JOHN MARCH PART III

XL.

ROUGH GOING

"Ah! Mr. Pettigrew, why'n't you walk right in, sir? I wasn't at prayer."

Mr. Pettigrew, his voice made more than usually ghostly by the wind and a cold, whispered that he thought he had heard conversation.

"O no, sir, I was only blowing up my assistant for losing a letter. Why, well, I'll be dog—You picked it up in the street, didn't you? Well, Mr. Pettigrew, I'm obliged to you, sir. Will you draw up a chair. Take the other one, sir; I threw that one at a friend the other day and broke it."

As the school-teacher sat down John dragged a chair close and threw himself into it loungingly but with tightly folded arms. Dinwiddie hitched back as if unpleasantly near big machinery. John smiled.

"I'm glad to see you, Mr. Pettigrew. I've been wanting a chance to say something to you for some time, sir."

Pettigrew whispered a similar desire.

"Yes, sir," said John, and was silent. Then: "It's about my mother, sir. Your last call was your fourth, I believe." He frowned and waited while the pipe-clay of Mr. Pettigrew's complexion slowly took the tint of old red sandstone. Then he resumed: "You used to tell us boys it was our part not so much to accept the protection of the laws as to protect them—from their own mistakes no less than from the mistakes of those who owe them reverence—much as it becomes the part of a man to protect his mother. Wasn't that it?"

The school-master gave a husky assent.

"Well, Mr. Pettigrew, I'm a man, now, at least bodily—I think. Now, I'm satisfied, sir, that you hold my mother in high esteem—yes, sir, I'm sure of that—don't try to talk, sir, you only irritate your throat. I know you think as I do, sir, that one finger of her little faded hand is worth more than the whole bad lot of you and me, head, heart, and heels."

The listener's sub-acid smile protested, but John—

"I believe she thinks fairly well of you, sir, but she doesn't really know you. With me it's just the reverse. Hm! Yes, sir. You know, Mr. Pettigrew, my dear mother is of a highly wrought imaginative temperament. Now, I'm not. She often complains that I've got no more romance in my nature than my dear father had. She idealizes people. I can't. But the result is I can protect her against the mistakes such a tendency might even at this stage of life lead her into, for they say the poet's heart never grows old. You understand."

The school-master bowed majestically.

"My mother, Mr. Pettigrew, can never love where she can't idealize, nor marry where she can't love; she's too true a woman for that. I expect you to consider this talk confidential, of course. Now, I don't know, sir, that she could ever idealize you, but against the bare possibility that she might, I must ask you not to call again. Hm! That's all, sir."

Mr. Pettigrew rose up ashen and as mad as an adder. His hair puffed out, his eyes glistened. John rose more leisurely, stepped to the hearth, picked up a piece of box stuff and knocked a nail out of one end.

"I'll only add this, sir: If you don't like the terms, you can have whatever satisfaction you want. But I remember"—he produced a large spring-back dirk-knife, sprung it open and began curling off long parings from the pine stick—"that in college, when any one of us vexed you, you took your spite out on us, and generally on me, in words. That's all right. We were boys and couldn't hold malice." A shaving fell upon Mr. Pettigrew's shoulder and stayed there. "But once or twice your venomous contempt came near including my father's name. Still that's past, let it go. But now, if you do take your spite out in words be careful to let them be entirely foreign to the real subject, and be dead sure not to involve any name but mine. Or else don't begin till you've packed your trunk and bought your railroad ticket; and you'd better have a transatlantic steamer ticket, too."

Mr. Pettigrew had drawn near the door. With his hand on it he hissed, "You'll find this is not the last of this, sir."

"I reckon it is," drawled John, with his eyes on his whittling. As the door opened and shut he put away his knife, and was taking his hat when his eye fell upon Cornelius's letter. He opened and read it.

The writing was Leggett's, but between the lines could be caught a whisper that was plainly not the mulatto's.

He was ready, he wrote, "to interjuce an' suppote that bill to create the Three Counties Colonization Company, Limited—which I has fo shawten its name an

takened out the tucks. The sed company will buy yo whole Immense Track, paying for the same one third 1/3 its own stock—another one third 1/3 to be subscribened by private parties—an the res to be takened by the three counties and paid for in Cash to the sed Company Limited—which the sed cash to be raised by a special tax to be voted by the People. This money shell be used by the sed Company Limited to construc damns an sich eloquent an discomojus impertinences which then they kin sell the sed lans an impertinences to immigraters factorians an minors an in that means pay divies on the Stock an so evvybody get mo or less molasses on his finger an his vote Skewered. Thattle fetch white immigration an thattle ketch the white-liner's vote. But where some dever an as soon as any six miles square shell contain twenty white children of school Age the sed Company Limited shell be boun to bill an equip for them a free school house. An faw evvy school house so billden sed Company Limited shell be likewise boun to bill another sommers in the three Counties where a equal or greater number of collared children are without one. Thattle skewer the white squatter and Nigger vote."

The next clause—there was only a line or two besides—brought an audible exclamation from the reader: "Lassly faw evvy sich school house so bilt the sed Co. Limited shell pay a sum not less than its cost to some white male college in the three counties older then the sed Company Limited."

John marvelled. What was Garnet doing or promising, that Leggett should thus single out Rosemont for subsidies? And who was this in the letter's closing line—certainly not Garnet—who would "buy both fists full" of stock as soon as the bill should pass? He stepped out and walked along the windy street immersed in thought.

"John!"—General Halliday beckoned to him. The General and Proudfit were pushing into the lattice doors of a fragrant place whose bulletin announced "Mock Turtle Soup and Venison for Lunch To-day." March joined them. "Had your lunch, John? I heard you were looking for me."

"Well, yes, but there's no hurry." The three stood and ate, talking over incidents of war times, with John at a manifest disadvantage, and presently they passed from the luncheon trestles to the bar.

"No, Proudfit, if Garnet hadn't come in on our left just then and charged the moment he did we'd have lost the whole battery. Garnet was a poor soldier in camp, you're right; but on the field you'd only to tease him and he'd fight like a wild bull."

They drank, lighted cigars, and sauntered out toward the General's office. "John, I've read what you wrote me. I can't see it. We'll never colonize any lands in

Dixie, my boy, till we've changed the whole system of laws under which we rent land and raise crops. You might as well try to farm swamp lands without draining them."

"Why, General, my scheme doesn't include plantations at all."

"Yes, it does; Dixie's a plantation State, and you can't make your little patch of it prosper till our planting prospers—can he, Proudfit?"

The Colonel laughed. "No go, General; I'm not going to side with you. Our prosperity, all around, hangs on the question whether you and the darkey may tax us and spend the taxes as you please, or we shall tax ourselves and spend the taxes as we please."

"Ah, Proudfit, you mean whether you may keep the taxes low enough to hold the darky down or let them be raised high enough to lift him up. Walk in, gentlemen. Proudfit, take the rocking-chair."

But the Colonel stood trying to return the General's last thrust, and John was bored. "General, all I want to see you about is to say that I'm going down into Blackland in a day or two to get as many darkies as I can to settle on my lands, and if you'll tell me the ones that are in your debt, I'll have nothing to do with them unless it is to tell them they've got to stay where they are."

Proudfit whirled and stared. The General gave a low laugh.

"Why, John, that sounds mighty funny to come from you. Would you do such a thing as that?—run off with another man's niggers?"

John bit his lip and looked at his cigar. "Are they yours, General?"

"By Jove! my son, they're not yours! O! of course, you've got the legal—pshaw! I'm not going to dispute an abstraction with you. Go and amuse yourself; you can't get 'em; the niggers that don't owe won't go; that's the poetry of it. I'd rather you'd take the fellows that owe than the one's that don't; but you won't get either kind."

"I can try, General." "No, sir, you can't!" exclaimed Proudfit. His cigar went into the fireplace with a vicious spat, and his eyes snapped. "Ow niggehs ah res'less an' discontented enough now, and whether you'll succeed aw not you shan't come 'round amongst them tryin' to steal them away! Damned if we don't run you out of the three counties! So long, General!" He went by March to the door.

John stood straight, his jaws set, chin up, eyes down. Halliday, by grimaces, was adjuring him to forbear. "But, Colonel Proudfit," he said—Proudfit paused—"you'll not insist on the word 'steal?'"

"You can call it what you damn please, sir, but you mustn't do it." The speaker passed out, leaving the door invitingly ajar.

The General caught John's arm—"Wait, I want to see you."

"I'll be back in a minute, General."

"My boy, the grave's full of nice fellows going to be back in a minute. Son John, there's only one thing I'm thoroughly ashamed of you for——"

"I can see you half a dozen better, General; let me go."

"You've no need to go; Proudfit's coming right back; he's only gone for his horse. There's plenty of time to hear the little I've got to say. John March, I'm ashamed of this reputation you've got for being quick on the trigger. O, you're much admired for it—by both sexes! Ye gods! John, isn't it pitiful to see a fellow like you not able to keep a kindly contempt for the opinion of fools! My dear boy—my dear boy! you'll never be worth powder enough to blow you to the devil till you've learned to let the sun go down on your wrath!"

John smiled and dropped his eyes, and the General, with an imperative gesture detaining some one at the young man's back, spoke on. "John, the old year's dying. For God's sake let it die in peace. Yes, and for your own sake, and for the sake of us old murderers of the years long dead, let as many old things as will die with it. I don't say bury anything alive—that's not my prescription; but ease their righteous death and give them a grave they'll stay in."

"General, all right! the Colonel may go for the present, but I'll tell you now, and I'll soon show him, that whatever the laws of my State give me leave to do I'll do if I choose, even if it's to help black men do what white men say shan't be done." John reached behind him for the latch.

His mentor smiled queerly. "Yes, even if it's to float a scheme drawing twice as much water as we've got on our political sandbar. Ah! John March, don't you know that the law's permission is never enough? Better get all the permissions you can, and turn your 'I' into the most multitudinous 'we' you can possibly make it. Seven legislatures can't dig you too much channel."

March's reply was cut short by a voice behind him, which said:

"You can have the *Courier's* permission."

As John wheeled about, Jeff-Jack came a step forward and Barbara Garnet shrank against a window.

"Well, Miss Garnet," laughed March, as Ravenel conversed with Halliday, "I *was* absorbed, wa'n't I? You and Miss Fannie going to watch the old year out and the new year in to-night?"

"No, sir, we're only going to the revival meeting," replied Barbara, with mellow gravity. "All bad people are cordially invited, you know. I reckon I've got to be there."

"Why, Miss Garnet, my name's Legion, too. I didn't know we were such close kin." He said good-day and departed, mildly wondering what the next incident would be. The retiring year seemed to be rushing him through a great deal of unfinished business.

XLI.

SQUATTER SOVEREIGNTY

It was really a daring stroke, so to time the revival that the first culmination of interest should be looked for on New Year's eve. On that day business, the dry sorts, would be apt to decline faster than the sun, and the nearness of New Year would make men—country buyers and horsemen in particular—social, thirsty, and adventurous.

In fact, by the middle of the afternoon the streets around the court-house square were wholly given up to the white male sex. One man had, by accident, shot his own horse. Another had smashed a window, also by accident, and clearly the fault of the bar-keeper, who shouldn't have dodged. Men, and youths of men's stature, were laying arms about each other's necks, advising one another, with profanely affectionate assumptions of superiority, to come along home, promising on triple oath to do so after one more drink, and breaking forth at unlooked-for moments in blood-curdling yells. Three or four would take a fifth or seventh stirrup cup, mount, start home, ride round the square and come tearing up to the spot they had started from, as if they knew and were showing how they brought the good news from Ghent to Aix, though beyond a prefatory catamount shriek, the only news any of them brought was that he could whip anything of his size, weight and age in the three counties. The Jews closed their stores.

Proudfit had gone home. Enos had met a brother and a cousin, and come back with them. John March, with his hat on, sat alone at his desk with Fair's and Leggett's letters pinned under one elbow, his map under the other, and the verbal

counsels of Enos, General Halliday, and Proudfit droning in his ears. He sank back with a baffled laugh.

He couldn't change a whole people's habit of thought, he reflected. Even the *Courier* followed the popular whim by miles and led it only by inches. So it seemed, at least. And yet if one should try to make his scheme a public one and leave the *Courier* out—imagine it!

And must the *Courier*, then, be invited in? Must everybody and his nigger "pass their plates?" Ah! how had a few years—a few months—twisted and tangled the path to mastership! Through what thickets of contradiction, what morasses of bafflement, what unimperial acceptance of help and counsel did that path now lead! And this was no merely personal fate of his. It was all Dixie's. He would never change his politics; O no! But how if men's politics, asking no leave of their owners, change themselves, and he who does not change ceases to be steadfast?

Behold! All the way down the Swanee River, spite of what big levees of prevention and draining wheels of antiquated cure, how invincibly were the waters of a new order sweeping in upon the "old plantation."

And still the old plantation slumbered on below the level of the world's great risen floods of emancipations and enfranchisements whereon party platforms, measures, triumphs, and defeats only floated and eddied, mere drift-logs of a current from which they might be cast up, but could not turn back.

He bent over the desk. "Jove!" was all he said; but it stood for the realization of the mighty difference between the map under his eyes and what he was under oath to himself to make it. What "lots" of men—not mountaineers only, but Blacklanders, too—had got to change their notions—notions stuck as fast in their belief as his mountains were stuck in the ground—before that map could suit him. To think harder, he covered his face with his hands. The gale rattled his window. He failed to hear Enos just outside his door, alone and very drunk, prying off the tin sign of John March, Gentleman. He did not hear even the soft click of the latch or the yet softer footsteps that brought the drunkard close before his desk; but at the first word he glanced up and found himself covered with a revolver.

"Set still," drawled Enos. In his left hand was the tin sign. "This yeh trick looked ti-ud a-tellin' lies, so I fotch it in."

Without change of color—for despair stood too close for fear to come between—John fixed his eyes upon the drunken man's and began to rise. The weapon followed his face up.

"Enos, point that thing another way or I'll kill you." He took a slow step outward from the desk, the pistol following with a drunken waver more terrible than a steady aim. Enos spoke along its barrel, still holding up the sign.

"Is this little trick gwine to stay fetch in? Say 'yass, mawsteh,' aw I blow yo' head off."

But John still held the drunkard's eye. As he took up from his desk a large piece of ore, he said, "Enos, when a man like you leaves a gentleman's door open, the gentleman goes and shuts it himself."

"Yass, you bet! So do a niggah. Shell I shoot, aw does you 'llow——"

"I'm going to shut the door, Enos. If you shoot me in the back I swear I'll kill you so quick you'll never know what hurt you." With the hand that held the stone, while word followed word, the speaker made a slow upward gesture. But at the last word the stone dropped, the pistol was in March's hand, it flashed up and then down, and the drunkard, blinded and sinking from a frightful blow of the weapon's butt, was dragging his foe with him to the floor. Down they went, the pistol flying out of reach, March's knuckles at Enos's throat and a knee on his breast.

"'Nough," gasped the mountaineer, "'nough!"

"Not yet! I know you too well! Not till one of us is dead!" John pressed the throat tighter with one hand, plunged the other into his pocket, and drew and sprung his dirk. The choking man gurgled for mercy, but March pushed back his falling locks with his wrist and lifted the blade. There it hung while he cried,

"O if you'd only done this sober I'd end you! I wish to God you wa'n't drunk!"

"'Nough, Johnnie, 'nough! You air a gentleman, Johnnie, sir."

"Will you nail that sign up again?"

"Yass."

The knife was shut and put away, and when Enos gained his feet March had him covered with his magazine rifle. "Pick that pistol up wrong end first and hand it to me! Now my hat! 'Ever mind yours! Now that sign."

The corners of the tin still held two small nails.

"Now stand back again." March thrust a finger into his vest-pocket. "I had a thumb-tack." He found it. "Now, Enos, I'll tack this thing up myself. But you'll stand behind me, sir, so's if anyone shoots he'll hit you first, and if you try to get

away or to uncover me in the least bit, or if anybody even cocks a gun, you die right there, sir. Now go on!"

The sun was setting as they stepped out on the sidewalk. The mail hour had passed. The square and the streets around it were lonely. The saloons themselves were half deserted. In one near the *Courier* office there was some roystering, and before it three tipsy horsemen were just mounting and turning to leave town by the pike. They so nearly hid Major Garnet and Parson Tombs coming down the sidewalk on foot some distance beyond, that March did not recognize them. At Weed and Usher's Captain Champion joined the Major and the parson. But John's eye was on one lone man much nearer by, who came riding leisurely among the trees of the square, looking about as if in search of some one. He had a long, old-fashioned rifle.

"Wait, Enos, there's your brother. Stand still."

John levelled his rifle just in time. "Halt! Drop that gun! Drop it to the ground or I'll drop you!" The rifle fell to the earth. "Now get away! Move!" The horseman wheeled and hurried off under cover of the tree-trunks.

"Gentlemen!" cried Parson Tombs, "there'll be murder yonder!" He ran forward.

"Brother Tombs," cried Garnet, walking majestically after him, "for Heaven's sake, stop! you can't prevent anything that way." But the old man ran on.

Champion, with a curse at himself for having only a knife and a derringer, flew up a stair and into the *Courier* office.

"Lend me something to shoot with, Jeff-Jack, the Yahoos are after John March."

Ravenel handed from a desk-drawer, that stood open close to his hand, a six-shooter. Champion ran down-stairs. Ravenel stepped, smiling, to a window.

March had turned his back and was putting up the sign, pressing the nails into their former places with his thumb. Men all about were peeping from windows and doors. Champion ran to the nearest tree in the square and from behind it peered here and there to catch sight of the dismounted horseman, who was stealing back to his gun.

"Keep me well covered, you lean devil," growled John to Enos, "or I'll shoot you without warning!" Working left-handed, he dropped the thumb-tack. With a curse between his teeth he stooped and picked it up, but could not press it firmly into place. He leaned his rifle against the door-post, drew the revolver and used its butt as a hammer. Champion saw an elbow bend back from behind a tree. The mountaineer's brother had recovered his gun and was aiming it. The captain fired and hit the tree. March whirled upon Enos with the revolver in his face, the

drunkard flinched violently when not to have flinched would have saved both lives, and from the tree-trunk that Champion had struck a rifle puffed and cracked. March heard the spat of a bullet, and with a sudden horrid widening of the eyes Enos fell into his bosom.

"Great God! Enos, your brother didn't mean to——"

The only reply was a fixing of the eyes, and Enos slid through his arms and sank to the pavement dead.

