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PLAYING THE MISCHIEF.

A Novel.

By J. W. DE FOREST,

AUTHOR OF "MISS RAVENEL'S CONVERSION FROM SECESSION TO LOYALTY,"
"EUROPEAN ACQUAINTANCE," &c.



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BY J. W. DE FOREST.


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PLAYING THE MISCHIEF.

CHAPTER I.

CATCHING A BEAU.

JOSEPHINE MURRAY was one of those young women whom every body likes very much on a first acquaintance.

She was handsome enough to make it an agreeable pastime to look at her; and her manners, while proper and lady-like, were exceedingly facile, gracious, and winning, if one might not even say alluring; and, furthermore, she was sufficiently bright, well-read, well-traveled, and fluent in speech to be remarkably entertaining; and, finally, she was gifted with a coquettishness which gave her a prompt hold upon the attention of gentlemen.

Because of these attractions, she made chance acquaintances easily, and pleased them greatly. Never did she journey alone but some agreeable stranger was drawn to pay her some notable *devoir* of courtesy, and to do his boldest and cleverest to engage her in conversation.

Nor did this *impromptu* admirer ever fail to have a delightful trip, to feel that he was a thoroughly appreciated individual, to part from his companion of an hour with regret, and to think of her many times a day for weeks afterward. Nor, indeed, was it uncommon for him to confess and affirm to his bosom friends that, if ever he met *that* lady again, he should certainly marry her.

In fact, Josephine Murray had a wonderful faculty not only for making people like her on short notice, but also for leading them to believe that she reciprocated the yearning. Her passing flirtations had a semblance of being love at first sight, and love, too, of an impulsive, unreflecting, fascinated, life-long nature.

When she conversed there was a mobility of expression in her delicate features, and a quick, nervous swaying and starting in her graceful figure, which made her seem charmingly impressionable. It was not easy for a man to resist the sweet eagerness with which she talked to him, and the air of appreciative, sensitive interest with which she listened to him, and the seeming tenderness with which her liquid black eyes gazed at him.

After an hour or so of exposure to these witcheries he was generally ready to say that he should have to marry her some day; not in the least doubting but that she would give herself to him for the asking, dropping her trustful head upon his bosom in the thankfulest manner.

On the occasion of her present journey, which was a trip by the day-train from New York to Washington, Josephine had embezzled the admiration and attentions of that eminent member of Congress, the Honorable G. W. Hollowbread.

Mr. Hollowbread, we ought to state, was easily caught by womankind, for nature had given him a keen hankering after that surely unparalleled dainty, and he had rather increased than diminished the appetite by long indulgence. He was over fifty years old; in fact, we may as well confess at once that he was fully sixty; yet not a session passed over his comely, iron-gray head without crowning it with some fresh flirtation. In all Congress there was not another elder or middle-aged gentleman who did so much love-making.

It was easy to discover signs of Mr. Hollowbread's sweetness and strength of temperament in his face and person. He was a darkly florid man, with crimson veins in his shapely, solid cheeks; his eyelids drooping straight across the pupils of his black, settled, ardent and, one might say, heated eyes; his princely, aquiline nose somewhat overfull at the end, as if bloated with luxury; his lower lip rather too plump, also, and slightly inclining to be pendulous; his head large enough in the brow, but still larger behind the ears; his grizzled neck extraordinarily thick and massive.

As for his figure, people who could put up with a considerable circumference, and who did not insist upon statuesque length and sinewiness of limb, usually spoke of it as portly, fine, handsome. He certainly held up his face nobly, walked with an old-style stateliness far more impressive than the gait of modern days, and had an air which frequently made strangers turn to gaze at him, querying if he were not one of the great ones of the earth. He looked intelligent likewise, and, in truth, was a man of uncom-

mon natural parts, and would probably have cut a very notable figure in our political world, only that he was grievously hampered by love of pleasure and by laziness.

Being the observing man that he was in regard to womankind, Mr. Hollowbread began to take minute note of Josephine Murray almost as soon as he laid eyes on her. He quickly became conscious of that charm of allurements, that indescribable something approaching to invitation, which exhaled from her manner.

He wanted to fix her attention, to enter into some sort of communication with her, to get near her. And get near her he presently did, quitting the seat which he had at first selected, and moving to another of more blessed proximity.

What manner of woman was she? She looked like a lady of culture and refinement, and yet she looked capable of a railroad flirtation. She gazed about her at people a good deal, and at himself she had glanced three or four times.

Mr. Hollowbread, once a very handsome man, and as yet unable to judge himself elderly, easily drew encouragement from such gossamer circumstances. He began to hope that she was going to Washington to beg for a clerkship, and that he had only to announce himself as a Congressman to be received with favor.

He had just prepared his little introductory speech about the weather, with a subsequent remark concerning the splendor of palace-cars, when two passing gentlemen pounced upon him.

"How are you, Hollowbread?" demanded one of them, in a loud, hard, hammering voice, at the same time slapping his shoulder with a hand like a mallet. "Always among the ladies, eh?" he added, emitting two harsh snorts of a horse-laugh. "I told Beauman we should find you here."

Mr. Hollowbread had started smartly, for the salutation had been rousing vociferous, and the slap rude enough to sting his fat back.

His tone was a little plaintive, and even a little remonstrative, as he answered:

"Oh! is that you, Mr. Drummond?"

Moreover, he put forth two pudgy fingers in a dilatory, cooling way, which was equivalent to saying, "Shake, if you must, and then get along."

Mr. Drummond smiled with insolent glee, took the two doughy digits between two of his own, and immediately dropped them.

He was clearly a man not easy to abash, and prompt at rendering scoff for scorn. He was a bold spirit also in other ways, for his wide-open eyes were already settled upon Josephine Murray's face, and he did not withdraw them until he had put her out of countenance.

As for her, she had looked up quickly at

the mention of his name, as if it were a name of much interest to her. And so it was, for she was journeying to Washington on business which required the good offices of Congressmen, and the member from her district was one Mr. Sykes Drummond.

She did not know him by sight from Adam, and this might be the very man. In one instant she had judged him by his looks, and had decided that he might be endured as an acquaintance if he would serve as an advocate.

He was about thirty years old, broad-shouldered, and otherwise strongly built, with a virile, audacious, trooper-like face, and a devil-may-care, pugnacious bearing. His forehead was large, and over the eyes singularly prominent; his nose was Roman, his chin vigorously defined, and his jaws powerful. His complexion was dark, pallid, and yet seemingly healthy; his black coarse hair was long and abundant. There was an interesting, and one might even say a fascinating, expression of mirthful recklessness about his flexible mouth, which was the handsomest feature of his countenance, and was indeed really handsome. On the whole, and taking into special consideration his appearance of puissant virility, he would be called an extremely good-looking man—at least by those who like the Robert-the-Devil type.

Meantime Mr. Hollowbread had exchanged friendly salutations with Beauman, an olive-complexioned dandy of about Drummond's age, whose beauty and air of repose reminded one of the Apollino, and who looked about as ill-fitted to grind in the mill of American life.

"And so you are going as Minister to Spain?" said the Congressman. "I am heartily glad to hear it. We need a gentleman there, if only for a change. Our last man at Madrid annoyed people by wetting his thumb in his mouth when he dealt cards at whist."

"I don't feel so sure of Spain," smiled Beauman. "I rather think I shall only get a castle there."

"What do the New York Exchange bummers say to your bill for unlocking the currency reserve?" interrupted Drummond.

"I don't know in the least; I have only been to Baltimore," replied Hollowbread, continuing to look quite unhappy at Mr. Drummond's sticking to him.

"I sha'n't support you. It's a popular whim just now, but a year hence it will be considered a blunder. A fellow must keep his feelers out for his—well, his re-election."

And here Drummond haw-hawed loudly, as if there were a delicious humor in this coarse confession of mere egotism.

"If the public dislikes the working of the bill, I shall be ready to move for its repeal," said Mr. Hollowbread, with a brevity and gloom which seemed to discourage continued

discussion of the subject, or further conversation of any nature.

"Just so—haw! haw!" laughed Drummond, superciliously satirical. "It's a good plan to take the advice of the public—haw! haw!—only it's a better plan to foresee it and take it before it comes—haw! haw!"

Mr. Drummond certainly had a very irritating laugh, and we may as well state here that it made him enemies. In a general way people do not like to be overpowered and put down by mere boisterousness of guffawing. I do not think that he habitually meant to hurt the feelings of his fellow-men. He purposed mainly, so far as he had a purpose, to call attention to his own superior wisdom or wit, and moreover his cachinnation resulted partly from mere impulse and superfluous animal force. But all the same, he did frequently irritate people, besides getting the harmful repute of being a bear in manners.

"Is Brother Bradford—Aristides Cato Bradford—aboard?" continued Drummond, seeing that Hollowbread was indisposed to discuss the currency question, and indeed not caring a straw to hear him discuss it.

"I believe he is in the smoking-car," responded Hollowbread, quite lighted up with the hope of getting shut of his guffawing friend. "If you will look about there, I think you will easily find him."

"Come along, Beauman," said Drummond; "good-morning, Hollowbread; luck to you!"

And with a knowing, impudent glance at Josephine Murray—a glance which seemed to say that the next time he met her he should speak to her—he tramped away.

Beauman, who had seemed to be a trifle ashamed of his ursine companion, raised his hat to Mr. Hollowbread, and also departed.

Our mature Congressional beau was now once more at liberty to light up a conversation with his pretty fellow-traveler. But his mind had been considerably perturbed by Drummond's rude assault upon his shoulders, his currency scheme, and his self-respect; and he could not at once get himself into a frame of spirit sufficiently tender and alert for the requirements of even a railway flirtation.

While he tried to collect his wits and sentiments, Josephine was surveying him, cautiously but wistfully. She had been interested in him from the moment she learned that he was a member of Congress. She had glanced at the Honorable Drummond with even greater interest, and she had quite started at hearing the name of the Honorable Bradford. Here were just the principalities and powers whom she would need for allies when she should commence her conjurings in Washington. She was not accustomed to be the first to speak when she made her traveling acquaintanceships. In

general it was only necessary for her to turn her graceful head a few times, and to flash her lustrous eyes hither and thither, in order to see some bewitched male creature flutter toward her, settle within chattering distance, and open his eager bill. But here was a chance to win potent friends which she must not let slip, nor waste through fastidious dalliance. She decided to volunteer a hail to this venerable legislator who was so obviously trying to drift in her direction.

"Are you going through to Washington, sir?" she asked, in a clear soprano voice, as light and fresh and sweet as a bird, and all the nicer for singing from that rosy nest, her pretty mouth.

"I am," smiled and bowed Mr. Hollowbread, quite delighted with the invitation to speak, as such an old beau must be. "Can I be of service to you on the way, or there? It will give me very great pleasure."

"I wished to ask if I should have any difficulty in finding respectable hackmen to take me about the city," said Josephine.

"I will see that you find such a one, if you will allow me," declared Mr. Hollowbread.

"I thank you very much," smiled Josephine, with a little bow and flutter, clearly as grateful as man could desire. "I had been told that the Washington hackmen are so awkward to deal with! Too knowing in the ways of their world. An overmatch for strangers."

"They are rather stupid than knavish," responded our legislator, who did not hesitate to speak demeaningly of them, they not being his constituents. "Many of them are negroes who are unable to read, and don't know one number from another."

"I have often heard of you, Mr. Hollowbread," continued Josephine, slipping away from a subject which was of no consequence to her, and hastening on, as one may say, to business; "I am glad that I have met you, even in this uncereemonious way."

"If I had known what a pleasure awaited me here, I should not have staid so long in the smoking-car," was the surely praiseworthy response of the Congressman. He knew that it was a pretty compliment, for he had previously delivered it with good effect to other chance acquaintances, and had meditated considerably upon the neatness and pith of it. Ah! what advantages these beaus of immemorial experience have over men who have done very little in the way of gallantry!

"You are too good to tell me so," nodded Josephine, flashing her bright young optics at the old gallant, and flashing them willfully, knowingly, and with malice aforethought.

Mr. Hollowbread was encouraged; this handsome creature was really making eyes

at him; he decided that he might safely and wisely move nearer.

"This intolerable rumble of the cars!" he complained. "If you will permit, I will take a seat where we can hear each other more distinctly."

They were in a palace-car, and it was very still indeed, so that there was no difficulty whatever in hearing; but Josephine wanted to make things entirely pleasant for her Congressman, and she sighed out, with an alluring smile, "So dreadfully noisy!"

Thereupon Mr. Hollowbread arose, balanced himself as large men often have to do, journeyed with bulky dignity across the alley, and installed himself within arms-length of his prey. It is amusing to think that this able wire-puller and veteran flirt did not by any means see both sides of his present situation. It did not so much as cross his statesman-like mind that, from this young lady's point of view, he was the mouse, and she the cat. Josephine, on the contrary, who was by nature preternaturally and almost diabolically knowing in the matter of coquetry, guessed accurately that the elderly magnate intended to make some sort of a conquest of her. There was just one item of his behavior which she was not old enough to understand, or even to note. She did not divine why he so promptly let down the window-blind immediately behind his legislative cranium. It was to hide the cloudings of gray which lurked underneath the well-oiled waves of his ebony, or rather plumbago-colored, hair.

"This begins to have the air of a confessional," said Josephine, with a gay little laugh, which had not a particle of protest in it, and which was consequently very inspiring.

"I shall be most happy to confess to you," simpered Hollowbread, with the cheerful air of a man who sees his way clearly, and likes the look of it.

A faint flash came into Josephine's smooth cheek, and the slightest possible spark flashed from her fine eyes. Ordinarily, a young lassie does not know what to do with an "auld man," and feels both disgust and indignation when she finds herself courted by one. But this young lassie was as wise as a serpent, and she stifled her annoyance with admirable promptness.

"Oh, no!" she giggled, perhaps a little nervously. "At all events, I must have the first chance to say what weighs upon my mind."

"It is impossible that it should be any thing bad!"

"No, it is nothing bad."

"And it must be something good."

"But it may be very tiresome to hear."

"I hope and beg that you will put me to the proof."

"I shall. But, perhaps, not to-day. The greatest of all days is to-morrow."

"There is a time for all things, and the best time is right away."

"Sometimes it is the best time for holding one's tongue."

"But life will be a burden to me until I hear this wonderful confession."

"Then you must make sure, if you want to live, to keep up the acquaintance."

"I shall devote my existence to it, if you permit."

"Who wouldn't permit it? Perhaps I came to Washington for that alone."

Now this was rather lively dialogue for Mr. Hollowbread; he was not accustomed to such cantering repartee. He was a slow man in body given to husky breathing, and notably short-winded; and his mind was so far similar, that, while he could make an excellent speech, any thing like debate distressed him. Moreover, although a Washington beau of much practice, he had not been accustomed to meet with the cleverest of women, so that this easy prattler both astonished and bothered him. Meanwhile she liked it; felt not a bit the worse for her spurt of dialogue; was ready to gallop along in that way an hour or two.

But she had thoroughly roused his interest and his strongest curiosity. He wondered with all his wits who she was, and whether she really had a confession of importance to make, and whether she would make it to him. It is astonishing, by-the-way, how rapidly two experienced flirts can become intimate. Mr. Hollowbread had not talked with Josephine five minutes, and yet he felt as if he had been acquainted with her for years, and was resolved not to lose sight of her until he had seen much more of her.

CHAPTER II.

SENDING FOR MORE BEAUS.

YES, notwithstanding the searing of many flirtations, Mr. Hollowbread was much interested in Josephine; and notwithstanding an extensive and painstaking study of woman-kind, he was at least equally puzzled by her.

That she could not be a needy female of plebeian bringing-up, humbly intent on some crumb of a clerkship in the Treasury, he had already perceived. This fact, indeed, he had not been able to settle upon firmly by dint of mere optical study.

True, it was obvious enough that she had good clothes and a stylish air; but then American women of all classes are apt to caparison themselves well, and to possess some refinement of bearing and expression; and even our representative of the people had occasionally been beguiled into temporarily respecting a milliner as if she were the daughter of a social grandee; a sort of

blunder, by-the-way, which mortified him, even when he liked the milliner.

But before Josephine had uttered five sentences he had taken note of her cultivated voice, and had set her down for a lady. There was no mistaking that neat, distinct, musical, delightful enunciation, without a stammer of awkwardness or a mince of affectation. It was as different, he thought, from the whining, drawling and mumbling of the lowly bred as is the step of a gentleman from the shuffle of a clod-hopper.

Nevertheless, he had observed (with satisfaction, we may add) that she was an audacious flirt. He could not quite understand how she could belong on the select heights of society and yet coquet with him so promptly and forwardly as she had done. It occurred to him that she might be making game of him; and this thought led him to glance at her once suspiciously and almost sternly.

He knew that he was elderly, and that young people often scoff at old beaus; and consequently he felt a little—just a little—shy of being drawn into positions which might subject him to rebuffs; for rebuffs he had sometimes encountered, even in office-worshiping Washington. Once—and his honorable blood boiled as he remembered it—a mere Treasury girl had slapped his face for—for just nothing at all, as he put it to himself.

But on second thoughts it did not seem possible that this gracious and patrician creature would beguile a mature stranger into conversation with the vulgar intent of giving him a humiliation. She must have had some serious purpose in volunteering speech, in alluring him onward with that intimate tone of gayety, and in hinting at a confidence, so that he felt encouraged to continue the dialogue and to give it a cant toward love-making.

On the whole, he felt safer in adventuring with ladies than with women of low degree. The former were clever enough to divine him without blunt explanations, and they would know how to check him without punching his head.

"Of course," he said to himself—"of course she wants something, and I shall have to get it for her. I wonder if it will cost me much trouble?" he grumblingly added, for he was an indolent old public functionary, and hated to pay for even his coquetties in hard work.

"I am most anxious, perhaps I may venture to say impetuously anxious, to know what your confession can be about," he continued, aloud, looking at Josephine with a sort of trained and veteran tenderness, such as sexagenarian eyes are capable of.

"And I want very much to have you want to know it," she laughed, prettily. "When I think that your curiosity is really intolerable, then perhaps I will tell you something."

"There is no use in rubbing a match which

is already lighted," he said. "You are more likely to put it out than to make it burn better."

Josephine knew a clever speech when she heard it, and she admired clever speeches very much. She was so pleased with Hollowbread's simile of the lighted match, that she felt tempted to reward him for it by telling him her secret at once. But on second thoughts it seemed wisest not to confide such a weighty matter to him until she knew him better and could entirely trust his good-will.

"That is very well," she nodded with her intelligent little head in an approving manner. "That is just as nicely said as can be. But you must keep alight a few days longer. When we meet again—when society has introduced us ceremoniously—then I will see."

"But how am I to look you up and plead for this introduction unless I know your name?"

"My name is—do you think I am going to say Norval?—no, it is Murray."

Mr. Hollowbread bowed reverentially, but he looked a little blank. Of the hundred thousand souls of Washington, he, of course, knew only a few hundred, and he could not, at the moment, remember that any one of them was a Murray.

"I suppose that you political people are rarely acquainted with clergymen."

