

JOHN MARCH PART II

XX.

FANNIE SUGGESTS

"Don't look so gruesome." She laughed.

John walked stiffly, frowned, and tried to twist the down on his upper lip. When only fenced and gardened dwellings were about them she spoke again.

"John, I'm unhappy."

"You, Miss Fannie?"

"Yes. As I passed you, you were standing right where you fell five years ago. For three days I've been thinking how deep in debt to you I've been ever since, and—how I've disappointed you."

The youth made no answer. He felt as if he would give ten years of his life to kneel at her feet with his face in her hands and whisper, "Pay me a little love." She laid her arm on her cottage gate, turned her face away, and added,

"And now you're disappointing me."

"I've got a right to know how, Miss Fannie, haven't I?"

Fannie's averted face sank lower. Suddenly she looked fondly up to him and nodded. "Come, sit on the steps a minute"—she smiled—"and I'll pick you a rose."

She skipped away. As she was returning her father came out.

"Why, howdy, Johnnie—Fan, I reckon I'll go to the office."

"You promised me you wouldn't!"

"Well, I'm better since I took some quinine. How's y' father, Johnnie?"

"Sir? Oh, she's not very well. She craves acids, and—Oh!—Father? he's very—I ain't seen him in a right smart while, sir. He's been sort o' puny for——"

"Sorry," said the General, and was gone.

Fannie held the rose.

"Thank you," said John, looking from it to the kindness in her eye. But she caressed the flower and shook her head.

"It's got thorns," she said, significantly, as she sat down on a step.

"Yes, I understand. I'll take it so."

"I don't know. I'm afraid you'll not want it when"—she laid it to her lips—"when I tell you how you've disappointed me."

"Yes, I will. For—oh! Miss Fannie——"

"What, John?"

"You needn't tell me at all. I know it already. And I'm going to change it. You shan't be disappointed. I've learned an awful lot in these last three days—and these last three hours. I've done my last sentimentalizing. I—I'm sure I have. I'll be too good for it, or else too bad for it! I'll always love you, Miss Fannie, even when you're not—Miss Fannie any more; but I'll never come using round you and bothering you with my—feelings." He jerked out his handkerchief, but wiped only his cap—with slow care.

"As to that, John, I shouldn't blame you if you should hate me."

"I can't, Miss Fannie. I've not done hating, I'm afraid, but I couldn't hate you—ever. You can't conceive how sweet and good you seem to anyone as wicked as I've been—and still am."

"You don't know what I mean, John."

"Yes, I do. But you didn't know how bad you were f-fooling me. And even if you had of—it must be mighty hard for some young ladies not to—to——"

"Flirt," said Fannie, looking down on her rose. "I reckon those who do it find it the easiest and prettiest wickedness in the world, don't they?"

"Oh, I don't know! All my wickedness is ugly and hard. But I'm glad you expected enough of me to be disappointed."

"Yes, I did. Why, John, you never in your life offered me a sign of regard but I felt it an honor. You've often tripped and stumbled, but I—oh, I'm too bad myself to like a perfect boy. What I like is a boy with a conscience."

"My guiding star!" murmured John.

"Oh! ridiculous!—No, I take that back! But—but—why, that's what disappoints me! If you'd made me just your first mile-board. But it hurts me—oh, it hurts me!"

and—far worse—it's hurting Cousin Rose Garnet! to—now, don't flush up that way—to see John March living by passion and not by principle!"

"H—oh! Miss Fannie!" He strained up a superior smile. "Is passion—are passions bound to be ignoble? But you're making the usual mistake——"

"How, John?" She put on a condescending patience.

"Why, in fancying you women can guide a man by——"

"Preaching?" the girl interrupted. Her face had changed. "I know we can't," she added, abstractedly. John was trying to push his advantage.

"Passion!" he exclaimed. "Passion? Miss Fannie, you look at life with a woman's view! We men—what are we without passion—all the passions? Furnaces without fire! Ships without sails!"

"True! John. And just as true for women. But without principles we're ships without rudders. Passion ought to fill our sails, yes; but if principles don't steer we're lost!"

"Now, are you not making yourself my guiding star?"

"No! I won't have the awful responsibility! I'm nothing but a misguided girl. Guiding star! Oh, fancy calling me that when your dear old——"

"Do—o—on't!"

"Then take it back and be a guiding star yourself! See here! D'you remember the day at the tournament when you were my knight? John March, can you believe it? I! me! this girl! Fannie Halliday! member of the choir! I prayed for you that day. I did, for a fact! I prayed you might come to be one of the few who are the knights of all mankind; and here you—John, if I had a thousand gold dollars I'd rather lose them in the sea than have you do what you're this day——"

"Miss Fannie, stop; I'm not doing it. It's not going to be done. But oh! if you knew what spurred me on—I can't expl——"

"You needn't. I've known all about it for years! I got it from the girls who put you to bed that night. But no one else knows it and they'll never tell. John," Fannie pushed her gaiter's tip with her parasol, "guess who was here all last evening, smoking the pipe of peace with pop."

"Jeff-Jack?"

"I mean besides him. Brother Garnet! John, what is that man mostly, fox or goose?"

"Oh, now, Miss Fannie, you're unjust! You're—you're partisan!"

"Hmm! That's what pop called me. He says Major Garnet means well, only he's a moss-back. Sakes alive! That's worse than fox and goose in one!" Her eyes danced merrily. "Why, that man's still in the siege of Vicksburg, feeding Rosemont and Suez with its mule meat, John."

"Miss Fannie, it's my benefactor you're speaking of."

"Aw! your grandmother! Look here. Why'd he bring Mr. Ravenel here—for Mr. Ravenel didn't bring him—to pow-wow with pop? Of course he had some purpose—some plan. It's only you that's all sympathies—no plans."

"Why, it's not an hour," cried John, rising, "since Jeff-Jack told me he wasn't a man of plans, other men's plans were good enough for him!"

Fannie's mouth opened and her eyes widened with merriment. "Oh—oh—mm—mm—mm." She looked up at the sky and then sidewise at the youth. "Sit down, sit down; you need the rest! Oh!" She rounded her mouth and laughed.

"Now, see here, John March, you've no right to make me behave so. Listen! I have a sneaking notion that, with some reference to your mountain lands, Brother Garnet—whom, I declare, John, I wouldn't speak to if it wasn't for Cousin Rose—has for years built you into his plans, including those he brought here last night. In a few days you'll at last be through Rosemont; but I believe he'd be glad to see you live for years yet on loves, hates, and borrowed money. Oh! for your father's sake, don't please that man that way! Why can't you plan? Why don't you guide? You plan fast enough when passion controls you; plan with your passions under your control. Build men—*build him*—into your plans. Why, John, owning as much of God's earth as you do, you're honor bound to plan."

"I know it, Miss Fannie. I've been feeling it a long time; now I see it." He started to catch up the rose she had dropped, but the laugh was hers; her foot was on it.

"You—don't you dare, sir! John, there's my foot's sermon. D'you see? Everybody should put his own rose and thorn, both alike, under his own foot. Shod or unshod, sir, we all have to do it. Now, why can't you bring Mr. Ravenel to see pop with a plan of your own? I believe—of course I don't know, but I suspect—Brother Garnet has left something out of his plan that you can take into yours and make yours win. Would you like to see it?" She patted her lips with her parasol handle and smiled bewitchingly.

"Would I—what do you mean, Miss Fannie?"

"Why, I've got it here in the house. It's a secret, but"—lips and parasol again, eyes wickeder than ever—"it's something that you can see and touch. Promise you'll never tell, never-never-never?"

He promised.

"Wait here." She ran into the house, trolling a song. As John sat listening for her return, the thought came abruptly, "Hasn't Jeff-Jack got something to do with this?" But there was scarcely time to resent it when she reopened the door coyly, beckoned him in, passed out, and closed it; and, watchworn, wasted, more dead than alive, there stood before John the thing Garnet was omitting—Cornelius Leggett.

When John passed out again Fannie saw purpose in his face and smiled.

"Well?—Can you build him in?—into your plans?"

The youth stared unintelligently. She laughed at him.

"My stars! you forgot to try!"

It was late at night when Lazarus Graves and Captain Champion, returning from Pulaski City, where they had been hurrying matters into shape for the prosecution of Leggett, rode down the Susie and Pussie Pike toward Suez. Where the Widewood road forked off into the forest on their left they stopped, having unexpectedly come upon a third rider bound the other way. He seemed quite alone and stood by his horse in deep shade, tightening the girth and readjusting blanket and saddle. Champion laughed and predicted his own fate after death.

"Turn that freckled face o' yo's around here, Johnnie March; we ain't Garnet and Pettigrew, an' th' ain't nothin' the matteh with that saddle."

"Howdy, Cap'm," said John, as if too busy to look up.

"Howdy yo'seff! What new devilment you up to now? None? Oh, then we didn't see nobody slide off fum behine that saddle an' slip into the bushes. Who was it, John? Was it Johanna, so-called?"

"No, it was Leggett," said John.

"Oh, I reckon!" laughed the Captain.

"Come on," grumbled Graves, and they left him.

XXI.

MR. LEGGETT'S CHICKEN-PIE POLICY

THE youth whistled his charge out of the brush and moved on, sometimes in the saddle with the mulatto mounted behind, sometimes, where the way was steep, walking beside the tired horse. When both rode he had to bear a continual stream of tobacco-scented whisperings poured into his ear.

"Mr. March, that crowd wouldn't do me this a-way if they knowed the patri'tisms I feels to 'em. You see, it's they financialities incur the late rise in Clairwateh County scrip. Yass, seh; which I catch the fo'cas' o' they intentions in time to be infested in a good passle of it myseff."

"So that now your school funds are all straight again?"

"Ezac'ly! all straight an' comp'ehensive. An' what shell we say then? Shell we commit sin that grace may aboun'? Supposin' I has been too trancadillious; I say jis' *supposin'* I may have evince a rather too wifely pretendencies; what does they care fo' that? No, seh, all they wants is to git shet o' me."

"And do you think they're wrong?"

"Mr. March, I does! Thass right where they misses it. Why, they *needs* me, seh! I got a new policy, Mr. March. I 'llowed to espound it las' week on the flo' of the house, same day the guvneh veto that bill we pass; yass, seh. The guvneh's too much like Gyarnit; he's faw the whole hawg or none. Thass not my way; my visions is mo' perspectral an' mo' clairer. Seh? Wha'd you say?"

"Oh, nothing," laughed John. "Only a shudder of disgust."

"Yass, seh. Well, it is disgusting ev'm to me. You see, I discerns all these here New Dixie projeckin'. I behole how they all a-makin' they sun'ry chicken-pies, which notinstanin' they all diff'ent, yit they all alike, faw they all turnovers! Yass, seh, they all spreads hafe acrost the dish an' then tu'n back. I has been entitle Slick an' Slippery Leggett—an' yit what has I always espress myseff? Gen'lemen, they must be sufficiend plenty o' chicken-pie to go round. An', Mr. March, if she don't *be* round, she won't *go* round. 'Tis true the scripeter say, To them what hath shell be givened, an' to them what hath not shell be takened away that which seem like they hath; but the scripeter's one thing an' chicken-pie's anotheh."

"Listen," whispered John, stopping the horse; and when Mr. Leggett would have begun again—"Oh, do shut your everlasting——"

"P-he-he-he-he!" tittered the mulatto under his breath. John started again and Leggett resumed.

"Whew! I'm that thusty! Ain't you got no sawt o' pain-killeh about yo' clo'es? Aw! Mr. March, mos' sholy you is got some. No gen'leman ain't goin' to be out this time o' night 'ithout some sawt o' corrective—Lawd! I wisht you had! Cayn't we stop som'er's an' git some? Lawd! I wisht we could! I'm jest a-honin' faw some sawt o' wetness.

"But exhumin' my subjec', Mr. March, thass anotheh thing the scripters evince—that ev'y man shall be judge' by his axe. Yass, seh, faw of co'se ev'y man got his axe to grime. I got mine. You got yo's, ain't you?—Well, o' co'se. I respec' you faw it! Yass, seh; but right there the question arise, is it a public axe? An' if so, is it a good one? aw is it a private axe? aw is it both? Of co'se, ef a man got a good public axe to grime, he espec'—an' you espec' him—to bring his private axe along an' git hit grime at the same junction. Thass natchiul. Thass all right an' puffiely corrosive. On'y we must take tu'ns tunnin' the grime-stone. You grime my axe, I grime yo's. How does that strack you, Mr. March?"

John's reply was enthusiastic. "Why, it strikes me as positively mephitic."

"Mr. March, thass what it is! Thass the ve'y word! Now, shell me an' you fulfil the scripter—"The white man o' the mountains an' the Etheropium o' the valleys shell jine they han's an' the po' man's axe shell be grime'?" Ain't them words sweet? Ain't they jess pufficly syruptitious? My country, 'tis of thee! Oh, Mr. March, ef you knowed how much patri'tism I got!—You hear them Suez fellehs say this is a white man's country an' cayn't eveh be a rich man's country till it is a white man's——"

"See here, now; I tell you for the last time, if you value your life you'd better make less noise."

"Yass, seh. Lawd, I cayn't talk; I'm that thusty I'm a-spitt'n' cotton!—No, seh! White man ain't eveh goin' to lif hisseff up by holdin' niggeh down, an' that's the pyo chaotic truth; now, ain't it?"

"Best way is to hang the nigger up."

"Aw, Mr. March, you a-jokin'! You know I espress the truth. Ef you wants to make a rich country, you ain't got to make it a white man's country, naw a black man's country, naw yit mix the races an' make it n yaller man's country, much less a yaller woman's; no, seh! But the whole effulgence is jess this: you got to

make it a po' man's country! Now, you accentuate yo' reflections on that, seh!—
Seh?"

"I say that's exactly what Widewood is."

"No, seh! no, seh! I means a country what's good faw a po' man, an' Widewood cayn't even be that 'ithout school-houses, seh! But thass what me an' you can make it, Mr. March. Why, thass the hence an' the whence that my constituents an' coefficients calls me School-house Leggett. Some men cusses me that I has mix' the races in school. Well, supposin' I has—a little; I'se mix' myseff. You cayn't neveh mix 'em hafe so fas' in school as they mixes 'em out o' school. Yit thass not in the accawdeons o' my new policy. Mr. March, I'm faw the specie o' schools we kin git an' keep——"

John laughed again. "Oh, yes, you're sure to keep all the specie you get."

Mr. Leggett giggled. "Aw! I means that *kine* o' school. An' jiss now that happ'm to be sep'ate schools. I neveh was hawgish like myfrien' Gyarnit. Gyarnit's faw Rosemont an' State aid *toe* Rosemont, an' faw nothin' else an' nobody else, fus', las', an' everlastin'. Thass jess why his projeckin' don't neveh eventuate, an' which it neveh will whilse I'm there to *preventuate*! Whoever hear him say, 'Mr. School-house Leggett, aw Mr. March, aw Mr. Anybody-in-God's-worl', pass yo' plate faw a piece o' the chicken pie?' What! you heard it? Oh, Mr. March, don't you be fool! An' yit I favo's Rosemont——"

"Why, you've made it your standing threat to burst Rosemont wide open!"

"Yass, te-he! I has often prevaricate that intention. But Law'! that was pyo gas, Mr. March. I favors Rosemont, an' State aid *toe* Rosemont—perwidin'—enough o' the said thereof to go round, an' the same size piece faw ev'y po' man's boy as faw ev'y rich man's boy. Of co's with gals it's diff'ent. Mr. March, you don't know what a frien' you been a-dislikin'!"

"They say you're in favor of railroads."

"Why, o' co'se! An' puttickly the Pussie an' Susie an' Great South Railroad an' State mawgage bawns in accawdeons—perwidin'!—one school-house, som'er's in these-yeh th'ee counties, faw ev'y five mile' o' road they buil; an' a Leggettstown braynch road, yass, seh. An', Mr. March, yit, still, mo'over, perwiddin' the movin' the capital to Suez, away fum the corrup' influence of Pulaski City. Faw, Mr. March, the legislatu'e will neveh be pyo anywher's else esceptin' in Suez, an' not evm myseff! Whew! I'm that thusty——"

XXII.

CLIMBING LOVER'S LEAP

The woods grew dense and pathless, and the whispering gave place to a busy fending off of the strong undergrowth. Presently John tied the horse, and the riders stepped into an open spot on a precipitous mountain side. At their left a deep gorge sank so abruptly that a small stone, casually displaced, went sliding and rattling beyond earshot. On their right a wasted moon rose and stared at them over the mountain's shoulder; while within hand's reach, a rocky cliff, bald on its crown, stripped to the waist, and draped at its foot in foliage, towered in the shadow of the vast hill.

"Why, good Lawd, Mr. March, this is Lover's Leap! We cayn't neveh climb up here!"

"We've got to! D' you reckon I brought you here to look at it? Come on. We've only got to reach that last cedar yonder by the dead pine."

The mulatto moaned, but they climbed. As they rose the black gorge seemed to crawl under them and open its hungry jaws.

"Great Lawd! Mr. March, this is sut'n death! Leas'wise it is to me. I cayn't go no fu'ther, Mr. March; I neglected to tell you I'se got a pow'ful lame foot."

"Keep quiet," murmured John, "and come on. Only don't look down."

The reply was a gasp of horror. "Oh! mussy me, you spoke too late! Wait jess a minute, Mr. March, I'll stan' up ag'in in a minute. I jess mus' set here a minute an' enjoy the view; it's gr-gran'!"

"Yass, seh. I'se a-comin', seh. I'll rise up in a few minutes; I'm sick at my stomach, but it'll pass off if I kin jiss set still a shawt while tell it passes off."