Champion had tripped on a root and got a cruel fall, losing his weapon in a drift of leaves; but as the brother of Enos was just capping his swiftly reloaded gun—

"Throw up your hands!" cried Parson Tombs, laying his aged eye along the sights of March's rifle; the hands went up and in a moment were in the clutch of the town marshal, while a growing crowd ran from the prisoner and from Champion to John March, who knelt with Parson Tombs beside the dead man, moaning,

"O good Lord! good Lord! this needn't 'a' been! O Enos, I'd better 'a' killed you myself! O great God, why didn't I keep this from happening, when I——"

Someone close to him, stooping over the dead under pretence of feeling for signs of life, murmured, "Stop talking." Then to the Parson, "Take him away with you," and then rising spoke across to Garnet, "Howdy, Major," with the old smile that could be no one's but Ravenel's. He and Garnet walked away together.

"Died of a gunshot wound received by accident," the coroner came and found. John March and the minister had gone into March's office, but Captain Champion's word was quite enough. It was nearly tea-time when John and the Parson came out again. The sidewalk was empty. As John locked the door he felt a nail under his boot, picked it up, and seeming not to realize his own action at all, stepped to the sidewalk's edge, found a loose stone and went back to the door, all the time saying,

"No, sir, I've made it perfectly terrible to think of God and a hereafter, but somehow I've never got so low down as to wish there wa'n't any. I—" his thumb pressed the nail into its hole in the corner of his sign—

"I do lots of things that are wrong, awfully wrong, though sometimes I feel—" he hammered it home with the stone—"as if I'd rather"—he did the same for the other two and the thumb-tack—"die trying to do right than live,—well,—this way. But—" tossing away the stone and wiping his hands—"that's only sometimes, and that's the very best I can say."

They walked slowly. The wind had ceased. By the *Courier* office John halted.

"Supper! O excuse me, Mr. Tombs really! I—I can't sir!—I—I'll eat at the hotel. I've got to see a gentleman on business. But I pledge you my word, sir, I'll come to the meeting." They shook hands. "You're mighty kind to me, sir."

The gentleman he saw on business was Ravenel. They supped together in a secluded corner of the Swanee Hotel dining-room, talking of Widewood and colonization, and by the time their cigars were brought—by an obsequious black waiter with soiled cuffs—March felt that he had never despatched so much business at one sitting in his life before.

"John," said Ravenel as they took the first puff, "there's one thing you can do for me if you will: I want you to stand up with me at my wedding."

March stiffened and clenched his chair. "Jeff-Jack, you oughtn't to've asked me that, sir! And least of all in connection with this Widewood business, in which I'm so indebted to you! It's not fair, sir!"

Ravenel scarcely roused himself from reverie to reply, "You mustn't make any connection. I don't."

"Well, then, I'll not," said March. "I'll even thank you for the honor. But I don't deserve either the honor or the punishment, and I simply can't do it!"

"Can't you 'hide in your breast every selfish care and flush your pale cheek with wine'? Every man has got to eat a good deal of crow. It's not so bad, from the hand of a friend. It shan't compromise you."

With head up and eyes widened John gazed at the friendly-cynical face before him. "It would compromise me; you know it would! Yes, sir, you may laugh, but you knew it when you asked me. You knew it would be unconditional surrender. I don't say you hadn't a right to ask, but—I'm a last ditcher, you know."

"Well," drawled Ravenel, pleasantly, when they rose, "if that's what you prefer—__"

"No, I don't prefer it, Jeff-Jack; but if you were me could you help it?"

"I shouldn't try," said Ravenel.

XLII.

JOHN HEADS A PROCESSION

By the afternoon train on this last day of the year there had come into Suez a missionary returning from China on leave of absence, ill from scant fare and overwork.

General Halliday, Fannie, and Barbara were at tea when Parson Tombs brought in the returned wanderer. The General sprang to his feet with an energy that overturned his chair. "Why, Sammie Messenger, confound your young hide! Well, upon my soul! I'm outrageous proud to see you! Fan—Barb—come here! This is one of my old boys! Sam, this is the daughter of your old Major; Miss Garnet. Why, confound your young hide!"

Parson Tombs giggled with joy. "Brother Messenger is going to add a word of exhortation to Brother Garnet's discourse," he said with grave elation, and when the General execrated such cruelty to a weary traveler, he laughed again. But being called to the front door for a moment's consultation with the pastor of the other church, he presently returned, much embarrassed, with word that the missionary need not take part, a prior invitation having been accepted by Uncle Jimmie Rankin, of Wildcat Ridge. Fannie, in turn, cried out against this substitution, but the gentle shepherd explained that what mercy could not obtain official etiquette compelled.

"Tell us about John March," interposed the General. "They say you saved his life."

"I reckon I did, sir, humanly speakin'." The Parson told the lurid story, Fannie holding Barbara's hand as they listened. The church's first bell began to ring and the Parson started up.

"If only the right man could talk to John! He's very persuadable to-night and he'd take fum a stranger what he wouldn't take fum us." He looked fondly to the missionary, who had risen with him. "I wish you'd try him. You knew him when he was a toddler. He asks about you, freck-wently."

"You'd almost certainly see him down-town somewhere now," said Fannie.

Barbara gave the missionary her most daring smile of persuasion.

March was found only a step or two from Fannie's gate.

"Well, if this ain't a plumb Provi*dence*!" laughed the Parson. The three men stopped and talked, and then walked, chatted, and returned. The starlight was cool and still. At the Parson's gate, March, refusing to go in, said, yes, he would

be glad of the missionary's company on a longer stroll. The two moved on and were quite out of sight when Fannie and Barbara, with Johanna close behind them, came out on their way to church.

"It would be funny," whispered Fannie, "if such a day as this should end in John March's getting religion, wouldn't it?"

But Barbara could come no nearer to the subject than to say, "I don't like revivals. I can't. I never could." She dropped her voice significantly—"Fannie."

"What, dear?"

"What were you going to say when Johanna rang the tea-bell and your father came in?"

"Was I going to say something? What'd you think it was?"

"I think it was something about Mr. Ravenel."

"O well, then, I reckon it wasn't anything much, was it?"

"I don't know, but—Johanna, you can go on into church." They loitered among the dim, lamp-lit shadows of the church-yard trees. "You said you were not like most engaged girls."

"Well, I'm not, am I?"

"No, but why did you say so?"

"Why, you know, Barb, most girls are distressed with doubts of their own love. I'm not. It's about his that I'm afraid. What do you reckon's the reason I've held him off for years?"

"Just because you could, Fannie."

"No, my dear little goosie, I did it because he never was so he couldn't be held off. I knew, and know yet, that after the wedding I've got to do all the courting. I don't doubt he loves me, but Barb, love isn't his master. That's what keeps me scared." They went in.

The service began. In this hour for the putting away of vanities the choir was dispensed with and the singing was led by a locally noted precentor, a large, pert, lazy Yankee, who had failed in the raising of small fruits. His zeal was beautiful.

"Trouble! 'Tain't never no trouble for me to do nawthin', an' even if 'twas I'd do it!" He sang each word in an argumentative staccato, and in high passages you could see his wisdom teeth. Between stanzas he spoke stimulating exhortations:

"Louder, brethren and sisters, louder; the fate of immortal souls may be a-hangin' on the amount of noise you make."

As hymn followed hymn the church filled. All sorts—black or yellow being no sort—all sorts came; the town's best and worst, the country's proudest and forlornest; the sipper of wine, the dipper of snuff; acrid pietist, flagrant reprobate, and many a true Christian whose God-forgiven sins, if known to men, neither church nor world could have pardoned; many a soul that under the disguise of flippant smiles or superior frowns staggered in its darkness or shivered in its cold, trembling under visions of death and judgment or yearning for one right word of guidance or extrication; and many a heart that openly or secretly bled for some other heart's reclaim. And so the numbers grew and the waves of song swelled. The adagios and largos of ancient psalmody were engulfed and the modern "hyme toons," as the mountain people called them, were so "peert an' devilish" that the most heedless grew attentive, and lovers of raw peanuts, and even devotees of tobacco, emptied their mouths of these and filled them with praise.

Garnet had never preached more effectively. For the first time in Barbara's experience he seemed to her to feel, himself, genuinely and deeply the things he said. His text was, "Be sure your sin will find you out." Men marvelled at the life-likeness with which he pictured the torments of a soul torn by hidden and cherished sin. So wonderful, they murmured, are the pure intuitions of oratorical genius! Yet Barbara was longing for a widely different word.

Not for herself. It was not possible that she should ever tremble at any pulpit reasoning of temperance and judgment from the lips of her father. Three things in every soul, he cried, must either be subdued in this life or be forever ground to powder in a fiery hereafter; and these three, if she knew them at all, were the three most utterly unsubdued things that he embodied—will, pride, appetite. The word she vainly longed for was coveted for one whose tardy footfall her waiting ear caught the moment it sounded at the door, and before the turning of a hundred eyes told her John March had come and was sitting in the third seat behind her.

In the course of her father's sermon there was no lack of resonant Amens and soft groanings and moanings of ecstasy. But Suez was neither Wildcat Ridge nor Chalybeate Springs, and the tempering chill of plastered ceiling and social inequalities stayed the wild unrestraint of those who would have held free rule in the log church or under the camp-meeting bower. The academic elegance of the speaker's periods sobered the ardor which his warmth inspired, and as he closed there rested on the assemblage a silence and an awe as though Sinai smoked but could not thunder.

Barbara hoped against hope. At every enumeration of will, pride, and appetite she saw the Pastor's gaze rest pleadingly on her, and in the stillness of her inmost heart she confessed the evil presence of that unregenerate trinity. Yet when he rose to bid all mourners for sin come forward while the next hymn was being sung, she only mourned that she could not go, and tried in vain not to feel, as in every drop of her blood she still felt, there behind her, that human presence so different from all others on earth. "This call," she secretly cried, "this hour, are not for me. Father in Heaven! if only they might be for him."

Before the rising precentor could give out his hymn Uncle Jimmie Rankin had sprung to his feet and started "Rock of Ages" in one of the wildest minors of the early pioneers. At once the strain was taken up on every side, the notes swelled, Uncle Jimmie clapped hands in time, and at the third line a mountain woman in the gallery, sitting with her sun-bonnet pulled down over her sore eyes, changed a snuff-stick from her mouth to her pocket, burst into a heart-freezing scream, and began to thrash about in her seat. The hymn rolled on in stronger volume. The Yankee precentor caught the tune and tried to lead, but Uncle Jimmie's voice soared over him with the rapture of a lark and the shriek of an eagle, two or three more pair of hands clapped time, the other Suez pastor took a trochee, and the four preachers filed down from the high pulpit, singing as they came. Garnet began to pace to and fro in front of it and to exhort in the midst of the singing.

"Who is on the Lord's side?" he loudly demanded.

"Should my tears forever flow," sang the standing throng.

But no one advanced.

"Should my zeal no respite know," they sang on, and Garnet's "Whosoever will, let him come," and other calls swept across their chant like the crash of falling trees across the roar of a torrent.

"Oh, my brother, two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken and the other left; which one will you be? Come, my weary sister; come, my sin-laden brother. O, come unto the marriage! Now is the accepted time! The clock of God's patience has run down and is standing at Now! Sing the last verse again, Uncle Jimmie! This night thy soul may be required of thee! Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, the other left. O, my sweet sister, come! be the taken one!—flee as a bird! The angel is troubling the pool; who will first come to the waters? O, my unknown, yet beloved brother, whoever you are, don't you know that whosoever comes first to-night will lead a hundred others and will win a crown with that many stars? Come, brethren, sisters, we're losing priceless moments!"

Why does no one move? Because just in the middle of the house, three seats behind that fair girl whose face has sunk into her hands, sits, with every eye on them, the wan missionary from China, pleading with John March.

Parson Tombs saw the chance for a better turn of affairs. "Brethren," he cried, kneeling as he spoke, "let us pray! And as our prayers ascend if any sinner feels the dew o' grace fall into his soul, let him come forward and kneel with the Lord's ministers. Brother Samuel Messenger, lead us in prayer!"

The missionary prayed. But the footfall for which all waited did not sound; the young man who knelt beside the supplicant, with temples clutched in his hands, moved not. While the missionary's amen was yet unspoken, Parson Tombs, still kneeling, began to ask aloud,

"Will Brother Garnet——"

But Garnet was wiser. "Father Tombs," he cried "the Lord be with you, lead us in prayer yourself!"

"Amen!" cried the other pastor. He was echoed by a dozen of his flock, and the old man lifted his voice in tremulous invocation. The prayer was long. But before there were signs of it ending, the step for which so many an ear was strained had been heard. Men were groaning, "God be praised!" and "Hallelujah!" Fannie's eyes were wet, tears were welling through Barbara's fingers, mourners were coming up both aisles, and John March was kneeling in the anxious seat.

XLIII.

ST. VALENTINE'S DAY

One morning some six weeks after New Year's eve Garnet's carriage wheels dripped water and mud as his good horses dragged them slowly into the borders of Suez. The soft, moist winds of February were ruffling the turbid waters of Turkey Creek and the swollen flood of the Swanee. A hint of new green brightened every road-side, willows were full of yellow light, and a pink and purple flush answered from woods to fence-row, from fence-row to woods, across and across the three counties.

"This pike's hardly a pike at all since the railroad's started," said the Major, more to himself than to Barbara and Johanna; for these were the two rear occupants of the carriage.

"Barb, I got a letter from Fair last night. You did too, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"He'll be here next week. He says he can't stop with us this time."

Barbara was silent, and felt the shy, care-taking glance of her maid. Garnet spoke again, in the guarded tone she knew so well.

"I reckon you understand he's only coming to see if he'll take stock in this land company we're getting up, don't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Doe he know you're going to spend these two weeks at Halliday's before you go North?"

"I think he does."

The questioner turned enough to make a show of frowning solicitude. "What's the matter with you this morning? sad at the thought of leaving home?"

"No, sir"—the speaker smiled meditatively—"we only don't hit on a subject of interest to both."

The father faced to front again and urged the horses. He even raised the whip, but let it droop. Then he turned sharply and drew his daughter's glance. "Is Fair going to stay with John March?"

They sat gaze to gaze while their common blood surged up to his brows and more gradually suffused her face. Without the stir of an eyelash she let her lips part enough to murmur, "Yes."

Before her word was finished Garnet's retort was bursting from him, "Thanks to you, you intermeddling——" He was cut short by the lurch of the carriage into a hole. It flounced him into the seat from which he had half started and faced him to the horses. With a smothered imprecation he rose and laid on the whip. They plunged, the carriage sprang from the hole and ploughed the mire, and Garnet sat down and drove into the town's main avenue, bespattered with mud from head to waist.

Near the gate of the Academy grounds stood Parson Tombs talking to a youth in Rosemont uniform. The student passed on, and the pastor, with an elated face, waved a hand to Garnet. Garnet stopped and the Parson came close.

"Brother Tombs, howdy?"

"Why, howdy-do, Brother Garnet?—Miss Barb!—Johanna." He pointed covertly at the departing youth and murmured to Garnet, "He'll make ow fo'teenth convert since New Year's. And still there is room!—Well, brother, I've been a-hearin' about John March's an' yo'-all's lan' boom, but"—the good man giggled—"I never see a case o' measles break out finer than the lan' business is broke out on you!—And you don't seem to mind it no mo'n—Look here! air you a miracle o' grace, aw what air you?"

"Why, nothing, Brother Tombs, nothing! Nothing but an old soldier who's learned that serenity's always best."

The Parson turned to Barbara and cast a doting smile sidewise upon the old soldier. But Garnet set his face against flattery and changed the subject.

"Brother Tombs, speaking of John March, you know now risky it is for anybody—unless it's you—to say anything to him. Oh, I dare say he's changed, but when he hasn't been converted two months, nor a member of the church three weeks, we mustn't expect him to have the virtues of an old Christian."

"He's changed mo'n I'm at libbety to tell you, Brother Garnet. He's renounced dancing."

"Yes?—Indeed! He's quit dancing. But still he carries two revolvers."

"Why, Brother John Wesley, I—that's so. I've spoke to John about that, but—the fact is——"

Garnet smiled. "His life's in constant danger—that's my very point. The bad weather's protected him thus far, but if it should last five years without a break, still you know that as soon as it fairs off——"

"*Uv* co'se! Enos's kinsfolks 'll be layin' faw him behind some bush aw sett'n' fire to his house; an' so what shall he do, brother, if we say he——"

"Oh, let him shoot a Yahoo or two if he must, but I think you ought to tell him he's committing a criminal folly in asking that young Yankee, Mr. Fair, to stop with him at Widewood when he comes here next week!"

"Why, Brother Garnet! Why, supposin' that young stranger should get shot!"

"Yes, or if he should no more than see March shot or shot at! What an impression he'd carry back North with him! It's an outrage on our whole people, sir, and God knows!—I speak reverently, my dear brother—we've suffered enough of that sort of slander! I'd tell him, myself, but—this must be between us, of course——"

"Why, of co'se, Brother Garnet," murmured the Pastor and bent one ear.

"It's a pure piece of selfish business rivalry on John's part toward me. He's asked Fair to his house simply to keep him away from Rosemont."

"Why, Brother Garnet! Rosemont's right where he'd ought to go to!"

"In John's own interest!" said Garnet.

"In John's—you're right, my brother! I'm suprised he don't see it so!"

"O—I'm not! He's a terribly overrated chap, Brother Tombs. Fact is—I say it in the sincerest friendship for him—John's got no real talents and not much good sense—though one or two of his most meddlesome friends have still less." The Major began to gather up the reins.

"Well, I'll try to see him, Brother Garnet. I met him yeste'day—Look here! I reckon that young man's not goin' to stop with him after all. He told me yeste'day he was going to put a friend into Swanee Hotel because Sisteh March felt too feeble, aw fearful, aw somethin', an' he felt bound to stand his expenses."

"And so he"—the Major paused pleasantly. "How much did you lend him?"

"Aw! Brother Garnet, I didn't mean you to know that! He had to put shuttehs on his sitt'n'-room windows, too, you know, to quiet Sisteh March's ve'y natu'al fears. I only promised to lend him a small amount if he should need it."

"O, he'll need it," said the Major, and included Barbara in his broad smile. "Still, I hope you'll let him have it. If he doesn't return it to you I will; I loved his father. John should have come to me, Brother Tombs, as he's always done. I say this to you privately, you know. I'll consider the loan practically made to me, for we simply can't let Fair go to Widewood, even if John puts shutters on all his windows."