"We are most anxious to be acquainted with them. Slander asserts that we need their intimacy."

"I am a niece of the Reverend John Murray, of St. Albans."

Mr. Hollowbread bowed again; here was solid social footing at last; here was unclouded respectability.

"I shall hereafter hear him preach every Sunday," he said, with decorous gayety.

"I wouldn't, if I were you. He is a good and nice man, but he isn't at his best in preaching."

"I shall at least have the pleasure of looking at his family pew," added Mr. Hollowbread, smiling pointedly at the young lady who would be one of the occupants of that inclosure.

"The family pew shall show what gratitude pews can feel."

Mr. Hollowbread, despite of all his seasoning experiences with womanhood, began to be afraid of this young creature. She was so self-possessed, so prompt in reply, and, as it seemed to him, so clever, that she was downright alarming. She had as yet said nothing disagreeable; but suppose she should try her adroit wits at that business? It was clear enough to him that if she chose to be satirical she could take the skin off. Nevertheless, her manner was so lady-like, and her smile was so encouraging, that he ventured one more advance:

"I don't see how looking at the rector's pew will enable me to call at the rector's house."

"Nor I," she laughed, and continued to watch him roguishly; but with a roguishness which was very enticing.

"I shall have to discover some friend who knows the family, and who will do me the great favor of presenting me."

"I hope you will not find it difficult," responded the audacious Josephine.

"No obstacles shall balk me," affirmed Mr. Hollowbread, absolutely coloring—the delighted old lady-killer—with pride and pleasure.

After that there was much further talk, all of an agreeable, amicable nature, and some of it quite flattering to Hollowbread. It was a long time since he had had such an exciting, fascinating adventure with such a young and pretty and bright and aristocratic woman. To be sure, he did not yet know at all what he was to do with her, nor quite what he wanted to do. Youthful as she was, she could hardly think of being his wife; and, on his part, he had not the least notion of getting married. In fact, he hardly looked into the future at all; he was simply basking in the coquettish present. It was delicious to be saying nice things to a lovely lady of not more than twenty-two, who did not resent or repel or evade his elderly courtship a bit, and who, on the contrary, seemed to relish it not a little.

But, in being thus gracious, Josephine had other objects in view than merely securing the present company and future acquaintance of Hollowbread. After a time she began to talk of Mr. Drummond, and of Mr. Beauman, and even of the as yet unseen Mr. Bradford.

"Was Mr. Beauman a member of Congress?" she inquired.

No; Mr. Beauman was not a member, he stated; Mr. Beauman was a gentleman in search of diplomatic duty; he was likely to go abroad before long.

"Mr. Drummond is a member," she continued; "and, by-the-way, he must be from my district. I think I have heard that our representative is a Mr. Sykes Drummond."

"Ah, indeed!" carelessly responded Hollowbread, who was not anxious to be sent after Drummond. "Probably, then, this is the man—the rather loud-talking person who spoke to me some time ago—a little rough in his manners, you may have noticed."

Josephine perceived that her companion did not like Drummond, and she turned aside from the subject for a little.

"I am not acquainted with him," she said. The only Congressman whom I know is Mr. Bradford. He is an old acquaintance and friend. I should really like to see him."

This hint, although a disagreeable one to

Hollowbread, was so plain that he could not evade it.

"If you will excuse me a moment, I will go and search for Mr. Bradford," he volunteered, if it could be called volunteering when he was thus crowded up to the business.

"Oh, I am so sorry to trouble you!" she apologized; but as she flashed her eyes upon him, both flatteringly and imploringly, the poor man could do nothing but go.

Had he looked behind him and seen the smile with which she contemplated his expansive back, he would have been indignant; and had she followed him and discovered the trick which he played upon her, she also might have lost her temper, sweet as it was. Mr. Hollowbread, steadying himself by the seats, marched with ponderous procrastination down the alley, set his beaver on firmly before opening the door, got himself over the connecting gangway as carefully as if he were an elephant, and, continuing to journey in the leisurely fashion of a procession or a caravan, at last arrived in the presence of Messrs. Drummond, Bradford, and Beauman.

"How do do, Bradford?" he sighed out in a husky way, and sat down to take his ease.

"Ah! Mr. Chairman of Finance!" replied Bradford; "glad to see you here. We have business with you."

Bradford, by-the-way, was a man of about twenty-eight, well built, and above the average height, with regular and slightly florid features, straight hair of a light chestnut color, contemplative and poetical hazel eyes, and a strangely varying expression of face, sometimes absolutely feminine in its sweetness, sometimes resolute, imperious, and almost combative. It seemed as if he must be in temper and character a mixture, or, perhaps, one might say, an alternation of man and woman.

"Oh, bother business!" groaned Mr. Hollowbread, as if he had nothing on his mind, and wished for nothing there.

"Bradford and I are a unit," said Drummond. "We both think the same small-beer of your bill for issuing more counterfeit money—haw, haw!" he added, with one of his insolent bursts of merriment. "There is too much water in our financial whisky already. Every drop that you add only spoils the punch. We shall vote against you."

"I am sorry for it, gentlemen," sighed Hollowbread, who rather hated the subject, even when people agreed with him on it. Small-talk was his forte, and he ought to have been on the House Gossiping Committee, if there is such a thing. "I am exceedingly sorry for it, on your account. You will get yourselves at loggerheads with the American people."

"If the American people wants more debased money, it is an ass," loudly affirmed

Drummond, with another of his insolent horse-laughs, scattering chopped feed and bran, as it were, in the face and eyes of his senior.

Mr. Hollowbread simply yawned and breathed hard, as if he were utterly weary of the topic. He hated Drummond, and considered him an insolent, noisy brute, and never talked to him when he could help it.

"Of course we understand that increasing the volume of irredeemable currency doesn't increase the amount of money in the country," put in Bradford. "You diminish the purchasing power of the paper dollars just in proportion as you add to their number."

"I know that," rather sulkily conceded Hollowbread. "I suppose that only our carpet-baggers and wild-cat members, and self-made gentry, are ignorant of that. But my policy is not one of permanent inflation. It is an alternation of judicious inflation and judicious contraction. For instance, I would make money abundant, to move the crops, and then draw it in again after they have got East."

"In other words, when the Western farmers are selling their corn you would debase the currency, so as to let New York pay them a few cents less on the bushel. But when those same farmers come to pay for their winter and spring goods, you would tighten the money market, so as to fleece them a little on every axe and shovel. Up to a certain point the plan works well for the middlemen and the speculators, and the manufacturers and the importers; but how does it work for the farmers? If they knew just what you are trying to do, they would curse the day when you were born."

"The great West is all for an issue of the greenback reserve," seemed to Mr. Hollowbread a sufficing answer. "I agree with it. The reserve should be issuable. We must have an elastic end to our currency."

"A coin currency, with one end of the rope in our gold-mines and the other in the markets of Europe, is the only elastic one possible."

"We can make one out of paper."

"Let me give you a plan," said Bradford. "Enter into a monetary convention with Austria. Agree to take her shin-plasters if she will take ours. Then when we run short of paper dollars, we can call in a few hundred millions of paper swanzigers, and *vice versa*. There would be a sort of elasticity in that, especially if each Government printed and issued vigorously, to get ahead of the other, or to move the crops."

"Haw! haw!" roared Drummond, who was quite able to enjoy another man's cleverness when it heaped scorn upon still another man.

"Of course that is pushing the idea to an absurdity," returned Hollowbread, addressing himself to Bradford, and turning his Aja-

cean shield of a back upon Drummond. "I understand as well as any man the folly of the phrase 'cheap money.'"

"Then why not explain the folly of it to your fellow-inflationists?" demanded Bradford. "There is your Sea Island friend, Chevalier, elocutionizing away for cheap money, and swearing that the South must have it or collapse. Has he forgotten the time when he had cheap money, and when it took a bale of it to buy a bale of cotton?"

"Oh, Chevalier explains that what he wants is cheap interest," grinned Hollowbread, the false-hearted trimmer, who had pretended to support Chevalier in debate.

"Then let him demand specie payments," exclaimed Bradford. "A debased currency always raises the rate of interest. If you dilute a man's capital down to half its value, and pay him his interest in diluted money worth fifty cents on the dollar, of course he must double his interest to keep his income at the old level, and he will get as much more as possible to recover the loss on his principal."

"There is no use in arguing with these dunces, Mr. Bradford," sighed Hollowbread. "They are carried away by the phrase 'cheap money,' and can't be made to see the nonsense of it. They will have it, this bogus money. And I bow. I may not agree with the sovereign people's opinion, but I feel bound to bow to it."

"And I don't. We are not representatives of the people in the sense of representing its ignorance."

"We are not representatives of the people at all," laughed Drummond. "We are representatives of the wire-pullers and log-rollers who run the primary meetings."

"Gentlemen, I don't know that I care to argue so many huge questions as you raise," smiled Mr. Hollowbread, with the air of a man who knows how wise he is in evading the trouble of showing useless wisdom. "What I am positive about," he added, counterfeiting a yawn, "is that the palace-car is a better one to snooze in than this. I shall return to my bower."

Thereupon, without saying a word to Bradford or Drummond concerning Josephine Murray's desire to see them, he blandly made his way back to her. Her countenance fell a little when he re-appeared unattended, but she was intelligent enough not to express her disappointment in words.

"Those fellows have really been very ingenious in hiding themselves," he sighed, puffily, as if he had been hunting them at full speed. "One would think that they had jumped off the cars."

"Do Congressmen often do that?" asked Josephine.

"Very frequently—when they are disappointed in love," smiled Mr. Hollowbread. "Who knows how I shall end?"

CHAPTER III.

COMING TO BUSINESS.

JOSEPHINE was disappointed about missing Bradford and Drummond; she did not believe that Mr. Hollowbread had searched for them as vigorously as he ought to have done; but being that sort of lady who, missing one man, will catch at the next, she good-naturedly resumed her semi-flirtation.

The dialogue went on until the old public functionary got hoarse and tired, and consequently became a little less ardent. So he produced an illustrated weekly, and let Josephine amuse herself with that while he chewed some troches.

But meantime he gazed at her without winking, studying the many delicate particulars of her beauty, the finish of her Grecian features, the faint, soft lamask tint in her brunette cheek, the liquid splendor of her dark eyes, and the trimness of her lithe figure.

The freshness of youth is certainly a wonderful enchantment; probably we are only fully conscious of it after we ourselves have lost it. It is likely enough that Josephine had never before been so gloated over as she was while perusing that periodical. She was aware of the gloating, too, and showed herself suitably grateful for it, looking up occasionally with a friendly glimpse of a smile, or uttering some companionable remark concerning the small events of the journey. That she should think to do this proved great social ability, for she was reading a number of one of Charles Roade's serials, and the love matters therein interested her deeply. By the time that she had finished her luncheon of light literature it was dark, and raining torrents.

"Are we near Washington?" she asked.

"I am sorry to say that we are entering the outskirts," replied Hollowbread. "We are near the end of what has been to me a most delightful journey."

She smiled and nodded, as she had smiled and nodded to all his previous fine speeches. But then there came over her a spasm of that pathetic lonesomeness which women often feel when they are among strangers, and homeless.

"I wish I were there!" she sighed. "I hate these dreary drives about strange cities."

Mr. Hollowbread suggested (hoping the while to the contrary) that her uncle would be at the station.

"No," said Josephine. "I started unexpectedly to myself, and I forgot to telegraph. They look for me this week, but not to-day."

The truth is that she had shopped generously in New York by way of preparing for her campaign in Congress, and, coming un-awares upon the bottom of her purse, she

had been forced to set out at once for Washington, or go hungry.

"I trust that you will permit me to see you safe to your uncle's house," begged Mr. Hollowbread, thinking what nice things he would dare to murmur in the enchanted solitude of a hack.

Arranging her draperies, and putting on otherwise a gracious pretense of not hearing, Josephine made no reply.

Her head was full of a plot for catching her old friend Bradford in the station, or, at least, for stumbling upon an accidental acquaintance with Mr. Drummond, and so getting herself escorted home by one of those young honorables. If she could speak with either one of them for only a single instant, she would know how to lasso him and take him along with her.

Presently the train halted, and Mr. Hollowbread cumbrously helped Josephine out of the car, or, rather, he considerably impeded her attempt to make a hasty escape from it. In her eagerness she fell into his arms, and almost capsize him; but hurry as she might she could not intercept Messrs. Drummond and Bradford. She could only catch sight of them as they sped away, sachel in hand.

It was clear enough that they had not jumped off the cars twenty miles back; and for the moment she was somewhat disposed to pick a bone with the gallant old gentleman who held her arm; but she did not show her miff. In the first place, it would not have been worth while; in the second place, it would have been out of character. In dealing with men, at least, Josephine was amazingly good-tempered, and under no circumstances did she ever quarrel with a bean, unless as a means for getting a preferable one.

Thus Mr. Hollowbread had his sweet will, and was able to escort her to her home, no man putting asunder. He would have been glad to get a vehicle suitable to the happiness and honor which had befallen him. But this proved impossible, for the tremendous rain had driven nearly all the passengers to take wheels, and there was a scarcity of hacks. The only disengaged charioteer whom he lighted upon was a ragged, giggling, skipping young negro, as full of grins, jumps, and whistles as if he were a mixture of monkey, parrot, and grasshopper.

"Hack, sah?" yelled this disquieting mongrel, capering up to our statesman with an apparent intention of leaping upon his head and standing there on tiptoe, with one foot in the air.

"Yes," responded Mr. Hollowbread, with all possible grimness, desiring to impress the nondescript with a sense of the gravity and responsibility of his business. "Do you know where 200 Izzard Street is? Be sure you tell the truth, now!"

"Sho—yes, sah; knows it puffy, sah.

B'longs up that way myself, sah," chirped this colored grasshopper, delivering himself with a capriole, a grimace, and a snigger, which showed persistent light-mindedness, and lying, we will add, like the great adversary of mankind.

"Do you know me?" insisted Mr. Hollowbread, intending to terrify the jackanapes into sobriety of mind by Congressional grandeur.

"Sho—yes, sah; knows you ezzactly, sah. Seen you up to the Capitol, sah," asserted coachee, balancing from one foot to the other like a dancing bear. "You's one of the membahs, sah—wah! wah! wah!" he laughed, or, rather, te-he'd, as though there was no standing the joke, whatever it was.

"I've seen you before," continued Mr. Hollowbread, staring at the youngster with an air of having seen him in jail. "Who are you?"

"I'm Jehu—Jehu Beaumont, of Souf Carliny," was the answer, supported by unrestrained merriment.

"Oh, Jehu!" repeated Hollowbread, who had no more met the creature before than he wanted to meet him again. "Well, Jehu, a fellow with such a name as that ought to get us to 200 Izzard Street in no time. There, take these checks and put the baggage on, and cover it up well, and then call me in the ladies' room."

Five minutes later the two travelers were in their hack, with Jehu Beaumont whooping on the box, and Josephine's Saratoga trunks towering behind him, each one as big as Mr. Hollowbread.

"What fun!" said Josephine, drumming her wet bootees on the straw in the bottom of the conveyance. "Well, it will soon be over, and that's a comfort."

"Good heavens! I forgot to ask him if he could read!" exclaimed our thoughtful Congressman. "Jehu, you rascal!" he shouted, already in a state of wrath and recrimination, so sure was he of being miscarried.

No response coming back, he stuck his head out of the window, getting it soaked to the scalp immediately, and demanded:

"Jehu, did you ever go to a Bureau school?"

Incomprehensible yelps and guffaws responded, and Mr. Hollowbread pulled in and wiped his disheveled top-knot, hoping for the best.

Josephine, not knowing of her escort's dripping scalp, and probably not fit to care much about it, uttered one of those pretty giggles of amusement which we like to hear from women, especially when we ourselves are comfortably circumstanced. Then, with another whoop from Jehu, a dull and damp cracking of the whip, and a scrabbling of horseshoes over the deluged paving-stones, the hack rumbled forward through the chaotic darkness and the tempestuous rain.

Mr. Hollowbread drew his handkerchief, mopped up as well as he could his trickling locks, wiped out the shuddering nape of his neck, and enjoyed the drive in silence. The conditions of the moment were hard upon his spirits, and almost too much for his affectionate temperament. He felt sure that he should catch a cold in his head, and he thought it likely that he would have a week of lumbago.

But presently he remembered that here was a precious opportunity slipping by; and vanity, combined with sterling old habits of courting, enabled him to rouse himself to his duty. But what should he say?

An elderly gentleman's mind does not work to advantage when his cravat and neckband are dripping wet; and Mr. Hollowbread could not for the moment hit upon any remark more pungently emotional than the following:

"Would not this be a proper time, Miss Murray, to make that little confession?" he murmured, smiling from pure habit in the darkness, although his smile could not be seen.

"Some other day I will tell you whether it was a proper time or not," laughed Josephine.

"That is very cruel!" sighed Hollowbread, meanwhile combing his hair into shape with his fingers, and rubbing his back against the knobby padding of the carriage to dry up a drop which was stealing down his spine.

Josephine thought a sober second thought, and decided that she might as well commence business. Here was an experienced Congressman, who was clearly bowitched with her, and who, therefore, would probably give her the best advice that he could concerning her project. Why should she lose an opportunity of securing an adequate opinion as to her chances, and perhaps also a promise of help?

It might not be dignified to accord a confidence to a stranger; but had this elder of the people himself been perfectly dignified? Had he not made eyes at her, and paid her compliments only proper in a young beau, and even tried to touch her hand in the darkness?

She drew away from him the least trifle, but she began to tell him what he desired.

"I have the greatest mind to confess a little bit," she said, cooing an encouraging laugh.

"Only half a word would be an immense favor," answered our coquettish old sage, edging an inch or two nearer to her.

"The Government—owes me a great deal of money," faltered Josephine, her heart the while beating tremendously.

Mr. Hollowbread was not pleased with the information. We may almost go so far as to say that he was scared and disgusted by it. So she was a claimant—wanted to screw a

lot of money out of the Treasury—wanted him to help her do it! He never had done that sort of thing—much; and he did not want to do any more of it on any terms whatever; and his first sentiment was one of vexation, recoil, and aversion.

"Ah! a great deal!" he repeated, mechanically, and with a vague feeling that women always cost more than they come to.

"Yes," gasped Josephine, terribly frightened by her own audacity, and afraid of receiving a discouraging answer. "Twenty thousand dollars."

Mr. Hollowbread drew a deep breath of relief. He was glad to hear that it was not a million or two. Then he reflected that this claim, being so moderate in amount, might really be a just one, and not like a demand which he had been inveigled into countenancing some ten years before, the very remembrance of which now made him sick at his conscience. For a sort of conscience he had, and rather a tender and honorable one, too, as men inside of politics average.

"It seems reasonable," he replied, hopefully, as if claims were a matter of logic or taste, and rational people never asked for much. "I suppose that Uncle Sam could not possibly refuse you such a moderate sum."

"Oh, but you must treat this matter seriously," she at once pleaded. "I shouldn't have told you about it, if I hadn't expected that you would treat it seriously."

Her tone informed him that she was quite in earnest, and he dropped his purposes of joking and complimenting.

