aren't worth it. It will be a millstone about your necks!"

"Well," said I, "you can understand the reason for making the rentals high. We had to show revenue for the Belt Line system in order to float the bonds, but the rentals become of no consequence when once you own both properties—and that's our proposal to you."

"Oh, yes!" said he, and at once changed the subject.

This was the only instance, in all my observation of him, in which he forgot anything, or failed correctly to see the very core of the situation. I felt somehow elated at being for a moment his superior in any respect.

We began discussing rates and tonnage, and he sent for his freight expert again. I took from my pocket some letters and telegrams and made computations on the backs of them. Some of these figures he wanted to keep for further reference.

"Please let me have those figures until this afternoon," said he. "I must ask you to excuse me now. At two I'll give the matter another half-hour. Come back, Mr. Barslow, prepared to name a reasonable sum, and I will accept or reject, and finish the matter."

I left the envelopes on his desk and went out. At the hotel I sat down to think out my program and began arranging things for my departure. Was it the 11th or the 12th that Mr. Halliday was to return? I would look at his message. I turned over

all my telegrams, but it was gone.

Then I thought. That was the telegram I had left with Pendleton! Would he suspect that I had left it as a trick, and resent the act? No, this was scarcely likely, for he himself had asked for it. Suddenly the construction of which it was susceptible flashed into my mind. “With slight modifications contract submitted as to L. & G. W. and Belt Line matter will be executed. Halliday.”

I was feverish until two o’clock; for I could not guess the effect of this telegram, should it be read by Pendleton. I found him impassive and keen-eyed, and I waited longer than usual for that aquiline swoop of his, as he turned in his revolving chair. I felt sure then that he had not read the message. I think differently now.

“Well, Mr. Barslow,” said he smilingly, “how far down in the millions are we to-day?”

“Mr. Pendleton,” I replied, steady as to tone, but with a quiver in my legs, “I can say nothing less than an even two millions.”

“It’s too much,” said he cheerfully, and my heart sank, “but I like Lattimore, and you men who live there, and I want to stay in the town. I’ll have the legal department prepare a contract covering the whole matter of transfers and future relations, and providing for the price you mention. You can submit it to your people, and in a short time I shall be in Chicago, and, if convenient to you, we can meet there and close the transaction. As a matter of form, I shall submit it to our directors; but you may consider it settled, I think.”

“One of our number,” said I, as calmly as if a two-million-dollar transaction were common at Lattimore, “can meet you in Chicago at any time. When will this contract be drawn?”

“Call to-morrow morning—say at ten. Show them in,” this last to his clerk, “Good-morning, Mr. Barslow.”

One doesn’t get as hilarious over a victory won alone as when he goes over the ramparts touching elbows with his charging fellows. The hurrah is a collective interjection. So I went in a sober frame of mind and telegraphed Jim and Alice of my success, cautioning my wife to say nothing about it. Then I wandered about New York, contrasting my way of rejoicing with the demonstration when we three had financed the Lattimore & Great Western bonds. I went to a vaudeville show and afterward walked miles and miles through the mysteries of the night in that wilderness. I was unutterably alone. The strain of my solitary mission in the

great city was telling upon me.

“Telegram for you, Mr. Barslow,” said the night clerk, as I applied for my key.

It was a long message from Jim, and in cipher. I slowly deciphered it, my initial anxiety growing, as I progressed, to an agony.

“Come home at once,” it read. “Cornish deserting. Must take care of the hound’s interest somehow. Threatens litigation. A hold-up, but he has the drop. Am in doubt whether to shoot him now or later. Stop at Chicago, and bring Harper. Bring him, understand? Unless Pendleton deal is made, this means worse things than we ever dreamed of; but don’t wait. Leave Pendleton for later, and come home. If I follow my inclinations, you will find me in jail for murder. Elkins.”

All night I sat, turning this over in my mind. Was it ruin, or would my success here carry us through? Without a moment’s sleep I ate my breakfast, braced myself with coffee, engaged a berth for the return journey, and promptly presented myself at Pendleton’s office at ten. Wearily we went over the precious contract, and I took my copy and left.

All that day I rode in a sort of trance, in which I could see before my eyes the forms of the hosts of those whom Jim had called “the captives below decks,” whose fortunes were dependent upon whether we striving, foolish, scheming, passionate men went to the wall. A hundred times I read in Jim’s telegram the acuteness of our crisis; and a sense of our danger swept dauntingly over my spirit. A hundred times I wished that I might awake and find that the whole thing —Aladdin and his ring, the palaces, gnomes, genies, and all—could pass away like a tale that is told, and leave me back in the rusty little town where it found me.

I slept heavily that night, and was very much much more myself when I went to see Harper in Chicago. He had received a message from Jim, and was ready to go. He also had one for me, sent in his care, and just arrived.

“You have saved the fight,” said the message; “your success came just as they were counting nine on us. With what you have done we can beat the game yet. Bring Harper, and come on.”

Harper, cool and collected, big and blonde, with a hail-fellow-well-met manner which spoke eloquently of the West, was a great comfort to me. He made light of the trouble.

“Cornish is no fool,” said he, “and he isn’t going to saw off the limb he stands on.”

I tried to take this view of it; but I knew, as he did not, the real source of the enmity between Elkins and Cornish, and my fears returned. Business differences might be smoothed over; but with two such men, the quarrel of rivals in love meant nothing but the end of things between them.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The “Dutchman’s Mill” and What It Ground.

We sat in conclave about the table. I saw by the lined faces of Elkins and Hinckley that I had come back to a closely-beleaguered camp, where heavy watching had robbed the couch of sleep, and care pressed down the spirit. I had returned successful, but not to receive a triumph: rather, Harper and myself constituted a relief force, thrown in by stratagem, too weak to raise the siege, but bearing glad tidings of strong succor on the way.

It was our first full meeting without Cornish; and Harper sat in his place. He was unruffled and buoyant in manner, in spite of the stock in the Grain Belt Trust Company which he held, and the loans placed with his insurance company by Mr. Hinckley.

“I believe,” said he, “that we are here to consider a communication from Mr. Cornish. It seems that we ought to hear the letter.”

“I’ll read it in a minute,” said Jim, “but first let me say that this grows out of a talk between Mr. Cornish and myself. Hinckley and Barslow know that there have been differences between us here for some time.”

“Quite natural,” said Harper; “according to all the experience-tables, you ought to have had a fight somewhere in the crowd long before this.”

“Mr. Cornish,” went on Mr. Elkins, “has favored the policy of converting our holdings into cash, and letting the obligations we have floated stand solely on the assets by which they are secured. The rest of us have foreseen such rapid liquidation, as a certain result of such a policy, that not only would our town receive a blow from which it could never recover, but the investment world

would suffer in the collapse."

"I should say so," said Harper; "we'll have to look closely to the suicide clause in our policies held in New England, if that takes place!"

"Well," said Jim, continuing, "last Tuesday the matter came to an issue between us, and some plain talk was indulged in; perhaps the language was a little strong on my part, and Mr. Cornish considered himself aggrieved, and said, among other things, that he, for one, would not submit to extinguishment, and he would show me that I could not go on in opposition to his wishes."

"What did you say to that?" asked Hinckley.

"I informed him," said Jim, "that I was from Missouri, or words to that effect; and that my own impression was, the majority of the stock in our concerns would control. My present view is that he's showing me."

A ghost of a smile went round at this, and Jim began reading Cornish's letter.

"Events of the recent past convince me," the secessionist had written, "that no good can come from the further continuance of our syndicate. I therefore propose to sell all my interest in our various properties to the other members, and to retire. Should you care to consider such a thing, I am prepared to make you an alternative offer, to buy your interests. As the purchase of three shares by one is a heavier load than the taking over of one share by three, I should expect to buy at a lower proportional price than I should be willing to sell for. As the management of our enterprises seems to have abandoned the tried principles of business, for some considerations the precise nature of which I am not acute enough to discern, and as a sale to me would balk the very benevolent purposes recently avowed by you, I assume that I shall not be called upon to make an offer.

"There is at least one person among those to whom this is addressed who knows that in beginning our operations in Lattimore it was understood that we should so manage affairs as to promote and take advantage of a bulge in values, and then pull out with a profit. Just what may be his policy when this reaches him I cannot, after my experience with his ability as a lightning change artist, venture to predict; but my last information leads me to believe that he is championing the utopian plan of running the business, not only past the bulge, but into the slump. I, for one, will not permit my fortune to be jeopardized by so palpable a piece of perfidy.

"I may be allowed to add that I am prepared to take such measures as may seem

to my legal advisers best to protect my interests. I am assured that the funds of one corporation will not be permitted by the courts to be donated to the bolstering up of another, over the protest of a minority stockholder. You may confidently assume that this advice will be tested to the utmost before the acts now threatened are permitted to be actually done.

“I attach hereto a schedule of our holdings, with the amount of my interest in each, and the price I will take. I trust that I may have an answer to this at your earliest convenience. I beg to add that any great delay in answering will be taken by me as a refusal on your part to do anything, and I shall act accordingly.