Again the speaker lifted his reins and the Parson drew back with a bow to Barbara, when Johanna spoke and the whole group stared after two townward-bound horsemen.

"Those are mountain people, right now," said the Parson.

"Yes," replied Garnet, "but they're no kin to Enos." He moved on to Halliday's gate.

It was the fourteenth of the month. The Major stayed in town for the evening mail and drove home after dark, alone, but complacent, almost jovial. He had got three valentines.

XLIV.

ST. VALENTINE'S: EVENING

At Widewood that same hour there was deep silence. Since the first of the year the only hands left on the place were a decrepit old negro and wife, whom even he pronounced "wuthless," quartered beyond the stable-yard's farther fence. For some days this "lady" had been Widewood's only cook, owing to the fact that Mrs. March's servant, having a few nights before seen a man prowling about the place, had left in such a panic as almost to forget her wages, and quite omitting to leave behind her several articles of the Widewood washing.

Within the house John March sat reading newspapers. His healthy legs were crossed toward the flickering hearth, and his strong shoulders touched the centre-table lamp. The new batten shutters excluded the beautiful outer night. His mother, to whom the mail had brought nothing, was sitting in deep shadow, her limp form and her regular supply of disapproving questions alike exhausted. Her slender elbow slipped now and then from the arm of her rocking-chair, and unconscious gleams of incredulity and shades of grief still alternated across her face with every wrinkling effort of her brows to hold up her eyelids.

John was not so absorbed as he seemed. He felt both the silence and the closed shutters drearily, and was not especially cheered by the following irrelevant query in the paragraph before him:

"Who—having restored the sight of his jailer's blind daughter and converted her father from idolatry—was on this day beheaded?"

Yet here was a chance to be pleasant at the expense of a man quite too dead to mind.

"Mother," he began, so abruptly that Mrs. March started with a violent shudder, "this is February fourteenth. Did any ancient person of your acquaintance lose his head to-day?" He turned a facetious glance that changed in an instant to surprise. His mother had straightened up with bitter indignation, but she softened to an agony of reproach as she cried:

"John!"

"Why, mother, what?"

"Ah! John! John!" She gazed at him tearfully. "Is this what you've joined the church for? To cloak such——"

"My dear mother! I was simply trying to joke away the dismals! Why,"—he smiled persuasively—"if you only knew what a hard job it is." But the ludicrousness of her misconstruction took him off his guard, and in spite of the grimmest endeavor to prevent it, his smile increased and he stopped to keep from laughing.

Mrs. March rose, eloquent with unspoken resentment, and started from the room. At the door she cast back the blush of a martyr's forgiveness, and the next instant was in her son's big right arm. His words were broken with laughter.

"My dear, pretty little mother!" She struggled alarmedly, but he held her fast. "Why, I know the day is nothing to you, dear, less than nothing. I know perfectly well that I am your own and only valentine. Ain't I? Because you're mine now, you know, since I've turned over this new leaf."

The mother averted her face. "O my son, I'm so unused to loving words, they only frighten me."

But John spoke on with deepening emotion. "Yes, mother, I'm going to be your valentine, and yours only, as I've never been or thought of being in all my life before. I'm going to try my very best! You'll help me, won't you, little valentine mother?"

She lifted a glance of mournful derision. "Valentine me no valentines. You but increase my heart-loneliness. Ah! my self-deluded boy, your fickle pledges only mean, to my sad experience, that you have made your own will everything, and my wish nothing. Valentine me no valentines, let me go."

The young man turned abruptly and strode back to his newspapers. But he was too full of bitterness to read. He heard his mother's soft progress upstairs, and her slow step in the unlighted room overhead. It ceased. She must have sat down in the dark. A few moments passed. Then it sounded again, but so strange and hurried that he started up, and as he did so the cry came, frantic with alarm, from the upper hall, and then from the head of the stairs:

"John! John!"

He was already bounding up them. Mrs. March stood at the top, pale and trembling. "A man!" she cried, "with a gun! I saw him down in the moonlight under my window! I saw him! he's got a gun!"

She was deaf and blind to her son's beseechings to be quiet. He caught her hands in his; they were icy. He led her by gentle force down-stairs and back to her sitting-room seat.

"Why, that's all right, mother; that's what you made me put the shutters on down here for. If you'd just come and told me quietly, why, I might a' got him from your window. Did you see him?"

"I don't know," she moaned. "He had a gun. I saw one end of it."

"Are you sure it was a gun? Which end did you see, the butt or the muzzle?"

Mrs. March only gasped. She was too refined a woman to mention either end of a gun by name. "I saw—the—front end."

"He didn't aim it at you, or at anything, did he?"

"No—yes—he aimed it—sidewise."

"Sideways! Now, mother, there I draw the line! No man shall come around here aiming his gun sideways; endangering the throngs of casual bystanders!"

"Ah! John, is this the time to make your captive and beleaguered mother the victim of ribald jests?"

"My dear mother, no! it's a time to go to bed. If that fellow's still nosing 'round here with his gun aimed sideways he's protection enough! But seriously, mother, whatever you mean by being embargoed and blockaded——"

"I did not say embargoed and blockaded!"

"Why, my dear mother, those were your very words!"

"They were not! They were not my words! And yet, alas! how truly——" She turned and wept.

"O Lord! mother——"

"My son, you've broken the second commandment!"

"It was already broke! O for heaven's sake, mother, don't cave in in this hysterical way!"

The weeper whisked round with a face of wild beseeching. "O, my son, call me anything but that! Call me weak and credulous, too easily led and misled! Call me too poetical and confiding! I know I'm more lonely than I dare tell my own son! But I'm not—Oho! I'm not hysterical!" she sobbed.

So it continued for an hour. Then the lamp gave out and they went to bed.

The next morning John drove his mother to Suez for a visit of several days among her relatives, and rode on into Blackland to see if he could find "a girl" for Widewood. He spent three days and two nights at these tasks, stopping while in

Blackland with—whom would you suppose? Proudfit, for all the world! He took an emphatic liking to the not too brainy colonel, and a new disrelish to his almost too sparkling wife.

As, at sunset of the third day, he again drew near Suez and checked his muddy horse's gallop at Swanee River Bridge, his heart leaped into his throat. He hurriedly raised his hat, but not to the transcendent beauties of the charming scene, unless these were Fannie Halliday and Barbara Garnet.

XLV.

A LITTLE VOYAGE OF DISCOVERIES

For two girls out on a quiet stroll, their arms about each other and their words murmurous, not any border of Suez was quite so alluring as the woods and waters seen from the parapet of this fine old stone bridge.

The main road from Blackland crossed here. As it reached the Suez side it made a strong angle under the town's leafy bluffs and their two or three clambering by-streets, and ran down the rocky margin of the stream to the new railway station and the old steamboat landing half a mile below. The bridge was entirely of rugged gray limestone, and spanned the river's channel and willow-covered sand-bars in seven high, rude arches. One Christmas dawn during the war a retreating enemy, making ready to blow up the structure, were a moment too slow, and except for the scars of a few timely shells dropped into their rear guard, it had come through those years unscathed. For, just below it, and preferable to it most of the year, was a broad gravelly ford. Beyond the bridge, on the Blackland side, the road curved out of view between woods on the right and meadows on the left. A short way up the river the waters came dimpling, green and blue in August, but yellow and swirling now, around the long, bare foot of a wooded island, that lay forever asleep in midstream, overrun and built upon by the winged Liliputians of the shores and fields.

The way down to this spot from the Halliday cottage was a grassy street overarched with low-branching evergreen oaks, and so terraced that the trees at times robbed the view of even a middle distance. It was by this way that Fannie and Barbara had come, with gathered skirts, picking dainty zigzags where, now and then, the way was wet. The spirit of spring was in the lightness of their draperies' texture and dyes—only a woman's eye would have noticed that Barbara was in mourning—and their broken talk was mainly on a plan for the

celebration, on the twenty-second, not of any great and exceptionally truthful patriot's birthday—Captains Champion and Shotwell were seeing to that—but of Parson Tombs's and his wife's golden wedding.

When John March saw them, they had just been getting an astonishing amount of amusement out of the simple fact that Miss Mary Salter and the younger pastor were the committee on decorations. They were standing abreast the bridge's parapet, the evening air stirring their garments, watching the stern-wheeler, Launcelot Halliday, back out from the landing below into the fretting current for a trip down stream. John had always approved this companionship; it had tended to sustain his old illusion that Fannie's extra years need not count between her and him. But the pleasure of seeing them together now was but a flash and was gone, for something else than extra years was counting, which had never counted before. He had turned over a new leaf, as he said. On it he had subscribed with docile alacrity to every ancient grotesqueness in Parson Tombs's science of God, sin, and pardon; and then had stamped Fannie's picture there, fondly expecting to retain it by the very simple trick of garlanding it round with the irrefragable proposition that love is the fulfilling of the law! But not many days had the leaf been turned when a new and better conscience awoke to find shining there, still wet from God's own pen, the corollary that only a whole sphere of love can fulfil the law's broad circumference.

As Fannie and Barbara made their bow and moved to pass on he hurriedly raised his hat and his good horse dropped into a swift, supple walk. The bridle hand started as if to draw in, but almost at the same instant the animal sprang again into a gait which showed the spur had touched her, and was quickly out of hearing.

"Barb," murmured Fannie, "you're thinking he's improved."

"Yes, only—-"

"Only you think he'd have stopped if he'd seen us sooner. Why can't you think maybe he wouldn't? But you're not to blame; you simply have a girl's natural contempt for a boy's love. Well, a boy's love *is* silly; but when you see the constant kind, like John's, as sure as you live there are not many things entitled to higher respect. O Barb! I've never felt so honored by any other love that man ever offered me. He'll get over it; completely. I believe it's dying now, though it's dying hard. But the next time he loves, the girl who treats his love lightly—Let's go down in these woods and look for hepaticas. John can't bring them to me any more and Jeff-Jack never did. He sends candy. There's homage in a wild flower, Barb; but candy, oh—I don't know—it makes me ashamed."

"Why don't you tell him so?"

Fannie leaned close and whispered, "I'm afraid."

"Why, he gave me wild flowers, once."

"When? Who?" The black eyes flashed. "When did he ever give you flowers?"

"When I was five years old." They turned down a short descent into the woods.

Fannie smiled pensively. "Barb, did you notice that John——"

"Has been trading again! His love's not very constant as to horses."

"But what a pretty mare he's got! Barb, 'pon my word, when John March is well mounted, I do think, physically, he's—" The speaker hearkened. From the low place where they stood her eyes were on a level with the road. "It's him again; let's hide."

March came loping down from the bridge, slackened pace, and swept with his frowning glance the meadows on the left. Then he moved along the edge of the wood searching its sunset lights and glooms, and presently turned down into them, bending under the low boughs. And then he halted, burning with sudden resentment before the smiling, black-eyed girl who leaned against the tree, which had all at once refused to conceal her.

Neither spoke. Fannie's eyes were mocking and yet kind, and the resentment in John's turned to a purer mortification. A footstep rustled behind him and Barbara said:

"We're looking for wild flowers. Do you think we're too early?"

"No, I could have picked some this afternoon if I'd felt like it, but it's a sort o' belief with me that nobody ought to pick wild flowers for himself—ha-ha-ha!—Oh eh, Miss Garnet, I reckon I owe you an apology for charging down on you this way, but I just happened to think, after I passed you, that you could tell me where to find your father. He's president *pro tem.* of our land company, you know, and I want to consult him with Mr. Gamble—you know Mr. Gamble, don't you?—president of the railroad? O! of course you do! Well, he's our vice-president."

"Why, no, Mr. March, I don't know where you'll find pop-a right now. I might possibly know when I get back to the house. If it's important I could send you word."

"O no! O no! Not at all! I'll find him easily enough. I hope you'll both pardon me, Miss Fannie, but it seems as if I learned some things pow'ful slow. I ought to know by this time when two's company and three's a crowd."

Before he had finished, the two listeners had seen the remoter significance of his words, and it was to mask this that Barbara drawled—

"Why, Mr. March, that's not nice of you!"

But the young man's confusion was sufficient apology, and both girls beamed kindly on him as he presently took his leave under the delusion that his face hid his inward mortification.

XLVI.

A PAIR OF SMUGGLERS

A short way farther within the wood they began to find flowers.

"Well—yes," said Fannie, musingly. "And pop consented to be treasurer *pro tem.*, but that was purely to help John. You know he fairly loves John. They all think it'll be so much easier to get Northern capital if they can show they're fully organized and all interests interested, you know." She stooped to pick a blossom. Barbara was bending in another direction. Two doves alighted on the ground near by and began to feed, and, except for size, the four would have seemed to an on-looker to have been very much of a kind.

Presently Fannie spoke again. "But I think pop's more and more distrustful of the thing every day. Barb, I reckon I'll tell you something."

Barbara crouched motionless. "Tell on."

"O—well, I asked pop yesterday what he thought of this Widewood scheme anyhow, and he said, 'There's money in it for some men.' 'Well, then, why can't you be one of them,' I asked him, and said he, 'It's not the kind of money I want, Fan.'"

"O pshaw, Fannie, men are always saying that about one another."

"Yes," murmured Fannie.

"Fan," said Barbara, tenderly, "do stop talking that way; you know I'm nearly as proud of your father as you are, don't you?"

"Yes, sweetheart."

"Well, then, go on, dear."

"I asked him if John was one," resumed Fannie, "and, said he, 'No, I shouldn't be a bit surprised to see John lose everything he and his mother have got.'"

Barbara flinched and was still again. "Has he told him that?"

"No, he says John's a very hard fellow to tell anything to. And, you know, Barb, that's so. I used to could tell him things, but I mustn't even try now."

"Why, Fan, you don't reckon Mr. Ravenel would care, do you?"

"Barb, I'll never know how much he cares about anything till it's too late. You can't try things on Jeff-Jack."

"I wish," softly said Barbara, "you wouldn't smile so much like him."

"Don't say anything against him, Barb, now or ever! I'm his and he's mine, and I wouldn't for both worlds have it any other way." But this time the speaker's smile was her own and very sweet. The two returned to the road.

"I asked pop," said Fannie, "where Jeff-Jack stands in this affair. He laughed and said, 'Jeff-Jack doesn't take stands, Fan, he lays low.'"

"Somebody ought to tell him."

"Tell who? Oh, John!—yes, I only wish to gracious some one would! But men don't do that sort of thing for one another. If a man takes such a risk as that for another you may know he loves him; and if a woman takes it you may know she doesn't."

"Fan," said Barbara, as they locked arms, "would it do for me to tell him?"

"No, my dear; in the first place you wouldn't get the chance. You can't begin to try to tell him till you've clean circumgyrated yourself away down into his confidence. It's a job, Barb, and a bigger one than you can possibly want. Now, if we only knew some girl of real sense who was foolish enough to be self-sacrificingly in love with him—but where are we going to find the combination?"

"And even if we could, you say no woman in love with a man would do it."

"There are exceptions, sweet Simplicity. What we want is an exception! Law, Barb, what a fine game a girl of the true stuff could play in such a case! Not having his love yet, but wanting it worse than life, and yet taking the biggest chance of losing it for the chance of saving him from the wreck of his career. O see!" They stopped on the bridge again to watch the sun's last beams gilding the waters, and Barbara asked,

"Do you believe the right kind of a girl would do that?"

"Why, if she could do it without getting found out, yes! Why, Law, I'd have done it for Jeff-Jack! You see, she might save him and win him, too; or she might win him even if she tried and failed to save him."

"But she might," said Barbara, gazing up the river, "she might even save him and still lose."

"Yes, for a man thinks he's doing well if he so much as forgives a deliverer—in petticoats. Yet still, Barb, wouldn't a real woman sooner lose by saving him, than sit still and let him lose for fear she might lose by trying to save him?"

"I don't know; you can't imagine mom-a doing such a thing, can you?"

"What! Cousin Rose? Why, of all women she was just the sort to have done it. Barb, you'd do it!" Fannie expected her friend to look at her with an expression of complimented surprise. But the surprise was her own when Barbara gave a faint start and bent lower over the parapet. The difference was very slight, as slight as the smile of fond suspicion that came into Fannie's face.

"Fannie"—still looking down into the gliding water—"how does your father think Mr. March is going to lose so much; is he afraid he'll be swindled?"

"I believe he is, Barb."

"And do you think"—the words came very softly and significantly—"that that makes it any special matter of mine that he should be warned?"

"Yes, sweetheart, I do."

"Then"—the speaker looked up with distressed resolve—"I must do what I can. Will you help me, or let me help you, rather?"

"Yes, either way, as far as I can." They moved on for a moment. Then Barbara stopped abruptly, looking much amused. "There's one risk you didn't count!"

"What's that?"

"Why, if he should mistake my motive, and——"

"What? suspect you of being——"

"A girl of the true stuff!"

"O but, sweet, how could he?"

As they laughed Fannie generously prepared to keep her guess to herself, and to imply, still more broadly, that all she imputed to her friend was the determination secretly to circumvent a father's evil designs.

Barbara roused from a reverie. "I know who'll help us, Fan,—Mr. Fair." She withstood her companion's roguish look with one of caressing gravity until the companion spoke, when she broke into a smile as tranquil as a mother's.

"Barb, Barb, you deep-dyed villain!"

The only reply of the defendant—they were once more in the shady lane—was to give her accuser a touch of challenge, and the two sprang up a short acclivity to where a longer vista opened narrowly before them. But here, as if rifles had been aimed at them, they shrank instantly downward. For in the dim sylvan light two others walked slowly before them, their heads hidden by the evergreen branches, but their feet perfectly authenticated and as instantly identified. One pair were twos, one were elevens, and both belonged to the Committee on Decorations. An arm that by nature pertained unto the elevens was about the waist that pertained unto the twos, and at the moment of discovery, as well as could be judged by certain sinuosities of lines below, there was a distance between the two pairs of lips less than any assignable quantity.

XLVII.

LEVITICUS

The two maidens were still laughing as they re-entered their gate. Fannie threw an arm sturdily around her companion's waist and sought to repeat the pantomime, but checked herself at the sight of a buggy drawing near.

It was old, misshapen, and caked with wet and dry mud, as also was the mule which drew it. In the vehicle sat three persons. Two were negro women. One of them—of advanced years—was in a full bloom of crisp calico under a flaring bonnet which must have long passed its teens. The other was young and very black. She wore a tawdry hat that only helped to betray her general slovenliness. From between them a negro man was rising and dismounting. A wide-brimmed, crackled beaver rested on his fluffy gray locks, and there was the gentleness of old age in his face.

