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Alabama Sketches

BY

SAMUEL MINTURN PECK

Author of "Cap and Bells,"

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TO MY SISTER
MRS. LUCY PECK MARTIN

THE TROUBLE AT ST. JAMES'S

THE TROUBLE AT ST. JAMES'S

DAN GROBY, the negro sexton, knew more of the unquiet pastorate of the Rev. Mr. Crofton than any one at Oakville. Vibrating in his daily duties between the church and the rectory, he lived in the thick of the fight. It was on the forenoon of the day before Easter that Dan, leaning on his broom in front of the church door, narrated to me the events which had occurred during my long absence.

"Hit do look peaceful, don't it, sah?" said Dan, gazing up at the little Gothic structure with moss-grown roof shaded by great water-oaks, in whose ivy-draped boughs mocking-birds builded and sang perennially.

"Dat vine dar's growed a heap since you went away." The negro pointed to a trumpet-vine which, planted by no hand, but born of the warm Southern soil, had climbed upon the church tower, higher and higher, till its green tendrils festooned the belfry; and in midsummer the lithe, scarlet-throated blos-

soms peeped in at the old bell, and thrilled with delight at its mellow clang.

"The old church is prettier than ever, Dan," said I. "Pretty and peaceful are just the words for it."

"Yes, sah; hit certainly do look peaceful, but hit don't always live up to hits looks. De bishop tole de senior warden dat St. James's Church, Oakville, gived him more trouble o' mind than any other church in de diocese. Says he, 'Mr. Dow, when I'm at home in Mobile I take this parish to bed with me every night.' I hyern de bishop say dem very words standin' in de vestry-room door. Dat was two years ago, an' we had a turrible time here agin last Easter."

Here Dan intimated that I would best take a seat, by dusting a place on the doorstep with his old hat.

"Now dat's some'h'n lak. Now I knows you's comf'table I kin take my time an' begin at de beginnin', wid de comin' o' Mr. Crofton.

"When Mr. Crofton fust come, some o' de vestry 'llowed dat kaze he was young an' a Englishman, an' kind o' strange-lak, dey was gwine twis' him round their fingers, lak dey done de rest o' de preachers what's been at St. James's Church. But dis nigger knowed

better. Soon as he sot eyes on Mr. Crofton, an' seen dat squar chin o' hisn, an' tuck in dem keen blue eyes, an' sized him up, he said to hisse'f, 'Dis man ain't twissable; he ain't lak none o' de ministers afore him; he ain't a-gwine round de woods a-pullin' up weeds an' bottleizin' lak Mr. Netherby; an' he ain't gwine have 'spepsia lak Mr. Hodge; nor he ain't gwine take to fowels, an' hatch aigs in a hot box agin de Lord's will, lak Mr. Singleton. No! dis man won't give hisse'f to none o' dem vocations; he gwine 'vote his time to his perfession.' "

"You thought that the new shepherd would rule the flock, and make his sheep turn their toes out, did you, Dan?"

"Yes, sah, an' he done it," said the old sexton, with a burst of explosive negro laughter. "Soon as he tole 'em all howd'ye, he begun on de choir.. Ain't none o' de preachers afore him at St. James's Church had de courage to run agin de choir. You know, sah, dat choirs is always mighty bumptious. De cullurd people's got a sayin', dat when de Devil comes to church he sits in de choir.

"De very fust Sunday after de minister come, de spranner, she never wait for him to send de hymes, but she pick out de ones she

want to sing, and sont 'em to de minister; an' I tuck 'em.

“ ‘Who sent this to me, sexton?’ says Mr. Crofton. He didn’t know den dat my name was Dan.

“ ‘Mrs. Phillips, de spranner,’ an’ I started for de door.

“ ‘Stop, sexton,’ says he, an’ when I turned about, bless de Lord, if he hadn’t torn up Mrs. Phillips’s note!

“ ‘Here are the hymns for the choir,’ handin’ me another piece of paper from his desk. ‘Take them to the organist.’

“Next Tuesday at de choir meetin’, in come de minister, smilin’ lak he belonged dar, an’ give 'em a talk. I was washin’ de winders an’ hyerd ever’ word. He tole 'em he liked their voices very much, but dar was some little changes he wanted 'em to make dat would add greatly to de beauty of de service. 'Twas de duty of de choir to set a good example to de rest of de congregation by bein’ punctual an’ orderly, an’ nex’ Sunday he wanted 'em all to 'semble 'fore service and walk in de church 'fore him. De minister was very pleasant mannered enjoren de whole talk, but he talked lak—lak—”

“Like one having authority?”

"Yes, sah, dat's hit; an' when he was through, though dey never said nothin', I seed dat one of de choir was jest a-bilin'."

"You mean Mrs. Phillips?"

"Yes, sah; she who's been rulin' de roost so long, tarifyin' de organist, an' makin' all de others stan' about. Well, sah, when I seed Mrs. Phillips's eyes a-snappin' an' her body a-swellin', I says to myse'f, 'Lordy, man! you sholy is a brave man!'

"Enjoren de rest o' de week de choir had a mighty miration 'mong demse'ves, but nex' Sunday dey all come to time but Mrs. Phillips. Jes' after de last bell, Mr. Crofton he pertend he ain't missed Mrs. Phillips.

" 'Are you all here?' he say.

"Den de 'tralto, she say, 'All but Mrs. Phillips. Hadn't we better wait a minute? Mrs. Phillips said she wouldn't come, but perhaps she'll change her mind.'

"Den Mr. Crofton, he say, 'No; the service waits for nobody. The second soprano will sing Mrs. Phillips's solos.' An' in dey all marched. Now, sah, I knowed Mrs. Phillips, an' when I seed dis, says I to myse'f, 'Bless Gawd, some'h'n gwine happen.' "

Here Dan paused and took a chew of tobacco, which he cut from the plug with a vener-

able knife. He went through the operation very leisurely to give my fancy time to picture the probable course of the indignant Mrs. Phillips.

"Well, sah, when de service begin I kep' my neck on de stretch from behind de organ.

"Mr. Crofton, he say, 'Dearly beloved brethren, the Scripture moveth us in Sunday places.' Mrs. Phillips ain't come. Den de choir, dey sung, 'O come let us sing unto de Lord!' An' Mrs. Phillips ain't come yet. Den thinks I to myse'f, if Mrs. Phillips is comin', she gwine be here before de Te Deum, for she won't let nobody sing dem solos but herse'f.

"Sho 'nough, jes' 'fore de Te Deum, de big door open, an' in walked Mrs. Phillips, dressed in her finest clo'es an' her best bonnet, an' she sailed up de aisle lak a steamboat comin' up de river. When she got half-way up de church, wid her eyes sot on de organ, an' makin' for de choir, Mr. Crofton cotch on to her motions, an' his eyes flashed lak fox fire. But Mrs. Phillips kep' a-sailin' lak she gwine to dat choir spite o' de whole worl'. Howsomever, she never got dar. No, bless Gawd! When she lined de last pew, dar stood Mr. Crofton on de top step and dey faced one

'nother. 'Twarn't for long, but you could 'a' hyerd a pin drap all over de church. De minister never said no word. He jes' looked her in de eye, an' p'inted to a empty seat on de aisle, an' Mrs. Phillips wilted. She took dat seat, an' there ain't been no more trouble wid de choir.

"Den Mr. Crofton regerlated de Sunday school, an' de Daughters o' de King, an' de Brothers o' St. Andrew, an' de Woman's Aux-illary. After dat he wrastled wid de Low Church elemun', an' he an' Mr. Welham, de junior warden, had a scrap what made de sparks fly; an' dis was de way hit come to pass. Mr. Welham was de head o' de Low Church party in de congregation, dat wants de church as plain as a country school-house; an' Mr. Crofton is High Church, an' a mighty han' for trimmin's. Dat man, sah, has a diffunt colored ribbin roun' his neck ever' feast day in de year. Mr. Welham he watch dem ribbins a-comin' an' a-comin', an' he say he don't b'lieve in no such flummery. If he had his way, de minister wouldn't wear no surplus at all. But de ribbins kep' a-comin', an' Mr. Welham kep' a-gittin' madder. Den dar was de flowers. Some days dar'd be white flowers on de altar, an' some days dar'd

be red, an' Mr. Welham say if he had his way dar wouldn't be no altar at all, but jes' a plain table. An' so hit went on raisin' a powerful stir in de congregation, some sidin' wid de minister, an' some wid Mr. Welham, till fust thing you know, dar was lighted candles on de altar, lighted in de broad daylight, bless Gawd! Now, dat was de last straw for Mr. Welham. He jes' couldn't stand dat. One day after service I come in de church to sweep, an' Mr. Welham was haulin' de minister over de coals for de shines he was cuttin' in de chancel. De minister, he never say nothin'. He listen an' listen till Mr. Welham was clean through an' all out o' breaf. Den Mr. Crofton straightened hisse'f an' answer:

" 'Mr. Welham, I wish you to understand that I am not responsible to you for anything I do. If you have any charges to make against me, prefer them to the bishop.' "

"Den he walk into de vestry-room."

"Which party, Dan, did you hold with?"

"Well, sah, I didn't 'xactly know de rights of it," hesitated Dan, scratching his head.

"But you sided with the parson," I laughed.
"You went for High Church."

“De parson was my captain in de army of de Lord, an’ I never was no wobbler, sah. As for High Church—de higher you gits, de nigher you is to heaven. All de beautiful things tries to rise. Look at de trees. Dey grows upperds. An’ de birds builds their nests in de trees; an’ de flowers holes up their heads as high as dey kin; an’ even de pore little vines what can’t stand alone, dey reaches out their weeny-teeny han’s for some’h’n to he’p ’em up. See dat vine dar on de tower! De higher hit climbs de prettier hit grows; an’ when summer-time comes, de brightest blooms is always at de top, swingin’ an’ laughin’ round de ole church bell.

“Yes, sah, I th’owed in my lot wid de minister, an’ lay low, lak Brer Rabbit.”

“Did Mr. Welham write to the bishop?”

“If he did, nothin’ ever come of it, an’ de Low Church folks give up de fight. Dey had to, for Mr. Crofton carried de town, an’ filled de church plum full ever’ Sunday. He drawed de young well as de ole, for he could ride de bicycle an’ box, as well as pray an’ preach. He’d put on de gloves an’ have a round wid a young man, den he’d go smoke a pipe wid a ole one. ’Twarn’t only de church people what filled de church: de other

denominationers tuck to comin' too, for there never had been no man at Oakville what could preach lak Mr. Crofton. Judge Adams an' Ginul Tompkins an' all de lawyers got to drappin' in for de night sermon.

"One Sunday night, says de Ginul to me comin' out de church: 'Dan, your preacher's too big a man for Oakville. You've got a five-thousand-dollar man for twelve hundred dollars, and you won't keep him long. He'll be a bishop some day.'

"After de scrap wid Mr. Welham de parish was peaceful so long dis nigger got to thinkin' de wust was over; but jes' 'fore Lent de clouds begin to gather for another storm. 'Twas Mr. Crofton's hardest fight, an' 'tain't gwine be easy for me to give you de straights o' dat row."

As Dan paused to pull the threads of the story together before weaving the final weft, a small stream of water, which seemed to have its source somewhere in the rear of the church, began to flow along by the sidewalk. Each second it grew, glistening in the dappled light that sifted through the water-oaks, and dancing over their gnarled and projecting roots with a merry tinkling laughter; heard with the solemn roll of the organ within, it sug-

gested to my fancy a band of little children playing truant from their prayers.

"See dar, sah!" said Dan, suddenly pointing to the streamlet, as if it had given him a happy thought. "De big row growed right out o' dat water. You never hyern o' fire comin' out o' water, did you? Dat stream runs from de organ motor, an' de organ motor hatched out de biggest trouble de minister ever had to wrastle wid. Hit lasted forty days an' forty nights, an' hit didn't end till de day after Easter. If I live till I die, sah, I never kin forgit dat Lent. But de Lawd brought he'p to de minister in a strange way. You know de ole hyme, sah:

"Gawd moves in a mysterious way
His wonder to perform;
He plants His foot upon de deep
An' rides upon de storm."

"Whenever I looks back upon dat Lent, I always 'members dat hyme.

"Now hit come to pass dat when de vestry tuck note how Mr. Crofton was a-buildin' up de church, dey cotch de fever, too. One of 'em got up an' made a high-falootin' speech in de vestry meetin.' I was sittin' outside on de doorstep an' hyern it all. Hit was all about progress bein' de order of de day, an

hit behoovin' de vestry to do their part, as public-sperrited citizens as well as church members, to assist their beloved rector in his noble work.

“ ‘Hi yi!’ I says to myse’f; ‘dat soun’s lak de speeches at de Fo’th o’ July barbecue. I wonder what’s comin’!’ an’ I listen agin. Well, sah, hit was what de newspapers call a eloquent effut, dat speech, an’ hit ended by movin’ dat de vestry put a water-motor in de church to run de organ, an’ de motion was seconded an’ carried. Mr. Crofton was mighty pleased at what de vestry had done, an’ he made a little talk back to ’em, thankin’ ’em for their support an’ kind feelin’, and when de meetin’ was over his face was jes’ a-beamin’ wid happiness.

“ ‘Dan,’ says he, ‘the vestry are going to put a water-motor in the church, and you won’t have to blow the bellows any more.’

“ ‘I never said nothin’. ’Twarn’t my place to crittercise de doin’s o’ de vestry, nor I didn’t have de heart to spile de minister’s pleasure by tellin’ him dat de vestryman what made dat fine speech had a goose to cook for hisse’f. I ’spicioned, right den an’ dar, dat man owned stock in de water company.

"Nex' day a committee went to make 'rangement 'bout de water. Now hit happened dat de superintendent of de water-works, Mr. McKennan, was gone off on a long business trip, an' de care o' de works was lef' wid de foreman, an Irishman named Higgins, an' Higgins, he say he let 'em have water for so much a quarter.

"Well, sah, de motor was put in de church in Janiuary, an' hit hadn't been dar three weeks 'fore I seed dat trouble was breedin'; an' hit all growed out o' de fact dat de contract warn't drawed up on paper. Dat's de best way—to write down what bofe sides is 'greein' to. Hit's most trouble at de start, but hit saves trouble in de end. When you puts your money down, an' de goods is delivered, or in de case of a horse trade, dat's another thing. You pays for your jug o' merlasses or swaps horses an' rides off. If dem merlasses is sour, or de horse goes lame, you can't blame nobody but yerse'f, for you might ha' 'xamined de horse or smelt de merlasses. But in de case of de vestry an' Higgins hit was diffunt. Pretty soon Higgins raised a talk dat de church was usin' more water than she paid for. He say he understood when de 'rangement was made dat dar'd be two

services on Sunday an' one in de week, an' one choir practice, lak dey had in de Presbyterian church, wid de funerals th'owed in free; an' lo an' behole, de 'Piscopals had three services on Sunday an' three in de week, not countin' de Saints' days. An Higgins, he say he never know when dem Saints' days is comin'; an' den he swear a blue streak. Dis was 'fore Lent. When Lent come, I thought Higgins gwine have apoplexy ever' time he pass de church, for dar was nine services a week, not takin' account o' de choir practices.

"One day Higgins say to me: 'Dan, when is this revival goin' to stop?' an' he put a strong word jes' 'fore 'revival.'

"'Dis ain't no revival, boss,' I say. 'De church is keepin' de holy season of Lent.'

"'Holy season of Lent!' snorted Higgins; 'I suppose that means that the church intends to borrow water from the company without paying for it. See here, Dan, you tell your Englishman he must stop this Lent business, or pay double!' an' Higgins put in dat strong word agin 'fore 'Englishman.'

"'Mr. Higgins,' I say, mighty polite, for I was dead skeered of him, 'Mr. Crofton can't stop Lent if he wanted to.'

"'Why not?' says he. 'The Methodists

and Baptists close their protracted meetin's when they want to.'

" 'Dat's so, boss,' I say back, for I wanted to 'gree wid him all I could. 'De Babtises an' de Methodises kin stop when dey likes, kaze dey begins when dey chooses, but hit ain't so wid de Church. Dis Lenten season is as regerlar as de heavenly bodies. Hit begins on Ash Wednesday, de day you plants ash potatoes, an' it lasts till de fust Sunday after de full moon, on or after de twenty-fust of March, which is Easter Sunday. If Mr. Crofton was to stop Lent 'fore Easter hit would be jes' as scannerlous as if de Methodis' preacher was to dance de German. Hit's jes' so, an' so hit's got to be, 'kaze hit's in de Prayer-book, an' de Prayer-book ain't no political flatform what changes ever' election. De Prayer-book is older an' more to be respected than de Constitution of de United States.'

" 'Dan,' says Higgins, 'you're a fool,' an' he puts in dat same word 'fore 'fool,' an' walks off cussin'.

"When I tole Mr. Crofton about de conversation, he said dat Higgins was a ignorant Dissenter.

"Instid o' gwine to de vestry what made de

'rangement wid him, Higgins laid all de blame on de minister; an' nex' day when Mr. Crofton was on de way to de post-office, Higgins stopped him in front o' Biggs's bar-room. Dat meetin' o' Higgins an' de minister was de onliest thing I missed through de whole row. I was too far away, an' though I hurried up as soon as I could, I never cotch nothin' but de motions. Higgins come out de bar-room, leavin' Biggs an' his loafers to listen from de door. De meetin' was short, an' Higgins did most o' de talkin'. Mr. Crofton waited till Higgins was through wid his blusterin', den he kyarved him up lak he done Mr. Welham. I thought Higgins was gwine hit him, an' I b'lieve Mr. Crofton thought so, too, for I seed de minister's hands tighten at his side, an' dar he stood lak a rock till Higgins drap his fist; den he went on his way to de post-office. After Mr. Crofton was out o' hearin', Biggs an' his gang raised de laugh on Higgins. Dey jes' whooped an' hollered, an' I got behind a tree an' laughed, too, till I most split. De men in de bar-room tole Higgins dat he had to stan' treat for de crowd, an' dey made him do it; but when dey all raised their glasses, Higgins swore a turrible oath, an' tole 'em he was gwine git even wid Mr.

Crofton if he lost his soul a-doin' it. De men axed Higgins how he gwine do hit, an' Higgins, he say, 'Jes' wait'; an' he tuck on such a ugly face, I promise myse'f I'se gwine keep my eyes stretched.

"On de followin' Monday Mr. Crofton 'quainted de vestry of his meetin' wid Higgins, an' read 'em a threatenin' letter what de man had sont him through de post-office. For hisse'f, de minister say, he had no fear, but Higgins seemed determined to raise trouble, an' might try to interfere wid de music o' de church, which would cause considerable inconvenience, 'specially just den, when de choir was practisin' de music for Easter Sunday. To be certain o' de church's position in de question, Mr. Crofton tole de vestry dat he had made some investigations an' had found out dat de church was payin' as much for de use o' de water-power as de broom-factory, or de city fountain, which run day an' night, an' de water company had no moral nor legal right for complaint. Such bein' de case, he didn't think de church should pay any more than she was a-payin'; an' he wished to ask de vestry if dey didn't deem hit wise to state to Higgins, through a committee, dat de church would not raise its price for de water,

an' dat he must cease his scannerlous talk o' de church's swindlin' de water company, an' keep away from hit's presinks unless he come in de sperrit o' peace.

"When de minister finish, de vestry sot dar an' gaze at one 'nother, an' hem an' haw; for de water company had money to put in de bank, an' job printin' to let, an' store goods to buy, an' a power o' paternage to 'stribute round de town, an' Higgins had de management o' hit all while de superintendent was away.

"Den de minister 'membered dat grand barbecue speech, an' all de beautiful talk about de sperrit o' progress, an' 'sistin' their beloved rector. Whar was dat 'thusiasm now? Hit hadn't no more enjorance than de cotton-waggin's dust blowed through de pines. Mr. Crofton looked round de room, an' I seed de light fadin' out o' his face, and hit was a sight to give you de heartache."

Dan's face grew sad at the recollection, and I hastened to inquire what action the vestry took in the matter.

"Dey didn't take no action, sah," replied the old negro, returning to his story. "I knowed dey wouldn't. Jes' as dey was scatterin', de vestryman what owned stock in de

water company said to Mr. Welham dat he thought de church might pay a little more, an' pacify Higgins, for hit was de best policy for de church to live at peace wid de worl'. But Mr. Welham he say dat he thought de best policy was to let Mr. Crofton an' Higgins scrap hit out. After Higgins foun' out dat de vestry had gone back on de minister, he tuck to comin' round de church an' raisin' more Cain than ever. He thought if he kep' a-kickin', de vestry would pay him any price he ax for de water; an' so hit went on till Passion Week, wid Higgins sendin' sassy messages to de minister, an' hangin' round de church lak a evil sperrit.

"Now hit happened dat dar was one chune what de choir was practisin' dat made Higgins redder in de face than all de other music, an' dat chune was de Hallelujah Chorus. Hit was Mr. Crofton's plan to have it sung on Palm Sunday, but de choir didn't learn hit in time, so he tole 'em to sing it for de offertory on Easter Day.

"Did yer ever chance to know dat chorus, sah? Well, sah, hit's de glorifyin'est chune ever I hyerd. De spranners hallelujahed high up in de trebles, den de basses roared hit down low, an' de 'traltos an' de tenors pitched

hit back an' forth in de middle; den dey all sot in an' shouted hit together, an' see-sawed an' zig-zagged up an' down de scales, while de organist played wid his all fours, an ever' stop pulled out to de very een. Hit sholy was a sight to see Mrs. Phillips singin' dat song. She patted her foot an' nodded her head an' sung till she got red in de face; for there ain't nobody gwine 'spose, what knows Mrs. Phillips, dat she'd let anybody hallelujah louder'n she did, an' she de fust spranner. An' all de time de choir was a-practisin' dat chorus an' a-hallelujahin' inside. Higgins was outside de church watchin' dat water runnin', an' cussin'. Hit seem lak he thought Mr. Crofton an' de choir was a-crowin' over him; an' to tell de trufe, hit did have dat kind of a soun'.

“De minister hoped dat after Lent was over, an' Higgins seed de services come less frequent, dat he would simmer down, an' de storm would blow over. But, sah, I knowed Higgins, an' kep' on de watchout for devilment; an' de mornin' o' Sadday, de very day 'fore Easter, Higgins played it on de minister in a way nobody ever could a-thought o' gyardin' aginst. He struck at Mr. Crofton through de organist, Mr. Marbry; an' till you see Mr.

Marbry, sah, you can't noways 'preciate de devilmment o' Higgins. I don't know whar Mr. Marbry come from, but when ole Miss Maria Prim throwed up de organ 'kaze she couldn't keep up wid de new-fangled High Church music, Mr. Crofton picked him up from somewhar. But wharever he come from, dat little man's been through de mill o' misfortune, an' when you look at his little white face an' weak legs you can see de shadder of hit still restin' on him. Sometimes when I sees Mr. Marbry I misdoubt if he's got any bones.

"On Sadday mornin', after de service, Mr. Marbry stayed on to go over de Easter music by hisse'f when nobody was dar; for de ladies was comin' in de afternoon to dress de church wid flowers, an' Mr. Marbry was a nervous little man, an' dis was his last chance. He was a-playin' an' I was a-sweepin', when I hyern a heavy step come in de door. I turned to look, an' bless Gawd, hit was Higgins, an' 'twas de fust time he'd been inside de church since de motor was put in. 'Now what you want here, man?' I said to myse'f, an' I leaned on my broom to watch. He marched straight up de aisle, an' stood right behind de organist's back, an' Mr. Marbry war so tuck

up wid de music he never seed nor hyerd him.

“ ‘Hello!’ says Higgins; an’ Mr. Marbry nearly fell back’ards over de bench.

“ ‘Hello! I say,’ says Higgins ag’in, wid a devlish grin on his red face; ‘that’s very fine music you’re makin’.’

“ ‘Mr. Marbry riz up shakin’ all over, too skeered to open his mouth.

“ ‘Ain’t I good enough to speak to?’ says Higgins, still grinnin’ dat ugly grin. ‘I’ve come in here specially to shake hands with you.’

“ ‘Den Mr. Marbry put out his little tremblin’ fingers, an’ Higgins tuck ’em in his big, rough han’, an’ de nex’ second Mr. Marbry fell on his knees an’ fatched a scream what made my hyar twis’ up. Mr. Crofton runned in from de vestry-room an’ jerked Higgins loose; but de devilment was done, an’ Higgins went out de church jes’ a-chucklin’.

“ ‘Mr. Marbry’s fingers was squeez mighty nigh to a jelly. In lesser’n two minutes dat han’ had swole twice de size o’ de other. Mr. Crofton done what he could for de pore little man. He tuck him down to de rectory an’ bathed de han’ in cold water, an’ hot water, an’ arniky, but nothin’ wouldn’t he’p him, an’

he went home wid his arm in a sling. Well, sah, things looked mighty blue 'bout dat time, for what was Easter Day widout music, an' what was music widout de organ? Hit would be as bad as 'possum widout sweet potatoes.

"I seed dat Mr. Crofton was very sorrowful, an' I thought dat de Devil had sholy won de day.

" 'Dan,' said de minister, 'keep this matter quiet. The Lord will provide.'

" 'How He gwine do hit, sah?' says I. 'Ain't nobody in dis whole town kin play dat music but de other organists, an' dey all got to play in their own churches to-morrow.'

"Mr. Crofton didn't say no more, an' I went back to my work at de church, keepin' a close mouth. I always tried to do jes' what de minister told me, 'kaze I done found out hit was de right thing ever' time. Dat afternoon, when de church was all dressed wid flowers, an' I'd cleaned out de litter, I went up street to buy my Sunday pervisions. As I passed Biggs's bar-room I hyerd Higgins tellin' de gang about de hand-shake he'd give de organist, an' I leaned ag'in de wall to listen. Some o' de men laughed wid Higgins at de way he had sp'iled de music an' got even

wid de minister, but de rest looked sober, an' one young fellow turned on Higgins an' tole him 'twas a cowardly trick. All de men jumped when dey hyerd dat word, for dey was all skeered o' Higgins; an' what s'prised 'em de more, de young fellow was Higgins's engineer at de water-works. In a minute de scrap was on, an' when dey pulled him off Higgins, Higgins give de young man his walkin' papers, in change for a black eye an' a bloody nose.

"Well, sah, I never seed anything since I was bcrned dat look half so pretty to me as Higgins wid dat head on him. After supper dat night I felt so good I couldn't keep hit to myse'f, an' I started for de rectory. Hit 'peared to me, though Mr. Crofton was a Christian an' a man o' Gawd, he wouldn't be noways human if he didn't draw some comfort from dat black eye an' broke nose o' Higgins. De minister held his mouf straight when I tole him, but he couldn't keep de twinkle out of his eye.

"When I was through de story, I says to him, 'Mr. Crofton, has de Lord purvided yit?'

" 'Not yet, Dan, but He will,' said de minister; an' de words hadn't more'n lef' his lips when de door-bell rang. Dat bell rang so

pat I cotch my breaf, an' de minister was startled, too. I started for de door.

“ ‘Stop, Dan,’ said de minister. ‘I’ll answer the bell this time.’ ”

“Now maybe you gwine laugh, sah, but when Mr. Crofton lef’ me all alone in dat room I felt somehow lak de niggers say dey feels when dey’s hoodooed. Yet I knowed hit warn’t no sinful spell, ’kaze I seed de cross hangin’ over de chimney-place, an’ smelt de Easter lilies on de minister’s desk. Bime-by, waitin’ dar in de place, which was so still I could listen at myse’f a-breathin’, I hyerd de front door shet, an’ peekin’ out de winder, I seed Mr. Crofton go out de gate wid somebody. I couldn’t make out who hit was, an’ wondered if some sick person had sent for de minister, or if it mought be dat Higgins, not satisfied wid de harm he’d already done to Mr. Marbry, an’ mad at de lickin’ he’d got in de scrap at Biggs’s, was layin’ a trap for Mr. Crofton in de dark. When dis last notion struck me, I turned cole all over, an’ snatched up my hat to foller. Den I drapped hit ag’in, for dey had got so far hit would be lak s’archin’ for a black sheep in de dark, unless I knowed whar dey was a-gwine, which I didn’t ’spicion in de least. So I done de nex’ best thing,

an' kep' it up till de minister come back. When Mr. Crofton cotch me on my knees, I jumped up kind o' shame-lak. But I forgot all de shame feelin' in de light of de minister's face.

" 'Dan, the Lord has provided!'

" 'What's dat you say, Mr. Crofton?' I jerked out. 'Is—is He gwine sen' a angel to play de organ to-morrow?'

" 'Hit soun's foolish now, what I said dat night, but I was so glad to see de minister safe an' soun', an' so worked up wid de waitin', an' de prayin', an' de shinin' o' de cross, an' de sweetness o' de lilies, I wouldn't 'a' been s'prised at nothin'.

" 'Mr. Crofton smiled. 'No, Dan, not an angel, but the young fellow who gave Higgins the black eye. He is a German.'

" 'But, sah, kin he play de Easter music? Does he know de Hallelujah Chorus?'

" 'We have been' through all the Easter music at the church, and he renders the chorus with more spirit than Mr. Marbry. It was a German who composed the Hallelujah Chorus.'

" 'Well, sah,' says I, grinnin' all over, 'to-morrow's gwine be Easter an' Thanksgivin' all rolled up together.' An' wid a happy good night to de minister I started for home.

"As I walked by de flower gyardens I seed de white roses an' de lilies all shiny wid de jew, leanin' towards de east to ketch de fust glory of de dawn; an' de sweet smells what can't be seen nor hyerd seem lak dey was strayin' through de starlight, an' shakin' han's for joy. But dar warn't nothin' dat night happier'n me.

"If Mr. Crofton hadn't been a Christian an' a minister, I would 'a' sholy 'spicioned dat he toted a rabbit's foot, 'kaze ever'thing was a-turnin' out so fine. I felt so good all over dat if I'd been a Methodis' nigger, lak I used to be, I raly b'lieve I would 'a' shouted; but jes' before I got home I felt my faith a-weakenin'. Hit's a pity, sah, dat a Christian's faith ain't more enjoren. When I lifted de latch I begin to misdoubt de trust I brung from de rectory, an' I said to myse'f, 'If de Lord has purvided, de Devil ain't dead, an' Higgins is still got one eye open, an' dar's plenty of time for him to git in his work.' An' layin' awake in de bed till four o'clock, I worked hit out dis way: If so be Higgins was satisfied wid de devilment he'd already done, an' laid abed till noon, nussin' his head an' thinkin' dat when he crippled de organist de music was sp'iled, all was gwine to turn out

well for de minister an' me; but on de other han', if so be Higgins riz early an' see dat Mr. Crofton had got de better o' him, an' worser still, finds out dat de man at de organ was de same fellow what give him de black eye, dar'd be trouble. He could do one more thing widout comin' in reach o' de law; an' if I was foxy enough to drap onto hit in my mind, I knowed hit wouldn't 'scape Higgins.

"I gits up soon, sah, ever' mornin', but nex' day I riz when de east was red, to go an' open de church an' git de sexton's treat what comes ever' Easter, an' lasts me for a year. What is it? Well, now, I'm most a-feared to tell you, 'kaze you might come an' rob me o' hit to-morrow mornin'. Hit's de fust smell o' de flowers in de church on Easter Day. Dat's de sexton's treat.

"When I opened de door all quiet-lak dat mornin', de church was so sweet and peaceful seem lak I cotched de shine of a angel's wing through de lilies on de altar, but hit mought 'a' been de light peepin' in de east winder. I stood right still, an' de sweet lonesomeness of de place began to bring back de trust I had at de rectory de night before. But all de same, when de forenoon come an' de bell was rung an' de service was opened, I tuck my

seat outside de church on de little foot-bridge whar I could look four ways for Higgins. About de middle o' de service he turned a corner two blocks off an' come down de street. De minister was jes' gwine to read de Epistle, an' I did hope hit would last till Higgins passed de church. If hit had 'a' been Good Friday 'twould 'a' helt out; but de Easter Epistle is short, an' jes' as Higgins reached de bridge de choir struck up wid de 'Glory Be to Thee,' an' worst luck of all, dat young German pawed an' cut de pigeon's wing on de organ pedals lak he was dancin' at a ball.