“Very respectfully,
“J. Bedford Cornish.”

“Huh!” ejaculated Harper, “would he do it, d’ye think?”

“He’s a very resolute man,” said Hinckley.

“He calculates,” said Jim, “that if he begins operations, he can have receiverships and things of that kind in his interest, and in that way swipe the salvage. On the other hand, he must know that his loss would be proportioned to ours, and would be great. He’s sore, and that counts for something. I figure that the chances are seven out of ten that he’ll do it—and that’s too strong a game for us to go up against.”

“What would be the worst that could happen if he began proceedings?” said I.

“The worst,” answered Jim laconically. “I don’t say, you know,” he went on after a pause, “that Cornish hasn’t some reason for his position. From a cur’s standpoint he’s entirely right. We didn’t anticipate the big way in which things have worked out here, nor how deep our roots would strike; and we did intend to cash in when the wave came. And a cur can’t understand our position in the light of these developments. He can’t see that in view of the number of people sucked down with her when a great ship like ours sinks, nobody but a murderer would needlessly see her wrecked. What he proposes is to scuttle her. Sell to him! I’d as soon sell Vassar College to Brigham Young!”

This tragic humorousness had the double effect of showing us the dilemma, and taking the edge off the horror of it.

“If it were my case,” said Harper, “I’d call him. I don’t believe he’ll smash things; but you fellows know each other best, and I’m here to give what aid and comfort I can, and not to direct. I accept your judgment as to the danger. Now let’s do business. I’ve got to get back to Chicago by the next train, and I want to

go feeling that my stock in the Grain Belt Trust Company is an asset and not a liability. Let’s do business.”

“As for going back on the next train,” said Mr. Elkins, “you’ve got another guess coming: this one was wrong. As for doing business, the first thing in my opinion is to examine the items of this bill of larceny, and see about scaling them down.”

“We might be able,” said I, “to turn over properties instead of cash, for some of it.”

Elkins appointed Harper and Hinckley to do the negotiating with Cornish. It was clear, he said, that neither he nor I was the proper person to act. They soon went out on their mission and left me with Jim.

“Do you see what a snowfall we’ve had?” he asked. “It fell deeper and deeper, until I thought it would never stop. No such sleighing for years. And funny as it may seem, it was that that brought on this crisis. Josie and I went sleighing, and the hound was furious. Next time we met he started this business going.”

I was studying the schedule, and said nothing. After a while he began talking again, in a slow manner, as if the words came lagging behind a labored train of thought.

“Remember the mill the Dutchman had?... Ground salt, and nothing but salt ... Ours won’t grind anything but mortgages ... Well, the hair of the dog must cure the bite ... Fight fire with fire ... *Similia similibus curantur* ... We can’t trade horses, nor methods, in the middle of the ford.... The mill has got to go on grinding mortgages until we’re carried over; and Hinckley and the Grain Belt Trust must float ’em. Of course the infernal mill ground salt until it sent the whole shooting-match to the bottom of the sea; but you mustn’t be misled by analogies. The Dutchman hadn’t any good old Al to lose telegrams in an absent-minded way where they would do the most good, and sell railroads to old man Pendleton ... As for us, it’s the time-worn case of electing between the old sheep and the lamb. We’ll take the adult mutton, and go the whole hog ... And if we lose, the tail’ll have to go with the hide.... But we won’t lose, Al, we won’t lose. There isn’t treason enough in all the storehouses of hell to balk or defeat us. It’s a question of courage and resolution and confidence, and imparting all those feelings to every one else. There isn’t malice enough, even if it were a whole pack, instead of one lone hyena, to put out the fires in those furnaces over there, or stop the wheels in that flume, or make our streets grow grass. The things we’ve built are going to stay built, and the word of Lattimore will stand!”

“My hand on that!” said I.

There was little in the way of higgling: for Cornish proudly refused much to discuss matters; and when we found what we must pay to prevent the explosion, it sickened us. Jim strongly urged upon Harper the taking of Cornish's shares.

"No," said Harper, "the Frugality and Indemnity is too good a thing to drop; and I can't carry both. But if you can show me how, within a short time, you can pay it back, I'll find you the cash you lack."

We could not wait for the two millions from Pendleton; and the interim must be bridged over by any desperate means. We took, for the moment only, the funds advanced through Harper; and Cornish took his price.

The day after Harper went away we were busy all day long, drawing notes and mortgages. Every unincumbered piece of our property, the orts, dregs, and offcast of our operations, were made the subjects of transfers to the rag-tag and bobtail of Lattimore society. A lot worth little or nothing was conveyed to Tom, Dick, or Harry for a great nominal price, and a mortgage for from two-thirds to three-fourths of the sum given back by this straw-man purchaser. Our mill was grinding mortgages.

I do not expect that any one will say that this course was justified or justifiable; but, if anything can excuse it, the terrible difficulty of our position ought to be considered in mitigation, if not excuse. Pressed upon from without, and wounded by blows dealt in the dark from within; with dreadful failure threatening, and with brilliant success, and the averting of wide-spread calamity as the reward of only a little delay, we used the only expedient at hand, and fought the battle through. We were caught in the mighty swirl of a modern business maelstrom, and, with unreasoning reflexes, clutched at man or log indifferently, as we felt the waters rising over us; and broadcast all over the East were sown the slips of paper ground out by our mill, through the spout of the Grain Belt Trust Company; and wherever they fell they were seized upon by the banks, which had through years of experience learned to look upon our notes and bonds as good.

"Past the bulge," quoted Jim, "and into the slump! We'll see what the whelp says when he finds that, in spite of all his attempts to scuttle, there isn't going to be any slump!"

By which observation it will appear that, as our operations began to bring in returns in almost their old abundance, our courage rose. At the very last, some bank failures in New York, and a bad day on 'Change in Chicago, cut off the stream, and we had to ask Harper to carry over a part of the Frugality and

Indemnity loan until we could settle with Pendleton; but this was a small matter running into only five figures.

Perhaps it was because we saw only a part of the situation that our courage rose. We saw things at Lattimore with vivid clearness. But we failed to see that like centers of stress were sprinkled all over the map, from ocean to ocean; that in the mountains of the South were the Lattimores of iron, steel, coal, and the winter-resort boom; and in the central valleys were other Lattimores like ours; that among the peaks and canyons further west were the Lattimores of mines; that along the Pacific were the Lattimores of harbors and deep-water terminals; that every one of these Lattimores had in the East and in Europe its clientage of Barr-Smiths, Wickershams, and Dorrs, feeding the flames of the fever with other people's money; and that in every village and factory, town and city, where wealth had piled up, seeking investment, were the "captives below decks," who, in the complex machinery of this end-of-the-century life, were made or marred by the same influences which made or marred us.

The low area had swept across the seas, and now rested on us. The clouds were charged with the thunder and lightning of disaster. Almost any accidental disturbance might precipitate a crash. Had we known all this, as we now know it, the consciousness of the tragical race we were running to reach the harbor of a consummated sale to Pendleton might have paralyzed our efforts. Sometimes one may cross in the dark, on narrow footing, a chasm the abyss of which, if seen, would dizzily draw one down to destruction.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The Beginning of the End.

Court parties and court factions are always known to the populace, even down to the groom and scullions. So the defection of Cornish soon became a matter of gossip at bars, in stables, and especially about the desks of real-estate offices. Had it been a matter of armed internecine strife, the Elkins faction would have mustered an overwhelming majority; for Jim's bluff democratic ways, and his apparent identity of fibre with the mass of the people, would have made him a

popular idol, had he been a thousand times a railroad president.

While these rumors of a feud were floating about, Captain Tolliver went to Jim's office several times, dressed with great care, and sat in silence, and in stiff and formal dignity, for a matter of five minutes or so, and then retired, with the suggestion that if there was any way in which he could serve Mr. Elkins he should be happy.

"Do you know," said Jim to me, "that I'm afraid Hamlet's 'bugs and goblins' are troubling Tolliver; in other words, that he's getting bughouse?"

"No," said I; "while I haven't the slightest idea what ails him, you'll find that it's something quite natural for him when you get a full view of his case."

Finally, Jim, in thanking him for his proffered assistance, inquired diplomatically after the thing which weighed upon the Captain's mind.

"I may be mistaken, suh," said he, drawing himself up, and thrusting one hand into the tightly-buttoned breast of his black Prince Albert, "entiahly mistaken in the premises; but I have the impression that diffe'ences of a pussonal nature ah in existence between youahself and a gentleman whose name in this connection I prefuh to leave unmentioned. Such being the case, I assume that occasion may and naturally will arise foh the use of a friend, suh, who unde'stands the code—the code, suh—and is not without experience in affaiahs of honah. I recognize the fact that in cehtain exigencies nothing, by Gad, but pistols, ovah a measu'ed distance, meets the case. In such an event, suh, I shall be mo' than happy to suhve you; mo' than happy, by the Lord!"

"Captain," said Jim feelingly, "you're a good fellow and a true friend, and I promise you I shall have no other second."

"In that promise," replied the Captain gravely, "you confeh an honah, suh!"