The spring sap seemed to have started anew in the elder woman's veins. She tittered as she scrambled to rise, and when the old man offered to help her, she eyed him with mock scorn and waved him off.

"G'way fum me, 'Viticus Wisdom—gallivantin' round here like we was young niggehs!—Lawd! my time is come I cayn't git up; my bones dun tuk dis-yeh shape to staay!"

"Come, come!" said the husband, in an undertone of amiable chiding; and the buggy gave a jerk of thankful relief as its principal burden left it for the sidewalk, diffusing the sweet smell of the ironing-table.

While the younger woman was making her mincing descent, Fanny and Barbara came toward them in the walk.

"Miss Halliday," said Leviticus, lifting his beaver and bowing across the gate, "in response to yo' invite we—O bless the Lawd my soul! is that my little—Miss Barb, is that you?"

Before he could say more Virginia threw both hands high. "Faw de Lawd's sake!" She thrust her husband aside. "G'way, niggah! lemme th'oo dis-yeh gate 'fo' I go ove' it!" She snatched Barbara to her bosom. "Lawd, honey! Lawd, honey! Ef anybody 'spec' you' ole Aunt Fudjinny to stan' off an' axe her baby howdy dey bettah go to de crazy house! Lawd! Lawd! dis de fus' chance I had to hug my own baby since I been a po' ole free niggah!" She held the laughing girl off by the shoulders.

"Honey, ef it's my las' ac', I"—she snatched her close again, kissed one cheek twice and the other thrice, and held her off once more to fix upon her a tearful, ravishing gaze. "Lawd, honey, Johanna done tole me how you growin' to favo' my sweet Miss Rose, an' I see it at de fun'l when I can't much mo'n speak to you, an' cry so I cayn't hardly see you; but Lawd! my sweet baby, dough you cayn't neveh supersede her in good looks, you jess as quiet an' beautiful as de sweet-potateh floweh!

"Howdy, Miss Fannie?" She gave her hand and courtesied.

"Howdy, Uncle Leviticus?" said Barbara.

The old man lifted his hat again, bowed very low, and looked very happy. "I'm tol'able well, Miss Barb, thank the Lawd, an' hope an' trus' an' pray you're of the same complexion." Still including Barbara in his audience, he went on with an address to Fannie already begun.

"You know, Miss Fannie, yo' letteh say fo' Aunt Fudjinny an' me to come the twentieth—yass, ma'am, we understan'—but, you know, Mr. Mahch, he come down an' superscribe faw this young—ah——"

"Girl," suggested Barbara, with pretty condescension; but Fannie covertly trod on her toe and said, "lady," with a twinkle at the dowdy maiden.

"P'ecisely!" responded Leviticus to both speakers at once. "An' Mr. Mahch, he was bereft o' any way to fetch her to he's maw less'n he taken her up behime o' his saddle, an' so it seem' like the Lawd's call faw us to come right along an' bring her hencefah, an' then, if she an' his maw fin' theyse'ves agreeable, then Mr. Mahch—which his buggy happn to be here in Suez—'llow to give her his transpotes the balance o' the way to-morrow in hit."

"And you and Aunt Virginia will stay through the golden wedding as our chief butler and chief baker, as I wrote you; will you?"

"Well, er, eh"—the old man scratched his head—"thass the question, Miss Fannie. Thass what I been a-revolvin', an' I sees two views faw revolution. On one side there is the fittenness o' we two faw this work."

"It's glaring," mused Fannie.

"Flagrant," as gravely suggested Barbara.

"P'ecisely! Faw, as you say in yo' letteh, we two was chief butler an' chief baker to they wedd'n' jess fifty year' ago, bein' at that time hi-ud out to 'Squi' Usher—the ole 'Squieh, you know—by Miss Rose' motheh, which, you know, Miss Tomb' she was a Usher, daughteh to the old 'Squi' Usher, same as she is still sisteh to the present 'Squieh, who was son to the ole 'Squieh, his father an' hern. The ole 'Squieh, he married a Jasper, an' thass how come the Tombses is remotely alloyed to the Mahches on the late Jedge's side, an' to you, Miss Barb, on Miss Rose's Montgomery side, an' in these times, when cooks is sca'ce an' butlehs is yit mo' so, it seem to me—it seem to me, Miss Fannie, like yo' letteh was a sawt o'—sawt o'——"

"Macedonian cry," said Fannie.

"Hark from the Tombses," murmured Barbara.

"And so you'll both come!" said Fannie.

"Why, as I say, Miss Fannie, thass the question, fo' there's the care o' my flock, you know."

"De laymbs," put in Virginia, "de laymbs is bleeds to be fed, you know, Miss Fannie, evm if dey is black."

"Yass, ma'am," resumed Leviticus; "an' if we speak o' mere yearthly toys, Fudjinia's pigs an' chickens has they claims."

"Well, whoever's taking care of them now can keep on till the twenty-second, Uncle Leviticus; and as for your church, you can run down there Sunday and come right back, can't you? Why can't you?"

"Uncle Leviticus," said Barbara, "we expect, of course, to pay you both, you know."

"Why, of course!" said Fannie, "you understood that, didn't you?"

"Yass'm, o' co'se," interposed Virginia, quickly, while Leviticus drawled,

"O the question o' pay is seconda'y!—But we'll have to accede, Fudjinia; they can't do without us."

"I think, Fannie," said Barbara, looking very business-like, "we'd better have them name their price and agree to it at once, and so be sure——"

"Lawd, honey!" cried Virginia, "we ain't goin' to ax no prices to you-all! sufficiend unto de price is de laboh theyof, an' we leaves dat to yo' generos'ty. Yass, dass right where we proud an' joyful to leave it—to yo' generos'ty."

"Well, now, remember, the Tombses mustn't know a breath about this. You'll find Johanna in the kitchen. She'll have to give you her room and sleep on the floor in Miss Barb's; she'll be glad of the excuse——"

"Thaank you, Miss Fannie," replied Virginia, with amiable complacency, "but we 'llowin' to soj'u'n with friends in town."

"O, indeed! Well"—Arrangements for a later conference were made. "Good-evening. I'm glad you're bringing such a nice-looking girl to Mrs. March. What is her—what is your name?"

"Daaphne."

"What!"

"Yass'm. Mr. Mahch say whiles I wuck faw he's maw he like me to be naame Jaane, but my fo'-true name's Daaphne, yass'm."

"Barb," said Fannie, "I've just thought of something we must attend to in the house at once!"

XLVIII.

DELILAH

Daphne Jane was one of Leggettstown's few social successes. She was neither comely nor guileless, but she was tremendously smart. Her pious parents had sent her for two or three terms to the "Preparatory Department" of Suez University, where she had learned to read, write, and add—she had been born with a proficiency in subtraction. But she had proved flirtatious, and her father and mother had spent their later school outlays on her younger brothers and sisters. Daphne Jane had since then found sufficient and glad employ trying to pomatum the frizzles out of her hair, and lounging whole hours on her window-sill to show the result to her rivals and monopolize and cheer the passing toiler with the clatter of her perky wit and the perfumes of bergamot and cinnamon.

Cornelius Leggett had easily discovered this dark planet, but her parents were honestly, however crudely, trying to make their children better than their betters expected them to be, and they forbade him the house and her the lonely stroll.

The daughter, from the first moment, professed to look with loathing upon the much-married and probably equally widowed Cornelius, but her mother did not trust her chaste shudderings. When John March came looking for a domestic, she eagerly arranged to put her out to service in a house where, Leviticus assured her, Cornelius dared not bring his foot. John March, however, was not taken into this confidence. The maid's quick wit was her strong card, and even Leviticus did not think it just to her to inform a master or mistress that it was the only strong card she held.

So, thanks to Leviticus, the only man in Leggettstown who would stop at no pains to "suckumvent wickedness in high places," here she was, half-way to Widewood, and thus far safe against any unguessed machinations of the enemy or herself. In Suez, too, all went well. Before Mrs. March Jane seemed made of angelic "yass'ms," and agreed, with a strange, sweet readiness to go to Widewood and assume her duties in her mistress's absence, which would be for a few days only.

"And you'll go"—"yass'm"—"with my son"—"yass'm"—"in the buggy"—"yass'm"—"and begin work"—"yass'm"—"just as though"—"yass'm"—"I were there"—"yass'm." Mrs. March added, half to herself, half to her son, "I find Suez"—"yass'm"—"more lonely than"—"yass'm"—"our forest home." "Yass'm"—said the black damsel.

John was delighted with such undaunted and unselfish alacrity. He was only sorry not to take her home at once, but really this business with Garnet and Gamble was paramount. It kept him late, and the next morning was well grown when he sought his mother to say that he could now take Jane to Widewood.

"My son, you cannot. It's too late."

"Why, what's the matter?"

"Nothing, my dear John."

"Where's the girl?"

"On the way to her field of labor."

"How is she getting there?"

"In our buggy."

"You haven't let her drive out alone?"

"My son, why should you charge me with both cruelty and folly?"

"Who took her out?"

"One, my dear boy, who I little thought would ever be more attentive to the widow's needs than her own son: Cornelius Leggett." Mrs. March never smiled her triumphs. Her lips only writhed under a pleasant pain.

"Well, I'll be——"

"Oh!"

"Why, what, mother? I was only going to say I'll be more than pleased if he doesn't steal the horse and buggy. I'll bet five dollars——"

"Oh!"

"O, I only mean I don't doubt he's half ruined both by now, and all to save a paltry hour."

"My son, it is not mine to squander. Ah! John, the hours are not ours!"

"Why, what are they? O! I see. Well, I wish whoever they belong to would come take 'em away!"

Cornelius was at that moment rejoicing that this one was peculiarly his. As he drove along the quiet Widewood road he was remarking to his charge:

"I arrove fum Pussy on the six o'clock train. One o' the fus news I get win' of is that you in town. Well! y'ought to see me!"

But his hearer refused to be flattered. "Wha'd you do—run jump in de riveh?"

"Jump in—I reckon not! I flew. Y'ought to see me fly to'a'ds you, sweet lady!"

The maiden laughed. "Law! Mr. Leggett, what a shoo-fly that mus' 'a' been! Was de conducto' ayfteh you?"

Mr. Leggett smiled undaunted. "My mos' num'ous thanks to yo' serenity, but I enjoys fum my frien' Presi*dent* Gamble the propriety of a free paass ove' his road."

"Oh? does you indeed! *Is* dat so! Why you makes me proud o' myse'ff. You hole a free paass on de raailroad, an' yit you countercend to fly to me!" The manner changed to one of sweet curiosity. "Does you fly jess with yo' two feet, aw does you comp'ise de assistance o' yo' ears?"

"Why, eh—why, I declah 'pon my soul, you—you es peart es popcawn! You trebbles me to respond to you with sufficient talk-up-titude."

"Does I? Laws-a-me! I ax yo' pahdon, Mr. Leggett. But I uz bawn sassy. I ought to be jess ashame' o' myseff, talkin' dat familious to a gen'leman o' yo' powehs an' 'quaintances. Why you evm knows Mr. Mahch, don't you?"

"Who, me? Me know Johnnie Mahch? Why, my dea'—escuse my smile o' disdaain—why Johnnie Mahch—why—why, I ra-aise' Johnnie!"

"Why, dee Lawdy! Does you call him Johnnie to his face?"

"Well, eh—not offm—ve'y seldom. 'Caze ef I do that, you know, then, here, fus' thing, he be a-callin' me C'nelius."

"I think C'nelius sounds sweet'n—" The speaker clapped a hand to her mouth. "Escuse me! O, Mr. Leggett, *kin* you escuse me?"

"Escuse you?"—his sidelong glance was ravishing—"yo' beauty mo'n escuse you."

The maiden dropped her lashes and drew her feet out of her protector's way. "An' you an' Mr. Mahch is frien's! How nice dat is!"

"Yass, it nice faw him. An' it useful faw me. We in cahoots in dis-yeh lan' boom. O, yass, me an' him an' Gyarnit an' Gamble, all togetheh like fo' brethers. I plays the fife, Johnnie beats the drum, Gyarnit wear the big hat an' flerrish the stick, an' Gamble, he tote the ice-wateh!" The two laughed so heartily as to swing against each other.

"Escuse me!" said Mr. Leggett, with great fondness of tone.

"You ve'y escusable," coyly replied the damsel. "Mr. Leggett, in what similitude does you means you plays de fife?"

"Why in the s'militude o' legislation, you know. But Law'! Johnnie wouldn't neveh had the sense to 'range it that-a way if it hadn't been faw my dea' ole-time frien' an' felleh sodjer, Gyarnit."

"Is dat so? Well, well! Maajo' Gyarnit! You used to cook faw him in camp di'n' you? How much good sense he got, tubbe sho'!" A mixture of roguishness spoiled the pretence of wonder.

"Good sense? Law'! 'twant good sense in Gyarnit nuther. It was jess my pow' ove' him! my stra-ange, masmaric poweh! You know, the arrangements is jess this! Gyarnit got th'ee hund'ed sheers, I got fawty; yit I the poweh behime the th'one. Johnnie, he on'y sec'ta'y an' 'ithout a salary as yit, though him an' his maw got—oh! I dunno—but enough so he kin sell it faw all his daddy could 'a' sole the whole track faw—that is, perwidin' he kin fine a buyeh. Champion, Shotwell, the Graveses—all that crowd, they jess on'y the flies 'roun' the jug; bymeby they find theyse'ves onto the fly-papeh." The pair laughed again, and——

"Oh! escuse me!"

"My acci*dent*, seh. Mr. Leggett, hoccum you got all dat poweh?"

"Ah!" said the smiling gallant, "you wants to know the secret o' my poweh, do you? Well, that interjuce the ezacly question I'm jess a-honin' to ass you. You ass me the secret o' my poweh. Don't you know thass the ve'y thing what Delijah ass Saampson?"

"Yass, seh. I knows. Dass in de Bible, ain't it?"

"It is. It in the sacred scripters, which I hope that, like myseff, fum a chile thou hass known them, ain't you? Yass, well, thass right. I loves to see a young lady pious. I'm pious myseff. Ef I wan't a legislater *I'd* be a preacher. Now, you ass me the same riddle what Delijah ass Saampson. An' you know how he anseh her? He assed a riddle to her. An' likewise this my sweet riddle to you: Is I the Saampson o' yo' hope an' dream an' will you be my Deli——Aw! now, don't whisk away like that an' gag yo'seff with yo' handkercher! I's a lawful widoweh, dearess."

The maiden quenched her mirth and put on great dignity. "Mr. Leggett, will you please to teck yo' ahm fum roun' my wais'?" She glanced back with much whiteness of eyes. "Teck it off, seh; I ain't aansw'ed you yit."

The arm fell away, but his whispering lips came close. "Ain't I yo' Saampson, dearess o' the dear? Ain't you the Delijah o' my haht? Answeh me, my julepina, an' O, I'll reply you the secret o' my poweh aw any otheh question in the wide, wide worl'!"

"Mr. Leggett, ef you crowds me any wuss on dis-yeh buggy seat I—I'll give you—I'll give you a unfavo'able answeh! Mr. Leggett"—she sniggered—"you don't gimme no chaynce to think o' no objections even ef I had any! Will you please to keep yo' foot where yo' foot belong, seh? Mr. Leggett——"

"What is it, my sweet spirit o' nightshade?"

"Mr. Leggett"—the eyes sparkled with banter—"I'll tell you ef you'll fus' aansweh *me* a riddle; will you? 'Caze ef you don't I won't tell you. Will you?"

"Lawd! I'll try! On'y ass it quick befo' my haht bus' wide opm. Ass it quick!"

"Well, you know, I cayn't ass it so scan'lous quick, else I run de dangeh o' gettin' it wrong. Now, dis is it: When is—hol' on, lemme see—yass, dass it. When is two—aw! pshaw! you make me laaugh so I can't ax it at all! When is two raace hawses less'n one?"

"Aw, sheh! I kin ans' that in five minutes! I kin ans' it in one minute! I kin ans' it now! Two hosses is—"

"Hol' on! I said raace hawses! Two raace hawses, I said, seh!"

"Well, dass all right, race hosses! Two race hosses less'n one when they reti-ud into the omlibus business."

"No, seh! no seh!" The maiden cackled till the forest answered back. "No, *seh*! two raace hawses less'n one when each one on'y jess abreas' o' the otheh!"

—"'Breas' o'—aw pshaw! you tuck the words right out'n my mouth! I seed the answeh to it fum the fus; I made a wrong espunction the fus time on'y jess faw a joke! Now, you ans' my question, dearess."

But the dearest had become grave and stately. "Mr. Leggett, befo' I comes to dat finality, I owes it to myseff an' likewise to my pa'ents to git yo' respondence to, anyhow, one question, an' ef you de man o' poweh you say you is, y' ought to be highly fitt'n' to give de correc' reply."

"Espoun' your question, miss! Espoun' yo' question!"

"Well, seh, de question is dis: Why is de—? No, dat ain't it. Lemme see. O yass, whass de diff'ence 'twix' de busy blacksmiff an' de loss calf? Ans' me dat, seh! Folks say C'nelius Leggett a pow'ful smaht maan! How I gwine to know he a smaht maan ef he cayn't evm ans' a riddle-diddle-dee?"

"I kin ans' it! I's ans'ed bushels an' ba'ls o' riddles! Now that riddle is estremely simple, an' dis is de inte'p'etation thereof! The diff'ence betwix' a busy blacksmiff an' a loss ca-alf—thass what you said, ain't it?—Yass, well, it's because—O thass

too easy! I dislikes to occupy my facilities with sich a trifle! It's jess simply because they both git so hawngry they cross-eyed! Thass why they alike!"

"No, seh! no, seh! miss it ag'in! O fie, fo' shaame! a man o' sich mind-powehs like you! Didn't you neveh know de blacksmiff fill de air full o' bellows whilce de loss calf—aw shucks! you done made me fo'git it! Now, jess hesh up, you smaht yalleh niggeh! try in' to meek out like you done guess it! Dis is it; de blacksmiff he fill de caalf full o' bellows, whilce——"

They both broke into happy laughter and he toyed innocently with one of her pinchbeck ear-rings.

"O! my sweet familiarity! you knows I knows it! But yo' sof' eyes is shot me th'oo to that estent that I don't know what I does know! I jess sets here in the emba'ssment o' my complacency a won'de'n' what you takes me faw!"