"Higgins stopped an' pulled his short pipe out of his mouth. 'Who is that at the organ, Dan?'

"He looked at me sharp-lak wid his good eye. De other one was jes' beginnin' to peep open, an' wid a black splotch roun' hit, an' his swell-up nose, he sholy was a sight to skeer de crows.

"I stood up from de bridge respectful-lak, an' a turrible temptation struck me. Thinks I, 'Maybe if I say hit's one of de ladies, he'll go on down town after his drink widout raisin' trouble. De service is half through.' Den I thinks, 'No, I ain't gwine tell no lie on Easter Day.' Hit wouldn't 'a' done no

good, sah, 'kaze I was shore Higgins knowed hit warn't no woman's foot pawin' dem pedals.

" 'Hit's a man, sah,' says I. All de same I wasn't gwine tell Higgins more'n I was obleege to.

" 'What man?'

" 'I don't know his name, sah.'

"Dat last word I say was half de trufe. De Dutchman's name was some'h'n lak Swizzlehammer or Swoxelhimmer, or a mixture o' de two. I never could 'member dem Dutch names.

" 'Do I know him?' says Higgins.

"Den I sorter stammered an' said, 'You kin go in de church an' see if you know him, sah.'

"I knowed dat Higgins wouldn't go in de church wid dat head on him. But soon as I answered I seed dat I'd drapped my watermelon. Higgins had cotch on.

" 'You black rascal!' said he, grabbin' me by de collar an' shakin' me, 'who's playin' that organ?'

"De game was up den, an' I 'fessed. I tole him hit was de Dutchman, an' ever'thing. I had to, for wid ever' question come a choke an' a shake. When Higgins foun' out dat de choir hadn't sung de Hallelujah Chorus yet, he drapped me an' felt in his pocket. He was

lookin' for his wrench to turn off de water. Dat was what I was feared of. De wrench wasn't dar. He went to the hydrant, which was on de edge of de sidewalk jes' outside de vestry-room, an' tried to work hit wid his fingers. He couldn't. He hammered wid a brickbat. Dat wouldn't do. Den he riz wid a swear an' started off to git his wrench.

"As soon as Higgins turned de corner, I slipped in de vestry-room to tell de minister. When Mr. Crofton come in de room to git his sermon, while de choir was singin' de last hyme, I said, 'Higgins has gone to git de wrench to turn off de water an' spile de Hallelujah Chorus!' An' I trimbled all over.

" 'Have faith, Dan. Perhaps he won't find it,' said de minister; but he looked troubled.

"A thought struck me. I shuffled from de room, an' was back in a minute.

" 'What have you done, Dan?' asked de minister.

" 'Dat water ain't gwine be turned off to-day,' I answered, dodgin' de question.

" 'Dan, what have you done?' said de minister ag'in.

" 'Higgins, he tuck me by de th'roat an' choked me.'

" 'Daniel Groby, what have you done?'

“De choir started on de last verse of de hyme, an’ Mr. Crofton stood wid his han’ on de door-knob lookin’ me through an’ through.

“ ‘I ain’t done much. I jes’ drapped some sand an’ grabbel in de hydrant so Higgins can’t unscrew it. Is I done wrong, sah?’

“ ‘Are you sure Higgins can’t turn off the water?’ said Mr. Crofton.

“ ‘Not if he bust hisse’f. De pipe’s got to come up fust. Is—is I done a sin?’

“ ‘No, Dan.’

“De minister’s eye twinkled, an’ he went back to preach de sermon.

“When de door closed behind him, I stayed dar in de vestry-room, but I lef’ de outside door on de crack so I could keep my eye on dat hydrant. In a little while Higgins come back, jes’ a-puffin’, wid de wrench in his han’. He was afeard to be too late, but when he hyerd de minister’s voice he drewed a long breaf an’ looked all aroun’. I reckon he was lookin’ for me, an’ I sholy was glad to be in dat vestry-room. ‘Now he gwine take a pull on dat screw,’ says I to myse’f, peepin’ through de crack of de door. But no. He lit his pipe, an’ sat down on a root of de oak-tree wid de wrench in his han’. Den I cotch on to de devilment of de man.

“Well, sah, he sot dar smokin’ till de sermon was over, an’ den he riz an’ went to de hydrant, an’ fittin’ on de wrench, waited for de chorus to begin. Soon as de choir was in full tilt he gave a pull, but de screw wouldn’t budge for de sand an’ de grabbel.

“‘Hallelujah!’ roared de basses, an’ Higgins pulled ag’in till his face turned red.

“‘Hallelujah!’ tuck up de ’traltos, an’ Higgins give another pull, an’ by de movin’ of his lips I knowed he was cussin’ a blue streak.

“‘Hallelujah! Hallelujah!’ shouted de tenors an’ spranners; den de whole business jined in together as if dey gwine lif’ de roof off de church, wid Mrs. Phillips spreadin’ herse’f an’ outdoin’ ’em all. Wid ever’ shout Higgins got madder an’ madder, till in de middle of de chorus he braced his feet an’ brought a jerk what busted de wrench, an’ he went over back’ards in a turrible fall across de roots of de tree, an’ dar he laid wid a broken leg.

“In two minutes church was over.

“‘I’m sorry, Dan,’ said de minister, takin’ off his surplus; ‘but the way of the transgressor is hard.’ Den he hurried out whar de people was gatherin’ about Higgins, an’ had him carried to de rectory,—for Higgins didn’t

have no home but a boardin'-house,—an' dar he stayed two months.

"At fust Higgins couldn't understan' dat play of de minister, nor I neither. De mornin' after Easter, when I come in de room to fotch Higgins his breakfuss, he raised his head up for to cuss an' swear; den, all sudden-lak, he glanced at de minister standin' in 'de door behind me, an' stopped hisse'f. Mr. Crofton he didn't say nothin'. He jes' walked to de bed an' tuck Higgins's han', an' dey looked at one 'nother 'bout a minute. Den Higgins turned his face to de wall. When de minister seed dat, he put de nice breakfuss on de table by de bed jes' to Higgins's han', an' tuck me out de room wid him.

"Dat finished de man. Lo an' behole, nex' time de bishop come, Higgins was confirmed."

"Dan," said I, "your story is like a fairy tale."

"What's dat, sah?"

"A story where everything is better than in real life."

"You won't find dat fault wid hit when you hyer de last word, sah," said Dan, with a sigh. "De minister's gwine to leave us."

"Going away?"

"Yes, sah; Ginul Tompkins was in de rights

o' hit. Mr. Crofton is too big a man for Oakville, an' dey have made him a bishop up in de Northwest. Dey needs him out dar, 'mong dem Injuns an' Injun agents. I hyer tell dar's men up dar worser'n Higgins."

And the old sexton went into the sanctuary to sweep, very sorrowful.

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**SISTER TAYLOR'S REGISTERED
LETTER**

SISTER TAYLOR'S REGISTERED LETTER

“**J**OSIAH, ain't Marthy Taylor come for it yet?” asked Miss Eliza Jackson of the village postmaster.

“No,” replied Josiah Bingham to the earnest inquiry of the spinster, “and her boy Sam says that she ain't a-comin'.”

It was three o'clock. The July sun slanted through the big-leaved chestnut-oak whose wide-spreading boughs shaded the door, and whenever the drowsy wind stirred the foliage dappled shadows swayed lazily across the threshold. The day was intensely warm, but curiosity can render one insensible to temperature, and Miss Eliza was certainly oblivious of the heat.

A registered letter—the first in the history of Hickory Hollow—had come to the little country post-office, and the Widow Taylor, to whom it was addressed, for reasons sufficient to herself, but vastly irritating to her friends, obstinately refused to go to the office and sign

for its receipt. To no one was Marthy Taylor's conduct more exasperating than to Miss Eliza, her bosom friend; indeed, so unreasonable was Marthy's behavior, and so outdone her crony, that had not curiosity come to the rescue of affection the lifelong tie which bound them would have been broken.

"And what are you goin' to do about it, Si?" continued the old brown sunbonnet.

"Send it back to the person who wrote it," said the piny-woods postmaster, filling his pipe.

"Josiah Bingham!" exclaimed Eliza in dismay.

If the letter, whose author Bingham ever since its arrival had declined to divulge, was returned unopened, no one at the Hollow would know its contents.

"Let me see it again, Josiah."

A yellow envelope, handled by the female denizens of the hamlet till its corners were frazzled, passed over the counter. Fascinated, Miss Eliza gazed at the typewritten address, and pressed the wonderful epistle between her forefinger and thumb. Had it been a lemon, or a piece of sugar-cane, how quickly it would have given up its secret! Josiah watched the process over his pipe with

an amused smile. Suddenly Miss Eliza started and caught her breath, and he laughed. At the mocking sound she laid the letter down and sighed. Days and nights of baffled curiosity had made her hollow-eyed, and after the start she had given, a pathetic look came into her thin face, but the heartless beholder viewed the old maid unmoved.

"Josiah," she said, "Marthy Taylor's had a power o' trouble. Her husband, Jim Taylor, got in debt, and lost half his land. Then he had the rheumatism for six months, and when he got up again nothin' would do but he must go across the Mississippi to look for his brother Tom, and on the way he was took down with the fever and died, and Marthy had to sell the rest of the land to pay his doctor's bill and funeral expenses. Seems to me, Josiah, you'd be sorry for Marthy Taylor."

"I am sorry for Marthy—I'm sorry she's so stubborn. But what's that got to do with it?" said Josiah, glancing toward the letter which Eliza's eyes had never left.

"It's got this much, Si Bingham: If you was truly sorry for Marthy, you'd go take the letter to her and—"

"Take it to her!" interrupted Josiah, "why she sent me word by Sam that she wouldn't

have it if it was handed her on a silver waiter."

"Josiah Bingham, listen till I'm through. What I propose is that you carry it with the receipt to Marthy, and make her think that the law requires her to take it and sign—that she'll be sent to jail if she don't. Do it, Josiah, and I'll go ahead and help you to persuade her. Who knows there ain't a fortune inside instead of the bad news she's expectin'."

"No, Miss Eliza," said Josiah, resolutely, "the post-office regulations can't be broke for a woman's whim-whams; and if Marthy Taylor don't come sign for it before to-morrow night, that letter's goin' back to the one who sent it, by the next post." And the object of contention disappeared in the postmaster's iron safe.

When Miss Eliza heard the lock click she left the store. Josiah was hopeless. But a great deal may be done in twenty-four hours, and she did not despair.

Hidden from the postmaster's eyes by a bend in the road, she turned up a little lane. In spite of Josiah's provoking prudence, unknown to him Eliza had made a great discovery, which concerned her quite as much as Marthy, and with the perturbation caused by

it, came an irresistible craving for sympathy and counsel. Running over the women of the Hollow hastily, she thought that Mary Jane Higgins would be least likely to abuse her confidence—at all events, for twenty-four hours. At the end of that time, if the contents of the mysterious letter were not known to her, her misery would be too great for her to care whether Mary Jane told or not.

Reaching her destination, ere she was seated something in Miss Eliza's manner made Mrs. Higgins aware of the momentousness of the visit.

"Has Marthy got the letter?" exclaimed Mary Jane.

"No, but I've found out who wrote it," replied Miss Eliza.

"Did Josiah tell you?"

"Not he," replied Eliza, resentfully. "I found it out by accident. I asked Josiah to let me see the letter again, and while I had it in my hand, a corner of the stamp rose up, and I saw the missing part of the postmark. You see, the stamp wasn't well stuck on, and the missing letters got printed underneath."

"And the letter came from—"

"Texas."

"But who wrote it?"

"Tom Taylor," and Miss Eliza blushed. The heart of an old maid faithful to her first love is like a jar of rose leaves. The exterior may be forbidding, but, ah, what fragrance hides within! Though a score of years had passed since Tom Taylor had bidden Miss Eliza good-bye, when she came to suspect that he was the author of the wonderful letter the old love surged up in her heart, and the hope of her youth blossomed anew.

"I thought that Tom went to Arkansas," said Mary Jane.

"So did everybody else. But when father forbade him the house, and he went away, he wrote me a letter."

"What was in it, Eliza?"

"I never knew. Father burned it—all but the envelope. That was postmarked 'Texas.' "

"And you've never told anybody all these years—not even after your father died," said Mary Jane, solemnly. "Now I know, Eliza Jackson, why you never married!"

Miss Eliza silently wiped her eyes, and there was a long pause.

"Mary Jane," said the old maid, tearfully, "if I had known Tom Taylor's address, I'd have answered him. If Marthy Taylor would only receive that registered letter I might

write to him now. But Marthy won't have it, and Josiah's going to send it back to-morrow night—and, oh, Mary Jane, what shall I do?"

"It's a shame," said Mary Jane, indignantly. "Marthy's standin' in her own light; Tom may be sending her money, or," and the speaker's eyes shone, "he may be writin' to find out if you are still single!"

The latter possibility made Miss Eliza's heart leap, and started her tears afresh.

"Seems to me," continued Mary Jane, "that Marthy's troubles have gone to her head and unsettled her mind. Every woman in the Hollow's been and talked to her, and it's only made her more stubborn."

"Yes," said Miss Eliza, "but we've all gone separately. Maybe, Mary Jane, if we went together, and—"

"To be sure," interrupted Mary Jane, with flashing eyes, "I never thought of that! Let's all go in a body, and take Elder Lawton along. If she won't listen to us women, she'll never be able to stand out against the elder. We'll go this afternoon; it ain't too late."

The newly formed plan met the indorsement of every one; not a woman refused to go, not even old Granny Summerfield, who was eighty years old, and nearly deaf and blind, and was

asked by Mary Jane to show Marthy how serious was the matter in hand. So energetic was Mary Jane that in less than an hour the party, sixteen strong, walking two and two like a funeral procession and led by the elder's high hat, approached Marthy's door.

She received them grimly, and when all had taken their seats in a semicircle, sat down, with her boy Sam standing behind her chair, and waited for developments. The importance of the occasion, as Eliza and Mary Jane had hoped, was fully impressed upon her. She had battled separately with every woman present in regard to the unwelcome letter, and had come off victorious, and she felt that she could fight them all together; but the elder—that was taking an unfair advantage of her.

It had been agreed that Eliza should make the first assault, but Marthy's look of anger was not lost upon Eliza, and she furtively signed to Mary Jane to begin.

"Marthy," said the latter, thoroughly frightened by the honor unexpectedly thrust upon her—"Marthy, we are all your friends, and we hate to see you a-standin' in your own light, so we've come around—we've come—

we've come—" and inspiration failing her, Mary Jane looked at the elder and the other women panic-stricken.

"Yes, Mary Jane," said Marthy, smiling acidly, "I see you are all here; there ain't none o' you missin'."

"What did she say?" asked Granny Summerfield, looking from Marthy to the others, with her hand to her ear. "Is she a-goin' to get the letter?"

"No, Granny," exclaimed Marthy, raising her voice, "and nobody can make me go."

Granny advanced her chair and strained her ears, delighted to be addressed personally.

"I know what they are all come for, Granny," continued Marthy, ignoring every one but the old woman, "and I know it's all Eliza Jackson's doin's. Eliza is makin' a cat's paw o' Mary Jane Higgins, and Mary Jane ain't got sense enough to see it."

And Marthy's eyes glared back and forth between Eliza and Mary Jane till the latter burst into tears.

A group of women gathered around her and attempted consolation. "There—there—Mary Jane! Don't take on so. She don't mean what she says," they cried, patting the hysterical woman on the back to little purpose.

"Yes, I do mean it—every word!" said Marthy, her eyes snapping.

"Marthy Taylor"—Miss Eliza could restrain herself no longer—"you always were stubborn and headstrong, and maybe that's why Providence has punished you in the past. If you'd a-listened to Mary Jane instead o' insultin' us both, she'd a-told what the elder and all of us think. You are countin' on that letter bringin' you bad tidings, but it's our idea that it may hold the best news you ever had."

"Good news for me!" exclaimed Marthy, bitterly. "I ain't never had any good news since I was born. It's liker to bring me more debts o' Jim's for me to pay; or else that worthless brother o' his has got into some scrape and wants me to help him out of it."

"Shame on you, Marthy!" said Miss Eliza, indignantly. "It's a foul bird that bewrays its own nest."

"Tom Taylor never came from my nest. And if I was you, Eliza Jackson, I wouldn't take up for a man that made an old maid o' me," retorted Marthy.

"Come—come, sisters," said the elder, thinking it time to interpose; "don't speak in wrath." Then he turned to Marthy.

“Sister Taylor, you’ve been sorely afflicted, we all know, but your troubles have been sent for your good, and not to harden your heart. Now regarding this letter, which is the cause of our presence, it is your duty to receive it in a Christian spirit, whether its message be one of joy or sorrow. But it’s my belief, and that of all your friends, that the clouds are a-liftin’. If such be the case, think how sinful it would be to blind your eyes to the light that’s breakin’ through. Should you persist in your present course, you will grieve the hearts of all your friends, act against the interest of your orphan boy, and defraud the author of the letter of the sum of twelve cents. Reconsider, Sister Taylor, I beg of you, before it’s too late.”

The elder looked pleadingly at Marthy, but she remained steadfast, and seeing that his appeal had been uttered in vain, the old man addressed the disappointed women: “Sisters, let us unite in prayer.”

For the elder and all to assume that they were right and she wrong was beyond measure irritating to Marthy; to be prayed over was more than she could bear. But she waited till the pious petition was ended, and then in the midst of the fervent amens abruptly

left the room, and the assembly broke up in confusion.

When the gate closed behind them, the women gathered in knots and proceeded slowly homeward, discussing Marthy's scandalous behavior; for like the industrious bee which sucks honey from every flower, gossip finds matter for discourse in all things, and plucks solace even from defeat.

But for Miss Eliza there was no comfort anywhere. She had given up all hope concerning the letter, and unnoticed by the other women, hurried home. It was nearly dark ere she arrived, and, picking up a pail, she was going out to milk the cow, when she heard the sound of bare feet trotting behind her.

"Sam Taylor!" Miss Eliza leaned against the cowshed.

"Don't be scared, Miss Eliza."

"Your mother ain't sick, or nothin'?"

"No, I've come to tell you some'h'n," said the boy, out of breath. "Don't you mind what mammy said. She's worried nearly to death because we're so poor. We're mighty nigh starvin', Miss Eliza, but mammy's proud, and that's what makes her act so con-

trary. Miss Eliza, do you think that letter might be from Uncle Tom, and have money in it?"

"Sam, I'm sure it's from your uncle. Whether or not it's got money in it, I don't know; but I believe it brings good news of some sort."

"Then mammy's got to have it," said the boy, his eyes shining in the dark.

"It's no use, Sam," sighed Miss Eliza, gloomily. "You've talked to her?"

"Yes," admitted Sam.

"I've talked to her. Everybody's argued with her, and at last we took the elder. It's no use."

"I tell you, Miss Eliza, mammy's got to have that letter. Talkin' ain't everythin'. I've *talked*, but I ain't *done*."

"What can you do, poor child?" exclaimed Miss Eliza, compassionately.

"That's my secret; but if mammy don't read that letter before to-morrow night, I'll eat my hat," laughed Sam, and he disappeared in the night.

"Sam! Sam!" called Miss Eliza, "come back!" She was alarmed. Suppose Sam, trying to enter the store to abstract the letter

should be shot by Josiah for a thief! She wished she had told him it was locked up in Bingham's safe.

She waited a moment, hoping that Sam would return, then going to the fence she looked down the road, but he was gone, and she came back to the cowshed with another anxiety upon her troubled soul.

Early next morning she sought Mary Jane again, and discussing Sam's visit, they agreed that the boy's wild scheme must be prevented, or Josiah informed of his design. While they were yet debating the matter, Sam passed the door and was called in.

"I never said nothin' about breakin' in Josiah Bingham's store," said Sam, regarding Miss Eliza reproachfully.

"But we know you were goin' to, Sam," said Miss Eliza.

Sam meditated a moment.

He had supposed that Miss Eliza would keep her counsel. But since she had told Mary Jane he well knew that unless he threw the latter off the track the whole village would speedily be made aware of his resolution, and every woman in it might watch him so closely that it would endanger the execution of the cunning stratagem which he had devised.

"Well, Miss Eliza, don't fret. If the letter's locked up in Josiah Bingham's safe, it'll have to stay there for all of me," and Sam walked away with well-simulated despair.

"Them women!" said he, disgustedly. "Can't none of 'em keep a secret. It's me ag'in the Hollow," he continued, sauntering along, whistling softly. "And the first thing is to fix Josiah."

"Mr. Bingham, mammy's weakenin'," he said, a few moments later, leaning over the counter.

"She's comin' for the letter?"

" 'Twouldn't no ways s'prise me if she did. We had a big time at our house yesterday. The whole settlement was there,—I mean all the women folks,—and they brought Elder Lawton. But mammy was game. They talked to her, and mammy talked back and give 'em as good as they brought, as long as they fit fair."

"How?" queried Josiah.

"Why, when mammy'd cleaned out all the women, and got the best o' the elder, too, he ups and prays over her. I think it was a durned mean trick."

A pause.

"Mr. Bingham I want you to promise me some'h'n."

"What is it, Sam?"

"Mr. Bingham, if mammy comes down here for that letter, don't say nothin' to her, nor ask no questions, 'cause she feels powerful sore. Just let her sign and get away as quick as you can."

Josiah consented. "I won't say a word, Sam, but hand her the letter and receipt as soon as she comes in."

"Thank you, sir," said Sam, and left the store.

For the women of the Hollow the day was one of unalloyed gloom. Many were the disconsolate glances cast in the direction of Marthy Taylor's gate, but nobody dared to enter. Neither did any one repair to the post-office for a parting look at the document whose arrival had so perturbed the village. But the calm was deceitful. Little dreamed the inhabitants that they were sleeping, so to speak, over a mine whose explosion would cause an excitement beside which all previous emotions were destined to sink into nothingness.

It was the happy fate of Mary Jane Higgins to discover the lighted fuse; perhaps as a

reward for the philanthropic errand on which she was engaged at the time. It happened in this wise.

Toward sunset it occurred to Mary Jane's kind heart that it would be a good deed to visit Miss Eliza and aid her in bearing up against her heavy disappointment. On this worthy mission, just as she was about to enter Miss Eliza's gate she saw Marthy's door open and the widow peer furtively down the road as if to see if the coast was clear.

At the vision, Mary Jane slunk out of view within the gateway, and beheld Marthy make her way rapidly in the direction of the post-office.

"Eliza, she's gone for the letter!" exclaimed Mary Jane, wildly, and in a jiffy the two women were out of the gate.

In the road they were speedily joined by other women, for Mary Jane's eyes were not the only ones to spy Marthy set forth, and before the latter had reached the store, the whole village, with the elder in the van, were on Marthy's trail.

"It's the Lord's doing, sisters. But don't follow her too close," exclaimed the elder, still keeping ahead.

Josiah was evidently true to his word, for

Marthy remained scarcely half a minute within. When she came out, she tore open the envelope and, gazing at the contents a moment, gave a yell that almost froze the blood of all the spectators, and then turned a series of somersaults in the road.

"The Lord have mercy upon her," said the elder. "She's lost her mind."

"What is it? What is it?" cried Granny Summerfield. The yell had entered even her deaf ears.

"She's gone crazy," answered Mary Jane.

"Poor thing! Poor thing!" chorused the other women.

"We must catch her and get the letter before she destroys it," said the elder, and all hurried after Marthy, who had started homeward at the top of her speed.

Just as pursued and pursuers reached the widow's gate the door of the house opened, and in the rays of the setting sun a second Marthy stood before them and faced her double running up the walk.

"Oh, mammy! mammy! I've got the letter!" called Sam, tossing off his mother's bonnet. "It's from Uncle Tom. He's just heard about pap's death, and how poor we are, and he's sent us two hundred dollars — and he's

comin' home to buy back the land! Read it, mammy!"

For a moment Marthy stared like one in a trance, then she sat down on the step and buried her face in her apron, sobbing.

"Shall I read it to you, Sister Taylor?" said the elder.

Marthy nodded assent.

It was even as Sam had said.

When the elder finished, he added: "That's all that concerns you, Sister Taylor. There's a postscript, but that is for Sister Eliza Jackson."

THE DRAGON CANDLESTICK



THE DRAGON CANDLESTICK

HOW came it, this strange object of Old World art, suggestive of lithe fingers and bizarre fantasies, and breathing of Italy and the Renaissance, in a West Alabama mansion in the year 18—? Though the skies were as blue and the winds were as soft as those of Italy, and though the harrying hand of civil war had given the house a look of premature antiquity, made pathetically beautiful by embowering trees and old-fashioned flowers, yet the eerie bit of rococo did not seem at home in its New World surroundings.

In the late afternoon of a drowsy Southern June, it stood between Dorothy Randall and her mother on the table by the window; and under a glass case similar to those that are sometimes placed over small clocks and wax flowers to protect them from the dust, it looked quaint and beautiful. The design was that of a mediæval dragon, with scales and wings of varicolored metal. In the dragon's

mouth, which formed the socket, was a candle of pink wax, the sides of which were embellished by a delicate tracery of vines and flowers; and the bit of wick at the tip of the candle, which had never been lighted, had grown yellow with age, so that it looked as if it were of silk.

From the manner with which it was regarded by mother and daughter it was clear that the table by the window was not its usual resting-place, but that it had been recently brought forth from safe-keeping for an especial reason.

"It is marvellously beautiful," said the young girl, after a deep-drawn breath; and with a wondering look in her pretty gray eyes she carefully lifted the glass case from the curio. "See, mother, see!" she added, clasping her hands in admiration, as the wind, softly shifting the rose-vine that clambered over the western window, let in a tiny sunbeam, which gayly flickered and danced upon the dragon's wings and scales of many colors.

The two women were attired in black, and the shadow that lingered on their pale Southern faces, and subdued even the young girl's tones of admiration, showed that they had recently suffered some heavy affliction.

"Mother, why have you never let me see it before?"

Mrs. Randall sighed.

"For the reason, my child, that your father would never suffer it to be shown, and but rarely mentioned it, because it brought to mind his Cousin Tom, of whom he was very fond; and since your father died the thought of the dragon candlestick has not occurred to me till to-day."

"Did it belong to Cousin Tom?" asked Dollie, for so most people continued to call the girl despite her increased inches and her eighteen years.

"Yes," said Mrs. Randall, and her glance passed quickly from the candlestick to an old yellow envelope sealed with green wax which she held in her lap. So interested was Dollie in the candlestick that she had not observed this latter object.

"I've heard it hinted that Cousin Tom was not in his right mind; is it true, mother?"

"No!" Mrs. Randall said, decidedly. Then, after a short pause, she continued with somewhat less decision: "Tom Randall was never out of his mind. He was merely different from other people."

"In what way did he betray his eccentricity?"

"I prefer that you should not use the word eccentricity in connection with your Cousin Tom, my dear. It does not seem quite the appropriate word, and jars upon me."

"People say that the wound in his head—"

"I know what people say," interrupted Mrs. Randall. "Tom was no queerer with the bullet in his head than before."

"How did Cousin Tom come into possession of the candlestick?" the girl went on, with growing interest.

"We never knew. When the war was over and Tom came back from the army, he said he could not begin life again in the midst of so much desolation; so he sold his property and went abroad, and we heard nothing of him for seven years."

"Where did he go?"

"I don't know. When he came back he didn't give any detailed account of where he had been or what he had done. Indeed, so reserved was he that we did not know he possessed the dragon candlestick till the day before he died; and the facts connected with this candlestick constitute, in my opinion, the only evidence against poor Tom's sanity.

When he was near his end he made this bit of bric-a-brac the centre of a mystery which is still unsolved."

Mrs. Randall began again to finger the green-sealed envelope in a nervous manner, looking the while at the yellowed paper and its unbroken seal with a kind of curious eagerness. But Dollie continued to be engrossed with the candlestick, on which her eyes fixed themselves in a dreamy gaze. Outside the window the fluting of the breeze sank to a mournful cadence, and the rose-vine again shifted its position, shutting out the little sunbeam which had danced about the candlestick, making the little dragon glimmer with an eerie lustre.

"Oh, mother, there's a letter, too! Where did you get it?" said Dollie, waking from her reverie and reaching eagerly for the time-yellowed document on her mother's knee.

Mrs. Randall, with a little start, moved it out of her reach.

"Wait, my dear. Be patient with me. I feel a little unnerved this afternoon. The sight of these things makes poor Tom's memory so vivid it almost seems as if I could see—" The quivering voice broke and could not finish.

A new thought thrilled Dollie. Had her Cousin Tom been her father's rival? It requires something more than the desolation of his country to make a strong man a silent exile for seven years.

"Let us put the candlestick and envelope by till to-morrow, or another day when you feel stronger, mother."

"No!" said Mrs. Randall, with piteous resolution. "I must open the envelope to-day. You do not know all that it means to me. It is my last hope, and the future is so dark! It seems as if the claims arising from your father's failure would never cease. The executor tells me now that our home must be sold, for it also is mortgaged, and the note falls due in a month."

"Yes, mother, I know; but what do you expect from the candlestick and envelope?"

"I hardly know. Tom was strongly opposed to your father's mercantile venture, and tried to prevent it, so I can't help hoping that his kind foresight may come to our rescue, even after his death, in some way through this envelope or candlestick."

Mrs. Randall looked at her daughter with more of fear than hope in her troubled face.

Dollie drew a little footstool to her side, and sitting down, took her mother's hand in both her own.

"Mother," she said, "we have been through much together; don't let us be down-hearted. Something will turn up, be sure."

"Oh, my child, I don't know. Everything seems to be failing us. If I could only believe what Tom said the day before he died! But suppose the people are right who think that he was deranged!"

Dollie's heart ached for her mother, but it was clear to her that the story must be told and the envelope opened before Mrs. Randall could be restored to calmness.

"What did Cousin Tom say the day before he died?"

"Tom's health failed gradually," Mrs. Randall began. "It came to us slowly and without being told that he could not get well. For several days he had lain almost in a stupor, when one afternoon he brightened up and called your father and me to him. He told us he knew he could not live many days, perhaps not many hours, and there was something he wished to do before it was too late. In obedience to his direction, I brought him a carefully tied package from a chest he had.

He opened the package and took from it the candlestick and this sealed envelope. Then he remarked that what he was about to say was of the utmost importance, though it might not appear so.

“ ‘I know you both so well,’ said he, ‘and love you so dearly, that I feel sure you would observe my wish, even if it were not the last injunction of a dying man. You must never part with this candlestick, nor remove the candle which it holds. This bit of bric-a-brac is the most valuable of all my small possessions. It has some worth as a work of art, but it is not for that reason that I wish you to prize it. Take it and this sealed envelope, and guard them carefully. The world is going well with you now. I hope it may continue to do so.’ Then he looked at me and sighed, and I knew he was thinking of your father’s business enterprises.

“ ‘But if the tide should turn,’ he resumed, ‘and trouble mount upon trouble till sorrow and disaster seem about to engulf you, then, after every expedient has been tried, and tried in vain, and all seems hopeless, then bring forth this candlestick and envelope and break the seal.’ ”

“How queer, mother!” said Dollie, breath-

lessly. "Did he add nothing to throw light on this strange injunction?"

"Nothing. In a few moments delirium set in,—if it had not already begun,—and he died at daybreak."

"What did father think?"

"He did not know what to think. Several times after his business troubles began I urged him to open the envelope, but each time he replied that the hour specified by poor Tom had not come, and refused to break the seal. But now it seems to me that the time has arrived."