"Property destroyed during the late war?" he ventured to inquire.

"No," said Josephine; "during the Revolutionary war."

Mr. Hollowbread nearly whistled at the thought of a claim of such antiquity; but he checked the impulse just in time; he merely puckered.

"It was in 1812," continued Josephine, collecting her mind sufficiently to remember particulars.

"Oh," broke in Hollowbread, pleased to find himself in the present century.

The claim might not be so absurd, after all; something of that date had got through in Buchanan's time; or was it in Polk's?

"I beg pardon, Miss Murray," he went on; "you must mean our last war with England. That was in 1812?"

"Yes, of course," said Josephine. "I am sure of the date."

There was a brief silence. The story of destruction was such a meagre one as to be awkward to tell; and our heroine had a vague hope that she would not be obliged to rehearse it at all—merely to mention the sum which she had fixed upon as suitable reparation.

"Was it a ba—rn?" hesitated Mr. Hollowbread. He did not mean to be malicious,

nor witty; he rather thought it might be a barn; it frequently was a barn.

"Ye-s," confessed Josephine, with a sinking at the heart. "But a very valuable one," she eagerly added, laying as heavy an accent on the *very* as it could well stagger under. "Barns sometimes cost twenty thousand dollars, I believe, even now."

"Oh, frequently," smiled Mr. Hollowbread, remembering the cheap prices of old times and amused by that "even now." I have known the Government to pay much more than that for a burned barn," he added, alluding to some scandalous Augean affairs which he had seen pushed through Congress.

Josephine started; perhaps she had not put her demand high enough; and seeing how easily her legislator took it, she decided to raise it.

"But there were other things destroyed at the same time," she continued. "More than I can think of."

"Horses and cows," insinuated Mr. Hollowbread, who could not help seeing the matter more or less in a jocular light, and who remembered that he might grin over it in the darkness.

"Certainly," responded Josephine, very glad of the suggestion, and jotting it down in her memory.

"Hayricks, farming-tools, carts, harrows, sheds and other outhouses," pursued the Congressman.

"Oh, yes; all those. It would make a great deal more, you see."

"I see," said Hollowbread; but so did Josephine see. At that moment a flash of lightning revealed his face to her, and upon that face a smile of lazy amusement. In a second all was dark again, but our heroine had discovered that her confidant was laughing at her, and she was both soundly frightened and roundly miffed.

"This is all in confidence, sir," she said, in a tone so changed that he noticed it, and feared lest she had discovered his merriment.

"Oh, certainly—upon honor!" he protested. "Well, I will endeavor to advise you to the best of my ability," he added, seriously. "But I must have the particulars—exact date, place, circumstances, and so forth—every thing, you understand, that can be learned. Was it during a battle that this occurred? Please go on, Miss Murray."

But Josephine was quite hurt, had become cautious, and would tell him no more.

"At some more suitable time," she answered, almost curtly. "Just now I wish I knew where we are. Does Washington reach to the Pacific Ocean?"

"We certainly seem to have come a great way," admitted Mr. Hollowbread, who had already noted that the hack had passed his dwelling-place, and had half wished that he was in it.

Then, while they talked of commonplace matters, there passed several minutes, or, as it appeared to them, a quarter of an hour, of monotonous, mysterious journeying. It was a Tam o' Shanter night, the wind roaring and the rain rattling and splashing, and nobody abroad but the dell.

They had got away from the ruddy shop-windows of the lower city, and were traversing some region which even Hollowbread could not recognize, and which most of the time he could not see. He began to fear that the driver belonged to some gang of murderers, and that the country might lose a Congressman.

"This coachman is crawling!" exclaimed Josie, at last, becoming alarmed.

So he was. He had driven very rapidly while in Pennsylvania Avenue, but since leaving that lighted thoroughfare he had dawdled strangely. It was really very odd, for the rain kept on pouring at a wonderful rate, and it could not have been nice sitting out in it.

"I wonder if that rascal has lost himself!" exclaimed Mr. Hollowbread, trembling with sudden rage.

Then the hack stopped, and Josie cried: "We are there!"

They looked out; but there was no house visible; there was absolutely nothing visible; the whole space around them was darkness.

"Why don't you go on?" howled Mr. Hollowbread, flattening his bulbous Roman nose against the front window.

The only response was the hissing, seething, spattering, and splashing of the absolutely maniacal rain.

CHAPTER IV.

A SOAKING FLIRTATION.

MR. HOLLOWBREAD WRENCHED the back-door open, and shouted again; stuck his head out in the pitch-black storm, and fairly yelled; still no answer.

"They must be dead," put in Josephine; "or what is the matter?"

"Jehu!—you rascal, there!—Jehu!" stormed the thundering Mr. Hollowbread, who would have lightened also if he had only been electric.

"What will the horses do?" worried Josephine, getting thoroughly frightened.

Mr. Hollowbread was alarmed, also, about the horses, and about things in general. It was dreadful to get out in that deluge without an umbrella; but to that pass, it seemed to him, he must come, or perish. Out he clambered, very hot with confinement and wrath, but cooling with disgusting rapidity, for his feet alighted in a rivulet ankle-deep, and the driving rain fairly spanked

through his clothing. What was worse, if worse could be, a flash of lightning revealed to him the awful fact that there was no one on the box.

Where was Jehu? Had the infamous scoundrel run away? Or was the poor devil lying about somewhere dead? And what was the honorable, and corpulent, and rather delicate Mr. Hollowbread to do under such circumstances? At first he did nothing but bellow and bawl toward all the points of the compass, "Jehu! Jehu! Je-hu! Jehu!" Then he put his dripping beaver, running a stream like a church-roof, inside the hack, and said, hoarsely: "You had better get out."

"Get out!" gasped Josephine. "Why, I shall be wet through."

"No; you had better stay in!" groaned Mr. Hollowbread. "That rascal has gone; but don't be alarmed. I'll—I'll try to get up there," he puffed, "and drive the scoundrelly horses myself. Only, the Lord knows where I shall drive them to!"

"Oh, dear!" murmured Josephine, guessing that he was not used to driving, nor otherwise well adapted to it, and fearing lest his passenger should meet with accidents.

Then followed a considerable period of silence, during which she at first imagined Mr. Hollowbread struggling up to the box, and afterward began to wonder if he had fallen off it, and broken his fat neck. Even in this situation she had intelligence and humor enough to say to herself:

"What if all the men in the world should drop down dead? What would become of the women?"

Meantime Hollowbread had not got on the box at all, but had been vainly searching for the supposed steps which led up to it, and cursing the stupidity of the coachmaker in making no steps, or in putting them where a gentleman could not find them. Having completely circumnavigated the vehicle by feeling his way gingerly around the horses' noses, then more confidently along the traces, wheels, and rack, and having thus got back to his starting-point without discovering any means of ascent, he fell into a state of complete despair, and raised a fresh yell of "Jehu!"

"Yere me," answered a voice close by him; and Jehu re-appeared, demoniacally, in a flash of lightning, the wettest goblin that ever was seen since the flood.

"Yere you?" broke out the drenched Hollowbread, in such a state of indignation that he nearly had a fit on the spot. "You black fool! wher've you been to?"

"I done loss the coach," explained Jehu. "Golly! Thought I *never* should get back to't."

"What did you leave it for? Are you drunk?" roared Hollowbread, to whom the

wild idea came that Jehu might have got down to obtain a glass of whisky.

"Jes' stepped off a minute to look for de road, sah," confessed this wonderful coachman.

"To look for the road! Oh, you blundering, lying rascal! Well, where are we?"

"Fo' God, I dunno, sah. They was a name on the cawnah, but I couldn' read 'um."

"Oh, get on!" groaned Mr. Hollowbread, who was struggling into the hack—"get on, and drive *somewhere*. Drive till morning, and be hanged to you! I will keep as far as possible from you," he added, to Josephine, taking the front seat. "I am wetter than all the Egyptians in the Red Sea. I would have gone on the box if I could have found it."

"Oh, I am so sorry for this!" she answered; "and it has all been on my account!"

She was not thinking just then of her claim, nor planning to make him friendly to it. She was occupied with her present situation, and wanted to be on good terms with the only male person within reach, and had quite forgotten her vexation at him for laughing at her.

Nevertheless, he did not believe that she was sorry enough for his soaking, or indeed that any human being could be sorry enough. He picked at his clinging trowsers in the darkness, and wished himself at home very frequently, and said very little.

Meanwhile the hack wandered and wobbled about the slippery streets of the invisible city. Sometimes the horses started on a trot, and the passengers had high hopes; then the gait subsided to a walk, and they understood that Jehu was in a quandary.

At last our legislator-a-soak could stand it no longer. He attacked the rickety front window so fiercely that he actually forced it to shove up; next he howled through the writhing, hissing, venomous rain:

"Where are we?"

"I'm gwine to git down again," responded Jehu, coming to a halt. "Gwine to look around fur de name."

"And you wouldn't know it if you should see it!" absolutely shrieked Hollowbread. "Good Lord, I wish the niggers were all in slavery again!" he added, as if that would make them read better. "You ought to be horsewhipped, you stupid rascal! *Don't* you get down! Those horses will run away. I shall have to get out myself."

And get out he did, cursing all things compendiously as he emerged into the pitiless storm, without caring whether Josephine heard him or not.

She, by-the-way, only smiled at his profanity and at the causes of it. She was accustomed to have men serve her, and to see them suffer considerably in serving her; and she usually gave them small meed of grati-

tude for it, though she could utter thanks abundantly.

The fact that her present victim was elderly, and inconveniently pudgy and audibly short-winded, only made his martyrdom on her behalf the less estimable and the more amusing. We must try to pardon her; she had the ordinary ignorance of youth with regard to the pathos of age and infirmity; and Mr. Hollowbread was but reaping the usual reward of old beaus who will wait on young ladies.

He had a fearful time outside among the forces of nature. There were faint street-lamps in the distance, but they cast no more effective light than so many decayed mackerel, and he staggered gaiter-deep in streams and gutters which he could not see. By moments he wondered that he still lived, and whether he should be alive that time to-morrow.

At last he was run against by a building—one of those isolated buildings which are so frequent amidst the magnificent distances of Washington—a building which seemed to be out alone and lost, like himself.

After search enough to discover the true site of the ruins of Troy, he found a door-bell, and rang it incessantly for the next minute.

Presently the door was opened by some one holding a candle, but the candle was blown out instantly by the furious wind, and Mr. Hollowbread never saw the person.

"Has every body gone to bed in this city?" he shouted, with that unreasonable indignation which leads aggrieved people to feel that they have a right to call the first individual they meet to an account.

"I d—d—d—dunno, sah," responded a voice, which seemed to be that of an elderly negro man.

"Is this Izzard Street?" continued Hollowbread, not wishing to lose time in unnecessary conversation with a stutterer.

"Y—y—yes, sah."

"What number is it?"

For a mercy the invisible one knew what his number was, and had the power given him at last to state that it was 90.

"And No. 200 is off this way, is it?" continued Hollowbread, slapping the right-hand beam of the door-frame.

"Y—y—yes, sah."

"Thank you," said our traveler, summoning up all his remaining grace to utter that courtesy.

Then, after exchanging some vocal signals with Jehu, he got himself back into the hack in such a state of moisture that it seemed as if he should never be dry again in this world.

And here a fresh vexation filled up the measure of his sorrow, and caused him to slop over in loud profanity. As he climbed, dripping, yea, streaming, into the ill-

starred vehicle, a flash of lightning revealed Josephine's face to him, and showed that she was laughing.

Of course he could not swear at a lady, and so he swore at the coachman. On his knees, and with his bare head stuck out of the door-window, he cursed Jehu until he made himself dizzy. If Jehu had been sent where Mr. Hollowbread wished him, his wet raiment would have been dried to a cinder in no time.

"Yes, sah," was the meek response of that humbled charioteer. "But whar has we to go, sah?"

"I'll have you arrested, you rascal!" continued the aggrieved honorable. "I'll have your license taken away from you. Drive straight on. You ought to be put in jail, you ignoramus! You are a hundred and ten doors from the place. I'll see whether this sort of thing is to be tolerated in the capital of the country. You are a mile from the place. Hang your stupid, black, woolly head! Keep to the right, if you know it. Beast! lunkhead! blunderhead! Drive on!"

"Oh, isn't it outrageous?" softly ejaculated Josephine, beginning to pity him a little, and yet hardly able to suppress a giggle.

Mr. Hollowbread was out of breath. Moreover, if he had had ever so much wind left, he was too angry to answer her. Not only had she cruelly laughed at his sorrows, but the mere contrast between her condition and his was most irritating, and enough to make him almost want to pitch her out of the hack. There she was, as dry as a bone, and as warm as toast, all curled and tucked up on her seat to keep out of his runlets and puddles. He, meantime, was so wet that he slopped and squelched, and was, moreover, pretty sure of a siege of rheumatism. Under the circumstances, he could not speak to her, either genially or otherwise, for a full minute. He wished that he had never seen her; wished that he had called in Bradford and Drummond to take charge of her; wished that he were at home and abed and fast asleep. Women certainly wrought vast trouble in the world, and had made him in especial an immense amount of bother, and did not by any means pay their way, confound them!

Time passed, however, and the dialogue revived. With it, also, revived the beau in Hollowbread's nature, that fervent old fire which had made him a luminary in female society, and which could still enable him to shine through dampness, like a fire-fly in a swamp. He listened to Josephine's fresh young voice, and he liked the sound of it. Moreover, he saw, by a flash of lightning, how prettily she was bundled together on that back seat, and how carelessly her garments were gathered about her, just expos-

ing her little bootees. They were very little, he judged; and certainly she was exceedingly attractive to the eye; her figure seemed to be as perfect as her face. Well, he must forgive her for laughing. If a woman would only be handsome, he must forgive her any amount of heartlessness. That was what he always had done, and still must do.

"I am so dreadfully sorry that you have suffered so much on my account!" apologized Josephine, who naturally guessed that he was in a temper, and who did not want him angry at herself, lest he might oppose her claim.

"You are not in the least to blame, of course," he responded, doing his soaked best to be gracious.

"It is a terribly unfortunate introduction to you," she continued. "I had hoped that our acquaintance was begun agreeably."

"It has," he asserted, beginning to think once more that she liked him, and that he should yet have a good time in flirting with her—so easy is it for an ancient Lothario to cajole himself. "I admit that it is not pleasant to be humbugged and dragged about in the wet by a miserable ignoramus of a black negro," he pursued, warming up considerably as he recited his wrongs. "But, nevertheless, I shall always retain delightful recollections of your part of this evening's adventure."

"You are the best of men to say so," replied Josephine, tucking her skirts still farther out of the way of his drainings. "I hope to hear from you very soon that you haven't suffered by the exposure."

"Thank you," said Mr. Hollowbread, and was about to add that he would venture to call without further introduction, when the hack stopped.

"Hi! Guess we's thar," Jehu was heard to bawl through the rain. "Shall I git down, sar, or will you?"

"Confound the idiot!" howled Mr. Hollowbread, in suddenly renewed fury. "Get down yourself!" he thundered, opening the door with unchristian violence. "No! hold on. The horses might go off. I'll get down. You wouldn't know the number if it should be burned and branded into your stupid carcass. *I'll* get down," he concluded with a moan.

"So sorry! so *very* sorry!" murmured Josephine, ready to shriek, however, with laughter.

"Oh, don't blame yourself," answered Hollowbread, and went off through the complicated showers, muttering to himself, "Of course she isn't in fault. Pretty girl.—Hang that gutter!—I don't believe she was really laughing at me.—By George, how it drives, and how slippery it is!—And I don't blame her much, if she did laugh at me, such a sight as I must be. This must be the house, hang it!" he continued.

Yes, it was No. 200, and the horrid pilgrimage was over. Mr. Hollowbread's tiger-like ring at the bell soon brought a mulatto maiden to the door, who said, "Law sakes!" at the sight of his dripping caparisons, and who promptly produced an umbrella.

"Tell them Miss Murray has come!" he gasped, and hastened back to the carriage, shining in the hall-light as if he were varnished.

"Don't go through the rain again," begged Josephine, which was a kind of mockery, seeing that he could not possibly get wetter than he was. "Let me take the umbrella and skip in alone. Good-night, Mr. Hollowbread. To meet again!"

She pressed his hand; yes, she really, unquestionably squeezed it twice; then she was flying up the steps. Under the porch which shielded the door a gray-haired, clerical-looking gentleman and a wrinkled little lady whose hair was almost white stood to receive her. Kisses and words of greeting were interchanged in the sight of Mr. Hollowbread, who felt as if the blessings fairly belonged to himself, and would have liked one amazingly. Then, still staring through the rain-fall of his hat-brim, he saw Josephine burst into a spasm of laughter. Was she recounting his ridiculous misfortunes, and making mock of them? Well as he thought he knew women, he did not fully know how spasmodical they are at times, even the strongest of them and the cleverest. The truth is, the evening's adventure had made our heroine nervous, so that she could not help saluting its close with a burst of slightly hysterical merriment. But Mr. Hollowbread, irritable with fatigue, wettings, and a general sense of ill-treatment, guessed that she was holding him up to scorn; and, forgetting that farewell pressure of the hand, he threw himself back behind his leather curtain, as full of humiliation and wrath as of rain-water.

"Is this to be a specimen of my acquaintance with that little flirt?" he said to himself, as he rambled homeward, dripping and drizzling like a street-sprinkler. "If so—and I really think it will be so—the sooner I end it the better. And yet," he added, after a time, "she is most astonishingly pretty—yes, and delightful."

CHAPTER V.

UNCLE JOHN AND AUNT HULDAH.

To her gray-haired, serious, reverend uncle, and to her white-haired, invalided, old-fashioned, prim aunt, this Josephine of ours could make herself quite as agreeable as to that sparkling veteran of the world, Mr. Hollowbread.

Nor was it a small triumph on her part,

for they were not prepared to like her entirely. Indeed, they had heard things of her which had made them fear lest they should find her a worrying guest, and be obliged now and then to frown openly upon her behavior.

Yet, before they had looked at her a minute, and before she had uttered twenty sentences, they were glad she had come to them, and wanted to hold her in lap. A handsome young face, a lively and intelligent and amiable expression, sparkling eyes which can be alternately pathetic and roguish, and a magnetism of animal spirits playing through all, make up a pretty sure passport to human favor. Moreover, Josephine was a lady in carriage, and was very clever for her age. She had courtesy of manner, an unusual tact in adapting herself to people, and a ready fund of light, pleasant chitchat.

"I have surprised you," she said, when she had kissed the two elders. "I have come as if I had rained down. But I thought it best to get on here without giving you the trouble of looking for me and going to meet me. And wasn't it well that I did! Such a night for you to be out in! And such a time as I have had in getting here! I have driven a hundred miles, and through four Noachian deluges, since I left that station. You shall hear all about it presently. I know it will amuse you."

"And did you come all alone through this dreadful storm?" asked Mrs. Murray, poking out her thin lips and opening wide her gray eyes, like an infant expressing wonder.

She was a singular-looking old lady, by-the-way; remarkably small and lean in figure, with a little white, puckered face, an eager expression, and jerky motions.