After this it was thought wise to permit the papers to print the story of Cornish's retirement; otherwise the Captain might have fomented an insurrection.

"The reasons for this step on the part of Mr. Cornish are purely personal," said the *Herald*. "While retaining his feeling of interest in Lattimore, his desire to engage in certain broader fields of promotion and development in the tropics had made it seem to him necessary to lay down the work here which up to this time he has so well done. He will still remain a citizen of our city. On the other hand, while we shall not lose Mr. Cornish, we shall gain the active and powerful influence of Mr. Charles Harper, the president of the Frugality and Indemnity Life Insurance Company. It is thus that Lattimore rises constantly to higher

prosperity, and wields greater and greater power. The remarkable activity lately noted in the local real-estate market, especially in the sales of unconsidered trifles of land at high prices, is to be attributed to the strengthening of conditions by these steps in the ascent of the ladder of progress."

Cornish, however, was not without his partisans. Cecil Barr-Smith almost quarreled with Antonia because she struck Cornish off her books, Cecil insisting that he was an entirely decent chap. In this position Cecil was in accord with the clubmen of the younger sort, who had much in common with Cornish, and little with the overworked and busy railway president. Even Giddings, to me, seemed to remain unduly intimate with Cornish; but this did not affect the utterances of his paper, which still maintained what he called the policy of boost.

The behavior of Josie, however, was enigmatical. Cornish's attentions to her redoubled, while Jim seemed dropped out of the race—and therefore my wife's relations with Miss Trescott were subjected to a severe strain. Naturally, being a matron, and of the age of thirty-odd years, she put on some airs with her younger friend, still in the chrysalis of maidenhood. Sometimes, in a sweet sort of a way, she almost domineered over her. On this Elkins-Cornish matter, however, Josie held her at arms' length, and refused to make her position plain; and Alice nursed that simulated resentment which one dear friend sometimes feels toward another, because of a real or imagined breach of the obligations of reciprocity.

One night, as we sat about the grate in the Trescott library, some veiled insinuations on Alice's part caused a turning of the worm.

"If there is anything you want to say, Alice," said Josie, "there seems to be no good reason why you shouldn't speak out. I have asked your advice—yours and Albert's—frequently, having really no one else to trust; and therefore I am willing to hear your reproof, if you have it for me. What is it?"

"Oh, Josie," said I, seeking cover. "You are too sensitive. There isn't anything, is there, Alice?"

Here I scowled violently, and shook my head at my wife; but all to no effect.

"Yes, there is," said Alice. "We have a dear friend, the best in the world, and he has an enemy. The whole town is divided in allegiance between them, about nine on one side to one on the other—"

"Which proves nothing," said Josie.

"And now," Alice went on, "you, who have had every opportunity of seeing, and ought to know, that one of them is, in every look, and thought, and act, a *man*,

while the other is—"

"A friend of mine and of my mother's," said Josie; "please omit the character-sketch. And remember that I refuse even to consider these business differences. Each claims to be right; and I shall judge them by other things."

"Business differences, indeed!" scoffed Alice, albeit a little impressed by the girl's dignity. "As if you did not know what these differences came from! But it isn't because you remain neutral that we com—"

"*You* complain, Alice," said I; "I am distinctly out of this."

"That I complain, then," amended Alice reproachfully. "It is because you dismiss the *man* and keep the—other! You may say I have no right to be heard in this, but I'm going to complain Josie Trescott, just the same!"

This seemed to approach actual conflict, and I was frightened. Had it been two men, I should have thought nothing of it, but with women such differences cut deeper than with us. Josie stepped to her writing-desk and took from it a letter.

"We may as well clear this matter up," said she, "for it has stood between us for a long time. I think that Mr. Elkins will not feel that any confidences are violated by my showing you this—you who have been my dearest friends—"

She stopped for no reason, unless it was agitation.

"Are," said I, "I hope, not 'have been.'"

"Well," said she, "read the letter, and then tell me who has been 'dismissed.'"

I shrank from reading it; but Alice was determined to know all. It was dated the day before I left New York.

"Dear Josie," it read, "I have told you so many times that I love you that it is an old story to you; yet I must say it once more. Until that night when we brought your father home, I was never able to understand why you would never say definitely yes or no to me; but I felt that you could not be expected to understand my feeling that the best years of our lives were wasting—you are so much younger than I—and so I hoped on. Sometimes I feared that somebody else stood in the way, and do fear it now, but that alone would have been a much simpler thing, and of that I could not complain. But on that fearful night you said something which hurt me more than anything else could, because it was an accusation of which I could not clear myself in the court of my own conscience—except so far as to say that I never dreamed of doing your father anything but good. Surely, surely you must feel this!

“Since that time, however, you have been so kind to me that I have become sure that you see that terrible tragedy as I do, and acquit me of all blame, except that of blindly setting in motion the machinery which did the awful deed. This is enough for you to forgive, God knows; but I have thought lately that you had forgiven it. You have been very kind and good to me, and your presence and influence have made me look at things in a different way from that of years ago, and I am now doing things which ought to be credited to you, so far as they are good. As for the bad, I must bear the blame myself!”

Thus far Alice had read aloud.

“Don’t, don’t,” said Josie, hiding her face. “Don’t read it aloud, please!”

“But now I am writing, not to explain anything which has taken place, but to set me right as to the future. You gave me reason to think, when we met, that I might have my answer. Things which I cannot explain have occurred, which may turn out very evilly for me, and for any one connected with me. Therefore, until this state of things passes, I shall not see you. I write this, not that I think you will care much, but that you may not believe that I have changed in my feelings toward you. If my time ever comes, and I believe it will, and that before very long, you will find me harder to dispose of without an answer than I have been in the past. I shall claim you in spite of every foe that may rise up to keep you from me. You may change, but I shall not.

> “‘Love is not love
> Which alters when it alteration finds.’
>
> And mine will not alter. J. R. E.”

“My dear,” said Alice very humbly, “I beg your pardon. I have misjudged you. Will you forgive me?”

Josie came to take her letter, and, in lieu of other answer, stood with her arm about Alice’s waist.

“And now,” said Alice, “have you no other confidences for us?”

“No!” she cried, “no! there is nothing more! Nothing, absolutely nothing, believe me! But, now, confidence for confidence, Albert, what is this great danger? Is it anything for which any one here—for which I am to blame? Does it threaten any one else? Can’t something be done about it? Tell me, tell me!”

“I think,” said I, “that the letter was written before my telegram from New York came, and after—some great difficulties came upon us. I don’t believe he would

have written it five hours later; and I don't believe he would have written it to any one in anything but the depression of—the feeling he has for you."

"If that is true," said she, "why does he still avoid me? Why does he still avoid me? You have not told me all; or there is something you do not know."

As we went home, Alice kept referring to Jim's letter, and was as much troubled by it as was Josie.

"How do you explain it?" she asked.

"I explain it," said I, "by ranging it with the well-known phenomenon of the love-sick youth of all lands and in every time, who revels in the thought of incurring danger or death, and heralding the fact to his loved one. Even Jim is not exempt from the feelings of the boy who rejoices in delicious tears at the thought of being found cold and dead on the doorstep of the cruel maiden of his dreams. And that letter, with a slight substratum of fact, is the result. Don't bother about it for a moment."

This answer may not have been completely frank, or quite expressive of my views; but I was tired of the subject. It was hardly a time to play with mammets or to tilt with lips, and it seemed that the matter might wait. There was a good deal of the pettishness of nervousness among us at that time, and I had my full share of it. Insomnia was prevalent, and gray hairs increased and multiplied. The time was drawing near for our meeting with Pendleton in Chicago. We had advices that he was coming in from the West, on his return from a long journey of inspection, and would pass over his Pacific Division. We asked him to run down to Lattimore over our road, but Smith answered that the running schedule could not be altered.

There seemed to be no reason for doubting that the proposed contract would be ratified; for the last desperate rally on our part appeared to have put a crash out of the question, for some time at least. To him that hath shall be given; and so long as we were supposed to possess power, we felt that we were safe. Yet the blow dealt by Cornish had maimed us, no matter how well we hid our hurt; and we were all too keenly conscious of the law of the hunt, by which it is the wounded buffalo which is singled out and dragged down by the wolves.

On Wednesday Jim and I were to start for Chicago, where Mr. Pendleton would be found awaiting us. On Sunday the weather, which had been cold and snowy for weeks, changed; and it blew from the southeast, raw and chill, but thawy. All day Monday the warmth increased; and the farmers coming into town reported great ponds of water dammed up in the swales and hollows against the enormous

snow-drifts. Another warm day, and these waters would break through, and the streams would go free in freshets. Tuesday dawned without a trace of frost, and still the strong warm wind blew; but now it was from the east, and as I left the carriage to enter my office I was wet by a scattering fall of rain. In a few moments, as I dictated my morning's letters, my stenographer called attention to the beating on the window of a strong and persistent downpour.

Elkins, too much engrossed in his thoughts to be able to confine himself to the details of his business, came into my office, where, sometimes sitting and sometimes walking uneasily about, he seemed to get some sort of comfort from my presence. He watched the rain, as one seeing visions.