"It certainly has," said Dollie, emphatically, for a slight tone of doubt in her mother's conclusion showed a desire for reëncement.

The sun was almost down. The slanting rays glided through the window and played upon the opposite wall, limning quaint frescoes of dappled light and shade in the form of leaves and roses, which replied like echo pictures to the flowers and foliage swaying in the breeze. Some of the beams fell upon the candlestick, making the little dragon's eyes twinkle with expectancy.

It was a momentous hour to the two women in black. Dollie could not guess the contents

of the envelope, and vainly endeavored to surmise what connection it could have with the candlestick. Her mother's hopes were more definite. Mrs. Randall mentally set aside the candlestick, and placed her faith in the time-yellowed, green-sealed document. A sealed envelope with a mystery attached to it may contain almost anything—titles to real estate, railroad bonds, or even delightfully prosaic bank bills; and in her excitement it seemed as if she dared not break the seal of the dead, for, with Dollie's eager eyes following each tremulous motion, she took her well-worn scissors and timidly clipped an end of the envelope and drew out the contents. A glance told her they were neither titles, bonds, nor bank bills. A single sheet was all, but being of parchment it had given the envelope a deceptive thickness.

"Take it, Dorothy, take it!" Mrs. Randall exclaimed, her eyes dimmed by suppressed tears. "Take it, and tell me what it is."

The parchment crackled in the girl's impatient fingers.

"Why, mother, it is a bit of verse in some foreign language—Italian, I think; yes, it is Italian, and the writing is very indistinct. That doesn't matter, however, for Cousin

Tom, or some one, has added below it an English translation."

"Read it!"

"When fortune jeers,
And full of tears,
Hope limps on leaden sandal,
Be not downcast,
But hie thee fast
And light the Dragon Candle."

"Is there no more?"

"That is all," said Dollie, gazing at the parchment, thoroughly mystified.

"Then we are ruined!" exclaimed Mrs. Randall, despairingly, through her tears.

"Mother, I am going to light the candle," said Dollie, striking a match.

"Stop!" Mrs. Randall cried. "You have the faith that would move mountains. To me, all is now as clear as day. Your Cousin Tom must always have had a streak of insanity, and doubtless while abroad he was imposed upon by some swindling fakir, and induced to give an extravagant price for the candlestick on account of the absurd legend accompanying it. It is just the kind of story to captivate poor Tom's fancy."

Dollie gazed at the little dragon in silence, unconvinced.

"My dear child, can't you see that the whole affair bears the stamp of fraud or insanity? Do you attribute to the candlestick the properties of Aladdin's wonderful lamp, and believe that the lighting of the candle will evoke a marvellous genius with power to make us rich and great?"

"No, mother, I don't think that. I don't know what I think. But I'm going to light the candle."

"Dorothy, stop! I command you. I feel that should you do as you wish it would be using a dead man's weakness to mock his memory. In our affliction let us bear ourselves with becoming dignity. Take the candlestick away; the sight of it is painful to me."

When Mrs. Randall finished speaking the little dragon looked very sorrowful, or so Dollie thought, and after a brief reverie the girl carried him away.

Meantime the sun had set, and dusk began to gather around the old house. The negro plough hands, returning from the cotton-fields, went by on their mules, with trace chains clinking time to their plantation songs. Dusk thickened to darkness, through whose cooling folds, damp with dew, the cowbells in the lane

rang softer and slower, till all were hushed in sleep beneath the low-boughed oaks. So the long evening dragged itself away in sadness, almost in silence; and after her mother had retired, nothing was left to keep Dollie company but a clear-voiced mocking-bird singing on the crest of a tall magnolia.

After the girl had gone to bed she remained a long time awake, her head full of distracting fancies.

Dollie felt keenly the money troubles that harassed her mother and threatened to make them homeless. Was there nothing she could do, she asked herself, to earn the money with which to pay off the horrible mortgage? She might grow strawberries for the Northern markets. She had heard there was money to be made in that way. But alas! it would take a year to raise berries, and the mortgage was due in a month. A lottery ticket? Her heart sank, for the suggestion made more real their desperate circumstances. Then her mind reverted to the dragon candlestick, and the green-sealed envelope, and her mother's bitter disappointment, from which, by a natural transition, her thoughts passed to her Cousin Tom. Poor Cousin Tom, faithful to the grave! Would any man ever love her as well?

she questioned herself, and in the utterly unfathomable, the chain of her meditation became broken, and she seemed to be thinking of many things at once. She wondered if she was asleep. She tried to move, and found she could not stir. How strange to be asleep and yet thinking of so many things! She was sure that her eyes were open, for did she not see the dragon candlestick on the mantel, where she had placed it in the afternoon? How queerly the little dragon was acting, shaking his wings and winking his eyes! She thought she ought to be frightened, but she was not.

Suddenly she felt as if some one were in the room. It was her Cousin Tom. How could he be there, when she knew he was dead? He glided through the moonlight to the bed, and bent over and whispered:

“Hie thee fast
And light the Dragon Candle.”

Then his figure faded out through the window, and she saw nothing but the little dragon waving his wings, dancing and beckoning to her in the most extraordinary manner. As she watched it she felt as if she must get out of bed. Finally, after a mighty effort, she

found herself sitting on the side of the bed, with her blood tingling and her heart beating violently. She looked around nervously. The room was perfectly still, and every object was clearly outlined, for the moonbeams shining opaquely through the thin muslin curtains filled the place with a soft and silvery light. All was silent within, but below in the garden the katydids nicked the stillness with their serrated notes, and whenever the night wind stirred the curtain, the room was filled with the breath of flowers.

Gradually her heart beat more calmly, and soon she heard the town clock strike two. She had slept longer than she thought. She looked toward the mantel where stood the dragon candlestick. The little dragon was behaving quite decorously now, yet so vivid had been her vision it was difficult to believe that the little creature had not been dancing, winking, and beckoning to her a few moments before.

Rising from the side of the bed, she approached the mantel, lifted the glass cover from the candlestick, and placed the dragon upon a table near the window. For a moment she paused, thrilled by a feeling that resembled awe more than fear. Then, with beating

heart, she struck a match and held it to the candle. It did not ignite immediately, but by and by, when she came to the end of a second match, the yellow wick began to burn with a thin, bluish flame. By this time Dollie was trembling so she could scarcely stand; she seated herself where she could watch the candle as it burned.

She had a singular feeling. A sense of expectancy possessed her. She felt sure that something strange was about to happen, yet she had no idea what it would be. It was in vain that her reason told her that her mother was right. She could not rid herself of an eerie emotion of prescience.

The candle began to burn more brightly. Still the flame remained azure-tinted, and the peculiar radiance, blending with the opaque moonlight from the curtained window, illuminated the room with an uncanny light. As the flame increased, a slight aromatic odor arose from the candle, and it seemed to Dollie that the little dragon smiled.

Gradually the perfume grew more intense and filled the entire apartment. With her gaze still fixed upon the candle, a delicious drowsiness stole over her, which she knew was caused by the smell of the burning wax. In

another moment all care, all anxiety had passed from her. She was asleep.

* * * * *

When Dollie awoke, the birds were singing gayly in the garden below, the sun was high in the heavens, and her mother was standing at her side.

"Dorothy, daughter, why are you sleeping in your chair?" asked Mrs. Randall, with amazement in her patient gaze.

Dollie rubbed her eyes, only half awake.

"What is it, mother?"

"You did not come to breakfast, and I feared you were ill, and—dear me, Dollie," exclaimed Mrs. Randall, interrupting herself, "what a singular odor there is in the room!"

This remark cleared the drowsy cobwebs from the girl's brain, and as the occurrences of the night came back to her she looked toward the table.

"It is the perfume of scented wax, mother. I had a strange dream, and when I woke in the night I lighted the dragon candle. But see, mother, how queer it looks!"

Mrs. Randall's eyes followed Dollie's glance, and they both approached the little dragon.

The candle was only a third consumed, but

the wick had disappeared, and in its place was a circular disk of tin or some other metal.

"What can it be?" said Dollie, excitedly.

"Whatever it is, it is not a candle," replied her mother.

Dollie's eyes were flashing, and Mrs. Randall's patient eagerness was pathetic.

"I am going to see what it is," said the girl, and she began to peel the wax from the false candle, which proved to be a small cylindrical box, about an inch in diameter and six inches long.

With growing wonder the two women passed the strange box back and forth between them, and marveled over it and its unknown contents, treating it much as they would have done a strange letter in an unfamiliar hand, making divers surmises as to what was within, when an inappreciable muscular effort would instantly have opened it and revealed all.

The humor of the situation occurred first to Dollie.

"How absurd, mother, to be guessing what is inside, when we can open it at once and see!"

"Wait!" said Mrs. Randall, with quivering lip. "Wait a moment; I cannot bear a second disappointment."

Dollie looked at her mother, and felt that she had not realized how much the last few months of grief and distress had worn and aged her.

"I was wrong, Dorothy. I cannot wait. Open the box at once!" she cried, wringing her thin, white hands in a nervous tremor.

Without an instant's further delay the girl removed the top, and inverting the box, poured out upon the table what seemed to be a shower of twinkling dewdrops, which laughed in the morning light with all the tints of the rainbow. The effect was dazzling.

"Diamonds, mother!" cried Dollie, and in the sudden revulsion from anxiety and fear the two women fell sobbing into each other's arms.

After their tears had subsided and they came to examine the glittering heap, it was found to contain fifty large diamonds of the purest water. Mrs. Randall could not estimate their value, and sent for her legal adviser.

When the old lawyer had heard the story and inspected the gems he congratulated Mrs. Randall.

"These will put an end to all your financial difficulties," said he. "I am not an expert in

precious stones, but I know these diamonds will suffice to pay off the mortgage on your home, redeem your plantation that has been sold for debt, and still leave a handsome sum for a safe investment."

Then the old man and Dollie fell to debating the question whether her cousin knew of the existence of the diamonds, or if he had bought the dragon candlestick on account of the legend. Dollie turned and appealed to her mother, but the latter did not hear. She had glided to the window and was gazing far away where Tom Randall's grave lay green on the hillside.

PAP'S MULES

PAP'S MULES

THE Widow Barbour stood on the edge of the throng which had gathered under the big oak in front of the corner store, and listened with growing consternation to the great news of the impending battle. Fortunately she had disposed of the contents of her basket before the arrival of the stage, or her butter and eggs would have remained unsold, so great was the excitement that convulsed the village. As the widow's rustic mind gradually apprehended the tale of the approaching carnage which threatened Oakville, her thoughts reverted to her home at Hickory Hollow, and an irresistible desire seized her to communicate the fearful tidings to the benighted denizens of that mountain hamlet. If there was to be a battle at Oakville, and blood was to flow in the streets, Nancy Barbour did not wish to see it, so she mounted old Sorrel and started at speed for home.

But it was far to Hickory Hollow, and with her heart beating time to Sorrel's cantering

feet, Nancy soon recognized the impossibility of surviving four hours without telling the news to some one, so she resolved upon a diversion up Blackberry Lane for the purpose of terrifying the family of Susan Cline, a crony of hers, who had formerly dwelt at Hickory Hollow.

“ ‘Tain’t likely Susan’s heard the great news,” murmured the widow as she galloped, “an’ if I don’t tell somebody soon I’ll jes’ bust.”

The trees around John Cline’s log cabin were in half leafage, although it was but April, and the foliage afforded considerable protection against the West Alabama sun. The tide of war was rapidly engulfing the doomed Confederacy, but there was no hint of conflict in Cline’s dooryard. True, there was smoke, but it was not the sulphurous fumes of battle, smelling of burned powder and carnage, but the incense of peace curling gracefully from the fire about Susan Cline’s soap-pot, and redolent of the spicy scent of pine knots and hickory boughs. The south wind at intervals blew the pungent smoke into the peach-trees that hung over the garden fence, and the bees that were rifling the pink blossoms rose with an indignant hum, to

return to their toil when the gust had passed.

Susan stirred the steaming caldron meditatively with a long soap-stick. Sometimes she made a brief remark to guide the labors of her two daughters, Betsy and Judith, the first of whom bent over a wash-tub, while the other churned a turn of milk; sometimes she looked across the field to where her husband was ploughing with a pair of bay mules; or her glance fell tenderly upon Johnny, her little boy of ten, who made it his duty to keep the fire burning about the pot of soap.

A messenger of ill to this peaceful scene might well lament his errand. But no compunction visited Nancy Barbour's brain, as she galloped up the lane. With her brown skirt sailing in the wind and her sunbonnet flapping from side to side, the widow's appearance was well calculated to excite the anxious fear of the little group in the dooryard.

"Lan' sake! Nance, what's the matter?" exclaimed Susan, as Nancy drew rein at the gate. "Has anything happened to my kin at the Hollow?"

With a breathlessness, partly real, but largely assumed, Nancy shook her head negatively, and asked for a gourd of water,

and it was not till after repeated solicitation that she proceeded to unfold her tale of terror. Time was precious, yet the widow could not deny herself the enjoyment of her friend's suspense.

"The day o' wrath's at han', Susan Cline," she finally began, "an' you pore critters are washin' clo'es, churnin' milk, an' bilin' soap!"

Susan threw a quick, questioning glance at Nancy as if she suspected her sanity.

"Nance, have yer come gallopin' up the lane jest to norate about Judgment Day?"

"No, Suse, I've come from Oakville; the Yankees are a-comin'; thar's goin' to be a battle thar, and blood's goin' to run in the streets."

"The Yankee Raiders a-comin' at last!" exclaimed Susan. "Are yer shore the news is true, Nance?"

"Yes, Suse; the news was brought by stage, and it's a sartin' fact. The mayor, the aldermen, and the one-armed and the one-legged soldiers have helt a meetin' under the big oak front of Brown's sto'. The soldiers 'llow it's no use to put up a fight, for thar's no able-bodied men left to fight; but the mayor and t'others say it would be a dessgrace to sur-

render without a gun pintoed or a lick struck. It was a great meetin', Suse. His honor stood on a barrel and made a grand speech."

Nancy paused to enjoy the sensation she was creating. Meanwhile, to brace her nerves, she took out a box of snuff from her flat bosom, and, inserting her brush, she mopped up a brown ball and put it between her thin lips.

"His honor's a fool, and the old soldiers are in the right," said Susan, gesticulating with her soap-stick. "Thar's been enough blood and tears shed in this pore country."

"Well," resumed Nancy, "his honor out-talked 'em and carried the people with him. I tell yer, Suse, thar's goin' to be a battle, shore. The mayor's organized a company, and named it the Oakville Home Guard, and appinted Abner Wilkins cap'n. And you know the old cannon on the bluff which used to be fired on the Fourth o' July, and ain't been fired in nigh on to four year? Well, they've drug it down to the bridge and loadened it with scrap iron. But thar's some folks agin' the cannon, sayin' she's too old and rusty to shoot; an' if she do shoot, nobody knows which end's a-goin' off."

A stronger gust shook the peach trees, driving out the bees, shattering the blossoms and

flaking Judith's yellow hair with pink. After it there came a hush as if the wind had suddenly stopped and held its breath, like a frightened child. Then it fled furtively down the lane. One could trace its feet by little eddies of dust. Then came a bit of April cloud, no larger than one's hand, and floated under the noontide sun, casting a shadow over the little group.

Susan glanced at her frightened children, and a feeling of resentment toward the bearer of ill tidings who had alarmed them rose in her heart.

"We are much obliged to you, Nance, for comin' out of yer way to bring us bad news, but we're not beholden to you for namin' us pore critters jes' because we are washin' our clo'es and bilin' our soap. Livin' or dead, a body needs soap and clean clo'es. Furthermoah, if the Raiders be a-comin', we can't hender 'em."

Susan's affected calmness vexed Nancy, who vaguely felt herself defrauded. She had expected more of a panic.

"I'm powerful glad to see you so reesigned, Suse, for it's a Christian's duty. Howsomever, in Oakville they 'llowed the Raiders 'ud skin the county, and thar wouldn't be a four-legged

critter left to milk or plough. What are you-uns goin' to do when yer mules is gone?"

"It would be a hard case to lose our mules, for they are our main support, Nance, but the ground's broke and planted, and we could make out to work it with a hoe."

Having parried Nancy's final effort to create dismay, Susan ordered her little flock back to their labors; and the widow, fearing to be forestalled as a messenger of ill to the dwellers on Little Creek, declined Susan's invitation to dinner, and giving Sorrel a blow with her switch, departed at a brisk pace for Hickory Hollow.

When Nancy's lank figure had disappeared down the lane, a sigh from his mother filled Johnny's face with gloom.

"Mammy, do yer reckon' the Yanks'll take pap's mules?" asked the little boy, anxiously.

"I don't know, son; they mought, and then agin they moughtn't. But go tell yer pap to come to the house, and take Tige with you; I'm feard he'll git scalted with this soap."

"Don't you be skeered, sonny," said Cline, as he saw a tear roll down the little boy's thin cheeks while he helped to ungear the mules.

"I ain't feard o' nothin', pap. But Mis' Barbour she 'llowed as how the Yanks 'ud

sholy carry off our mules, and since I heard that word seems like I love Cindy and Beck more'n anything on the place. Tige he ain't nowhar now."

"Well, son, don't borry trouble; wait till the Raiders are here 'fore you take to grievin'."

Johnny was not comforted. He pulled down Cindy's head by her long ears and laid his cheek against the mule's muzzle.

"I tell yer, pap, I couldn't give up Beck and Cindy nohow. They've been here ever since I was born. I've rid 'em to the creek to drink. I've rid 'em to mill, and I've rid 'em ever'whar. Pap, Beck and Cindy ain't no young mules; both of 'em's seen their best days. They couldn't stand it to pull cannon and sich like, day and night. More'n that, them Yanks ain't usen' to mules, and don't know the ways o' mules. Now thar's Cindy, she'd jes' as soon kick a stranger as not, and she'd be shore to kick them Yanks, and they mought shoot her. I tell yer, pap, lesscr'n two days thar'd be a dead Yank or a dead mule, and I'm a-feard it mought be Cindy."

"Do make haste and come to bed, Bet," said Judith, impatiently, that night in the small back bedroom where the children slept.

"Mammy's shet me up, and shet me up the hollen joren day since Mis' Barbour left, till I feel jest like a grain o' hot corn 'fore it pops."

"It's all your fault, Jude," replied Betsy, blowing out the tallow dip and lying down. "If you hadn't tuned up to cry I wouldn't 'a cried, and mam wouldn't 'a got mad."

"But jest think, Bet, maybe the Yanks'll come fore day, and thar's pap and mam gone to bed same as common. Seems like we-uns ought to be sittin' up singing hymes, or doin' some'h'n different to what we do every night."

"Lan' sake, Jude! I wouldn't sing a hyme in the dead o' night for nothin' you could give me."

"Wouldn't yer sing a hyme for that string o' yaller beads in Brown's sto'?"

"No! I wouldn't sing a lonesome hyme in the dead o' night for nothin' and nobody. It 'ud make me feel like we was a watchin' with a dead corpse."

Judith fell back, covered her head with the quilt, and exclaimed in half-smothered tones of horror: "Bet, if you say ary 'nother word about a dead corpse, I tell you pint blank, I'll holler jest as loud as I can."

After a moment's silence, Judith, half suffocated, uncovered her head and peered around

the room, when, her eyes falling on the little trundle-bed in the corner where Johnny lay, she whispered:

“Sis, is Johnny asleep?”

“Yes, don’t wake him,” drawled Betsy, drowsily.

“I ain’t goin’ to wake him. If he was asleep I was goin’ to say, s’posin’—” The girl paused suddenly as if overcome by the magnitude of the supposition.

“S’posin’ what?” asked Betsy, turning in the bed with increased interest.

“S’posin’—s’posin’ our Johnny was to run off with pap’s mules unbeknownst down to Bearheaven swamp and save ’em from the Raiders?”

“Shucks! Johnny’s too little,” replied the prosaic Betsy, who straightway turned over and went to sleep; and Judith, deprived of a listener, soon followed her sister’s example and was wrapped in slumber.

But the little tow-headed boy in the trundle-bed remained awake. His sisters had been mistaken in thinking him asleep. Still wide awake and with his eyes fixed upon the pencil of moonlight that slanted through the window, dimly illuminating the room, his childish imagination, fed upon the piny-woods super-

stitutions, transformed the shaft of light into the apparition of a long white hand beckoning him to the world outside. But the fancy faded when he heard Judith's wild supposition, and his heart gave a great bound. It had not before occurred to him that he might save the mules which he loved so well and which he knew were so necessary to the support of the family. The idea, carelessly sown by Judith, grew in his little brain like a grain of mustard-seed. He knew Bearheaven swamp well, and he felt certain that he could run the mules off into its recesses and keep them there safe till the Raiders had left Oakville. He wondered that the plan had not occurred to him at once. As soon as his sisters were asleep he would start. While he lay quiet in bed thus maturing his scheme, the clock in his mother's room struck twelve, and the slow, regular breathing of his sisters told him that they were both in deep slumber.

Rising cautiously from the trundle-bed, and slipping on his clothes, he tiptoed to the window, caught the sill with both hands, gave a spring, wriggled through the opening, and dropped lightly to the ground.

Safe outside, the thought came to him that he must take something along to eat.

The mules could graze on the young cane that grew abundantly in the swamp. Congratulating himself on the happy thought, he glided through the open hallway to the pine cupboard to see what it contained. In it was a yellow dish heaped with cold boiled bacon, collards, and corn-pone. On the next shelf was a cup of sorghum molasses and a pitcher of butter-milk.

Taking a cottonade bag from a nail and removing the garden-seed it held, he whispered to himself: "I can carry the bread and meat in this seed bag o' pap's; and I can make out to take them merlasses in a bottle. But these here collards that's wet and cold, this is the onliest way they can be carried," said he, filling his mouth with them, and giving voice to a suppressed laugh. "In the mornin' when mammy finds I'm gone, and the collards gone, too, she'll know I couldn't a-carried 'em no other way, and she'll be powerful glad I took a bite o' somethin' 'fore I lef'."

Carefully lifting the pitcher of buttermilk he took a drink, which seemed to go the wrong way.

"It's quare; when I think about leavin' mam I begin to choke."

Replacing the pitcher on the shelf, he turned his head.

"Jest listen at pap snorin'! He's clean forgot about them Yanks."

Here, with a scratch and a yawn, Tige rose from the floor and came forward wagging his tail.

"Tige, you must come, too, and he'p save pap's mules," said Johnny, patting the dog on the head. Tige licked the boy's hand and followed him to the stable.

When all was ready for the flight, mounted on Cindy and leading Beck, Johnny paused in the lane for a parting look at the little cabin. The full moon was still high in the heavens, and its rays, sifting through the half-grown foliage of the oaks, dappled the rough board roof of the cabin with the shadow of baby leaves, which flickered and danced as the night wind blew. The soft radiance fell also on the pink blossoming peach-trees, bleaching the dewy flowers till they were white and glistening. Whatever the moonbeams touched they beautified with silent peace.

Suddenly from the Oakville way came a mighty sound—boom—oom—oom—oom—that shook the very ground, and rolled away to the wilds of Bearheaven swamp, and reverberated through the distant hills as far as Hickory Hollow.

Johnny delayed no longer. Followed by Tige, barking furiously, he was well on his way to the morasses of Bearheaven when the echoes died away. The inmates of the cabin were speedily frightened out of their slumbers.

"John, John! wake up, thar's the cannon! The Raiders are come to Oakville," said Susan, excitedly, and at the same moment two screams rang from the back room, and the girls bounded in. But it was not till the alarmed family had dressed themselves that Johnny was missed.

"Whar's the boy?" Susan exclaimed to the frightened girls. Their bewildered faces testifying to their ignorance of their brother's whereabouts, the anxious mother hastened to the door and called: "Johnny, Johnny! come to yer mam, sonny; she wants you."

Meanwhile from Oakville there came a confused sound of human voices and barking dogs, while many little lights began to appear, some of which were stationary, while others moved about like fireflies, appearing and disappearing as their rays were intercepted by intervening objects.

In the yard Susan met her husband returning from the stable.

"Johnny can't be found," she said, "and I'm a-feared he's taken Tige and gone to Oakville."

"The mules are gone, too," answered John.

"Then maybe the mules have broke out, and Johnny's gone to fetch 'em."

"No, Susan, the bridle and saddle are missin', too, and the gate's latched."

"Then," said the distressed mother, "Johnny's run off with the mules. He was standin' by when Nancy Barbour 'llowed the Raiders would carry 'em off. Yes, he's run the mules off to Hickory Hollow to save 'em; and, oh, John, he may be shot and killed on the road, like my other boy in Virginia, and I'll never see him agin!" and dropping into a chair, Susan Cline buried her face in her apron.

* * * * *

Oakville had fallen! But the old town had not surrendered without a blow, and municipal honor remained spotless. The city fathers felt a thrill of pride even in defeat.

Everything had gone off in style—even the old rusty cannon. The load of scrap-iron had passed out at the proper end, thus belying the predictions of the croakers. Yet, for some reason (perhaps from inaccuracy of aim, per-

haps from the queer shapes of the projectiles—old nails, corkscrews, sardine-boxes, etc.) the greater part of the load was found next day sticking in the sides and rafters of the bridge.

Jack Green, old Brown's fifteen-year-old red-headed clerk, fired the cannon. Only one man was needed to man the gun, for there was not enough powder for a second load. Jack was a proud boy. As the man who fired the cannon on the night of the Raid, his fame in Oakville would be eternal. It was not an ordinary cannon; Jack wished the fact kept in mind. It was a gun that half the town regarded as certain to bring death to the man who applied the match.

The old mayor was equally proud. What was a war governor beside a raid mayor! To repulse the enemy had been beyond his expectation; and when it was discovered at daylight that they were fifteen hundred strong, while the Home Guard were but fifty, his honor remarked to a friend that no braver defense was recorded in the pages of history.

When Susan rallied from the blow of Johnny's flight, the rigor of household discipline increased rather than diminished, and in spite of her discomposure, she busied her-

self with her usual duties, and set the girls each a large task of ironing.

"I know it'll be as it always is," said Judith, seizing the occasion of her mother's morning visit to the hen-house; "we'll be the last fambly the Raiders come to."

"Well, I don't know as anybody's pinin' for 'em," replied her sister.

"Bet, yer don't understand!" exclaimed Judith, fretfully, dropping her iron on the rest with a loud clink. "It's this way: I didn't want the Yanks to come, but since they are come, I don't want to be the last human bein' in Oak County to set eyes on 'em. I think it's a dessgrace to be the last about everything, and I don't want folks to be a-pityin' we-uns and sayin' the Yanks came to Oakville and went away, and them pore Clines in Blackberry Lane never seed a Yank."

Judith took up her iron again, but finding it had grown cold, she replaced it before the bright bed of embers in the fireplace, and lifting another, rubbed it on a roll of rags to free it of ashes. Meantime a loud cackling in the hen-house gave token that old Speckle and Susan were not of one mind in the matter of nest-building; and the din was much increased

when the red rooster lifted his voice in sympathy with Speckle's domestic woes.

"Bet," said Judith, solemnly, after a long pause, "thar's some'h'n on my mind, and it's a-swellin' and a-swellin' like bread sponge. If I don't tell it soon, it'll choke me."

"Then you'd better tell it 'fore mam comes back," responded her phlegmatic sister.

Judith put down her iron.

"It's this, sis. Mam 'llows that Johnny's run the mules off to Hickory Hollow, but that's not my b'lief. I 'llow Johnny's many miles from the Hollow. He'd never 'a' run off nohow if somebody hadn't a-put the notion in his head."

The girl's eyes grew misty, and her voice trembled. "Oh, sis, it's all my doin's. Johnny warn't asleep last night when I was s'posin'. He ain't gone to Hickory Hollow; he's down in Bearheaven swamp, an' if the Yanks find him and chase him, takin' him to be a man in the bresh and briers, he'll chance it to be shot 'fore he'd give up ary one o' them mules; an' if anything was to happen to our Johnny it would break my heart, it sholy would."

Judith gazed at her sister tearfully. The latter thought a moment.

"Oughtn't pap and mam to know it?"

"No; what's the use o' tellin' 'em? Pap won't leave us by our lone selves, and go look for Johnny; and mam would give me a tongue lashin' for puttin' notions in Johnny's head."

With this Judith walked to the window, and as she did so she gave a cry.

Approaching the cabin from Oakville was a squad of blue-coated cavalry. The thick dust rolling in dark billows around the knees of the horses, passed into a gray cloud which wrapped its sullen garments about the April breeze, and floated down the zigzag fence, stifling the fragrant breath of the sassafras blossoms, and blinding the startled blue eyes of the wild violets.

The troop was met at the gate by John, with Susan and the girls behind him. A brief dialogue ensued, in the course of which Cline answered truthfully the inquiries in regard to his stock, telling the story of Johnny's flight in the night with the mules, and his mother's consequent anxiety. But the account did not satisfy the officer in charge, and he ordered the stable to be searched. The search proving fruitless, he began to question Cline afresh, when Susan stepped forward: "My husband's given yer a true word, sir. We had two

mules, but our little boy, our onliest boy—his brother was killed in Virginia—my boy he's run off with the mules, and we don't know whar he is. We 'llow he's gone up in the hills whar we use to live, but we ain't certain."

Susan paused and grasped the gate-post nervously. "Mr. Officer, if you run acrost a little sandy-haired boy with two bay mules and a yaller dog, please be merciful to 'em. My Johnny's little and slim, but he's gritty, and he'll chance it to be shot sooner than give up ary one of them mules."

The squad rode off fifty yards and halted, anxiously watched by the little group at the gate. The commander was inclined to doubt the existence of the small boy. Some one had hidden the mules, it was evident, and where were they more likely to be than in the swamp to the south, the nearest cover offering a chance of successful concealment. With the arrival of this decision the troop wheeled and rode rapidly down the winding lane leading to Bearheaven swamp.

"Shet up!" said Susan to Judith, who on the departure of the soldiers had begun to sob. "Shet right up and go to your ironin'."

With an effort the girl controlled herself and faced her mother.

"I ain't cryin' for nothin,' and I won't be shet up no longer. You think I'm takin' the high-sterics, but I ain't; it's grief. You an' pap 'llow that Johnny's gone to Hickory Hollow, but yer 'llow wrong. Johnny an' them mules are down yonder in Bearheaven, an' them Yanks are on his track to hunt him, like he was a wild beast. But thar ain't no time to talk. I can't stand it to stay here no longer. I'm a-goin' to Johnny."

She darted from the cabin. Bareheaded across the stable-yard she fled. Over the fence, scarcely seeming to touch it, on in a diagonal direction toward a thick growth of young pines she flew. The Raiders had a few moments' start of her, but their course lay along the winding lane, and Judith knew that by taking short cuts through thicket, field, and wood, she could shorten the distance a third. Every foot of ground was as well known to her as to the cotton-tailed rabbit that jumped up before her, or the startled quail that rose whizzing from the broom-sedge. Fortunately she was clad in brown homespun, whose hue was similar to that of the tree-trunks, and her hair to the yellow tint of last year's broom-sedge which surged about her as she ran.

At intervals she saw between the pines and over the sedge the heads of the cavalrymen. They were riding at full speed along the curving road. As she reached a rise in the field a jay-bird flew up, and lit upon a persimmon tree and began to summon his kindred with a shrill note. Fearing discovery, the girl crouched in the sedge, and the downy seed, floating about her, clung to her gown and frosted her hair. Above her thin, flushed cheeks her dark-blue eyes gleamed like bits of polished steel. She had stooped just in time, for at the cry of the bird the men looked toward her. She saw with beating heart that she had escaped their gaze, for the squad rode on.

Judith sprang up and sped down the incline. Before her rose a wood, the southern boundary of the sedge field. Once in this cover her flight could not be seen from the road. She rushed through the blackberry briars, caught the top rail of the fence with both hands, and swung over it like a boy.