The speaker slowly rose, grabbling the face of the rock.

"Mr. March, wait a minute, I w-want to tell you. Is-is-is you w-waitin'? Mr. March, this is pufficly safe and haza'dous, seh, I feels that, seh, but I don't like this runnin' away an' hidin'! It's cowardly; le's go down an' face the thing like men! I'm goin' to crawl down back 'ards; thass the skilfullest way."

"Halt!" growled John, and something else added "tick-tick."

"Oh! Mr. March, faw God's sake! Ef you mus' shoot me, shoot me whah I won't fall so fuh! Why, I was a-jokin'! I wa'n't a-dreamin' o' goin' back! Heah I come, seh, look out! Oh, please put up that-ah naysty-lookin' thing!—Thank you,

seh!—Mr. March, excuse me jiss a minute whilse I epitomize my breath a little, seh, I jess want to recover my dizziness—This is fine, ain't it? Oh, Lawd! Mr. March, excuse my sinkin' down this a-way! Oh, don't disfunnish yo'seff to come back to me, seh; I's jiss faint and thusty. Mr. March, I ain't a-scared; I'm jiss a-parishin' o' thust! Lawd! I'm jiss that bole an' rackless I'd resk twenty lives faw jiss one hafe a finger o' pyo whiskey. I dunno what'll happm to me ef I don't git some quick. I ain't had a drap sence the night o' the ball, an' thass what make this-yeh flatulency o' the heart. Oh! please don't tech me; ev'm ef you lif' me I cayn't stan'. Oh, Lawd! the icy han' o' death is on me. I'll soon be in glory!"

"Glory!" answered an echo across the gorge.

John laughed. "We're nearly to the cave. If I have to carry you it 'll double the danger."

"Oh, yass, seh! you go on, I'll jine you. I jis wants a few minutes to myseff faw prayer."

"Cornelius," said the cautiously stooping youth, "I'm going to take you where I said I would, if I have to carry you there in three pieces. Here—wait—I'd better tote you on my back. Put your arms around my neck. Now give me your legs. That's it. Now, hold firm; one false step and over we go."

He slowly picked his way. Once he stopped, while a stone which had crumbled from under his tread went crashing through the bushes and into the yawning gulf. The footing was terribly narrow for several rods, but at length it widened. He crouched again. "Now, get off; the rest is only some steep climbing in the bushes."

"Mr. March, I ain't eveh goin' to git down to God's blessed level groun' ag'in!"

"Think not? You'll be there in five seconds if you take hold of any dead wood. Come on."

They climbed again, hugged the cliff while they took breath, climbed once more, forebore to look down, and soon, crowding into what had seemed but a shallow cleft, were stooping under the low roof of a small cavern. Its close rocky bounds and tumbled floor sparkled here and there in the light of the matches John struck. From their pockets the pair laid out a scant store of food.

"Now I must go," said John. "I'll come again to-morrow night. You're safe here. You may find a snake or two, but you don't mind that, do you?"

"Me? Law, no! not real ones. Di'mon'-back rattlesnake hisself cayn't no mo' scare me 'n if I was a hawg. Good-by, seh."

How the heavy-eyed youth the next day finished his examinations he scarcely knew himself, but he hoped he had somehow passed. He could not slip away from Rosemont until after bedtime, and the night was half gone when he reached the cliff under Lover's Leap. A light rain increased the risk of the climb, but he reached the cave in safety only to find it deserted. On his way down he discovered ample signs that the promiscuous lover, an hour or two before, had slowly, safely, and in the "skilfullest way" reached the arms of his most dangerous but dearest love; "cooned it every step," John said, talking to his horse as they trudged back toward Rosemont. "What the rattle-snakes couldn't do," he added, "the bottle-snake has done."

Mr. Leggett's perils might not be over, but out of the youth's hands meant off his indulgent conscience, and John returned to his slighted books, quickened in all his wilful young blood by the knowledge that a single night of adventurous magnanimity had made him henceforth master of himself, his own purposes, and his own mistakes.

XXIII.

A SUMMONS FOR THE JUDGE

Baccalaureate Sunday. It was hot, even for Suez. The river seemed to shine with heat. Yet every convenient horse-rack was crowded with horses, more than half of them under side-saddles, and in the square neighing steeds, tied to swinging limbs because too emotionally noble to share their privileges with anything they could kick, pawed, wheeled, and gazed after their vanished riders as if to say, "Pon my word, if he hasn't gone to *church*."

The church, Parson Tombs's, was packed. Men were not few, yet the pews and the aisles, choked with chairs from end to end, were one yeast of muslins, lawns, and organdies, while everywhere the fans pulsed and danced a hundred measures at once in fascinating confusion.

In the amen pews on the right sat all Montrose; facing them, on the left, sat all Rosemont, except the principal; Garnet was with the pastor in the pulpit. The Governor of Dixie was present; the first one they of the old *régime* had actually gotten into the gubernatorial chair since the darkies had begun to vote. Two members of the Governor's staff sat in a front pew in uniform; blue!

"See that second man on the left?" whispered Captain Shotwell to an old army friend from Charleston; "that handsome felleh with the wavy auburn hair, soft mustache, and big, sawt o' pawnderin' eyes?"

"What! that the Governor? He can't be over thirty or thirty-one!"

"Governor, no! *he* wouldn't take the governorship; that's Jeff-Jack Ravenel, editor of the *Courier*, a-ablest man in Dixie. No, that's the Governor next to him."

"That old toad? Why, he's a moral hulk; look at his nose!"

"Yes, it's a pity, but we done the best we could—had to keep the alignment, you know. His brother leases and sublets convicts, five stockades of 'em, and ought to be one himself.

"These girls inside the altar-rail, they're the academy chorus. That one? Oh, that's Halliday's daughter. Yass, beautiful, but you should 'a' seen her three years ago. No use talkin', seh—I wouldn't say so to a Yankee, but—ow climate's hard on beauty. Teach in the acad'? Oh! no, seh, she jus' sings with 'em. Magnificent voice. Some Yankees here last week allowed they'd ruther hear her than Adelina Patti—in some sawngs.

"She's an awful man-killeh; repo'ted engaged to five fellehs at once, Jeff-Jack included. I don't know whether it's true or not, but you know how ow Dixie gyirls ah, seh. An' yet, seh, when they marry, as they all do, where'll you find mo' devoted wives? This ain't the lan' o' divo'ces, seh; this is the lan' o' loose engagements an' tight marriages.

"D' you see that gyirl in the second row of Montroses, soft eyes, sawt o' deep-down roguish, round, straight neck, head set so nice on it? That's Gyarnet's daughteh. That gyirl's not as old as she looks, by three years."

He ceased. The chorus under the high pulpit stood up, sang, and sat again. Parson Tombs, above them, rose with extended arms, and the services had begun. The chorus stood again, and the church choir faced them from the gallery and sang with them antiphonally, to the spiritual discomfort of many who counted it the latest agony of modernness. In the long prayer the diversity of sects and fashions showed forth; but a majority tried hard not to resent any posture different from their own, although Miss Martha Salter and many others who buried their faces in their own seats, knew that Mr. Ravenel's eyes were counting the cracks in the plastering.

Barbara knelt forward—the Montrose mode. She heard Parson Tombs confess the Job-like loathsomeness of everyone present; but his long-familiar, chanting monotonous fainted and died in the portals of her ears like a nurse's song, while

her sinking eyelids shut not out, but in, one tallish Rosemont senior who had risen in prayer visibly heavy with the sleep he had robbed from three successive nights. The chirp of a lone cricket somewhere under the floor led her forth in a half dream beyond the town and the gleaming turnpike, across wide fields whose multitudinous, tiny life rasped and buzzed under the vibrant heat; and so on to Rosemont, dear Rosemont, and the rose mother there.

Her fan stops. An unearthly sweetness, an unconditioned bliss, a heavenly disembodiment too perfect for ecstasy, an oblivion surcharged with light, a blessed rarefaction of self that fills the house, the air, the sky, and ascends full of sweet odors and soothing sounds, wafts her up on the cadenced lullaby of the long, long prayer. Is it finished? No.

"Oh, quicken our drowsy powers!" she hears the pastor cry on a rising wave of monotone, and starts the fan again. Is she in church or in Rosemont? She sees Johanna beckoning in her old, cajoling way, asking, as in fact, not fancy, she had done the evening before, for the latest news of Cornelius, and hearing with pious thankfulness that Leggett has reappeared in his official seat, made a speech that filled the house with laughter and applause, put parties into a better humor with each other than they had been for years, and remains, and, for the present, will remain, unmolested.

Still Parson Tombs is praying. The fan waggles briskly, then more slowly—slowly—slowly, and sinks to rest on her white-robed bosom. The head, heavy with luminous brown hair, careens gently upon one cheek; that ineffably sweet dissolution into all nature and space comes again, and far up among the dream-clouds, just as she is about to recognize certain happy faces, there is a rush of sound, a flood of consternation, a start, a tumbling in of consciousness, the five senses leap to their stations, and she sits upright fluttering her fan and glancing round upon the seated congregation. The pastor has said amen.

Garnet spoke extemporaneously. The majority, who did not know every line of the sermon was written and memorized, marvelled at its facility, and even some who knew admitted it was wonderful for fervor, rhetorical richness and the skill with which it "voiced the times" without so much as touching those matters which Dixie, Rosemont's Dixie, did not want touched. Parson Tombs and others moaned "Amen," "Glory," "Thaynk Gawd," etc., after every great period. Only General Halliday said to his daughter, "He's out of focus again; claiming an exclusive freedom for his own set."

The text was, "But I was born free."

Paul, the speaker said, was as profound a believer in law as in faith. Jealous for every right of his citizenship, he might humble himself, but he never lightly

allowed himself to be humbled. Law is essential to every civil order, but the very laying of it upon a man makes it his title-deed to a freedom without which obedience is not obedience, nor citizenship citizenship. No man is entirely free to fill out the full round of his whole manhood who is not in some genuine, generous way an author of the laws he obeys. "At this sacred desk and on this holy day I thank God that Dixie's noble sons and daughters are at last, after great tribulations, freer from laws and government not of their own choice than ever before since war furled its torn and blood-drenched banner! We have taught the world—and it's worth the tribulation to have taught the world—under God, that a people born with freedom in the blood cannot be forced even to do right! 'What you order me to do, alien lawmaker, may be right, but I was born free!' My first duty to God is to be free, and no freedom is freedom till it is purged of all indignity!

"But mark the limitation! Freemen are not made in a day! It was to a man who had bought his freedom that Paul boasted a sort that could not be bought! God's word for it, it takes at least two generations to make true freemen; fathers to buy the freedom and sons and daughters to be born into it! Wherefore let every one to whom race and inheritance have given beauty or talent, and to whom the divine ordering of fortune and social rank has added quality and scholarship, hold it the first of civic virtues to reply to every mandate of law or fate, Law is law, and right is right, but, first of all, I was born free, and, please God, I'll die so!

"Gentlemen of the graduating class:"

Nine trim, gray jackets rose, and John March was the tallest. The speaker proceeded, but he had not spoken many words before he saw the attention of his hearers was gone. A few smiled behind their hands or bit their lips; men kept a frowning show of listening to the address; women's faces exchanged looks of pity, and John turned red to his collar. For, just behind the Governor, the noble head and feeble frame of Judge March had risen unconsciously when his son rose, and now stood among the seated multitude, gazing on the speaker and drinking in his words with a sweet, glad face. The address went on, but no one heard it. Nor did any one move to disturb the standing figure; all Suez, nay, the very girls of Montrose knew that he who seemed to stand there with trembling knees and wabbling hands was in truth not there, but was swallowed up and lost in yonder boy.

Garnet was vexed. He shortened the address, and its last, eloquent sentence was already begun when Ravenel rose and through room swiftly made for him stepped back to Judge March. He was just in time to get an arm under his head and shoulders as he sank limply into the pew, looking up with a smile and trying to say nothing was wrong and to attend again to the speaker. Garnet's hearers

were overcome, but the effect was not his. Their gaze was on the fallen man; and when General Halliday cleared his sight with an agitated handkerchief, and one by one from the son's wide open eyes, the hot, salt tears slipped down to the twitching corners of his mouth, and the aged pastor's voice trembled in a hurried benediction, women sobbed and few eyes were dry.

"Father," said John, "can you hear me? Do you know me?"

A glad light overspread the face for reply. But after it came a shadow, and Doctor Coffin said, softly,

"He's trying to ask something."

Fannie Halliday sat fanning the patient. She glanced up to Garnet just at John's back and murmured,

"He probably wants to know if——"

John turned an eager glance to his principal, and Garnet nodded "Yes."

"Father," cried John, "I've passed! I've passed, father; I've passed! Do you hear, dear father?"

The Major touched the bending youth and murmured something more. John turned back upon him a stare of incredulity, but Garnet smiled kindly and said aloud,

"I tell you yes; it will be announced to-morrow."

"Father," cried John, stooping close to the wandering eyes, "can you see me? I'm John! I'm son! Can you hear me, father? Father, I've got first honors—first honors, father! Oh, father, look into my eyes; it will be a sign that you hear me. Father, listen, look; I'm going to be a better son—to you and to mother—Oh, he hears me! He understands—" The physician drew him away.

They carried the sick man to the nearest house. Late in the afternoon Tom Hersey and two or three others were talking together near the post-office.

"Now, f'r instance, what right had he to give that boy first honors! As sho's you're a foot high, that's a piece o' pyo log-rollin'."—Doctor Coffin came by.—"Doctor, I understand Mrs. March has arrived. I hope the Jedge is betteh, seh.—What?—Why—why, you surprise—why, I'm mighty sorry to heah that, seh.—Gentlemen, Jedge March is dead."

XXIV.

THE GOLDEN SPIKE

About a week beyond the middle of June, 1878, when John March had been something like a year out of Rosemont and nine months a teacher of mountain lads and lasses at Widewood, Barbara finished at Montrose. She did not read her graduation essay. Its subject was Time. Its spelling was correct, and it was duly rosetted and streamered, but it was regretfully suppressed because its pages were mainly given to joyous emphasis of the advantages of wasting the hours. Miss Garnet had not been a breaker of rules; yet when she waved farewell and the younger Miss Kinsington turned back indoors saying,

"Dearest, best girl!" the sister added, affectionately—

"That we ever got rid of."

On a day near the middle of the following month there began almost at dawn to be a great stir in and about Suez. The sun came up over Widewood with a shout, hallooing to Rosemont a promise for all Dixie of the most ripening hours, thus far, of the year, and woods, fields, orchards, streams, answered with a morning incense. Johanna stood whispering loudly at Barbara's bedside:

"Week up, honey; sun high an' scoldin'! jess a-fuss-in' an' a-scoldin'!" One dark hand lifted back the white mosquito-net while the other tendered a cup of coffee.

Barbara winked, scowled, laid her wrists on the maid's shoulders and smiled into her black face. Johanna put away a brown wave of hair. "Come on, missie, dat-ah young Yankee gen'leman frien' up an' out."

Barbara bit her lip in mock dismay. "Has he de-part-ed?" She had a droll liking for long words, and often deployed their syllables as skirmishers in the rear for her sentences.

Johanna tittered. "Humph! you know mawnstus well he ain't gone. Miss Barb, dass de onyess maan I even see wear a baang. Wha' fuh he do dat?"

"I must ask him," said Barbara, sipping her coffee. "It's probably in fulfillment of a vow."

The maid tittered again. "You cay n't ast as much as he kin. But dass my notice 'twix Yankees an' ow folks; Dixie man say, Fine daay, seh! Yankee say, You think it a-gwine fo' to raain? Dixie man—Oh, no, seh! hit jiss cayn't rain to-day, seh! Den if it jiss po' down Yankee say, Don't dis-yeh look somepm like raain?"

An' Dixie man—Yass, seh, hit do; hit look like raain, but Law'! hit ain't raain. You Yankees cayn't un'stan' ow Southe'n weatheh, seh!"

Only Johanna laughed. Presently Barbara asked, "Have you seen pop-a?"

"Yo' paw? Oh, yass'm, he in de wes' grove, oveh whah we 'llovin' to buil' de new dawmontory. He jiss a-po'in' info'mations into de Yankee." Barbara laughed this time—at the Yankee—and Johanna mimicked: "Mr. Fair, yo' come to see a beautiful an' thrivin' town, seh. Suez is change' dat much yo' fatheh wouldn' know it ag'in!"

"Pop-a's right about that, Johanna."

"Oh, yass'm." Johanna was rebuked; but Barbara smiled. By and by—"Miss Barb, kin I ax you a favo'?—Yass'm. Make yo' paw put me som'ers in de crowd to-day whah I ken see you when you draps de hammeh on de golden spike—Law'! dass de dress o' dresses! You looks highly fitt'n' to eat!"

Young Fair had come to see the last spike driven in the Pulaski City, Suez and Great South Railroad.

At breakfast Mrs. Garnet poured the coffee. Garnet told the New Englander much about New England, touching extenuatingly on the blueness of its laws, the decay of its religion, and the inevitable decline of its industries. The visitor, with only an occasional "Don't you think, however"—seemed edified. It pleased Barbara to see how often, nevertheless, his eye wandered from the speaker to the head of the board to rest on one so lovely it scarce signified that she was pale and wasted; one whose genial dignity perfected the firmness with which she declined her daughter's offer to take her place and task, and smiled her down while Johanna smoothed away a grin.

The hour of nine struck. Fair looked startled. "Were we not to have joined Mr. Ravenel's party in Suez by this time?"