"By morning," said he, "there ought to be ducks in Alderson's pond. Can't we do our chores early and get into the blind before daylight, and lay for 'em?"

"I heard Canada geese honking overhead last night," said I.

"What time last night?"

"Two o'clock."

"Well, that lets us out on the Alderson's pond project," said he; "the boys who hunted there weren't out walking at two. In those days they slept. It can't be that we're the fellows.... Why, there's Antonia, coming in through the rain!"

"I wonder," said I, "if la grippe isn't taking a bad turn with her father."

She came in, shedding the rain from her mackintosh like a water-fowl, radiant with health and the air of outdoors.

"Gentlemen," said she gaily, "who but myself would come out in anything but a diving-suit to-day!"

"It's almost an even thing," said Jim, "between a calamity, which brings you, and good fortune, which keeps you away. I hope it's only your ordinary defiance of the elements."

"The fact is," said she, "that it's a very funny errand. But don't laugh at me if it's absurd, please. It's about Mr. Cornish."

"Yes!" said Jim, "what of him?"

"You know papa has been kept in by la grippe for a day or so," she went on, "and we haven't been allowing people to see him very much; but Mr. Cornish has been in two or three times, and every time when he went away papa was nervous and feverish. To-day, after he left, papa asked—" here she looked at Mr.

Elkins, as he stood gravely regarding her, and went on with redder cheeks—"asked me some questions, which led to a long talk between us, in which I found out that he has almost persuaded papa to—to change his business connections completely."

"Yes!" said Jim. "Change, how?"

"Why, that I didn't quite understand," said Antonia, "except that there was logwood and mahogany and Mexico in it, and—and that he had made papa feel very differently toward you. After what has taken place recently I knew that was wrong—you know papa is not as firm in his ideas as he used to be; and I felt that he—and you, were in danger, somehow. At first I was afraid of being laughed at—why, I'd rather you'd laugh at me than to look like *that*!"

"You're a good girl, Antonia," said Jim, "and have done the right thing, and a great favor to us. Thank you very much; and please excuse me a moment while I send a telegram. Please wait until I come back."

"No, I'm going, Albert," said she, when he was gone to his own office. "But first you ought to know that man told papa something—about me."

"How do you know about this?" said I.

"Papa asked me—if I had—any complaints to make—of Mr. Elkins's treatment of me! What do you suppose he dared to tell him?"

"What did you tell your father?" I asked.

"What could I tell him but 'No'?" she exclaimed. "And I just had a heart-to-heart talk with papa about Mr. Cornish and the way he has acted; and if his fever hadn't begun to run up so, I'd have got the rubber, or Peruvian-bark idea, or whatever it was, entirely out of his mind. Poor papa! It breaks my heart to see him changing so! And so I gave him a sleeping-capsule, and came down through this splendid rain; and now I'm going! But, mind, this last is a secret."

And so she went away.

"Where's Antonia?" asked Jim, returning.

"Gone," said I.

"I wanted to talk further about this matter."

"I don't like it, Jim. It means that the cruel war is not over."

"Wait until we pass Wednesday," said Jim, "and we'll wring his neck. What a poisonous devil, to try and wean from us, to his ruin, an old man in his dotage!

—I wish Antonia had stayed. I went out to set the boys wiring for news of washouts between here and Chicago. We mustn't miss that trip, if we have to start to-night. This rain will make trouble with the track.—No, I don't like it, either. Wasn't it thoughtful of Antonia to come down! We can line Hinckley up all right, now we know it; but if it had gone on—we can't stand a third solar-plexus blow...."

The sky darkened, until we had to turn on the lights, and the rain fell more and more heavily. Once or twice there were jarring rolls of distant thunder. To me there was something boding and ominous in the weather. The day wore on interminably in the quiet of a business office under such a sky. Elkins sent in a telegram which he had received that no trouble with water was looked for along our way to Chicago, which was by the Halliday line. As the dark day was lowering down to its darker close, I went into President Elkins's office to take him home with me. As I entered through my private door, I saw Giddings coming in through the outer entrance.

"Say," said he, "I wanted to see you two together. I know you have some business with Pendleton, and you've promised the boys a story for Thursday or Friday. Now, you've been a little sore on me because I haven't absolutely cut Cornish."

"Not at all," said Jim. "You must have a poor opinion of our intelligence."

"Well, you had no cause to feel that way," he went on, "because, as a newspaperman, I'm supposed to have few friends and no enemies. Besides, you can't tell what a man might sink to, deprived all at once of the friendship of three such men as you fellows!"

"Quite right," said I; "but get to the point."

"I'm getting to it," said he. "I violate no confidence when I say that Cornish has got it in for your crowd in great shape. The point is involved in that. I don't know what your little game is with old Pendleton, but whatever it is, Cornish thinks he can queer it, and at the same time reap some advantages from the old man, if he can have a few minutes' talk with Pen before you do. And he's going to do it, if he can. Now, I figure, with my usual correctness of ratiocination, that your scheme is going to be better for the town, and therefore for the *Herald*, than his, and hence this disclosure, which I freely admit has some of the ear-marks of bad form. Not that I blame Cornish, or am saying anything against him, you know. His course is ideally Iagoan: he stands in with Pendleton, benefits himself, and gets even with you all at one fell—"

“Stop this chatter!” cried Jim, flying at him and seizing him by the collar. “Tell me how you know this, and how much you know!”

“My God!” said Giddings, his lightness all departed, “is it as vital as that? He told me himself. Said it was something he wouldn’t put on paper and must tell Pendleton by word of mouth, and he’s on the train that just pulled out for Chicago.”

“He’ll beat us there by twelve hours,” said I, “and he can do all he threatens! Jim, we’re gone!”

Elkins leaped to the telephone and rang it furiously. There was the ring of command sounding through the clamor of desperate and dubious conflict in his voice.

“Give me the L. & G. W. dispatcher’s office, quick!” said he. “I can’t remember the number ... it’s 420, four, two, naught. Is this Agnew? This is Elkins talking. Listen! Without a moment’s delay, I want you to find out when President Pendleton’s special, east-bound on his Pacific Division, passes Elkins Junction. I’m at my office, and will wait for the information here.... Don’t let me wait long, please, understand? And, say! Call Solan to the ’phone.... Is this Solan? Mr. Solan, get out the best engine you’ve got in the yards, couple to it a caboose, and put on a crew to make a run to Elkins Junction, as quick as God’ll let you! Do you understand? Give me Schwartz and his fireman.... Yes, and Corcoran, too. Andy, this is a case of life and death—of life and death, do you understand? See that the line’s clear, and no stops. I’ve got to connect east at Elkins Junction with a special on that line.... *Got to*, d’ye see? Have the special wait at the State Street crossing until we come aboard!”

CHAPTER XXV.

That Last Weird Battle in the West.

There was still some remnant of daylight left when we stepped from a closed carriage at the State Street crossing and walked to the train prepared for us. The rain had all but ceased, and what there was came out of some northern quarter of the heavens mingled with stinging pellets of sleet, driven by a fierce gale. The turn of the storm had come, and I was wise enough in weather-lore to see that its rearguard was sweeping down upon us in all the bitterness of a winter's tempest.

Beyond the tracks I could see the murky water of Brushy Creek racing toward the river under the State Street bridge.

"I believe," said I, "that the surface-water from above is showing the flow from the flume."

"Yes," said Jim absently, "it must be about ready to break up. I hope we can get out of the valley before dark."

The engine stood ready, the superabundant power popping off in a deafening hiss. The fireman threw open the furnace-door and stoked the fire as we approached. Engineer Schwartz, the same who had pulled us over the road that first trip, was standing by his engine, talking with our old conductor, Corcoran.

"Here's a message for you, Mr. Elkins," said Corcoran, handing Jim a yellow paper, "from Agnew."

We read it by Corcoran's lantern, for it was getting dusky for the reading of telegraph operator's script.

"Water out over bottoms from Hinckley to the Hills," so went the message. "Flood coming down valley. Snow and drifting wind reported from Elkins Junction and Josephine. Look out for washouts, and culverts and bridges damaged by running ice and water. Pendleton special fully up to running schedule, at Willow Springs."

"Who've you got up there, Schwartz? Oh, is that you, Ole?" said Mr. Elkins. "Good! Boys, to-night our work has got to be done in time, or we might as well go to bed. It's a case of four aces or a four-flush, and no intermediate stations. Mr. Pendleton's special will pass the Junction right around nine—not ten

minutes either way. Get us there before that. If you can do it safely, all right; but get us there. And remember that the regular rule in railroading is reversed to-night, and we are ready to take any chance rather than miss—*any* chances, mind!”

“We’re ready and waiting, Mr. Elkins,” said Schwartz, “but you’ll have to get on, you know. Looks like there was time enough if we keep the wheels turning, but this snow and flood business may cut some figure. *Any* chances, I believe you said, sir. All right! Ready when you are, Jack.”