"How does you know I's tuck you at all yit; is I said so, Mr. Saampson?—Don't you tetch me, seh! right here in full sight o' de house! You's too late, seh! too late! Come roun' here, C'nelius Leggett, an' he'p me out'n dis-yeh buggy, else I dis'p'int you yit wid my aansweh.—No, seh! you please to take jess de tips o' my fingehs. Now, gimme my bundle o' duds!" the voice rose and fell in coquettish undulations—"now git back into de buggy—yass, seh; dass right. Thaank yo ve'y much, seh. Good-by. Come ag'in."

"Miss Daphne, y' ain't ans' my interrogutive yit."

"Yass, I is. Dass my answeh—come ag'in."

"Is dat all de respondence my Delijah got faw her Saampson?"

"Mr. Leggett, I ain't yo' Delijah! Thass fix! I ain't read the scripters in relations to dat young lady faw nuthin! Whetheh you my Saampson remain"—the smile and tone grew bewitching—"faw me to know an faw you to fine out."

"Shell I come soon?" murmured Mr. Leggett, for the old field hand and his wife were in sight; and the girl answered in full voice, but winsomely:

"As to dat, seh, I leaves you to de freedom o' yo' own compulsions."

He moved slowly away, half teased, half elated. At the last moment he cast a final look backward, and Daphne Jane, lagging behind the old couple, tossed him a kiss.

Quite satisfied to be idle, but not to be alone, the maiden so early contrived with her Leggettstown vivacity to offend the old field hands, that the night found her with only herself and her cogitations for company.

However, the house was still new to her, if not in its pantry, at least in its bureaus and wardrobes, and when she had spent the first evening hour counterfeiting the softly whimpered quavers of a little screech-owl that snivelled its woes from a tree in the back-yard, the happy thought came to her innocent young mind to try on the best she could find of her mistress's gowns and millinery. By hook and by crook, combined with a blithe assiduity, she managed to open doors and drawers, and if mimicry is the heaven of aspiring laziness, the maid presently stood unchallenged on the highest plateau of a sluggard's bliss. She minced before the mirror, she sank into chairs, she sighed and whined, took the attitudes given or implied by the other Daphne's portrait down-stairs, and said weary things in a faint, high key.

And then—whether the contagion was in the clothing she had put on, or whether her make-up and her acting were so good as to deceive Calliope herself—inspiration came; the lonely reveler was moved to write. Poetry? No! "Miss it ag'n!" She began a letter intended to inform "Mr. S. Cunnelius Leggett," that while alike by her parents and by Mrs. March she was forbidden to see "genlmun frens," an unannounced evening visitor's risks of being shot by Mr. March first, and the question of his kinship to the late Enos settled afterward, were probably—in the popular mind—exaggerated. The same pastime enlivened the next evening and the next. She even went farther and ventured into verse. Always as she wrote she endeavored to impersonate in numerous subtleties of carriage the sweet songstress whose gowns she had contrived—albeit whose shoes she still failed—to get into. And so, with a conscience void of offence, she was preparing herself to find out, what so many of us already know, that playing even with the muse's fire is playing with fire, all the same.

XLIX.

MEETING OF STOCKHOLDERS

At sunrise of the twenty-second, Barbara started from her pillow, roused by the jarring thunder of a cannon. As it pealed a second time Fannie drew her down.

"It's only Charlie Champion in the square firing a salute. Go to sleep again."

As they stepped out after breakfast for a breath of garden air, they saw John March a short way off, trying to lift the latch of Parson Tombs's low front gate. He tried thrice and again, but each time he bent down the beautiful creature he rode would rear until it seemed as if she must certainly fall back upon her rider. The pastor had come out on his gallery, where he stood, all smiles, waiting for John to win in the pretty strife, which the rider presently did, and glanced over to the Halliday garden, more than ready to lift his hat. But Fannie and Barbara were busy tiptoeing for peach blossoms.

"Good-morning, Brother March; won't you 'light? I declare I don't know which you manage best, yo' horse aw yo' tempeh!" The parson laughed heartily to indicate that, however doubtful the compliment, his intentions were kind.

"Good-morning, sir," said John in the gateway as his pastor came bareheaded toward him; and after a word or two more of greeting—"Mr. Tombs, there's to be a meeting of stockholders in the parlor of the hotel at ten o'clock. My friend, Mr. Fair, got here yesterday evening, and we want him to see that we mean business and hope he does."

"I see," said Parson Tombs, with a momentous air. "And I'll come. I may be a little late in gett'n' there, faw I've got to hitch up aft' a while and take Mother Tombs to spend the day, both of us, with our daughters, Mrs. Hamlet and Lazarus Graves. I don't reckon anybody else has noticed it but them, but, John, my son, Mother Tombs an' I will be married jess fifty years to-night! However that's neither here nor there; I'll come. If I'm half aw three-quarters of an hour late, why, I reckon that's no mo'n the rest of 'em will be, is it?"

John smiled and said he feared it wasn't. As his mare leaped from the sidewalk to the roadway he noted the younger pastor going by on the other side, evidently on a reconnoisance. For the committee on decorations was to come with evergreens to begin to deck the Tombs parsonage the moment the aged pair should get out of sight of it.

Three persons were prompt to the moment at the meeting of stockholders: Garnet, Gamble, and Jonas Crickwater, the new clerk of Swanee Hotel and a subscriber for one share—face value one hundred dollars, cash payment ten. A moment later Cornelius entered, and with a peering smile.

"Howdy, Leggett?" said Garnet, affably; but when the tawny statesman moved as though he might offer to shake hands, the Major added with increased cordiality, "take a seat," and waved him to a chair against the wall; then, turning his back, he

resumed conversation with the railroad president. Presently John March arrived, with a dignity in his gait and an energy in his eye that secretly amused the president of the road. John looked at his watch with an apologetic smile.

"I supposed you had gone some place to get Mr. Fair," said Garnet.

"He's in Jeff-Jack's office; they're coming over together." John busied himself with his papers to veil his immense satisfaction. Looking up from them he saw Leggett. "Oh!" he exclaimed, stepped forward, and, with a constrained bow, for the first time in his life gave him his hand. The mulatto bowed low and smiled eruptively, too tickled to speak.

At the end of half an hour the gathering numbered nine, and everybody was in conversation with somebody. Mr. Crickwater, after three gay but futile attempts to tell Gamble that they were from the same State in the North, leaned against a wall with anguish in his every furtive glance, hopelessly button-holed by Leggett.

"Ah!" cried Garnet, as Jeff-Jack and Fair entered together. The Major laughed out for joy. In a moment it was—"Mr. Fair, this man, and Mr. Fair, that one—you remember President Gamble, of course?—and Captain Champion? Mr. Fair, let me make you acquainted with Mr. Hersey. Mr. Weed I think you met the last time you were here. No! this is Mr. Weed, that's our colored representative, Mr. Leggett. He'd like to shake hands with you, too, sir."

"Mr. Fair," said Cornelius, "seh, to you; yass, I likes to get my sheer o' whateveh's a-goin'."

He was about to say much more, but Garnet purposely drowned his voice. "Gentlemen, we'll proceed to business. Mr. Crickwater, will you act as doorkeeper?" Mr. Crickwater assumed that office.

Secretary March having occasion to mention the number of subscribed shares represented by those present as six hundred and eleven, Garnet explained that besides his own subscription he represented one of fifteen shares and another of ten for two ladies, and Champion unintentionally uttered a lurid monosyllable as Shotwell stuck him under the leg with a pin. They were the shares, Garnet added, that General Halliday had failed to take.

Business went on. When, by and by, Mr. Crickwater admitted Parson Tombs, the pastor found the company listening to the Honorable Cornelius Leggett as he expounded the reasons for, and the purposes of, the various provisions of An Act to authorize the Counties of Blackland, Clearwater, and Sandstone to subscribe to the capital stock of the Three-Counties Land and Improvement Company, Limited, and to declare said counties to be bodies politic and corporate for the purposes therein mentioned.

"You see, gentlemen," interposed Garnet, "we make Mr. Leggett one of the principal advocates of this bill in order to secure the support of those, both in the Legislature and at the polls, who are likely to vote as he votes on the question of the three counties subscribing to this other thousand shares, the half of our capital stock reserved for the purpose."

Mr. Weed asked how many shares offered to voluntary subscribers on the ten-dollar instalment plan had been taken, and Garnet replied, "All. Those, together with the shares assigned me in exchange for the mortgages I hold on Widewood and propose to surrender, the forty for which Mr. Leggett pays five hundred dollars, and the two hundred retained by Mr. March and his mother, make six hundred and forty, leaving three hundred and sixty to be placed with capitalists willing to pay their face value. We have to-day an increased confidence that these reinforcements"—he smiled—"are not far off. When this is done we shall have raised the three-eighths of the face value of the one thousand private shares, as required, before the three counties' subscription to the other thousand shares can become effective. I have to state, gentlemen, that General Halliday has been compelled by the weight of other burdens to resign the treasurership; but on the other hand I have the pleasure to announce that Captain Charles Champion has consented to act as treasurer, and *also*, that Colonel Ravenel expresses his willingness to serve as one of the two trustees for the three counties on the—(applause)—on the very reasonable condition that he be allowed to name the other trustee. I believe there's no other formal business before the meeting, but before we adjourn I think a few brief remarks from one or two gentlemen who have not yet spoken will be worth far more than the time they occupy. I'll call on our vice-president, Mr. Gamble." (Applause.)

Gamble said his father used to tell him a man of words and not of deeds was like a garden full of weeds. Here he was silent so long that Champion whispered to Shotwell, "He's stuck!"

But at length he resumed, that he attributed his own success in life to his always having believed in deeds!

"Indeed!" echoed Shotwell in so audible a whisper that half the group smiled.

Gamble replied that his statement might surprise some that had been asleep for the last twenty years, but he guessed there wasn't any such person in this crowd. (Laughter.) However, he proposed to say in a few words, which should be as much like deeds as he could make 'em, what he was willing to do. He paused so long again that Champion winked at John and was afraid to look at Shotwell.

He remembered, the speaker finally began again, another good saying—couldn't seem to be sure whether it was from Shakespeare or the Bible—that "a fool and

his money are soon parted." Now, he was far from intending that for anyone present——

"No-o," slowly interrupted Hersey, turning from a large spittoon, "we ain't any of us got any money to part with."

"Well, I haven't mistook any of you for fools, neither. But I think that proverb, or whatever you call it, is as much's to say just like this, that if a man ain't a fool, 'tain't easy to part him from his money!" (Applause.)

"How about a fool and his land?" asked John, with a genial countenance.

"O *you're* all right," eagerly replied Gamble, and smiled inquiringly as the company roared with laughter. "Why, gentlemen, our able and efficient secretary is all right! Land ain't always money, and the fool is the man who won't let his land go when he's got too much of it. (Applause.) But that's not what I was driving at. What I was driving at was this: that if we want to get any man or men to put big money into this thing out o' their own pockets, we've got to make 'em officers of the company an' give'em control of it. Of course, our secretary is in to stay; that's part of his pay for the land he gives; but except as to him, gentlemen, there'll have to be a new slate. How's that, Mr. President?"

"Certainly; we're all pro tern, except Mr. March—and Colonel Ravenel."

"Yes, Colonel Ravenel, of course; but the man he selects for the other trustee must be someone satisfactory to the men on the new slate, eh, Colonel?"

Ravenel smiled, nodded, and as Gamble still looked at him, said, "All right."

"Now, gentlemen, if any of you don't agree to these things, now is the time to say it." A long pause. "If we are all agreed, then all I've got to add, Mr. President, is just this: you say there's three hundred and sixty shares for sale at their face value; I'll take two hundred when anybody else will take the balance." (Applause.)

As Gamble sank down Garnet glanced over to Fair, who was sitting next to Jeff-Jack; but Fair began to read some of the company's printed matter and the whole gathering saw Ravenel give Garnet a faint shake of the head.

"Ravenel!" suggested Champion, but Jeff-Jack quietly replied, "Father Tombs," and five or six others repeated the call. The pastor rose.

"I'm most afraid, my dea' friends an' brethren, I oughtn't to try to speak to this crowd. I'm a man of words and not of deeds, an' yet I'm 'fraid I shan't evm say the right thing. I belong to the past. I've been thinkin' of the past every minute I've been a-sitt'n' here. Yo' faces ah all turned to the future an' ah lighted"—he lifted

his arm and waggled his hand—"by the beams of a risin' sun reflected from the structu'es o' yo' golden dreams. As I look back down the long an' shining stair-steps o' the years I count seventy-two of 'em in the clear sight o' memory's eye besides fo' or five that lie shrouded in the silve'y mist of earliest childhood." The pastor, ceased and his hearers were very still.

"I don't tell my age to brag of it, but if I remind you-all that I've baptized mo' Suez babies than there are now Suez men an' women alive, an' have seen jest about eve'y cawnehstone laid in this town that's ever been laid, I needn't say my heart's in yo' fawtunes whether faw this world aw the next.

"An' I don't doubt you goin' to be prospe'd. What I'm bound to tell you I've my private fears of, an' yet what I'm hopin' an' trustin' and prayin' the Lord will deliveh you fum—evm as a cawp'ate company—is the debasin' sin o' money greed. Gentle*men*, an' dea' friends an' breth'en, may Gawd save you fum that as he saved the two Ezra Jaspehs, the foundeh o' Suez an' his cousin, the grantee of Widewood, fum the folly o' Ian' greed. For I tell you they may not 'a' managed either tract as well as some otheh men think they might 'a' done it, but they were saved the folly whereof I speak. They's been some talk an' laugh here this mawnin' about John March a-partin' with so much o' his lan'. Well, if that makes him a fool, he's a fool by my advice! Faw when he come to me with his plans all in the bud, so to speak, I said to him there an' then, an' he'll remembeh: Johnnie, s'I, I've set on the knees of both Ezra Jaspehs, an' I'm tellin' you what I know of the one that was yo' fatheh's grand-fatheh, as you say you know it of yo' own sainted fatheh: that if the time had eveh come in his life when paht'n' with Widewood tract would of seemed any ways likely to turn it into sco'es an' hund'eds o' p'osp'ous an' pious homes he would 'a' givm ninety-nine hund'edths away faw nothin' rather than not see that change; yes, an' had mo' joy oveh the one-hund'edth left to him than oveh the ninety an' nine to 'a' kep' 'em as the lan's of on'y one owneh an' one home.

"Gentlemen, I'm free to allow, as I heah the explanations o' all the gue-ards an' counteh-gue-ards o' this beautiful scheme—schools faw the well-to-do an' the ill-to-do, imperatively provided as fast as toil is provided faw the toiler and investments faw the investor—I have cause to rejoice an' be glad. An' yet! It oughtn't to seem strange to you-all if an' ole man, a man o' the quiet ole ploughin' an' plantin', fodder-pullin', song-singin', cotton-pickin', Christmas-keepin' days, the days o' wide room an' easy goin', should feel right smaht o' solicitude an' tripidation when he sees the red an' threatenin' dawn of anotheh time, a time o' mines an' mills an' fact'ries an' swarmin' artisans' an' operatives an' all the concomitants o' crowded an' complicated conditions, an' that he should fall to prayin' aloud in the very highways an' hotels, like some po' benighted believer in printed prayehs an' litanies, the petition: Fum all Ole Worl' sins an' New Worl'

fanaticisms, fum all new-comers, whetheh immigrants aw capitalists, with delete'ious politics at va'iance fum ow own, which, heavm knows, ah delete'ious enough, an' most of all fum the greed o' money, good Lawd deliv' us!

"An' I have faith that he will. Uphel' by that faith, I've taken fifteen shares myself. But O, if faith could right here an' now be changed into sight, then would this day be as golden in my hopes faw Suez an' her three counties as it already is faw my private self in memory o' past joys."

The speaker was sinking into his chair when Garnet asked with a smile that everyone but the pastor understood, "Why, how's that Brother Tombs; is this day something more than usual to you?"

"Brother Garnet, if I've hinted that it is, it's mo' than I started out to do, but I'm tempted, seein' so many friends in one bunch so, to jest ask yo'-all's congratulations on"—the eyes glistened with moisture—"the golden anniversary o' my weddin' day."

The walls rang with applause, men crowded laughingly around the Parson to shake his hand, and in ten minutes the room was silent and the company gone, "every man to his tent," as the happy Parson said, each one as ready for his noontide meal as it was for him.

L.

THE JAMBOREE

The social event of that midday was not the large family dinner where Mother Tombs sat between Hamlet and Lazarus, and Father Tombs between their wives; where Sister March was in the prettiest good humor conceivable and the puns were of the sort that need to be italicized, and the anecdotes were family heirlooms, and the mirth was as spontaneous as the wit was scarce, and not one bad conscience was hidden beneath it all. The true social event of that hour was the repast given by John March to Mr. Fair in Swanee Hotel, at which General Halliday, Captain Champion, and Dr. Coffin were on John's left, Ravenel sat at the foot of the board, and at John's right were Fair, in the place of honor, then Garnet, and then Shotwell in the seat appointed for Gamble, who had suddenly found he couldn't possibly stay.

Here were no mothers' quotations of their children's accidental wit, nor husbands' and wives' betrayals of silly sweetnesses of long-gone courtships and honeymoons. Passing from encomiums upon Parson Tombs's powers to the subject of eloquence in general, the allusions were mainly to Edmund Burke, John C. Calhoun, Sargent S. Prentiss, and Lorenzo Dow. The examples of epigram were drawn from the times of Addison, those of poetic wisdom from Pope, of witty jest from Douglas Jerrold and Sidney Smith, of satire from Randolph of Roanoke. John March told, very successfully, how a certain great poet of the eighteenth century retorted impromptu upon a certain great lord in a double-rhymed and triple-punned repartee. Champion and Shotwell, in happy alternation, recited two or three incredible nonsense speeches attributed to early local celebrities, and Garnet and Halliday gave the unpublished inside histories of three or four hitherto inexplicable facts, or seeming facts, in the personal or political relations of Marshall, Jackson, Webster, and Clay. Burns and Byron were there in spirit, and John could have recited one of his mother's poems if anyone had asked for it.

As for Ravenel and Fair, they had their parts and performed them harmoniously with the rest, so that John could see that he himself and everyone else were genuinely interesting to those two and that they were growingly interesting to each other. Both possessed the art of provoking the others to talk; they furnished the seed of conversation and were its gardeners, while the rest of the company bore its fruits and flowers. Ravenel seemed always to keep others talking for his diversion, Fair for his information.