"Yes, but there's no hurry. Still, we'll start. Johanna, get your lunch-baskets. Sorry you don't meet Mr. March, sir; he's a trifle younger than you, but you'd like him. I asked him to go with us, but his mother—why, wa'n't that all right, Barb?"

"Oh, it wasn't wrong." Barbara smiled to her mother. "It was only useless; he always declines if I don't. We're very slightly acquainted. I hope that accounts for it." She arched her brows.

As she and the young visitor stood by the carriage while Johanna and the luncheon were being stowed he said something so graceful about Mrs. Garnet that Barbara looked into his face with delight and the Major had to speak his

name twice before he heard it.—"Ready? Yes, quite so. Shall I sit—oh! pardon; yes—in front, certainly."

The Major drove. The young guest would gladly have talked with Barbara as she sat back of him and behind her father; but Garnet held his attention. Crossing Turkey Creek battle-ground——

"Just look at those oats! See that wheat! Cotton, ah, but you ought to see the cotton down in Blackland!"

When the pike was dusty and the horses walked they were frequently overtaken and passed by cavalcades of lank, hard-faced men in dingy homespun, and cadaverous women with snuff-sticks and slouched sun-bonnets. Major Garnet bowed to them.

"Those are our Sandstone County mountaineers; our yeomanry, sir. Suez holds these three counties in a sort o' triple alliance. You make a great mistake, sir, to go off to-morrow without seeing the Widewood district. You've seen the Alps, and I'd just like to hear you say which of the two is the finer. There's enough mineral wealth in Widewood alone to make Suez a Pittsburg, and water-power enough to make her a Minneapolis, and we're going to make her both, sir!" The monologue became an avalanche of coal, red hematite, marble, mica, manganese, tar, timber, turpentine, lumber, lead, ochre, and barytes, with signs of silver, gold, and diamonds.

"Don't you think, however——"

"No, sir! no-o-o! far from it——"

A stifled laugh came from where Johanna's face darkened the corner it occupied. Barbara looked, but the maid seemed lost in sad reverie.

"Barb, yonder's where Jeff-Jack and I stopped to dine on blackberries the day we got home from the war. Now, there's the railroad cut on the far side of it. There, you see, Mr. Fair, the road skirts the creek westward and then northwestward again, leaving Rosemont a mile to the northeast. See that house, Barb, about half a mile beyond the railroad? There's where the man found his plumbago." The speaker laughed and told the story. The discoverer had stolen off by night, got an expert to come and examine it, and would tell the result only to one friend, and in a whisper. "'You haven't got much plumbago,' the expert had said, 'but you've got dead oodles of silica.' You know, Barb, silica's nothing but flint, ha-ha!"

Fair smiled. In his fortnight's travel through the New Dixie plumbago was the only mineral on which he had not heard the story based.

A military horseman overtook the carriage and slackened to a fox-trot at Garnet's side. "Captain Champion, let me make you acquainted with Mr. Fair. Mr. Fair and his father have put money into our New Dixie, and he's just going around to see where he can put in more. I tell him he can't go amiss. All we want in Dixie is capital."

"Mr. Fair doesn't think so," said Barbara, with great sweetness.

"Ah! I merely asked whether capital doesn't seek its own level. Mustn't its absence be always because of some deeper necessity?"

Champion stood on his guard. "Why, I don't know why capital shouldn't be the fundamental need, seh, of a country that's been impoverished by a great waugh!"

Barbara exulted, but Garnet was for peace. "I suppose you'll find Suez swarming with men, women, and horses."

"Yes," said Champion—Fair was speaking to Barbara—"to say nothing of yahoos, centaurs, and niggehs." The Major's abundant laugh flattered him; he promised to join the party at luncheon, lifted his plumed shako, and galloped away. Garnet drove into the edge of the town at a trot.

"Here's where the reservoir's to be," he said, and spun down the slope into the shaded avenue, and so to the town's centre.

"Laws-a-me! Miss Barb," whispered Johanna, "but dis-yeh town is change! New hotel! brick! th'ee sto'ies high!" Barbara touched her for silence.

"But look at de new sto'es!" murmured the girl. Negroes—the men in dirty dusters, the women in smart calicoes, girls in dowdy muslins and boy's hats—and mountain whites, coatless men, shoeless women—hung about the counters dawdling away their small change.

"Colored and white treated precisely alike, you notice," said Garnet, and Barbara suppressed a faint grunt from Johanna.

Trade had spread into side-streets. Drinking-houses were gayly bedight and busy.

"That's the new *Courier* building."

The main crowd had gone down to the railway tracks, and it was midsummer, yet you could see and feel the town's youth.

"Why, the nig—colored people have built themselves a six-hundred dollar church; we white folks helped them," said Garnet, who had given fifty cents. "See that new sidewalk? Our chain-gang did that, sir; made the bricks and laid the pavement."

The court-house was newly painted. Only Hotel Swanee and the two white churches remained untouched, sleeping on in green shade and sweet age.

The Garnet's wheels bickered down the town's southern edge and out upon a low slope of yellow, deep-gullied sand and clay that scarce kept on a few weeds to hide its nakedness while gathering old duds and tins.

"Yonder are the people, and here, sir," Garnet pointed to where the green Swanee lay sweltering like the Nile, "is the stream that makes the tears trickle in every true Southerner's heart when he hears its song."

"Still 'Always longing for the old plantation?'" asked the youth.

"Yes," said Barbara, defiantly.

The carriage stopped; half a dozen black ragamuffins rushed up offering to take it in charge, and its occupants presently stood among the people of three counties. For Blackland, Clearwater, and Sandstone had gathered here a hundred or two of their gentlest under two long sheds on either side of the track, and the sturdier multitude under green booths or out in the sunlight about yonder dazzling gun, to hail the screaming herald of a new destiny; a destiny that openly promised only wealth, yet freighted with profounder changes; changes which, ban or delay them as they might, would still be destiny at last.

Entering a shed Barbara laughed with delight.

"Fannie!"

"Barb!" cried Fannie. A volley of salutations followed: "Good-morning, Major"—"Why, howdy, Doctor.—Howdy, Jeff-Jack.—Shotwell, how are you? Let me make you acquainted with Mr. Fair. Mr. Fair, Captain Shotwell. Mr. Fair and his father, Captain, have put some money into our"—A tall, sallow, youngish man touched the speaker's elbow—"Why, *hel-lo*, Proudfit! Colonel Proudfit, let me make you," etc.—"I hope you brought—why, Sister Proudfit, I decl'—aha, ha, ha!—You know Barb?"

General Halliday said, "John Wesley, how goes it?"

Garnet sobered. "Good-morning, Launcelot. Mr. Fair, let me make you acquainted with General Halliday. You mustn't believe all he says—ha, ha, ha! Still, when a radical does speak well of us you may know it's so! Launcelot, Mr. Fair and his father have put some money"—Half a dozen voices said "Sh-sh!"

"Ladies and gentlemen!" cried Captain Shotwell. "The first haalf—the fro'—the front haalf of the traain—of the expected traain—is full of people from Pulaaski City! The ster'—the rear haalf is reserved faw the one hundred holdehs of these

red tickets." (Applause.) "Ayfter the shor'—brief puffawn'—cerem'—exercises, the traain, bein' filled, will run up to Pulaaski City, leave that section of which, aw toe which, aw at least in which, that is, belonging toe—I mean the people containing the Pulaaski City section (laughter and applause)—or rather the section contained by the Pu—(deafening laughter)—I should saay the city containing the Pulaas'—(roars of laughter)—Well, gentlemen, if you know what I want to say betteh than I do, jest say it yo'se'ves an'——"

His face was red and he added something unintelligible about them all going to a terminus not on that road, while Captain Champion, coming to his rescue, proclaimed that the Suez section would be brought back, "expectin' to arrive hyeh an hou' by sun. An' now, ladies and gentlemen, I propose three cheers faw that gallant an' accomplished gentleman, Cap'm Shotwell—hip-hip——" And the company gave them, with a tiger.

At that moment, faint and far, the whistle sounded. The great outer crowd ran together, all looking one way. Again it sounded, nearer; and then again, near and loud. The multitude huzzaed; the bell clanged; gay with flags the train came thundering in; out in the blazing sunlight Captain Champion, with sword unsheathed, cried "Fire!" The gun flashed and crashed, the earth shook, the people's long shout went up, the sax-horns sang "Way Down upon the Swanee River"—and the tears of a true Southerner leaped into Barbara's eyes. She turned and caught young Fair smiling at it all, and most of all at her, yet in a way that earned her own smile.

The speeches were short and stirring. When Ravenel began—"Friends and fellow-citizens, this is our Susie's wedding," the people could hardly be done cheering. Then Barbara, by him led forth and followed by Johanna's eager eyes, gave the spike its first wavering tap, the president of the road drove it home, and "Susie" was bound in wedlock to the Age. Married for money, some might say. Yet married, bound—despite all incompatibilities—to be shaped—if not at once by choice, then at last by merciless necessity—to all that Age's lines and standards, to walk wherever it should lead, partner in all its vicissitudes, pains and fates.

The train moved. Mr. Fair sat with Barbara. Major Grant secured a seat beside Sister Proudfit—"aha—ha-ha!"—"t-he-he-he-he!" Fannie gave Shotwell the place beside her, and so on. Even Johanna, by taking a child in her lap, got a seat. But Ravenel and Colonel Proudfit had to stand up beside Fannie and Barbara. Thus it fell out that when everyone laughed at a moonshiner's upsetting on a pile of loose telegraph poles, Ravenel, looking out from over the swarm of heads, saw something which moved him to pull the bell-cord.

"Two people wanting to get on," said Shotwell, as Ravenel went to the coach's rear platform. "They in a buggy. Now they out. Here they—Law', Miss Fannie, who you reckon it is? Guess! You *cayn't*, miss!"

Barbara, with studied indifference, asked Fair the time of day.

"There," said Shotwell, "they've gone into the cah behind us."

"Sister March and her son," observed Garnet to Mrs. Proudfit and the train moved on.

XXV.

BY RAIL

Everybody felt playful and nearly everybody coquettish. When Sister Proudfit, in response to some sly gallantry of Garnet's used upon him a pair of black eyes, he gave her the whole wealth of his own. He must have overdone the matter, for the next moment he found Fannie's eyes levelled directly on him. She withdrew them with a casual remark to Barbara, yet not till they had said to him, in solemn silence:

"You villain, that time I saw you!"

Mrs. March had pushed cheerily into the rear Suez coach. Away from home and its satieties no one could be more easily or thoroughly pleased. Her son said the forward coach was better, but in there she had sighted Fannie and Barbara, and so——

"There's more room in here," she insisted with sweet buoyancy.

Hamlet Graves rose. "Here, Cousin Daphne!" His brother Lazarus stood up with him.

"Here, John, your maw'll feel better if you're a-sett'n' by her."

But she urged the seat, with coy temerity, upon Mr. Ravenel.

"How well she looks in mourning," remarked two Blackland County ladies. "Yes, she's pretty yet; what a lovely smile."

"Don't go 'way," she exclaimed, with hostile alarm, as John turned toward the coach's front. He said he would not, and chose a standing-place where he could watch a corner of Fannie's distant hat.

"You won't see many fellows of age staying with their mothers by choice instead o' running off after the girls," commented one of the Blackland matrons, and the other replied:

"They haven't all got such mothers!"

Mrs. March was enjoying herself. "But, Mr. Ravenel," she said, putting off part of her exhilaration, "you've really no right to be a bachelor." She smiled aslant.

"My dear lady," he murmured, "people who live in gla——"

She started and tried to look sour, but grew sweeter. He became more grave. "You're still young," he said, paused, and then—"You're a true Daphne, but you haven't gone all to laurel yet. I wish—I wish I could feel half as young as you look; I might hope"—he hushed, sighed, and nerved himself.

"Why, Mr. Ravenel!" She glanced down with a winsome smile. "I'm at least old enough to—to stay as I am if I choose?"

"Possibly. But you needn't if you don't choose." He folded his arms as if to keep them from doing something rash.

Mrs. March bit her lip. "I can't imagine who would ever"—she bit it again. "Mr. Ravenel, do you remember those lines of mine—

"'O we women are so blind'?"

"Yes. But don't call me Mr. Ravenel."

"Why, why not?"

"It sounds so cold." He shuddered.

"It isn't meant so. It's not in my nature to be cold. It's you who are cold." She hushed as abruptly as a locust. A large man, wet with the heat, stood saluting. Mr. Ravenel rose and introduced Mr. Gamble, president of the road, a palpable, rank Westerner; whereupon it was she who was cold. Mr. Gamble praised the "panorama gliding by."

"Yes." She glanced out over the wide, hot, veering landscape that rose and sank in green and yellow slopes of corn, cotton, and wheat. The president fanned his soaking shirt-collar and Mrs. March with a palm-leaf fan.

"Mercury ninety-nine in Pulaski City," he said to Ravenel, and showed a telegram. Mr. Ravenel began to ask if he might introduce——

"Mr. March! Well, you *have* changed since the day you took Major Garnet and Mr. Fair and I to see that view in the mountains! If anybody'd a-told me that I'd ever be president of—Thanks, no sir." He wouldn't sit. He'd just been sitting and talking, he said, "with the two beauties, Miss Halliday and Miss Garnet." Didn't Mrs. March think them such?

She confessed they looked strong and well, and sighed an unresentful envy.

"Yes," said he, "they do, and I wouldn't give two cents on the dollar for such as don't."

Mrs. March smiled dyingly on John, and said she feared her son wouldn't either. John looked distressed and then laughed; but the president declared her the picture of robust health. This did not seem to please her entirely, and so he added,

"You've got to be, to write good poetry. It must be lots of fun, Mrs. March, to dash off a rhyme just to while away the time—ha, ha, ha! My wife often writes poetry when she feels tired and lazy. I know that whirling this way through this beautiful country is inspiring you right now to write half a dozen poems. I'd like to see you on one of those lovely hillsides in fine frenzy rolling"—He said he meant her eye.

The poetess blushed. A whimper of laughter came from somewhere, but one man put his head quickly out of a window, and another stooped for something very hard to pick up, while John explained that crowds and dust were no inspiration to his mother, who was here to-day purely for his sake. She sat in limp reverie with that faint shade on her face which her son believed meant patience. He and the president moved a reverent step aside.

"I hear," said Gamble, in a business undertone, "that your school's a success."

"Not financially," replied John, gazing into the forward coach.

"Mr. March, why don't you colonize your lands? You can do it, now the railroad's here."

"I would, sir, if I had the capital."

"Form a company! They furnish the money, you furnish the land. How'd I build this road? I hadn't either money or lands. Why, if your lands were out West"—— the speaker turned to an eavesdropper, saying sweetly, "This conversation is private, sir," but with a look as if he would swallow him without sauce or salt, John mused. "My mother has such a dislike,"—he hesitated.

"I know," the president smiled, "the ladies are all that way. If a thing's theirs it just makes 'em sick to see anybody else make anything out of it. I speak from experience. They'll die poor, keeping property enough idle to make a dozen men rich. What's a man to do? Now, you"—a long pause, eye to eye—"your lands won't colonize themselves."

"Of course not," mused John.

The president showed two cigars. "Would you like to go to the smoking-car?"

March glanced toward his mother. She was looking at her two kinsmen with such sweet sprightliness that he had trouble to make her see his uplifted cigar. She met his parting smile with a gleam of terror and distrust, but he shook his head and reddened as Hamlet winked at Lazarus.

"It means some girl," observed one of the Blackland matrons.

"Well, I hope it does," responded the other.

"Wait," said the giver of the cigar, "we're stopping for wood and water. It'll be safer to go round this front coach than through it." John thought it would not, but yielded.

"Now, Mr. March," they stood near the water-tank—"if you could persuade your mother to give you full control, and let you get a few strong men to go in with you—see? They could make you—well—secretary!—with a salary; for, of course, you'd have to go into the thing, hot, yourself. You'd have to push like smoke!"

"Of course," said John, squaring his handsome figure; as if he always went in hot, and as if smoke was the very thing he had pushed like, for years.

"I shouldn't wonder if you and I"—Gamble began again, but the train started, they took the smoker and found themselves with Halliday, Shotwell, Proudfit, and a huge Englishman, round whom the other three were laughing.

XXVI.

JOHN INSULTS THE BRITISH FLAG

The Briton had seen, on the far edge of Suez, as they were leaving the town, a large building.

"A nahsty brick thing on top a dirty yellow hill," he said; what was it?

"That?" said Shotwell, "that's faw ow colo'ed youth o' both sexes. That's Suez University."

"Univer—what bloody nonsense!"

All but March ha-haed. "We didn't name it!" laughed the Captain.

John became aware that some one in a remote seat had bowed to him. He looked, and the salute came again, unctuous and obsequious. He coldly responded and frowned, for the men he was with had seen it.

Proudfit touched the Briton. "In the last seat behind you you'll see the University's spawnsor; that's Leggett, the most dangerous demagogue in Dixie."

"Is that your worst?" said the Englishman; "ye should know some of ours!"

"O, yes, seh," exclaimed Shotwell, "of co'se ev'y country's got 'em bad enough. But here, seh, we've not on'y the dabkey's natu'al-bawn rascality to deal with, but they natu'l-bawn stupidity to boot. Evm Gen'l Halliday'll tell you that, seh."

"Yes," said the General, with superior cheerfulness, "though sometimes the honors are easy."

"O, I allow we don't always outwit 'em"—everybody laughed—"but sometimes we just haf to."

"To save out-shooting them," suggested the General.

"O, I hope we about done with that."

"But you're not sure," came the quick retort.

"No, seh," replied the sturdy Captain, "we're not shore. It rests with them." He smoked.

"Go on, Shot," said the General, "you were going to give an instance."