“All aboard!” sang out Corcoran, and with a commonplace ding-dong of the bell, and an every-day hiss of steam, which seemed, somehow, out of keeping with the fearful and unprecedented exigency now upon us, we moved out through the yards, jolting over the frogs, out upon the main line; and soon began to feel a cheering acceleration in the recurrent sounds and shocks of our flight, as Schwartz began rolling back the miles under his flying wheels.

We sat in silence on the oil-cloth cushions of the seats which ran along the sides of the caboose. Corcoran, the only person who shared the car with us, seemed to have some psychical consciousness of the peril which weighed down upon us, and moved quietly about the car, or sat in the cupola, as mute as we.

There was no need for speech between my friend and me. Our minds, strenuously awake, found a common conclusion in the very nature of the case. Both doubtless had considered and rejected the idea of telegraphing Pendleton to wait for us at the Junction. No king upon his throne was more absolute than Avery Pendleton, and to ask him to waste a single quarter-hour of his time might give great offense to him whom we desired to find serene and complaisant. Again, any apparent anxiety for haste, any symptom of an attempt to rush his line of defenses, would surely defeat its object. No, we must quietly and casually board his train, and secure the signing of the contract before we reached Chicago, if possible.

“You brought that paper, Al?” said Jim, as if my thoughts had been audible to him.

“Yes,” said I, “it’s here.”

“I think we’d better be on our way to St. Louis,” said he. “He can hardly refuse to oblige us by going through the form of signing, so as to let us turn south at the river.”

“Very well,” said I, “St. Louis—yes.”

Out past the old Trescott farm, now covered with factories, cottages, and railway tracks, leaving Lynhurst Park off to our left, curving with the turnings of Brushy Creek Valley, through which our engineers had found such easy grades, dropping the straggling suburbs of the city behind us, we flew along the rails in the waning twilight of this grewsome day. On the windward windows and the roof rattled fierce flights of sleet and showers of cinders from the engine. Occasionally we felt the car sway in the howling gusts of wind, as we passed some opening in the hills and neared the more level prairie. Stories of cars blown from the rails flitted through my mind; and in contemplating such an accident my thoughts busied themselves with the details of plans for getting free from the wrecked car, and pushing on with the engine, the derailing of which somehow never occurred to me.

“We’re slowing down!” cried Jim, after a half-hour’s run. “I wonder what’s the matter!”

“For God’s sake, look ahead!” yelled Corcoran, leaping down from the cupola and springing to the door. We followed him to the platform, and each of us ran down on the step and, swinging out by the hand-rail, peered ahead into the dusk, the sleet stinging our cheeks like shot.

We were running along the right bank of the stream, at a point where the valley narrowed down to perhaps sixty rods of bottom. At the first dim look before us we could see nothing unusual, except that the background of the scene looked somehow as if lifted by a mirage. Then I noticed that up the valley, instead of the ghostly suggestions of trees and hills which bounded the vista in other directions, there was an appearance like that seen on looking out to sea.

“The flood!” said Jim. “He’s not going to stop, is he Corcoran?”

At this moment came at once the explanation of Schwartz’s hesitation and the answer to Jim’s question. We saw, reaching clear across the narrow bottom, a great wave of water, coming down the valley like a liquid wall, stretching across the track and seeming to forbid our further progress, while it advanced deliberately upon us, as if to drown engine and crew. Driven on by the terrific gale, it boiled at its base, and curled forward at its foamy and wind-whipped crest, as if the upper waters were impatient of the slow speed of those below. Beyond the wave, the valley, from bluff to bluff, was a sea, rolling white-capped waves. Logs, planks, and the other flotsam of a freshet moved on in the van of the flood.

It looked like the end of our run. What engineer would dare to dash on at such

speed over a submerged track—possibly floated from its bed, possibly barricaded by driftwood? Was not the wave high enough to put out the fires and kill the engine? As we met the roaring eagre we felt the engine leap, as Schwartz's hesitation left him and he opened the throttle. Like knight tilting against knight, wave and engine met. There was a hissing as of the plunging of a great red-hot bar into a vat. A roaring sheet of water, thrown into the air by our momentum, washed cab and tender and car, as a billow pours over a laboring ship; and we stood on the steps, drenched to the skin, the water swirling about our ankles as we rushed forward. Then we heard the scream of triumph from the whistle, with which Schwartz cheered us as the dripping train ran on through shallower and shallower water, and turning, after a mile or so, began climbing, dry-shod, the grade which led from the flooded valley and out upon the uplands.

"Come in, Mr. Elkins," said Corcoran. "You'll both freeze out there, wet as you are."

Not until I heard this did I realize that we were still standing on the steps, our clothes congealing about us, peering through the now dense gloom ahead, as if for the apparition of some other grisly foe to daunt or drive us back.

We went in, and sat down by the roaring fire, in spite of which a chill pervaded the car. We were now running over the divide between the valley we had just left and that of Elk Fork. Up here on the highlands the wind more than ever roared and clutched at the corners of the car, and sometimes, as with the palm of a great hand, pressed us over, as if a giant were striving to overturn us. We could hear the engine struggling with the savage norther, like a runner breathing hard, as he nears exhaustion. Presently I noticed fine particles of snow, driven into the car at the crevices, falling on my hands and face, and striking the hot stove with little hissing explosions of steam.

"We're running into a blizzard up here," said Corcoran. "It's a terror outside."

"A terror; yes," said Jim. "What sort of time are we making?"

"Just about holding our own," said Corcoran. "Not much to spare. Got to stop at Barslow for water. But there won't be any bad track from there on. This snow won't cut any figure for three hours yet, and mebbe not at all, there's so little of it."

"Kittrick has been asking for an appropriation to rebuild the Elk Fork trestle," said Jim. "Will it stand this flood?"

"Well," said Corcoran, "if the water ain't too high, and the ice don't run too swift

in the Fork, it'll be all right. But if there's any such mixture of downpour and thaw as there was along the Creek back there, we may have to jump across a gap. It'll probably be all right."

I remembered the Elk Fork, and the trestle just on the hither side of the Junction. I remembered the valley, green with trees, and populous with herds, winding down to the lake, and the pretty little town of Josephine. I remembered that gala day when we christened it. I groaned in spirit, as I thought of finding the trestle gone, after our hundred-and-fifty-mile dash through storm and flood. Yet I believed it would be gone. The blows showered upon us had beaten down my courage. I felt no shrinking from either struggle or danger; but this was merely the impulse which impels the soldier to fight on in despair, and sell his life dearly. I believed that ruin fronted us all; that our great system of enterprises was going down; that, East and West, where we had been so much courted and admired, we should become a by-word and a hissing. The elements were struggling against us. That vengeful flood had snatched at us, and barely missed; the ruthless hurricane was holding us back; and somehow fate would yet find means to lay us low. I had all day kept thinking of the lines:

> "Nor ever yet had Arthur fought a fight
> Like this last dim, weird battle of the west.
> A death-white mist slept over land and sea:
> Whereof the chill, to him who breathed it, drew
> Down to his blood, till all his heat was cold
> With formless fear: and even on Arthur fell
> Confusion, since he saw not whom he fought."

And this, thought I, was the end of the undertaking upon which we had entered so lightly, with frolic jests of piracy and Spanish galleons and pieces-of-eight, and with all that mock-seriousness with which we discussed hypnotic suggestion and psychic force! The bitterness grew sickening, as Corcoran, hearing the long whistle of the engine, said that we were coming into Barslow. The tragic foolery of giving that name to any place!

Out upon the platform here, in the blinding whirl of snow. The night operator came out and talked to us of the news of the line, while the engine ran on to the tank for water. There was another telegram from Agnew, saying that the Pendleton special was on time, and that Mr. Kittrick was following us with another train "in case of need."

The operator was full of wild stories of the Brushy Creek flood, caused by the

thaw and the cloudburst. We cut him short in this narration, and asked him of the conditions along the Elk Fork.

“She’s up and boomin’,” said he. “The trestle was most all under water an hour ago, and they say the ice was runnin’ in blocks. You may find the track left without any underpinnin’. Look out for yourselves.”

“Al,” said Jim slowly, “can you fire an engine?”

“I guess so,” said I, seeing his meaning dimly. “Why?”

“Al,” said he, as if stating the conclusion of a complicated calculation, “we must run this train in alone!”

I saw his intent fully, and knew why he walked so resolutely up to the engine, now backed down to take us on again. Schwartz leaned out of his cab, a man of snow and ice. Ole stood with his shovel in his hand white and icy like his brother worker. Both had been drenched, as we had; but they had had no red-hot stove by which to sit; and buffeted by the blizzard and powdered by the snow, they had endured the benumbing cold of the hurricane-swept cab.

“Get down here, boys,” said Jim. “I want to talk with you.”

Ole leaped lightly down, followed by Schwartz, who hobbled laboriously, stiffened with cold. Youth and violent labor had kept the fireman warm.

“Schwartz,” said Jim, “there is a chance that we’ll find the trestle weakened and dangerous. We’ll stop and examine it if we have time, but if it is as close a thing as I think it will be, we propose to make a run for it and take chances. Barslow and I are the ones, and the only ones, who ought to do this, because we must make this connection. We can run the engine. You and Ole and Corcoran stay here. Mr. Kittrick will be along with another train in a few hours. Uncouple the caboose and we’ll run on.”