John pointed this out to Miss Garnet that evening, at the Parson's golden wedding, and noticed that she listened to him with a perfectly beautiful eagerness.

"It's because I talked about Fair," he said to himself as he left her—"Aha! there they go off together, now."

The scene of this movement was that large house and grounds, the "Usher home place," just beyond the ruined bridge where Cornelius had once seen ghosts. A pretty sight it was to come out on the veranda, as John did, and see the double line of parti-colored transparencies meandering through the dark grove to the gate and the lane beyond. Shotwell met him.

"Hello, March, looking for Fair? He's just passed through that inside door with Miss Garnet."

"I know it—I'm not looking for anyone—in particular."

Out here on the veranda it was too cool for ladies; John heard only male voices and saw only the red ends of cigars; so, although he was not—of course he wasn't!—looking for anyone—in particular—he went back into the crowded house and buzzing rooms.

"Hunt'n' faw yo' maw, John?" asked Deacon Sexton as he leaned on his old friend Mattox; "she's——"

"Why, I'm not hunting for anybody," laughed March; "do I look like I was?"

He turned away toward a group that stood and sat about Parson Tombs.

"I never suspicioned a thing," the elated pastor was saying for the third or fourth time. "I never suspicioned the first thing till Motheh Tombs and I got into ow gate comin' home fum the Graveses! All of a sudden there we *ware* under a perfec' demonstration o' pine an' ceda' boughs an' wreaths an' arborvitæ faschoons! Evm then I never suspicioned but what that was all until Miss Fannie an' Miss Barb come in an' begin banterin' not only Motheh Tombs but *me*, if you'll believe it, to lie down an' rest a while befo' we came roun' here to suppeh! Still I 'llowed to myself, s'I, it's jest a few old frien's they've gotten togetheh. But when I see the grove all lightened up with those Chinee lanterns, I laughed, an' s'I to motheh, s'I, 'I don't know what it is, but whatev' it is, it's the biggest thing of its kind we've eveh treed in the fifty years that's brought us to this golden hour!' An' with that po' motheh, she just had to let go all ho-holts; heh—heh cup run oveh.

"You wouldn't think so now, to see heh sett'n' oveh there smilin' like a basket o' chips, an' that little baag o' gold dollahs asleep in heh lap, would you? But that smile ain't change' the least iota these fifty years. What a sweet an' happy thought it was o' John March, tellin' the girls to put the amount in fifty pieces, one for each year. But he's always been that original. Worthy son of a worthy motheh! Why, here he is! Howdy, John? I'm so proud to see Sisteh March here to-night; she told me at dinneh that she 'llowed to go back to Widewood this evenin'."

"I see in the papeh she 'llowed to go this mawnin'," said Clay Mattox.

John showed apologetic amusement. "That's my fault, I reckon, I understood mother to say she couldn't stay this evening."

A finger was laid on his shoulder. It was Shotwell again. "John, Miss Fannie Halliday wants Jeff-Jack. Do you know where he is?"

"No! Where is Miss Fannie?"

Shotwell lifted his hand again, with a soothing smile. "Don't remove yo' shirt; Ellen is saafe, fo' that thaynk Heavm, an' hopes ah faw the Douglas givm."

March flung himself away, but Shotwell turned him again by a supplicating call and manly, repentant air. "Law, John, don't mind my plaay, old man; I'm just about as sick as you ah. Here! I'll tell you where she is, an' then I'll tell you what let's do! You go hunt Jeff-Jack an' I'll staay with heh till you fetch him!"

"That would be nice," cheerfully laughed John.

In the next room he came upon Fannie standing in a group of Rosemont and Montrose youths and damsels. They promptly drew away.

"John," she said, "I want to ask a favor of you, may I?"

"You can ask any favor in the world of me, Miss Fannie, except one."

"Why, what's that?" risked Fannie.

"The one you've just sent Shotwell to do." He smiled with playful gallantry, yet felt at once that he had said too much.

Fannie put on a gayety intended for their furtive observers, as she murmured, "Don't look so! A dozen people are watching you with their ears in their eyes." Then, in a fuller voice—"I want you to get Parson Tombs away from that crowd in yonder. He's excited and overtaxing his strength."

"Then may I come back and spend a few minutes—no more—with you—alone? This is the last chance I'll ever have, Miss Fannie—I—I simply must!"

"John, if you simply must, why, then, you simply—mustn't. You'll have the whole room trying to guess what you're saying."

"They've no right to guess!"

"We've no right to set them guessing, John." She saw the truth strike and felt that unlucky impulse of compassion which so often makes a woman's mercy so unmercifully ill-timed. "Oh!" she called as he was leaving.

He came back with a foolish hope in his face. She spoke softly.

"Everybody says there's a new John March. Tell me it's so; won't you?"

"I"—his countenance fell—"I thought there was, but—I—I don't know." He went on his errand. Champion met him and fixed him with a broad grin.

"I know what's the matter with you, March."

"O pooh! you think so, eh? Well, you never made a greater mistake! I'm simply tired. I'm fairly aching with fatigue, and I suppose my face shows it."

"Yes. Well, that's all I meant. Anybody can see by your face you're in a perfect agony of fatigue. You don't conceal it as well as Shotwell does."

"Shotwell!" laughed John. "He's got about as much agony to conceal as a wash-bench with a broken leg. O, I'll conceal mine if anybody'll tell me how."

Champion closed his lips but laughed audibly, in his stomach. "Well, then, get that face off of you. You look like a boy that'd lost all his money at a bogus snake-show."

When Fair came up to Barbara, she was almost as glad to see him as John supposed, and brought her every wit and grace to bear for his retention, with a promptness that satisfied even her father, viewing them from a distance.

"Miss Garnet, I heard a man, just now, call this very pleasant affair a jamboree. What constitutes a jamboree?"

"Why, Mr. Fair," said Barbara, in her most captivating drawl, "that's slang!"

"Yes, I didn't doubt. I hope you're not guilty of never using slang, are you?"

"O no, sir, but I never use it where I can't wear a shawl over my head. Still, I say a great many things that are much worse than slang."

"Miss Garnet, you say things that are as good as the best slang I ever heard."

"Ah!—that's encouraging. Did you ever hear the Misses Kinsington's rule: Never let your slang show a lack of wit or poverty of words! They say it's a sure cure for the slang habit. But if you really need to know, Mr. Fair, what constitutes a jamboree, I can go and ask Uncle Leviticus for you; that is, if you'll take me to him. He's our butler to-night, and he's one of the old slave house-servants that you said you'd like to talk with."

"But I want to talk with you, just now; definitions can wait."

"O you shall; there's every facility for talking there, and it's not so crowded."

The consumption of refreshments had been early and swift, and they found the room appropriated to it almost empty. Two or three snug nooks in it were occupied by one couple each. Leviticus was majestically superintending the coming and going of three or four maid-servants. Just as he gathered himself up to define a jamboree, Virginia happened in and stood with a coffee-cup half wiped, eying him with quizzical approbation.

"A jamboree? You want to know what constitutes a jamboree? Well—What you want, Fudjinia?"

"Go on, seh, go on. Don't let me amba'as you. I wants jess on'y my civil rights. Go on, seh." She set her arms akimbo.

"A jamboree!" repeated Leviticus, giving himself a yet more benevolent dignity. "Well, you know, Miss Barb, to ev'ything they is a season, an' a time to ev'y puppose. A wedd'n' is a wedd'n', a infare is a infare, a Chris'mus dinneh is a Chris'mus dinneh! But now, when you come to a jamboree—a jam—Fudjinia"—he smiled an affectionate persuasion—"we ain't been appi'nted the chiefs o' this evenin's transactions to stan' idlin' round, is we?"

"Go on, seh, go on."

"Well, you know, Mr. Fair, when we South'enehs speak of a jamboree, a jamboree is any getherin' wherein the objec' o' the getherin' is the puppose fo' which they come togetheh, an' the joy and the jumble ah equal if not superiah to each otheh."

Virginia brought up a grunt from very far down, which might have been either admiration or amusement. "Umph! dat is a jamboree, faw a fac'! I wond' ef he git dat fum de books aw ef he pick it out'n his own lahnin'?"

"Miss Garnet," said Fair, "there are wheels within wheels. I am having a jamboree of my own."

LI.

BUSINESS

"This," replied Barbara, "has been a bright day for our whole town." And then, more pensively, "They say you could have made it brighter."

Whereat the young man lowered his voice. "Miss Garnet, I had hoped I could."

"And I had hoped you would."

"Miss Garnet, honestly, I'm glad I did not know it at the meeting. It was hard enough to disappoint Mr. March; but to know that I was failing to meet a hope of yours—"

Presently he added:

"Your hope implied a certain belief in me. Have I diminished that?"

"Why-y, no-o, Mr. Fair, you've rather aug-men-ted it."

He brightened almost playfully. "Miss Garnet, you give me more pleasure than I can quietly confess."

"Why, I didn't intend to do that."

"To be trusted by you is a glad honor."

"Well, I do trust you, Mr. Fair. I'm trusting you now—to trust me—that I really want to talk—man-talk. As a rule," continued Barbara, putting away her playfulness, "when a young lady wants to talk pure business, she'd better talk with her father, don't you think so?"

"As a rule, yes. And, as a rule, I make no doubt that's what you would do."

Barbara's reply was meditative. "One reason why I want to talk about this business at all this evening is also a strong reason why I don't talk about it to pop-a."

"I see; he's almost as fascinated with it as Mr. March is."

"It means so very much to the college, Mr. Fair, and you know he's always been over eyes and ears in love with it; it's his life." She paused and then serenely seized the strategic point at which she had hours before decided to begin this momentous invasion. "Mr. Fair, why, do you reckon, Mr. Ravenel has consented to act as commissioner?"

Fair laughed. "You mean is it trust or distrust?"

"Yes, sir; which do you reckon it is?"

He laughed again. "I'm not good at reckoning."

"You can guess," she said archly.

"Yes, we can both do that. Miss Garnet, I don't believe your *father* is actuated by distrust; he believes in the scheme. You, I take it, do not, and you are solicitous for him. Do I not guess rightly?"

"I don't think I'm more solicitous than a daughter should be. Pop-a has only me, you know. Didn't you believe in Mr. March's plan at one time, sir?"

"I believed thoroughly, as I do still, in Mr. March. I also had, and still have, some belief in his plan; but"—confidentially—"I have no belief in——"

"Certain persons," said Barbara so slowly and absently that Fair smiled again as he said yes. They sat in silence for some time. Then Barbara said, meditatively, "If even Mr. March could only be made to see that certain persons ought not to have part in his enterprise—but you can't tell him that. I didn't see it so until now. It would seem like pique."

"Or a counter scheme," said Fair. "Would you wish him told?"

"You admit I have a right to a daughter's solicitude?"

"Surely!" Fair pondered a moment. "Miss Garnet, if the opportunity offers, I am more than willing you should say to Mr. March——"

"I rarely meet him, but still——"

"That I expressed to you my conviction that unless he gets rid of——"

"Certain——" said Barbara.

"Persons," said Fair, "his scheme will end in loss to his friends and in ruin to him."

"And would that be"—Barbara rose dreamily—"a real service to pop-a?"

Fair gave his arm. "I think it the best you can render; only, your father——" He began to smile, but she lifted a glance as utterly without fear as without hardihood and said:

"I understand. He must never know it's been done."

"That's more than I meant," he replied, as Fannie Halliday came up. The two girls went for their wraps.

"March?" said Ravenel, as he and Fair waited to escort them home. "O, no, he left some time ago with his mother."

On the way to the Halliday cottage Fair said to Barbara:

"I'm glad of the talk we've had."

"You can afford to be so, Mr. Fair. It showed your generosity against the background of my selfishness."

"Selfishness? Surely it isn't selfish to show a daughter's care and affection for a father."

By her hand on his arm he felt her shrink at the last word. "I love my father, yes. But you're making mistakes about me. Let's talk about Miss Fannie; she'll only be

Miss Fannie about two weeks longer. You ought to stay to see her married, Mr. Fair."

"And you are to be bridesmaid! But I *must* go to-morrow. I wish my father and mother could reach here in time on their way home from New Orleans, but when they get this far your bridal party will have been two days married and gone."

Barbara mused a moment. "You know, this plan for me to give a year to study in the North has been as much mine as pop-a's; but pop-a's entirely responsible for putting me into your father's and mother's care on the journey. I've been in a state of alarm ever since."

"Really, that's wrong! You're going to be a source of great pleasure to them. And you'll like them, too, very much. They are interesting in many ways and good in all, and as travelers they are perfect."

"You give me new courage, Mr. Fair. But"—she spoke more playfully—"I'm afraid of New England, yet. There's a sort of motherly quality in our climate that I can't expect to find there. Won't the snow be still on the ground?"

"Very likely; the higher mountain tops, at least, will be quite covered."

"Well, I'm glad that doesn't mean what I once thought it did. I thought the snow in New England covered the mountain tops the same way the waters covered them in the Deluge."

Fair looked down into his companion's face under the leafy moonlight and halted in a quick glow of inspiration. "When first you see New England, Miss Garnet, nature will have been lying for four months in white, sacramental silence. But presently you will detect a growing change——"

"A stealing out of captivity?"

"Yes!—each step a little quicker than the one behind it——" So he went on for a full minute in praise of the New England spring.

Barbara listened with the delight all girls have for flowers of speech plucked for themselves.

"You know," she responded, as they moved on again, "it doesn't come easy for us Southerners to think of your country as being beautiful; but we notice that nearly all the landscapes in our books are made in 'barren New England,' and we have a pri-vate cu-ri-os-i-ty to know how you all in-vent them."

"If New England should not charm you, Miss Garnet,"—Fair hurried his words as they drew near Ravenel and Fannie waiting at the cottage gate—"my disappointment would last me all my life."

"Why, so it would me," said Barbara, "but I do not expect it. Well, Fannie, Mr. Fair has at last been decoyed into praising his native land. Think of——" She hushed.

A strong footstep approached, and John March came out of the gloom of the trees, saluting buoyantly. Ravenel reached sidewise for his hand and detained him.

"I took my mother away early," said March. "She can't bear a crowd long. I was feeling so fatigued, myself, I thought a brisk walk might help me. You still think you must go to-morrow, Mr. Fair? I go North, myself, in about a week."

The two girls expressed surprise.

"For the land company?" quickly prompted Fannie.

"Yes, principally. I'll take my mother's poems along and give them to some good publisher. O no-o, it's not exactly a sudden decision; its taken me all day to make it. My mother—O—no, she seems almost resigned to my going, but it's hard to tell about my mother, Miss Garnet; she has a wonderful control of her feelings."

LII.

DARKNESS AND DOUBT

The paragraph in the *Courier* which purported to tell the movements of Mrs. March silently left its readers to guess those of her son. Two men whose abiding-places lay in different directions away from Suez had no sooner made their two guesses than they proceeded to act upon them without knowledge of, or reference to, the other.

About an hour after dark on the night of the golden wedding both these men were riding, one northward, the other southward, toward each other on the Widewood road. Widewood house was between them. Both moved with a wary slowness and looked and listened intently, constantly, and in every direction.

When one had ridden within a hundred yards or so of the Widewood house and the other was not much farther away, the rider coming up from the southward

stopped, heard the tread of the horse approaching in front, and in hasty trepidation turned his own animal a few steps aside in the forest. He would have made them more but for the tell-tale crackle of dead branches strewed underfoot by the March winds. He sat for a long time very quiet, peering and hearkening. But the other had heard, or at least thought he had heard, the crackle of dead branches, and was taking the same precautions.

The advantage, however, was with the rider from the south, who knew, while the other only feared, there was something ahead it were better to see than be seen by. About the same time the one concluded his ears might have deceived him, the other had divined exactly what had happened. Thereupon the shrewder man tied his horse and stole noiselessly to a point from whose dense shade he could see a short piece of the road and the house standing out in the moonlight.

The only two front windows in it that had shades were in Mrs. March's bed-chamber. The room was brightly lighted and the shades drawn down. The rest of the house was quite dark. The man hiding so near these signs noted them, but drew no hasty conclusions. He hoped to consider them later, but his first need was to know who, or, at least where, the person was whom he had heard upon the road.

Though already well hidden he crouched behind a log, and upon the piece of road and every shadowy cover of possible approach threw forward an alert scrutiny supported by the whole force of his shrewdest conjectures. The sounds and silences that belong to the night in field and forest were far and near. Across the moon a mottled cloud floated with the slowness of a sleeping fish, a second, third, and fourth as slowly followed, the shadow of a dead tree crawled over a white stone and left it in the light; but the enigma remained an enigma still. It might be that the object of conjecture had fled in the belief that the conjecturer was none other than Widewood's master. But, in that same belief, who could say he might not be lying in ambush within close gunshot of the horse to which the conjecturer dared not now return? In those hills a man would sometimes lie whole days in ambush for a neighbor, and one need not be a coward to shudder at the chance of being assassinated by mistake. To wait on was safest, but it was very tedious. Yet soon enough, and near and sudden enough, seemed the appearance of the man waited for, when at length, without a warning sound, he issued from the bushy shadow of a fence into the bright door-yard. In his person he was not formidable. He was of less than medium stature, lightly built, and apparently neither sinewy nor agile. But in his grasp was something long and slender, much concealed by his own shadow, but showing now a glint of bright metal and now its dark cylindrical end; something that held the eye of the one who watched him from out the shadow. Neither the features nor yet the complexion of the one he watched were discernible, but the eyes were evidently

on a third window of the lighted room not at its front, but on a side invisible to the watcher. This person rose from his log and moved as speedily as he could in silence and shadow until he came round in sight of this window and behind the other figure. Then he saw what had so tardily emboldened the figure to come forward out of hiding. This window also had a shade, the shade was lowered, and on it the unseen lamp perfectly outlined the form of a third person. Without a mutter or the slightest gesture of passion, the man under the window raised the thing in his grasp as high as his shoulder, lowered it again and glanced around. He seemed to tremble. The man at his back did not move; his gaze, too, was now fastened, with liveliest manifestations of interest, on the window-shade and the moving image that darkened it.

As the foremost of the two men began for the third time that mysterious movement which he had twice left unfinished, the one behind, now clearly discerning his intention, stole one step forward, and then a second, as if to spring upon him before he could complete the action. But he was not quick enough. The black and glistening thing rose once more to the level of its owner's shoulder, and the next instant on the still night air quivered the plaintive wail of—a flute.