The bare feet of the cracker girl were swift, but her brain went faster. She believed that she knew the place where the boy had hidden himself and the mules. About a mile farther to the right of the wood, in the deepest part of

the swamp, was a small knoll which rose above the encircling morass like a tiny island. It was thickly fringed with cane, and further concealed from view by the branches of a large tree which had been felled by some opossum-hunter. Johnny and she had discovered the spot while looking for a strayed cow.

Down through the wood she ran like a young doe. The cool gloom was grateful to her heated face, but she did not smell the fragrance of the wild honeysuckles nor of the yellow jasmine bells that brushed her brow. Reaching the morass, overshadowed by great gum and cypress trees and dotted with tufts of water-grass, she leaped from hillock to hillock over the black mud. Here and there on the leaf-strewn pools rose bubbles of marsh gas that broke as her light steps shook the clumps of quaggy grass and cane roots.

She stopped a moment to listen. She heard nothing but the hammering of a log-cock on a dead gum-tree, and the tiny bark of a squirrel. Her feet were covered with mud above the ankles, and her breathing was quick; but the bourne was almost gained.

Continuing her flight she came to one of the creeks which wound through the swamp.

Like most swamp streams, though narrow, it was deep. Too wide to be leaped, too full of dead sticks and branches to be swum, crossing seemed well-nigh impossible.

Judith looked in vain along the creek for a fallen tree that might offer a precarious bridge. Upward her despairing glance was met by a muscadine which hung like a great green chandelier over the dark water. Taking a forked stick, she leaned over the creek and drew the vine toward her. Pulling stoutly to test the strength of its attachment to the boughs above, she ran back a few steps to gain momentum, then swung like a pendulum full twenty feet over the water, and dropped lightly on the other side.

If the boy were not there! Her step became unsteady, and her muddy, brier-torn ankles trembled.

"Johnny! Johnny!" she exclaimed, with a husky whisper.

She heard a swishing sound, then the foliage swayed, and Johnny with Tige at his side appeared through the parting reeds.

"Golly, Jude, is that you? Me and Tige took yer for a swamp rabbit or some other wild critter a-lopin' through the swamp. Have the Yanks come to pap's house?"

"Yes, they've been thar a-lookin' for horses and mules, and they've took the road to Bearheaven. I 'llowed you'd be here with them two mules, and I've come to tell yer the Yanks are on yer track."

Johnny's eyes gleamed.

"Let 'em come! Them Raiders can't find us lessern they had hound dogs."

The flexile cane closed behind them, and the mules were discovered, tethered and browsing contentedly on the young cane.

Seated on the stump of the gum-tree which had been the ill-starred opossum's abode, Judith rendered Johnny a terse account of recent events. The boy listened attentively. But Tige, who had greeted Judith with much tail-wagging, began to leap upon her and lick her hands as if he thought Johnny had not greeted her with sufficient enthusiasm. From leaps to barks was a natural canine transition.

"Shet up, Tige!" said Johnny, springing to his feet and seizing the dog by the nape of the neck; but Tige tore loose and circled about Judith with still louder barks. She made an unsuccessful spring at one of his hind legs, which only added to his glee.

"Shet up, you yaller fool!" repeated the boy, clinching his teeth and seizing a stout

sassafras switch on which he had been whittling to pass the time away.

Tige easily eluded Johnny's lunges. The dog had not enjoyed himself so much in many a day, and it was not till Judith, armed with another switch, had turned Tige's flank, that Johnny succeeded in giving the dog a smart blow that sent him yelping into the cane-brake.

Tige was finally silenced. But to celebrate the event, the mule Cindy raised her head, turned back her long ears, and gave voice to a sonorous bray that rang through the swamp and floated along the distant river bank in slowly expiring echoes. Johnny seized Cindy by the muzzle to prevent a repetition of the untimely noise, and Judith, fearing the contagion of a bad example, took the other mule in charge.

But the precautions were useless; the mischief was done. From the other bank of the winding creek came a sound of crackling twigs, and horses' feet tramping the mud.

"Johnny, it's the Yanks!" exclaimed Judith, with a look of despair.

In two minutes more the little swamp island would be surrounded and they would be caught like quail in a net.

"Yes," said the boy, gritting his teeth, "but the mules ain't thurn yet."

A loud splashing told that the cavalrymen were crossing the creek, and Tige began again to bark.

"Don't stop to saddle. If Tige shets up maybe we can dodge 'em, and swim the river," said Johnny.

He leaped on Cindy, Judith on Beck.

Just as they broke through the fringe of cane on the south bank of the knoll, a loud "Halt!" rang from the thick undergrowth fifty yards away. They were heard by their pursuers, but not seen. Johnny made for the laurel bush and cane along the winding creek. The mules, though old, were still active and sure-footed, and they were fresher than the Federal horses.

"Halt!" came again from the rear. Still hidden by the cane and laurel, the boy and girl turned a bend in the water-course.

"Fire!" and a shower of bullets whizzed through the shrub, cutting leaves and twigs on every hand. A bit of bark grazed Johnny's ear.

"Are yer hit, Jude?" cried the boy over his shoulder.

"No, are you?"

"No, but I can see blood on Cindy's ear."

Still keeping to cover, they made turn after turn, but sound each time betrayed them, and they failed to increase the distance much from their pursuers. Worse, the men were widening the line of pursuit. The boy's tactics were discovered. He thought of another plan, gave the mule a sharp blow and spurred to the right.

A few hundred yards away was a clearing, a small field formerly cultivated, but now reverting to wilderness. Could ground be gained on the wild ride to this open place, its firmer footing and freedom from trees might enable them to increase the space so greatly that when they re-entered the swamp on the farther side, their flight could not be heard. They were trailed, not by the eye, but by the ear.

"The clearin'!" hissed the boy.

"The clearin'?" gasped Judith.

"Yes, gain on 'em thar; dodge 'em t'other side."

On, on they went with heads bent low. A black-jack bough combed Judith's streaming hair, and would have dragged her from the mule, but she grasped its bristling mane. A low beech limb scraped Johnny's back, burst-

ing his "gallus," and tearing his shirt from neck to waist. But the clearing was gained and the pursuers distanced. Half a minute later the squad broke cover, to see pap's mules and their youthful riders dart like arrows into the farther swamp *safe!*

"Halt!" rang the command; this time addressed to the squad.

"Two cracker children and mules! I thought there were ten Rebels well mounted," said the officer, and in deep disgust the troop tracked their own trail back to the road.

The Raid had passed like a summer storm. Three days and nights of sun and dew had broadened the tender leaves above John Cline's cabin, and painted them a deeper green, as a thin woman clothed in brown homespun walked wearily up Blackberry Lane.

The Widow Barbour was tired, but when she drew near Susan's home, the limp folds of her draggled gown grew crisp with curiosity, and her old blue sunbonnet took on an interrogative tilt.

"Things seem 'bout the same as common at Susan's," she said to herself, quickening her pace. "The fence is all thar and the beegums is standin'. Nothin's tore down," she

sighed, regretfully. "Howsomever, I don't hear no hens cacklin'," and her eyes brightened. "But thar's the old black sow sunnin' herself agin the fence fat as ever," she added, sorrowfully.

Lifting the gate latch, Nancy heard a cheerful voice within:

"Bring forth ther raw-yell di-er-dem
And cra-own Him Lor-or-ord of all."

"Thar's Susan a-singin' Coronation, and it's a true word that Johnny's saved his pap's mules," sniffed Nancy, tearfully, and her mind reverted to old Sorrel, miles away, in the hands of the departed Raiders.

Nancy listened to Susan's story with a keen but melancholy interest. Susan was nearing the end.

"When the squad stopped agin on their way back from the swamp and called for some'h'n to eat, I sot in and fried 'em a half side o' bacon, and nigh on to all Speckle's last year's chickens."

"They was fine pullets, Suse."

"Yes, Nance; but when the cap'n told me my boy and gal was safe, I could 'a' slaughtered the whole yard, I was so thankful. I heard the cap'n 'llow to the sarjin, while they sot

eatin', that he'd never seed sich bare-back ridin' outsidersn a circus."

"Warn't none of 'em teched nowhar?"

"Well, Jude's right smart brier-scratched round the legs, and she left some of her hair in the swamp; but skin and hair ain't like clo'es; they'll grow agin."

"It's told about that one of the mules was hurt."

"A ball bored a hole in Cindy's ear, but Johnny says Cindy had ears to spare; and Jude 'llows to tie a ribbin' in the hole next time she rides to Oakville, for she's got word that Brown's red-headed clerk's laid out to joke her for runnin' from the Yanks. But lan' sakes! Nance, have yer walked all the way from the Hollow?" ended Susan, noting Nancy's bedraggled appearance.

"Yes, Suse," Nancy's thin lips began to quiver, "Sorrel's gone"; and two tears made their way slowly through the wrinkles on her yellow cheeks. She drew a snuff-stained wad from her flat bosom and put it to her eyes.

"Thar—thar, Nance, don't cry," said Susan compassionately, picking up a snuff-box and well-chewed brush which had fallen from Nancy's kerchief. "Sorrel warn't much account."

"She was my onliest critter," replied Nancy, wiping her eyes. "I told the Yanks she was twenty year old, and axed 'em to look in her mouth. But the head robber of 'em all 'llowed that nobody could tell a horse's age by teeth after it was eight year old. Far's he knowed, Sorrel mought be twenty or she mought be only ten. Anyhow, he 'llowed on that horse critters was skace, and Sorrel had pints; which is a true word, for she was an old racer when I got her from Jack Green's daddy. She won many a dollar for old Green when she was young. But I'll never set eyes on Sorrel agin," and the handkerchief went up to her face once more.

Susan offered verbal consolation, but Nancy remained uncomforted. How was she in future to convey her eggs and butter to market? If she were forced to walk, every one at the Hollow would go and come before her. In the midst of her mourning John Cline and Johnny entered.

Noting Nancy's grief-stricken look, John forebore to speak to her, and turned to Susan.

"Thar's great news at Oakville, wife. Word's come that Lee's surrendered, and the war's done."

The handkerchief fell from Nancy's face.

In silence she sat and stared at Cline like a sleep-walker.

Johnny's eyes were flashing.

"And Mis' Barbour, what yer reckon? If we didn't find old Sorrel a-wanderin' round the streets! She was so no 'count the Yanks turned her loose; and she's out thar at the gate."

"Do you hear, Nance? Sorrel's come back, and the war's over," said Susan, patting Nancy on the shoulder.

Nancy rallied.

"What d'yer say, Suse?" She clutched Susan's arm. "Sorrel's come back, and the war's done? Don't a human soul know it at the Hollow!"

And Nancy rose to her feet.

THE OLD PIANO



THE OLD PIANO

MISS NANCY PEYTON was indulging in a melancholy pleasure: she was viewing the past through the medium of a box of old letters and keepsakes. If the act had not been voluntary, one would have doubted if the term "pleasure" were not misapplied. Else why did tears gather in her eyes and roll from time to time silently down her thin cheeks? And why was her smile sadder even than her tears as it dawned and died in a quiver of her lip?

It was springtime in Alabama. The south wind gently swayed the yellow jasmine sprays on the wide veranda, and straying into the room, impishly rattled the time-yellowed missives that Miss Nancy's slim fingers had untied. The breath of the jasmine was fragrant, but not so sweet to Miss Nancy's lips as the knot of faded violets that she held in her hand. With a tearful kiss she put them back into the box on her knee.

Miss Nancy did not unlock her treasure

casket every day. Only in times of depression did the opening lid disclose its contents; and she never closed it till she had read every line of every note. Why she did so is a psychological mystery, for she knew them all by heart.

They were arranged chronologically, and she read them so. Another fact was revealed by closer inspection: they were all in the same hand, the hand of a man; the signature John Alston.

The first note was merely to ask if she would be at home at four p. m. It was written the day after she had first met him at a ball given by the officers of the brigade. That was fifteen years ago. She was twenty then. Fifteen and twenty were thirty-five. She glanced at the mirror across the room. Her hair was well sprinkled with gray. She sighed.

The next note asked if she would take a horseback ride with the writer. How well she recalled that ride! With her foot in his hand, no one had ever before lifted her so surely and gracefully to the saddle. They rode into the country. As they rode among the hills the wind was aromatic with the odors of hickory buds and pine, while in the hollows the cool,

still air was full of the shy perfume of wild honeysuckle and crab-apple blooms. She remembered even the forms of the brilliant-hued clouds that hung over the setting sun as they parted at the door.

All the notes might easily have been read in less than five minutes by any one but Miss Nancy. To the little old maid, however, each bit of paper was a key that unlocked a vanished happy hour, a precious memory of the past. As she read each yellow billet she refolded it tenderly, with eyes full of tears and dreams.

She came to the last. It was one of the briefest in the packet. The regiment had received unexpected orders to march at sunset. He must see her at five. He had something to tell her. How wildly her heart had throbbed when she first read that note. She had donned with care her prettiest white muslin gown, and looped the sleeves with blue ribbons. Blue was his favorite color. Her eyes were blue.

Then just as she went down with a fluttering heart to wait for him so that not a minute of the precious parting hour should be lost, the door-boy without warning had ushered in upon her a bevy of callers. A moment after-

wards John Alston came. Never could she forget the disappointment and anger that clouded his face when he saw the visitors. But he gracefully dissembled his wrath, and presented her with the little knot of violets.

She took them again from the box and kissed them.

She had tried every polite art to make the untimely callers take their leave: she made the conversation very brilliant, then followed it by a lull, without success; finally she sang for them a new song just received. Captain Alston politely accompanied her to the piano and gave her a reproachful glance. Could it be that he believed the callers were there by her arrangement to prevent him from seeing her alone? Perhaps he did, for they applauded the song—and stayed on.

At last the time was up. He left, with his story untold. And she never saw him again.

The war dragged on with its dreary succession of disasters to the ill-starred South. When all was over it seemed to Miss Nancy that the Peytons had fared worse than any of the old families. Her father and only brother had died in battle, and her mother and she lived on at the family mansion. Struggle as they would, poverty, like a spider, wove an

ever-contracting net about them, till her mother escaped earthly sorrow by the door of the tomb.

Miss Nancy's past was indeed sad; but it was the grinding care of the present that had sent her to-day to weep over her little box of keepsakes.

To support herself and her one servant, her old decrepit nurse, she gave music lessons on her piano, which, if not as old as old Hannah, was quite as infirm and rheumatic. They were both in a bad way in the matter of age, but in this regard there was more hope for the piano than for Hannah. The latter could not be made young again, but the piano could be tuned and renovated. Half the strings rattled, and one key was totally dumb. It could not be delayed longer. She owed it to her music pupils. It would cost eight dollars. She knew, for she had asked the old Englishman who cared for the health of the superannuated, antebellum instruments with which the town abounded.

Meantime Miss Nancy had locked her box of keepsakes and put it away. She seated herself in her little willow rocker, looked at the old piano, and sighed. She had not the eight dollars. She knew that the tuner would

wait for his pay if she asked him, but her ancestral pride revolted at the thought.

"Well, Hannah?" she said, interrogatively, as the old negress shuffled into the room.

"I'se sorry ter tell yer, Miss Nannie, but de flour and de meal's bofe gin out; an' dey ain't more'n a poun' o' meat lef', an' de sugar an' coffee is mighty low."

"You've made them last a long time, Hannah."

"I done my level bes', Miss Nannie. I biles de coffee twice, an' I crumbles de lef'-over corn-pone in de new dough, an' I prays ober 'em, but dey will gin out."

"We must buy more," said Miss Nancy, leaving the room. "Wait here, Hannah."

In a few moments she returned. One hand held a large silver soup-ladle, and on her arm, closely embraced, she brought an empty cut-glass decanter of quaint and exquisite design.

At sight of her mistress a tear rolled down old Hannah's face.

"I wuz feared you wuz gwine do dat, Miss Nannie."

"Hush, Hannah!"

"Miss Nannie, I gotter speak. I's a-consumin' wid shame. I's des eatin' up all de Peyton silber."

"I eat, too, Hannah."

"How much does yer eat? Not ez much ez a sparrer bird."

The old woman's apron went to her eyes. "I can't face dat ar soup ladle, Miss Nannie. Des think o' all de good gumbo hit's lif' up in dis house, an' now hit's gwine down ter dem ar Jews, an' I'se gotter carry hit. Oh, Miss Nannie!"

"Hush, Hannah. The money for the ladle and decanter is not all to be spent for food."

"What yer gwine spen' hit fur, Miss Nannie?"

"I must have my piano repaired and tuned. All our small revenue comes from that old instrument, and I can give lessons on it no longer in its present condition. I've tried to keep it in repair myself."

"Deed you has, Miss Nannie. Many a time I'se seed yer workin' at hit wid dat holler-headed tack hammer, an' I thought o' all dem three hundred niggers ole Marser use ter own."

"Never mind that, Hannah. Take these things and this note—you know where. I think they will bring fifteen dollars. And on your return stop at Mr. Hathaway's and tell

him I wish him to come to-morrow and repair my piano."

The grief-stricken owner of the head-handkerchief left the room, and muttered to herself as she hobbled on her errand: "Dis is de hebbiest basket I ever toted. Seem lak dis soup ladle weigh forty poun.' An' Miss Nannie she's des gittin' thinner an' thinner, she dat wuz so pretty. But 'tain't all poverty an' teachin' whut's de matter. Dis ole nigger ain' no bline mole. Miss Nannie's des a-wearin' her heart out fur dat ole sweetheart o' hern. An' Marse Alston he loved Miss Nannie; I seed love in his eyes."

"I was delayed, Miss Peyton, or I should have come at nine," said the old piano-tuner as he bustled into the room next morning at eleven.

"An hour or so doesn't matter, Mr. Hathaway. There is never occasion for haste in Oakville."

He ran his withered fingers over the keyboard. "Hum—m, out of tune, and the action needs regulating—one key entirely dumb."

He opened his handbag, took out his tools, and proceeded to the business in hand. Miss Nancy stood near with keen interest. It was

quite an event to her. She went to open another window to let in more light.

"Yes, I was delayed, Miss Peyton," said the little old man, working away. He was fond of gossip. "I was called out to the Randolph place."

"I thought the house was vacant since the old Judge's death," said Miss Nancy, throwing open the window-blinds.

"It was till this week; but the heir has come."

"The second cousin?"

"Yes."

"One of the Randolphs of Virginia, I presume?"

"No; a cousin in the female line; one of the Alstons of South Carolina."

Miss Nancy's heart gave a little leap.

"He was named for the Judge, you know," added the old man, picking at the strings of the piano.

"I don't think I ever heard Judge Randolph's Christian name," remarked Miss Nancy, interrogatively. "He was never called anything but Judge."

"The Judge's given name was John, and the heir's name is John Cecil Alston, and he is the richest man in Oakville."

Miss Nancy's knees gave way beneath her. She sank on an ottoman, and the folds of the damask curtain rolled about her, almost concealing her little form.

The old man noticed nothing, but continued to strum and click with his instruments at the vitals of the old piano. He was becoming absorbed in his occupation, and began to sing to himself in a cracked, quavering voice as he worked:

"Maxwelltown braes are bonnie,
Where early fa's the dew,
'Twas there that Annie Laurie
Gied me her promise true."

By and by he ceased singing and hummed softly, and Miss Nancy summoned courage to speak.

"I suppose"—she stopped; she could not say his name—"I suppose Judge Randolph's heir has brought his wife with him?"

She did not speak loudly and her voice was somewhat deadened by the curtain. The old man caught the sound but could not distinguish the words.

"What did you remark, Miss Peyton?"

"Did you see his wife?"

"Whose wife?"

"The wife of Judge Randolph's heir."

“Mr. John Cecil Alston has no wife. He’s an old bachelor.

‘And for bonnie Annie Laurie
I’d lay me down and dee.’”

The laborer’s thoughts were again on his work. There was a scraping sound, he was taking out the action.

The hour was approaching noon. The balm of flowers floated in from the garden blent with the drowsy hum of bees, while far off in the pines was heard the cooing of a dove.

“I don’t think I’ve ever tuned this instrument before, Miss Peyton?”

“No. Except for the little turns I’ve given it, it has not been tuned in fifteen years.”

“Ah, what have we here caught under the hammer? A bit of paper. Why, it’s a note, and addressed to you, Miss Peyton. No wonder that key was dumb.”

The old man went on with his work. Miss Nancy retired behind the curtain with the note. It was written hurriedly with a pencil on a scrap of paper, and ran thus:

MISS NANNIE: Good-bye! I love you more than all the world. If you think you can ever care for me, write to me at Atlanta within a week.

Yours always,

JOHN CECIL ALSTON.

She clasped it tightly in both hands to her breast. If a bird ever sobbed, it would sound like the queer noise Miss Nancy made, half a sob, half a piteous little laugh. Yes, he had loved her, loved her "more than all the world."

He had written the note doubtless behind her back while she sang, that last afternoon. He had placed it where he thought she would be certain to look. She must have brushed it into the piano while moving the sheet-music, and it had stayed there fifteen years.

She left the old man at work and went to her room. She could not talk to any one. She wanted to be alone—to think.

It was fifteen years ago John Alston had loved her. Fifteen years ago she had bright eyes, and dimples, and apple-blossom cheeks. She was a pretty girl in his memory, if he ever thought of her at all. It was a pretty girl he had loved, not a faded little woman with gray locks and tired eyes. How foolish of her heart to beat so. If he was in Oakville he had not come to see her, but to inherit an estate. She wept. Then she rose. She would put this last note with the others. They belonged all to the past. She would

lock them all in the box and never open it again.

She had unlocked the box and untied the ribbon that held the notes together, when she heard a step on the stair. She thrust the note into her bosom. But it was only old Hannah. She met the old woman with an inquiring glance.

"Dere's a gen'leman ter see yer downstairs, Miss Nannie."

"Who is it, Hannah?"

"He didn't gin his name. I axed him in de libery, 'kaze Marse Hathaway wuz in de parlor."

The old negress lingered.

Miss Nancy began to brush her hair for a speedy descent.

"De gen'leman said he knowed yer endoren' de war," said Hannah, nervously.

Miss Nancy adjusted her collar.

"Don't go down in dat lonesome black, Miss Nannie; wah some'h'n white."

"I haven't anything white, Hannah."

"Honey, yes yer is," and the old woman brought with shaking hands a white muslin gown.

Miss Nancy recognized it and felt faint.

She was weak. She hadn't had of late the kind of food she could eat.

"Day's a-breakin', little Missy; de gen'leman shook dis ole nigger's han'."

Miss Nancy's fingers could not fasten the white gown. Hannah did it.

"Now lem me pin dese on," taking up the knot of withered violets from the open box.

"Hannah!" said Miss Nancy, trembling.

"Forgib me, little Missy—hit's Marse Alston!"

MRS. McMURTRIE'S ROOSTER

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“ONE must have, of course, some chief pursuit, some great ambition,” said Frank Wharton, elucidating his favorite theory to his friend John Stevens, over a cigar. “But a mind always laboring at one thing resembles a machine with too much friction on one cog. Even if the wheel is the stoutest, it will be the first to wear out, entailing premature uselessness, or perhaps even destruction, upon the whole mechanism.”

“You mean every fellow should have a fad,” said Jack, smoking contemplatively.

“Not a fad, but an avocation—something more permanent.”

“Like golf or polo,” suggested Jack.

“No; not like polo or golf,” responded Wharton a bit impatiently. “They are games. I mean some secondary pursuit to follow at odd times; and not for a season only, but for years, perhaps for life.

“I don’t deny the usefulness of rest and recreation,” resumed the theorist, after a puff

or two, "but I've found out by experience that nothing rests like change of work. As for recreation, in the case of young men it easily glides into something worse, and I am convinced that the business or professional man who wishes to escape prostrated nerves must seek some pleasant avocation."

As Wharton's profession was the law, and his chosen field the little West Alabama town of Oakville, where overwork was unheard of and nervous prostration an unknown phenomenon, he may seem to have theorized needlessly. But he was far-seeing as well as logical. Moreover, two clients the first three months after the display of his shingle, and the encouraging prospect of a notaryship, impelled him to hasten the practice of his pet scheme.

But what should be his avocation? Restful work must of necessity give pleasure, consequently his choice of an avocation should be decided by some personal bent. Art? He preferred the nearest window to any picture. Music? He could hardly whistle one tune. Bee-keeping? The little insects might swarm in the middle of court week; besides, he hated honey. Wood-carving? He could never whittle without cutting his fingers. In his per-

plexity he gazed at a green-grocer's store across the way and was straightway inspired.

"Gardening!" he exclaimed, like one who has met his fate.

He had always liked to "see things growing," but being town-bred, he had never had an opportunity to assist the verdant aspirations of nature.

"Gardening it shall be!" and he slapped his knee in the exuberance of satisfaction.

Eminently logical Wharton was, yet a man of action. In a month he had installed himself in a cozy suburban cottage with an acre of ground, not forgetting, in the selection of the ground for horticultural purposes, the possibility of a wife in the choice of his house.

The daffodil, which comes before the swallow dares, chooses February for its arrival at Oakville, and spring was already peeping pink-clad from the peach-boughs as the young lawyer sowed his first paper of radish seeds.

"What are you planting?" inquired a rasping, nasal voice from the fence that separated Wharton's demesne from that of his right-hand neighbor.

"Seed," said the startled lawyer, rising suddenly from the fresh-turned mold to spy the end of a long, sharp nose and a lock of

reddish-gray hair, beneath an old brown sunbonnet, protruding over the fence.

"Of course," said the sunbonnet; "I didn't suppose you were planting ice or gunpowder."

"Beg pardon, Miss—"

"I'm not a Miss. I'm Mrs. McMurtrie. I had a husband once," interrupted the sunbonnet quickly, with an indignant grunt.

"Excuse me, Mrs. McMurtrie—I'm Mr. Wharton—I'm planting radish seed."

"Then why didn't you say so at first?"

With a quick motion Mrs. McMurtrie pushed back her sunbonnet and revealed a thin face and a glaring pair of spectacles, before which Wharton felt like a guilty schoolboy.

"Well, Mr. Wharton, if you'd asked my advice, I'd have said plant fruit-trees and let gardening alone. You don't seem to know much about it."

"Appearances in this case are not deceptive," said Wharton, in his suavest tone. If he could not love his neighbor he would try to propitiate her. "Yet, Mrs. McMurtrie, next to my chosen profession, the law, I love gardening above all occupations. It is the dream of my life to raise fine radishes and—"

"Radishes!" grunted Mrs. McMurtrie through her nose. "You'll have different

dreams after you have swallowed them. They are very cold on the stomach. You'd better plant fruit-trees."

"I'll risk the radishes. I've a good digestion," returned the lawyer, leaning on his hoe and smiling amiably. "Gardening is the healthiest of work and the primal occupation of man. Adam, our first ancestor, you know, kept a garden."

"And was driven out of it."

"For eating fruit. Got you there, Mrs. McMurtrie," said the daring Wharton, venturing a small laugh.

"Fruit of the tree of knowledge, which disproves your ancestry, Mr. Wharton."

Wharton's laughter shrivelled, and the spectacles followed up their victory with a condescending smile which made the lawyer long to throw his hoe at them, or swear, or something; but he forebore.

"Gardening in this neighborhood, Mr. Wharton, is a losing business," resumed Mrs. McMurtrie, when the lawyer was sufficiently humiliated. "Mr. Bunny, who came before you, failed at it, and you'll fail, too. The soil is infested with worms and bugs. If your vegetables come up, which I doubt, seeing you know nothing about gardening, the bugs

and worms'll eat them up as soon as they are above ground. But, bless me, how dark it's growing. I must go in. Good night, Mr. Wharton."

"Good night, Mrs. McMurtrie," answered Wharton, audibly. "Deuce take you!" he added under his breath.

Twenty feet from the fence the bonnet turned toward him.

"'Tain't my fault that we are neighbors, Mr. Wharton, and it won't be my fault if we are enemies," and justifying tradition by having the last word, the bonnet disappeared in the house and the door was banged to.

Wharton was truly puzzled, and meditated over his strange neighbor and their singular interview as he sat smoking that night.

"A man neither lives nor dies to himself, the preachers tell us," he soliloquized. "It's clear he can't garden to himself. . . . 'Bugs and worms'!—I didn't see one. I wonder what she meant! . . . 'Plant fruit-trees'—as if bugs were not a sight more destructive to fruit than to vegetables. . . . There's 'a nigger in the woodpile' somewhere," puffed on Wharton, quoting in his reverie an old bit of Southern slang.

Here his meditation was interrupted by

music. He laid down his pipe and went to the window to listen.

"By George, that's a sweet voice!" he exclaimed to himself.

The voice floated from Mrs. McMurtrie's cottage, and sang "Within a Mile o' Edinburgh Town" to a piano accompaniment.

"I'll bet she's as sweet as a rose," continued the young lawyer. "Heaven knows, she ought to be. Such a thorn as Mrs. McMurtrie should sport the loveliest rose in the world, according to the law of compensation."

With the end of the song the piano closed, greatly to Wharton's regret, and the young fellow retired with the resolution to make acquaintance of the singer by fair means or foul, even if he had to dare the wrath of the old brown sunbonnet.

Wharton thought no more of his avocation that night. Nothing less poetical than red lips and roses crossed his happy sleep, and resting as he had never done before, he rose to meet the morning with a brain as clear as the dewdrops that swung on the daffodils beneath his bedroom window.

As soon as he was dressed, the fondness for his avocation had returned with full power.

There was no time for seed-planting before breakfast, but it would be delightful merely to look over the ground, for the amateur gardener takes as much pleasure in laying out, in imagination, his mellow mold as a young woman does in arranging a vase of beautiful roses or other lovely flowers.

Alas! when Wharton reached the spot he beheld a sight that stirred his wrath. Along his carefully planted radish-bed were scattered eight or more leghorn fowls making the loamy soil fly with beak and toe, while a large white rooster was summoning the remainder of his flock with the most urgent calls from Mrs. McMurtrie's back-yard fence.

The mystery of Mrs. McMurtrie's conversation was solved. Mrs. McMurtrie had an avocation also, and it was raising poultry. Wharton understood why the unfortunate Bunny had failed at gardening, and why his own failure was prophesied.

He shooed the fowls across the fence, smoothed over the radish-bed, and returned to the house too angry to eat his breakfast, and so had a headache all day.

This was but the beginning of his gardening troubles. Wharton had pictured the practice of his avocation as one long, sweet idyl, a

vista of toothsome bunches of rosy radishes, juicy peas, scarlet tomatoes, and golden carrots. The following six weeks resembled the opening of an epic. Beds of lettuce, beets, and spinach met the fate of the radishes, and served as themes for animated discussion across the fence. In every argument he was woefully worsted, till, mentally bruised and disheartened, he finally sought advice and consolation from Stevens.

Jack listened to Wharton's dismal story with outward sympathy and much inward enjoyment.

"Remonstrated with Mrs. McMurtrie?"

" 'Remonstrated?' Well, I should say so! But it's the same tune always, with variations—'bugs and worms.' You see, she laid her case at our first meeting. I told her her hens were devouring my seed."

"And she said?"

"She said anybody but a ninny would know that hens never ate radish seed, for radish seed was as strong as mustard seed and would burn out any hen's insides. No, she asserted, the fowls were after bugs and worms, and instead of raising a row I should be grateful to her hens for destroying them. Then she laughed, and the old white rooster flapped his

wings and crowed at the top of his stentorian voice."

"Why didn't you tell her, Frank, that the bugs and worms in your ground were your bugs and worms, and you didn't wish them destroyed?"

"I did; and she said that if I was such a crank as to set up a nursery for bugs and worms, she'd be happy to tell the town, and I'd never get another case at the law."

"It's not panning out as you expected, I see—your avocation," said Stevens, refilling his pipe.