"Yes, seh. Take Leggett, in the case o' this so-called University."

"That's hardly a good example," remarked Proudfit, who, for Dixie's and Susie's sake, regretted that Shotwell was talking so much and he so little.

"Let him alone," said Halliday, thoroughly pleased, and Shotwell went on stoutly.

"The concern was started by Leggett an' his gang—excuse my careless terms, Gen'l—as the public high-school. They made it ve'y odious to ow people by

throwin' it wide open to both raaces instead o' havin' a' sep'ate one faw whites. So of co'se none but dahkeys went to it, an' they jest filled it jam up."

"What did the whites do?" asked the Briton.

"Why, what *could* they do, seh? You know how ow people ah. That's right where the infernal outrage come in. Such as couldn't affode to go to Rosemont aw Montrose jest had to stay at home!" The speaker looked at John, who colored and bit his cigar.

"So as soon as ow crowd got control of affairs we'd a shut the thing up, on'y faw Jeff-Jack. Some Yankee missiona'y teachers come to him an' offe'd to make it a college an' spend ten thousand dollahs on it if the State would on'y go on givin' it hafe o' the three counties' annual high-school funds."

The Englishman frowned perplexedly and Proudfit put in—

"That is, three thousand a year from our three counties' share of the scrip on public lands granted Dixie by the Federal Government."

"Expressly for the support of public schools," said General Halliday, and March listened closer than the foreigner, for these facts were newest to John.

"Still," said March, "the State furnishes the main support of public education."

"No," responded Shotwell, "you're wrong there, John; we changed that. The main suppote o' the schools is left to the counties an' townships."

"That's stupid, all round," promptly spoke the Briton.

"I thought," exclaimed John, resentfully, "we'd changed our State constitution so's to forbid the levy of any school tax by a county or township except on special permission of the legislature."

"So you have," laughed the General.

"The devil!" exclaimed the Englishman.

"O, we had to do that," interposed Proudfit again, and Gamble testified,

"You see, it's the property-holder's only protection."

"Then Heaven help his children's children," observed the traveler. John showed open disgust, but the General touched him and said, "Go on, Shotwell."

"Well, seh, we didn't like the missiona'y's proposition. We consid'ed it fah betteh to transfah oveh that three thousan' a year to Rosemont, entire; which we did so.

Pub—? No, seh, Rosemont's not public, but it really rep'esents ow people, which, o' co'se, the otheh don't."

"Public funds to a private concern," quietly commented the Englishman—"that's a steal." John March's blood began to boil.

"O," cried Shot well—"ow people—who pay the taxes—infinately rather Rosemont should have it."

"I see," responded the Briton, in such a tone that John itched to kick him.

"Well, seh," persisted the narrator, "you should 'a' heard Leggett howl faw a divvy!" All smiled. "Worst of it was—what? Wha'd you say, Gen'l?"

"He had the constitution of the State to back him."

"He hasn't now! Well, seh, the bill faw this ve'y raailroad was in the house. Leggett swo' it shouldn't even so much as go to the gove'neh to sign *aw* to veto till that fund—seh? annual, yes, seh—was divided at least evm, betwix Rosemont an' the Suez high school."

"Hear, hear!"

"Well, seh"—the Captain became blithe—"Jeff-Jack sent faw him—you remembeh that night, *President* Gamble—this was the second bill—ayfteh the first hed been vetoed—an' said, s'e, 'Leggett, if I give you my own word that you'll get yo' fifteen hund'ed a year as soon as this new bill passes, will you vote faw it?'—'Yass, seh,' says Leggett—an' he did!"

Proudfit laughed with manly glee, and offered no other interruption.

"Well, seh, then it come Jeff-Jack's turn to keep his word the best he could."

"Which he's done," said Gamble.

"Yes, Jeff-Jack got still anotheh bill brought in an' paassed. It give the three thousan' to Rosemont entieh, an' authorized the three counties to raise the fifteen hund'ed a year by county tax." The Captain laughed.

"Silly trick," said the Englishman, grimly.

"Why, the dahkeys got they fifteen hund'ed!"

"Don't they claim twenty-two fifty?"

"Well, they jess betteh not!"

"Rascally trick!"

"Sir," said John, "Mr. Ravenel is my personal friend. If you make another such comment on his actions I shall treat it as if made on mine."

"Come, Come!" exclaimed Gamble, commandingly; "we can't have——"

"You'll have whatever I give, sir!"

Three or four men half rose, smiling excitedly, but sank down again.

"You think, sir," insisted John, to the Englishman's calmly averted face, "that being in a free country—" he dashed off Shotwell's remonstrant hand.

"'Tain't a free country at all," said the Briton to the outer landscape. "There's hardly a corner in Europe but's freer."

"Ireland, for instance," sneered John.

"Ireland be damned," responded the foreigner, still still looking out the window. "Go tell your nurse to give you some bread and butter."

John leaped and swept the air with his open palm. Gamble's clutch half arrested it in front, Shotwell hindered it from behind, neither quite stopped it.

"Did he slap him?" eagerly asked a dozen men standing on the seats.

"He barely touched him," was the disappointed reply of one.

"Thank the Lawd faw evm that little!" responded another.

Shotwell pulled March away, Halliday following. Near the rear door——

"Johnnie," began the General, with an air of complete digression, but at the woebegone look that came into the young man's face, the old soldier burst into a laugh. John whisked around to the door and stood looking out, though seeing nothing, bitter in the thought that not for the Englishman's own sake, but for the sake of the British capital coveted by Suez, a gentleman and a Rosemonter was forbidden to pay him the price of his insolence.

"I'd like to pass," presently said someone behind him. He started, and Gamble went by.

"May I detain you a moment, sir?" said John.

The president frowned. "What is it?"

"In our passage of words just now—I was wrong."

"Yes, you were. What of it?"

"I regret it."

"I can't use your regrets," said the railroad man. He moved to go. "If you want to see me about——"

John smiled. "No, sir, I'd rather never set eyes on you again."

As the Westerner's fat back passed into the farther coach his response came——

"What you want ain't manners, it's gumption." The door slammed for emphasis.

March presently followed, full of shame and indignation and those unutterable wailings with which youth, so often, has to be born again into manhood. Gamble had rejoined the Garnet group. John bowed affably to all, smiled to Fannie and passed. Garnet still sat with Mrs. Proudfit behind the others, and John, as he went by, was, for some cause supplied by this pair, startled, angered anew, and for the time being benumbed by conflicting emotions. He found his mother still talking joyously with the Graveses, who were unfamiliar with the graceful art of getting away. He found a seat in front of them, and sat stiff beside a man who drowsed.

"I'm a hopeless fool," he thought, "a fool in anger, a fool in love. A fool even in the eyes of that idiot of a railroad president in yonder smirking around Fannie.

"They'll laugh at me together, I suppose. O, Fannie, why can't I give you up? I know you're a flirt. Jeff-Jack knows it. I solemnly believe that's why he doesn't ask you to marry him!

"Yes, they're probably all laughing at me by now. O, was ever mortal man so utterly alone! And these people think what makes me so is this silly temper. They say it! Mother assures me they say it! I believe I could colonize our lands if it wa'n't for that. O, I will colonize them! I'll do it all alone. If that jackanapes could open this road I can open our lands. Whatever he used I can use; whatever he did I can do!"

"Sir?" said the neighbor at his elbow, "O excu—I thought you spoke."

"Hem! No, I was merely clearing my throat.

"I can do it. I'll do it alone. She shall see me do it—they shall all see. I'll do it alone—all alone——"

He caught the steel-shod rhythm of the train and said over and over with ever bigger and more bitter resolution, "I'll do it alone—I'll do it alone!"

Then he remembered Garnet.

XXVII.

TO SUSIE—FROM PUSSIE

ON the return trip Garnet sat on the arm of almost every seat except Fannie's.

"No, sir; no, keep your seat!" He wouldn't let anybody be "disfurnished" for him! Proudfit had got the place next his wife and thought best to keep it.

"Mr. Fair," said Garnet, "I'd like you to notice how all this region was made in ages past. You see how the rocks have been broken and tossed,"—etc.

"Mr. Fair"—the same speaker—"I *wish* you'd change your mind and stay a week with us. Come, spend it at Rosemont. It's vacation, you know, and Barb and I shan't have a thing to do but give you a good time; shall we, Barb?"

"It will give us a good time," said Barb. Her slow, cadenced voice, steady eye, and unchallenging smile charmed the young Northerner. He had talked about her to Fannie at luncheon and pronounced her "unusual."

"Why, really"—he began, looked up at Garnet and back again to Barbara. Garnet bent over him confidentially.

"Just between us I'd like to advise with you about something I've never mentioned to a soul. That is about sending Barb to some place North to sort o' round out her education and character in a way that—it's no use denying it, though it would never do for me to say so—a way that's just impossible in Dixie, sir."

The young man remembered Barbara's mother and was silent.

"Well, Barb, Mr. Fair will go home with us for a day or two, anyhow," Garnet was presently authorized to say. "I must go into the next car a moment——"

John March, meditating on this very speaker with growing anger, saw him approach. Garnet entered, beaming.

"Howdy, John, my son; I couldn't let you and Sister March——"

March had stepped before his mother: He spoke in a deep murmur.

"I'm not your son, sir. My mother's not your sister."

"Why, what in thun—why, John, I don't know whether to be angry or to laugh."

"Don't you dare to do either. Go back to that other man's——"

"Speak more softly for heaven's sake, Mr. March, and don't look so, or you'll do me a wrong that may cost us both our lives!"

"Cheap enough," said the youth, with a smile.

"You've made a ridiculous mistake, John. Before God I'm as innocent of any——"

"Before God, Major Garnet, you lie. If you deny it again I'll accuse you publicly. Go back and fondle the hand of that other man's wife; but don't ever speak to my mother again. If you do, I—I'll shoot you on sight."

"I'll call you to account for this, sir," said Garnet, moving to go.

"You're lying again," was John's bland reply, and he turned to his seat.

"Why, John," came the mother's sweet complaint, "I wanted to see Brother Garnet."

"Oh, I'm sorry," said the complaisant son.

Garnet paused on the coach's platform to get rid of his tremors. "He'll not tell," he said aloud, the uproar of wheels drowning his voice. "He's too good a Rosemonter to tattle. At first I thought he'd got on the same scent as Cornelius.

"Thank God, that's one thing there's no woman in, anyhow. O me, O me! If that tipsy nigger would only fall off this train and break his neck!

"And now here's *this* calf to live in daily dread of. O dear, O *dear*, I ought to a-had more sense. It's all her fault; she's pure brass. They call youth the time of temptation—Good Lord! Why youth's armored from head to heel in its invincible ignorance. O me! Well—I'll pay him for it if it takes me ten years."

John's complacency had faded with the white heat of his anger, and he sat chafing in spirit while his elbow neighbor slept in the shape of an N. Across the car he heard Parson Tombs explaining to the Graves brethren and Sister March that Satan—though sometimes corporeal—and in that case he might be either unicorporeal or multicorporeal—and at other times unicorporeal—as he might choose and providence permit—and, mark you, he might be both at once on occasion—was by no means omnipresent, but only ubiquitous.

Lazarus supposed a case: "He might be in both these cahs at once an' yet not on the platfawm between 'em."

"It's mo' than likely!" said the aged pastor, no one meaning anything sly. Yet to some people a parson's smiling mention of the devil is always a good joke, and the Graves laughed, as we may say. Not so, Sister March; she never laughed at the prince of darkness, nor took his name in vain. She spoke, now, of his "darts."

"No, Sister March, I reckon his darts, fifty times to one, ah turned aside fum us by the *providence* that's round us, not by the po' little patchin' o' grace that's in us."

John's heart jumped. Garnet looked in and beckoned him out. He went.

"John"—the voice was tearful—"I offer my hand in penitent gratitude." John took it. "Yes, my dear boy, my feet had well-nigh slipped."

"I oughtn't to have spoken as I did, Major Garnet."

"It was the word of the Lord, John. It saved me and my spotless name! The mistake had just begun, in mere play, but it might have grown into actual sin—of impulse, I mean, of course—not of action; my lifelong correctness of——"

"Oh, I'm sure of that sir! I only wish *I*——"

"God bless you! I've a good notion to tell your mother this whole thing, John, just to make her still prouder of you." He squeezed the young man's hand. "But I reckon for others' sakes we'd better not breathe it."

"O, I think so, sir! I promise——"

"You needn't have promised, John. Your think-so was promise enough. And a mighty good thing for us all it's so. For, John March, you're the hope of Suez!"

"You've got the key of all our fates in your pocket, John—you and your mother now, and you when you come into full charge of the estate next year. That's why Jeff-Jack's always been so willing to help me to help you on. But never mind that, only—beware of new friends. When they come fawning on you with offers to help you develop the resources of Widewood, you tell 'em——"

"That I'm going to develop them myself, alone."

"N-n-no—not quite that. O, you couldn't! You've no idea what a—why, *I* couldn't do it *with* you, without Jeff-Jack's help, nor he without mine! Why, just see what a failure the effort to build this road was, until"—the locomotive bellowed.

"Half-an-hour late, and slowing up again!" exclaimed John. He knew the parson's wife was pressing his mother to spend the night with them, and he was afraid of having his soul asked after. "Why do we stop here, hardly a mile from town?"

"It's to let my folks off. They're going to walk over to the pike while I go on for the carriage and drive out; they and Jeff-Jack and the Hallidays."

The train stopped where a beautiful lane crossed the track between two fenced fields. Fair and Barbara alighted and stood on a flowery bank with the sun glowing in some distant tree-tops behind them. Fannie leaned from the train, took both Jeff-Jack's uplifted hands and fluttered down upon rebounding tiptoes; the bell sounded, the scene changed, and John murmured to himself in heavy agony,

"He's going to ask her! O, Fannie, Fannie, if you'd only refuse to say yes, and give me three years to show what I can do! But he's going to ask her before that sun goes down, and what's she going to say?"

XXVIII.

INFORMATION FOR SALE

"Hope of Suez!" Garnet felt he had spoken just these three words too many. "Overtalked myself again," he said to himself while chatting with others; "a liar always does. But he shall pay for this. Ah me!"

He was right. The young man would have sucked down all his flattery but for those three words. Yet on one side they were true, and March guiltily felt them so as, looking at his mother, he thought again of that deep store of the earth's largess lying under their unfruitful custody. Suez and her three counties would have jeered the gaudy name from Lover's Leap to Libertyville though had they guessed better the meaning of the change into which a world's progress was irresistibly pushing them, whoever owned Widewood must have stood for some of their largest wishes and hopes, and they would have ceased to deride the blessed mutation and to hobble it with that root of so many world-wide evils—the calling still private what the common need has made public. The ghost of this thought flitted in John's mind, but would not be grasped or beckoned to the light.

"I wish I could think," he sighed, but he could only think of Fannie. The train stopped. The excursionists swarmed forth. The cannon belched out its thunderous good-byes, and John went for his horse and buggy, promising to give word for Garnet's equipage to be sent to him.

"I must mind Johanna and her plunder," said the Major; "but I'll look after your mother, too." And he did so, though he found time to part fondly with the Proudfits.

"He won't do," thought John, as he glanced back from a rise of ground. "Fannie's right. And she's right about me, too; the only way to get her is to keep away till I've shown myself fit for her; that's what she means; of course she can't say so; but I'm satisfied that's what she means!"

He passed two drunken men. Here in town at the end of Suez's wedding so many had toasted it so often, it was as if Susie's own eyes were blood-shot and her steps uncertain. "It's my wedding, too," he soliloquized. "This Widewood business and I are married this day; it alone, to me alone, till it's finished. Garnet shall see whether—humph!—Jake, my horse and buggy!" And soon he was rattling back down the stony slopes toward his mother.

"Hope of Suez!" he grimly laughed. "We'll be its despair if we don't get something done. And I've got to do it alone. Why shouldn't I? Yes, it's true, times have changed; and yet if this was ever rightly a private matter in my father's hands, I can't see why it has or why it should become a public matter in mine!"

He said this to himself the more emphatically because he felt, somehow, very uncertain about it. He wished his problem was as simple as a railroad question. A railroad can ask for public aid; but fancy him asking public aid to open and settle up his private lands! He could almost hear Susie's horse-laugh in reply. Why should she not laugh? He recalled with what sweet unboastful tone his father had always condemned every scheme and symptom of riding on public shoulders into private fortune. In the dear *old* Dixie there had been virtually no public, and every gentleman was by choice his own and only public aid, no matter what—
"Look out!"

He hauled up his horse. A man pressed close to the side of the halted buggy, to avoid a huge telegraph pole that came by quivering between two timber wheels. He offered John a freckled, yellow hand, and a smile of maudlin fondness.

"Mr. Mahch, I admiah to salute you ag'in, seh. *Hasn't* we had a glo'ious day? It's the mos' obtainable day Susie eveh see, seh!"

"Well, 'pon my soul!" said John, ignoring the proffered hand. "If I'd seen who it was, I'd 'a' driven straight over you." Both laughed. "Cornelius, did you see my mother waiting for me down by the tracks?"

"I did, seh. Thah she a-set'n' on a pile o' ceda'-tree poles, lookin' like the las' o' pea-time—p-he-he-he!"

"Majo' Gyarnit? O yass, seh, he thah, too. Thass how come I lingud thah, seh, yass, seh, in espiration o' Johanna. Mr. Mahch, I loves that creatu' yit, seh!—I means Johanna."

"Oh!—not Major Garnet," laughed John, gathering the reins.