At mortal risks both conjectured and unconjectured, it was an instrument of music, not of murder, which Mr. Dinwiddie Pettigrew was aiming sidewise.

LIII.

SWEETNESS AND LIGHT

Yet the pulse of the man behind him, who did not recognize him, began to quicken with anger. Almost at the flute's first note the image on the window-shade started and hearkened. A moment later it expanded to grotesque proportions, the room swiftly grew dark, and in another minute the window of a smaller one behind it shone dimly as with the flame of a lamp turned low. The flutist fluted on. From the melody it appeared that the musician had at some date not indicated, and under some unaccountable influence, dreamt that he dwelt in marble halls with vassals and serfs at his side. The man at his back had come as near as the darkness would cover him, but there had stopped.

Presently the music ceased, but another sound, sweeter than all music, kissed, as it were, the serenader's ear. It was the wary lifting of a window-sash. He ran forward into the narrow shade of the house itself, and lost to the restraints of

reason, carried away on transports of love, without hope of any reply, whispered, "Daphne!"

And a tender whisper came back—"Wait a minute."

"You'll come down?" he whisperously asked; but the window closed on his words, the dim light vanished, and all was still.

He was watching, on his left, the batten shutters of the sitting-room, when a small, unnoticed door near the dark, rear corner of the house clicked and then faintly creaked. Mr. Pettigrew became one tremolo of ecstasy. He glided to the spot, not imagining even then that he was to be granted more than a moment's interview through an inch or two of opening, when what was his joy to see the door swiftly spread wide inward by a dim figure that extended her arms in gracious invitation.

"O love!" was all his passion could murmur as they clasped in the blessed dark, while she, not waiting to hear word or voice, rubbed half the rice powder and rouge from her lips and cheeks to his and cried,

"O you sweet, speckle', yalleh niggeh liah, you tol' me you on'y play de fife in de similitude o' ligislation!"

As Dinwiddie silently but violently recoiled Daphne Jane half stifled a scream, sprang through a stair door, shot the bolt and rushed upstairs. At the same instant he heard behind him a key slipped from its lock. He glanced back in affright, and trembling on legs too limp to lift, dimly saw the outer door swing to. As the darkness changed to blackness he heard the key re-enter its lock and turn on the outside. The pirate was a prisoner.

Daphne Jane, locking everything as she fled, whirled into her mistress's room and out of her mistress's clothes. Though quaking with apprehension so that she could scarcely button her own things on again, she was filled with the joy of adventure and a revel of vanity and mirth. The moment she could complete her change of dress and whisk her borrowed fineries back into their places she stole to a window over the door by which she had let the serenader in, softly opened it, and was alarmed afresh to hear two voices.

The words of the one in the room were quite indistinguishable, but those from the other on the outside, though uttered in a half whisper, were clear enough.

"No, seh, I ain't dead-sho' who you is, but I has ezamine yo' hoss, an' whilce I wouldn' swear you ah Mr. Pettigrew, thass the premonition I espec' to espress to my frien' Mr. March, lessn you tell me now, an' tell me true, who you ah.

"Yass, seh, I thought so. Yass, seh. No, seh, I know they ain't a minute to lose, but still I think the time ain't quite so pow'ful pressin' to me like what it is to you; I thought jess now I hyeard buggy-wheels, but mebbe I didn't.

"Yass, seh, I *does* think I has cause, if not to be mad, leas'wise to be ve'y much paained. You fus' kiss the young lady I destine faw my sultana, an' now you offeh me a briibe! Well, thass how I unde'stood it, seh.

"Seh? No, seh! that wouldn't be high tone'! But I tell you what I will do, seh. I'll let you out an' take yo' place an' make the young lady think her on'y mistake was a-thinkin' she was mistakened.

"Seh? Yass, I'm jess that se'f-sacrificin'. I'm gen'ous as the whistlin' win'. An' I'll neveh whisp' a breath o' all this shaameful procedu'e evm to my dear frien' March, ef so be that—an' so long as—yo' gratichude—seh?

"O nothin'. I wus jess a-listenin' ef that soun' was buggy wheels, but I know that don't make no diff'ence to you, yo' courage is so vas'. I'm the bravess o' the brave, myseff, an' yit jess to think o' takin' yo' place fills me as full o' cole shivehs as a pup und' a pump.

"Seh? O I say I'll neveh whisp' it so long as yo' gratichude continue to evince itseff fresh an' lively at the rate of evm on'y a few dollahs per month as a sawt o' friendship's offerin'.

"Seh? I cayn't he'p it, seh; thass the ve'y bes' I can do; no otheh co'se would be hon'able."

The listening maid heard the door unlock and open and beheld liberty bartered for captivity with love for boot, and Mr. Pettigrew speed like a phantom across the moonlight and vanish in the woods. Before she could leave the window a sound of galloping hoofs told at last the coming of John March. Cornelius had barely time to scamper out into the night when the master of Widewood came trotting around the corner of the house and thence off to the stable, never to know of the farce which made Mr. Pettigrew thereafter the tool of Leggett, and which might even more easily have been a tragedy with the mountain people for actors and himself its victim.

LIV.

AN UNEXPECTED PLEASURE

Ravenel and Fannie were married in church on an afternoon. The bridesmaids were Barbara and a very pretty cousin of Fannie's from Pulaski City, who would have been prettier yet had she not been revel-worn. The crowded company was dotted with notables; Garnet and Gamble took excellent care of the governor. But the bride's father was the finest figure of all.

"Old Halliday looks grand!" said Gamble.

"I'm glad he does," kindly responded Garnet; "it would be a pity for him to be disappointed in himself on such an occasion."

Parson Tombs kissed the bride, who, in a certain wildness of grateful surprise, gave him his kiss back again with a hug. When Ravenel's sister, from Flatrock, said:

"Well, Colonel Ravenel, aren't you going to kiss me?" he gracefully did so, as if pleased to be reminded of something he might have forgotten. And then he kissed the aged widow with whom he had lived so long. Her cottage, said rumor, was not to be sold, after all, to make room for the new brick stores. No, the Salters' house had been bought for that purpose—it was ready to tumble down, anyhow—and on Miss Mary's marriage, soon to be, Miss Martha and her mother would take the Halliday cottage, the General keeping a room or two, but getting his meals at the hotel.

"It's a way of living I've always liked!" he said, tossing his gray curls.

The bridal pair, everybody understood, were to leave Suez on the Launcelot Halliday, and turn northward by rail in the morning on an unfamiliar route.

John March chose not to see the wedding. He remained in Pulaski City, where for three days he had been very busy in the lobbies of the Capitol, and was hoping to take the train for the north that evening. Between the trifling of one and the dickering of another, he was delayed to the last moment; but then he flung himself into a shabby hack, paid double fare for a pretence of double speed, and at the ticket window had to be called back to get his pocketbook. The lighted train was moving out into the night as a porter jerked him and his valise on to the rear platform.

He stood there a moment alone silently watching the lamps of the town sink away and vanish. His thought was all of Fannie. She was Fannie Ravenel now. Fate had laughed at him. He calculated that the pair must about this time be rising from supper on the boat.

"Happy bridegroom!—and happy bride!"

As the dark landscape perpetually spun away from him he began with an inexperienced traveler's self-consciousness to think of the strangeness of his own situation; but very soon Fannie's image came before him again in a feverish mingling of gratitude and resentment. Had she not made his life? But for her he might yet be teaching school in the hills of Sandstone. No doubt he would have outgrown such work; but when? how soon? how tardily? how fatally late? She had lured and fooled him; but she had lured and fooled him into a largeness of purpose, a breadth of being, which without her might never have come to him.

"I cannot be with her, I must not go near her; but I am here!" he exclaimed, catching a certain elation from his unaccustomed speed. "The prospect may be desert, but it's wide; it's wide!"

She had been good *for* him, he mused, not to him. She had been wiser than she meant; certainly she had not been kind. She was not cold-hearted. His welfare was dear to her. And yet she had cold-heartedly amused herself with him. She was light-minded. There! The truth was out! Just what he meant by it was not so clear; but there it was, half comforting him, half excusing her; she was light-minded! Well, she was Fannie Ravenel now. "Happy Fannie Ravenel!" He said it with a tempered bitterness and went in.

It was the sleeping-car he was on. Two steps brought him to the open entrance of its smoking-room—they were enough. With drooping eyelids its sole occupant was vacantly smiling at the failure of his little finger to push the ash from a cold cigar.

"Jeff-Ja'!" exclaimed March, "O my Lord!"

The bridegroom looked up with a smart exaggeration of his usual cynicism and said, "J—(h-h)—Johnnie, this 's 'n un'spec'—'spected pleasure!"

"I thought you were aboard the——" faltered John, and stood dumb, gnawing his lip and burning with emotions.

"John, o' frien', take a chair." The speaker waved a hand in tipsy graciousness. "What made you think I was aboard—I look like one? Wha'—(h-h)—kind o' board—sideboard? S' down, John, make 'seff at home. Happm have cars all t' ourselves. Mr. March, this 's ufforshnate, ain't it? Don't y' sink so? One o' my p'culiar 'tacks. Come on 'tirely since leavin' Suez. Have—(h-h)—seat. My dear frien', I know what you're thinkin' 'bout. You're won'rin' where bride is an' feel del'cacy 'bout askin'. She's in state-room oth' end the car, locked in. She's not 'zactly locked in, but I'm locked out. Mrs. Ravenel is—(h-h)—annoyed at this, Mr. March; ve'y mush annoyed."

He put on a frown. "John, 'll you do me a—(h-h)—favor?"

"I'm afraid I can't, Ravenel. I've a good notion to get off at the next station."

"Tha's jus' what I's goin' t' ash you t' do. I'll stan' 'spence, John. You shan't lose anything."

"O no, if I get off I'll stand the expense myself. You've lost enough already, Jeff-Jack."

"No, sir; *I'll* stan' 'spence. I can be gen'rous you are. Or 'f you'll stay 'n' take care Mrs. Ravenel I'll—(h-h)—get off m'seff!"

John shook his head, took up his bag and returned to the rear platform.

The train had stopped and was off again, when the porter came looking everywhere, the rear platform included.

"Whah dat gemman what get on at P'laski City?"

Ravenel waved his cigar.

"He's out in back garden pickin' flowers! Porter—you—f—ond o' flowers? 'F you want to go an' pick some I'll—(h-h)—take care car for you. Porter!—here!—I—(h-h)—don't want to be misleading. Mr. March's simply stepped out s—see 'f he can find a f—four-leaf clover."

LV.

HOME-SICKNESS ALLEVIATED

On the second morning after the wedding and next trip of this train, the sleeping-car was nearly half filled with passengers by the time it was a night's run from Pulaski City. To let the porter put their two sections in order, a party of three, the last except one to come out of the berths, had to look around twice for a good place in which to sit together. They were regarded with interest.

"High-steppers," remarked a very large-eared commercial traveler to another.

"The girl's beautiful," replied the other, remembering that he was freshly shaved and was not bad-looking himself.

"Yes," said the first, "but the other two are better than that; they're comfortable. They're done raising children and ain't had any bad luck with 'em, and they've got lots of tin. If that ain't earthly bliss I'll bet you!"

"They're gett'n' lots of entertainment out of that daughter, seems like."

"Reason why, she's not their daughter."

"How d'you know she's not?"

"I mustn't tell—breach o' confidence. Guess."

"O I guess you're guessing. George! she's—what makes you think she's not their daughter?"

"O nothin', only I'm a man of discernment, and besides I just now heard 'em call her Miss Garnet."

Their attention was diverted by the porter saying at the only section still curtained, "Breakfus' at next stop, seh. No, seh, it's yo' on'y chaynce till dinneh, seh. Seh? No, seh, not till one o'clock dis afternoon, seh."

"Is that gentleman sick?" asked the younger commercial man, wishing Miss Garnet to know what a high-bred voice and tender heart he had.

"Who? numb' elevm? Humph! he ain't too sick to be cross. Say he ain't sleep none fo' two nights. But he's gitt'n' up now."

The solicitous traveler secured a seat at table opposite Miss Garnet and put more majestic gentility into his breakfasting than he had ever done before. Once he pushed the sugar most courteously to the lady she was with, and once, with polished deference, he was asking the gentleman if he could reach the butter, when a tardy comer was shown in and given the chair next him. As this person, a young man as stalwart as he was handsome, was about to sit down, he started with surprise and exclaimed to Miss Garnet,

"Why! You've begun——Why, are we on the same train?"

And she grew visibly prettier as she replied smilingly,

"You must be Number Eleven, are you not?"

Coming out of the place the young lady's admirer heard her introduce Number Eleven to "Mr. and Mrs. Fair," and Mr. Fair, looking highly pleased, say,

"I don't think I ever should have recognized you!"

Something kept the train, and as he was joined by his large-eared friend—who had breakfasted at the sandwich counter—he said,

"See that young fellow talking to Mr. Fair? That's the famous John Marsh, owner of the Widewood lands. He's one of the richest young men in Dixie. Whenever he

wants cash all he's got to do is to go out and cut a few more telegraph-poles—O laugh if you feel like it, but I heard Miss Garnet tell her friends so just now, and I'll bet my head on anything that girl says." The firm believer relighted his cigar, adding digressively, "I've just discovered she's a sister-in-law"—puff, puff—"of my old friend, General Halliday"—puff, puff—"president of Rosemont College. Well, away we go."

The train swept on, the smoking-room filled. The drummer with the large ears let his companion introduce "Mr. Marsh" to him, and was presently so pleased with the easy, open, and thoroughly informed way in which this wealthy young man discussed cigars and horses that he put aside his own reserve, told a risky story, and manfully complimented the cleanness of the one with which Mr. March followed suit.

A traveling man's life, he further said, was a rough one and got a fellow into bad ways. There wasn't a blank bit of real good excuse for it, but it was so.

No, there wasn't! responded his fellow-craftsman. For his part he liked to go to church once in a while and wasn't ashamed to say so. His mother was a good Baptist. Some men objected to the renting of pews, but, in church or out of it, he didn't see why a rich man shouldn't have what he was willing to pay for, as well as a poor man. Whereupon a smoker, hitherto silent, said, with an oratorical gesture,

"Lift up your heads, O ye gates, the rich and the poor meet together, yet the Lord is the maker of them all!"

March left them deep in theology. He found Mr. and Mrs. Fair half hid in newspapers, and Miss Garnet with a volume of poems.

"How beautiful the country is," she said as she made room for him at her side. "I can neither write my diary nor read my book."

"Do you notice," replied he, "that the spring here is away behind ours?"

"Yes, sir. By night, I suppose, we'll be where it's hardly spring at all yet."

"We'll be out of Dixie," said John, looking far away.

"Now, Mr. March," responded Barbara, with a smile of sweetest resentment, "you're ag-grav-a-ting my nos-tal-gia!"

To the younger commercial traveler her accents sounded like the wavelets on a beach!

"Why, I declare, Miss Garnet, I don't want to do that. If you'll help me cure mine I'll do all you'll let me do to cure yours."

Barbara was pensive. "I think mine must be worse than yours; I don't want it cu-ured."

"Well, I didn't mean cured, either; I only meant solaced."

"But, Mr. March, I—why, my home-sickness is for all Dixie. I always knew I loved it, but I never knew how much till now."

"Miss Garnet!" softly exclaimed John with such a serious brightness of pure fellowship that Barbara dropped her gaze to her book.

"Isn't it right?" she asked, playfully.

"Right? If it isn't then I'm wrong from centre to circumference!"

"Why, I'm glad it's so com-pre-hen-sive-ly cor-rect."

The commercial traveler hid his smile.

"It's about all I learned at Montrose," she continued. "But, Mr. March, what is it in the South we Southerners love so? Mr. Fair asked me this morning and when I couldn't explain he laughed. Of course I didn't confess my hu-mil-i-a-tion; I intimated that it was simply something a North-ern-er can't un-der-stand. Wasn't that right?"

"Certainly! They *can't* understand it! They seem to think the South we love is a certain region and everything and everybody within its borders."

"I have a mighty dim idea where its Northern border is sit-u-a-ted."

"Why, so we all have! Our South isn't a matter of boundaries, or skies, or landscapes. Don't you and I find it all here now, simply because we've both got the true feeling—the one heart-beat for it?"

Barbara's only answer was a stronger heart-beat.

"It's not," resumed March, "a South of climate, like a Yankee's Florida. It's a certain ungeographical South-within-the-South—as portable and intangible as—as——"

"As our souls in our bodies," interposed Barbara.

"You've said it exactly! It's a sort o' something—social, civil, political, economic——"

"Romantic?"

"Yes, romantic! Something that makes——"

"'No land like Dixie in all the wide world over!'"

"Good!" cried John. "Good! O, my mother's expressed that beautifully in a lyric of hers where she says though every endearing charm should fade away like a fairy gift our love would still entwine itself around the dear ruin—verdantly—I oughtn't to try to quote it. Doesn't her style remind you of some of the British poets? Aha! I knew you'd say so! Your father's noticed it. He says she ought to study Moore!"

Barbara looked startled, colored, and then was impassive again, all in an instant and so prettily, that John gave her his heartiest admiration even while chafed with new doubts of Garnet's genuineness.

The commercial man went back to the smoking-room to mention casually that Mrs. March was a poetess.

"There's mighty little," John began, but the din of a passing freight train compelled him to repeat much louder—"There's mighty little poetry that can beat Tom Moore's!"

Barbara showed herself so mystified and embarrassed that March was sure she had not heard him correctly. He reiterated his words, and she understood and smiled broadly, but merely explained, apologetically, that she had thought he had said there was mighty little pastry could beat his mother's.

John laughed so heartily that Mrs. Fair looked back at Barbara with gay approval, and life seemed to him for the moment to have less battle-smoke and more sunshine; but by and by when he thought Barbara's attention was entirely on the landscape, she saw him unconsciously shake his head and heave a sigh.

LVI.

CONCERNING SECOND LOVE

When the train stopped at a station they talked of the book in her hand, and by the time it started on they were reading poems from the volume to each other. The roar of the wheels did not drown her low, searching tones; by bending close John could hear quite comfortably. Between readings they discussed those truths

of the heart on which the poems touched. Later, though they still read aloud, they often looked on the page together.

In the middle of one poem they turned the book face downward to consider a question. Did Miss Garnet believe—Mr. March offered to admit that among the small elect who are really capable of a divine passion there may be some with whom a second love is a genuine and beautiful possibility—yet it passed his comprehension—he had never seen two dawns in one day—but did Miss Garnet believe such a second love could ever have the depth and fervor of the first?