"There was a strange gentleman with me," said Josephine, not proposing to tell much about Mr. Hollowbread. "Hacks were scarce, and he had to come a long way out of his road, poor man, and got awfully wet in looking for the house. Did you see him? I do believe he could have spouted water like a Triton."

Old Mrs. Murray looked at her husband, as if for an explanation; trembled all over, like a kitten aiming at a marble; saw that a joke was intended, and giggled.

"You have not changed at all since we saw you last," said the rector, smiling down upon Josephine's frolicsome face, as if he liked her well just as she was, and wished that she might never change. He was a tall, portly man of sixty-three, with a large, pallid, dropsical but amiable face, his thin hair almost white, and his whiskers entirely so, his bearing at once ponderous and tremulous. He looked much older than his years, and yet he was clearly younger than his wife.

"Ah! my life has changed," answered Josephine, suddenly remembering the meeting of which he spoke and the sorrows which had

befallen her since. "I have had enough to change me, you know," she added, lifting her eyes to his as she uttered these last two words, and disclosing tears which were surely honest enough. Then she put a love of a lace handkerchief to her pathetic face, and murmured, "Poor Augustus!"

Yes, we must at last confess the fact that she was a widow. The poor Augustus in question was a nephew of the Reverend John Murray, and had died two years previous to the date of this history, so that his lovely relict was already out of mourning. Probably she could not now grieve for him very keenly; but a bereavement has always two sides of possible sorrow to it: the survivor can at least bemoan his or her own loneliness.

"Yes," sighed the rector, taking Josephine's unemployed hand. "It is hard to have a husband swept away so early."

"Swept away so early!" repeated Mrs. Murray, who had a curious way of echoing her lord's observations, as if she were responding to a litany.

"The Divine Providence seems to be very careless of our earthly happiness."

"Careless of our earthly happiness!" murmured the old lady.

"But if we were blessed continually here, we should never desire the better hereafter."

"Never desire the better hereafter!" gasped Mrs. Murray, getting a little out of breath. "I need not tell you how we sympathize with you in a sorrow which is partly our own."

"Our own!" added the old lady, falling considerably in the rear.

"We are glad, very glad, that you have come to us."

"Glad you have come to us!" repeated Mrs. Murray, freshening up under the influence of sympathy, and coming in almost even with him.

They were, indeed, very sorry for their relative, this beauteous and piteous young widow, so full of graces and of grief. They knew all the while that she had been an awful flirt; they supposed that, short as her married life had been, she had given her husband no little uneasiness; and, moreover, they had held poor Augustus himself in disrepute, as an idle, hare-brained, ridiculous spendthrift. Yet, when they saw his lovely young widow crying there before them, they could not help believing in the genuine pungency of her affliction, and sympathizing warmly with it. Old Mrs. Murray pulled out her own handkerchief, and moistened it with a few of the hard-wrung tears of age.

"Don't let us talk of it," she said, softly. "I am so sorry we put you in mind of it!"

"Don't blame yourselves," answered Josephine, with surprising cheerfulness, at the same time removing her handkerchief, and showing her fine eyes very slightly reddened. One would be tempted to say that there had

not been above one drop in each of them. "I shall learn to bear it better some day, I suppose. People do learn such things."

"God's will has been done, and it is our duty to submit," observed Parson Murray, with a somewhat *ex-officio* air and tone, for which we must strive to pardon him, remembering how often he was called upon to make such remarks, and also how little he had been able to esteem "poor Augustus."

"Our duty to submit," echoed Mrs. Murray, in her litany manner.

A minute later Josephine was narrating to the elders her drive from the station, and making them laugh heartily over the damp calamities of Mr. Hollowbread. She told every incident (except the flirting and the claim-hunting) with an amazing minuteness and with a picturesqueness and vivacity of language which rendered the story almost a work of genius. She was prodigiously diverting, and her hearers could not help being excessively amused, although they queried in spirit whether their merriment was quite proper. They were cheerful old people, but they had high notions of the dignity incumbent upon the Murrays, who were an ancient and patrician family.

"Mr. Hollowbread?" at last inquired Mrs. Murray. She wanted to get the name exactly, for she kept a diary, and she meant to set down the gist of this tale in her current volume. "I thought you said he was a stranger!" she immediately added, with a puzzled air, bordering on suspicion.

"Oh, I heard his name in the cars!" explained Josephine. "Some people spoke to him, and called him Mr. Hollowbread."

"A Congressman? I never heard of him," observed the rector, who was something of a gossip, but took little interest in political personages, unless they were leading Abolitionists.

"I never heard of him!" litanyed Mrs. Murray. "But don't you forget the name, Mr. Murray," she added, mindful of her diary.

Then, as it was a late hour for the old lady, the propriety of getting to bed was suggested to Josephine, and she was shown to her room.

"She is very entertaining," said the rector to his wife, as they marched slowly to their own sleeping-place, a vast apartment on the parlor-floor. He quite chuckled with satisfaction as he said it, not merely because he himself had a weakness for gossip and laughable narrations, but mainly because he was delighted at finding a new toy for Mrs. Murray. He was that rare specimen of man who makes a pet of his wife; who watches over her well-being and happiness with the assiduity of a mother watching over an only child; who unflinchingly sacrifices his own ease and his own tastes for her comfort, or even for her mere amusement; and who is disposed to use his fellow-mortals as mere

assistants and instruments in this loving labor.

Nature had made him very affectionate; nature had made it imperative with him that he should have a pet, which should be all his own, and subject to fondling by no other hands; and fortune had devised that he should only obtain such a pet in the shape of a wife. The tenderness and the sweet self-abnegation of his character were shown in the extraordinary choice which he had made.

At twenty-five, while yet one of the handsomest young men of his time, he married a lady fifteen years his senior, mainly because she had fallen desperately in love with him, but largely, too, because of his instinctive eagerness to be loved supremely. There was money in the match, but that counted for naught in his estimation; he had abundant means of his own. He really married out of pity—out of gratitude for preference—out of affection, and a passionate yearning for affection.

It would be difficult to imagine a more devoted husband than he had been. His wife had, of course, rapidly grown old on his hands, but his loyalty, his fondness, his attentions had never failed, and he had become only more tender with the continuance of his service. He had ruled his life entirely to compass the one end of her happiness. When at one time her health failed, he gave up his clerical duties, and traveled years for her sake; and when she wished once more to see him publicly useful, he had, for her sake, resumed his labors.

What must have been still more difficult, he had subordinated his minutes as well as his years to her comfort, watching all the livelong day to care for and amuse her. If he went out, it was because she wanted to go with him; if he staid within, it was because she was unable to go out. As she advanced in years, and her mind lost somewhat of its early vigor, he sought trifling diversions for her.

At sixty-three he was a gossip-monger and an inventor of child-like babblings for the pleasure of this tottering woman of seventy-eight. Many people laughed at him for this seemingly misplaced tenderness, and this seemingly undignified frivolity of mind. But to one who looks closely into his motives, and who does not object to a one-sided development and a waste of intellectual power, his life can appear scarcely less than beautiful.

It was all the more beautiful because it had brought him suffering. Much watching; countless hours of confinement in close rooms or in sick-chambers; daily intercourse with a person so much his senior; lack of exercise, and consequent loss of digestion—these things had aged him early. His white hair, the paleness and flabbiness of his face,

his swollen joints and feet and hands, the tottering of his heavy gait, were all signs of disease. He was dropsical, rheumatic and dyspeptic, with a blister or two about him very frequently, and medicine-bottles always upon his night-table. Worse still, his nervous constitution had suffered terribly, and he was subject, in case of irritation, to attacks of spasmodic excitement, almost amounting to hysteria.

It seemed, also, as if his mind had deteriorated, so fond was he of small social gossip and reminiscences, and so much time did he spend in trivial conversation.

There were people who declared that Mrs. Murray was a younger spirit and a sounder intellect than her husband. But strange as his life was, and deficient as it had been in exhibition of masculine power, it was morally as spotless as the record of a human being can well be. Never had he done a deed which he might not have confessed without shame in the face of the whole world.

"Yes, she is very entertaining," repeated the rector, rejoicing over his wife's new plaything.

"Why, so she is, Mr. Murray," answered the old lady, in equal gratulation. "What a story she made of that man getting out in the puddles and rain!" she giggled, in a spasmodic way, as if laughing were sharp exercise for her. "What was his queer name?" she asked, looking for her writing-materials.

"Hol-low-bread!—H-o-l-l-o-w-b-r-e-a-d—Hollowbread," said the rector, pronouncing it very plainly, and then spelling it, and then pronouncing it again. "Mr. Hollowbread—a Congressman," he explained, loudly. "I dare say the soaking was good for him. Most of those political lambs of the Lord's flock need washing very often."

"Why, Mr. Murray!" exclaimed Mrs. Murray, giggling again, but throwing up her hands in mild remonstrance.

Her husband was a joker, and, like many other clergymen, he frequently used devout phraseology in a humorous sense; but, although she had listened to this sort of thing from him for forty years, she was still not entirely wonted to it.

"Mr. Hollowbread!" she presently repeated, and sat down to put the name on paper. It was her custom to make brief notes for her diary before going to bed, and then to extend them in the morning during the hour between dressing and breakfast.

"I don't wonder Augustus was bewitched," resumed Parson Murray, after waiting for madame to finish her memoranda. "I don't discover beauty so frequently as some people are favored to do," he added, remembering, perhaps, that his wife had never been handsome—at least, not in his time. "But Josephine is certainly pretty, as well as a good talker."

"Why, so she is, Mr. Murray," agreed the old lady, not only without jealousy, but with enthusiasm. "No wonder Augustus was bewitched. I do hope she will behave herself as one of our family ought to. We will keep her always, and leave her something."

Mrs. Murray had a great respect for her property. It was inherited property; it was old family property; it was much nobler than earned property. To leave such wealth as this to any one would be much more than enrichment: it would be like conferring honors, decorations, patents of nobility.

"Don't talk about your will, Huldah," begged the rector. "It always makes you sick—and me, too," he added, remembering that he must not hint to her that she was specially feeble. "There will be time enough to consider about a legacy to Josephine when she has shown herself worthy of one."

"Well, I say so, Mr. Murray—that's just my opinion—there's always plenty of time. You are always in such a hurry."

We give this speech of madame's to show how she emphasized words, and also what confusion she sometimes got into as to who had said which.

"She must have been sobered since those times," continued Mr. Murray, referring to days when scandal had taken Josephine in hand. "She was a mere child then—only nineteen. Besides, Augustus was to blame. He had no business to love such society as he did, and to lead his wife into it. I can't believe any worse of her than that she suffered for being found in the company of evil-doers."

"Ho was a harum-scarum. To think of his spending and losing all that money in six years! A hundred thousand dollars gone in six years!" exclaimed Mrs. Murray, lifting both her hands in excitement, as she had often lifted them before over this financial tragedy. "How could he do it? And he only twenty-seven! Why, he was only married two years. It wasn't her fault, Mr. Murray."

"She was somewhat extravagant, I fear. Young women in these days are brought up to be so. But it was the stock-gambling which took the most of it."

Mrs. Murray threw up her hands again. Stock-gambling was a sin which had come up since her mind had lost somewhat in vigor, and she had never been able to comprehend its nature precisely. She had a vague idea that stocks were gambled for over card-tables, and she could see clearly that that must be a frightfully wasteful and wicked diversion. To bet gold and bank-bills was heinous enough, but absolutely to bet one's stocks—dear me!

"And that is the end of the Murray money on that side!" moaned the lady. "All that part of the Undivided gone!"

This word, "undivided," she pronounced with a sorrowful reverence which demands explanation. The principal wealth of the surviving Murrays consisted in an unshared estate, which had been accumulating under wise management for nearly three-quarters of a century, and which had gradually become, not merely a great property, but also an object of family pride, and hereditary glory, a fetiche. Out of this store the father of Augustus had withdrawn his share, and Augustus had wasted it.

"Traveling is very expensive," continued Mrs. Murray, unable to quit the woeful subject of this departed money. "Augustus carried her all over Europe. Every one knows that that is expensive."

"It cost us ten thousand a year," answered the rector, who had tastes suitable to an archbishop, and would long since have reduced himself to poverty but for his more prudent wife. "I don't suppose they got along on a cent less. It must be confessed that some of my flesh and blood are fearful fools."

"And she only has her own little property! How much did you say? Only five or six thousand dollars! We must leave her something, Mr. Murray."

"Hadt'n we better wait till morning, Huldah?" remonstrated the rector, fearful lest his venerable invalid should make herself wakeful and pass a bad night.

"Well, I say wait, Mr. Murray. You are always in such a hurry! I meant to wait," answered the old lady, just a little peevishly, for she was very tired and dozy.

"Yes, you said so," conceded the patient husband; and that was the last of their conversation for that night.

CHAPTER VI.

A VETERAN CLAIMANT.

ONE of Josephine Murray's first doings in Washington was to look up an old acquaintance, a certain Mrs. Frances Hooker-Warden, who, as she understood from report, had an enviable experience in the claim industry.

To save time, she waived all ceremony of card or message, and went unheralded to the Warden residence. It was a plain, small brick house of the old-fashioned Washington type, with a rusty, painted front, which looked high, because it was very narrow, and with a steep stone stairway climbing up to the shabby porch which sheltered its faded door.

"I guess she hasn't got her money yet," said Josephine to herself, glancing at the blistered blinds and other unkempt features of the time-worn façade as she mounted those penitential steps.

Presently thereafter she was in a scant,

sombre, musty parlor: a parlor carpeted with threadbareness and curtained with jaundice and furnished with rickets: such a parlor as one is apt to find in the "furnished houses" of cities which have a "season." In another minute or two Mrs. Hooker Warden and her daughter, Belle Warden, were rustling up to her with greetings.

"So this is Josie Umberfield!" cried Mrs. Warden, who was a lively, muscular lady of about forty-five, with a brown complexion, unusually black and glittering eyes, and luxuriant masses of black hair. She spoke, by-the-way, with an eager smile, which had been considered fascinating when she was young, but which now had an air of having been used too often, and got worn to transparent thinness. "I am delighted to see you as Mrs. Murray—delighted to see you by any name," she rattled on. "Are you to stay some time in Washington? I am so glad! Do you remember Belle?"

"How could I forget her?" exclaimed Josephine, who could say nice things to women as well as to men. "She was one of the good girls at our school who were pretty."

Belle Warden, a tall and Junonian blonde of nineteen, with regular features and noticeably clear, steady gray eyes, smiled hospitably, but with a sort of statuesque calmness.

"You are very good to say that, Mrs. Murray," she replied, with that tone of sincerity and gravity which seems to belong to contralto voices. "I wish I could have gone to your wedding. It was kind of you to invite us."

"I would have asked you to be bridesmaid, if you had been old enough," declared Josephine. "You know I was immensely your senior at school."

"Three years' difference was a great deal in those days. You were one of the grand ladies of the first class, and I was your humble admirer."

"You are still, Belle," smiled Mrs. Warden. "Why didn't you say so? Belle is just like a man, Mrs. Murray—or, rather, like a man on his oath. She weighs every word solemnly, and thinks twice over a compliment, even when it is true."

"Dear me, what obstacles to conversation!" laughed Mrs. Murray. "If I weighed my words, I should stutter dreadfully, and end by turning dumb. But do have the goodness, both of you, to call me Josie. I want to bring back the pleasant old times when I used to frolic at your house in New York; besides, I want to be intimate. Do you know I have no friends in Washington except my venerable relatives by marriage, the Murrays? I want friends, confidants, advisers, helpers."

"Why not take the venerable relatives?" inquired Belle. "They are excellent people; the old colonel is magnificent."

"What a creature you are, Belle!" laughed Mrs. Warden. "There is Mrs.—I mean Josie—ready to jump into our arms; and you suggest the Murrays. Don't you understand that she wants to tell us something, and wants sympathy?"

"The Murrays are too venerable and too other-worldish," explained Josie, as we will mainly call her hereafter. "Yes, I want to tell you something, and to have you encourage me, and say, 'How nice!' But don't let us hurry about it."

Then there was a talk concerning other days, by which it appeared that Josie had been a wild girl at school, and that Mrs. Warden had led a gay social career in New York, very much to her taste, except in the matter of expense.

At last the conversation veered around once more to the object of the visitor in coming to Washington. With many misgivings Josie unfolded that enchanted budget of her claim, which sometimes seemed to her to contain a fortune, and sometimes to have nothing in it.

"And you must advise me," she said, laying her burden on the feet of Mrs. Warden with the boundless faith of a novice in the wisdom of that blundering veteran, Experience. "You must tell me how these things are pushed and carried."

"Poor mamma!" commented Belle, in her calm contralto, and with her grave and, so to speak, manly smile. "She wishes she knew."

"Nonsense, Belle! I do know," answered Mrs. Warden, in a rather cattish, spitting fashion. "I know as much about it as any woman, or any body, in Washington. You will admit it some day, when I bring you in my money—and no thanks to you, either! But it does take work and time, my dear," she confessed, turning to Josie. "Perhaps I had better tell you all about my own claim," she continued, very naturally, that being a subject on which she could not help talking when chance offered. "You know I am a great-granddaughter of the famous revolutionary naval hero, Commodore John Saul Hooker. I am the last stem of the race—I mean Belle is. That is my claim."

"Did the Government owe him anything?" asked Josie, her mind turning to barns, hayricks, and the like.

"Owe him any thing! It owed him its salvation, more than likely. How do we know that our revolutionary sires would ever have broken the yoke of England, if it had not been for his exertions, his triumphs, and his heroism? My view is, that, excepting Washington, Greene, and one or two other generals, the country owes more to John Saul Hooker than to any other man who ever lived."

"To be sure," assented Josie, conscious of a momentary spasm in her throat as she con-

ceded to herself that Mrs. Warden's claim was far more imposing than her own.

"Our stupid Congress," continued Commodore John Saul Hooker's great-granddaughter with animation, "gave Signora Ameriga Vespucci twenty thousand dollars because she was the remote descendant of the man who discovered this country. Now, I say that it owes something more, a vast deal more, to the near descendant of the man who saved it."

"But, you see, there was a great deal more interest due on the Vespucci debt," put in Belle. "Two centuries more of interest."

"Belle, do stop!" snapped Mrs. Warden, making a face at her satirical daughter. "I do think it is shabbily undutiful in you to sneer at your great-great-grandfather's services, and at your mother's labors; and all my work is for you, too. And I don't believe that woman was a bit of a Vespucci, either; I believe she was nothing but an Italian adventuress. It's an everlasting shame to the Congressmen of that time to have been so humbugged by such an impostor—that is, if she was one. Twenty thousand dollars to an I don't know what, because she called herself Ameriga Vespucci, and dressed in solid velvet! And here I, the near relative of John Saul Hooker, with a perfectly made-out genealogy and a position in our best American society—I can't get an appropriation!"

"But you are going to get one," added Josie, willing to say something pleasant, and eager to believe that appropriations were attainable.