Cornelius sputtered with delight, and kept between the wheels. "Mr. Mahch,"—he straightened, solemnly, and held himself sober—"I was jess about to tell you what I jess evise Majo' Gyarnit espressin' to yo' maw—jess accidental as I was earwhilin' aroun' Johanna, you know."

"What was it? What did he say?"

"O, it wan't much, what he say. He say, 'Sis' Mahch, you e'zac'ly right. Don't you on no accounts paht with so much's a' acre o' them lan's lessn——"

"Lord!—the lands—take care for the wheel."

But Mr. Leggett leaned heavily on the buggy. "Mr. Mahch, I evince an' repose you in confidence to wit: that long as you do like Gyarnit say——"

John gave a stare of menace. "Major Garnet, if you please."

"Yass, seh, o' co'se; Majo' Gyarnit. I say, long as you do like he say, Widewood stay jess like it is, an' which it suit him like grapes suit a coon!" The informant's booziness had returned. One foot kept slipping from a spoke of the fore-wheel. With pretence of perplexity he examined the wheel. "Mr. Mahch, this wheel sick; she mighty sick; got to see blacksmiff befo' she can eveh see Widewood."

John looked. The word was true. He swore. The mulatto snickered, sagged against it and cocked his face importantly.

"Mr. Mahch, if you an' me was on'y in cahoots! En we *kin* be, seh, we kin—why, hafe o' yo' lan's 'u'd be public lan's in no time, an' the res' 'u'd belong to a stawk comp'ny, an' me'n' you 'u'd be a-cuttin' off kewponds an' a-drivin' fas' hawses an' a-drinkin' champagne suppuz, an' champagne faw ow real frien's an' real pain faw ow sham frien's, an' plenty o' both kine—thah goes Majo' Gyarnit's kerrige to him." It passed.

"But, why, Cornelius, should it suit Major Garnet for my lands to lie idle?"

"Mr. Mahch, has you neveh inspec' the absence o' green in my eye? It suit him faw a reason known on'y to yo's truly, yit which the said yo's truly would accede to transfawm to you, seh; yass, seh; in considerations o' us goin' in cahoots, aw else a call loan, an' yit mo' stric'ly a call-ag'in loan, a sawt o' continial fee, yass, seh; an' the on'y question, now much kin you make it?"

John looked into the upturned face for some seconds before he said, slowly and pleasantly, "Why, you dirty dog!" He gave the horse a cut of the whip. Leggett smiling and staggering, called after him, to the delight of all the street,

"Mr. Mahch, thass confidential, you know! An' Mr. Mahch! Woe! Mr. Mahch." John glanced fiercely back—"You betteh 'zamine that *hine* wheel! caze it jess now pa-ass oveh my foot!"

XXIX.

RAVENEL ASKS

The Garnet carriage, Johanna on the back seat, came smartly up through the town, past Parson Tombs's, the Halliday cottage, and silent Montrose Academy, and was soon parted from the Marches' buggy, which followed with slower dignity and a growing limp.

"Well, Johanna," said Garnet, driving, "had a good time?"

"Yass, seh."

"What's made Miss Barb so quiet all day; doesn't she like our friend?"

The answer was a bashful drawl—"I reckon she like him tol'able, seh."

"If you think Miss Barb would be pleased you can change to this seat beside me, Johanna." The master drew rein and she made the change. He spoke again. "You saw me, just now, talking with Cornelius, didn't you?"

"Yass, seh."

"His wife's dead, at last."

No answer.

"Johanna," he turned a playful eye, "what makes you so hard on Cornelius!"

She replied with a white glance of alarm and turned away. He would have pressed the subject but she murmured,

"Dah Miss Barb."

Barbara sat on a bare ledge of rock above the road-side, plating clovers. Fair stood close below, watching her fingers. She sprang to her feet.

"What did keep you so?" She moved to where Fair had stopped to hand her down, but laughed, turned away, waved good-by to Fannie and Ravenel out in a field full of flowers and western sunlight, and ran around by an easier descent to the carriage. Fair helped her in.

"Homeward bound," she said, and they spun away. As they turned a bend in the pike she glanced back with a carefully careless air, but saw only their own dust.

John, driving beside his mother, with eyes on the infirm wheel, was very silent, and she was very limp. The buggy top was up for privacy. By and by he heard a half-spoken sound at his side, and turning saw her eyes full of tears.

"O thunder!" he thought, but only said, "Why, mother, what's the matter?"

"Ah! my son, that's what I wonder. Why have you shunned me all day? Am I—"

"There are the Tombeses waiting at their gate," interrupted the son. The aged pair had hurried away from the train on foot to have their house open for Sister March.

"Yes," said Daphne, sweetly yielding herself to their charge, "John's fierce driving has damaged a wheel, and we wont——"

"Go home till morning," said the delighted pastor with a tickled laugh that drew from his wife a glance of fond disapproval.

John drove alone to a blacksmith shop and left his buggy there and his horse at a stable. For the blacksmith lay across his doorsill "sick." He had been mending rigs and shoeing critters since dawn, and had drunk from a jug something he had thought was water and found—"it wusn't."

March sauntered off lazily to a corner where the lane led westward like the pike, turned into it and ran at full speed.

With a warm face he came again into the main avenue at a point nearly opposite the Halliday's cottage gate. General Halliday and the Englishman were just going through it.

John turned toward the sun-setting at a dignified walk. "I'm a fool to come out here," he thought. "But I must see at once what Jeff-Jack thinks of my plan. Will he tell me the truth, or will he trick me as they say he did Cornelius? O I must ask him, too, if he did that! I can't help it if he is with her; I must see him. I don't

want to see her; at least that's not what I'm out here for. I'm done with her—for a while; Heaven bless her!—but I must see him, so's to know what to propose to mother."

The day was dying in exquisite beauty. Long bands of pale green light widened up from the west. Along the hither slope of a ridge someone was burning off his sedge-grass. The slender red lines of fire, beautiful after passion's sort, but dimming the field's fine gold, were just reaching the crest to die by a road-side. The objects of his search were nowhere to be seen.

A short way off, on the left, lay a dense line of young cedars and pines, nearly parallel with the turnpike. A footpath, much haunted in term-time by Montrose girls, and leading ultimately to the rear of the Academy grounds, lay in the clover-field beyond this thicket. John mounted a fence and gazed far and near. Opposite him in the narrow belt of evergreens was a scarcely noticeable opening, so deeply curved that one would get almost through it before the view opened on the opposite side. He leaped into the field, ran to this gap, burst into the open beyond, and stopped, hat in hand—speechless. His quest was ended.

Not ten steps away stood two lovers who had just said that fearfully sweet "mine" and "thine" that keeps the world a-turning. Ravenel's right arm was curved over Fannie's shoulder and about her waist. His left hand smoothed the hair from her uplifted brow, and his kiss was just lighting upon it.

The blood leaped to his face, but the next instant he sunk his free hand into his pocket and smiled. John's face was half-anger, half-anguish.

"Pleasant evening," said Ravenel.

"For you, sir." John bowed austerely. "I will not mar it. My business can wait." He gave Fannie a grief-stricken look and was hurrying off.

"John March," cried Ravenel, in a voice breaking with laughter, "come right back here, sir." But the youth only threw up an arm in tragic disdain and kept on.

"John," called a gentler voice, and he turned. "Don't leave us so," said Fannie. "You'll make me unhappy if you do." She had drawn away from her lover's arm. She put out a hand.

"Come, tell me I haven't lost my best friend."

John ran to her, caught her hand in both his and covered it with kisses, Ravenel stood smiling and breaking a twig slowly into bits.

"There, there, that's extravagant," said Fannie; but she let the youth keep her hand while he looked into her eyes and smiled fondly through his distress. Then she withdrew it, saying:

"There's Mr. Ravenel's hand, hold it. If I didn't know how men hate to be put through forms, I'd insist on your taking it."

"I reckon John thinks we haven't been quite candid," said Ravenel.

"I'm not sure we have," responded Fannie. "And yet I do think we've been real friends. You know John"—she smiled at her hardihood—"this is the only way it could ever be, don't you?" But John turned half away and shook his head bitterly. She spoke again. "Look at me, John." But plainly he could not.

"Are you going to throw us overboard?" she asked. There was a silence; and then—"You mustn't; not even if you feel like it. Don't you know we hadn't ever ought to consult our feelings till we've consulted everything else?"

John looked up with a start, and Fannie, by a grimace, bade him give his hand to his rival. He turned sharply and offered it. Ravenel took it with an air of drollery and John spoke low, Fannie loitering a step aside.

"I offer you my hand with this warning—I love her. I'm going on to love her after she's yours by law. I'll not make love to her; I may be a fool, but I'm not a hound; I love her too well to do that. But she's bound to know it right along. You'll see it. Everybody'll know it. That'll be all of it, I swear. But any man who wants to stop me from it will have to kill me. I believe I have the right, before God, to do it; but I'm going to do it anyhow. I prize your friendship. If I can keep it while you know, and while everybody else knows, that I'm simply hanging round waiting for you to die, I'll do it. If I can't—I can't." The hands parted.

"That's all right, John. That's what I'd do in your place."

March gazed a moment in astonishment. Then Fannie, still drifting away, felt Ravenel at her side and glanced up and around.

"O, you haven't let him go, have you? Why, I wanted to give him this four-leaf clover—as a sort o' pleasant hint. Don't you see?"

"I reckon he'll try what luck there is in odd numbers," said Ravenel, and they quickened their homeward step.

John went to tea at the Tombses in no mood to do himself credit as a guest. His mother was still reminding him of it next day when they alighted at home. "I little thought my son would give me so much trouble."

But his reply struck her dumb. "I've got lots left, mother, and will always have plenty. I make it myself."

XXX.

ANOTHER ODD NUMBER

Fannie expressed to Barbara one day her annoyance at that kind of men—without implying that she meant any certain one—who will never take no for an answer.

"A lover, Barb, if he's not of the humble sort, is the most self-conceited thing alive. He can no more take in the idea that your objection to him is *he* than a board can draw a nail into itself. You've got to hammer it in."

"With a brickbat," quoth Barbara, whose notions of carpentry were feminine, and who did not care to discuss the matter. But John March, it seemed, would not take no from fate itself.

"I don't believe yet," he mused, as he rode about his small farm, "that Jeff-Jack will get her. She's playing with him. Why not? She's played with a dozen. And yet, naturally, somebody'll get her, and he'll not be worthy of her. There's hope yet! She loves me far more than she realizes right now. That's a woman's way; they'll go along loving for years and find it out by accident—You, Hector! What the devil are you and Israel over in that melon-patch for instead of the corn-field?"

"I've been too young for her. No, not too young for her, but too young to show what I can do and be. She waited to see, for years. The intention may not have been conscious, but I believe it was there! And then she got tired of waiting. Why, it began to look as though I would never do anything or be anybody! Great Cæsar! You can't expect a girl to marry an egg in hopes o' what it'll hatch. O let me make haste and show what I am! what I can—'Evermind, Israel, I see you. Just wait till we get this crop gathered; if I don't kick you two idle, blundering, wasting, pilfering black renters off this farm—as shore's a gun's iron!"

"No, she and Jeff-Jack'll never marry. Even if they do he'll not live long. These political editors, if somebody doesn't kill 'em, they break down, all at once. Our difference in age will count for less and less every year. She's the kind that stays young; four years from now I'll look the older of the two—I'll work myself old!"

A vision came to the dreamer's fancy: Widewood's forests filled with thrifty settlers, mines opened, factories humming by the brooksides, the locomotive's

whistle piercing the stony ears of the Sleeping Giant; Suez full of iron-ore, coal, and quarried stone, and Fannie a widow, or possibly still unwed, charmed by his successes, touched by his constancy, and realizing at last the true nature of what she had all along felt as only a friendship.

"That's it! If I give men good reason to court me, I'll get the woman I court!"—But he did not, for many weeks, give men any irresistible good reason to court him.

"Ah me! here's November gone. Talk of minutes slipping through the fingers—the months are as bad as the minutes! Lord! what a difference there is between planning a thing and doing it—or even beginning to do it!"

Yet he did begin. There is a season comes, sooner or later, to all of us, when we must love and love must nest. It may fix its choice irrationally on some sweet ineligible Fannie; but having chosen, there it must nest, spite of all. Now, men may begin life not thus moved; but I never knew a man thus moved who still did not begin life. Love being kindled, purpose is generated, and the wheels in us begin to go round. They had gone round, even in John's father; but not only were time, place, and circumstance against the older man, but his love had nested in so narrow a knot-hole that the purposes and activities of his gentle soul died in their prison.

"Yes, that's one thing I've got to look out for," mused John one day, riding about the northwestern limits of his lands where a foaming brook kept saying, "Water-power!—good fishing!—good fishing!—water-power!" He dismounted and leaned against his horse by the brook's Widewood side, we may say, although just beyond here lay the odd sixty acres by which Widewood exceeded an even hundred thousand. The stream came down out of a steeply broken region of jagged rocks, where frequent evergreens and russet oaks studded the purple gray maze of trees that like to go naked in winter. But here it shallowed widely and slipped over a long surface of unbroken bed-rock. On its far side a spring gushed from a rocky cleft, leapt down some natural steps, ran a few yards, and slid into the brook. Behind it a red sun shone through the leafless tree-tops. The still air hinted of frost.

Suddenly his horse listened. In a moment he heard voices, and by an obscure road up and across the brook two riders came briskly to the water's edge, splashed into the smooth shallow and let their horses drink. They were a man and a maid, and the maid was Barbara Garnet. She was speaking.

"We can't get so far out of the way if we can keep this"—she saw John March rise into his saddle, caught a breath, and then cried:

"Why, it's Mr. March. Mr. March, we've missed our road!" Her laugh was anxious. "In fact, we're lost. Oh! Mr. March, Mr. Fair." The young men shook hands. Fair noted a light rifle and a bunch of squirrels at March's saddle-bow.

"You've been busier than we."

"Mighty poor sign of industry. I didn't come out for game, but a man's sure to be sorry if he goes into the woods without a gun. I mean, of course, Miss Garnet, if he's alone!"

Barbara answered with a smile and a wicked drawl, "You've been enjoying both ad-van-tag-es. I used to wish I was a squirrel, they're so en-er-get-ic." She added that she would be satisfied now to remain as she was if she could only get home safe. She reckoned they could find the road if Mr. March would tell them how.

John smiled seriously. "Better let me show you." He moved down the middle of the stream. "This used to be the right road, long time ago. You know, Mr. Fair"—his voice rang in the trees, "our mountain roads just take the bed of the nearest creek whenever they can. Our people are not a very business people. But that's because they've got the rare virtue of contentment. Now—"

"I don't think they're too contented, Mr. March," said Barbara, defensively. "Why, Mr. Fair, how much this creek and road are like ours at Rosemont!"

"It's the same creek," called March.

By and by they left it and rode abreast through woods. There was much badinage, in which Barbara took the aggressive, with frequent hints at Fannie that gave John delicious pain and convinced him that Miss Garnet was, after all, a fine girl. Fair became so quiet that John asked him two or three questions.

"O no!" laughed Fair, he could stay but a day or two. He said he had come this time from "quite a good deal" of a stay in Texas and Mexico, and his father had written him that he was needed at home. "Which is absurd, you know," he added to Barbara.

"Per-fect-ly," she said. But he would not skirmish.

"Yes," he replied. "But all the same I have to go. I'm sorry."

"We're sorry at Rosemont."

"I shall be sorry at Widewood," echoed March.

"I regret it the more," responded Fair, "from having seen Widewood so much and yet so little. Miss Garnet believes in a great future for Widewood. It was in trying to see something of it that we lost——"

But Barbara protested. "Mr. Fair, we rode hap-hazard! We simply chanced that way! What should I know, or care, about lands? You're confusing me with pop-a! Which is doub-ly ab-surd!"

"Most assuredly!" laughed the young men.

"You know, Mr. March, pop-a's so proud of the Widewood tract that I believe, positively, he's jealous of anyone's seeing it without him for a guide. You'd think it held the key of all our fates."

"Which is triply absurd!"

"Superlatively!" drawled Barbara, and laughing was easy. They came out upon the pike as March was saying to Fair:

"I'd like to show you my lands; they're the key of my fate, anyhow."

"They're only the lock," said Barbara, musingly. "The key is—elsewhere."

John laughed. He thought her witty, and continued with her, though the rest of the way to Rosemont was short and plain. Presently she turned upon the two horsemen a pair of unaggressive but invincible eyes, saying, languorously,

"Mr. March, I want you to show Widewood to Mr. Fair—to-morrow. Pop-a's been talking about showing it to him, but I want him to see it with just you alone."

To Fair there always seemed a reserve of merriment behind Miss Garnet's gravity, and a reserve of gravity behind her brightest gayety. This was one thing that had drawn him back to Rosemont. Her ripples never hid her depths, yet she was never too deep to ripple. I give his impressions for what they may be worth. He did not formulate them; he merely consented to stay a day longer. A half-moon was growing silvery when John said good-by at the gate of the campus.

"Now, in the morning, Mr. Fair, I'll meet you somewhere between here and the pike. I wish I could say you'd meet my mother, but she's in poor health—been so ever since the war."

That night Garnet lingered in his wife's room to ask—

"Do you think Barb really missed the road, or was that——"

"Yes, they took the old creek road by mistake."

"Has Fair—said anything to her?"

"No; she didn't expect or wish it——"

"Well, I don't see why."

—"And he's hardly the sort to do unexpected things."

"They've agreed to ride right after breakfast. What d'you reckon that's for?"

"Not what you wish. But still, for some reason she wants you to leave him entirely to himself."

College being in session breakfast was early.

"Barb, you'll have to take care of Mr. Fair to-day, I reckon. You might take my horse, sir. I'll be too busy indoors to use him."