Yes, she replied with slow care, she did—in a man's case at least. To every deep soul she did believe it was appointed to love once—yes—with a greater joy and pain than ever before or after, but she hardly thought this was first love. It was almost sure to be first love in a woman, for a woman, she said, can't afford to let herself love until she knows she is loved, and so her first love—when it really is love, and not a mere consent to be loved——

"Which is frequently all it is," said John.

"Yes. But when it is a real love—it's fearfully sure and strong *because* it has to be slow. I believe when such a love as that leaves a woman's heart, it is likely to leave it hope-less-ly strand-ed."

"And you think it's different with a man?"

"Why, I hope it's sometimes different with a woman; but I believe, Mr. March, that with a man the chances are better. A man who simply must love, and love with his whole soul——"

"Then you believe there are such?"

"Yes, there must be, or God wouldn't create some of the women he makes."

"True!" said John, very gallantly.

"But don't you think, Mr. March, a man of that sort is apt to love prematurely and very faultily? His best fruit doesn't fall first. Haven't you observed that a man's first love is just what a woman finds it hardest to take in earnest?"

"Yes, I have observed that! And still—are you too cynical to believe that there are men to whom first love is everything and second love impossible?"

"No," said Barbara, with true resentment, "I'm not too cynical. But—" she looked her prettiest—"still I don't believe it."

John turned on her a hard glance which instantly softened. It is a singular fact that the length and droop of a girl's eyelashes have great weight in an argument.

"And yet," she resumed, but paused for John to wave away the train-boy with his books.

"And yet what?" asked March, ever so kindly.

"And yet, that first love is everything, is what every woman would like every man to believe, until he learns better." Her steadfast gaze and slow smile made John laugh. He was about to give a railing answer when the brakeman announced twenty minutes for dinner.

"What! It can't——" he looked at his watch. "Why, would you have imagined?"

O yes; her only surprise—a mild one—was that he didn't know it.

At table she sat three seats away, with her Northern friends between; and when they were again roaring over streams, and through hills and valleys, and the commercial travelers, whose number had increased to four, were discussing aërial navigation, and March cut short his after-dinner smoke and came back to resume his conversation, he found Miss Garnet talking to the Fairs, and not to be moved by the fact—which he felt it the merest courtesy to state—that the best views were on the other side of the car.

Thereupon he went to the car's far end and wrote a short letter to his mother, who had exacted the pledge of one a day, which she did not promise to answer.

In this he had some delay. A woman with a disabled mouth, cautiously wiping crumbs off it with a paper napkin, asked him the time of day. She explained that she had loaned her watch—gold—patent lever—to her husband, who was a printer. She said the chain of the watch was made of her mother's hair. She also stated that her husband was an atheist, and had a most singular mole on his back, and that she had been called by telegraph to the care of an aunt taken down with measles and whose husband was a steamboat pilot, and an excellent self-taught banjoist; that she, herself, had in childhood been subject to membranous croup, which had been cured with pulsatilla, which the doctor had been told to prescribe, by his grandmother, in a dream; also that her father, deceased, was a man of the highest refinement, who had invented a stump-extractor; that her sisters were passionately fond of her; that she never spoke to strangers when traveling, but, somehow, he, March, did not seem like a stranger at all; and that she had brought her dinner with her in a pasteboard shirt-box rather than trust railroad cooking, being a dyspeptic. She submitted the empty box in evidence, got him to step to the platform and throw it away, and on his return informed him that it was dyspepsia had disabled her mouth, and not overwork, as she and her sisters had once supposed.

Still March did finish his letter. Then he went and smoked another cigar. And then he came again and found the four traveling men playing whist, Mr. and Mrs. Fair dozing, and Miss Garnet looking out of a window on the other side in a section at the far end of the car, the only one not otherwise occupied.

"I'm in your seat," she said.

"O don't refuse to share it with me; you take away all its value."

She gradually remarked that she was not the sort of person wilfully to damage the value of a seat in a railroad car, and they shared it.

For a time they talked at random. He got out a map and time-table and, while he held one side and she the other, showed where they had had to lie five hours at a junction the night before. But when these were folded again there came a silent interval, and then John sank lower in his place, dropped his tone, and asked,

"Do you remember what we were speaking of before dinner?"

Barbara dreamily said yes, and they began where they had left off.

Three hours later, on the contrary, they left off where they had begun.

LVII.

GO ON, SAYS BARBARA

Miss Garnet said she ought to rejoin her friends, and John started with her.

On their way the dyspeptic stopped them affectionately to offer Barbara a banana, and ask if she and the gentleman were not cousins. Miss Garnet said no, and John enjoyed that way she had of smiling sweetly with her eyes alone. But she smiled just as prettily with her lips also when the woman asked him if he was perfectly sure he hadn't relations in Arkansas named Pumpkinseed—he had such a strong Pumpkinseed look. The questioner tried to urge the banana upon him, assuring him that it was the last of three, which, she said, she wouldn't have bought if she hadn't been so lonesome.

Barbara sat down with her, to John's disgust, a feeling which was not diminished when he passed on to her Northern friends, and Mr. Fair tried very gently to draw him out on the Negro question! When he saw Mrs. Fair glancing about for the

porter he sprang to find and send him, but lingered, himself, long among the mirrors to wash and brush up and adjust his necktie.

The cars stopping, he went to the front platform, where the dyspeptic, who was leaving the train, turned to thank him "for all his kindness" with such genuine gratitude that in the haste he quite lost his tongue, and for his only response pushed her anxiously off the steps. He still knew enough, however, to reflect that this probably left Miss Garnet alone, and promptly going in he found her—sitting with the Fairs.

Because she was perishing to have Mr. March again begin where he had left off, she conversed with the Fairs longer than ever and created half a dozen delays out of pure nothings. So that when she and John were once more alone together he talked hither and yon for a short while before he asked her where the poems were.

Nevertheless she was extremely pleasant. Their fellow-passenger just gone, she said, had praised him without stint, and had quoted him as having said to her, "It isn't always right to do what we have the right to do."

"O pshaw!" warmly exclaimed John, started as if she had touched an inflamed nerve, and reddened, remembering how well Miss Garnet might know what that nerve was, and why it was so sore.

"I wish I knew how to be sen-ten-tious," said Barbara, obliviously.

"It was she led up to it." He laughed. "She said it better, herself, afterward!"

"How did she say it?"

"She? O she said—she said her pastor said it—that nothing's quite right until it's noble."

"Well, don't you believe that principle?"

"I don't know! That's what I've asked myself twenty times to-day."

"Why to-day?" asked Miss Garnet, with eyes downcast, as though she could give the right answer herself.

"O"—he smiled—"something set me to thinking about it. But, now, Miss Garnet, is it true? Isn't it sometimes allowable, and sometimes even necessary—absolutely, morally necessary—for a fellow to do what may look anything but noble?"

He got no reply.

"O of course I know it's the spirit of an act that counts, and not its look; but—here now, for example,"—John dropped his voice confidentially—"is a fellow in love with a young lady, and——Do I speak loud enough?"

"Yes, go on."

He did so for some time. By and by:

"Ah! yes, Mr. March, but remember you're only supposing a case."

"O, but I'm not only supposing it; it's actual fact. I knew it. And, as I say, whatever that feeling for her was, it became the ruling passion of his life. When circumstances—a change of conditions—of relations—made it simply wrong for him to cherish it any more it wasn't one-fourth or one-tenth so much the unrighteousness as the ignobility of the thing that tortured him and tortured him, until one day what does he up and do but turn over a new leaf. Do I speak too low?"

"No, go on, Mr. March."

"Well, for about twenty-four hours he thought he had done something noble. Then he found that was just what it wasn't. It never is; else turning over new leaves would be easy! He didn't get his new leaf turned over. He tried; he tried his best."

"That's all God asks," murmured Barbara.

"What?"

"Nothing. Please don't stop. How'd it turn out?"

"O bad! He put himself out of sight and reach and went on trying, till one day—one night—without intention or expectation, he found her when, by the baseness—no, I won't say that, but—yes, I will!—by the baseness of another, she was all at once the fit object of all the pity and the sort of love that belongs with pity, which any heart can give."

"And he gave them!"

"Yes, he gave *them*. But the old feeling—whatever it was——" John hesitated.

"Go on. Please don't stop."

"The—the old feeling—went out—right there—like a candle in the wind. No, not that way, quite, but like a lamp drinking the last of its oil. Where he lodged that night——"

"Yes——"

"—He heard a clock strike every hour; and at the break of day that—feeling—whatever it was—with the only real good excuse to live it ever had—was dead."

"And that wasn't true love? Don't you believe it was?"

"Do you, Miss Barbara Garnet? Could true love lie down and give up the ghost at such a time and on such a pretext as that? Could it? Could it?"

"I think—O—I think it—you'll forgive me if——"

"Forgive! Why, how can you offend *me*? You don't imagine——"

"O no! I forgot. Well I think the love was true in degree; not the very truest. It was only *first* love; but it was the first love of a true heart."

"To be followed by a later and truer love, you think?"

"You shouldn't—O I don't know, Mr. March. What do you think?"

"Never! That's what I think. He may find refuge in friendship. I believe such a soul best fitted for that deep, pure friendship so much talked of and so rarely realized between man and woman. Such a heart naturally seeks it. Not with a mere hunger for comfort——"

"O no."

"—But because it has that to give which it cannot offer in love, yet which is good only when given; worthless to one, priceless to two. Sometimes I think it's finer than love, for it makes no demands, no promises, no compacts, no professions——"

"Did you ever have such a friendship?"

"No, indeed! If I had—oh pshaw! I never was or shall be fit for it. But I just tell you, Miss Garnet, that in such a case as we've spoken of, the need of such a heart for such a friendship can't be reckoned!"

He smiled sturdily, and she smiled also, but let compassion speak in her eyes before she reverently withdrew them. He, too, was still.

They were approaching a large river. The porter, growing fond of them, came, saying:

"Here where we crosses into Yankeedom. Fine view fum de rear platfawm—sun jes' a-sett'n'."

They went there—the Fairs preferred to sit still—and with the eddies of an almost wintry air ruffling them and John's arm lying along the rail under the

window behind them, so as to clasp her instantly if she should lurch, they watched the slender bridge lengthen away and the cold river widen under it between them and Dixie.

Their silence confessed their common emotion. John felt a condescending expansion and did not withdraw his arm even after the bridge was passed until he thought Miss Garnet was about to glance around at it, which she had no idea of doing.

"I declare, Miss Garnet, I—I wish——"

She turned her eyes to his handsome face lifted with venturesome diffidence and frowning against the blustering wind.

"I'm afraid "—he gayly shook his head—"you won't like what I say if you don't take it just as I mean it." He put his hand over the iron-work again, but she was still looking into his face, and he thought she didn't know it.

"It wouldn't be fair to take it as you don't mean it," she said. "What is it?"

"Why, ha-ha—I—I wish I were your brother!—ha-ha! Seriously, I don't believe you can imagine how much a lone fellow—boy or man—can long and pine for a sister. If I'd had a sister, a younger sister—no boy ever pined for an older sister—I believe I'd have made a better man. When I was a small boy——"

Barbara glanced at his breadth and stature with a slow smile.

He laughed. "O, that was away back yonder before you can remember."

"It certainly must have been," she replied, "and yet——"

"And yet—" he echoed, enjoying his largeness.

"I thought all the pre-his-tor-ic things were big. But what was it you used to do? I know; you used to cry for a sister, didn't you?"

"Yes. Why, how'd you guess that?"

"I can't say, unless it was because I used to cry for a little brother."

"And why a little one?" he asked.

"I was young and didn't know any better."

"But later on, you——"

"I wanted the largest size."

"D'd you ever cry for a brother of the largest size?"

"Why, yes; I nearly cry for one yet, sometimes, when somebody makes me mad."

"Miss Garnet, I'm your candidate!"

"No, Mr. March. If you were elected you'd see your mistake and resign in a week, and I couldn't endure the mor-ti-fi-ca-tion."

John colored. He thought she was hinting at fickleness; but she gave him a smile which said so plainly, "The fault would be mine," that he was more than comfortable again—on the surface of his feelings, I mean.

And so with Barbara. The train had begun a down-grade and was going faster and faster. As she stood sweetly contemplating the sunset sky and sinking hills, fearing to move lest that arm behind her should be withdrawn and yet vigilant to give it no cause to come nearer, an unvoiced cry kept falling back into her heart—"Tell him!—For your misguided father's sake! Now!—Now!—Stop this prattle about friendship, love, and truth, and tell him his danger!"

But in reality she had not, and was not to have, the chance.

The young land-owner stood beside her staring at nothing and trying to bite his mustache.

He came to himself with a start. "Miss Garnet——"

As she turned the sky's blush lighted her face.

"That case we were speaking of inside, you know——"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, as I said, I knew that case myself. But, my goodness, Miss Garnet, you won't infer that I was alluding in any way to—to any experience of my own, will you?"

She made no reply.

"Law! Miss Garnet, you don't think I'd offer anybody a friendship pulled out of a slough of despond, do you?"

Barbara looked at him in trembling exaltation. "Mr. March, I know what has happened!"

He winced, but kept his guard. "Do you mean you know how it is I am on this train?"

"Yes, I know it all."

"O my soul! Have I betrayed it?"

"No, sir; the train conductor—I led him on—told us all about it before we were twenty miles from Suez."

"I ought to have guessed you'd find it out," said John, in a tone of self-rebuke.

"Yes," she replied, driving back her tears with a quiet smile, "I think you ought."

"Why—why, I—I—I'm overwhelmed. Gracious me! I owe you an humble apology, Miss Garnet. Yes, I do. I've thrust a confidence on you without your permission. I—I beg your pardon! I didn't mean to, I declare I didn't, Miss Garnet."

"It's safe."

"I know it. I'm surer of that than if you were anyone else I've ever known in my life, Miss Garnet."

"It shall be as if I had never heard it."

"O no! I don't see how it can. In fact—well—I don't see why it should—unless you wish it so. Of course, in that case——"

"That's not a con-tin-gen-cy," said Barbara, and for more than a minute they listened to the clangorous racket of the rails. Then John asked her if it did not have a quality in it almost like music and she brightened up at him as she nodded.

He made a gesture toward the receding land, bent to her in the uproar and cried, "It scarcely seems a moment since those hills were full of spring color, and now they're blue in the distance!"

She looked at them tenderly and nodded again.

"At any rate," he cried, holding his hat on and bending lower, "we have Dixie for our common mother." His manner was patriotic.

She glanced up to him—the distance was trivial—beaming with sisterly confidence, and just then the train lurched, and—he caught her.

"H-I conscience! wa'n't it lucky I happened to have my arm back there just at that moment?"

Barbara did not say. She stood with her back against the car, gazing at the track, her small feet braced forward with new caution, but she saw March lapse into reverie and heave another sigh.

However, she observed his mind return and rightly divined he was thinking her silence a trifle ungracious; so she lifted her hand toward a white cloud that rose above the vanished hills and river, saying:

"Our common mother waves us farewell."

"Yes," he cried with grateful pleasure. Seeing her draw her wrap closer he added, "You're cold?" And it was true, although she shook her head. He bent again to explain. "It'll be warmer when we leave this valley. You see, here——"

"Yes," she nodded so intelligently that he did not finish. Miss Garnet, however, was thinking of her chaperone and dubiously glanced back at the door. Then she braced her feet afresh. They were extremely pretty.

He smiled at them. "You needn't plant yourself so firmly," he said, "I'm not going to let you fall off."

O dear! That reversed everything. She had decided to stay; now she couldn't.

Once more the Northern pair received them with placid interest. Mr. Fair presently asked a question which John had waited for all day, and it was dark night without and lamplight within, and they were drawing near a large city, before the young man, in reply, had more than half told the stout plans and hopes of this expedition of his after capital and colonists.

Mrs. Fair showed a most lively approval. "And must you leave us here?"

Barbara had not noticed till now how handsome she was. Neither had John.

"Yes, ma'am. But I shan't waste a day here if things don't show up right. I shall push right on to New York."

Barbara hoped Mr. Fair's pleasantness of face meant an approbation as complete as his wife's, and, to hide her own, meditatively observed that this journey would be known in history as March's Raid.

John laughed and thanked her for not showing the fears of Captains Champion and Shotwell that he would "go in like a lion and come out like a lamb."

They hurried to the next section and peered out into the night with suppressed but eager exclamations. Long lines of suburban street-lamps were swinging by. Banks of coke-furnaces were blazing like necklaces of fire. Foundries and machine-shops glowed and were gone; and, far away, close by, and far away again, beautifully colored flames waved from the unseen chimneys of chemical works.

"We've neither of us ever seen a great city," Miss Garnet explained when she rejoined her protectors. John had been intercepted by the porter with his brush, and Barbara, though still conversing, could hear what the negro was saying.

"I lef' you to de las', Cap. Seem like you 'ten'in' so close to business an' same time enjoyin' yo'seff so well, I hated to 'sturb—thank you, seh!" The train came slowly to a stand. "O no, seh, dis ain't de depot. Depot three miles fu'theh yit, seh. We'll go on ag'in in a minute. Obacoat, seh? Dis yo' ambreel?"

John bade his friends good-by. "And now, Miss Garnet"—he retained her hand a moment—"don't you go off and forget—Dixie."

She said no, and as he let go her hand she let him see deeper into her eyes than ever before.

A step or two away he looked back with a fraternal smile, but she was talking to Mrs. Fair as eagerly as if he had been gone three days. The train stood so long that he went forward to ask what the delay signified and saw the four commercial travelers walking away with their hand-bags. The porter was busy about the door.

"Big smash-up of freight-cyars in de yard; yass, seh. No seh, cayn't 'zac'ly tell jis how long we be kep' here, but 'f you dislikes to wait, Cap, you needn'. You kin teck a street-cyar here what'll lan' you right down 'mongs' de hotels an' things; yass, seh. See what; de wreck? No, seh, it's up in de yard whah dey don't 'llow you to pa-ass."

Out in the darkness beside the train March stood a moment. He could see Miss Garnet very plainly at her bright window and was wondering how she and her friends, but especially she, would take it if he should go back and help them while away this tiresome detention. If she had answered that last smile of his, or if she were showing, now, any tendency at all to look out the window, he might have returned; but no, howdy after farewell lacked dignity. The street-car came along just then and Barbara saw him get into it.