"Oh, yes, I am going to get one," pugnaciously declared Mrs. Warden, already given over to the possession of the claim-hunting spirit—a fiend as bewildering as the imps of the gambling-table and the lottery-wheel. "If I work at these stupid wretches twenty years for it, I will have one. I mean that justice shall be done in this one instance, whatever it costs."

"But if it should cost more than it comes to?" sighed Josie, remembering her own venture rather than Mrs. Warden's.

"That is worth saying, Mrs. Murray," put in Belle. "Keeping house and receiving are very expensive in Washington; and when you don't get your appropriation, after all—"

"Oh, Belle!" broke in mamma, with a sharp hitch of her shoulders, half tremulous and half piteous. "You will break my spirits and my heart some day. You are harder to carry than forty claims."

The daughter had the good sense and self-command to refrain from a defense of herself, and so to avoid a dialogue of recriminations. Apparently, she had fought many battles with her mother on this subject of claim-hunting, and had learned to confine her warfare to an occasional protest or sarcasm.

"I shall get enough to pay me well," persisted Mrs. Warden, petulantly. "I have laid my claim at one hundred thousand dollars. It is the least—don't you think so, Josie?—that Congress can have the face to allow me. And I shall get it—that is, eventually, and pretty soon, too—I know I shall. One gets used to figuring up chances at last. Ha, ha!"

She did not look the confidence which she uttered. She had an air of remembering many disappointments, and of glancing forward askance, unwillingly, to many more. This brief talk concerning her claim seemed to have worn upon her—to have sharpened her features and blanched her color. She was an older woman apparently than when she had rustled buxomly into the room to greet a visitor, whose mere name brought back less anxious and more cheerful years.

As Josie gazed at this veteran of the world, a brunette like herself, and reputed to have been once a beauty, but now prematurely faded and seamed with ill-rewarded coquetry and fruitless intriguing, she had an uneasy sense that she was surveying herself grown older.

As she noted those eager, egotistic, unhappy black eyes, that varnish of thin, cracked gayety over a visible ground of disappointment and dissatisfaction, that hysterical vivacity of manner which so reminded you of the tremor of one carrying a heavy load, she asked herself rather woefully, Shall I ever be like that? But this gloom was only for a moment; the healthy and handsome and youthful are not naturally prophets of evil; and very rare indeed is it that they foresee ultimate failure as their own lot.

"But how do you do it?" she presently asked, as if the great-granddaughter of John Saul Hooker had done it. "Whom do you go to? How do you put things to them? What do you do and say? I want to know every thing."

"Oh, I can tell you every thing. I know every thing," affirmed Mrs. Warden, not a little vain of her knowledge, though it had brought her so little and cost her so much. "During the last three years I have done every thing, positively every thing, that a lady can do."

At this point Belle colored, as if aware that her mother had done some things which a lady should not do, not even in Washington.

"The main thing is to work, work, work!" continued Mrs. Warden, with happy compendiousness. "Never give it up; stick to it every day, and year after year; work, work, work!"

The repetition of this word seemed to help her, to console her for failures, to give her courage and hope.

"But work how?" inquired Josie. "You

might as well tell me to reflect, or to cipher."

"To be sure," laughed Mrs. Warden, a lively person and fond of a joke. "You are the same Josie Umberfield. How you used to amuse me in those New York days with your sarcasms on the beaux! You can do it yet, I see."

"Oh, I don't sarcasm it any longer. It doesn't pay. Men don't like to be sarcasmed. You can get a great deal more out of them with compliments; and, after all, you have to go to them for almost every thing—as, for instance, in claim-hunting."

"I wish women could vote; then it wouldn't be so. If I do fail in this demand of mine for justice, I solemnly mean to turn woman's rights woman, and go to agitating. If we had a Congress of ladies—"

"Then you and I wouldn't get any money," interrupted Josie. "Pretty young gentlemen would have it all. I think we had better trust our affairs to male legislators. But do tell me, Mrs. Warden, how you work at them, as you call it, to make them nice."

"Well, just as you work at men for other things," laughed the elder coquette. "Ask them for what you want. Coax them. Pout at them. Then coax them again."

"For shame, mamma!" burst out Belle, blushing with humiliation over the maternal trickeries.

"For shame yourself, Belle, for throwing it all on me!" retorted the mother. "If you had only helped me the least bit, we should have had our money long since, and almost without trouble."

"I will not degrade myself for any purpose," snapped this young lady, who was certainly troubled with self-respect, and, perhaps, with a temper.

"Oh, you chicken!" smiled Josie. "You will learn better some day. Consider the weakness of us poor women. When you get married, you will have to coax your husband."

"I will ask him for nothing which he is not able to give and willing to give," declared the young idealist. "At all events, he will be my husband, and not the husband of somebody else; I shall have a right to go to him for money. Excuse me if I seem to be reproving you, Mrs. Murray. I don't mean it. But I do want my mother to keep away from such business as she talks of. She is—I will say it—too old."

It was a sharp blow, we must admit, and no wonder Mrs. Warden flinched under it.

"Belle!" she gasped, her eyes sparkling with anger and then filling with tears. "How considerate and polite to your mother! It seems to me you might find some other fashion of expressing your regard for me."

"Let us talk of something else," suggested Josie, who saw that she had stepped into an

old quarrel between parent and child, and found the situation embarrassing. "It is all my fault. I had no business to—"

"No! we will talk of this," insisted Mrs. Warden, calling up her spunk and giving Belle a repressive glance. "What was I saying? Oh, I was telling you how to wake up our lazy, addle-headed, obstinate members of Congress," she continued, turning her indignation upon that imperfect body. "Well, to begin with, it might be well for you to give dinners and receptions."

"I am not keeping house, you know," interjected Josie.

"But won't the Murrays help you? They are rich and have influence, and might help you just as well as not."

"Colonel Murray and Rector Murray!" exclaimed Belle. "My dear mamma, do you consider what sort of people they are? Don't you remember how fastidious the colonel is about Government money?"

"No; I suppose they won't help me; not in this business," admitted Josie.

"I suppose they won't," echoed Mrs. Warden. "The colonel thinks a Government sixpence is sacred, and nobody should have it but the departments. He is a perfect old fogey, and sometimes I hate him," she declared, quite honestly, though sometimes she was far from hating him, and would have been pleased at any time to have a right to love him. "Well, if you can't receive, you must be received. You must go to all the parties, and be in society all the while. We will go together. We will work together. You shall help me, and I will help you. Is it a bargain? Good! Then we will conquer. As Belle has had the kindness to tell me, I am too old to work alone. Congressmen prefer to be petitioned by a younger lady. But I can advise, and you can execute. Well, you must pick out your man, and then you must enchant and bewilder him, and then you must put your case in his hands. Of course, you know how to enchant and bewilder. You always did know that."

"I have picked out my man," said Josie. "Do you know a certain Honorable Mr. Hollowbread?"

CHAPTER VII.

COUNTING UNHATCHED CHICKENS.

"MR. HOLLOWBREAD!" stared Mrs. Warden, marveling that Josie had chosen, as her champion, an old gentleman instead of one of the youthful Solons whom she was in the habit of selecting—first one, and then another, or, perhaps, half a dozen together—for the future service and glory of her daughter.

"You could not possibly do better," she immediately added, well pleased that her coquettish young friend should be so easily contented, and hoping that she might stay

so. "Mr. Hollowbread is one of the solid old members—one of the most respectable men, for ability and character, that we have—and really worth having for a backer, I do assure you. But is he interested—bewitched and bewildered—already?" she asked, a sudden pang of jealousy shooting through her heart at the thought that this rival claim might win before her own.

Thereupon Josie narrated the adventures of the previous evening, including every one of Mr. Hollowbread's gentilities and duckings. She told the tale in her incomparable style, flinging it out in a perfect torrent of unhesitating, gleeful prattle, and giggling the while with the malicious fun of those demi-gods (if there be such) who pass their time in laughing at poor humanity.

There are rare persons, and usually they are, I believe, women, who have this talent of brisk, dashing, irresistible narration—a talent which comes to them by fits and starts, and which has an air of inspiration. It is useless to describe them; it is impossible to give an adequate report of them; the charm lies in the fluency and in the manner. The delivery of a comic passage by a first-class actor can alone render a fair idea of this extraordinary natural power. Mrs. Warden laughed over the Hollowbread disasters until she screamed and cried, and held her hands to her sides. Even Belle, though disposed to criticize Josie for her traveling freedoms, could not help being amused.

"There is no fool like an old fool," commented Mrs. Warden at last, not in the least meaning herself, though a flirt at forty-five.

"That is no compliment to Mrs. Murray," said Belle, recovering her self-possession so far as to disapprove of that lady, and to desire to give her a little dig.

"We can't choose who shall like us," answered the mother. "You don't admire Mr. Hamilton Bray, and yet he admires you."

This, by-the-way, was a reference to a courtship which Mrs. Warden wanted to discourage, as not offering an alliance grand enough for her daughter. It has doubtless been observed already that she was excessively proud of Belle, and in her waspish way very fond of her.

"Oh, do let Mr. Bray pass!" pouted the girl. "I don't like even to hear about him. You needn't be afraid that we shall ever come to terms. We disagree too much on a subject that he takes a great interest in. He thinks he is amazingly clever, and I think he isn't."

"He is clever enough to admire you, miss," bragged mamma.

"Oh, that doesn't require any cleverness," put in Josie, normally quick at a compliment, and in the present case anxious to please.

"Josie Murray, you are an angel!" said the elder lady. "Now to pay you for that, we will go back to Mr. Hollowbread. I ad-

vise you to keep him in view. Among other things, he is very rich. Oh, yes, indeed! A million or so—that is, so every body says. He might answer for a husband, if you don't mind hair-dye and some other extras."

"Is he so rich?" stared our heroine.

"Then what does he stay in Congress for?" "Why, what would you have him do?" asked Mrs. Warden, who had long since been bitten by the Washington madness, and thought politics the noblest of earthly pursuits.

"If I were a rich man, I would never do a stitch of work," was the sybaritic answer. "I would spend my money; I would have a palatial residence; I would give dinners and parties; I would take the lead in society; I would swing between New York and Europe. Why, it would be sufficient occupation and amusement for one year to build and fit up and furnish one's own house," continued this little worldling, who, in trying to imagine herself a man, remained a woman. "Such houses as they are getting now in the upper part of New York! Oh, they have improved greatly since you were there. Every year makes a difference for the better. I know a dozen, twenty—perhaps fifty—residences, where the mere front-doors cost from five hundred to a thousand dollars each. Now, imagine what you go into when you pass through a thousand dollars to get to it. It is something like the palace of Aladdin, or Solomon's Temple."

Mrs. Warden, and even her graver, wiser daughter, was evidently interested. The woman of our day is fascinated by the mere idea of lavishing money in profusion. Doubtless the reason is not far to seek; it is no longer her business to earn, but merely to spend; she has ceased to be a producer, and become merely a consumer. The fault lies not upon any individual, but upon all society.

"Heavenly doors!" pursued Josie, warming with her subject. "Panelings and carvings three inches deep; plaques of bronze from France; windows in Bohemian glass! And then you go in over parquetry of oak and black-walnut, laid in lozenges and all sorts of patterns. I like encaustic tiles the best, though. I wish you could see some of the hall-chairs they make now. Mr. Griper Jinks's chairs have griffins at the sides supporting the family shield (he has ancestors just about as much as an ape), and they are all of the most elaborately carved oak and rose-wood, and cost a hundred apiece. Stair-carpet is Aubusson, now fifteen dollars a yard, though the Dutch rugs are coming in. Wilton has completely gone out. Room carpets are generally Aubusson, made to order, fifteen dollars the yard. Mrs. Jared Jones's suite of three parlors used up about one thousand dollars in carpets alone. And the pier-glasses cost as much more."

"It is wicked," said Belle.

"Yes; think of the heathen, who might be converted with only one pier-glass," laughed Josie.

"I wish I could be as sinful," sighed Mrs. Warden, her black eyes sparkling with both pleasure and envy. "Well, when my claim comes in! Mr. Jared Jones is dead, isn't he? What are curtains made of now?"

"Lace, damask, satin—any thing," answered Josie. "Yes, Mr. Jared Jones is dead. Lambrequins and draperies are in style, if you fancy them; and of course most people do."

"Do poor people fancy them much?" asked Belle.

"Pshaw! what have poor people to do with it?" sputtered mamma, impatient at this interruption to the fairy tale. "They get their living by making these very things, and that is enough for them. Of course one wants lambrequins or draperies."

"Yes, a window looks bare with nothing but lace," agreed Josie. "Brussels costs one hundred and twenty-five dollars a window, and Cluny insertion two hundred. But I know some houses—Mrs. Manikin's and old Griper Jinks's, for instance—where they have real-thread lace, fifteen hundred dollars a window! Put on six hundred for damask and two hundred for lambrequins, and you get something worth making a courtesy to. Just think of it! twenty-three hundred dollars a window—forty-six hundred dollars for the two!" exclaimed the penniless Cleopatra, her mouth absolutely watering. "And then the furniture—oh! They make chair-covers now of Gobelin or Cretonne; you can imagine the cost. And the furniture is suitable—two thousand dollars a room! And that is nothing. I know one ebony cabinet, inlaid with ivory, that came to two thousand; and then there are tables of inlaid marquetry and tables of Florentine mosaic, some of them twelve or fifteen hundred apiece; all sorts of lovely gimeracks at fabulous prices. Twenty-five hundred dollars is moderate for the fitting-up of a parlor in mere chairs, sofas, and upholstery; there are some which cost ten times that. And this, mind you, doesn't include the statues and pictures and bronzes, and albums of engravings, and that sort of artistic finishing. Oh, when you come to that, there is no booting it up. A real first-class, tip-top, nobby and snobby New York parlor represents a fortune. Of course I don't mean that people in good style keep all their art in their parlors. Every body who is any body has a gallery, now. But I never cared so much for walls full of paintings. They are very pretty, and of course they are *chic*. But I should be satisfied with a handsome suite of rooms, say three parlors; and well fitted up, say ten or twenty thousand apiece."

"I should be satisfied with less," sighed

Mrs. Warden, who knew by experience how hard it is to get money, even in small quantities.

Belle said nothing. She had no special taste for expenditure, and could not catch fire at the thought of it. It was wonderful that such a straightforward, sensible, judicial young person should be the child of such an excitable, adventurous, flirtish, sly old pussy-cat as Mrs. Hooker Warden.

The explanation is that Belle was in every respect, physically and intellectually and morally, the image of her deceased father, James Warden, a lawyer of more than ordinary ability, who had been too conscientious to plead unjust causes, and who had won fees and fame but slowly. This resemblance the mother had often noted and lamented, with a sarcastic, impatient, whimsical pathos worthy of study rather than of sympathy.

"Belle is James all over," she often said. "It is like being married twice to the same man. I wish to gracious that my girl had been born a boy. She is altogether too gentlemanly for petticoats. There was a mistake somewhere, and it will always keep us in a muddle. As a man, she would be perfect; but as a woman, she is a failure. If she would only use her beauty, as other handsome girls do, she could have any body, or do any thing. But she *won't* use it—she *won't*!"

To return to the interview between the three ladies, we will say that there was much more delightful discourse about palatial residences, their outfittings, and their occupants. Cornices and ceilings were described and discussed; so were frescoes, of course in oil-colors and of Italian delineation; so were crystal finger-plates and bronze door-knobs and sconces; so were dinner-sets and breakfast-sets and tea-sets; so were dresses and bonnets.

And the chain which linked all these luxurious items—the sentiment which made this conversation a delight to the speakers—was not an appreciation of art or of perfect handiwork, but satisfaction in mere outlay. It was the cost, the expenditure, the ostentatious extravagance, which made Josie Murray smack her lips, so to speak, as she discoursed of New York grandeur.

Listening to her frequent reference to the price of things, one could easily divine the feeling which had brought her to Washington, and set her feet in the ways of the claimant. She desired money, and was willing to obtain money in any permitted fashion, for the mere purpose of making a show with it. Satan himself, after six thousand years of going up and down in the earth, and walking to and fro in it, could hardly have been more worldly.

As for Mrs. Warden, we must do her the justice to state that, while she was quite as covetous in her longings, and as little punc-

tilious as to the ways and means of satisfying them, the leading motive of her rapacity was love for her daughter, a trait amiable even in a harpy.

"But, my dear, business before pleasure," said Mrs. W., at last. "We must stop talking about these fine things, and see how we are to get them. I shall have to introduce you to some Congressmen of the available sort. Your excellent relatives are dreadfully other-worldly, as you say, and won't take you among the people you need to know. The only political principalities and powers that they consort with are such old-styled grandees as Senator Ledyard and Representative Payson, who never touch any thing but national measures, and put their moral pocket-handkerchiefs to their noses when they see a private claim. Mr. Hollowbread, too, he wants to belong to that monastic set, and, moreover, he is a kind of Mr. Facing-Both-Ways, and, finally, he is as slow as an armadillo. Honestly, I don't believe you can get much good work out of the creature."

"I have claims on two others," said Josie. "Edgar Bradford is a very old friend of mine, and Mr. Sykes Drummond is member from my district."

Mrs. Warden's great black eyes snapped and sparkled with jealousy. Bradford was one of the chiefest of the promising young men whom she intended for Belle; and Drummond she had settled upon as one who might do, in case all his betters should fail. She was an odd woman, was Mrs. Warden, and her jealous vanity was one of her queerest streaks.

It is a whimsical but serious fact that she could on occasion set her own dowager cap at Bradford, Drummond, and other youth with a pertness which gave them both entertainment and uneasiness. A doting parent, but an untamable old flirt, she would labor in one moment to make a market for Belle, and in the next to cut her out.

We may as well mention here that Bradford had a profound respect and an almost tender liking for the daughter, qualified by a considerable disesteem for the unwise, scheming, coquetting, grinning mother.

"Dear me, don't I know them?" exclaimed Mrs. Warden, with a smirk which claimed intimacy and almost ownership. "Drummond is here very frequently; and as for Edgar Bradford—you must ask Belle about him."

"I have nothing in the world to tell you about him, Mrs. Murray," snapped the young lady appealed to; "that is, nothing special. He is a very fine man—at least, in some things. Colonel Julian Murray has a high opinion of him, and says he will make a noble Congressman."

"How you do quote Colonel Murray forever and forever!" put in Mrs. Warden, jealous of every body whom her child admired.

"You have such a passion for fussy, fastidious red-tapists! I wish he would help us untie *our* red-tape; then I would admire him."

"You admire him as it is, mamma," said Belle; and truly enough, for Mrs. Warden's cap was often pointed at the colonel; "and I do believe that you respect him more than you would if he should push our absurd claim."

"Absurd!" flamed out the mother, as ready to argue for her appropriation with a woman or with a baby as with a Congressman, so nearly had she become a monomaniac on the subject.

"Oh, well, never mind about *that*," pursued the girl, in a tone which was doubtless too impatient and quelling for a daughter. "But as for Mr. Bradford, it certainly is absurd to refer Mrs. Murray to me for information about him. I dare say she knows him far better than I do."

"Oh no!" protested Josie.

But she could hardly help smiling as she uttered this denial. She remembered how she had in other days felt the young man's arm around her waist and his mustache against her cheek. She knew him better than she had ever known any male being, except her late husband, "poor Augustus."