The girl and her cavalier took but a short gallop. They had nearly got back to the grove gate when he ventured upon a personal speech; but it was only to charge her with the art of blundering cleverly.

She assured him that her blunders were all nature and her art accident. "Whenever I want to be witty I get into a hurry, and haste is the an-ti-dote of wit."

"Miss Garnet," he thought, as her eyes rested calmly in his, "your gaze is too utterly truthful."

"Ah!" said Barbara, "here's Mr. March now."

Fair wished he might find out why Miss Garnet should be out-man[oe]uvring her father.

XXXI.

MR. FAIR VENTURES SOME INTERROGATIONS

The air was full of joy that morning, and John boyishly open and hearty.

"Fact is, Mr. Fair, I don't care for young ladies' company. Half of them are frauds and the rest are a delusion and a snare—ha-ha-ha! Miss Garnet is new goods, as the boys say, and I'm not fashionable. Even our mothers ain't very well

acquainted yet; though my mother's always regretted it; their tastes differ. My mother's literary, you know."

"They say Miss Garnet's a great romp—among other girls—and an unmerciful mimic."

"Don't you rather like that?"

"Who, me? Lord, yes! The finest girl I know is that way—dances Spanish dances—alone with other girls, of course. The church folks raised Cain about it once. O I—you think I mean Miss Halliday—well I do. Miss Garnet can tease me about her all she likes—ha, ha! it doesn't faze me! Miss Fannie's nothing to me but a dear friend—never was! Why, she's older than I am—h-though h-you'd never suspect it."

"Well, yes, I think I should have known it."

"O go 'long! Somebody told you! But I swear, Mr. Fair, I wonder, sir, you're not more struck with Miss Halliday. Now, I go in for mind and heart. I don't give a continental for externals; and yet—did you ever see such glorious eyes as Fan—Miss Halliday's? Now, honest Ingin! *did* you, *ever*?"

Mr. Fair admitted that Miss Halliday's eyes danced.

"You say they do? You're right! Hah! *they* dance Spanish dances. I've seen black eyes that went through you like a sword; I've seen blue eyes that drilled through you like an auger; and I've seen gray ones that bit through you like a cold-chisel; and I've seen—now, there's Miss Garnet's, that just see through you without going through you at all—O I don't like any of 'em! but Fannie Halliday's eyes—Miss Fannie, I should say—they seem to say, 'Come out o' that. I'm not looking at all, but I know you're there!' O sir!—Mr. Fair, don't you hate, sir, to see such a creature as that get married to anybody? I say, to *anybody*! I tell you what it's like, Mr. Fair. It's like chloroforming a butterfly, sir! That's what it's like!"

He meditated and presently resumed—"But, Law' no! She's nothing to me. I've got too much to think of with these lands on my hands. D'you know, sir, I really speak more freely to you than if you belonged here and knew me better? And I confess to you that a girl like F—Miss Halliday—would be enough to keep me from ever marrying!"

"Why, how is that?"

"Why? O well, because!—knowing her, I couldn't ever be content with less, and, of course, I couldn't get her or make her happy if I got her. Torture for one's better than torture for two. Mind, that's a long ways from saying I ever did want her, or ever will. I'm happy as I am—confirmed bachelor—ha-ha-ha! What I do

want, Mr. Fair, sir, is to colonize these lands, and to tell you the truth, sir—h—I don't know how to do it!"

"Are your titles good?"

"Perfect."

"Are the lands free from mortgage?"

"Free! ha-ha! they'd be free from mortgage, sir, but for one thing."

"What's that?"

"Why, they're mortgaged till you can't rest! The mortgages ain't so mortal much, but they've been on so long we'd almost be afraid to take them off. They're dried on sir!—grown in! Why, sir, we've paid more interest than the mortgages foot up, sir!"

"What were they made for? improvements?"

"Impr—O yes, sir; most of 'em were given to improve the interior of our smoke-house—sort o' decorate it with meat."

"Ah, you wasted your substance in riotous living!"

"No, sir, we were simply empty in the same old anatomical vicinity and had to fill it. The mortgages wa'n't all made for that; two or three were made to raise money to pay the interest on old ones—interest and taxes. Mr. Fair, if ever a saint on earth lived up to his belief my father did. He believed in citizenship confined to taxpayers, and he'd pay his taxes owing for the pegs in his shoes—he made his own shoes, sir."

"Who hold these mortgages?"

"On paper, Major Garnet, but really Jeff-Jack Ravenal. That's private, sir."

"Yes, very properly, I see."

"Do you? Wha' do you see? Wish I could see something. Seems like I can't."

"O, I only see as you do, no doubt, that any successful scheme to improve your lands will have to be in part a public scheme, and be backed by Mr. Ravenel's newspaper, and he can do that better if he's privately interested and supposed not to be so, can't he?"

March stared, and then mused. "Well, I'll be—doggoned!"

"Of course, Mr. March, that needn't be unfair to you. Is it to accommodate you, or him, that Major Garnet lends his name?"

"O me!—At least—O! they're always accommodating each other."

"My father told me of these lands before I came here. He thinks that the fortunes of Suez, and consequently of Rosemont, in degree, not to speak"—the speaker smiled—"of individual fates, *is* locked up in them."

"I know! I know! The fact grows on me, sir, every day and hour! But, sir, the lands are my lawful inheritance, and although I admit that the public——"

"You quite misunderstand me! Miss Garnet said—in play, I know—that the key of this lock isn't far off, or words to that effect. Was she not right? And doesn't Mr. Ravenel hold it? In fact—pardon my freedom—is it not best that he should?"

"Good heavens, sir! why, Miss Garnet didn't mean—you say, does Jeff-Jack hold that key? He was holding it the last time I saw him! O yes. Even according to your meaning he thinks he holds it, and he thinks he ought to. I don't think he ought to, and incline to believe he won't! *Lift* your miserable head!" he cried to his horse, spurred fiercely, and jerked the curb till the animal reared and plunged. When he laughed again, in apology, Fair asked,

"Do you propose to organize a company yourself to—eh—boom your lands?"

"Well, I don't—Yes, I reckon I shall. I reckon I'll have to. Wha' do you think?"

"Might not Mr. Ravenel let you pay off your mortgages in stock?"

"I—he might. But could I do that and still control the thing? For, Mr. Fair, I've got to control! There's a private reason why I mustn't let Jeff-Jack manage me. I've got to show myself the better man. He knows why. O! we're good friends. I can't explain it to you, and you'd never guess it in the world! But there's a heavy prize up between us, and I believe that if I can show myself more than a match for him in these lists—this land business—I'll stand a chance for that prize. There, sir, I tell you that much. It's only proper that I should. I've got to be the master."

"Is your policy, then, to gain time—to put the thing off while you——"

"Good Lord, no! I haven't a day to spare! I'll show you these lands, Mr. Fair, and then if you'll accept the transfer of these mortgages, I'll begin the work of opening these lands, somehow, before the sun goes down. But if I let Ravenel or Garnet in, I—" John pondered.

"Haven't you let them in already, Mr. March? I don't see clearly why it isn't your best place for them."

March was silent.

XXXII.

JORDAN

Barbara lay on a rug in her room, reading before the fragrant ashes of a perished fire. She heard her father's angry step, and his stern rap on her door. Before she could more than lift her brow he entered.

"Barb!—O what sort of posture—" She started, and sat coiled on the rug.

"Barb, how is it you're not with your mother?"

"Mom-a sent me out, pop-a. She thought if I'd leave her she might drop asleep."

He smiled contemptuously. "How long ago was that?"

"About fifteen minutes."

"It was an hour ago! Barb, you've got hold of another novel. Haven't you learned yet that you can't tell time by that sort of watch?"

"Is mom-a awake?" asked the girl, starting from the mantel-piece.

"Yes—stop!" He extended his large hand, and she knew, as she saw its tremor, that he was in the same kind of transport in which he had flogged Cornelius. In the same instant she was frightened and glad.

"I've headed him off," she thought.

"Barb, your mother's very ill—stop! Johanna's with her. Barb"—his tones sank and hardened—"why did that black hussy try to avoid telling me you were home and Fair had gone off with that whelp, John March? What? Why don't you speak so I can hear? What are you afraid of?"

"I'm afraid we'll disturb mom-a. Johanna should have told you plainly."

"Oh! indeed! I tell you, if it hadn't been for your mother's presence I'd have thrown her out of the window." An unintentional murmur from Barbara exasperated him to the point of ecstasy. He paled and smiled.

"Barb, did you want to keep me from knowing that Fair was going to Widewood?" They looked steadily into each others' eyes. "Which of us is it you don't trust, that Yankee, or your own father? Don't—" he lifted his palm, but let it sink again. "Don't move your lips that way again; I won't endure it. Barbara

Garnet, this is Fannie Halliday's work! So help me, God, I'd rather I'd taken your little white coffin in my arms eighteen years ago and laid it in the ground than that you should have learned from that poisonous creature the effrontery to suspect me of dishonest—Silence! You ungrateful brat, if you were a son, I'd shake the breath out of you. Have you *ever* trusted me? Say!"—he stepped close up—"Stop gazing at me like a fool and answer my question! Have you?"

"Don't speak so loud."

"Don't tell me that, you little minx; you who have never half noticed how sick your mother is. Barb"—the speaker's words came through his closed teeth—"Mr. John March can distrust me and leave me out of his precious company as much as he damn pleases—if you like his favorite forms of speech—and so may your tomtit Yankee. But you—sha'n't! You sha'n't repay a father's careful plans with suspicions of underhanded rascality, you unregenerate—see here! Do those two pups know you didn't want me to go? Answer me!"

She could not. Her lips moved as he had forbidden, and she was still looking steadily into his blazing eyes, when, as if lightning had struck, she flinched almost off her feet, her brain rang and roared, her sight failed, and she knew she had been slapped in the face.

He turned his back, but the next instant had wheeled again, his face drawn with pain and alarm. "I didn't mean to do that! Oh, good Lord! it wa'n't I! Forgive me, Barb. Oh, Barb, my child, as God's my witness, I didn't do it of my own free will. He let the devil use me. All my troubles are coming together; your suspicions maddened me."

Her eyes were again in his. She shook her head and passed to her mirror, saying, slowly, "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall." She glanced at the glass, but the redness of its fellow matched the smitten cheek, and she hurried to the door.

"Barb"—the tone was a deep whine—she stopped without looking back. "Don't say anything to your mother to startle her. The slightest shock may kill her."

Barbara entered the mother's chamber. Johanna was standing by a window. The daughter beamed on the maid, and turned to the bed; but consternation quenched the smile when she beheld her mother's face.

"Why, mom-a, sweet."

A thin hand closed weakly on her own, and two sunken blue eyes, bright with distress, looked into hers. "Where is he?" came a feeble whisper.

"Pop-a? Oh, he's coming. If he doesn't come in a moment, I'll bring him." The daughter's glance rested for refuge on the white forehead. "Shall I go call him?"

The pallid lips made no reply, the sunken eyes still lay in wait. Barbara racked her mind for disguise of words, but found none. There was no escape. Even to avoid any longer the waiting eyes would confess too much. She met them and they gazed up into hers in still anguish. Barbara's answered, with a sweet, full serenity. Then without a word or motion came the silent question,

"Did he strike you?"

And Barbara answered, audibly. "No."

She rose, adding, "Let me go and bring him." Conscience rose also and went with her. Just outside the closed door she covered her face in her hands and sank to the floor, moaning under her breath,

"What have I done? What shall I do? Oh God! why couldn't—why *didn't* I lie to *him*?" She ran down-stairs on tiptoe.

Her father, with Pettigrew at his side, was offering enthusiasm to a Geometry class. "Young gentlemen, a swift, perfect demonstration of a pure abstract truth is as beautiful and delightful to me—to any uncorrupted mind—as perfect music to a perfect ear."

But hearing that his daughter was seeking him, he withdrew.

The two had half mounted the stairs, when a hurried step sounded in the upper hall, and Johanna leaned wildly over the rail, her eyes streaming.

"Miss Barb! Miss Barb! run here! run! come quick, fo' de love of God! Oh, de chariots of Israel! de chariots of Israel! De gates o' glory lif'n up dey head!"

Barbara flew up the stairs and into her mother's room. Mr. Pettigrew stood silent among the crystalline beauties of mathematical truth, and a dozen students leaped to their feet as the daughter's long wail came ringing through the house mingled with the cry of Johanna.

"Too late! Too late! De daughteh o' Zion done gone in unbeseen!"

Through two days more Fair lingered, quartered at the Swanee Hotel, and conferred twice more with John March. In the procession that moved up the cedar avenue of the old Suez burying-ground, he stepped beside General Halliday, near its end. Among the headstones of the Montgomeries the long line stopped and sang,

"For oh! we stand on Jordan's strand, Our friends are passing over."

In the midst of the refrain, each time, there trembled up in tearful ecstasy, above the common wave of song, the voices of Leviticus Wisdom and his wife. But

only once, after the last stanza, Johanna's yet clearer tone answered them from close beside black-veiled Barbara, singing in vibrant triumph,

"An' jess befo', de shiny sho' We may almos' discoveh."

XXXIII.

THE OPPORTUNE MOMENT

Coming from the grave Fair walked with March.

"Yes, I go to-night; I shall see my father within three days. He may think better of your ideas than I do. Don't you suppose really—" etc. "You think you'll push it anyhow?"

"Yes, sir. In fact, I've got to."

After all others were gone one man still loitered furtively in the cemetery. He came, now, from an alley of arborvitæ with that fantastic elasticity of step which skilled drunkards learn. He had in hand a bunch of limp flowers of an unusual kind, which he had that day ridden all the way to Pulaski City to buy. He stood at the new grave's foot, sank to one knee, wiped true tears from his eyes, pressed apart the evergreens and chrysanthemums piled there, and laid in the midst his own bruised and wilted offering of lilies.

As he reached the graveyard gate in departing his mood lightened.

"An' now gen'lemen," he said to himself, "is come to pa-ass the ve-y nick an' keno o' time faw a fresh staht. Frien' Gyarnit, we may be happy yit."

He came up behind Fair and March. Fair was speaking of Fannie.

"But where was she? I didn't see her."

"Oh, she stayed at Rosemont to look after the house."

"The General tells me his daughter is to be married to Mr. Ravenel in March."

John gave an inward start, but was silent for a moment. Then he said, absently,

"So that's out, is it?" But a few steps farther on he touched Fair's arm.

"Let's go—slower." His smile was ashen. "I—h—I don't know why in the devil I have these sickish feelings come on me at f-funerals." They stopped. "Humph! Wha'd' you reckon can be the cause of it—indigestion?"

Mr. Fair thought it very likely, and March said it was passing off already.

"Humph! it's ridiculous. Come on, I'm all right now."

The man behind them passed, looked back, stopped and returned. "Gen'lemen, sirs, to you. Mr. Mahch, excuse me by pyo accident earwhilin' yo' colloquial terms. I know e'zacly what cause yo' sick transit. Yass, seh. Thass the imagination. I've had it, myseff."

March stopped haughtily, Fair moved out of hearing, and Cornelius spoke low, with a sweet smile. "Yass, seh. You see the imagination o' yo' head is evil. You imaginin' somepm what ain't happm yit an' jiss like as not won't happm at all. But thass not why I seeks to interrump' you at this junction.

"Mr. Mahch, I'm impudize to espress to you in behalfts o' a vas' colo'ed constituency—but speakin' th'oo a small ban' o' they magnates with me as they sawt o' janizary chairman—that Gen'l Halliday seem to be ti-ud o' us an' done paass his bes' dotage, an' likewise the groun's an' debasements on an' faw which we be proud to help you depopulate yo' lan's, yass, seh, with all conceivable ligislation thereunto."

"What business is it of yours or your Blackland darkies what I do with my woods?"

"Why, thass jess it! Whass nobody's business is ev'ybody's business, you know."

March smiled and moved toward Fair. "I've no time to talk with you now, Leggett."

"Oh! no, seh, I knowed you wouldn't have. But bein' the talk' o' the town that you an' this young gen'leman"—dipping low to Fair—"is projeckin' said depopulation I has cawdially engross ow meaju' in writin' faw yo' conjint an' confidential consideration. Yass, seh, aw in default whereof then to compute it in like manneh to the nex' mos' interested."

"And, pray, who is the next most interested in my private property?"

"Why, Majo' Gyarnit, I reck'n—an' Mr. Ravenel, seein' he's the Djuke o' Suez—p-he!"

March let his hand accept a soiled document, saying, "Well, he's not Duke of me. Just leave me this. I'll either mail it to you or see you again. Good-by."

The title of the document as indorsed on it was: "The Suez and Three Counties Transportation, Immigration, Education, Navigation, and Construction Co."

XXXIV.

DAPHNE AND DINWIDDIE: A PASTEL IN PROSE

"Professor" Pettigrew had always been coldly indifferent to many things commonly counted chief matters of life. One of these was religion; another was woman. His punctuality at church at the head of Rosemont's cadets was so obviously perfunctory as to be without a stain of hypocrisy. Yet he never vaunted his scepticism, but only let it exhale from him in interrogative insinuations that the premises and maxims of religion were refuted by the outcome of the war. To woman his heart was as hard, cold, and polished as celluloid. Only when pressed did he admit that he regarded her as an insipid necessity. One has to have a female parent in order to get into this world—no gentleman admitted without a lady; and when one goes out of it again, it is good to leave children so as to keep the great unwashed from getting one's property. Property!—humph! he or his father, at least—he became silent.