"It would be really idyllic but for Mrs. McMurtrie's fowls," said Wharton, stoutly. "By George, Jack, you should have seen my peas! After numerous failures, due to the same cause, I succeeded in starting two rows of the prettiest peas ever seen. In two weeks they would have been ready to stick, when Mrs. McMurtrie's fowls flew over and devoured half of them. My cook saw them at it. There was no mistake."

"Mrs. McMurtrie must have admitted your grievance in the case of the peas."

"Not she," said Wharton, indignantly. "Now, Stevens, just guess what defense she put forward."

"Give it up."

"Rabbits!" exploded Wharton. "She said rabbits had eaten the peas, that the fields and hedges were full of cotton-tailed rabbits, and anybody would tell me they were extremely destructive to peas."

"You certainly have been long-suffering," said Stevens. "But the loss of your peas must have been the last straw, and you are going to sue for damages. I would."

"Well, no; you see, Jack, if—" Wharton shuffled and hesitated—"if I did that it would cause an open rupture, and I shouldn't be permitted to visit the house."

"'Open rupture! Visit the house!'" Stevens dropped his favorite brierwood in astonishment. "Merciful heavens! You don't mean to say that you visit the dragon and sip tea between skirmishes?"

"No, not exactly, but—" The young lawyer paused and actually wriggled with real nervousness.

"Oho!" exclaimed Stevens, as he stared most unmercifully at Wharton's blushes. "I see; I see; Mrs. McMurtrie has a daughter, and you are bringing a suit of another kind—practising in the court of love on the sly. 'There's nothing half so sweet in life as love's

young dream!' But, I say, have you considered what a model mother-in-law Mrs. McMurtrie will make?"

"Shut up, Stevens!" said the guyed lawyer; "Nellie Mosby is not Mrs. McMurtrie's daughter, but her niece, and not really her niece, for Mrs. McMurtrie is Nellie's uncle-in-law's second wife, so you see there's no blood tie. But you'd not need to be told they were no kin. Nellie's only eighteen, and by some hocus pocus Mrs. McMurtrie is her guardian with control of the girl's property till she's twenty-one. Nellie's an angel; she truly is. She sympathizes with me; and oh, Jack, you ought to hear her sing 'Within a Mile o' Edinburgh Town'!"

"Well, I'd be glad to hear her sing within a mile of anywhere, and it isn't my fault that I haven't," exclaimed Jack.

Wharton then related the story of his love; how he had fallen in love with a voice at first, and how he had contrived to make the acquaintance of its owner at the house of a neighbor, and had discovered that the bird was even sweeter than its song. So hard hit was he, he had dared to call at Mrs. McMurtrie's, and had persevered in his visits, though he was tolerated and not welcomed by

the elder woman on account of the battles at the fence. It was the old story—ever new.

Stevens listened attentively, and when Wharton had finished he said, gravely: "If I were you, Frank, and loved the girl as hard as you say you do, I'd renounce my avocation, at least for the present. What is the worth of a few vegetables compared with the heart and hand of a pretty girl like Miss Mosby, and a hand that holds money, too?"

"Cut that, Jack! I'm in love with the girl, not with her property," said Wharton, earnestly. "But you don't understand; the girl thinks her aunt wrong and sides with me. She says I must not give up my garden, that she could not respect me if I had so little of the proper spirit."

The men smoked in silence for a while.

"Rabbits, rabbits, cotton-tailed rabbits," hummed Stevens, meditatively. "By Jove, Wharton, I have it!"

"Have what?"

"A scheme by which you can rout the dragon and save your garden."

"For heaven's sake, unfold it!" exclaimed the amateur gardener.

Stevens straightway explained his plan. When the details were completed, and he

awaited Wharton's applause, the latter looked up with a pleased but rather doubtful smile.

"It's a first-class bluff and nothing more."

"That's all it's meant to be."

"But will Mrs. McMurtrie be bluffed?" asked Wharton, doubtfully.

"I'll bet my brierwood pipe," replied Stevens, "that she don't call it."

* * * * *

Mrs. McMurtrie's white leghorn rooster was a sagacious fowl. Billie White—for so his owner had named her pride—might, in the matter of education, be termed a self-made fowl, for no efforts had been made to train him. The vigorous "shooings" of Wharton alone, accompanied by flying clods and occasional stones, soon taught him to limit his incursions to the hours of Wharton's absence. It was Billie's habit to fly up in a half-dead peach-tree that leaned over the division fence,—a tree that Wharton had vainly implored Mrs. McMurtrie to cut down,—and if the way was clear, Billie would summon his numerous wives for the forage in the garden. If Wharton came in view, Billie gave a peculiar cry that not only warned his destructive family, but also informed Mrs. McMurtrie that the enemy was nigh.

The day after Stevens had proposed to Wharton his scheme for the salvation of the garden and the peaceful enjoyment of his avocation, the rooster gave his signal call, which was echoed by the hens, and in half a minute Mrs. McMurtrie's spectacles appeared at her kitchen door and glared at him.

The lawyer's singular movements, which bore no relation to gardening, evidently excited Mrs. McMurtrie's curiosity, for she immediately donned her sunbonnet and came to the fence.

"In the name of conscience, what are you doing, Mr. Wharton?" said the spectacles, after a moment of silent observation.

Wharton rose and lifted his hat. "Ah, Mrs. McMurtrie, is that you? Beautiful day, is it not?" said the lawyer, ignoring the question, and again stooping.

"The day's well enough. What are you making?"

Wharton rose again. "I'm making a rabbit-trap, Mrs. McMurtrie. I'm vastly grateful for the kind information you gave me, and I'm going to catch that beastly rabbit."

Then Wharton explained. "You see, Mrs. McMurtrie, this beam with the heavy stone a-top it, works by a trigger, and when—"

"I know," interrupted the spectacles, with an apprehensive backward glance. "That's not a trap, it's a dead-fall. It will smash the rabbit as flat as a griddle-cake!"

"Quite true, Mrs. McMurtrie; but I'd just as lief catch him dead as alive. I'm going to set the dead-fall to-night, and when the rabbit comes in the morning this log"—Wharton bent over the log—"will be suspended over the peas, and when he goes to nipping and touches this trigger, down falls the log, and Br'er Rabbit is translated to a better world. It's simply great, isn't it?"

Wharton looked up and found himself alone. "For once a man had the last word," he chuckled. But no; he knew not the resources of a woman. The violent closure of Mrs. McMurtrie's kitchen door was more eloquent than speech.

"Your brierwood's safe," said Wharton to Stevens, two days later.

"I knew it would be," laughed Jack. "The scheme worked?"

"Like a charm," responded Wharton, in particularly high feather over his triumph.

Next day the young man was not so merry. He went to see Nellie Mosby and was denied admission.

Wharton was disappointed, but not dismayed. He could see Nellie on the street. She was fond of walking, and he would waylay her. But he did not. For two days she never left the house. Was she ill, he wondered.

The third day Wharton weakened, and removed the dead-fall, and began to hate Stevens. Still Nellie did not appear; and strange to say, neither did the white rooster. Nellie must be ill; or perhaps Mrs. McMurtrie had locked her up. The harassing uncertainty made him miserable, and he neglected his business, for his fear of missing Nellie caused him to watch Mrs. McMurtrie's gate almost unceasingly.

In the afternoon of the fifth day the gate clicked; he saw Nellie starting for the village.

"Miss Nellie," said Wharton, overtaking her, "I was beginning to think I'd never see you." The girl averted her head with a pretty semblance of displeasure.

"Go away, sir! I'm forbidden to speak to you. We must part forever."

"Nellie!"

"What have you done with my aunt's rooster?" she asked, finally, turning her head.

"Billie White's been missing four days. Aunt's

in bed, ill with grief, and I've had to nurse her. It hasn't been any fun, I assure you."

Wharton was aghast. "Your aunt thinks I've made way with her rooster? And you, too, suspect me?"

"I never said I suspected you. But the evidence is strong. You wished Billie was dead—you said so. But to come in the night and carry him off—oh, Mr. Wharton!"

"I never robbed a hen-roost in my life," said the indignant Wharton, "and you know it, Miss Mosby."

The girl again averted her head. "It's very strange. The night you set that dead-fall, aunt shut Billie in a coop. The same night the coop was broken, and the thief was tracked to the fence. It showered that night, and the tracks were plain."

Wharton was horrified. "And there are two loose palings in the fence hanging only by nails. You can see them for yourself," added the girl.

"Stuff and nonsense, Nellie! You don't think I took that vile rooster?"

"No-o-o—, not if you say you didn't."

"And you'll tell your aunt I didn't?"

"Yes, but she won't believe you. Aunt says anybody who will steal will lie."

Wharton meditated. "And I'm not to come to the house any more after this?"

" 'Come to the house!' Why, if I'm caught speaking to you, I shall lose my next quarter's allowance."

"Will nothing make your aunt relent?" asked Wharton, looking up in despair.

"I don't know. Perhaps she might, if you proved an ali—alibi."

"That some one else took the fowl?"

"Yes; and if you restored Billie unhurt to her arms she'd give anything you asked for."

"Even her niece's hand in marriage?"

The girl blushed, and the man looked at her adoringly and loved her more than ever.

"I know what I'll do," said Wharton; "I'll order a white leghorn from Mobile, and Mrs. McMurtrie won't know the difference."

"Aunt Sophronia not know the difference!" cried Nellie. "Why, she hatched Billie in an incubator, and raised him by hand. She knows his every feather."

When Wharton parted with his inamorata he fell into a brown study. How absurd it was that his romance should be entangled with the fate of an old white rooster! But it was the way of life, in which the absurd and the sentimental, the trivial and the important are

inextricably blended. Did not the great Napoleon lose the battle of Leipsic, and blur the star of his destiny, by a fit of indigestion, caused by a surfeit of cold mutton? The map of Europe changed by a sheep!

After tea the young man's frame of mind was lamentable, and he began to heap obloquy upon gardening, when it occurred to him that but for his avocation he might never have met Nellie. He was seated in the summer-house where he could watch the light in her window. The perfume of the magnolias from Mrs. McMurtrie's blended with the fragrance of honeysuckles overhead to make the May night balmy. How long was his reverie he did not know. His musing was at length broken by the abrupt silence of the mocking-bird. The bird was hushed by voices and footsteps of some boys from a boarding-school near the town.

"Who lives here?"

The words rang clearly in the night air.

"New man named Wharton. Next place is where we hooked a rooster Saturday night."

Wharton started, and then sat rigid, tingling with interest.

"We swapped him with a negro for two fat

pullets, and the negro cooked the pullets for us."

"Were they good?"

"You bet! But he swindled us. He sold that rooster to old Grimsby, the chicken breeder, for two dollars. 'Twas a pure-blooded leghorn."

The boyish voices faded down the street.

Next day Wharton overtook Nellie a second time, when returning from the village.

"Miss Nellie, I've found the rooster."

"Oh, Mr. Wharton! Alive or dead?"

"Alive."

Then the lawyer told his sweetheart of the intercepted conversation between the two boarding-school lads, and also of an interview with Grimsby not yet narrated.

"And you've really seen Billie?" asked the girl, with sparkling eyes.

"Yes."

"When are you going to bring him to Aunt Sophronia?"

"I'm afraid I've bungled. As soon as I recognized the fowl I offered ten dollars for him, and—"

"Did you offer ten dollars for a rooster?" interrupted the girl.

"Of course. Ten dollars! Why, I'd go

through fire and water for you, Nellie. But practically, I admit, it was a mistake, for when Grimsby saw I wanted the fowl badly he asked twice the money. Then when I told him the bird belonged to some one I knew, and had been stolen, he thought I was trying to 'do' him; he grew angry and refused to sell at any price. Thereupon I got as mad as blazes, and was ordered from the place."

"You did make a muss of it, didn't you?"

"I'm awfully sorry," said Wharton.

It was growing dark, and they approached Mrs. McMurtrie's gate.

The girl entered and leaned over in deep thought. Then looking up, she said: "I know what you will do with your tiresome law. You'll garnishee, or foreclose, or file a bill on Grimsby, and then it will get in chancery, and we'll both be gray-headed, and Billie dead of old age, before it's all ended. Oh, I know what I'd do if I wasn't a girl."

"What would you do?" said Wharton.

"Why, I'd go to Grimsby's to-night at twelve o'clock and bring Billie home."

"Well, I'll not do it."

"Because you are afraid," said the girl

quickly. "You're afraid of the dog, or that Grimsby may shoot you; and yet you said you'd go through fire and water for me."

"So I would; but I won't turn thief and rob a hen-roost," exclaimed Wharton.

"'Turn thief! Rob a hen-roost!'" the girl returned, her eyes flashing through the dark. "Is it robbery to restore my aunt's property that you caused to be stolen? No; it isn't that. You don't care for me."

She paused to catch her breath, and looked as if she would speak again, but she thought better of it, and her little boot-heels went clicking angrily up the brick walk to the house. The next moment the door closed, and Wharton was left alone with the stars.

Wharton was no coward, and when he said that he would go through fire and water for Nellie he meant it. But rob a hen-roost and so make himself ridiculous—never! Moreover, he shrewdly suspected that the young woman wished to test the extent of her power over him. If he resisted her, and attained the desired result in another way, she would love him just as well, and more.

After cudgelling his brain all night the following note was the outcome in the morning, and he dispatched it by a little pickaninny.

DEAR MRS. MCMURTRIE: I have succeeded in tracing the valuable leghorn of which you were robbed last Saturday night. After passing through several hands it is now in the hands of a poultry-fancier. The man refuses to surrender him to me, or the bird would now be restored to you. If you will consent to accompany me and identify the fowl, I do not think there will be any trouble in obtaining your own.

Shall I call for you at eleven A. M.?

Respectfully yours,

FRANK WHARTON.

The reply was speedy and terse.

MR. WHARTON.

DEAR SIR: Come at eleven.

Very truly,

SOPHRONIA MCMURTRIE.

The expedition to Grimsby and its result may be, perhaps, best given in the words of Wharton to Stevens next day. In filling in the hiatus since their last meeting, the young lawyer came to the drive.

"Mrs. McMurtrie sat up in the carriage like a pair of red steelyards draped in black. If she was awe-inspiring in plain spectacles and a brown sunbonnet, picture her, Jack, in gold-rimmed pince-nez and a poke! She didn't speak for a quarter of a mile, then said she to me, suddenly, 'Who is this receiver of stolen property?'

" 'Excuse me,' said I; 'I fear my brief note

conveyed an erroneous impression. Mr. Grimsby bought the fowl of a negro.'

"'Bought it of a negro, did he?—and at night, I presume. You haven't helped matters, Mr. Wharton,' and she glared."

"Was there anything of a scrap at Grimsby's?" asked Stevens.

"Lord bless you, no! Grimsby went down before her like a man of straw. She identified the fowl by a bit of red yarn tied under the neck feathers. Grimsby tried to apologize and explain, but she cut him short and stalked off with the rooster."

There was silence for a few moments.

"Surely, that isn't all," said Stevens.

"Well—yes; we did patch up matters on the way back," admitted Wharton, sheepishly. Then, picking up courage, he said, "Perhaps it's throwing bouquets at myself to say it, but I think I displayed tact."

"What did you say?"

"Nothing. I tried to look pleasant, and waited for Mrs. McMurtrie to open the ball. For a while she sat smoothing the rooster's feathers, and the operation seemed to soothe her. Finally she looked up and said: 'I may have done wrong, Mr. Wharton, in harboring an unjust suspicion.'

“ ‘Don’t mention it, I beg of you,’ said I. ‘I realize, Mrs. McMurtrie, that my conduct has been most irritating.’ ”

“ ‘Quite true; and when you built that dead-fall for the rabbit without considering Billie’s curiosity—’ ”

“ ‘Ah, Mrs. McMurtrie,’ laughed I, very genially, ‘that was merely a bluff.’ ”

“ ‘A what?’ ”

“ ‘A bluff—a sham—the log in falling would have caught on a brick. It couldn’t have crushed an egg!’ ”

“ ‘So you buried the hatchet,’ said Stevens. ”

“ ‘Out of sight.’ ”

“ ‘How about the avocation?’ ”

“ ‘Would you believe it, Jack, Mrs. McMurtrie proposed that we divide the expense of a wire-netting above the fence! I told her I’d be proud to pay the whole.’ ”

“ ‘And Nellie?’ ”

“ ‘We are to be married in October.’ ”

THE MAID OF JASMINDALE

THE MAID OF JASMINDALE

IT was early spring in West Alabama, in the year 1865. Two Confederate soldiers in a dilapidated buggy, drawn by a horse quite in keeping with the appearance of the vehicle, rattled along a winding plantation road. The sun was just setting, and the slanting rays, which had slowly climbed the red-brown trunks of the pine-trees, through which the roadway wound, now lingered caressingly in their gnarled and twisted tops.

At times, along the winding lane, the occupants of the buggy detected on the spicy breath of the pines sweet scents of more quality, which betokened that here and there a cluster of wild honeysuckle or a yellow jasmine bell was already ablow; for there are many wild flowers in Alabama that come before the swallow dares, and take even the winds of February with beauty.

No sound of war had ever floated down this woodland way. Migratory birds, like field-larks and robins, may have marvelled to each

other at the roar of the cannon and the smoke of battle they had chanced to hear and see on their southward way, but the cotton-tailed rabbit that leaped into the broom-sedge, and the gray squirrel that sprang up the pine trunk at the creak of the passing vehicle, knew naught of such things; or if they perceived any change in the order of the universe, it was to note with pleasure that sudden death had become less frequent among their furry brethren, or to congratulate themselves on the increase of longevity among all feathered and four-footed wild creatures.

In the drowsy peace and quietness of this old plantation highway, shaded by pines and fringed with sassafras—a drowsy quietness that appealed to every sense—the worn Confederate gray of the two soldiers seemed like an echo from the battle-fields far away; and this hint of war, which at first appeared out of harmony with the peaceful scene, when viewed more closely added a touch of pathos which removed all sense of discord. The man who drove used but one hand, for his left sleeve hung empty; while his comrade wore a bandage about his left shoulder and arm. It was clear that fate had put one of them under bond to keep the peace for a season at least,

while the other would never again seek the bubble reputation at the cannon's mouth.

At the end of one of the conversational pauses which come frequently to those who have travelled a long distance together and are weary, the man with one arm, giving the horse a gentle slap with the reins, addressed his companion:

"Well, Tom, we are almost there. When we turn the next curve we shall see the house, or, at least, the lights."

"Do you think we're expected?" asked the other.

"I doubt it. I wrote the day before we left the hospital, but if the letter had been received, my father would have met us at Gainesville; or he would have sent some one."

Urging the old horse forward with another slight blow,—he had not the heart to use the whip to an animal who had spent his strength in the army,—he continued: "What do you suppose I'm thinking of, Tom?"

"Can't imagine, Jack. Your mind should be bubbling with the happy thought that in a very few minutes you will see your father, mother, and sister after an absence of three years."

"Of course all that was in my mind; but at

the moment I was comparing this home-coming with the one I pictured when I enlisted."

A sad look passed over his face—a face which nature had meant for merriment, not gloom, in proof of which a smile soon followed. But he could not keep a slight ring of bitterness out of his voice as he exclaimed: "Take your time, old horse, you needn't hurry; as usual, second thoughts are wisest. I prefer that this triumphal chariot should arrive at my ancestral home under cover of darkness."

His friend gave him a quick look. "I think you are very fortunate in many regards. You have at least a home to which you can come, and a family there to welcome you. Look at my case. My home is beyond the lines, and I haven't heard from it in six months."

Dropping the reins for a moment to adjust his hat, which had been displaced by a jolt over a projecting pine root, the young veteran, whose surname was Ellis, said with a sigh: "I wonder where the battery is to-night, and what the boys are doing!" He looked at his empty sleeve. "'Tisn't likely I'll ever see the dear old guns again, and give them pet names, God bless 'em! But look, Tom, yonder are the

lights." And forgetful of his recent mood he put the old horse to his speed.

The buggy had emerged from the pines, and now wound along the edge of the wood. On the left rose the dark trees, like a great, shadowy wall. On the right, a moss-grown rail fence zigzagged along the lane, its numerous corners filled with alder shrubs, blackberry bushes, and wild plum-trees. The last were in full flower, and over their pallid and fragrant sprays gray moths hovered, intent to glean such sweets as were left them by the wild bees, pirates of the upper blue, who had rifled the tiny blossoms and fled to their secret cave in the old swamp-gum.

Beyond the rail fence a vast cotton-field, whose brown surface had been broken by the plough, but was not yet planted, stretched toward the west, and blent on the horizon with a cypress swamp whose tall treetops serrated the pale pink sky like a jagged silhouette.

During the last ten minutes the lights of home, which had greeted Ellis's eyes with a brightness scarce exceeding that of a will-o'-the-wisp, grew brighter and steadier, and soon the house began to outline itself through the trees. It was built in the colonnaded style,

and the columns gleamed white in the starlight. As Ellis led his companion up the winding walk, the fragrance of jonquils, hyacinths, and violets met them at every turn. The odor of the flowers was quite in harmony with what was passing in Tom Vance's mind. Had Ellis asked him a few moments ago for his thoughts he would doubtless have parried the question, for he was thinking of Jack's sister, whom he had never seen, but of whom his fancy had painted a picture very pleasing to him.

At night, by the smoldering camp-fire, when the other men were asleep, the two men had often talked of their homes; and Jack had frequently spoken of his sister. Sometimes he had read to Vance parts of her letters by the little flames that leaped up as the half-burned logs fell together. So that now, as he walked up the gravelled way, the breath of the flowers made his heart beat faster. Like incense floating round a shrine, it seemed to warn him of his nearness to the deity of his dreams; and the grating of the pebbles beneath his boot heels was needed to bring his excited fancy back to a realization of earth.

They had passed beneath a budding rose-vine which swayed between the white columns,

and entered the wide hall before they were discovered. Their presence was announced by a large brown dog, which leaped toward Ellis with a joyous bark. Half a minute later two slender women were clinging to him, and laughing and sobbing at the same time, while a tall old man, with tear-lit eyes, wrung his hand. Vance remained in the background, unwilling to intrude even his presence upon a meeting in which grief and joy were pathetically mingled. By and by there came a lull, and Ellis turned: "Where are you, Tom? Father, mother, Annie, this is my comrade, Tom Vance."

Annie Ellis was as lithe as a swamp-willow. She had little color. Her skin was not tinted like the rose; it bore more resemblance in its healthy paleness to the milk-white petals of the bay-flowers. Her light-brown hair rippled over her brow, and when touched by the sunlight, revealed changeful glints of gold. She had long, curling lashes, and her eyes were as soft as brown velvet; yet they were full of light when she smiled. Her lips were the hue of pomegranate blossoms. But her chief charm was a dimple on her cheek. When her face was in repose, no one would suspect its existence. To Vance it did not seem like an

ordinary dimple. The first time he saw it he felt a peculiar thrill. Afterwards he kept trying to bring the dimple back; but it did not appear every time its owner smiled. She seemed to keep it for special moments.

For the first few days after their arrival, Mrs. Ellis could not see enough of Jack. It was a long time before she reconciled herself to the loss of his arm; and often her eyes would fill when she looked at his empty sleeve; but she never alluded to the matter in Jack's presence.

In consequence of this tender monopoly, Vance fell to her daughter's care, and the arrangement was evidently satisfactory. Sometimes the young soldier leaned over the piano while the girl sang to him, "Lorena," "Ever of Thee," and other ballads of a sentimental turn; sometimes they strolled about the old flower-garden among the roses and lilacs. Often in the morning they wandered farther, and walked in the woods beneath the long-leaved pines, many of which rose fifty feet without a branch, and when the south wind stirred the lofty tops immense cones would fall swishing through the air, to bound on the elastic carpet of pine-needles.

Frequently they went fishing in the creek.

On these occasions they always took Jim, the twelve-year-old son of Sophy, the cook, to carry the bait and bait the hooks. Jim was as black as ebony. He never wore a hat, and when he smiled, which was often, his big white teeth gleamed like piano-keys. His mother kept his face greased till it shone.

"I do 'spise a ash-faced nigger," said Sophy.

What Jim thought of these fishing expeditions can be learned from his indignant account to his mother.

"I tell yer de trufe, mammy, I's des tired o' gwine fishin' wid Marse Tom an' Miss Annie. Dey don' ketch no fish. See dis heah string o' perch? I cotch 'em, ever' one. Miss Annie she know how ter fish des as well as I does, but she ain' cotch a fish sence Marse Tom been heah. Dat's de Gord's trufe! Dis de way dey do, mammy. When dey starts ter de creek dey walks so slow, look lak dey don' keer whe'r dey gits dar or no.

"Den when we comes ter de creek dey say, 'Jim, bait de hooks.' Den when I gits a wu'm out de gourd, and stick de p'int o' de hook in him, Miss Annie she hollers, she do, an' puts her han's ober her eyes. Ain' dat what wu'ms is made for, mammy? Den she

pull her han's down slow lak, an' look at Marse Tom dis way. An Marse Tom he look at Miss Annie.

"Den when dey draps de lines in de creek, 'tain' no time fo' Marse Tom got his line all tang'ul up wid Miss Annie's, an' dey hatter pick out de knot. Dey don' lemme do dat. Dey do dat deyselves; an' fas' as Miss Annie pick out one knot, Marse Tom he got anne'r one made.

"Den dey gits tired o' fishin', an' say, 'Jim, you can fish.' An dey goes off a-pickin' vi'-lets an' sittin' on lorgs."

In the afternoon the young girl and the soldier sat in the old summer-house under the myrtles. Annie would sew, and Vance would read to her from Lalla Rookh, while the cooing of the doves in the pines and the humming of the bees formed a fitting accompaniment to Moore's softly flowing lines. Cupid never pities wounded soldiers; such are his favorite game. The wound in his shoulder healed rapidly, but a deeper wound opened in the Kentuckian's heart.

This idyllic existence had lasted several weeks, when one day there came a change. It was as if a discordant string had been touched in the flow of a sweet melody, and

the discord, instead of dying away, gradually became dominant. The dimple did not appear for a whole week, and the smile became less and less frequent. But all was so gradual there was no savor of discourtesy. Vance tried to brush away the cloud with a little gift of flowers. An hour later he saw his poor blossoms exhaling their deserted fragrance on a window-seat. When this simple device failed, his helplessness was piteous. Had he been less of a lover and more of a beau, he would have thought of a dozen ways of bringing about an explanation. Without appearing to avoid him, she gradually saw less of him. It could not be accidental, for accidents seldom occur in such disagreeable consecutive-ness. Each day she seemed to grow farther away from him. But he did not lack society. Mr. Ellis took him on long drives over the winding plantation roads. Mrs. Ellis, having petted Jack to her heart's content, carried Vance on tours of her poultry-yard, or gave him instruction in rose culture. He tried to respond appreciatively to her little attentions, and to manifest the proper interest by occasional questions. But when he asked Mrs. Ellis what was the best time for pruning hens, and what she did for her roses when they took

the gapes, his kind hostess was bewildered. She confided to her daughter that she feared the hardships of war, and his wound, had affected Vance's brain.

"Poor fellow!" she sighed. "It is much better to lose an arm."

"Perhaps he was thinking of his Kentucky sweetheart," said Miss Ellis. "The Blue Grass girls are said to be very beautiful."

Meanwhile Vance kicked over a flower-pot, and muttered something under his breath. He was a man of action, and never swore when he knew what to do. But now he was puzzled, and had sought solitude and the open air to think it all out. The woman he loved was acting in the most incomprehensible and exasperating manner. What had he done to offend her? What had he left undone? He gave it up, and dropped into the rustic seat under the cedar-tree, found an easy position for his shoulder, and as his eyes fell on his old gray coat he felt ashamed of his impatience.

Then he put his hand in his pocket and drew out something. It was not a letter, nor a photograph, but a little tobacco-pouch she had made him in the blissful days when she was all smiles and sunshine. It was made of

brown silk—the color of her eyes—and his initials were worked in crimson—the hue of her lips. It had smelled of violets when it came into his possession. He wondered if it still retained its fragrance! No; the perfume had fled with her favor, and the scent of the tobacco made him sneeze. He filled his cob-pipe, struck a Confederate-made sulphur match. It broke. More successful with another, he puffed rapidly at first, then slower, and gazed over the pine-covered Alabama hills, down the river, where the pines blended with the cypress-trees till all were veiled on the horizon in a purple mist. Presently a resolute expression came on his face. He knocked the ashes from his pipe on his boot heel, and put his pipe away. Then he took a pencil from his pocket and wrote on a slip of paper:

DEAR MISS ELLIS:

I would like much to see you for a few moments in the summer-house under the myrtles at 12 o'clock. If you will kindly come I shall be very grateful.

Yours faithfully, T. V.

Calling Jim, who was not far away, he sent the note. By and by the boy came back.

“Did you give the note to Miss Ellis?” said Vance.

"Yes, sah; I give her de letter."

"What did she say, Jim?"

"Miss Annie didn' say nothin', Marse Tom."

"What did she do?"

Jim scratched his head. "Well, sah, fus' she tuck de letter an' onwrap it. Den she read it, an' her han' 'gun ter trimble. Den she squeez de letter in one han' an' guv a long breaf. Den she look way off lak she seed some'h'n comin'."

"That will do, Jim."

Vance looked at his watch. It was just a quarter past eleven. He directed his steps toward the myrtles.

Jim dug his big toe in the ground and looked after him. "Marse Tom an' Miss does mighty curis. Dat's de Gord's trufe! Las' week dey couldn' cotch no fish for talkin', an' dis week Marse Tom he write a letter to Miss Annie, an' dey livin' in de same house, an' eatin' toge'er three times a day. Won'er what dey gwine do nex' week!"

The negroes on the plantation were very proud of their young mistress. They watched the progress of affairs with keen interest, and Vance met their approval, though they deemed no one quite worthy of her. Old Ben,

the gardener, Sophy, the cook, and Melinda, the house-girl, discussed the situation in the kitchen.

" 'Spec we gwine have a weddin' on dis plantation 'fore long. Look lak young Miss is made up her mind dis time," said old Ben, leaning on his hoe by the kitchen door.

"Ole man, you's way behine the times," said Sophy, laying in a deep dish the foundation of a chicken pie. "Dat's de way hit looked ter me, too, las' week. But de win's done changed. 'Pears ter me now young Miss is gwine serve Marse Vance lak she done all de rest o' de young men. He gwine git his walkin' papers 'fore long, ef he ain' already got 'em. Marse Vance sholy do look sorrowful."

"I knows ever'thing what's gwine on in de big house," said Lindy. "But I don' tell all I knows," she added, looking at Sophy.

"Huh!" sniffed Sophy, contemptuously, "you allers knows more'n de trufe."

Lindy's massive lips protruded in a warlike manner, and old Ben hastened to interpose. "Let de gal talk ef she wanter, ole woman. Don't yer mine her, Lindy; words is made fur de spression o' knowledge. Keep on, gal."

The girl rolled the whites of her eyes in the

direction of Sophy indignantly, but encouraged by the old man's defense, she could not resist the temptation to display her superior information.

"I knows de day an' I knows de hour when de cloud 'gun ter riz," she began, solemnly, "an' dis is de very way: I wuz a-sweepin' out de big hall las' Sadday before breakfus'; an' I wuz a hurryin' ter get thu 'fo' de white folks come down, when I seed Marse Jack come out'n his room an' go in Marse Tom's room a-whistlin'. He lef' Marse Tom's door on de crack. I could'n heah all dey say to one ne'r, but I cotch some o' de words. 'Peared lak dey wuz talkin' 'bout some young lady up in Kaintucky, an' Marse Jack, he wuz a-runnin' Marse Tom. I knows I hearn him say some'h'n 'bout Katie.

"Des 'bout dat time, Miss Annie she come out'n her room ter'er en' o' de hall, an' she walk down de hall ter de top o' de stairs a hummin' a chune, an' she look so peert, seem lak she gwine ter dance ever' step she tuck. She wuz dressed in white, kaze hit was a warm mornin', an' she had a bunch o' peach-flowers pin on her breas'.