Schwartz blew his nose with great deliberation.

“Ole,” said he, “what d’ye think of the old man’s scheme?”

“Ay tank,” said Ole, “dat bane hellufa notion!”

“Come,” said Mr. Elkins, “we’re losing time! Uncouple at once!”

We started to mount the engine; but Schwartz and Ole were before us, barring the way.

“Wait,” said Schwartz. “Jest look at it, now. It’s quite a run yet; and the chances are you’d have the cylinder-heads knocked out before you’d got half way; and

then where’d you be with your connections?”

“Do you mean to say,” said Jim, “that there’s any likelihood of the engine’s dying on us between here and the Junction?”

“It’s a cinch!” said Schwartz.

“For God’s sake, then, let’s get on!” said Jim. “I believe you’re lying to me, Schwartz. But do this: As you come to the trestle, stop. From the approach we can see down the other track for ten miles. If Pendleton’s train is far enough off so as to give us time, we’ll see how the bridge is before we cross. If we’re pressed for time too much for this, promise me that you’ll stop and let us run the engine across alone.”

“I’ll think about it,” said Schwartz; “and if I conclude to, I will. It’s got to clear up, if we can see even the headlight on the other road very far. Ready, Jack?”

We wrung their hard and icy hands, leaped upon the train, and were away again, spinning down the grade toward the Elk Fork, and comforted by our speed. Jim and I climbed into the cupola and watched the track ahead, and the two homely heroes in the cab, as the light from the furnace blazed out upon them from time to time. Now we could see Schwartz stoking, to warm himself; now we could see him looking at his watch and peering anxiously out before him.

It was wearing on toward nine, and still our goal was miles away. Overhead the sky was clearing, and we could see the stars; but down on the ground the light, new snow still glided whitely along before the lessening wind. Once or twice we saw, or thought we saw, far ahead, lights, like those of a little prairie town. Was it the Junction? Yes, said Corcoran, when we called him to look; and now we saw that we were rising on the long approach to the trestle.

Would Schwartz stop, or would he run desperately across, as he had dashed through the flood? That was with him. His hand was on the lever, and we were helpless; but, if there was time, it would be mere foolhardiness to go upon the trestle at any but the slowest speed, and without giving all but one an opportunity to walk across. One, surely, was enough to go down with the engine, if it, indeed, went down.

“Don’t stay up there,” shouted Corcoran, “go out on the steps so you can jump for it if you have to!”

Out upon the platform we went in the biting wind, which still came fiercely on, sweeping over the waste of waters which covered the fields like a great lake. There was no sign of slowing down: right on, as if the road were rock-ballasted,

and thrice secure, the engine drove toward the trestle.

“She’s there, anyhow, I b’lieve,” said Corcoran, swinging out and looking ahead; “but I wouldn’t bet on how solid she is!”

“Can’t you stop him?” said Jim.

“Stop nothing!” said Corcoran. “Look over there!”

We looked, and saw a light gleaming mistily, but distinct and unmistakable, across the water on the other track. It was the Pendleton special! Not much further from the station than were we, the train of moving palaces to which we were fighting our way was gliding to the point beyond which it must not pass without us. There was now no more thought of stopping; rather our desires yearned forward over the course, agonizing for greater speed. I did not see that we were actually upon the trestle until for some rods we had been running with the inky water only a few feet below us; but when I saw it my hopes leaped up, as I calculated the proportion of the peril which was passed. A moment more, and the solid approach would be under our spinning wheels.

But the moment more was not to be given us! For, even as this joy rose in my breast, I felt a shock; I heard a confused sound of men’s cries, and the shattering of timbers; the caboose whirled over cornerwise, throwing up into the air the step on which I stood; the sounds of the train went out in sudden silence as engine and car plunged off into the stream; and I felt the cold water close over me as I fell into the rushing flood. I arose and struck out for the shore; then I thought of Jim. A few feet above me in the stream I saw something like a hand or foot flung up out of the water, and sucked down again. I turned as well as I could toward the spot, and collided with some object under the surface. I caught at it, felt the skirt of a garment in my hand, and knew it for a man. Then, I remember helping myself with a plank from some washed-out bridge, and soon felt the ground under my feet, all the time clinging to my man. I tried to lift him out, but could not; and I locked my hands under his arm-pits and, slowly stepping backwards, I half carried, half dragged him, seeking a place where I could lay him down. I saw the dark line of the railroad grade, and made wearily toward it. I walked blindly into the water of the ditch beside the track, and had scarcely strength to pull myself and my burden out upon the bank. Then I stopped and peered into his face, and saw uncertainly that it was Jim—with a dark spot in the edge of the hair on his forehead, from which black streaks kept stealing down as I wiped them off; and with one arm which twisted unnaturally, and with a grating sound as I moved it; and from whom there came no other

sound or movement whatever.

And over across the stream gleamed the lights of the Pendleton special as it sped away toward Chicago.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The End—and a Beginning.

As to our desperate run from Lattimore to the place where it came to an end in a junk-heap which had been once an engine, a car reduced to matchwood, a broken trestle, and a chaos of crushed hopes, and of the return to our homes thereafter, no further details need be set forth. The papers in Lattimore were filled with the story for a day or two, and I believe there were columns about it in the Associated Press reports. I doubt not that Mr. Pendleton and Mr. Cornish each read it in the morning papers, and that the latter explained it to the former in Chicago. From these reports the future biographer may glean, if he happens to come into being and to care about it, certain interesting facts about the people of this history. He will learn that Mr. Barslow, having (with truly Horatian swimming powers) rescued President Elkins from a watery grave, waited with his unconscious derelict in great danger from freezing, until they were both rescued a second time by a crew of hand-car men who were near the trestle on special work connected with the flood and its ravages. That President Elkins was terribly injured, having sustained a broken arm and a dangerous wound in the forehead. Moreover, he was threatened with pneumonia from his exposure. Should this disease really fasten itself upon him, his condition would be very critical indeed. That Mr. Barslow, the hero of the occasion, was uninjured. And I am ashamed to say that such student of history will find in an inconspicuous part of the same news-story, as if by reason of its lack of importance, the statement that O. Hegvold, fireman, and J. J. Corcoran, conductor of the wrecked train, escaped with slight injuries. And that Julius Schwartz, the engineer, living at 2714 May Street, and the oldest engineer on the L. & G. W., being benumbed by the cold, sank like a stone and was drowned. Poor Schwartz! Magnificent Schwartz! No captain ever went down, refusing to leave the bridge of his sinking

ship, with more heroism than he; who, clad in greasy overalls, and sapped of his strength by the icy hurricane, finding his homely duty inextricably entangled with death, calmly took them both, and went his way.

This mine for the historian will also disclose to him the fact that the rescued crew and passengers were brought home by a relief-train in charge of General Manager Kittrick, and that Mr. Elkins was taken directly to the home of Mr. Barslow, where he at once became subject to the jurisdiction of physicians and nurses and “could not be seen.” But as to the reasons for the insane dash in the dark the historian will look in vain. I am disposed now to think that our motives were entirely creditable; but for them we got no credit.

Much less than a nine days’ wonder, however, was this tragedy of the Elk Fork trestle, for other sensations came tumbling in an army upon its very heels. Times of war, great public calamities, and panic are the harvest seasons of the newspapers; and these were great days for the newspapers in Lattimore. Not that they learned or printed all the news. I received a telegram, for instance, the day after the accident, which merely entered up judgment on the verdict of the day before. It was a message from Mr. Pendleton in Chicago.

“In matter of Lattimore & Great Western,” this telegram read, “directors refuse to ratify contract. This sent to save you trip to Chicago.”

“No news in that,” said I to Mr. Hinckley; “I wonder that he bothered to send it.”

But, in the era of slug heads which set in about three days after, and while Jim was still helpless up at my house, it would have received recognition as news—although they did very well without it.

“Great Failure!” said the *Times*. “Grain Belt Trust Company Goes to the Wall! Business Circles Convulsed! Receiver Appointed at Suit of Charles Harper of Chicago! Followed by Assignment of Hinckley & Macdonald, Bankers! Western Portland Cement Company Assigns! Atlas Power Company Follows Suit! Reason, Money Tied up in Banks and Trust Company. Where will it Stop? A Veritable Black Friday!”

Thus the headlines. In the news report itself the *Times* remarked upon the intimate connection of Mr. Elkins and myself with all the failed concerns. The firm of Elkins & Barslow, being primarily a real-estate and insurance agency, would not assign. As to the condition of the business of James R. Elkins & Company, whose operations in bonds and debentures had been enormous, nothing could be learned on account of the critical illness of Mr. Elkins.

“It is not thought,” said the *Herald*, “that the failures will carry down any other concerns. The run on the First National Bank was one of those panicky symptoms which are dangerous because so unreasoning. It is to be hoped that it will not be renewed in the morning. The banks are not involved in the operations of the Grain Belt Trust Company, the failure of which, it must be admitted, is sure to cause serious disturbances, both locally and elsewhere, wherever its wide-spread operations have extended.”