"But Mr. Bradford will be no help to you, I am afraid, my dear," insinuated Mrs. Warden, who was far too sly herself to believe Josie's "Oh no," and remained jealous. "He has a young man's fancy for being a national-measure Congressman, and he frowns on claimants in general, though he is civil to us. You had better see what you can do with Mr. Hollowbread, and perhaps keep an eye on Sykes Drummond. There is Mr. Bowie, too. Southern members are very useful in these days. They are mostly carpet-baggers, you know, and want their share of what is going. It is dreadfully shabby, of course. A Congressman ought not to take any thing for getting a claimant's money, especially a lady's; but they do. I am sorry to say it, for the honor of my country. That is, a good many of them do, and one has to put up with it. There is precious little of pure justice and honor in these days. You will find it out when you have toiled and moiled inside politics as I have for the last six or eight sessions."

"Six or eight sessions!" exclaimed Josie. "If it takes as long as that—well, I shan't be as young as I am now, for one thing."

"What better can one do? It is great fun," answered the veteran intriguer, a lobbyist who had learned to love lobbying, notwithstanding an unprofitable experience of it.

"One might get married," suggested Josie.

"You can do that *en passant*; it might be the wisest thing. After all, there is no man who will work for one like one's own hus-

band. What with law and custom and public opinion to push him, a husband does pretty well, and he sticks. At all events, he is generally better by far than any one else. After studying the world a good deal, I have come to the conclusion that there is no man so useful as a husband."

"Why don't you get married yourself?" smilingly inquired Josie.

"Because I should poison the man," broke in Belle. "I don't agree with my mother half the time, but I won't share her with any body."

Mrs. Warden leaned forward and slapped her daughter on the shoulder in a petting fashion.

"But I shall get my claim without going up the aisle for it, and that will be nicer," she laughed. "Oh, you needn't shake your head, Belle; I know that I shall get it. I can fix the exact amount. I shall get just one hundred thousand dollars."

"I hope so," said Josie; "but there will be nothing left for me."

"One grant is an argument for another," judged Mrs. Warden. "Besides, we must join hands; we must work together. Meet us at the President's reception to-morrow evening, and I will introduce you to ever so many useful people. Tell Colonel Julian Murray from me that he must take you there; and get the rector and his wife to go. The more respectably you are escorted, the better you will start in your business. Nice people in Washington are just good for that, to help along people who can't afford to be quite so nice."

"And so you will chaperon me? A thousand thanks!" said Josie, gratefully, as she took her leave.

CHAPTER VIII.

A PATRIARCH OF THE ARMY.

DURING the morning of Josie's second day in Washington she received a call from that uncle of hers whom we have heard mentioned as the colonel.

Julian Murray, the only surviving brother of the Reverend John Murray, was a full colonel in the regular army, and chief of an office in the War Department. He was a fine-looking veteran, quite tall and remarkably straight, with a long, firm, and striding gait, as of one who had marched much, with an air of unconsciousness and self-possession which was nothing less than patrician, and yet with little ways of putting himself at ease which were as unceremonious as old slippers.

His abundant hair was nearly white; his face was long, thin, high-featured, and distinguished, if not handsome; his expression was calm, sweet, benevolent, and yet singu-

larly resolute. There was a little absent-mindedness in his demeanor, and there was a frequent smile, which seemed to apologize for it. On the whole, he made one think of a venerable and entirely sane Don Quixote. Sixty-five years of age—that is to say, three years older than the rector—he appeared to be the younger of the two, and was clearly the haler and stronger. No one who had to deal with him ever doubted that he was in the full possession of all his intellectual faculties.

"Uncle Julian!" exclaimed Josie, kissing him immediately, although she had met him but once before in her life. "I remember you distinctly at my wedding. You said to me, 'Go through life by easy marches, my dear!' I have never forgotten the advice, though I haven't been able to follow it."

"Well, I am sorry for that, my dear," answered the colonel, obviously pleased at being recollected so well and embraced so cordially. "I wish you better fortune in future than you have had. Let me see, I don't want to be calling you Mrs. Murray, and my memory is a tattered old knapsack, and I am always losing names out of it—"

"Josephine I was christened. It will be Josie here."

"Josie! It is a pretty name; it suits you well," declared the old gentleman, surveying her handsome face with unmistakable approbation. "Well, Josie, you must pardon my not calling to see you yesterday. I was kept frightfully busy at my office till late in the evening by a demand for special returns. Those Congressional fellows can't understand figures unless we write them out for them as plain as baker. And so this is my first chance to get at you."

"But you are going to make a long call now?" said Josie.

"I shall want to," replied the colonel, seating himself with unceremonious ease in a great arm-chair, and stretching out his long, thin figure in a disjointed fashion. "I am very glad that you have come to join us, Josie. We will do what we can to make things pleasant to you. We will march you into society at once. John"—and here he turned to his brother—"why couldn't you and Huldah go to the Presidential reception to-night? Mrs. Warden has dropped me a sort of order to go myself and take Josie. She is quite right; Josie ought to see it. But how can an old bachelor like myself escort a young lady suitably? I don't see but what you two will have to get on your uniforms and turn out."

"Why, certainly," broke out Mrs. Murray, her small, wrinkled gray eyes twinkling at the prospect of something entertaining. "Of course Josephine ought to see it. Don't you think so, Mr. Murray? And somebody must go with her—somebody who can introduce her to people—some lady."

"We will risk it," agreed the rector, who perceived that his wife meant to go, and that he might as well like it. "We must be careful not to trample on people," he added, with a smile. "We will get into some corner and see the crowd go by."

"Have you all the things you want, Josephine?" asked the old lady, a lover of good style in dressing, notwithstanding her frugality.

"Every thing," laughed the young woman, remembering how she had spent her last spare dollar at Stewart's. "But do call me Josie."

"I would," said the prim dame of other days; "but I am old-fashioned, and don't fancy the new nicknames. You must let it be Josephine."

"Any thing you like best," smiled Josie, and Mrs. Murray patted her on the shoulder—or, rather, on the trimming of her dress, so fastidious and delicate was that wrinkled, tremulous old hand, even in its endearments.

But the Reverend John Murray was still a little troubled and anxious in spirit. Drawing his brother aside, he whispered,

"I don't know about taking Huldah into such a crowd and excitement. Won't it be fearfully crammed?"

The colonel looked vacant, and whistled softly: he knew that there was no sense in their discussing the matter. The old lady (as he often called his sister-in-law) would settle it all by herself.

"Well, I think we had better risk it," continued the rector, after some further useless pondering. "It will be very entertaining."

Entertaining to his old wife he meant. He was always seeking to amuse her, often at the cost of much trouble, and sometimes at a little risk. Apparently he feared lest her mind should drop into dotage, unless it were kept constantly awake by gentle fillips and shocks. He, as it were, compelled her to incessant intellectual movement, as men who have taken poison are made to walk continuously, lest they should sink into mortal lethargy. It seemed also as if Mrs. Murray had the same fear concerning herself, so averse was she to tranquillity, and so eager after new impressions. She caught at every hold on life; she let nothing pass her without putting forth her frail hands to grip it; trifling diversions, tattle—every thing was made use of as a stimulant.

"Well, you will be here to go with us, Julian?" anxiously concluded the rector.

"Certainly," promised the colonel. And so this discussion between the two brothers came to an end; if discussion it might be called, where only one spoke, and he knew that the matter had been decided beforehand.

"You came just at the right time, and I am glad of it," said the colonel, turning to

Josie. He liked her exceedingly already, and was pleased at finding amusement for her. As we already know, she was very agreeable on a first acquaintance, and, moreover, she had been making her lovely eyes do their best to cajole him. There was nobody, excepting people who were blind and stone-deaf, whom she was not capable of softening with her oglings and her cooings.

"It was so lucky!" answered Josie, who, by-the-way, had planned to be here just at this time. "And it is all so good of you! I have only seen you for a minute, and here I am under obligations to you!"

The colonel laughed in an easy, softly deprecating fashion, as if to say that she was making too much of it. Josie studied him a moment, and guessed that she must not flatter him too broadly; he had an air of being very shrewd, as well as very modest, and he might not like compliments.

"You must be my beau this evening, at least some of the time," she ventured to add.

"You will have so many young ones that you won't want me," he laughed again.

She thought of saying something about dear Augustus's relatives, and how much she preferred their company to all the world besides; but her second impression was that this could not be made to sound otherwise than spoony, and so she omitted it.

"Do you never walk with young ladies, if they want to have you?" she persisted, for she had really taken a fancy to the old soldier, and she was eager to interest him.

"I shall be very glad to walk with my young niece, if she cares for it," he declared with a simplicity which puzzled Josie, one of those young women who can understand almost any thing more easily than frankness. Actually she could not decide whether he were paying her some sort of courtship, or petting her as he would a child.

"Certainly I shall care for it, and very much," she said, trying again to enchant him with her smile and her eyes.

Is it to be supposed that this pretty thing of two-and-twenty contemplated flirting with her husband's gray-haired uncle? Well, she was perhaps capable of it, when there was no younger man to be got at; and capable even of letting her mind stray into suppositions of something more than a mere flirtation. The colonel was a bachelor, and she had heard that he had large possessions, and she took it for granted that he was socially lofty and influential. It was worth while, for various likely and unlikely reasons, to be on the best of terms with him. Moreover, smiles and soft glances came naturally to her, and were so habitual that she could hardly help them.

But presently there commenced a conversation which set her gently on one side, as if she were a listener, revealing to her that

these elderly people had an intellectual life quite outside of her narrow boundaries, and making her fear that she would not be able to command their respect and obedience.

"I had a walk with Bradford this morning," said the colonel, turning to his brother. "And we held another powwow over the development theory."

Josie pricked up her ears; not that she cared for the development theory, or so much as knew what it was, but because here was mention of one of her old beaux, who might perchance be a beau again.

"Mr. Bradford, the Congressman?" she asked. "I am so glad you know him! He is an old, old friend of mine."

"Is he? Well, he is a splendid fellow," answered the colonel, and went on with his remarks to the rector. "Bradford agrees with me in thinking that the Church Universal won't suffer the least jot of harm from the doctrine of development or evolution."

"I don't want to hear from Congressman Bradford about the future of the Church Universal," broke in the rector, with the natural waspishness of a clergyman who sees his domain taken under the protection of a layman. "If he has any message to forward to me concerning finance or our Indian relations, I will listen to it respectfully. But he is no more qualified to prophesy in religious matters than he is to work miracles."

The colonel laughed in his noiseless way, not with any air of derision, but placatingly.

"Now, see here, John. Look at this question in the light of history. Your Church Universal has learned a great deal from laymen since they were first invented. Once it denounced astronomy, and sent Galileo to the guard-house. But at last it had to accept the solar systems, and since then it has flourished wonderfully on them. See what shining discourses your modern divines, from Channing down to the *Ecce Caelum* man, have made out of astronomy! The Church actually did not know what a great and beneficent Deity it worshiped until the vastness of His creation was revealed to it by the anathematized star-gazers. Well, it accepted astronomy, and it has grown mightier on it. Some day it will accept evolution, and grow mightier on that."

"Never!—never!" exclaimed the clergyman, his pulpy and pallid face beginning to flush with agitation. "Evolution is not true, and the Church can not accept it. God's Church can not grow mightier on falsehood." "Don't, Mr. Murray" softly interjected his wife. "You mustn't get excited."

She was eying him closely and anxiously. For years she had watched over his health with almost as much solicitude as he had devoted to her. It would be hard to find

two other beings who cared for each other more tenderly and vigilantly than did these two elderly invalids.

"I don't want to annoy John, you know, Mrs. Murray," said the colonel.

"No; of course you don't," assented the old lady, nervously. "Of course, Mr. Murray, Julian doesn't want to annoy you. And I do wish you wouldn't get excited."

"But I do want him to see this thing from the right point of view," continued the colonel. "If he once gets hold of the butt-end of it, instead of the muzzle-end, it won't hurt him."

"Certainly," nodded Mrs. Murray, with quite vague ideas, however, as to which was the butt-end, and which the muzzle. "Do, Mr. Murray, try to discuss it patiently, and not agitate yourself."

"I don't want to discuss it at all," affirmed the rector. "It is an irritating piece of nonsense, and a matter of no importance."

"But you can't help discussing it," urged Julian. "It is in the forefront of the battle of modern thought. If you don't seize it, and turn it to your own purposes, it will damage you badly."

"I say never!—I say never!" asserted the old-school theologian. "The Church stands solidly on Revelation, and needs no human science to support it."

"Suppose the Church had gone on denying the Copernican system, and affirming that the earth is the centre of the universe, where would it be now? Would any intelligent man respect its teachings?"

"Oh, I agree with you so far. I concede astronomy, of course; there was a mistake there. Theologians should not set themselves against merely physical science. But this development theory is an encroachment on moral domain. If the human race grew up from monads and monkeys, then I can't tell you where its moral responsibility commenced, and then you'll deny that there is any such responsibility."

"No, I won't. Look here. Can you tell me in what week, or even in what month, of life the responsibility of the individual commences?"

The rector was silent. He did not at all like to be catechised by his brother. Julian had once or twice taken him down in a memorandum-book, and had very shortly brought him into a condition of contradiction to himself, or into a very deplorable state of flat heterodoxy.

"You don't believe in the damnation of unborn infants?" persisted the colonel.

"Of course not. The Church never held such nonsense."

"And how about infants a week old?"

"I don't care to be put through my primer," said Parson Murray, seeing very plainly where he was being driven to.

"But there is a time in the life of the in-

dividual when moral responsibility has commenced?"

"Of course; and that is the only point which it concerns us to know—the only point which a good Christian will care to investigate," affirmed the theologian, becoming fluent all at once, as he perceived a chance to instruct.

"And there is a time in the life of the individual when this responsibility has not commenced?"

"I admit it," conceded the rector, excitedly. "But what of it? It is a matter of no practical importance. We who hear the truth and understand it are responsible for our use of it. All the rest is of no account."

"Very well," pursued the colonel, remorselessly pushing on his columns of logic. "Now, if the time when this moral responsibility commences is a point of no consequence in the case of the individual, it is a point of no consequence in the case of the race. You can accept evolution, and still hold fast to your doctrine of human responsibility for sin, and all the while be as logical as you are now. In fact, evolution does not add to your difficulties at all. Nobody queries when monads or monkeys become responsible; they are not supposed ever to become so; they are embryonic men. The great trouble is to say when the infant—not the monad or monkey infant, but the human one—enters into responsibility."

"I don't know any thing about it," grumbled the reverend. "I want to leave all these mysteries in the hands of my Creator. And I can not endure to see finite men striving to take them out of his sufficient and merciful grasp."

"The scientists do not attempt to take things out of his grasp. They only seek to understand his method of working."

"They have always been the foes of the clergy and the scornors of doctrine," asserted the rector, getting irritated rapidly under the repetition of that alarming word, "scientists."

"They are the advanced guard and the skirmishers of religion in the warfare of discovering truth and glorifying the Creator. Nine-tenths of them have been worthy men, as little given to sin and atheism as the clergy. The Church hierarchy is the only army I ever heard of that poured cannon and musketry into its own skirmishers and forlorn hopes."

The rector became very much flushed, and seemed about to reply in high dudgeon. But his wife checked him; she had been watching him nervously all through this discussion; and now, seeing the blood fly to his tired face, she put up her shield to save him.

It was a very venerable Pallas withdrawing a very feeble Achilles from the combat.

"Now, Mr. Murray, don't!" she said. "You will get yourself excited, and have a rush of blood to your head."

He glanced aside at her, and saw that her wrinkled old hands were tremulous, and said to himself that he must be tranquil for her sake.

"Oh, dear! this is a worrying sort of world," he groaned. "I trust that when we get into the other one, we shall have no mysteries to clear up. I don't want to be troubled with heterodoxies and queries and doubts *there*," he concluded, in a pathetic tone, which almost verged on a sob.

"Well, let us drop our discussion," said the colonel. "I am sorry if I seem to be a foe, rather than an ally. You see," he explained to Josie, "I have just got to reading, in my old age. I have had precious little time for it during the greatest part of my life. And while I was in active service among the Indians and along our dull frontiers, these fellows in the rear were writing a prodigious quantity of the most wonderful books. What with Max Müller and Whitney, and Dalton and Lecky, and Spencer and Darwin, and forty more amazing chaps, I am up to my eyes in new ideas all the while."

"And who wrote about development?" asked Josie, thinking she would book herself on a subject which so interested the colonel.

"Why, Darwin, chiefly." "Oh yes—Darwin. I have heard about him; of course I have. Only I never quite understood what he wanted to prove."

"You will never quite understand it," declared the unbeaten rector. "None of us will ever quite understand it!"

"Don't, Mr. Murray!" expostulated his wife, fearful of seeing the blood fly to his head.

Then they once more talked of the Presidential reception, and decided that they would all go to it together.

CHAPTER IX.

A PRESIDENTIAL SQUEEZE.

"We will go early to avoid the crowd, and then get away early," little old Mrs. Murray said any number of times during the day to Josie.

"Certainly," the young lady would reply, with perfect readiness, and with a delightful smile. "It will be much the best way."

"You see we would like to have you stay as late as any body," the ancient dame would add. "But neither Mr. Murray nor I can stand fatigue as we could once; and so—"

"Why, my dear aunt, you are only too good to go with me at all," interrupted Josie. "The instant you feel tired, give me a sign and we will leave. Now, promise me that, or I shall be uneasy all the evening."

So Mrs. Murray imagined that the enter-

prise would be made short and easy for her old members, and for the rector's determination of blood to the head. Little did she know the nature and forces and possible orbit of the indefatigable young comet of society upon whose train she was trusting herself. She and her husband were destined not to return home that night until long after fatigue had begun to swell their ankles and tie knots in their muscles.

"Yes, we will let you know when we are fatigued," said the confiding rector. "Of one blessed circumstance I feel comfortably sure this year: there will be no jam; there can not be one. They had an awful crush last year in the White House. But to-night the reception is to be in the Treasury, where the tag-rag and bob-tail will find plenty of room. We shall be able to keep together and to make the rounds without difficulty. See here."

And he actually produced a plan of the first floor of the Treasury building, which he had got the colonel to draw out for him with all the accuracy of an old West Pointer, a precaution justified to his mind by the necessity and duty of taking good care of Mrs. Murray.

"There we go in," he continued, pointing with his great pulpy forefinger to guide his wife's investigations. "There is the entrance-hall. There is the ladies' cloak-room. There is the gentlemen's cloak-room. We leave you there; go here to get rid of our overcoats; then go to this other door to meet you. Then we move on together to this room to shake hands with the President. Then around through this long suite of rooms to the entrance-hall again. I think one tour, taken very leisurely, and without tiring ourselves, will answer our purpose."

It was an excellent plan of campaign, but, like many another, it worked best on paper. When the Murrays drove up to the Treasury, they found it besieged with carriages, while the great entrance-hall swarmed with people, whose numbers were rapidly increasing.

"It is going to be splendid!" exclaimed Josie. "Really something worth coming to."