"Miss Annie sholy did look sweet dat mornin'.

“But when she struck de top o’ de stairs by Marse Tom’s door look lak a spell tuck her. She must ’a’ hearn some’h’n ter ’stress her, for she tu’n de color o’ green hick’ry smoke roun’ de eyes. ’Fore Gord, I thought she wuz gwine ter fall, but she cotch hole de banister, bless de Lord!

“Hit sholy did look pitterful ter see dem peach-flowers a-trim’lin on her breas’! But Miss Annie she b’longs ter de quality, she do; when she come to, she walked down dem stairs lak a queen, an’ she laugh an’ joke ole Marse at de breakfus’ table. But dis nigger kep’ her eyes sot on dem peach-flowers. She knowed dey’d tell what wuz gwine on inside.”

Meantime the bright April day was wearing on to noon. In the summer-house the sunbeams sifted through the honeysuckles and jasmines, and dappled the ground beneath. Vance looked at his watch for the twentieth time. Ten minutes to twelve! He leaned his head on his hand, and listened to the drowsy hum of the bumblebees that were banqueting on the jasmine. Two mocking-birds were building a nest in the vine, and flew back and forth with wisps of grass and dry sticks. He sat so still they did not heed him.

The happy birds gently shook the vine, and

a jasmine flower fell upon Vance's knee. He lifted it to his face. The fragrance of the flower appealed to him in a singular manner. His happiness had been as evanescent as the beauty of the flower. The flutter of a bird's wing had sent the little bloom earthward, and something even less tangible had marred the melody of love that had been singing in his heart.

Perhaps she would not come! He had not thought of that. He tried to think what he would do if she did not come. If they had only quarrelled! He tried to gain hope from proverbs, especially the one about true love's never running smooth. He could not make it apply. Everything had run smoothly, even her coldness. Oh, how he wished this indefinable something that had come between this beautiful girl and himself were only a man! How he would like to fight him! He could not sit still. He clenched his hand and sprang to his feet.

Annie Ellis stood in the door of the summer-house. She smiled pleasantly in response to his greeting, and seated herself in a rustic chair. In her hand was a piece of needlework. This did not imply any discourtesy; it had been agreed between them early in their

acquaintance that she should continue whatever she had in hand during their meetings. He had delighted to watch her hands. So graceful was her sewing that the needle seemed never to be pushed by her dainty fingers, but rather to follow them of its own volition. A bit of fancy-work gives a woman an immense advantage over a man. It aids her in preserving the appearance of composure which neither can feel. To-day the young man viewed the needlework with positive dislike. That, and the girl's deceptive calmness, appeared to imply that everything in their mutual relations was as it should be, and seemed to strengthen the horrid web on whose breaking Vance felt that his happiness depended. After a moment's silence she raised her eyes inquiringly. Vance had remained standing. He had not thought what he was going to say. He never did.

"Miss Ellis, there's something wrong. I don't know what it is. But I must know."

The girl looked up quickly. She had never seen him like this before.

"I did not think a man could be as happy as I have been at Jasmindale. I ought to have known it could not last."

She did not dare to look up now. How glad

she was that she had brought her needle-work! She bent her head above it, and remained silent.

"When Jack and I were lying around the camp-fire at night, and the other men were sleeping, we used to talk to each other of our homes; Jack would tell me of Jasmindale, and I would speak of Oaklands."

He paused a moment, and continued: "I knew that Jack's home was beautiful, but I have found it more beautiful than I had pictured; and it is you who have made it so."

The needle began to lose its way.

"Miss Ellis, Jasmindale has been like a bit of heaven till a week ago. The stars shone fairer, and the flowers were more fragrant, than any I had ever known, and I loved the light and sweetness because they seemed reflected from you. But a week ago something began to come between us—something—I don't know what—as intangible as a shadow. And now I am more unhappy than I can say."

The girl let her embroidery fall, and tried to steady herself, but her heart beat so rapidly she could hardly think. It did not seem possible that she could be mistaken. She wished now that she had spoken to Jack, but her

pride had not let her. Besides, she had feared Jack's raillery.

"Mr. Vance," she began, in a strange little voice,—it did not resemble her usual tone,—
"when you told Jack of Oaklands, did you ever tell him about—"

She stopped suddenly. Of course he had told Jack; it was Jack's voice she had overheard.

"Mr. Vance, who is Katie?" The question leaped from her lips before she thought, and her voice was perilously near to tears.

Vance wondered at the irrelevant question.

"Why—Katie is the name of a cannon in our battery. The boys used to name the guns for their sweethearts. I named my gun Katie because I was ashamed to confess I had no sweetheart. But I did have one even then, for I dreamed of you, Miss Ellis, before I ever met you."

He looked at the girl. He saw it all now.

"Annie!" He knelt at her side and put his arm around her. "And you were jealous of a gun!"

And the mocking-bird in the jasmine-vine above them burst into a carol of love to his mate.

THE POLITICAL SPLIT IN
OAKVILLE

THE UNIVERSITY OF
CHICAGO

THE POLITICAL SPLIT IN OAKVILLE

THERE was great excitement in Oakville. The biennial election for mayor and aldermen of the little West Alabama town was approaching, and for special reasons the coming contest was regarded as particularly important to municipal welfare. Even the women caught fire and talked politics at dinners and balls, and it was rumored that several engagements were on the verge of fracture by reason of a difference in political opinion.

Oakville always cast a solid vote for Democracy at state and presidential elections; but when a mayor and board of aldermen were to be chosen, when there was no Republican opposition to be feared, the loyal Democrats of the town deemed it no treason to the glorious old party to make what is termed politically a split. The candidates for mayor on the present occasion were the incumbent, Colonel Jackson, who had held the office for a series of terms, and Charles Lawton, a

young lawyer, who was very popular in the town; and both were Democrats.

A circumstance that always gave the municipal election at Oakville a peculiar and picturesque interest was the existence of the negro vote. The candidate who could control a majority of this element was always successful, and for eight years Colonel Jackson had carried the negroes, so to speak, in the pocket of his voluminous vest.

Charles Lawton, the Colonel's opponent, being unmarried and young, did not suffer political ambition to interfere with a sweeter hope. Thirty-six hours before election day found Lawton on Judge Lawrence's veranda making love to Miss Alice, the Judge's only daughter; or rather intending to make love as soon as the old gentleman had finished his evening pipe and retired.

"Well, Charlie, who's going to be mayor?" asked the Judge, from his arm-chair.

"Why, I am, Judge."

"That's what a candidate should always tell the public, my boy, but before Alice and me you can lay by your armor. Honestly, what is the latest from the political front?"

"Honestly, Judge, I am gaining votes every day, and I shall poll two-thirds of the white

vote of the town," began Lawton, though well aware that a political discussion would delay the Judge's bedtime three-quarters of an hour.

"Very good; but have you discovered any outrageous abuses to reform? A new candidate should always pose as a reformer."

"Certainly, Judge, the town is full of complaint."

"List the abuses, the grievances; let us see if they are strong enough to win votes," said the Judge, through a cloud of smoke.

"Well, to begin with a small one, there's the hog law. Under Colonel Jackson's régime no hogs are permitted at large. In the old days the poor man's pig waxed fat on the acorns that fell from the water-oaks in the autumn and the pusley that grew in the spring. And now it is rumored that Jackson is going to have a cow law passed."

"You can't down Jackson with the hog law," said the Judge, refilling his pipe.

"Oh, there are many more abuses!" claimed Lawton, warming up.

"Yes, indeed, papa," interpolated Miss Alice. "Charlie, tell papa about the licenses."

"Yes, Judge, there's the question of licenses. It's a fearful abuse. Everything is licensed. You can't sell a pint of chestnuts on the street

without a license. To keep in with the butchers—the leading butcher is a saloon-keeper—Jackson has passed a law that no countryman can bring meat into the city and offer it for sale till ten A. M. without a license. The poor cracker boy who shoots a deer in the hills cannot bring his venison to town and sell it till ten o'clock. It's outrageous. By and by there will be a tax on windows, as in France."

"I admit the grievance," said the Judge, with evident enjoyment; "but you can't down Jackson with licenses."

"All right, I can tell abuses all night."

"Yes, indeed, papa, if you care to listen," said Miss Alice. The clock in the hall had just struck ten.

"I'll mention only the great ones," said Lawton, catching the hint. "The worst of all is, that Jackson has run the town horribly in debt trying to make a city of it. Look at that white elephant, the new city hall. Why, it cost forty thousand dollars, and the town had to issue bonds to pay for it, and Jackson has to levy a tax to pay the interest on those bonds. And what good is the city hall?"

"O Charlie, we have lovely cotillions there!" remonstrated Miss Alice.

"Yes, and strawberry suppers and church fairs!" exclaimed Lawton, with as much scorn as he dared. "But only two obstacles are in my path, Judge," he continued, "the whisky ring and the negro vote, and Jackson carries this whisky ring on his finger and the negro vote in his pocket. If I could but break the whisky ring!" sighed the young man.

"Ah, Charlie, a ring made of whisky is the hardest thing in the world to break," said the old gentleman.

"Well, if I can't break the whisky ring, if I could only divide the negro vote with Jackson, I should be mayor of Oakville."

"Why can't you divide it?"

"I'll tell you why, Judge," said Lawton, drawing up his chair. "Do you know Lucullus Williams, the negro tinner?"

"Yes."

"Well, he holds the mayorship of Oakville in the palm of his hand, and it's a burning shame. Lucullus is the political boss of all the negroes in Oakville. They look up to Lucullus as their chief citizen, and they vote just as he tells them. On election day Lucullus has them all rounded up like a flock of sheep."

"But where does Jackson come in?" asked the Judge, a little perplexed.

"Why, Jackson has bought Lucullus!" said Lawton, in an intense whisper.

"Just think how disgraceful, papa!" exclaimed Miss Alice. "Oh, Charlie, if you could only have bought him first!"

"That's unfortunate, but I hope you may win," said the Judge. "However, don't set your heart on the office, Charlie. Jackson is a most expert politician, and he will be hard to defeat. Don't give any more time to the educated voters, and devote all your attention to the negroes. With a respectable minority of the colored vote your election is assured."

Lawton rose to go. The moon was climbing above the magnolias, and the young man had to admit that the old Judge had sat him out. Hurriedly making an engagement to play tennis at five o'clock next day, he started homeward.

The moonlight had flooded the treetops, and gleamed like silver on the dew-wet leaves. As Lawton walked by one old-fashioned flower-garden after another the night airs wafted to him a succession of perfumes. The balm of roses, magnolias, honeysuckles, myrtles, jasmynes, and mimosas floated by him in bewildering sweetness. But none of them could make

him forget the breath of the lilies that Alice Lawton had worn at her throat.

Yes, Alice was all the world to him. He sighed. How he hated this dirty political fight! He loved the law, his profession, and he almost regretted having entered the contest for the mayorship. He would drop out now but for one thing.

Lawton had loved Alice Lawrence for two years, but he had not yet asked her to marry him. He could not go to the old Judge and demand the hand of his only daughter until he had an assured income. His practice was increasing, but that alone would not enable him to keep a wife; however, with the addition of the mayor's salary it would be ample. If he did not get the office he could not perhaps marry for two years, and two years to a man in love sometimes seems an eternity.

So he determined to fight it out and win the mayor's office, if possible, by any means that were not dishonorable. For Alice's sake he would wade through political mire as deep as the mud of Bearheaven swamp, if it were only mire that would wash off.

Even Lawton's enemies admitted his political gift, but his friends declared he was too direct, too honest, to enter the lists with a

shrewd old schemer like Jackson. Some of his advisers wished Lawton to outbid Jackson for Lucullus Williams's influence, but at this suggestion Lawton's honor revolted. His counsellors laughed, and replied that he had not been in politics long enough.

But every political "boss" has his rival, black as well as white. Lucullus Williams had his.

There was a negro carpenter in Oakville who was longing for Lucullus's political brogans: As yet, however, Jim Lawrence—he was a former slave of the Judge's—had not acquired enough influence with his race to render him an object of bribery to the whisky ring.

Yet Jim was learning. He knew that to keep one's name before the public was the first principle of politics. To do so he had offered his services to Lawton free of charge, and the young lawyer had been glad to accept them.

"I ain't much of a speechifyer, Marse Charlie," said Jim, "but I'm a powerful han' at still-huntin', and I'll jes' cirkilate roun' 'mong de colored folks an' git yer all de votes I kin, for I jes' bodaciously 'spises dat biggerty nigger, Lucullus Williams, wursuren pisen."

So it happened the morning after his conversation with Judge Lawrence that Lawton on his way to his office stopped to see Jim at his shop.

Jim's place of business was on a side street and had been a stable before the war. In front of the wide door on each side, two immense oaks, survivors of the primeval forest, shaded the moss-grown roof in summer and pelted it with acorns in autumn.

The interior of Jim's shop would have delighted the eyes of the old Dutch painters. To his original trade of carpenter Jim had added the avocation of upholsterer and cabinet-maker. Besides containing planed and unplaned wood of all kinds, the room seemed a hospital for decrepit furniture. The cobwebby walls were lined with chairs, sofas, and beds, in various stages of dissolution or convalescence. Jim was repairing a broken-legged chair when Lawton entered.

"Mornin', Marse Charlie! Take dis chair, Marse Charlie; dat un's missin' a leg," said Jim, bustling forward with a newly mended chair on his big black arm, and blowing the dust from it with his great thick lips.

"Never mind, Jim; what's the news?"

"Don't ax me, Marse Charlie."

"Haven't you gained me any more votes?"

"Lawd, Marse Charlie, I'm feared I los' some," said Jim, dolefully, gluing the chair leg. "You know ole Jerusalem?"

"The old lame darky?"

"Yes, that lives next door to me. I worked hard on ole Jerusalem, Marse Charlie, an' he swore to me he's gwine vote for you ef he's livin', kaze he knowed yer gran'father, the old general. Well, las' night, after all my talkin' to Jerusalem, dat biggerty nigger, Lucullus Williams, he tolled Jerusalem into de back door of Biggs's bar-room with a drink o' whisky, an' twelve o'clock las' night Jerusalem come a-staggerin' home bumpin' de fence every step, an' a-hoorawin for Jackson. Hit's mighty desscouragin', Marse Charlie, hit sholy is," said Jim, sorrowfully.

"It is, Jim," agreed Lawton, waxing grave.

"Yes, Marse Charlie, an' I'm 'feared all my votes is gwine de way o' Jerusalem's. De onliest way to keep 'em is to ketch 'em an' pen 'em up like pigs," said Jim, hanging up the chair to dry.

"I suppose Lucullus has command of all the liquor he wants?"

"To be sho'! Ain't you h'yerd what Cunnel Jackson done to Lucullus?"

"No."

"De Cunnel he's done writ a order on all de bar-rooms in de town for to give Lucullus all de whisky he ax for, an' Lucullus is tellin' de niggers de Cunnel wants 'em to drink to his success. De Cunnel says he can't drink wid 'em all hisse'f. But, Marse Charlie, Lucullus ain't no ways 'feared to take de job, dat he ain't! Yes, Marse Charlie, dat's how it is, an' Lucullus is jes' gwine roun' sweatin' whisky."

"Never mind, Jim, we will give 'em a good fight, anyway."

"Dat we will, Marse Charlie. But hit's mighty hard fightin' 'ginst whisky. Hit draws niggers lak merlasses does flies. Howsomever, I'm gwine have one more wrastle wid ole Jerusalem when he gits sober."

"That's the right spirit, Jim. Have you talked to the colored people about the hog law?"

"Yes, but Lawd, Marse Charlie, dey don't care nothin' 'bout no hog law. Dey jes' laughs an' say hit's easier to pick up de white folks' hogs in a pen than gwine roun' loose."

The bright reports brought to Lawton from the white voters did not remove the dejection caused by the machinations of Lucullus. But

he withheld from his Caucasian supporters Jim's depressing tidings.

When the next afternoon arrived Lawton was too low-spirited for tennis. After the first game Alice and he retired to a rustic seat under the myrtles. Never had the girl looked so winsome. Why had she made herself so bewitching just at the hour when fate seemed to shadow his hope of winning her?

"I know why you play so badly," she said; "you are blue about the election."

"You have guessed it."

Then Lawton related to Alice all that Jim had said. When he had finished he could not resist the girl's sympathetic glance. He plunged: "Miss Alice, do you know why I want the mayor's office so badly?"

"No," she answered, softly, toying with her tennis racquet.

"It is nothing to be mayor of Oakville, but with the salary added to my present income I could ask the girl I love to marry me. Alice, do you understand?"

"Yes," still more softly, and with drooping lashes.

"And do you still wish me to get the office?"

The girl blushed, then looking up, waived the question.

"Charlie, I've thought of a plan."

"A plan to do what?" asked Lawton, a little coldly, not pleased by the evasion.

"To make you mayor of Oakville."

"Oh, indeed?"

"Very well, if I'm an idiot I'll keep the plan to myself; and I hope you won't be mayor."

Lawton surrendered.

"'Idiot!' I want the office so badly I'm catching at straws."

"Charlie, I know how you can get three hundred negro votes."

"Great heavens! How?"

"Listen, and I will tell you," said Alice, laying down her racquet with an air of importance.

"Charlie, why do men drink whisky?"

"Because they like it, I suppose."

"Nothing of the kind. They drink whisky because they are naturally lazy. Men would much rather eat than drink, but food has to be prepared, while whisky is always ready, easy to carry, never spoils, and doesn't have to be cooked."

"Oh, I see! You want me to give the negroes a barbecue. It's too late."

"No, not a barbecue; something better. What time do the saloons close?"

"At midnight before election day."

"And no whisky can be sold to-morrow?"

"Not a drop. All saloons are closed by law."

"Then to-night at twelve Lucullus Smith will be powerless."

"What then?" asked Lawton, growing interested.

"Listen, listen," said the girl, excitedly. "Has Jim Lawrence a handful of negroes on whom he can depend?"

"A handful, yes."

"Then at one o'clock to-night let Jim and his aides go around town and knock at all the cabin doors and tell all the negroes that Marse Lawton's got a big supper for them down town at the court-house."

"I see, I see," said Lawton.

"You needn't appear in the matter. Jim can manage the whole affair," continued Alice. "Once you have the negroes in the court-house, keep them there till the polls open. Give them all they can eat and the things that negroes like best."

"I know," said Lawton; "I'll give them sardines, ginger-cake, tinned salmon, and watermelon."

"And cigars," added Alice.

"Certainly; all the two-fors they can smoke."

"Charlie, what is a two-for? A new brand of cigar?"

"No, two for five cents—the cigars that negroes smoke."

"Yes, Charlie, plenty of two-fors, and bread and pickles and cheese and everything. You must work rapidly. Send the omnibus for the negroes."

"I'll charter all the cabs in Oakville. Let me once get three hundred negroes in the courthouse at three o'clock in the morning, and I'll keep them there till the polls open, so help me, *vi et armis*."

It was six o'clock. There was much to do, and time was flying.

Lawton hurried to find his most energetic white supporter, Dick Newton, for he wished to have another man's opinion upon Alice's daring scheme.

Dick Newton wore a wide-brimmed hat, a flannel shirt, stuffed his trousers in his boots, and belonged to the class of men who are utilized in the South as deputy sheriffs, railroad overseers, town marshals—in brief, wherever rough work calls for a steady hand and a cool head, men like Dick Newton are in demand.

Newton was bound to Lawton by the double tie of friendship and self-interest. He wished to be marshal of Oakville, and as the marshal is chosen by the mayor and board of aldermen, he could not get his wish as reform candidate unless Lawton and his ticket were elected.

Newton listened attentively.

"If it works as easy as it sounds, the game is ours. By George, Mr. Lawton, we'll try it!" said Newton, and they started for Jim's shop.

"Lawd, Marse Charlie," said Jim, "why ain't we thought o' dat skene before? Hit's a beautiful skene; cose hit'll work."

"Do you really think so, Jim?"

"To be sho', Marse Charlie. Marse Newton, dar, he knows dat most o' de niggers in Oakville ain't struck a lick o' work in three days, an' cose dey ain't got no money to buy nothin' to eat. Dey's jes' been livin' on whisky, an' mean whisky at dat; an' when hit's out of 'em dey's jes' as holler as a gourd. When dark comes dis night half of 'em won't have nothin' to put inside of 'em but old crusts an tater skins. You ax me will dey go down to de court-house to a good supper! Bless God, Marse Charlie, dem hongry

niggers'll follow me down dar like a drove o' razor-back hogs."

Political trickery was a new business to Lawton. After the plan had been agreed upon he did not know how to begin.

"See here, Mr. Lawton," said Dick, seeing his embarrassment, "this is no work for you. With Jim's help I'll take charge now."

"Yes, Marse Charlie, jes' leave dis nigger business to Marse Newton and me. We gwine trap dem niggers lak patridges."

"A little pen work is all we need from you, Mr. Lawton," said Newton. "Write me a few orders on the groceries and livery stables, and you may go home."

It was now dusk. Conspirators delight in darkness. As night came on with its silence and secrecy, the plot appeared so easy of accomplishment it seemed almost as much of a frolic to Newton and Jim as a poker party or a 'possum supper. But they dissembled their glee.

"Ain't you lost, nigger?" said Lucullus, as he met Jim on the street. "Go home, boy! I done got all yer votes. You gotter learn to play on dis horn 'fore you kin ketch niggers." And Lucullus waved a whisky-bottle in the twilight.

"Dat's so Lucullus," replied Jim; "you got 'em dis time. I'm gwine home an' let de Debbul have his day."

By midnight Newton and Jim had all things ready. There was no red tape necessary to get possession of the court-house. It was used for assemblies of all kinds free of rent. Any one could obtain the key from the sheriff by asking.

The negro hunt began at one o'clock in the morning, after the arrival of the midnight train. When the omnibus and cabs returned from the station to the various stables, Jim Lawrence and his negro confederates were waiting at the doors with orders from Lawton, and in ten minutes the omnibus and fifteen cabs were dashing over the streets of Oakville in all directions.

"Who's dat at my door?" exclaimed old Jerusalem.

"Wake up, wake up, nigger! Is yer gwine miss it all?" said Jim, excitedly.

"What I gwine miss, Jim?"

"Ain't yer h'yerd, man, 'bout de big supper Marse Lawton's givin' de cullud folks down at de court-house? Bless Gawd, de tables is jes' breakin' down'. Dar's sardines an salmon fishes, an' Washington pies, an'

pickles, an' ginger-cake, an' crackers, an' all de seegyars yer kin smoke. Marse Lawton's sont a carriage for yer. De niggers is jes' eatin' away. Jump in dem britches."

"Wait, Jim, till I get a drink o' water, I'm jes' a-burnin' up inside."

"Water!" said Jim, scornfully. Dar's two barls o' ice lemonade waitin' for yer at de court-house. Dar—dat's right—drive on."

From cabin to cabin dashed the cabs and omnibus, then to the court-house, and back again for another load. Six negroes were packed in one carriage and three on the box.

Scenes similar to that at old Jerusalem's cabin were repeated again and again.

Sometimes Jim would exclaim: "Hurry up, nigger, an' jump in dis carriage. De bar-rooms is all shet. You gwine git no more free whisky from Cunnel Jackson till de nex' 'lection. But Marse Lawton's got a supper for yer; I kin smell it clean here. Jump in, nigger, jump in!"

And not a negro hesitated.

Never before had Oakville heard such a popping of whips and rolling of wheels at that hour of the night. People were wakened from their deepest slumbers and went to the windows to look out.

"Alice, my child, what can all this hubbub mean?" called old Judge Lawrence to his daughter across the hall.

"Go back to bed, papa, we shall know in the morning," replied the girl, peeping through the shutters, and clapping her hands for joy.

But the startled citizens of Oakville in general were not so well pleased as Miss Alice. When negro songs and laughter broke upon their ears one and all credited Colonel Jackson and Lucullus with the uproar. Some of the Colonel's stanchest supporters exclaimed: "Really, Jackson's carrying this negro business too far." At three o'clock the banquet-hall was full. No Fourth of July barbecue ever witnessed such a scene of light-hearted revelry. The iced lemonade sizzled down black, whisky-fevered throats, and the sardines, ginger-cake, and Washington pies disappeared like hoarfrost before a noontday sun. Box after box of "two-fors" went up in clouds, and the smoke floating from windows and doors gave the courthouse the look of an immense plantation smokehouse; and jokes were cracked and 'possum stories told till the morning sun came in at the wide windows.

When the feasting was at its height, Jim Lawrence mounted a table, and breaking the chains of his eloquence, made a speech that buried the fame of Lucullus Williams out of sight; and when he finished by proposing "three cheers for our comin' mayor, Mr. Charlie Lawton, whose hospitality we's enjoyin' dis night," the cheers shook the old clock in the courthouse tower.

"Well, Jim, we've got 'em," said Dick Newton, when Jim came out.

"Yes, Marse Newton, an' bless Gawd we gwine keep 'em."

And they did, for when Jim had carried in a fresh supply of comestibles and cigars Newton locked the great door and put the key in his pocket.

The battle was indeed won, for next morning Dick Newton unlocked the door of the banquet-hall, and Jim and his aides marched three hundred negroes across the street to the polls in blocks of six, each with a Lawton ticket in his hand.

The white citizens of Oakville knew not whether to frown or laugh at the novel spectacle. But when they comprehended the boldness of the scheme and the adroitness with which it had been executed, they laughed; and

when they beheld Jim Lawrence's joy and pride shining through his pompous solemnity, and Lucullus's speechless discomfiture, and Colonel Jackson's surprise and dismay, they roared.

When the votes were counted, Lawton's majority was unprecedented.

That evening Lawton went to receive the congratulations of Alice Lawrence.

"Miss Alice, you stand before the mayor of Oakville, and your case will be tried forthwith," said the young man, with mock gravity.

"With what am I charged, your honor?"

"With inciting electoral frauds."

"My sentence?" asked the girl, with a dimple and a blush.

"Matrimony for life."

UNDER THE WHITE ROSE-
TREE

AN IDYL OF THE CIVIL WAR



UNDER THE WHITE ROSE- TREE

AN IDYL OF THE CIVIL WAR

PROFESSOR WINSTON had dwelt the greater part of his forty-five years at Oakville, and the little west Alabama town was very dear to him. He loved the soft blue Southern skies above it, and the widespread water-oaks that shaded its streets. He loved its quaint old gardens, with their spicy musk-roses, fragrant honeysuckle, and the languid tiger-lilies that swayed over their shadow-flecked walks. He loved its mocking-birds, that nested in the fig-trees and myrtles and sang all night. He loved the old town so well that even its faults and blemishes were dear to him. He liked to hear even the grunting of the village hogs that roamed the streets as fancy led them, and the klinkity-klank of the cow-bells at evening was pleasant to his ears.

Consequently, on a bright April morning in

1865, as the little man stood in front of the post-office and listened to the great news of the impending raid, he was not deficient in patriotism, although in the hour of municipal peril the first thought that entered his bachelor breast concerned the safety of his much-beloved watch.

The dear old watch whose faithful heart had throbbed so long against his own—would the Yankees rob him of it? The Professor left the excited throng and started homeward.

Across the street from the Professor's home, in a vine-embowered cottage, had lived for many years Miss Melinda Price. Dwelling full half a mile from the post-office, Miss Melinda frequently deplored her inability to keep as well informed in regard to the doings of the days as her friends in the immediate vicinity of that vortex, where a buggy or a wagon passed every fifteen minutes.

This morning, as usual, Miss Melinda was half an hour behind time. Only a dim echo of the momentous tidings had reached her, and she was standing at her gate in great perturbation as the Professor approached.

"What is this I hear, Professor?" said the little spinster, with a frightened smile. "Have we lost another battle?"

"Yes; worse than that," replied the Professor, so gravely that Miss Melinda's smile vanished, and she caught her breath. She knew the Professor was not an alarmist, and she listened eagerly to his brief statement of facts.

"What shall we do?" she exclaimed in dismay.

"We can do nothing," said her neighbor. "There is some talk of a defense, but it is foolish to attempt it. There are none in the town to make resistance but old men, children, and one-armed and one-legged soldiers."

"I know," said Miss Melinda, "but it is dreadful to wait like sheep in ignorance of what we are to suffer. Perhaps the Raiders will destroy the town."

"They will scarcely do that."

"If not, they will carry away everything of value. My cousin in Virginia wrote me that the Yankees took her carriage-horses, and some stragglers robbed her of all her silver plate, and carried off even her husband's watch."

The Professor's heart sank within him.

"Are you not going to hide your watch?" added Miss Melinda, catching sight of the Professor's watch-chain.

"I was thinking of doing so," said the little man, steadying his voice.

"I certainly should, Professor. Fortunately, I sent my silver forks and spoons to a friend up in the hills as soon as I received my cousin's letter. I kept nothing but my gold thimble that belonged to my grandmother."

"It is difficult to decide upon the method of concealment," said the Professor, taking the watch from his pocket and gazing at it tenderly. "It is the loudest ticker I ever heard," he continued, with pride. "At night it can be heard all over the house."

"Then you must not hide it in the house," said Miss Melinda. "However, it would not be heard after it had run down."

"Run down!" exclaimed the Professor, in a shocked tone. "It has not run down in thirty-five years."

"If I were you, I should bury it." Miss Melinda spoke in a solemn whisper, and looked around as if she feared an eavesdropper.

"'Bury it!'" echoed the Professor, experiencing another shock.

"Yes."

A brief silence ensued, during which the Professor grew reconciled to Miss Melinda's plan of concealment. Then he looked at his

little neighbor, and for the first time since he had heard of the approach of the Raiders his watch left his mind. He noticed that Miss Melinda had blue eyes, and that they were very pretty.

Miss Melinda was looking in the distance. A new thought had also come to her, but it did not concern the Professor's eyes. She had known for years that they were dark gray and very pleasant to look at. Then, either because of her new thought, or because she had become conscious of the Professor's admiring gaze, she blushed, and the pretty pink tint took away fifteen from her forty years.

"Where shall I bury it?" asked the Professor, mentally noting the blush for further meditation.

"Anywhere," replied Miss Melinda, adding in her confusion an embarrassed little dimple to the Professor's list of her attractions.

"Shall I bury it under the white rose-tree near the summer-house?"

"Under the white rose—the very place; I can see it from my window."

Then the little woman summoned courage to make known the thought that had caused her blush.

"Would you—would you mind hiding my

gold thimble with your watch?" she asked, shyly.

"Certainly not; I should like to do so," and a blush of pleasure suffused the Professor's face in turn.

Miss Melinda tripped away to bring the little gold heirloom, and watching her till she had disappeared in the house, the Professor jauntily tapped the heel of his boot with his walking-cane as he used to do when a college boy, and as he had not done for twenty years.

After Miss Melinda had given her thimble to the Professor, and he had gone away with it, she felt very strangely. At first she ascribed her singular emotions to her fright, for she was truly afraid of the Raiders. But then, she asked herself, if it was only fear that she felt, why was she not unhappy? Fear does not usually bring happiness, and Miss Melinda was forced to admit that she was not in the least miserable.

Another queer circumstance: instead of thinking of the approaching enemy, as all Oakville was doing, she found the Professor occupying more and more of her mind. This caused her a little discomfort till she explained it to herself in this way. Her grandmother's thimble was her most highly prized possession,

and now that it had passed temporarily into the Professor's keeping she could not naturally think of one and not think of the other. This explanation afforded her much satisfaction, and having reached it, she gave her whole mind to her thimble.

When the Professor reached his study he closed the door, which was a signal to old Patsy, the cook, and the lot-boy, Jim, that he did not wish to be disturbed. Then he took from his pocket a little case scarcely an inch cube in size and covered with blue satin. It was so dainty that he felt as if he were handling a butterfly. Before going further, he spread his handkerchief over an old, musty Greek volume that lay open upon the table. Very gently he placed the case upon the handkerchief, and pressed a tiny spring. As he did this the cover of the case flew back, disclosing Miss Melinda's thimble.