He often saw Mrs. March in church, yet kept his heart. But one night a stereoptican lecture was given in Suez. In Mrs. March's opinion such things, unlike the deadly theatre, were harmful only when carried to excess. To keep John from carrying this one to excess—that is, from going to it with anybody else—she went with him, and they "happened"—I suppose an agnostic would say—to sit next to Dinwiddie Pettigrew. John being in a silent mood Daphne and Dinwiddie found time for much conversation. The hour fixed for the lecture was half-past seven. Promptly about half-past eight the audience began to arrive. At a quarter of nine it was growing numerous.

"Oh! no," said General Halliday to the lecturer, "don't you fret about them going home; they'll stay like the yellow fever"—and punctually somewhere about nine "The Great Love Stories of History" began to be told, and luminously pictured on a white cotton full moon.

With lights turned low and everybody enjoined to converse only in softest whispers, the conditions for spontaneous combustion were complete in many bosoms, and at the close of the entertainment Daphne Dalrymple, her own asbestos affections warmed, but not ignited, walked away with the celluloid heart of Dinwiddie Pettigrew in a light blaze.

XXXV.

A WIDOW'S ULTIMATUM

At the time of which we would here speak the lover had made one call at Widewood, but had not met sufficient encouragement to embolden him to ask that the lovee would give, oh, give him back a heart so damaged by fire, as to be worthless except to the thief; though his manner was rank with hints that she might keep it now and take the rest.

Mrs. March was altogether too sacred in her own eyes to be in haste at such a juncture. Her truly shrinking spirit was a stranger to all manner of auctioning, but she believed in fair play, and could not in conscience quite forget her exhilarating skirmish with Mr. Ravenel on the day of Susie's wedding.

It had not brought on a war of roses. Something kept him away from Widewood. Was it, she wondered, the noble fear that he might subject her to those social rumors that are so often all the more annoying because only premature? Ah, if he could but know how lightly she regarded such prattle! But she would not tell him, even in impersonal verse. On the contrary, she contributed to the *Presbyterian Monthly*—a non-sectarian publication—those lines—which caught one glance of so many of her friends and escaped any subsequent notice—entitled,

"LOVE-PROOF.

"She pities much, yet laughs at LoveFor love of laughter! Fadeless youth"—

But the simple fact is that Mr. Ravenel's flatteries, when rare chance brought him and the poetess together, were without purpose, and justified in his liberal mind by the right of every Southern gentleman to treat as irresistible any and every woman in her turn.—"Got to do something pleasant, Miss Fannie; can't buy her poetry."

On the evening when March received from Leggett the draft of An Act Entitled, etc., the mother and son sat silent through their supper, though John was longing to speak. At last, as they were going into the front room he managed to say:

"Well, mother, Fair's gone—goes to-night."

He dropped an arm about her shoulders.

"Oh!—when I can scarcely bear my own weight!" She sank into her favorite chair and turned away from his regrets, sighing,

"Oh, no, youth and health never do think."

The son sat down and leaned thoughtfully on the centre-table.

"That's so! They don't think; they're too busy feeling."

"Ah, John, you don't feel! I wish you could."

"Humph! I wish I couldn't." He smoothed off a frown and let his palm fall so flat upon the bare mahogany that a woman of less fortitude than Mrs. March would certainly have squeaked. "Mother, dear, I believe I'll try to see how little I can feel and how much I can think."

"Providence permitting, my reckless boy."

"Oh, bless your dear soul, mother, Providence'll be only too glad! yes, I've a notion to try thinking. Fact is, I've begun already. Now, you love solitude——"

"Ah, John!"

"Well, at any rate, you can think best when you're alone."

"O John!"

"Well, father could. I can't. I need to rub against men. You don't."

"Oh!—h—h—John!" But when Mrs. March saw the intent was only figurative she drew her lips close and dropped her eyes.

Her son reflected a minute and spoke again. "Why, mother, just that Yankee's being here peeping around and asking his scared-to-death questions has pulled my wits together till I wonder where they've been. Oh, it's so! It's not because he's a Yankee. It's simply because he's in with the times. He knows what's got to come and what's got to go, and how to help them do it so's to make them count! He belongs—pshaw—he belongs to a live world. Now, here in this sleepy old Dixie——"

"Has it come to that, John?"

"Yes, it has, and it's cost a heap sight more than it's come to, because I didn't let it come long ago. I wouldn't look plain truth in the face for fear of going back on Rosemont and Suez, and all the time I've been going back on Widewood!" The speaker smote the family Bible with Leggett's document. His mother wept.

"Oh! golly," mumbled John.

"Oh! my son!"

"Why, what's the trouble, mother?"

Mrs. March could not tell him. It was not merely his blasphemies. There seemed to be more hope of sympathy from the damaged ceiling, and she moaned up to it,

"My son a Radical!"

He sprang to his feet. "Mother, take that insult back! For your own sake, take it back! I hadn't a thought of politics. If my words implied it they played me false!"

Mrs. March was anguished wonder. "Why, what else could they mean?"

"Anything! I don't know! I was only trying to blurt out what I've been thinking out, concerning our private interests. For I've thought out and found out—these last few days—more things that can be done, and must be done, and done right off with these lands of ours——"

"O John! Is that your swift revenge?"

"Why, mother, dear! Revenge for what? Who on?"

"For nothing, John; on widowed, helpless me!"

"Great Scott! mother, as I've begged you fifty times, I beg you now again, just tell me what to do or undo."

"Please don't mock me, John. You're the dictator now, by the terms of the will. They give you the legal rights, and the legal rights are all that count—with men. I'm in your power."

John laughed. "I wish you'd tell the dictator what to do."

"Too late, my son, you've taken the counsel of your country's enemies." She rose to leave the room. The son slapped his thigh.

"Pon my soul, mother, you must excuse me. Here's a letter.

"Has Jeff-Jack accepted another poem?" he asked, as she read. "I wish he'd pay for it."

She did not say, though the missive must have ended very kindly, for in spite of herself she smiled.

"Ah, John! your vanity is so large it can include even your mother. I wish I had some of it; I might believe what my friends tell me. But maybe it's vanity in me not to think they know best." She let John press her hand upon his forehead.

"I wish I could know," she continued. "I yearn for wise counsel. O son! why do we, both of us, so distrust and shun our one only common friend? He could tell us what to do, son; and, oh, how we need some one to tell us!"

John dropped the hand. "I don't need Jeff-Jack. He's got to need me."

"Oh, presumptuous boy! John, you might say Mr. Ravenel. He's old enough to be your father."

"No, he's not! At any rate, that's one thing he'll never be!"

The widow flared up. "I can say that, sir, without your prompting."

"Why, mother! Why, I no more intended——"

"John, spare me! Oh, no, you were brutal merely by accident! I thank you! I *must* thank you for pointing your unfeeling hints at the most invincib—I mean inveterate—bachelor in the three counties."

"Inveterate lover, you'd better say. He marries Fannie Halliday next March. The General's telling every Tom, Dick and Harry to-day."

"John, I don't believe it! It can't be! I know better!"

"I wish you did, but they told me themselves, away last July, standing hand in hand. Mother, he's got no more right to marry her——"

"Than you have! And he knows it! For John, John! There never was a more pitiful or needless mismatch! Why, he could have—but it's none of my business, only——" she choked.

"No, of course not," said the son, emotionally, "and it's none of mine, either, only—humph!" He rose and strode about. "Why she could just as easily——Oh, me!" He jostled a chair. Mrs. March flinched and burst into tears.

"Oh, good heavens! mother, what have I done now? I know I'm coarse and irreverent and wilful and surly and healthy, and have got the big-head and the Lord knows what! But I swear I'll stop everything bad and be everything good if you'll just quit off sniv—weeping!"

Strange to say, this reasonable and practicable proposition did not calm either of them.

"I'll even go with you to Jeff-Jack and ask his advice—oh! Jane-Anne-Maria! *now* what's broke?"

"Only a mother's heart!" She looked up from her handkerchief. "Go seek his advice if you still covet it; I never trusted him; I only feared I might doubt him

unjustly. But now I know his intelligence, no less than his integrity, is beneath the contempt of a Christian woman. I leave you to your books. My bed——"

"O mother, I wasn't reading! Come, stay; I'll be as entertaining as a circus."

"I can't; I'm all unstrung. Let me go while I can still drag——"

John rose. A horse's tread sounded. "Now, who can that be?"

He listened again, then rolled up his fists and growled between his teeth.

"Cawnsound that foo'—mother, go on up stairs, I'll tell him you've retired."

"I shall do nothing so dishonorable. Why should you bury me alive? Is it because one friend still comes with no scheme for the devastation of our sylvan home?"

Before John could reply sunshine lighted the inquirer's face and she stepped forward elastically to give her hand to Mr. Dinwiddie Pettigrew.

When he was gone, Daphne was still as bland as May, for a moment, and even John's gravity was of a pleasant sort. "Mother, you're just too sweet and modest to see what that man's up to. I'm not. I'd like to tell him to stay away from here. Why, mother, he's—he's courting!"

The mother smiled lovingly. "My son, I'll attend to that. Ah me! suitors! They come in vain—unless I should be goaded by the sight of these dear Widewood acres invaded by the alien." She sweetened like a bride.

The son stood aghast. She lifted a fond hand to his shoulder. "John, do you know what heart hunger is? You're too young. I am ready to sacrifice anything for you, as I always was for your father. Only, I must reign alone in at least one home, one heart! Fear not; there is but one thing that will certainly drive me again into marriage."

"What's that, mother?"

"A daughter-in-law. If my son marries, I have no choice—I must!" She floated upstairs.

XXXVI.

A NEW SHINGLE IN SUEZ

Next day—"John, didn't you rise very early this morning?"

"No, ma'am."

He had not gone to bed. Yet there was a new repose in his face and energy in his voice. He ate breakfast enough for two.

"Millie, hasn't Israel brought my horse yet?"

He came to where his mother sat, kissed her forehead, and passed; but her languorous eyes read, written all over him, the fact that she had drawn her cords one degree too tight, and that in the night something had snapped; she had a new force to deal with.

"John"—there was alarm in her voice—he had the door half open—"are you so cruel and foolish as to take last evening's words literally?"

"That's all gay, mother; 'tain't the parson I'm going after, it's the surveyor."

He shut the door on the last word and went away whistling. Not that he was merry; as his horse started he set his teeth, smote in the spurs, and cleared the paling fence at a bound.

The surveyors were Champion and Shotwell. John worked with them. To his own surprise he was the life of the party. Some nights they camped. They sang jolly songs together; but often Shotwell would say:

"O Champion, I'll hush if you will; we're scaring the wolves. Now, if you had such a voice as John's—Go on, March, sing 'Queen o' my Soul.'"

John would sing; Shotwell would lie back on the pine-needles with his eyes shut, and each time the singer reached the refrain, "Mary, Mary, queen of my soul," the impassioned listener would fetch a whoop and cry, "That's her!" although everybody had known that for years the only "her" who had queened it over Shotwell's soul was John's own Fannie Halliday.

"Now, March, sing, 'Thou wert the first, thou aht the layst,' an' th'ow yo' whole soul into it like you did last night!"

"John," said Champion once, after March had sung this lament, "You're a plumb fraud. If you wa'n't you couldn't sing that thing an' then turn round and sing, 'They laughed, ha-ha! and they quaffed, ha-ha!'"

"Let's have it!" cried Shotwell. "Paass tin cups once mo', gen'lemen!"—tink—tink—

"March," said Champion, "if you'll excuse the personality, what's changed you so?"

John laughed and said he didn't think he was changed, but if he was he reckoned it was evolution. Which did not satisfy Shotwell, who had "quaffed, ha-ha!" till he was argumentative.

"Don't you 'scuse personal'ty 't all, March. I know wha's change' you. 'Tain't no 'sperience. You ain't been converted. You're gettin' *ripe*! 'S all is about it. Wha' changes green persimmons? 's nature; 'tain't 'sperience."

"Well, I'd like to know if sunshine an' frost ain't experiences," retorted Champion.

"Some experiences," laughed John, "are mighty hot sunshine, and some are mighty hard frosts." To which the two old soldiers assented with more than one sentimental sigh as the three rolled themselves in their blankets and closed their eyes.

When the survey was done they made a large colored map of everything, and John kept it in a long tin tube—what rare times he was not looking at it.

"How short-sighted most men are! They'll have lands to dispose of and yet not have maps made! How the devil do they expect ever"—etc. Sometimes he smiled to himself as he rolled the gorgeous thing up, but only as we smile at the oddities of one whom we admire.

He opened an office. It contained a mantel-piece, a desk, four chairs, a Winchester rifle, and a box of cigars. The hearth and mantel-piece were crowded with specimens of earths, ores, and building stones, and of woods precious to the dyer, the manufacturer, the joiner and the cabinet-maker. Inside the desk lay the map whenever he was, and a revolver whenever he was not—"Out. Will be back in a few minutes."

On the desk's top were more specimens, three or four fat old books from Widewood, and on one corner, by the hour, his own feet, in tight boots, when he read Washington's Letters, Story on the Constitution, or the Geology of Dixie. What interested Suez most of all was his sign. It professed no occupation. "John March." That was all it proclaimed, for a time, in gilt, on a field of blue smalts. But one afternoon when he was—"Out of town. Will be back Friday"—some Rosemont boys scratched in the smalts the tin word, Gentleman.

"Let it alone, John," said the next day's *Courier*. "It's a good ad., and you can live up to it." It stayed.

XXXVII.

WISDOM AND FAITH KISS EACH OTHER

It came to pass in those days that an effort to start a religious revival issued from Suez "University." It seems the "Black-and-Tannery," as the Rosemont boys called it, was having such increase in numbers that its president had thought well to give the national thanks-giving day special emphasis on the devotional side. Prayer for gifts of grace to crown these temporal good fortunes extended over into a second and third evening, black young women and tan young men asked to be prayed for, the president "wired" glad news to the board in New York, the board "wired" back, "Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward!"—just ten words, economy is the road to commendation—meetings were continued, and the gray-headed black janitor, richest man in the institution, leading in prayer, promised that if the Lord would "come down" then and there, "right thoo de roof," he himself would pay for the shingles!

Since corner-stone day the shabby-coated president had not known such joy. In the chapel, Sunday morning, he read the story of the two lepers who found the Syrian camp deserted in the siege of Samaria; and preached from the text, "We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace.... So they came and called unto the porter of the city." That afternoon he went to Parson Tombs. The pastor was cordial, brotherly; full of tender gladness to hear of the "manifestations." They talked a great while, were pleased with each other, and came to several kind and unexpected agreements. They even knelt and prayed together. As to the president's specific errand—his proposal for a week of union revival meetings in Parson Tomb's church, with or without the town congregation, the "university students" offering to occupy only the gallery—the pastor said that as far as *he* was concerned, he was much disposed to favor it.

"Why, befo' the wa' ow slaves used to worship with us; I've seen ow gallery half full of 'm! And we'd be only too glad to see it so again—for we love 'em yet, seh—if they wouldn't insist so on mixin' religion an' politics. I'll consult some o' my people an' let you know."

When he consulted his church officers that evening only two replied approvingly. One of them was the oldest, whitest haired man in the church. "Faw my part," he said, "I don't think the churches air a-behavin' theyse'ves like Christians to the niggehs anywheres. I jest know ef my Lawd an' Master was here in Dixie now he'd not bless a single one of all these separations between churches, aw in

churches, unless it's the separation o' the sexes, which I'm pow'ful sorry to see that broke up. I'm faw invitin' them people, dry-so, an' I don't give a cent whether they set upstairs aw down"—which was true.

The other approving voice was young Doctor Grace.

"Brethren, I believe in separating worshippers by race. But when, as now, this is so fully and amicably provided for, I would have all come together, joined, yet separated, to cry with one shout, 'Lord, revive us!' And he'll do it, brethren! I feel it right here!" He put his hand on the exact spot.

Garnet spoke. "Brother Grace, you say the separation is fully provided for—where'll the white teachers of our colored brethren sit? If they sit down-stairs we run the risk of offending some of our own folks; if they sit in the gallery that's a direct insult to the whole community. It'll not be stood. When colored mourners come up to the front—h-they'll come in troops—where'll you put 'em?"

"I'd put them wherever there's room for them," was the heroic reply.

"Oh, there'd be room for them everywhere," laughed Garnet, "for as far as *our* young folks are concerned, the whole thing would be a complete fizzle. Why, you take a graceless young fellow, say like John March. How are you going to get him to come up here and kneel down amongst a lot of black and saddle-colored bucks and wenches?—I word it his way, you understand. No, sir, as sure as we try this thing, we'll create dissension—in a church where everything now is as sweet and peaceful as the grave."

"Of course we mustn't have dissensions," said Parson Tombs.

Mr. Usher, who spoke last and very slowly, said but a word or two. He agreed with Brother Garnet. And yet he believed this was a message from on high to be up and a-doin'. "This church, brethren, has jest *got* to be replastered, an' *I* don't see how we goin' to do it 'ithout we have a outpourin' o' the spirit that'll give us mo' church membehs."

So the good parson dropped the matter, and saw how rightly he had followed the divine guidance when only a day or two later the "university" insulted and exasperated all Suez by enrolling three young white women from Sandstone. The *Courier*, regretting to state that this infringed no statute, deprecated all violence, and while it extolled the forbearance of the people, yet declared that an education which educated backward, and an institution which sought to elevate an inferior race by degrading a superior, would compel the people to make laws they would rather not enact. The Black-and-Tannery's effort for a union revival meeting lay at the door of "our church," said Garnet smilingly to Sister Proudfit, "as dead as Ananias." The kind pastor was troubled.