"This is awful," murmured Parson Murray, aghast. "Huldah, I think you had better go back at once."

"No, no! I can bear it—a little while," gasped the old lady, a trifle frightened, but eager to see somewhat of the revelry, after the social manner of women.

So the two men scuffled along to the door of the feminine dressing-room, and poked their ladies, with much difficulty, through the jammed door of it, considerably maltreating a number of other females in the conflict, and duly apologizing to the wrong people. Next they fought or manoeuvred their way to the masculine cloak-room, gave up their great-coats to an already over-

worked, bewildered, and breathless servitor, and then commenced a fearful struggle to reach the exit-door of the ladies' room.

Meantime, old Mrs. Murray was pretty nearly at her wit's end, with the crowd and the confusion. That dressing-room was a terribly tight fit for the number of ladies within it. Before our couple had fairly got rid of their wrappings and received checks for them, there was a woman to every square foot of the floor, and each one seemed to be doing her solid best to incommode, crush, cast down, and trample to death every other.

"Dear me! I never knew before how hard ladies were," laughed Josie, as she pushed herself and hauled her aunt through the press. "I begin to believe they are the real bone and sinew of the country."

"I think I can stand it a little longer," gurgled Mrs. Murray, from beneath the hoops and flounces of a giant dowager who was combating in front of her. "I wonder how the gentlemen are getting along," she added, laughing rather hysterically, yet with good pluck for one of her ripe and, indeed, wilted condition.

Fortunately for their chances of advancing, there was no possibility of retreat. The general tendency of this phalanx of silks and satins was toward the exit-door, while a constantly thickening mass poured in through the entrance-door, rendering flight thitherward a chimera. Furthermore, Josie had not the least notion of giving up; she meant to see the reception, or perish in the attempt; she would have fought her way to it over dead bodies. So on they squeezed, and on they were shoved, until the pressure became terrific. Could the rector have seen his dear old wife in that maddened throng of a thousand millineries, he would have lifted up his loving voice and wailed with fright. He never imagined that she could be in such dire extremity. He did not know, and no man could suspect, without having physical experience of the fact, how savagely a thousand eager and frightened women can push and kick and trample.

He, meanwhile, clinging desperately to the arm of his elder but sturdier brother, was striving and suffering in the great hall outside. There also there was a wrestle as of giants; for every man who had wife or daughter or sweetheart inside of the dressing-room was butting toward the door of it; and the mightier were the obstacles in his way, the more anxiously he struggled to overcome them.

Thus it happened that in that much-sought-for portal two fierce crushes met, composed in large part of people who, while jammed face to face, were strangers to each other. Smith was almost in the arms of Mrs. Robinson, but her he did not want, and she did not want him; and meantime Mrs. Smith was hidden from him by a solid silken pha-

lanx. As for Robinson, he was rubbing noses with Mrs. Jones, whom he did not know by sight from the spouse of Melchisedek, while a giant Brown divided him from the wife of his bosom, the said Brown being quite wild and dangerous because he could not discern Mrs. B.

How they did dig each other, and bend each other's ribs inward, and lift each other off the floor, by dint of mere simple squeezing!

The portly and flabby and, so to speak, doughy rector was jammed and kneaded and moulded pretty nearly out of recognizable shape. He sought to bear it bravely; he smiled at his brother, and whispered, "This is like fighting with beasts at Ephesus;" but presently he got indignant, and grumbled at his fellow-sufferers as "bulls of Bashan;" and finally he became both gravely alarmed and earnestly wrathful.

"Sir, you are smashing my ribs!" he exclaimed, in the face of a raw-boned, untrimmed, unbroken gentleman from the mountains of North Carolina, who was doing his best to get beyond him without going through him.

At almost any other time the Southerner would have apologized to a clergyman whose physical boundaries he had invaded; but just now he was himself in great trouble, both of mind and body, and consequently not disposed to say any thing nice to any body; was indeed much inclined to be aggressive, or, at least, retaliatory. So he cruelly replied: "Your ribs are pooty well covered, my friend; they oughter stau' it better'n mine."

"Sir, I consider that remark—" puffed the rector.

But he was graciously prevented from finishing the perhaps unhallowed sentence. Just then a fresh squeeze of the mob took his breath away.

"This beats me!" continued the North Carolinian. "I never see a crowd of more'n a hundred men befo'."

And that was the last word he spoke in this world, so far as Parson Murray ever knew.

"Julian, I think I shall drop in a minute or two," groaned the rector, as soon as he had recovered speech.

"Hold on by me, John," answered the bony and heroic colonel. "Keep your hands up and your elbows over your ribs. As for dropping, a dead man couldn't do it. We must tussle it out. The ladies are having as sharp a fight as we."

"Are they?" gasped the rector, in affectionate terror, clutching at the shoulders of his neighbors as if he would climb on them, and peeping as well as he could between bumping heads to get a glimpse of his fragile old wife.

But he could only see a door full of female

faces, all tossing and troubled, as if they were, on a raft in a storm, and all unknown to him. Then he tried to shout, "Oh, Huldah! Huldah!" only his voice failed him, and the call was little better than a gasp.

But no Huldah responded. The venerable lady was hidden deep under skirts and flounces which did not belong to her; and moreover she was so occupied in mind by her buffetings, that had an elephant trumpeted in her ear she would hardly have heard him.

Well, we must leave the two gentlemen to endure and strive as they best may, and attend to the fortunes of the two Mrs. Murrays. Some small headway they were making from minute to minute; or rather some headway was being imposed upon them by others. By dint of good luck and severe tussling, ladies were constantly escaping from the room and going off with their natural protectors in a slender procession, which crept down one side of the hall toward the reception-saloon, thus making place for other ladies to reach the door-way.

Both Mrs. Murray and Josie were still alive and able to look the way they wanted to go, and even to scuffle a little. But, nearing the portal, the conflict became tremendous. No woman could or would have mercy on her sister-woman; they fought and they scolded like the heroes of the "Iliad." Presently a tall and sallow female, who combated in the rank behind our pair, losing her vitality because of a severe dig in the corset, screamed lamentably, "I shall faint in a minute!"

"This lady is swooning!" cried several of her fellow-martyrs. "Do make way for her there behind!"

Then a cruel voice—very pitiless, although nothing more masculine than a contralto—made this inclement response: "Hand her over to me if she has a fatal syncope, and I'll hold an inquest on her."

Josie Murray, full of the strength and gaiety of healthy youth, looked around with a giggle to see who this scoffer might be. To her surprise, she beheld a Bloomer: not, indeed, the ordinary Bloomer, a limp, diminutive, ill-favored nondescript, in a flannel or calico bathing-dress, but a young woman, who really looked like a man, so nearly did her garniture resemble masculine apparel. A tall and strong young person, dressed in a plaited frock-coat, plaited cloth vest, and gathered cloth pantaloons, was the figure which Josie stared at with a mixture of wonder, amusement, aversion, and contempt.

"Do look at that creature, aunt!" she whispered, loudly. "do look at her, quick!" she urged, as if there were danger lest the creature should fall to bits or otherwise vanish.

But Mrs. Murray, senior, was beyond staring even at monsters; her very curiosity was for the time stifled by physical suffer-

ing. She had but one idea in her ancient head, and that idea was to get once more alongside of her husband, never to leave him again in this world.

"I think I can stand it," she answered, dimly aware that Josie had spoken to her, but not capable of grasping what had been said.

Then a dark, black-eyed, vigorous lady, who had toiled slowly up to their shoulders, put her head between them, and laughed: "That is the woman's rights woman, Squire Nancy Appleyard."

"Oh, Mrs. Warden!" exclaimed Josie. "And Belle, too! Now we will conquer. We must go in *E pluribus unum*, as the American eagle says. Do get behind us and push us."

"Is it possible that you have your aunt here?" said Mrs. Warden. "Dear me! how can she stand this rampage! How brave you are, Mrs. Murray!" she added, recollecting the wisdom of saying pleasant things. "You set us all an example."

"I am getting on—I am getting on," murmured the old lady, without looking up. "Is my cap on my head?"

"It is all over it," laughed Josie. "But we will set that to rights in another room."

"We must try to get her through at once," counseled Mrs. Warden. "Suppose we make one tremendous push, and go through the door flying. The men won't be so hard on us as our own womankind are!"

So Mrs. Rector Murray was heartened up to the charge, and it was executed without regard to life or raiment. It was in part successful; the old lady was shot out of the waiting-room into the solid core of the male phalanx; there she was caught by her husband and brother-in-law, and laboriously dragged away, as if she were a body of Patroclus. But Josie and the Wardens could not follow her, for just then there was a violent reflux in the human tide; and they were borne back upon the line of ladies in the door-way, and, as it were, stranded there.

"You won't see them again for an hour," said Mrs. W. "You will have to stick to us."

"That will be much pleasanter," answered Josie, who had perhaps assisted the convulsion which had divided her from the Murrys. "They will want to sit in a corner and rest, while I want to go about and see the sights. Besides, you are to find me a bean, you know. You can spare one out of your five or six dozen."

"There is one engaged for you, only you must share him with us. We are with Congressman Bradford."

"Ah, how good of you!" said Josie, thinking meanwhile how mean it was. She had hoped to pick up Edgar Bradford in the crowd, and keep him to herself all the evening. And here Mrs. Warden had, so to speak, squatted on him, and pre-empted him.

Meanwhile the shoving and elbowing went on, and were very occupying to them all. But at last, to make a long story short, they got clear of that stormy door-way, and were conveyed away by Congressman Bradford. There was nothing remarkable in Josie's greeting to this young gentleman—nothing to show that they had once been a good deal in love with each other. She barely touched her gloves to his, gazed wistfully into his eyes for just a single instant, to see if he still cared for her a little bit, and said, in a rapid, light way, "So glad to meet you again!"

To make a dead set at Belle's escort would not do at all; not, indeed, that there could be any thing immoral or unfair in such an enterprise; but it would infuriate Belle's mamma, and that would be inconvenient.

"I am delighted to see you in Washington," answered Bradford; and asked where she was visiting, and promised to call.

Then he gave his arm to Mrs. Warden, and they all pushed on in search of a resting-place, there to shake out their ruffled plumage.

"We are flattened all out of shape," whispered Belle, looking in dismay at the irregular outlines of her crinoline.

"We are as slinky as ghosts," laughed Josie; "only we know by our feelings that we are flesh and blood. I think I must be black and blue all over."

"I am prepared, I believe, to enter the presence," said Mrs. Warden, after a few of those swift shakes and artistic slaps whereby a woman sets her costume to rights in a crowd.

"One minute," begged Josie. "Belle and I need an escort; and here comes one, and we will divide him."

Then catching, with a flirt of her fan, the eye of Mr. Hollowbread, who at that moment was plunging after them through the crowd, appearing and disappearing like a porpoise among surges, she beckoned him to hasten.

CHAPTER X.

MR. HOLLOWBREAD AGAIN,

DURING the last forty-eight hours Mr. Hollowbread had forgiven his lovely traveling companion for laughing at his duckings, and had come to long to see her once more.

He had discovered her some minutes before her eyes fell upon him, and had made himself very disagreeable to a number of persons in his efforts to reach her.

Her beckoning gesture redoubled his energy; he separated wives from husbands, parents from children, and button-holing constituents from members; he burst through tons and tons of crowding humanity, and placed himself by her side.

"I am so delighted!" exclaimed Josie,

with a trill and a quiver, as if words alone could not express all her joy. "What a piece of good luck to meet you, and just when I needed some one terribly!" she added, letting her limpid eyes dwell steadily upon his, as if they were fascinated by his watery gaze. "You know all my friends here? Isn't that nice! And now can you introduce me to the President?"

"I shall be proud to do so," declared Mr. Hollowbread, staring at her with admiration. He had been smitten with her in her traveling-dress, but in her evening-costume she was far more splendid. The stuff, the colors, and the minutiae he was man enough not to notice, but he was also sufficiently masculine to appreciate a brilliant general effect, especially when it included fine arms and shoulders.

"I was afraid you would never care to meet me again after our awful night adventure," continued Josie.

"Because I came out of it in such a ridiculous plight?" he answered, remembering how she had laughed at him, but no longer in anger. "I don't wonder you were amused at the figure I cut."

"I was not amused at it," asserted Josie. "Did you see me laugh after I got into the porch? It was at the astonishment in my good relatives' faces."

The fib was conceived with as much promptness as it was uttered. And it was a useless fib; a truthful explanation of her giggle as the result of nervous excitement would have answered just as well; but this agreeable young woman told white lies by instinct—told them more easily than not.

"But you were amused with my claim," she added, in a whisper, lifting her ripe young mouth as near to his stand-up collar as she could get it.

"Never?" affirmed Mr. Hollowbread, with double-bass solemnity, bending toward her the while in unpremeditated tenderness, so strongly was he attracted by her gaze, her manner, her beauty, her fragrance.

"Will you promise to look into it seriously some day?"

"I will." And he was quite grave about it by this time, as well he might be, considering its nature.

"I am very grateful. If you do, I shall hope. Well, now introduce us to the great soldier of the age."

She had nearly said "the great man of the age;" but it occurred to her that Mr. Hollowbread might feel himself disparaged and belittled thereby; she was clever enough to remember that, and to use the word "soldier."

"Colonel Bradford, will you lead the column?" said Hollowbread, with a ponderous jocularity for which we must pardon him, considering that a Congressman is not under obligations to run over with wit, and

has a good many temptations to be dull. "We veterans will support you."

"Close up, then," returned Bradford, who had served his three years in the field, and at times used a military phrase unconsciously.

They still had a warfare to wage before they could attain to the exalted host of the evening. From the site of that colossus they were separated by a door-way guarded by two six-foot dragons of the Washington police force, each setting his shoulder firm against his own door-post, and gripping his comrade's hands across the passage. Outside clung, hung, swarmed, and pushed a huge cluster of visitors, as closely packed as swarming bees around the mouth of a hive, and wearing the clothes off each other's backs in their struggle for entrance. Inside stood an usher, who watched the hard-laboring Grand Lama, noted vigilantly the progress which he made in getting rid of his worshippers, and from time to time waved the policemen a signal. Then up went the official arms; a dozen or so of the outsiders plunged through, ducking, and stumbling, and treading on each other; then down came the official barrier again, amidst much fighting and scolding.

Our three ladies bore this new trial with that patience and that courage which woman, as we have all heard a thousand times, displays in the great emergencies of life, meaning parties, receptions, picnics, and the like. The men were helpful, also, in the brutish fashion of their gender, worthy of scorn and gratitude. Mr. Bradford pulled with all his muscle, and Mr. Hollowbread pushed with all his avoirdupois.

At last our adventurers were face to face with the brief, sturdy, simple-mannered, much-enduring man who wore out the most formidable of all insurrections, and who saved his country. We will not report Mrs. Warden's speech: she no doubt said the correct thing, for the Executive smiled upon her; moreover, she must have been unanswerable, for he made no response. Bradford, who still remembered his soldierly training, and who held in profound respect his ancient commander, passed by him with an official bow, not even taking his tired hand.

Now came the turn of the elder Congressman, and of his two handsome young ladies. Josie Murray was tremulously alive to the greatness of the occasion, violently interested in the tranquil hero whom she saw so near her, and, to her credit be it said, not a little awed by him. For half a minute she had been staring at him with two dilated, sparkling, black eyes, which fairly seemed to eat him up, so hungry was their wonder. There was a pathetic air of uncomplaining endurance in his otherwise expressionless face, which she was clever enough to note

at the first glance, and which moved her deepest sympathy. It seemed to say that he hated these ceremonies of triumph, and that he had found the labors which won them more supportable. Moreover, the square-built man looked physically weary already, and almost painfully anxious to have his ovation end. No wonder, for he had already shaken a thousand hands, and there were thousands more itching to grapple him. The laurels had been very well, but the palms, or, rather, the fists, were too much.

"Mr. President, I hope I see you well this evening," said Mr. Hollowbread, with rather more grandeur of intonation than became the commonplace words, being indeed a very loose fit for them.

The President may have felt moved to answer, in the blunt language of pretty Molly Hopkins, "None the better for seeing you." But he did not; he merely moved his lips mechanically, and smiled almost imperceptibly; he knew the Congressman perfectly, but he had nothing just then to say to him.

"Allow me to present to you my two charming friends, Mrs. Murray and Miss Warden," continued Hollowbread, waving his hand superbly toward the ladies, and punching the head of another lady behind him with his elbow.

Belle Warden, pitying the jaded great man, bowed profoundly in silence, and slid on to her mother. But Josephine Murray, though her temples were fairly throbbing with awe, was resolved to speak to the hero, and get one precious word of response.

"Is not this almost as bad as a victory?" she asked, while all the blood in her heart rushed to her cheeks, and made her dazling.

"It is, madame; they are both great trials," answered the modest, war-worn man, breaking out into a hearty smile, so pleased was he at being understood. But that was all; he had nothing more to say to her; indeed, there was no chance to say more. Fifty fresh fellow-citizens and citizenesses had forced their way through the police barrier, and were upon him like the Philistines upon Samson. Josephine still hungered for executive conversation, but, much delighted with the memorable word she had got, was crowded and hustled into making her courtesy of departure.

"He is perfectly delightful!" she exclaimed to her Congressman, speaking so loud that the Pater Patria must have heard her, and, indeed, fully meaning that he should hear her.

"I am glad you find him so," grumbled Hollowbread, who had often criticised his chief magistrate for not being sociable. "No doubt every body does his best to be charming to Mrs. Murray," he added, with one of those bows whereby an old beau usually

italicizes his compliments. "The misfortune is that all of us can't please her."

"All of you would just please me," laughed Josie, speaking the exact truth concerning herself, though she uttered it jestingly.

"That is what I had suspected," he replied, not without a pang at his heart; no great matter of a pang, to be sure; a mere twinge, but prophetic.

"Then you have done me great wrong," declared Josie, looking up to his many-veined, Port-wine face with such innocent, beseeching eyes as would have deluded a much younger Lothario.

And Mr. Hollowbread, old and experienced, and knowing and wicked as he might be, was very considerably deluded. "Really likes me—tickled with a Congressman—we shall hear about the claim soon," he chuckled in his heart, with an odd mixture of credulity and shrewdness. For he had learned by dint of many adventures that women, at least such women as he usually stumbled upon in Washington, were not inclined to give themselves away, but rather to sell. "We must live and let live," he used to say; "we must pay for our luxuries, or do without."

By this time they were alone in that huge, jostling, humming assemblage. Belle Warden, looking upon Mr. Hollowbread as Josie's special captive, had promptly and joyfully left him to her, taking the unoccupied arm of Bradford. Moreover, our adroit little heroine did really propose to say a word concerning her claim, and had, therefore, intentionally allowed the Warden party to drift far ahead of her.

"You called me Miss Murray the other day, and now you call me Mrs. Murray," she said. "Have you learned that I have been married in the mean time?"

"I have instituted investigations," confessed the legislator, with the smile of a man who knows that he pays a compliment. "I have gathered some particulars of your history."

Josie was encouraged; it looked like fascination. Gentlemen, and especially elderly gentlemen of much business, do not usually worry themselves with inquiries about a lady, unless they are considerably interested in her.