He took it out with the greatest care, and turned it round and round. It seemed to him the smallest thimble he had ever seen. On one side near the rim was graven a tiny heart with a spray of forget-me-nots lying upon it.

"A lover's gift!" whispered the Professor. "It must be a hundred years old."

He had not believed a thimble could be so

pretty. Then he looked across the street at Miss Melinda's cottage, and it seemed to him as if he were rousing up, like Rip Van Winkle, from a benumbing sleep of twenty years; only, unlike Rip, he was waking up with a sensation of youth and happiness which was at once strange and familiar, and as sweet as the breath of the first hyacinth in the spring.

Soon his reverie was broken by the noise of horses and wagons and loud voices in the street. People were carrying their baled cotton into the hills to conceal it from the Raiders. This reminded the Professor that he also had something to do.

He could not put Miss Melinda's thimble and his watch in the ground with nothing to guard them from the rain and dampness.

He looked about him a few moments in vain. There was nothing the right size. A happy thought came to him. He would use his tobacco-box. It was of tin, and had a top. He wrapped the thimble-case in tissue paper, placed his watch in an envelope, put them both in the box, and tied it up. This was all he could do at present, for he did not dare to bury the box by day, for fear of being seen.

The Professor had faith in the honesty of

old Patsy; but of her grandson, Jim, he sighed to think he was doubtful. Jim's record did not yet include watches, but he held the negro idea that personal property out of place might be regarded as lost; and that a thing lost became the property of the finder was Jim's firm belief.

So it was not till ten o'clock that night that the watch and thimble were interred under the white rose-tree.

Two hours later Oakville was roused from its beauty-sleep by a discharge of musketry and the tramping of many horses in its streets.

The foe had come.

When morning arrived, Oakville found itself a conquered city. However, few if any of its fears were fulfilled. The commander of the Federal cavalry, realizing that municipal authority was necessarily suspended by martial law, stationed sentinels through the town at the houses of leading citizens to protect their property.

One soldier was deemed sufficient to guard the cottages of Miss Melinda and the Professor.

When Corporal Jones arrived, Miss Melinda was much flustered; but as the Corporal was a well-conducted young man, and never entered

the house save at meal-times, her fears soon subsided. The Professor had called after breakfast to give her the particulars of the concealment, and to say that all was, so far, well. Further, he had said he would come every day till the Federals were gone and their treasures exhumed.

"War," said Miss Melinda to her knitting, "is not so dreadful when one has a sympathetic friend to share its hardships."

But the Professor greatly missed his watch. So much had he relied upon it that he had let his clock run down years ago.

Suppose Corporal Jones should ask the time! He made haste to wind the clock.

Corporal Jones, however, was not inquisitive. He passed most of his time sitting on the veranda smoking, or walking in front of the house. The Professor noticed approvingly that the Corporal never smoked at Miss Melinda's cottage. Indeed, so well behaved was the young soldier that the Professor was almost sorry he had concealed his watch, and he nearly decided to dig it up, when he suddenly thought that if he did so he must return to Miss Melinda her thimble, and there would be no excuse for the daily morning calls that he looked forward to with so much pleasure.

Thus the bright April day waned to even, with peace and love following in the wake of war.

Jim's mind alone remained perniciously active.

Had Jim been reared from birth by old Patsy, his morals would have been better. The Professor had bought him by Patsy's entreaty, to keep him from going the old woman knew not where.

"Marse Richard's mighty tuck up wid Miss Melindy," said the boy to Patsy. "He's been to see her dis mornin', an' sence he come back he des looks ober dar all de time."

"Don't you pester 'bout Marse Richard. Ef it hadn't been for Marse Richard you might 'a' been sole off into de black swamp, to shake to death wid de chills."

"Well, I's free now. Marse Linkum's sot me free."

"Free, is yer?" said Patsy, contemptuously, as she wiped a plate. "Free or no, yer got to work for yer livin'. Jes' lif' yerse'f up and fetch me some stove-wood."

The boy went to the woodpile muttering to himself.

Jim was peculiarly gifted. His mental endowment fitted him to become equally eminent

as a detective or a thief. His knowledge was that of an Indian. He noticed everything and forgot nothing. Just now he was in doubt whether to go away with the Raiders, or to remain and taste the sweets of freedom at Oakville. For Jim, with more shrewdness than many of the whites, believed that the raid foreshadowed the end of the war.

Further, Jim had been to Zion, the negro church, a few nights before, and the negro preacher had taken for his theme the spoiling of the Egyptians. The white slaveholders were the Egyptians, and the negroes were the Israelites, whose past labors entitled them to something more than freedom. With this sermon fresh in a mind stimulated by the excitement of the raid, Jim was ripe for treasons, stratagems, and spoils.

From a corner in the woodpile Jim had witnessed Miss Melinda's interview with the Professor the day before. What was it Miss Melinda gave the Professor so carefully? It was small, but it might be very valuable. It might be a diamond! Jim's eyes grew big at the thought. His ideas were misty in regard to precious gems, but he knew they cost a great deal of money.

What was the Professor going to do with

this unknown thing? Here was a mystery going on right before him that he might turn to his advantage, for was not Miss Melinda an Egyptian?

Jim did not think this out in five minutes. He arrived at these conclusions after twenty-four hours of brain-work, and the result was a firm resolve to watch the Professor day and night.

The night after the arrival of the Raiders began very peacefully for the Professor. He retired at ten o'clock. All lovers are not wakeful, and he soon went to sleep. But his slumber was not dreamless; a throng of fancies passed in succession through his brain. He saw Miss Melinda. She was garbed in white and wore a bridal veil. But how strange—instead of orange-flowers her wreath was of blue forget-me-nots! He went forward to lead her to the altar, and she burst into tears and asked him for her thimble. Then all turned dark, and he seemed to hear the ticking of his watch. It grew louder and louder, till the ticking took the form of words: "You—have—not—wound—me—wound—me—wound—me!"

He sprang suddenly from the bed.

"My God! I haven't wound my watch!"

He sat upon the side of the bed in a cold sweat. He always wound his watch at ten o'clock. What time was it now? He struck a match and looked at the clock; ten minutes to eleven. He did not know how long the watch would go without being wound. Perhaps only an hour.

His lonely life had made him morbid. He felt as if the watch were dying, and imagined he could hear the ticks growing more and more feeble, like the passing throbs of a human heart. The thought was anguish; he could not bear it. He must go wind the watch at all risks; but at night in the darkness he might go without being observed.

He dressed hurriedly, opened the door softly, and looked down the veranda.

Corporal Jones was just knocking the ashes from his pipe. Was he going to light up again? No; he put the pipe in his pocket and lay down on his blanket. At the end of five minutes he had not stirred, and the Professor, supposing he was asleep, tipped carefully from his door. When he had turned the angle of the house, the little man breathed a bit easier, and threaded his way briskly through the shrubbery to the white rose-tree.

The Professor was wrong: Corporal Jones

was not asleep. . As soon as the Professor had gone around the corner of the house the soldier rose from his blanket and watched him by the dim light of the stars until he saw him digging beneath the white rose-tree. Before the Professor returned to his room the Corporal lay down again in his blanket.

With a feeling of unutterable relief, the Professor went to bed again.

When he had become still, Jim crept out from the woodpile, and rolled over and over among the chips in silent laughter. By and by, when he had given partial relief to his inward joy in this vivacious manner, he slowly rose to his feet and readjusted his one "gallus" over his shoulder. Then he brushed the chips and pine from his kinky head, and cautiously approached the Professor's back window and peeped through the shutters. The Professor was evidently asleep, for Jim raised his hands and made the patting motion familiar to those who have watched a woman cradle a sleeping child.

The boy then started to the flower-garden. To reach it he must come nearer the front of the house. He knew that the Corporal had spread his blanket on the front veranda, and it were wise to be careful. On occasions like

this Jim rejoiced in his black skin, which made detection difficult.

He crept on all fours till he reached the garden. Then, with a last look at the veranda, he glided through the bushes like a black-snake.

The rose-tree was an easy bourne. Its snowy blossoms wet with dew gleamed in the starlight like tiny elfin lamps, and the grass beneath was white with the shattered petals. As he reached it he bent his black woolly head close to the turf in search of the buried treasure, but he relied more upon the sense of touch than sight. So intent was he upon his quest that he did not hear the jingle of a spur twenty feet away.

His long, monkey-like fingers glided over the grass, seeking a soft spot. When it was found, he scratched up the dirt like a terrier dog hunting a rat; but just as his long fingernails scraped the top of the tobacco-box, and the spoils of Egypt were almost in his grasp, a big, muscular hand gripped him by the nape of the neck.

The Professor slept long and soundly. He usually rose at six o'clock, but it was nearly seven when he was awakened by a loud knocking at his door.

"Who is there?" he exclaimed.

"It's ole Patsy, Marse Richard," replied a voice broken by sobs.

The Professor sprang out of bed and jumped into his trousers.

"Oh, Marse Richard! Marse Richard!"

"What is the matter, Patsy?" he asked, opening the door in his shirt-sleeves.

"Marse Richard, I tried to wait till yer riz, but I couldn't wait no longer."

"Speak, Patsy! in heaven's name, what has happened?"

"Oh, Marse Richard! he's gone, he's gone!"

"Who is gone?"

"Jim, my onliest gran'chile."

The word "gone" is a word of ominous import to all who have hidden treasures. At its first mention the Professor gave a start, but when it was repeated and coupled with Jim's name, a fearful suspicion chilled his blood.

After much questioning he gathered all the facts known to the old woman. They were few. She knew not when Jim had left. She had not seen him since the evening before.

"Perhaps he has only gone down town to

look at the Raiders," said the Professor, as much to still his own misgivings as to cheer old Patsy.

"No, Marse Richard; Jim ain't slept last night. His bed ain't been touched. No, Jim's gone!" wailed the old creature.

The Professor had finished dressing, and his apprehensions had become unbearable. Trying to assume his usual manner, he strolled toward the flower-garden as if merely to take the air. When screened by the shrubbery, he hastened his pace and approached the spot where his every thought centred. At the first glance his fears increased. The ground appeared broken and uneven. In his haste the preceding night, could he have left the place in that untidy state? He knelt beneath the rose-tree with shaking knees.

The box was not there!

The Professor was standing under the yellow jasmines on Miss Melinda's front veranda.

The robbery had been told. Two drops glistened on Miss Melinda's lashes, but they were not tears of regret for the loss of the precious thimble, but of sympathy and sorrow for the Professor.

"And the worst is, I can make no effort for their recovery. In order to do so I must confess to Corporal Jones that we suspected him and his comrades of being thieves and robbers."

"Then the Corporal doesn't know of our loss?" said Miss Melinda, lifting her sympathetic blue eyes to the Professor's gaze.

"I haven't told him."

A silence.

"Ah, Miss Price! prudence whispered me yesterday to exhume the box, and I refrained because—"

Another silence.

"Because?" echoed Miss Melinda, gently.

"Because, if I did so, I must return your thimble, and that would end our secret."

Miss Melinda blushed.

"But there's another, a dearer secret, if I dared tell it to you!" exclaimed the Professor, fired by the blush.

There was a quick step and a jingling of spurs on the pebbled walk, and Corporal Jones stood before them.

He lifted his hat to Miss Melinda and bowed.

“The brigade is leaving, and I come to bid you good-bye.”

He turned to the Professor.

“And to return to you this box that I secured from a thief last night.”

He bowed again and was gone.

WHAT BECAME OF MARY
ELLEN

WHAT BECAME OF MARY ELLEN

WHEN Jim Evans bought the Oakville *Chronicle* and paid five hundred dollars for it, people called it a "fine deal." At first Jim congratulated himself, deeming the phrase a tribute to his shrewdness; but when he came to view his journalistic property it occurred to him that possibly the compliment had been misappropriated.

His misgiving grew when the *Argus*, the rival sheet, came out with the following paragraph:

Old Brown, of the *Chronicle*, has finally sold his moribund paper. It is perhaps unnecessary to state that his victim is a stranger. He hails from Mississippi, and is red-headed. Let us hope that his florid locks may throw at least a hectic glow on the dullness of our expiring contemporary.

"I'm not red-headed; my hair is auburn," said Evans, indignantly. "I'll make the *Chronicle* a big success, if I have to work day and night. Hang the *Argus*!"

“Amen!”

Evans had supposed himself alone in the ramshackle office, and turning abruptly, his glance fell upon a boy of sixteen, who met his eye with a smile, half fearful, half impudent.

To Evans's startled inquiry the boy explained that he was Tom Wilson, the *Chronicle* devil; and upon his insisting that he “went with the paper,” and could set type, Evans reëngaged him, and, with his staff of one, the young editor settled down to work.

The item most lauded by Brown had been the *Chronicle's* “good-will.” Experience proved that this intangible thing represented the right to solicit advertisements, and the doubtful pleasure of entertaining Colonel Badham, a decayed politician, who dropped in daily, with a bottle of cough mixture, to read the exchanges.

“Does he go with the paper, too?” asked Evans of Tom, at the end of a week.

“Who, the Colonel?”

Evans nodded.

“I don't know,” laughed the boy. “He's a chromo—the Colonel. That bottle of cough mixture is only old rye, and he sometimes has the jimjams. They say he drinks to forget a man he once killed. But he's been to the

legislature, and everybody else puts up with him, and I suppose we'll have to. Yes; I reckon the Colonel goes with the paper."

Jim and his bright-eyed staff soon became comrades, for there was but eight years difference in their ages, a space that youth and sympathy find small difficulty in spanning. Otherwise, however, time was an item in the little country office, and it excited the boy's admiration to see his chief setting unwritten editorials to save it. But it was when the clean-limbed, muscular young editor did the giant swing on the horizontal bar in the rear of the office that the lad would have died for him.

However, this bit of hero-worship not being required of him, Tom did something that pleased his chief far better; he introduced Evans to his pretty cousin, Jennie Hamlin, and ere long Jim had another incentive to spur him on in the race for journalistic success.

The *Chronicle* office faced Oakville's principal street. Evans put his case and stool at one window, and Tom Wilson placed his by the other. Editor could look up Mulberry Street, and the staff down. This arrangement saved the expense of a reporter, for

nothing, from a dog-fight to a shooting scrape, could happen in the heart of the town, but the eagle eye of the *Chronicle* was upon it, and the editor or staff swooped down, note-book in hand.

But there were days and weeks when nothing would happen—when not even the dogs would fight—days when the rain fell, and the wind sobbed through the old Southern town, and the ox-wagons creaked dirges, while the wet street, littered with soiled locks of cotton and bedraggled corn husks, presented a vista of desolation.

These were trying times.

“It’s disgusting!” cried Tom one day in despair. “Nobody’s died, nobody’s married, and nobody’s been born in three weeks! Now’s the time for the Colonel to take the jimjams. If the Colonel would only get the monkeys after him and hang himself, just think how we might scoop the *Argus*!”

Next week a circus struck the town—Hindfoot’s Great Show—“nine circuses combined”—and Tom was in ecstasy.

“Now we’ll have plenty of copy,” said the boy, gleefully. “There’s always a scrap in Oakville after the night’s performance. Somebody always gets stabbed or shot, or

something; and then there's the trial. This circus will last us almost till Christmas."

The circus had been billed for weeks. Immense posters flared up and down Mulberry Street, from bill-boards of undressed plank. Countrymen and negroes stared open-mouthed at the mammoth jaws of huge hippopotami swallowing hip-clouted heathen, and elephants brandishing Hindoo babies in their gyrating trunks. But the picture that excited most horror was a lurid representation of the female anaconda, "Mary Ellen." The artist of this poster had made a free copy of the Laocoön in blue, yellow, and green, and the effect was blood-curdling.

"Oh, she's a corker!" said the advance agent, as he posted Mary Ellen's likeness on the board. "She's not so awful big, but she's crushed five men to death, and Hind-foot wouldn't take ten thousand dollars for her."

Tom, who was standing near, heard this thrilling statement, and wrote a paragraph in the *Chronicle* that spread Mary Ellen's fame far and wide. But such is the nature of man, that though people shuddered at the picture and shivered over the paragraph, strange to relate they found the sensation rather pleas-

ant than otherwise, never dreaming that Oakville would ever have more than a spectatorial acquaintance with the fateful Mary Ellen; yet so it was, and this was the manner of it:

It was eleven o'clock; the night performance had ended, and Evans was leaving the tent with Jennie Hamlin on his arm, when a horrible shriek rang from the tent into the flaring torch-illuminated night. Simultaneously came a confused chorus of voices: "Shoot her!" "Shoot her—no, cut her, cut her!" "Too late, she's lettin' go!"—followed by a babel of curses and screams from men and women fleeing in all directions.

Evans drew Jennie to one side to guard her from the crush, and with vague guesses at the cause of the panic they paused for the excitement to subside before resuming their way. As they stood waiting, Tom dashed up.

"It's Mary Ellen, the big snake! She's gotten out and crushed the 'living skeleton,' " cried the boy, in one breath, and he dashed back under the swaying tent, which trembled and shook in the gusty light, suggestive of an antediluvian mammoth in mortal pain.

Jim feared that Jennie would faint, or at least scream as the other women were doing, when she heard Tom's dreadful announce-

ment, but she did neither. She merely clung to his arm and trembled.

That no one knoweth when his hour cometh is true of other things than death. It is equally true of love, and quite as veracious in the matter of the avowal; for what man knoweth when he is going to propose? Evans certainly did not. He had planned it many times, and had even selected the words he intended to say, but at each occasion the word and the moment never seemed to fit, though every day his love kept growing stronger and stronger, and bigger and bigger, till it seemed to him he would have to get a larger body to hold his heart. And now all suddenly as he felt the arm of the little woman he loved quivering in his own, he told his love almost before he was aware.

As for Jennie, she had long known that Evans loved her; her only doubts had been in regard to her own feelings. But when in her fright she clung to his muscular arm, and perceived how cool he was in all the panic, his voice as firm as his flesh, the young editor rose rapidly in her esteem. However, it was not till she saw his coolness transformed to ardor and anxiety as he told her his love and waited her answer, that her tottering doubts

tumbled and she lost her heart to Jim forever.

It was just as they reached Mrs. Hamlin's door that the young man's ear caught Jennie's trembling "yes." And then came the hardest act of his life, for she insisted that he should leave her immediately and go back to Tom to keep him from becoming the prey of "that dreadful snake." He tried to remonstrate, but Jennie closed the door, and with his betrothal kiss warm upon his lips, he hurried away to Tom, loading Mary Ellen with marrow-freezing objurgations at every breath.

When Tom Wilson burst back into the circus tent, the spectators had all fled and Mary Ellen had disappeared under a heap of fallen seats and tent-poles which the frightened people had overturned. Around this chaotic mass of lumber the infuriated Hindfoot was making the air blue with oaths, while a knot of employees nervously stirred the timbers. A glance told that they had no wish to recover the object of their search, and if it were found they would all flee incontinently.

Eager for copy, Tom passed on and entered the circus green-room. It was a poorly lighted place, smelling vilely of kerosene. In the centre of the comfortless place a group of jaded

performers, still in their fleshings and spangles, were gathered about the anaconda's victim.

"He's dead," said the clown, and a tear rolled down his chalk-white face made up in a perpetual smile. Recognizing by Tom's notebook that he was a representative of the press, the grief-stricken man added: "He was my brother, and that needn't have happened. Anacondas eat only once in three months. The snake should have been fed last week at Gainesville. She was hungry; that was all."

When Tom regained the searching party it had left the tent. Some one had discovered the serpent's trail in the mud outside, and the men were trying to track her by the aid of pine torches—a difficult thing to do, for the trail was effaced every few yards by the footprints of men and horses. The reptile had evidently been bewildered, for there were many turns in her course. Finally, however, it took the direction of Mulberry Street and the heart of the town.

"They'll not find her to-night," said Evans, who had joined the searchers.

"No," said the boy; "and they don't want to."

Still Hindfoot urged on the search, and lanterns and torches passed and repassed each

other in ever-widening circles, while the bearers muttered curses under their breath, and wished Mary Ellen in the bottomless pit.

By and by, when even Hindfoot was beginning to despair, some one cried out—no one knew who—that Mary Ellen had been discovered opposite Biggs's bar-room. At this all threw down their torches and rushed tumultuously to the spot.

The report was false. There was no serpent in front of Biggs's establishment, though some of the men about its hospitable door had seen many snakes in their time, and doubtless were destined to see many more. Among them was Colonel Badham. It was probably the Colonel who had given rise to the false rumor, for when the breathless throng arrived at the saloon the Colonel, full of eloquence and "cough mixture," was haranguing a group of jolly bottle-mates on natural history, and making frequent reference to the snakes he had seen "before the war."

"The blamed old fool!" exclaimed the angry and disappointed Hindfoot; "I guess he's seen his share. But if he meets Mary Ellen on his way home to-night he'll never see another in his lifetime, for she's as hungry as a wolf, and I'll bet my biggest elephant

she'll swallow something live before morning."

The impresario of the hippodrome then mounted an empty whisky-barrel, and discourteously interrupting the Colonel, offered in a loud voice a reward of five hundred dollars for the recovery in good condition of his lost attraction. Tidings in regard to the same, he said, could be telegraphed to Meridian, Mississippi.

The people then dispersed, for it was past one o'clock in the morning, and as they scattered to their homes, looking carefully to their feet, they marvelled much by the way what had become of Mary Ellen.

No one claimed the five-hundred-dollar reward. Daylight brought no solution of the mystery of Mary Ellen's whereabouts. Nor were the irate Hindfoot's fears for Colonel Badham fulfilled; for that rubicund gentleman reappeared on time at the *Chronicle* office next day with a replenished bottle of "cough mixture" and the same desire to keep posted in regard to the utterances of the press. Perhaps he was a little redder of countenance, and more wheezy of breath, after last night's bout, but that was all.

The good people of Oakville, as one might

suppose, longed ardently for the recovery of the lost serpent. How could they feel easy when such a ferocious reptile was at large in their midst? Had it been a lion or a tiger that had escaped, they could scarcely have been more anxious. Tigers and lions are addicted to roaring and might perhaps give warning of their approach. But a slimy reptile that crept on its belly without making any noise louder than a hiss—why, it was horrible to contemplate. If it always remained upon the ground one might be on guard against the creature, but anacondas were also arboreal in their habits, and often lassoed, so to speak, their prey from trees. Oakville was full of umbrageous water-oaks; they fairly lined its streets, and were the city's boast. Henceforth the pride of the town would become coignes of terror. Even the cause of religion would suffer, for who would dare to attend Thursday evening prayer meeting not knowing when they might be lifted from their feet into the air, to be crushed and swallowed in the top of the tree by the horrible monster?

Popular fear was not lessened when it became known that Fido, the pet pug of Miss Betsy Mayberry, had never been seen since

the eventful night. Of course Mary Ellen had eaten him. Hindfoot had foretold that something live would be swallowed before day.

Who would be the next? The town was terror-stricken.

Great was the relief given by a paragraph in the *Chronicle*, stating that as anacondas ate but once in three months, Fido's death would secure immunity for that period, and before the time was up the reptile would probably be found.

At this the people quieted down, and some one remarked—not in Miss Mayberry's hearing—that since "something live" had to do the Quintus Curtius act and save the city by leaping into the yawning gulf of Mary Ellen's interior, fate had chosen wisely in offering up Miss Betsy's pudgy pet.

Meantime the *Chronicle* had prospered beyond Evans's dearest hopes, and he asked Jennie Hamlin to set the day, and with a blush she had named the 14th of February.

"Why not the 14th of January?" asked the impatient Jim.

"Because the 14th of February is St. Valentine's day, when the birds mate."

"And the daffodils bloom," added Jim.

"We'll have a daffodil wedding," said the happy fellow.

But it was not to be. Nothing is more capricious than an Alabama winter. Valentine's day arrived, and with it the coldest weather of the year. It snowed in the morning, and in the afternoon it grew colder and colder. The absence of the pretty yellow flowers, however, was a small disappointment to Jim, for no cold could freeze the daffodil gold in his little bride's hair.

Tom had requested the privilege of doing the wedding "copy" for the *Chronicle*, and Jim consented. The two worked all day on the paper till four o'clock. Then Jim struck work and went to buy his license. The wedding would be at eight, and he told Tom he might also quit work, but the boy remained to fill up his galley—a few sticks would do it.

After working a few minutes his fingers became numb. The fire had gotten low, and as he warmed his hands at the stove it occurred to him to go down in the cellar and bring up coal and kindling for the next morning's fire. He lifted the trap door and descended with the coal-bucket. It was almost dark in the cellar, for night was coming on rapidly outside; but he managed to fill his bucket.

When he returned to the cellar for the lightwood he brought a lighted candle, but as he descended the steps a gust of wind extinguished it. With an impatient exclamation he went on, still holding the unlighted candle in his hand.

The kindling was in the farthest part of the cellar next the street. Groping along in the darkness and feeling around with bent body for the lightwood, he suddenly detected a peculiar and unpleasant odor. The next moment his right foot came in contact with an elastic substance that gave against his toe like a half-inflated bicycle tire. He leaned down and touched the object with his hand, and instinctively sprang backward with a thrill of horror that almost caused his heart to stop beating. A dreadful suspicion floated through his brain, and drawing a match from his pocket he lit the candle.

It was the anaconda!

At first the boy was almost paralyzed by fright. He was so terrified he could scarcely stand. But as the reptile did not move he gradually gained command of himself. The great snake was torpid evidently, and quite harmless by reason of the cold.

Tom's first impulse was to kill it, and he

drew his knife and opened it with the intention to bury the long, keen blade in the serpent's head. Then he recollected the five-hundred-dollar reward offered by Hindfoot, and how he might scoop the *Argus* if he secured Mary Ellen alive, and he returned the knife to his pocket.

Looking about him in the cellar, he found a good-sized wooden box into which he cautiously slid the snake. Then he nailed some stout slats across the top, and Mary Ellen was again a prisoner.

How had the snake gotten into the place, he wondered, when his heart began to beat more calmly.

A draught on his head gave him a clue, and following it up, he discovered, by the aid of his candle, an open brick-work ventilator in the side wall next to the street, from which several bricks were missing, leaving an aperture quite large enough for the anaconda's entrance, Fido included.

His curiosity satisfied on this point, it occurred to Tom that, the fire being now extinct in the stove, and the cold rapidly increasing outside, Mary Ellen's sleep would be far sounder in the room above than in the damp cellar, which was comparatively warm. So,

with an effort, he removed the caged serpent to the sanctum and returned for the lightwood. When all was done he donned his overcoat and cap, and resolved to keep his great find a secret.

"Golly! the *Argus* won't be in it when I work this scoop on 'em!" exclaimed Tom, with ungrammatical pride. "And Lord, how tickled Jim'll be! We'll get the five-hundred-dollar reward. Great Scott! I never expected to make such a raise as that in ten minutes without any capital. Jiminy Crickets! but it knocks the socks off them Wall Street fellows."

And overcome by extravagant joy, the boy danced the double shuffle in the middle of the sanctum, then hurried away to dress for the wedding, slamming the door behind him and leaving the lamp still burning, in the oblivion of his glee, and the office door unlocked.

It was a rare occurrence for Colonel Badham to miss a day at the *Chronicle* office, but on Jim Evans's wedding morn the snow and cold kept him at his home in the suburbs.

The day had been very dull. Toward nightfall he could stand it no longer, and with clearing weather, despite the violent wind and

great cold, he set forth to replenish his bottle and learn what had transpired in the political world since the preceding day.

A bottle newly filled at Biggs's, a bright light beaming from the *Chronicle* window, and a table full of exchanges in prospect, combined to make the old politician unusually cheerful as he approached the office, scarce five minutes after Tom's exit. But his good humor changed to irritation on entering the door.

"It's cold," said the Colonel.

He went to the stove.

"Fire out—lamp in full blast—nobody at work! What does it mean?" he added, with increased disgust, by the cold stove whose bituminous coals had all grown gray.

"Ah, I remember; it's Evans's wedding night," with a grunt. "Evans is a fool, and Tom's crazy. Lucky I came, or the house might have burned up."

The Colonel had received an invitation, and had intended to be present, but he had quite forgotten the wedding. He looked at his watch; half-past six. It was too late and too cold to go home now and don a wedding garment. Moreover, the unread newspapers looked very tempting, and as his glance fell

upon Tom's lightwood and coal, he decided to build a fire in the stove and spend a cozy evening.

Any change in the interior of a room attracts the attention of a daily visitor. The Colonel noted the slat-covered box in which Mary Ellen reposed, but gave it little thought. Evans's subscribers in the hills where dwelt the cracker whites often paid their dues in the produce of the country. Potatoes, turnips, fruit, and even game, all contributed from time to time to the *Chronicle's* exchequer. The first time the Colonel had seen this very box it had contained a live opossum, and now he supposed that it held another. Consequently when he stumbled against it while building the fire he pushed the box with his foot behind him into the middle of the room with an impatient, "Blame that 'possum!" and sitting down by the stove, was soon lost to his surroundings in the beloved exchanges.

The old man had laid a noble fire with Jim's fuel, and in a few moments bleakness fled the room. The stove blushed like a rose, causing the old tomato-can of water on its top to sing like a spinster's tea-pot. Oh, but it was cozy! Could the perfume of flowers have been substituted for the indescribable odor of sour

paste, printers' ink, and coal dust, characteristic of the rural sanctum, the air would have been like May.

"This is something like living," thought the Colonel, as he laid down the Atlanta *Constitution* to take a nip from his beloved bottle.

How quiet it was! Not a sound was heard but the scratching of a mouse in a heap of paper in the corner of the room. Even this rustling ceased as the tiny creature left its nest-building and pattered forth to forage for the crumbs fallen from Tom's lunch-basket.

Retreating several times at the rattle of the Colonel's newspaper, it finally reached the centre of the room and the slat-covered box. Sniffing a moment at the bottom, the mouse crept up the side to enter. Instinct is unerring. The little creature had never seen a snake, yet when it peered through the first crack it gave a panic-stricken squeak and dashed away to a hole in the floor.

Meanwhile, with the door and windows closed, the temperature of the office had been raised by the red-hot stove to summer heat. The luxurious warmth had made the Colonel draw back his chair, and had gradually permeated even the chilled and torpid Mary

Ellen's tropical curves, till it needed but the odor of the mouse to waken her. At the little animal's terrified squeak the anaconda blinked her eyes in the growing consciousness of her three months' fast.

Did the unaccustomed warmth bring back happy memories of lush jungles and Afric's sunny fountains, or did her cramped quarters irritate the snake into an effort for freedom? Tom had deemed the box secure, but with one twist of her lithe body, Mary Ellen popped off two slats and slid half her flexible length into the room.

The Colonel heard the noise, but did not turn around to look. He merely laid down the *Constitution* and picked up the *Courier-Journal*. Let the opossum escape if it could; it was nothing to him. If it got away, perhaps Tom would be blamed, and he did not like Tom. So he took another drink and continued to read.

Freed from her prison the reptile paused. She seemed thirsty as well as hungry, for she hesitated between the man and the pail of drinking-water which stood on a splint-bottomed chair by the door. Thirst conquered, and she glided noiselessly to the water-pail and drank half its contents.

Meanwhile the Colonel read on unconscious of his peril. Absorbed in a well-written editorial, he bent the sheet as he reached the middle of the column. The rustle of the paper drew the attention of the reptile, and turning from the water-pail with a greedy glitter in her eyes, she started toward him.

Had the old politician been young and active, his situation would have been perilous; but old, wheezy, and half-intoxicated, his case was well-nigh desperate. The advancing snake was between him and the door; the two rear windows were both closed, and he had no weapon. It appeared as if the anaconda would seize him and crush him in her coils ere he was aware of his danger. But fate seemed resolved that he should not perish by violence nor fill any but a drunkard's grave, for by a strange dispensation of Providence, the appetite for drink that had wrecked his health and ruined his life came to his aid.