The physical system adjusts itself to any permanent lesion in the body, and finally ceases even to send out its complaining messages of pain. So we in Lattimore, who a few weeks ago had been ready to sacrifice anything for the keeping of our good name; who by stealth justly foreclosed mortgages justly due, lest the world should wonder at their nonpayment; who so greatly had rejoiced in our own strength; who had felt that, surely, we who had wrought such wonders could not now fail:—even we numbly came to regard receiverships and assignments as quite the thing to be expected. The fact that, all over the country, panic, ruin, and business stagnation were spreading like a pestilence, from just such centers of contagion as Lattimore, made it easier for us. Surely, we felt, nobody could justly blame us for being in the path of a tempest which, like a tropic cyclone, ravaged a continent.

This may have been weak self-justification; but, even yet, when I think of the way we began, and how the wave of “prosperity” rose and rose, by acts in themselves, so far as we could see, in every way praiseworthy; how with us, and with people engaged in like operations everywhere, the most powerful passions of society came to aid our projects; how the winds from the unknown, the seismic throbbings of the earth, and the very stars in their courses fought for us; and when, at last, these mightinesses turned upon us the cold and evil eye of their displeasure, how the heaped-up sea came pouring over here, trickling through there, and seeping under yonder, until our great dike toppled over in baleful tumult, “and all the world was in the sea”; how business, east, west, north, and south, went paralyzed with fear and distrust, and old concerns went out like strings of soap-bubbles, and shocks of pain and disease went round the world, and everywhere there was that hellish and portentous thing known to the modern world only, and called a “commercial panic”: when I broadly consider these things, I am not vain enough seriously to blame myself.

These thoughts are more than ever in my mind to-day, as I look back over the decade of years which have elapsed since our Waterloo at the Elk Fork trestle. I look out from the same library in which I once felt a sense of guilt at the expense

of building it, and see the solid and prosperous town, almost as populous as we once saw it in our dreams. I am regarded locally as one of the creators of the city; but I know that this praise is as unmerited as was that blame of a dozen years ago. We rode on the crest of a wave, and we weltered in the trough of the sea; but we only seemed to create or control. I hold in my hand a letter from Jim, received yesterday, and eloquent of the changes which have taken place.

“I am sorry,” says he, “to be unable to come to your business men’s banquet. The building of a great auditorium in Lattimore is proof that we weren’t so insane, after all. I suppose that the ebb and flow of the tide of progress, which yearly gains upon the shore, is inevitable, as things are hooked up; but, after the ebb, it’s comforting to see your old predictions as to gain coming true, even if you do find yourself in the discard. It would be worth the trip only to see Captain Tolliver, and to hear him eliminate the *r*’s from his mother tongue. Give the dear old secesh my dearest love!

“But I can’t come, Al. I must be in Washington at that time on business of the greatest (presumptive) importance to the cattle interests of the buffalo-grass country. I could change my own dates; but my wife has arranged a tryst for a day certain with some specialists in her line in New York. She’s quite the queen of the cattle range—in New York: and, to be dead truthful, she comes pretty near it out here. It is rumored that even the sheepmen speak well of her.

“These Eastern trips are great things for her and the children. I’m riding the range so constantly, and get so much fun out of it, that I feel sort of undressed and embarrassed out of the saddle. In Washington I’m pointed out as a typical cowboy, the descendant of a Spanish vaquero and a trapper’s daughter. This helps me to represent my constituents in the sessions of the Third House, and to get Congressional attention to the ax I want ground. I am looked upon as in line for the presidency of the Amalgamated Association of American Ax-grinders.

“If we can make it, we’ll look in on you on our way back; but we don’t promise. With cattle scattered over two counties of buttes and canyons, we feel in a hurry when we get started home, after an absence sure to have been longer than we intended. Then, you know how I feel;—I wish the old town well, but I don’t enjoy *every* incident of my visits there.

“We expect to see the Cecil Barr-Smiths in New York. Cecil is the whole thing now with their companies—a sort of professional president in charge of the American properties; and Mrs. Cecil is as well known in some mighty good circles in London as she used to be in Lynhurst Park.

“I am glad to know that things are going toward the good with you. Personally, I never expect to be a seven-figure man again, and don’t care to be. I prefer to look after my few thousands of steers, laying on four hundred pounds each per year, far from the madding crowd. You know Riley’s man who said that the little town of Tailholt was good enough for him? Well, that expresses my view of the ‘J-Up-and-Down’ Ranch as a hermitage. It’ll do quite well. But these Eastern interests of Mrs. Jim are just now menacing to life in any hermitage. She has specifically stated on two or three occasions lately that this is no place to bring up a family. Think of a rough-rider like me in the wilds of New York! I can see plenty of ways of amusing myself down there, but not such peaceful ways as putting on my six-shooters and going out after timber wolves or mountain lions, or our local representative of the clan of the Hon. Maverick Brander. The future lowers dark with the multitudinous mouths of avenues of prosperity!”

This letter was a disappointment to Mr. Giddings. His special edition of the *Herald* commemorative of the opening of our Auditorium must now be deprived of its James R. Elkins feature, so far as his being the guest of honor goes. But there will be Jim’s photograph on the first page, and a half-tone reproduction of a picture of the wreck at the Elk Fork trestle.

“It is a matter of the deepest regret,” said the *Herald* this morning, “that Mr. Elkins cannot be with us on this auspicious occasion. He was the head of that most remarkable group of men who laid the foundations of Lattimore’s greatness. Only one of them, Mr. Barslow, still lives in Lattimore, where he has devoted his life, since the crash of many years ago, to the reorganization of the failed concerns, and especially the Grain Belt Trust Company, and to the salving of their properties in the interests of the creditors. His present prominence grows out of the signal skill and ability with which he has done this work; and he must prove a great factor in the city’s future development, as he has been in its past. Mr. Hinckley, the third member of the syndicate, now far advanced in years, is living happily with his daughter and her husband. The fourth, Mr. Cornish, resides in Paris, where he is well known as a daring and successful financial operator. He, of all the syndicate, retired from the Lattimore enterprises rich.

“There have been years when the names of these men were not held in the respect and esteem they deserve. The town was going backward. People who had been rich were, many of them, in absolute distress for the necessaries of life. And these men, in a vague sort of way, were blamed for it. Now, however, we can begin to see the wisdom of their plans and the vastness of the scope of their combinations. Nothing but the element of time was wanting, abundantly to

vindicate their judgment and sagacity. The industries they founded succeeded as soon as they were divorced from the real-estate speculation which unavoidably entered into their management at the outset. It is regrettable that their founders could not share in their success."

"Nothing but the element of time," said I to Captain Tolliver, who sat by me in the car as I read this editorial, "prevents the hot-air balloon from carrying its load over the Rockies."

"Nothing but luck," said the Captain, "evah could have beaten us. It was the Fleischmann failure, and it was nothing else. As to the great qualities of Mr. Elkins, suh, the editorial puts it too mild by fah. He was a Titan, suh, a Titan, and we shall not look upon his like again. This town at this moment is vegetating fo' the want of some fo'ceful Elkins to put life into it. The trilobites, as he so well dubbed them, ah in control again. What's this Auditorium we've built? A good thing fo' the city, cehtainly, a ve'y good thing: but see the difficulty, the humiliatin' difficulty we had, in gettin' togethah the paltry and trivial hundred and fifty thousand dolla's! Why in that elder day, in such a cause, we'd have called a meetin' in that old office of Elkins & Barslow's, and made it up out of ouah own funds in fifteen minutes. It's the so't of cattle we've got hyah as citizens that's handicappin' us; but in spite of this, suh, ouah unsuhpassed strategical position is winnin' fo' us. We ah just now on the eve of great developments, Barslow, great developments! All my holdin's ah withdrawn from mahket until fu'theh notice. Foh, as we ah so much behind the surroundin' country in growth, we must soon take a great leap fo'wahd. We ah past the boom stage, I thank God, and what we ah now goin' to get is a rathah brisk but entiahly healthy growth. A good, healthy growth, Barslow, and no boom!"

The disposition to moralize comes on with advancing middle age, and I could not help philosophizing on this perennial optimism of the Captain's. He had used these very words when, so long ago, we had begun our "cruise." The financial cycle was complete. The world had passed from hope to intoxication, from intoxication to panic, from panic to the depths, from this depression, ascending the long slope of gradual recovery, to the uplands of hope once more. Now, as twenty years ago, this feeling covered the whole world, was most pronounced in the newer and more progressive lands, and was voiced by Captain Tolliver, the grizzled swashbuckler of the land market. In it I recognized the ripple on the sands heralding the approach of another wave of speculation, which must roll shoreward in splendor and might, and, like its predecessors, must spend itself in thunderous ruin.