Yet he was gladdened again when Barbara, on horseback, brought word from "pop-a" that he had found half a dozen of his students praying together for the conversion of their fellows, and that the merest hint of revival meetings in Suez had been met by them with such zeal that he saw they were divinely moved. "Get thee up, brother," the Major's note ended, "for there is a sound of abundance of rain."

"Is it good news?" asked Barbara. The white-haired man handed her the note, joyfully, and stood at her saddle-bow watching her face as she gravely read it.

"Bless the Lord," he said, "and bless you, too, my daughter, faw yo' glad tidin's. I'll see Mary and Martha Salter and Doctor Grace right off, and get ready to ketch the blessed shower. May the very first droppin's fall on you, my beautiful child. I've heard what a wise an' blessed help you've been to yo' father since yo'—here lately. Ain't you a-goin' to give yo' heart to Jesus, daughter?"

She met his longing look with the same face as before; not blankly, yet denying, asking, confessing nothing. Truth there, but no fact.

"Well, good-by," said the old man, "I believe you're nearer the kingdom now than you know." His awkward kindness brought her nearer still.

Thus the revival began at Rosemont. The two congregations joined counsel, and decided to hold the meetings in Parson Tombs's church.

"I'm proud, Brother Tombs—or, rather, I'm grateful," said Garnet. "I look on this as a divine vindication against the missionary solicitude of an alien institution's ambitious zeal. My brethren, it's a heavenly proof of the superior vitality of Southern Christianity."

But they decided not to begin at once. Mary Salter thought they should, and so did the unmarried pastor of the other church, who, they said, was "sweet on her."

"All we need is faith!" said Miss Mary.

"No, it's not," was Miss Martha's calm response, "we need a little common sense." She said the two pastors ought to preach at least two Sunday sermons, each "pointed toward the projected—that is to say expected—showers of blessing."

"Sort o' take the people's temperature," put in Doctor Grace, but she ignored him. By that time, she said, it would be too near Christmas to start anything of the kind before——

"Why, Christmas, Sister Martha, think what Christmas is? It ought to be just the time!"

"Yes, but it isn't."

"I think Miss Martha's right," said Parson Tombs, very sweetly to Mary; "and I think," turning as affectionately to Martha, "that Miss Mary's right, too. We need faith *and* wisdom. The Lord promises both, and so we must use all we can *uv* both. Now, if we can begin a couple of days before New Year, so's to have things agoin' by New Year's eve, I *think* we'll find that wisdom and faith have kissed each other."

Miss Martha and Sister Tombs smiled softly at the startling figure. Miss Mary and the unmarried pastor dropped their eyes. But when Doctor Grace said, fervently, "That sounds good!" all admitted the excellence of Parson Tombs's suggestion.

XXXVIII.

RUBBING AGAINST MEN

About three in the afternoon on the last day of the year John March was in the saddle loping down from Widewood.

He was thinking of one of the most serious obstacles to the furtherance of his enterprise: the stubborn hostility of the Sandstone County mountaineers. To the gentlest of them it meant changes that would make game scarcer and circumscribe and belittle their consciously small and circumscribed lives; to the wilder sort it meant an invasion of aliens who had never come before for other purpose than to break up their stills and drag them to jail. As he came out into the Susie and Pussie pike he met a frowsy pinewoodsman astride a mule, returning into the hills.

"Howdy, Enos." They halted.

"Howdy, Johnnie. Well, ef you ain't been a-swappin' critters ag'n, to be sho'! Looks mighty much like you a-chawed this time, less'n this critter an' the one you had both deceives they looks a pow'ful sight."

John expressed himself unalarmed and asked the news.

"I ain't pick up much news in the Susie," said Enos. "Jeff-Jack's house beginnin' to look mos' done. Scan'lous fine house! Mawnstus hayndy, havin' it jined'n' right

on, sawt o', to old Halliday's that a way. Johnnie, why don't *you* marry? You kin do it; the gal fools ain't all peg out yit."

"No," laughed John, "nor they ain't the worst kind, either."

"Thass so; the wuss kine is the fellers 'at don't marry 'em. Why, ef I was you, I'd have a wife as pooty as a speckle' hound pup, an' yit one 'at could build biscuits an' cook coffee, too! An' I'd jess quile down at home in my sock feet an' never git up, lessen it wus to eat aw go to bed. I wouldn't be a cavortin' an' projeckin' aroun' to settle up laynds which they got too many settlehs on 'em now, an' ef you bring niggehs we'll kill 'em, an' ef you bring white folks we'll make 'em wish they was dead."

The two men smiled good-naturedly. March knew every word bespoke the general spirit of Enos's neighbors and kin; men who believed the world was flat and would trust no man who didn't; who, in their own forests, would shoot on sight any stranger in store clothes; who ate with their boots off and died with them on.

"Reckon I got to risk it," said John; "can't always tell how things 'll go."

"Thass so," drawled Enos. "An' yit women folks seem like evm they think they kin. I hear Grannie Sugg, a-ridin' home fum church, 'llow ef Johnnie March bring air railroad 'ithin ten mile' o' her, he better leave his medjer 'ith the coffin man."

"Tell her howdy for me, will you, Enos?" said John; and Enos said he would.

Deeply absorbed, but clear in bloody resolve, March walked his horse down the turnpike in the cold sunshine and blustering air. He heard his name and looked back; had he first recognized the kindly voice he would not have turned, but fled, like a partlet at sight of the hawk, from Parson Tombs.

"Howdy, John! Ought to call you Mister March, I reckon, but you know I never baptized you Mister." They moved on together. "How's yo' maw?"

John said she was about as usual and asked after the parson's folks.

"O they all up, thank the Lawd. Mr. March, this is the Lawd's doin' an' mahvellous in ow eyes, meetin' up with you this way. I was prayin' faw it as I turned the bend in the road! He's sent me to you, Mr. March, I feel it!"

March showed distress, but the parson continued bright.

"I jest been up to get Brother Garnet to come he'p us in ow protracted meet'n', an' to arrange to let the college boys come when they begin school ag'in, day after tomorrow. Mr. March, I wish you'd come, won't you? to-night!"

"I couldn't very well come to-night, Mr. Tombs. I—I approve of such meetings. I think it's a very pleasant way to pass—" he reddened. "But I'm too busy——"

"This is business, Mr. March! The urgentest kind! It's the spirit's call! It may never call again, brotheh! What if in some more convenient season Gawd should mawk when yo' fear cometh?"

The young man drooped like a horse in the rain, and the pastor, mistaking endurance for contrition, pressed his plea. "You know, the holy book says, Come, faw *all* things ah *now* ready; it don't say *all* things will ever be ready again! The p'esumption is they won't! O my dear young brotheh, there's a wrath to come—real—awful—everlasting—O flee from it! Come to the flowing fountain! One plunge an' yo' saved! Johnnie—do I make too free? I've been prayin' faw you by name faw years!"

"O you hadn't ought to have done that, sir! I wa'n't worth it."

"Ah! yes you air! Johnnie, I've watched yo' ev'y step an' stumble all yo' days. I've had faith faw you when many a one was savin' you was jess bound to go to the bad—which you know it did look that way, brotheh. But, s' I, Satan's a-siftin' of him! He's in the gall o' bitterness jess as I was at his age!"

"You! Ha-ha! Why, my dear Mr. Tombs, you don't know who you're talking about!"

"Yes, I do, brotheh. I was jess so! An' s' I, he'll pull through! His motheh's prayers 'll prevail, evm if mine don't! An' now, when ev'ybody sees you a-changin' faw the better——"

"Better! Great Sc——"

"Yes, an' yet 'ithout the least sign o' conversion—I say, s' I, it's restrainin' grace! Ah! don't I know? Next 'll come savin' grace, an' then repentance unto life. Straight is the way, an' I can see right up it!"

"Why, Mr. Tombs, you're utterly wrong! I've only learned a little manners and a little sense. All that's ever restrained me, sir, was lack of sand. The few bad things I've kept out of, I kept out of simply because I knew if I went into 'em I'd bog down. It's not a half hour since I'd have liked first-rate to be worse than I am, but I didn't have the sand for that, either. Why, sir, I'm worse to-day than I ever was, only it's deeper hid. If men went to convict camps for what they are, instead of what they do, I'd be in one now."

"Conviction of sin! Praise Gawd, brotheh, you've got it! O bring it to-night to the inquirer's seat!"

But the convicted sinner interrupted, with a superior smile: "I've no inquiries to offer, Mr. Tombs. I know the plan of salvation, sir, perfectly! We're all totally depraved, and would be damned on Adam's account if we wa'n't, for we've lost communion with God and are liable to all the miseries of this life, to death itself, and the pains of hell forever; but God out of his mere good pleasure having elected some to everlasting life, the rest of us—O I know it like a-b-c! Mother taught it to me before I could read. Yes, I must, with grief and hatred of my sin, turn from it unto God—certainly—because God, having first treated the innocent as if he were guilty, is willing now to treat the guilty as if he were innocent, which is all right because of God's sovereignty over us, his propriety in us, and the zeal he hath for his own worship—O——"

"But, Mr. Tombs, what's the use, sir? Some things I can repent of, but some I can't. I'm expecting a letter to-day tha'll almost certainly be a favorable answer to an extensive proposition I've made for opening up my whole tract of land. Now, I've just been told by one of my squatters that if I bring settlers up there he'll kill 'em; and I know and you know he speaks for all of them. Well, d' you s'pose I won't kill him the minute he lifts a hand to try it?" The speaker's eyes widened pleasantly. He resumed:

"There's another man down here. He's set his worm-eaten heart on something—perfect right to do it. I've no right to say he sha'n't. But I do. I'm just *honing* to see him to tell him that if he values his health he'll drop that scheme at the close of the year, which closes to-day."

"O John, is that what yo' father—I don't evm say yo' pious mother—taught you to be?"

"No, sir; my father begged me to be like my mother. And I tried, sir, I tried hard! No use; I had to quit. Strange part is I've got along better ever since. But now, s'pose I should repent these things. 'Twouldn't do any good, sir. For, let me tell you, Mr. Tombs, underneath them all there's another matter—you can't guess it—please don't try or ask anybody else—a matter that I can't repent, and wouldn't if I could! Well, good-day, sir, I'm sure I reciprocate your——"

"Come to the meeting, my brotheh. You love yo' motheh. Do it to please her."

"I don't know; I'll see," replied John, with no intention of seeing, but reflecting with amused self-censure that if anything he did should visibly please his mother, such a result would be, at any rate, unique.

XXXIX.

SAME AFTERNOON

Suez had never seen so busy a winter. Never before in the same number of weeks had so much cotton been hauled into town or shipped from it. Goods had never been so cheap, gross sales so large, or Blackland darkeys and Sandstone crackers so flush.

And naturally the prosperity that worked downward had worked upward all the more. Rosemont had a few more students than in any earlier year; Montrose gave her young ladies better molasses; the white professors in the colored "university," and their wives, looked less starved; and General Halliday, in spite of the fact that he was part owner of a steamboat, had at last dropped the title of "Agent." Even John March had somehow made something.

Barbara, in black, was shopping for Fannie. Johanna was at her side. The day was brisk. Ox-wagons from Clearwater, mule-teams from Blackland, bull-carts from Sandstone, were everywhere. Cotton bales were being tumbled, torn, sampled, and weighed; products of the truck-patch and door-yard, and spoils of the forest, were changing hands. Flakes of cotton blew about under the wheels and among the reclining oxen. In the cold upper blue the buzzards circled, breasted the wind, or turned and scudded down it. From chimney tops the smoke darted hither and yon, and went to shreds in the cedars and evergreen oaks. On one small space of sidewalk which was quiet, Johanna found breath and utterance.

"Umph! dis-yeh town is busy. Look like jess ev'ybody a-makin' money." She got her mistress to read a certain sign for her. "Jawn Mawch, Gen'lemun!—k-he-he!—dass a new kine o' business. An' yit, Miss Barb, I heah Gen'l Halliday tell Miss Fannie 'istiddy dat Mr. Mawch done come out ahade on dem-ah telegraph pole' what de contractors done git sicken' on an' th'ow up. He mus' be pow'ful smart, dat Mr. Mawch; ain't he, Miss Barb?"

"I don't know," murmured Barbara; "anybody can make money when everybody's making it." She bent her gaze into a milliner's window.

The maid eyed her anxiously. There were growing signs that Barbara's shopping was not for the bride-elect only, but for herself also, and for a long journey and a longer absence.

"Miss Barb, yondeh Mr. Mawch. Miss Barb, he de hayn'somess mayn in de three counties!"

"Ridiculous! Come, make haste." Haste was a thing they were beginning to make large quantities of in Suez. It has some resemblance to speed.

"Miss Garnet, pardon me." March gave the Rosemont bow, she gave the Montrose. "Don't let me stop you, please." He caught step.

"Is General Halliday in town? I suppose, of course, you've seen Miss Fannie this morning?" His boyish eyes looked hungry for a little teasing. She stopped in a store doorway. Her black garb heightened the charm of her red-brown hair, and of the countenance ready enough for laughter, yet well content without it.

"Yes. I'm shopping for her now." Her smiling lip implied the coming bridal, but her eyes told him teasing was no longer in order. General Halliday was in Blackland, she said, but would be back by noon. March gave the Rosemont bow, she gave the Montrose, Johanna unconsciously courtesied.

In the post-office John found two letters. One he saw instantly was from Leggett. He started for his office, opening the other, which was post-marked Boston. It ran:

"MY DEAR MR. MARCH.—My father has carefully considered your very clear and elaborate plan, and, while he freely admits his judgment may be wrong, he deems it but just to be perfectly frank with you."

The reader's step ceased. A maker of haste jostled him. He did not know it. His heart sank; he lost the place on the page. He leaned against an awning-post and read on:

"He feels bound to admire a certain masterly inventiveness and courage in your plan, but is convinced it will cost more than you estimate, and cannot be made at the same time safe and commercially remunerative."

There was plenty more, but the wind so ruffled the missive that, with unlifted eyes, he folded it. He looked across the corner of the court-house square to his office, whose second month's rent was due, and the first month's not yet paid. He saw his bright blue sign with the uncommercial title, which he had hoped to pay the painter for to-day. For, had his proposition been accepted, the letter was to have contained a small remittance. A gust of wind came scurrying round the post-office corner. Dust, leaves, and flakes of cotton rose on its wave, and—ah!—his hat went with them.

Johanna's teeth flashed in soft laughter as she waited in a doorway. "Run," she whispered, "run, Mr. Jawn Mawch, Gen'lemun. You so long gitt'n' to de awffice hat cayn't wait. Yass, betteh give it up. Bresh de ha'r out'n yo' eyes an' let dat-ah niggeh-felleh ketch it. K-he! I 'clare, dat's de mos' migracious hat I eveh see!

Niggeh got it! Dass right, Mr. Mawch, give de naysty niggeh a dime. Po' niggeh! now run tu'n yo' dime into cawn-juice."

At his desk March read again:

"We appreciate the latent value of your lands. Time must bring changes which will liberate that value and make it commercial; but it was more a desire to promote these changes than any belief in their nearness which prompted my father's gifts to Rosemont College and Suez University. Not that he shares the current opinion that you are having too much politics. Progress and thrift may go side by side with political storms, and I know he thinks your State would be worse off to-day if it could secure a mere political calm.

"In reply to your generous invitation to suggest changes in your plan, I will myself venture one or two questions.

"First—Is not the elaborateness of your plan an argument against it? Dixie is not a new, wild country; and therefore does not your scheme—to establish not only mines, mills and roads, but stores, banks, schools and churches under the patronage and control of the company—imply that as a community and commonwealth you are, in Dixie, in a state of arrested development?

"Else why propose to do through a private commercial corporation what is everywhere else done through public government—by legislation, taxation, education, and courts? Cannot—or will not—your lawmakers and taxpayers give you their co-operation?

"The spirit of your plan is certainly beyond criticism. It seeks a common welfare. It does not offer swift enrichment to the moneyed few through the use of ignorant labor unlifted from destitution and degradation, but rather the remuneration of capital through the social betterment of all the factors of a complete community. But will the plan itself pay? Have not the things around you which paid been those which cared little if savings-bank, church or school lived or died, or whether laws or customs favored them?

"Suppose that on your own lands your colony should seem for a time to succeed, would you not be an island in an ocean of misunderstanding and indifference? If you should need an act of county or township legislation, could you get it? Is this not why capital seeks wilder and more distant regions when it would rather be in Dixie?

"I make these points not for their own sake, but to introduce a practical suggestion which my father is tempted to submit to you. And this, it may surprise you to find, is based upon the contents of the paper handed you as I was leaving Suez, by the colored man, Leggett, whose peculiar station doubtless makes it

easy for him to see relations and necessities which better or wiser men, from other points of view, might easily overlook.

"This man would make your scheme as public as you would make it private, and my father is inclined to think that if public interest, action, and credit could be enlisted as suggested in Leggett's memorandum, your problem would have new attractions much beyond its present merely problematic interest, and might find financial backers. Alliance with Leggett is, of course, out of the question; but if you can consent and undertake to exploit your lands on the line of operation sketched by him we can guarantee the pecuniary support necessary to the effort, and you may at once draw on us at sight for the small sum mentioned in your letter, if your need is still urgent. With cordial regard,

"Yours faithfully,

"HENRY FAIR."

March started up, but sat again and gazed at the missive.

"Well, I will swear!" He smiled, held it at arm's length, and read again facetiously. "'Alliance with Leggett is, of course, out of the question; but if you can consent and undertake to exploit your lands on the line of operation sketched by him——'

"Now, where's that nigger's letter?—I wonder if I—" a knock at the door—"come in!—could have dropped it when my hat—O come in—ha! ha!—this isn't a private bedroom; I'm dressed."