It was several minutes since the Colonel had taken a nip, and when the snake had glided within a few feet of him, the old man reached for the bottle. At the motion the snake hissed, and the horrid sound lifted him to his feet shaking like one palsied. He turned.

Was it a real snake, or only a phantom of drink?

A second hiss brought a shriek of terror from the old man, and rushing to the rear of the room, upsetting and happily extinguishing the lamp in his fright, he plunged headlong through the glass window sash out into the snow.

At the moment of the Colonel's precipitate exit there were no eyes to witness the flying leap, for excessive cold had driven the good people of Oakville to their hearthstones; and it was only by chance that his terrified shriek reached the ears of a human being.

Two blocks distant Jim Evans was on his way to his wedding. There had been some delay in obtaining his marriage license. In his bachelor ignorance the young editor had thought it would be as simple a matter as buying a postage-stamp. It was more like filing a bill in chancery.

Finally extricating himself from the snarl of red-tape, he hurried away from the probate office with the indispensable document, to dress. Annoyance pursued him. It had been arranged that Dick Hamlin, Jennie's brother, should come to him at 7:40. At 7:35 it occurred to him that he had forgotten to tell Dick

of his change of quarters. He deserved a kicking for his forgetfulness. He had moved his belongings only a week ago, and his former room was three-quarters of a mile distant, at the other end of the street. If Dick went there for him and was directed to his new abode there would be full ten minutes' delay, perhaps more, and if he were tardy at his wedding he would feel disgraced. He would not keep his bride waiting, for her weight in gold. He must meet Dick half-way.

It was starlight. Through the wide wind-tossed boughs of the trees by the sidewalk the stars flashed fitfully like a swarm of fireflies. Another time he would have blessed their obscure illumination, but to-night, haste-driven, he longed for the more effectual radiance of street lights which Oakville did not boast. And the wind—he had to hold his hat on, while the great bare water-oaks groaned in the fierce blast which snapped their dead twigs and sent them hurtling downward.

Turning a corner he saw his sanctum brilliantly illuminated. It was the Colonel, of course, and he hoped the old man would keep sober enough not to set the place afire. Following this thought came the Colonel's yell.

Delirium tremens and a lighted lamp in an inflammable printing-office!

"Great God!" exclaimed the young man, and ran toward the place at full speed.

If Colonel Badham's exit from the *Chronicle's* back window be likened to the performance of a circus girl through a paper hoop, the latter half of his flying leap resembled the feat known in gymnasiums as the porpoise dive. For a moment he lay stunned upon the snow. Fortunately for his neck a piece of castaway stove-piping and some barrel-staves had broken his fall, though in doing so they had gashed his forehead and torn his clothing. But the wound on his face and the cuts caused by the broken window-glass assisted the icy air in restoring him to consciousness.

However, the low temperature did not drive all the fumes of whisky from his head, and his brain was far from clear when, bareheaded and with snow and blood sticking to his gray hair, he rose to his feet and sped through the night.

Yet of one thing he was sure. It was no hallucination of drink, but a real serpent that he had seen, though how it had gotten into the *Chronicle* office he did not try to fathom.

Then like a flash, as he ran, came the thought that his fearful assailant must be Hindfoot's snake, and that the next person who entered the office unwarned would surely be crushed. No sooner had this idea entered the Colonel's poor drink-fevered brain than he began to fancy that such a catastrophe was already happening. In another twenty yards it seemed to him he could hear the noise of a struggle in the room behind him, and in twenty steps more his head was in such a jumble he was incapable of distinguishing fact from fancy. An impulse, born perhaps of rapid motion, drove him to tell his story and seek help, and in the wake of this impulse followed the thought that the surest and quickest succor against the snake could be found at Biggs's bar-room, which was always full of men.

A moment more and the Colonel passed bareheaded and bleeding into the bright glow that shot forth like a great red tongue from the bar-room door.

Biggs's establishment, a noisy place at all times, and especially noisy at night, was divided into three compartments. The first, a kind of entry lit up by a large red lamp, contained a small tobacco-counter. The bar-

room proper was divided from this vestibule and hidden from the street by a screen, behind which gleamed the Circean smiles of glistening crystal and many-colored liquors, to whose potent spells the rattle of dominoes and the clicking of billiard-balls added an alluring accompaniment. Separated from this glittering shrine of Bacchus by a lattice was a smaller and less brilliantly lit apartment, where the god's dusky devotees befuddled their woolly heads for less money.

The rites were at their noisiest when the Colonel burst in, but in an instant all mirth ceased. Here was something more amusing than billiards or dominoes. Drinkers put down their glasses half consumed, on the bar, players deserted their tables, and all came to the front. Even the negroes, imbibing "tangle-foot" and "red-eye" for five cents a drink, forgot for a moment the color line marked by the second lattice, and crowding forward, pressed upon the heels of the white men.

"Are you sure it's a snake, and not a monkey?" exclaimed one of the latter, when the old man had gasped out his breathless story.

"I say, Colonel, did the snake swallow your hat?" cried another, and these and similar

sallies were greeted with peals of coarse laughter, in which the negroes joined uproariously.

"Hush, boys," said Biggs, gravely.

"Biggs, I tell you it's true," reiterated the Colonel, in agony; "Hindfoot's snake's killing some one at the *Chronicle* office. Hurry, for God's sake!"

The saloon-keeper viewed the speaker with a thrill of pity.

"All right, Colonel, don't you worry. I'll take care of the snake. Come take a drink," said Biggs, coaxingly, adding softly to the by-standers: "It's the best thing for him till the doctor sees him."

The assistant bar-keeper walked to the door and looked up the street.

"See, Colonel, it's all dark at the *Chronicle* office. There's nobody there; Jim Evans gets married to-night. Besides, it's too cold for snakes, anyway. They'd freeze to death in five minutes above ground, this weather."

The old man leaned against the door-jamb, for he began to feel weak. He understood. They thought he had delirium tremens. If he talked till daylight he saw that no one at the bar-room would believe him, and cursing in his heart the wretched appetite for drink

that had made his word lighter than the wind, he shook like one in an ague fit.

"By George, he's got 'em bad!" said a sympathetic by-stander. "Let's take him home."

Biggs nodded indorsement, and two men stepped forward to lay hands on the Colonel, but he eluded them and ran out at the door. As he turned the corner he stumbled and fell, but rising he hurried on. As he ran he wiped the blood from his face and tried to smooth his hair. If he only had his hat, and looked less wild, he thought, some one might give him credence.

He turned in at Brandon's drug-store and tried to tell his story to the young clerk, but the boy fled before him into the back room.

A few blocks farther on he knocked at the door of the Baptist parsonage. The preacher listened with a sorrowful glance.

"Come in, Colonel, and sit down," said the young man, sympathetically. But the Colonel heard him whisper to his wife, "Telephone for Doctor Seyton," and the old man fled the house. He was chilled to the bone, but he did not feel the cold, for his excited fancy pictured the horrible tragedy that he feared was being enacted at the *Chronicle* office.

Every one thought him mad, and he felt as if he soon should be if he did not find some one to credit his words. Would nobody believe him?

Yes, Jim Evans would, he was sure. Jim was always kind, and even if he did not credit his story he would go with him to the place, if only to "relieve the Colonel's fears." It was strange Jim had not entered his mind earlier.

With this happy thought he turned about and made for Evans's room, now not many blocks distant, so rapid had been his speed.

"Yer ain't gwine find him dar, suh," said a passing negro, who heard the Colonel's knocks and cries at Jim's door.

The Colonel was dazed.

"Lawd, boss, don't yer know dis is Marse Evans's weddin' night?" added the negro. "He gwine marry Miss Jinny Hamlin, de belle o' de town."

The Colonel had again forgotten the wedding.

It seems a simple thing to put on a wreath of orange-blossoms and a veil of tulle. That is what a man would suppose—a poor ignorant man! That is what Tom Wilson thought till he saw it done.

Tom had the freedom of the house by right of cousinship and as reporter for the *Chronicle*, and he had come early that he might not miss anything. He watched the white cloud as it descended on Jennie's dimpled face and shoulders and settled like a silver mist over her lissome form, and thought that was the end. It was hardly the beginning.

"A little more to the right, Hattie," said Mrs. Hamlin. "There—that's better."

"No, Aunt Hattie; it's too far," said the bride, twisting her head and gazing in a hand-mirror. "Just see how that stiff bud sticks out; it makes me look like a scarecrow."

"How do you like it this way?" asked Aunt Hattie, moving the wreath again.

Mrs. Hamlin viewed Jennie doubtfully.

"I think it looked better at first."

Then the whole act was repeated.

"By George, Jennie, you look as pretty as a picture, however it's fixed," said Tom, with admiring eyes. "And what will Jim care? He thinks you are perfect anyway."

"That's what he ought to think, Mr. Thomas," said the bride, saucily.

At last the wreath and veil were adjusted to suit all, and Tom walked around his pretty

cousin, who resembled a plump little fairy arrayed in moonlit gossamer.

"You'll never be able to sit down in all that rigging, Jennie."

"I don't intend to; Jennie Hamlin will never occupy another chair. When next she takes a seat she'll be Mrs. James Monroe Evans."

At this remark Mrs. Hamlin began to weep, and Aunt Hattie catching the tearful contagion followed her example.

Tom looked from one to the other in astonishment.

"Aunt Sarah, aren't you willing Jennie should marry Jim?"

"Yes, Tom."

"Then why are you crying?"

"I can't explain it, Tom. If you were a mother, you would understand."

When his aunts had put by their handkerchiefs Tom took out his.

"Now what are you crying for, you young scapegrace?" laughed Aunt Hattie.

"I'm weeping for poor Jim. Nobody's shedding any tears for him."

So they laughed and wept around the bride, for at weddings it is ever a thin and wavering line that divides the smile from the tears, so

attenuated indeed that the heart often mixes them and sends forth one to answer for the other. But there was no more sentimental badinage at Jennie's wedding. In the middle of Tom's gay mimicry a carriage drove rapidly to the gate, and hurried steps were heard in the hall below. A moment later Dick Hamlin appeared at the door with a strange look in his eyes and beckoned to his mother. A brief, whispered colloquy ensued, and Mrs. Hamlin returned to the room looking white and troubled.

"What is it, mother?" said Jennie. "Has Jim come?"

"No, my child; it was only Dick. He had forgotten something," replied Mrs. Hamlin, with apparent composure, but behind Jennie's back she gave Miss Harriet Hamlin a telegraphic look which sent her from the room, and Tom, whose keen eyes intercepted the flash of alarm, followed her.

Mr. Saunders, the Presbyterian minister, who was to officiate, and the last wedding guest had arrived some moments before, and when the carriage dashed up and Dick Hamlin entered the house alone, an expectant flutter was followed by a bewildered silence. There was something in the sound of the

young man's feet that smote expectant gayety as the chill wind of autumn smites and shatters the full-blown rose.

So sudden and eerie was the change from gay to grave throughout the house, it seemed as if the mental affection of fear, like many ills of the body, had also its germ—a germ of swift and subtle contagion, capable of penetrating in a moment even closed doors and solid walls.

“Oh, mother! what is the matter?” exclaimed the bride. “I’m frightened!”

Half-past eight found a conclave of Jennie’s male kindred assembled in a little back room. Dick was telling of his search for the missing bridegroom.

“It was agreed that I should call for Evans at his room, and I went at the appointed hour. He was not there. My first thought was that, as he had not mentioned his change of quarters, he might have supposed I would go to his former room. I drove rapidly to the place. He was not there. It was then nearly eight o’clock, and though it was so late I went back over my course, looking into the hotel and barber-shop on the way. Then I thought, of course, we had missed each other

in some manner, and I came back home as fast as I could."

The young fellow spoke rapidly and was much excited.

"Did you go to the *Chronicle* office?" asked old Jefferson Hamlin, Jennie's eldest uncle.

"No; for the place was deadly dark."

"Did you ask any one if he had seen Evans?"

"It was so bitter cold I met no one. And if I had, Uncle Jeff," added the young man, breathing heavily, "I couldn't have acted the town crier for the man who had promised to marry my sister. If it turns out that Jim Evans has jilted Jennie, I'll shoot him on sight."

"And if you don't, I will," muttered old Jeff Hamlin.

"Who is this man Evans?" asked a newly arrived cousin from Georgia, breaking the ominous hush that followed. "Does any one know anything about the fellow or his family?"

"I know him—I know all about him, and if anybody says he has jilted Jennie, the man lies!" exclaimed Tom Wilson, who had kept silence till now in the presence of his elders, springing forward indignantly. "If Jim Evans doesn't come here to-night, it will be

because—" But the sentence was never finished, for the family council was abruptly dissolved by a violent slamming of the front door which reverberated through the house from cellar to garret, followed immediately by a hoarse voice calling excitedly:

"Jim Evans! Jim Evans! Where is Jim Evans?"

Before the Hamlin men could reach the front hall the house was in confusion. Upon the tense and bodeful calm, broken only by anxious whispers here and there like the ominous breezes which presage the tempest, burst a storm of excitement in which all etiquette, all social reserve, were swept away. Women screamed, and men rushed forward eager to learn the cause of the uproar and to offer assistance if it were needed, for all were convinced by the strange wedding prelude that something dreadful had occurred or was imminent. So hoarse and wild had been the voice, the ears of none had recognized the speaker, and so changed was his appearance, the eyes of the startled wedding guests hardly assured them that it was Colonel Badham who stood before them.

Straightway the glances of all sought old Jeff Hamlin. He was the oldest man present;

moreover, he and Jennie's father had been comrades of Colonel Badham in the Mexican War. It was natural that he should be spokesman.

"Mortimer Badham," said the old soldier, solemnly, "why have you come to Walter Hamlin's widow's house this night in such a plight—this night, of all nights?"

"I want Jim Evans," replied the Colonel, shading his bloodshot eyes with his trembling hand as if the light hurt them. "I don't see him; where is he?"

"What do you want of James Evans, Mort Badham?"

The Colonel hesitated. The night's experience of incredulity had made him wary. He was resolved that he would mention the snake to no one but Jim.

If he did, no one would believe him, and all would deem him crazy and treat him as he had been treated elsewhere.

"I want Jim Evans—I have something to tell him."

The two old men faced each other in the centre of the crowded hall, and the silence was breathless. Tom Wilson stood at his uncle's elbow, and the bride crept half-way down the stairs unnoted.

"Mort Badham, you are drunk," exclaimed Jeff Hamlin, catching a whiff of the Colonel's whisky-laden breath.

"I am not drunk, Jeff Hamlin, and if I am, why can't I see Jim Evans? He was married to-night, and there is his bride. I want Jim Evans. What have you done with him? Where have you hidden him?"

As the Colonel pointed to Jennie, she sank sobbing on the stair in her mother's arms, and a murmur of sympathy rose from the pitying throng.

Among the wedding guests stood Miss Betsy Mayberry. For several moments the old lady had stared through her spectacles with features twitching and quivering with excitement. At the Colonel's question she could contain herself no longer.

"He is murdered! Jim Evans is murdered! Mort Badham has murdered him as he did my brother forty years ago. Don't you see the blood on his hands? Take him before he escapes."

"Betsy Mayberry," said the old man, tremulously, "I killed your brother, but it was in self-defense, as all the town knows."

Jefferson Hamlin laid his hand gently on the old woman's shoulder as if to soothe her.

"Mort Badham, James Evans is not in this house. He was to have married my niece to-night, but he has not come, and we don't know where he is."

Jim Evans not married, and missing! The Colonel felt, in a blind kind of way, a greater need of gaining credence, though his faculties were too confused to grasp the situation thoroughly, and losing all caution and presence of mind he began to rave.

"The snake! The snake! At the *Chronicle* office—help—help—"

At the word "snake," old Jeff motioned to the men to take the Colonel away. All believed him crazy from drink—all but Tom Wilson, across whose mind flashed a sickening thought. In half a minute he had dashed it into words, and all the men present, with Tom at their head, were flying to the *Chronicle* office.

It was the wildest, maddest race that Oakville had ever seen. No one spoke, for no one could spare the breath. Down one street and across another, through the snow and darkness and cutting wind, bareheaded, pell-mell, they flew, with Tom, ever gaining, in front. If anything had happened to Jim through his agency, the boy felt that he could not bear to live. Dear old Jim! And as he

ran, Tom wished, in his anguish, that he had never been born.

The next moment he was at the office, and with the throng at his heels, he burst in.

The room was empty.

With knives and pistols and canes and other chance weapons, a search was instituted. Tom showed the box with the broken slats in which he had caged the anaconda. But a thorough quest in the office and cellar failed to discover any trace of the anaconda or of Jim. The Colonel had been left behind in a state of exhaustion, so they were devoid of any information in regard to the broken window, and could only surmise if the old man, Jim, the reptile, or all three had made their escape through the opening. Inspection beneath found blood stains in the snow, which, with the broken glass and the recollection of the Colonel's appearance, sufficed to clear him of Miss Betsy Mayberry's accusation, if her words had aroused suspicion in the mind of any one.

Nothing further being discovered in the rear of the house, a search was begun, to radiate from the *Chronicle* office and embrace the town, through which the discovery of the anaconda by Tom Wilson and the disap-

pearance of Jim Evans had spread like wild-fire.

Hardly a minute later a cry was raised that a hat had been discovered within fifty yards of the *Chronicle* door, and all rushed to the spot to ascertain if it was the hat of Colonel Badham or of the missing bridegroom. The hat was crushed in and had evidently suffered rough treatment, but Tom Wilson, with a fearful heart, identified it as the property of Jim Evans.

But the uncertainty was nearly ended, for before he had gone another block Tom's young and anxious eyes spied something dark beneath a large water-oak, and the boy sprang forward with a cry and bent over Jim, lying on his face in the snow, unconscious. A large, half-decayed limb of the oak lying near solved the mystery; dislodged by the fierce wind, it had fallen upon his head.

The throng waited breathless while Doctor Seyton examined Evans, and a great cheer went up when the good doctor pronounced Jim alive and his injury but a slight concussion of the brain.

"But there will be no wedding to-night," added the doctor.

So it came about that a month later, on the

14th of March, when all the land was ablaze, there was a daffodil wedding after all, which Colonel Badham attended, in his right mind and clothed in a wedding garment, to greet the daffodil bride.

And Tom scooped the *Argus* and got five hundred dollars reward, for the morning after Jim's accident he found the anaconda under a heap of snow-covered jimson-weed in a corner of the *Chronicle* yard, half frozen. Hind-foot paid promptly on delivery of the snake at New Orleans, and for weeks afterwards Tom had the pleasure of seeing the escape and recapture of Mary Ellen republished in all the exchanges.

FAR FROM THE FRONT

FAR FROM THE FRONT

ANNE LATHAM had not heard from her husband, Benjamin Latham, in three months. In time of war women grow accustomed to long epistolary silences, but never before had Anne been so long without tidings. She was a hopeful woman, and had schooled herself to look on the bright side; nor had she been unrewarded, for Latham had served in Lee's army four long years unharmed by disease or bullet. During the past year, however, anxiety for the absent soldiers was not the only trial that came to rack the hearts of the women of the Confederacy. The wolf, hunger, long kept at bay by good crop years, scratched at the door.

It was not so hard to want themselves, but it was sickening to see their children lack. And it came to pass that many of the wives of the poor non-slave-owning whites who dwelt in the hills sometimes asked themselves if they were not paying too dearly for the possibility of some day owning a negro, and other benefits promised by secession.

Anne Latham, in the hills of West Alabama, had managed fairly well for three years. She had a horse with which to do ploughing, and she had raised corn, peas, and potatoes, which, with the milk of her cow, fed her little family of three; and with her spinning-wheel and loom she spun and wove clothing for herself and children.

For three years she had kept a brave heart, and it was not till the Confederate government pressed her horse into service that she began to despond.

The children wept when they beheld old Susie disappear down the piny hill road, but something besides grief for the loss of the faithful old mare set Anne's heart aching. If the war should last another year, how was she, without Susie, to cultivate the field and make bread for her children?

She wrote the loss to Ben, but added that she had enough to last her through the coming winter, and bade him not to fret. That was in the autumn. Spring came and found her with little to subsist upon but the milk of her cow, and the cow was going dry.

It was on a stormy night in April that Anne's future seemed to her well-nigh as dark as the skies. Everything that she knew was

discouraging, and the unknown might be even worse. For if he was not dead, why had her husband not written?

It was full night when Anne came from milking Susie, the cow, and built the fire to bake a pone of corn-bread for the children.

When all was ready—the little all—she divided the small pitcher of milk between the children, and broke the pone of bread into three pieces, taking the smallest herself.

“Mammie, where’s your cup?” asked the six-year-old Ben.

“I don’t care for milk nowadays, sonnie,” replied Anne.

“You used to drink it, mammie.”

“Yes; when we had a lot o’ milk, somebody had to drink it to keep it from spoiling. But come, eat your supper,” said the mother, willing to change the subject, and forcing a smile to her thin, hunger-stricken face; “it’s time little folks went to bed.”

“I want some more milk, mammie,” said four-year-old Lucy, beating her empty tin cup on the table.

“There isn’t any more. Take some of my bread.”

“No, mammie,” said the boy, “give her my cup. I’ve had enough.”

A lump came in the little fellow's throat, for he knew more of his mother's trouble than she supposed, and throwing his arm about her neck, he kissed her tenderly.

"Mammie, when is pap coming home from the war?"

Anne replied to the child's query with forced cheerfulness, and when the children were tucked away in bed, placing a lightwood knot upon the fading fire, she brought out her knitting. The wind sobbed down the chimney, and the rain rattled upon the cabin roof, for the storm was growing fiercer. Everything was gloomy but the blazing knot, and the old gray cat which sat purring by the fire. Thank God, the Government did not press cats—cats and women were left at home to catch mice, and bake, and plough.

The fire sent lights and shadows dancing about the room, now leaping across the rafters, now lingering on the bed where the children lay peacefully sleeping. Anne stopped knitting and leaned her head upon her thin, worn hand. She was hungry, but her heart was hungriest of all. What was beyond the storm and darkness, far away? Where was her husband to-night? If she could only know he was alive and well she could battle

with want a while longer. Perhaps with the coming grass the cow would still give milk enough for the children. She herself would continue to exist some way. She could boil herbs, or catch fish in the creek. She thought if she could only get a letter from Ben she could live through anything.

The cat stopped purring, and Anne, with her tired head upon her hand, began to nod from very weariness. In a semiconscious state she crooned softly a lullaby that she sung her children to sleep with. Then she fell asleep. Hungry people are prone to dream, and Anne dreamed of far-off Virginia. She was with her husband, and yet she was most unhappy, for she had left her children behind, and she could hear them, far away, crying with hunger and calling for her.

Suddenly she woke and sprang to her feet. What was that? A step on the cabin porch. Whose could it be at this hour? Whoever it was did not knock. Instead, the door was suddenly opened. She shrank back.

"Ben! Ben!" she sobbed, and a tattered, travel-stained, dripping figure in Confederate gray clasped her tightly in his arms.

The next moment she drew her husband to the fire, and as she heaped on the wood her

trembling and tearful laughter was pitiful to witness. She could not control herself.

"Oh, Anne," cried Latham, "how thin and starved you look!" Then he walked to the bed where the children lay.

Leaving the fire she stood beside him.

"Don't wake them," he said; and bending down he kissed them.

"I hadn't heard from you in three months, Ben, and I feared you were dead," said Anne; "and now you are here—oh, Ben, I am so happy!"

"I was sick in the hospital," said the man, with his arm around her waist; "and when I got back to camp, John Holmes had a letter from his wife in which she said you and the children were nigh starvation, and when I heard that word I started for home."

Latham gazed at his wife tenderly.

"And you—oh, Anne!—you are starving!" he exclaimed, for Anne's thin face turned gray, and reeling, she would have fallen had he not caught her in his arms.

"Thank God, there's some bacon left in my knapsack," said Latham, placing his wife in a chair.

In a few minutes the frying-pan was sputtering on the fire, and the frying bacon filled

the cabin with its savory scent, and a hurriedly made hoe-cake lay baking before the hot coals.

"Oh, Ben, how long is your furlough?" asked Anne, suddenly, as she sat by her husband's side with the color coming slowly back to her hollow cheeks. Hunger and sorrow forgotten in the joy of Latham's return, the only mote that could mar her happiness was the thought of a future parting.

"Never mind about the furlough," replied Ben, moving uneasily in his chair. "We won't talk about it to-night. After a man's been fighting four years he has a right to kiss his wife and children without thinking about the war."

"How long is it going to last, Ben?"

Latham had risen to his feet and was walking the cabin floor.

"God knows! But it can't last much longer unless men learn to live without food and clothes. It's got mighty nigh to that pass now. We can't hold out a year. It's two to one, and we ain't had any luck since Stonewall Jackson was killed. The men fight as well as ever, but how they have the heart to keep it up is a wonder, with letters coming from home telling of wives and children in woeful want."

Ben Latham stopped and looked at his wife

with a reddish light shining in his haggard eyes that almost frightened her.

"The men are fighting for their country, Ben," said the wife, encouragingly.

"For their country!" exclaimed Latham. "What is country to a man when wife and children are starving?"

The scant meal was now ready and the two sat down to eat. There was much to be heard and told. In answer to her husband's questions, the wife gave the story of her struggles and makeshifts. When she had finished, Latham inquired how much food there was in the cabin, and Anne replied that there was enough meal for two days, but when it was gone there was no more corn in the barn to be ground, and the potatoes had all rotted weeks ago.

Then the man said the country was full of game. During the four years' strife between North and South there had been little hunting, with the result that the wild creatures, unharmed, had multiplied almost beyond belief. So that Latham told Anne he was sure he could trap enough game to keep the family till garden and field could yield their produce; and furthermore, till the truck grew he could also weave fish-traps of white-oak

splints, and catch fish in Sipsey River. Oh, he could manage, said the husband.

"But won't you have to go back to the army before the crop's made?" said Anne.

The little supper had been eaten and the woman was now clearing the table.

"Anne," said Latham, with a touch of impatience, "I've just come; don't let us talk of my leaving."

"I'm sorry I spoke of it, Ben; but I'm so glad to have you back again, the thought of your leaving keeps rising before me like a ghost," replied the wife, with tears in her sad, weary eyes.

"Well, let ghosts alone to-night. I've seen enough dead men," said Latham, with a mirthless laugh that sounded dry and forced.

Husband and wife continued to talk, but something as intangible as a shadow marred all efforts at cheerfulness. At last Anne, after a silence, exclaimed: "How glad all the neighbors will be to see you, Ben. They'll have a thousand questions to ask. There hasn't been anybody home from the army in six months."

"I don't want to see any of the neighbors," said Latham, almost shortly.

"Oh, Ben!"

Anne looked at her husband in grieved surprise, and the tattered soldier continued, as if by way of necessary explanation: "I haven't time, Anne, for going about saying howd'ye and shaking hands. That's for people with fat barns and smokehouses. I must forage for you and the children. I shall be away most of the daytime hunting and fishing."

Anne was troubled. Something was wrong, and she could not fathom it. A vague apprehension of some unseen evil haunted her. She longed to question her husband in order to relieve her mind of anxiety, but she knew not how to form her questions, even had she not feared to ask them. Ben was keeping something from her, she was sure.

The latter viewed his wife's sorrowful face, and his conscience smote him. He kissed her several times.

"There, Anne; come, cheer up. Neighbors be hanged! I don't want to think of anybody but you and the children to-night."

Anne forced a smile, and Latham lit his pipe, but it did not seem to soothe him. In a few minutes he was again walking the floor. Meantime the storm raged outside.

"Anne, do you have visitors often? Is there much passing on the road?"

The wife replied that few people came to the house, and there were few wayfarers.

"I'm glad of that," said Latham, in a tone of relief, resuming his seat by the fire.

This remark, so unlike the Ben Latham of old, was too much for Anne. Bursting into tears, she threw her arms about her husband's neck.

"Oh, Ben! Ben! what is it? I'm so frightened. You are not as you used to be. Something dreadful has happened or is going to happen. Tell me—tell me what it is?"

"Nothing is going to happen, Anne. What nonsense! You've been so much alone you've grown notiony. What'll happen is that you'll be seeing spirits and ghosts if you don't rid your brain of such fancies," said the man, kissing his wife and laughing.

But the laugh was nervous and hollow, and the next moment he started to his feet.

"What's that, Anne? Don't you hear something?"

"Nothing but the storm," said the woman.

"Yes; there's some one at the gate—it's a man's tread—he's coming to the door. Great God!" exclaimed Latham, excitedly.

Startled by her husband's wild look, a

dreadful thought came to Anne. Had hardship and hunger turned his brain?

"Ben! Ben!" she cried, wringing her hands, "nobody is coming to harm us."

"Anne, I mustn't be seen," said Latham, greatly agitated.

There was a knock at the door.

"Anne, wife," said the man, grasping the woman's arm, "I'm a deserter. When I heard John Holmes's wife's letter, I deserted. I ran off in the night. I couldn't stay when I knew you and the children were starving."

The knock came again.

"If I'm seen, I shall be disgraced, and the punishment for desertion is death," whispered Latham, hoarsely.

Anne Latham looked at her husband. If he had deserted, it was not by reason of cowardice, nor to go over to the enemy, but for love of her and his children. Patriotism is born at the hearthstone, and man fights and dies for it. What is country but an assemblage of homes? There was an enemy far from the front attacking Ben Latham's home—an enemy that only he could battle with, and he had come home tattered and war-worn to fight hand-to-hand with hunger for those he loved.

These or similar thoughts came to Anne Latham, and with them a flood of affection for her husband.

"Hush, Ben," she said, "and open the door. Most likely it is some traveller who has lost his way, and doesn't know you."

The knock rang again, for the third time, and as Ben Latham opened the cabin door a dripping man in a captain's uniform of Confederate gray entered the room.

Anne Latham recognized the officer. It was Ben's captain, and with a cry of alarm she clutched her husband's arm.

"Great Scott! Latham, is it you! I was lost and rode for the first light. By Jove, it's a stormy night—as bad as some we had in Virginia. In heaven's name, man, why are you staring so? What's the matter?"

Ben Latham stood indeed like a man frozen, and gazed at his Captain dazed and speechless.

"Who would have believed you'd have treated your Captain so? And after fighting under him for four years! Man, I'm ashamed of you. Don't forget you're a soldier."

Still Ben Latham was silent, and the Captain looked at him astonished.

"This is your wife, I presume, and these are

your children." The officer went to the bed and surveyed the little sleepers.

As he did so Latham fell into a chair and began to sob as he had not done since he was a child. His wife stood over him filled with bewildered distress. She turned to the Captain.

"Captain," she said, "you have a furlough, and you are going home to your family. Be merciful to a man who couldn't get a furlough and hadn't seen his wife and children in three years."

"Why, I never knew that! If I had known the fact he should have had leave long ago." The Captain looked at Anne thoroughly mystified. "But I can't understand your husband's strange conduct toward me."

"Captain," continued Anne, "my husband may have done wrong, but he couldn't help it. He heard that his wife and children were about to starve, and he hurried home."

"I've hurried, too. It is not more than ten days since Lee's surrender."

"What, sir?" asked the wife, eagerly. "Lee's surrendered?"

"Yes; and the war's over. Hasn't your husband told you?" asked the Captain.

Ben Latham's sobs ceased, and he sat like a man in a dream.

"Mrs. Latham," said the Captain, kindly, "there wasn't a braver man in my company than your husband, but he's worn out, and I fear he's going into a fever. That only can account for his strange behavior to-night."

But Anne was not listening. She was kneeling by her husband.

"Ben, did you hear the Captain? Lee's surrendered, and the war's over. The Captain thinks you must have left for home the same day he did."

The Captain had gone to the door to view the weather. The storm was over.

"Do you understand, Ben? You were never missed from the company, for Lee surrendered a few hours after you left, and—and nobody knows your secret but me."

THE END

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