I often think of what General Lattimore was accustomed to say about these matters, and how Josie echoed his words as to the evil of fortunes coming to those who never earned them. Some time, I hope, we shall grow wise enough to—

I humbly beg your pardon, Madam, and thank you. That charming gesture of impatience was the one thing needful to admonish me that lectures are dull, and that the time has come to write *finis*. The rest of the story? Cornish—Jim—Josie—Antonia? Oh, this proneness of the business man to talk shop! Left to myself, I should have allowed their history to remain to the end of time, unresolved as to entanglements, and them unhealed as to bruises, bodily and sentimental. And, yet, those were the things which most filled our minds in the dark days after we missed connection with the Pendleton special.

In the first spasm of the crisis I was more concerned for Jim's safety than with the long-feared monetary cataclysm. *That* was upon us in such power as to make us helpless; but Jim, wounded and prostrated as he was, his very life in danger, was a concrete subject of anxiety and a comfortingly promising object of care.

"If we can keep this from assuming the character of true pneumonia," said Dr. Aylesbury, "there's no reason why he shouldn't recover."

He had been unconscious and then delirious from the time when he and I had been picked up there by the railroad-dump, until we were well on our way home on Kittrick's relief-train. At last he looked about him, and his eyes rested on Corcoran.

"Hello, Jack!" said he weakly; and as his glance took in Ole, he smiled and said: "A hellufa notion, you tank, do you? Ole, where's Schwartz?"

Ole twisted and squirmed, but found no words.

"We couldn't find Schwartz," said Kittrick. "He was so cold, he went right down with the cab."

"I see," said Jim. "It was bitter cold!"

He said no more. I wondered at this, and almost blamed him, even in his stricken state, for not feeling the peculiar poignancy of our regret for the loss of Schwartz. And then, his face being turned away, I peeped over to see if he slept, and saw where his tears had dropped silently on the piled-up cushions of his couch.

Mrs. Trescott came several times a day to inquire as to Mr. Elkins's welfare; but

Josie not at all. Antonia's carriage stopped often at the door; and somebody stood always at the telephone, answering the stream of questions. But when, on that third evening, it became known that the last "battle in the west" had gone against us, that all our great Round Table was dissolved, and that Jim's was a sinking and not a rising sun, public interest suddenly fell off. And the poor fellow whose word but yesterday might have stood against the world, now lay there fighting for very life, and few so poor to do him reverence. I had been so proud of his splendid and dominant strength that this, I think, was the thing that brought the bitterness of failure most keenly home to me. I could not feel satisfied with Josie. There were good reasons why she might have refused to choose between Jim and the man who had ruined him, while there was danger of her choice itself becoming the occasion of war between them. But that was over now, and Cornish was victorious. Gradually the fear grew upon me that we had rated Josie's womanhood higher than she herself held it, and that Cornish was to win her also. He had that magnetism which so attracted her as a girl, but that I had believed incapable of holding her as a woman. And now he had wealth, and Jim was poor, and the whole world stood with its back to us, and Josie held aloof. I was afraid he would speak of it, every time he tried to talk.

That night when the evening papers came out with all their plenitude of bad news (for we had pleased Watson by dying on the evening papers' time), it was a dark moment for us. Jim lay silent and unmoving, as if all his ebullient energy had gone forever. The physician omitted the dressing of his wound, because, he said, he feared the patient was not strong enough to bear it: and this, as well as the strange semi-stupor of the sufferer, frightened me. Jim had said little, and most of his words had been of the trivial things of the sick-room. Only once did he refer to the great affairs in which we had been for so long engrossed.

"What day is this?" he asked.

"Friday," said I, "the twenty-first."

"By this time," said he feebly, "we must be pretty well shot to rags."

"Never mind about that," said I, holding his hands in mine. "Never mind, Jim!"

"Some of those gophers," said he, after a while, "used to learn to ... rub their noses ... in the dirt ... and always stick their heads up—outside the snare!"

"Yes," said I, "I remember. Go to sleep, old man!"

I thought him delirious, and he knew and resented it; being evidently convinced that he had just made a wise remark. It touched me to hear him, even in his

extremity, return to those boyhood days when we trapped and hunted and fished together. He saw my pitying look.

"I'm all right," said he; but he said no more.

The nurse came in, and told me that Mrs. Barslow wished to see me in the library. I went down, and found Josie and Alice together.

"I got a letter from—from Mr. Cornish," said she, "telling me that he was returning from Chicago to-night, and was coming to see me. I ran over, because—and told mamma to say that I couldn't see him."

"See him by all means," said I with some bitterness. "You should make it a point to see him. Mr. Cornish is a success. He alone of us all has shown real greatness."

And it dawned upon me, as I said it, what Jim had meant by his reference to the gopher which learns to stick its head up "outside the snare."

"I want to ask you," said Josie, "is it all true—what was in the paper to-night about all of you, Mr. Hinckley and yourself, and—all of you having failed?"

"It is only a part of the truth," I replied. "We are ruined absolutely."

She said nothing by way of condolence, and uttered no expressions of regret or sympathy. She was apparently in a state of suppressed excitement, and started at sounds and movements.

"Is Mr. Elkins very ill?" said she at length.

"So ill," said Alice, "that unless he rallies soon, we shall look for the worst."

No more at this than at the other ill news did Josie express any regret or concern. She sat with her fingers clasped together, gazing before her at the fire in the grate, as if making some deep and abstruse calculation. But when the door-bell rang, she started and listened attentively, as the servant went to the door, and then returned to us.

"A gentleman, Mr. Cornish, to see Miss Trescott," said the maid. "And he says he must see her for a moment."

"Alice," said Josie, under her breath, "you go, please! Say to him that I cannot see him—now! Oh, why did he follow me here?"

"Josie," said Alice dramatically, "you don't mean to say that you are afraid of this man! Are you?"

“No, no!” said the girl doubtfully and distressfully; “but it’s so hard to say ‘No’ to him! If you only knew all, Alice, you wouldn’t blame me—and you’d go!”

“If you’re so far gone—under his influence,” said Alice, “that you can’t trust yourself to say ‘No,’ Josephine Trescott, go, in Heaven’s name, and say ‘Yes,’ and be the wife of a millionaire—and a traitor and scoundrel!”

As Alice said this she came perilously near the histrionic standard of the tragic stage. Josie rose, looked at her in surprise, in which there seemed to be some defiance, and walked steadily out to the parlor. I was glad to be out of the affair, and went back to Jim. I stood regarding my broken and forsaken friend, in watching whose uneasy sleep I forgot the crisis downstairs, when I was startled and angered by the slamming of the front door, and heard a carriage rattle furiously away down the street.

Soon I heard the rustle of skirts, and looked up, thinking to see my wife. But it was Josie. She came in, as if she were the regularly ordained nurse, and stepped to the bedside of the sleeping patient. The broken arm in its swathings lay partly uncovered; and across his wounded brow was stretched a broad bandage, below which his face showed pale and weary-looking, in the half-stupor of his deathlike slumber: for he had become strangely quiet. His uninjured arm lay inertly on the counterpane beside him.

She took his hand, and, seating herself on the bed, began softly stroking and patting the hand, gazing all the time in his face. He stirred, and, turning his eyes toward her, awoke.

“Don’t move, my darling,” said she quietly, and as if she had been for a long, long time quite in the habit of so speaking to him; “don’t move, or you’ll hurt your arm.” Then she bent down her head, lower and lower, until her cheek touched his.

“I’ve come to sit with you, Jim, dear,” said she, softly—“if you want me—if I can do you any good.”

“I want you, always,” said he.

She stooped again, and this time laid her lips lingeringly on his; and his arm stole about the slim waist.

“If you’ll just get well,” she whispered, “you may have me—always!”

He passed his fingers over her hair, and kissed her again and again. Then he looked at her long and earnestly.

“Where’s Al?” said he; “I want Al!”

I came forward promptly. I thought that this violation of the doctor’s regulation requiring rest and quiet had gone quite far enough.

“Al,” said he, still holding her hand, “do you remember out there by the windmill tower that night, and the petunias and four-o’clocks?”

“Yes, Jim, I remember,” said I. “But you mustn’t talk any more now.”

“No, I won’t,” said he, and went right on; “but even before that, and ever since, I haven’t wanted anything we’ve been trying so hard to get, half as much as I’ve wanted Josie; and now—we lost the fight, didn’t we? Things have been slipping away from us, haven’t they? Gone, aren’t they?”

“Go to sleep now, Jim,” said I. “Plenty of time for those things when you wake up.”

“Yes,” said he; “but before I do, I want you to tell me one thing, honest injun, hope to die, you know!”

“Yes,” said I; “what is it, Jim?”

“I’ve been seeing a lot of funny things in the dark corners about here; but this seems more real than any of them,” he went on; “and I want you to tell me—*is this really Josie*?”

“Really,” I assured him, “really, it is.”

“Oh, Jim, Jim!” she cried, “have you learned to doubt my reality, just because I’m kind! Why, I’m going to be good to you now, dearest, always, always! And kinder than you ever dreamed, Jim. And I’m going to show you that everything has not slipped away from you, my poor, poor boy; and that, whatever may come, I shall be with you always. Only get well; only get well!”

“Josie,” said he, smiling wanly, “you couldn’t kill me—now—not with an ax!”

THE END

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