"You had better catechise me on that subject hereafter," she murmured, weighing a little, just a very delicate little, upon the Hollowbread arm. "But now let us talk business. Will you really look into my claim some day, and see if it amounts to any thing?"

"I assure you that I will give my most serious attention to it, at any time and in any place which you will designate."

"I have heard that there are committee-rooms somewhere. Do ladies ever come to them?"

"Oh, the highest ladies in the land," asseverated Mr. Hollowbread, without even wiping his mouth after the clumsy and slobbering falsehood. His manner, however, was so humid with humbug, that Josie instantly suspected him of lying.

"Perhaps you had better call on me at my uncle's, if you would be so kind," she said. "Since I have been introduced to you by Mrs. Warden, I can present you as an acquaintance," she added, not in the least forgetting that there had been no such introduction. But it is necessary sometimes to suggest to a man what he ought to say in case he should be asked an awkward question.

"I shall be happy to call to-morrow morning, at twelve o'clock precisely, if convenient to you. You have some documents, some few little papers, I suppose?"

"Oh yes, and good ones. Mr. Frederic Curbstone, a New York banker, a friend of my husband, made them out for me. He heard of this claim somehow, and he said I ought to have the money."

Now, Mr. Curbstone, as our Congressman knew, was a sort of elegant sharper. He was a broker in New York, and a lobbyist in Washington. He bribed Treasury clerks to give him guesses as to what the Secretary was going to do with the "elastic end" of the currency; then he sold these guesses as solid facts to bankers, who valued themselves on being too much for their fellow-men; and sometimes, when his "points" turned out well, he got, in addition, a percentage on profits.

Mr. Hollowbread had not the highest confidence in claim-certificates which had been furnished by Mr. Frederic Curbstone. But he was too judicious to say any thing more or less than that he had no doubt all would be satisfactory. To keep this claim in his own hands, and thus to see as much as possible of the lovely claimant, was a purpose on which he had already set his heart. Of course, if it was a swindle, he would not really push it; at least, so the respectable gentleman assured himself at present. But, meantime, he would have many agreeable interviews with Mrs. Murray, and perhaps be useful to her in some other way.

"I must beg one thing of you," he urged, in a tone of affectionate counsel. "Do me the favor, and, perhaps I may say, do yourself the service, not to mention this affair to any other Congressman, at least not till I have looked into it. The less it is bruited, that is, while we are getting it into shape, you know, the more likely it is to win. There is an awful amount of greediness and selfishness in this political witch-caldron. The number of claimants is simply—immense! The Treasury of this gigantically prosperous country has not money enough to satisfy one-tenth of them. If your business were

known, you would be the mark of jealousy—a shining mark!" he added, gorgeously. "Rival claimants, miserable, envious charlatans, you understand, would work against your no doubt just suit, merely to favor themselves. The jackals of the lobby would sneak in to demand a share. Oh, it is horrible!" and Mr. Hollowbread made a wry face over the corruption he was exposing. "Believe me, my dear Mrs. Murray, that your best hope of success lies in absolute silence and discretion; that is, until you are fully prepared to go before the House."

"Of course," nodded Josie, thoughtfully. With all her coquetting and other levities, she was entirely in earnest about this claim, and solemnly greedy for the public money. "I promise you that no one but yourself shall know a word of it," she added, with such a look of earnestness and veracity that Mr. Hollowbread believed her, as, indeed, she believed herself for the moment.

She was charming to look at just then; much more charming even than usual. She indulged a blessed hope that she would soon be rich enough to dress better than most women, and, perhaps, to keep a carriage. She was thoroughly grateful to this old political trimmer, who had pledged himself to support her cause, and whose assistance she believed to be synonymous with victory, such was her faith in a Congressman and so little did she know of politics. She was in a condition to affirm that she should thank him, and that she might come to like him very much, or, possibly, to love him. All these gems of emotion sparkled in her expression, and gave her an air of being as good as she certainly was pretty.

Yet in another minute she had forgotten her gratitude, and wanted to get away from Mr. Hollowbread. She saw the Wardens snug in a corner, blockaded there by a splendidly gold-laced and copper-nosed old commodore, while Mr. Edgar Bradford was sailing about alone at his own sweet will.

In a very short time she had towed her venerable bean alongside the young man, although Hollowbread did not at all want to cruise in that direction.

"Have you seen my uncle and aunt, Mr. Bradford?" she asked, with an affectionately eager look, as though anxious to find the old people.

"I saw them a minute ago drifting into the next room. They were peeping and peering in all directions, as if their only object in life was to find their niece."

"I really ought to get back to them," sighed Josie. Here she gave her old friend an appealing glance, and at the same time made a piteous little wry mouth indicative of the fact that the good and great Hollowbread was insupportable. Of course, the young gentleman could do nothing less than say:

"Do let me take you to them."

"I am so much obliged to you, Mr. Hollowbread," smiled Josie, giving his arm a gentle pressure, and dropping it joyfully. "Recollect, I am to see you to-morrow!"

Then away she flitted, leaving her venerable admirer in a state of widower despondency; and not at all hopeful that he could make the rest of the evening pleasant to himself.

CHAPTER XI.

EDGAR BRADFORD AGAIN.

"I THINK your relatives are in this direction," remarked Bradford, signing toward the right.

"Oh, I dare say they are well enough off," returned Josie, inclining toward the left. "I want to talk to you for five minutes, if you can keep away from Belle Warden so long."

"I don't know that I need go back to the Wardens immediately," said Bradford, who was not disposed to joke about Belle, having a high respect for that young lady.

"Do you sit on Mrs. Warden's door-steps much?" queried Josie.

She was determined to learn whether he was in love with Belle, and she knew that persistent and saucy cross-questioning would elicit some sparks of confession from an enamored man, no matter how reticent he might strive to be.

"I sit on her door-steps as much as I do on any body's. I propose to sit on yours very frequently."

"But Belle is really a very sweet girl. Don't you think so?"

"She is more than sweet," affirmed Bradford, obliged in conscience to eulogize the young woman, if he must treat of her. "She is singularly upright and high-minded; one might almost say chivalrous."

"Do men fall in love with chivalrous ladies?" asked Josie, much inclined to believe the contrary.

"Perhaps they don't, much. I am inclined to fear that, as a general rule, they don't."

"Possibly because there are so few ladies who are chivalrous. Is that what you mean?"

"Partly that, and partly that men are not liable to fall in love with their own peculiarities. You mustn't understand that I am bragging about my own sex. It is a poor one enough, but it has its merits."

"You may brag about your sex, if you care to. I like it well enough. But are you one of the exceptions? Do you adore chivalrous ladies?"

"Heaven help me! How one woman can bore a man about another woman! I am not a bit in love with Miss Warden, if that question interests you."

Josie judged that he spoke the truth, and her manner took an immediate turn toward tenderness.

"I am glad that you are not absorbed there," she said. "I want to see as much of you as you can let me, without boring yourself. You must know, and you must be good enough to remember, that, with the exception of my Murrys and the Wardens, you are the only old friend I have in Washington."

Bradford perceived that he was being encouraged to something more than friendship, and he was far from feeling displeased at the discovery. He knew, from experiences of other days, that Josie Murray was a flirt, but he also knew that she could make flirting a very agreeable pastime.

He had coquetted with her before her marriage; he had likewise coquetted with her, as the nature of our story obliges us to confess, after she became a wife; and it seemed to him that she would be well worth some of his spare time, now that she was a widow. He was one of those variable men who become models of behavior when truly in love, but who are given to unscrupulous hazards of flirting when not touched by that purifying providence.

"You may be entirely sure that I shall not forget the old friendship," he declared, smiling to himself at the platonic name.

"That is a very kind promise. It is so kind that it would be quite naughty to break it. I was afraid that the only Congressman I should see any thing of would be Mr. Hollowbread."

"He seems to admire you immensely. He looked at you in a really tragic way when you deserted him. What a beau he is! How he has kept the fire going on his venerable altar! Your sex ought to raise a statue to him."

"He is an old fool!" said Josie.

"Oh—for admiring women?"

"No, not for that; but for believing that they can admire him. I was tempted to snub him just now, only—"

This was a favorite trick of Josie's—to half say something, and then wait to be questioned, thus making it easier for herself to tell what she wanted to tell.

"Only what?" asked Bradford, of course.

"Only that I may want a favor of him."

"A favor of Mr. Hollowbread! Why don't you come to your old friends for favors? You make me jealous."

"You see, I am here in Washington on business."

"On business! I couldn't have guessed it. What in the universe have you got to do with any thing that can be called business?"

"Affairs of state," laughed Josie, in a little, mysterious way, which was meant to excite curiosity.

Then she waited to be catechised, prefer-

ring to have her secret begged for ere she told it, so that she might in some sort grant a favor before asking one. But Bradford, through mere civil forbearance, failed to urge his query; so she was driven to decide whether she should frankly open her business to him. She hesitated; but it was not because she had pledged secrecy to Mr. Hollowbread; indeed, it was characteristic of her that she hardly remembered that circumstance. Probably, if she had been reproved for her faithless intent, she would have replied: "What right had he to ask me to make such a promise? He might have known that I wouldn't keep it, and couldn't."

She hesitated, because she felt obliged to treat Bradford delicately. He was not a Hollowbread; he was not an obvious old turkey-gobbler, whom a woman could entrap with a few grains of flattery and parings of flirtation; she could not have won his respectful good-will by speaking to him in the ears and making him her confidant within half an hour thereafter. He was a shrewd, clear-headed, self-possessed young fellow, who, furthermore, had very high notions of his own character, and considered himself peculiarly bound to be a gentleman. To be sure, his notions of gentlemanliness did not include strictness in some particulars which society speaks highly of, when it has the courage to speak of them at all. Josie knew by experience that he could flirt with married women, and even with the wife of a man whom he called his friend. But she had an idea that there were some other wrong things, she hardly knew what, which he stigmatized as dishonorable, and which nothing in the world could make him do.

Perhaps pushing extravagant demands for the payment of old barns might fall within this mysterious circle of impropriety. However, she decided to speak, and see what would come of it.

"Do you believe in claims?" she asked, in a light, indifferent way, ready to start back from the subject if he should make a face at it.

"Claims! What claims? I believe in your claims to admiration."

"And I believe in yours to confidence," she replied, which was certainly turning it adroitly and effectively.

He became graver as he looked down into her pleading face and asked: "Do you mean a claim on the Treasury?"

Josie nodded, meanwhile never taking her eyes off his, partly because she meant to fascinate him and partly because she was herself a little fascinated. His eyes were like hers in being dark and handsome, though they were only hazel, while hers were nearly black; and they were meditative, while hers were mischievous.

Now, when four such orbs look steadily into each other, the owners thereof are apt

to feel a thrill of agreeable emotion. Each of these two young persons had a sensation that he or she was on the point of falling in love with the other.

"Are you quite in earnest?" he asked, more tenderly than he had ever before put a question to a claimant.

Again Josie nodded, still gazing at him with all the witchery that brooded under her long lashes, and adding to it the enchantment of a pleading smile. Her heart was beating close by his arm, and she almost hoped that he felt it.

So he did, and his soul was considerably stirred by the sensation, and he found it difficult to meditate with statesman-like wisdom.

Was it possible that she really had a respectable claim on the United States Treasury? He looked at her wistfully, hoping that it might be so. She had been very sweet to him in other days. Her departed husband, poor Augustus, had been a good and even an overconfiding friend; and he could not deny that here was a fair demand upon his gratitude. Besides, her heart was thumping, and his own was responding in that moving fashion!

"I have never yet taken hold of any thing of that sort," he said. "It hasn't seemed to come in my way."

It had come in his way, enough; in fact, it had repeatedly and impudently tried to force itself upon him; but he had unceremoniously and arrogantly thrust it out of his way. He was an excessively proud young man; especially proud of his character for honor, and very touchy to any imputation upon it; marked, moreover, by a high, authoritative temper, which had grown the higher during his years of military command. To one lobbyist, who had frankly offered him a large sum to put a claim through, he had responded by showing him the door and thrusting him out.

Josie noted the reluctant fashion in which he fingered the subject, and was more humbled in spirit by it than one might have expected, considering her saucy courage and her habits of ruling men.

"Isn't it—respectable?" she stammered. Of a sudden the idea came to her that to bring a sham claim against the Government might be low. This suspicion, and the thought that Bradford might be looking down upon her as unlady-like, gave her a painful sense of humiliation. The sting was, of course, all the keener because once she had not been obliged to do low things, nor to do any thing at all, for her support.

Only two or three years ago she had a husband to care for her, and lived like one of the great ones of the earth, as American ladies do live.

It was dreadful to be so fallen into poverty, and to be driven to do what genteel peo-

ple scorn. For a moment she was nearly overcome by the sense of her degradation. Even there, with all that elbowing swarm of strangers about her, tears of mingled shame and disappointment brimmed her eyelids.

"The respectability depends upon the nature of the claim," said Bradford. "If it is a just one, the urging of it is, of course, perfectly respectable. What is yours about?"

But Josie would not answer his question just then. In her present shamefaced state of soul, and in his obviously unripe state of sentiment, she did not want to talk to him about payment for an old barn, at the rate of ten dollars or so for every shingle.

"I will let you know some time," she murmured. "When can you call on me?"

"To-morrow—say at three o'clock—if that is convenient to you," he proposed.

"I shall be so glad to see you!" sighed Josie.

In spite of the weight at her heart, she was tempted to smile. Congressman Bradford and Congressman Hollowbread were to call on her to hear her story. There were two of them; the business marched.

"Who does take charge of this sort of thing?" she said next. "Is there any body in particular?"

"There are members who do almost nothing else, and who make a great deal of money by it. They push a claim through for the half of it, or for what they can get. Of course they are contemptible scoundrels. No Congressman has a right to touch a dollar of the money which is paid on a claim. I hope that you don't need the services of such swindlers. They are a disgrace to themselves and to the body to which they belong, and to whomsoever employs them."

Josie would have been angry at him if she had not been afraid of him. She was certainly angry at herself for having mentioned her business to him so hastily. For once she had miscalculated and overrated the power of her feminine influences over the masculine soul. Not a word more must be said to him about the claim until she could make him "care for her," as she put it.

"Generally, people are supposed to go to their own member for such work," continued Bradford. "You must not understand me as recommending Drummond," he promptly added, remembering that that gentleman was suspected of dealing with unjust claims.

"Perhaps I may never go about it to any one," said Josie, who was even then looking around the room for Drummond. "It was urged upon me by a good friend of mine," and here she referred to that dubious broker and seller of "points," Mr. Fred Curbstone; "but I hate the paltry subject already. Let us talk of something less mercenary."

Bradford was full of attentions to her henceforward. He felt that he had hardly been kind enough to a woman who had al-

ways been kind to him, and sometimes perilously overkind. Besides, she was such a pretty creature; and he had been half in love with her more than once, and was perhaps falling a little in love with her anew! He pressed her hand favorably under his arm, and walked on with her superbly through the crowd of promenaders, pointing out notable persons for her inspection.

"Do you want any of these great people introduced to you?" he inquired. "I know them nearly all."

Josie would have liked to get at the grantees but for one thing. There was a warmth in Bradford's manner which suggested courtship, and for that joy she was always capable of giving up all others.

"Do I tire you?" she murmured. "If not, I will take some other opportunity of seeing the curiosities."

"Tire me! You gratify and flatter me very much. I don't suppose that any man was ever tired of your company."

It was true enough. Even poor Augustus, to whom she had not been a superexcellent wife, was always bewitched with her.

"Tell me honestly one thing," she said. "Did you evade coming to me on the cars? I sent Mr. Hollowbread for you."

"The old rogue! He lounged up to me and talked finance, and never mentioned you. That was so like Hollowbread!"

"Was it?" said Josie, without, however, being angry with the old deceiver, whose motive she guessed and appreciated. "Was Mr. Drummond there?"

"Yes; and Beauman. Did you send for all of us?" he laughed, remembering what a universal coquette she was.

"I sent for you. What a shabby thing in you to say that! Who is that little black-eyed thing, with long black hair down her back?"

"That is Jessie Cohen, the painter. She paints portraits of heroes and sages, and badgers Uncle Sam into buying them. The honored notables themselves don't much care to purchase. Miss Appropriation Cohen our funny men call her."

"And does Uncle Sam buy them?" inquired Josie, wondering in her busy head whether she too might not learn to portray the national glories, if the price suited.

"He has had to buy some. You will find two or three heroes hung up about the Capitol in *terrorem*. The art is not high, but the pay is. Two thousand dollars make a square yard of danbng sublime."

"What do you give so much for, if the work is poor?"

"She smiles and flatters for it. What is an ass of a legislator to do when Titania coaxes his long ears?"

Josephine thought of her claim, and of her own faculty at smiling and cajoling, and took courage.

"There is that man-woman again," she continued, indicating the virile costume and feminine visage of Squire Nancy Appleyard. "I hate a man-woman, she is so disappointing! You see a suit of clothes coming toward you; and you think that there is something which will like you, and protect you, or, at least, hurt you; and then you find a helpless, useless, harmless man-woman inside of it. Did you ever see a face at a window, and think it was a pretty face, and you would like to flirt with it, and then find out that it was a boy's face, instead of a young lady's? And wasn't it disappointing and enraging? Well, that is about the way a woman feels toward a Bloomer."

"I should think it might be so," replied Bradford. Meanwhile he surveyed Squire Nancy with a calm, meditative curiosity, much as if he were inspecting some very curious specimen of monkey—some monkey which stood more than usually upright. It was such an arrogant stare, and so obviously though unconsciously contemptuous, that it was a wonder Appleyard (if one may call her so) did not turn crimson with confusion and wrath. But that female attorney liked amazingly to be stared at, and bore the Congressman's scornful examination with a genial smile.

"What does she do?" asked Josie. "Is she really a lawyer?"

"A lawyer without clients, or position, or any thing that is legal. She is clamoring to be admitted to the Washington Bar, and begging meanwhile for a clerkship. I have had a chance to refuse to sign her petitions, and, being a fiend in human shape, I improved it."

"You are very hard upon her," smiled Mrs. Murray, pleased that he should be so.

"I don't treat her half so badly as does the member from your district. I may as well tell you the tale; it is the best-known joke in Washington; you will be sure to hear it. Drummond is pretending to court this Appleyard nondescript, and they say the poor Squire really hopes to bring him to an offer, and is sweetly in love with him. Now, that I call shabby. It would be a good joke if she should sue him for a breach of promise, and get her case. I wish she would, upon my honor."

Meantime Squire Appleyard strolled by them, elbowing her way with considerable manfulness through the crowd, and glancing impatiently in all directions, probably in search of Drummond. She was a tall and vigorous young person, resembling in figure a man much more than most women do, but still looking oddly in coat, vest, and pantaloons. It was impossible not to note, with a sort of discontented surprise, the slope of the shoulders, the hollowness of the back, the breadth of the hips, the fullness of the haunches, and the pulpy plumpness of the

thighs. To an eye unaccustomed to plain exhibition of such phenomena the effect was decidedly grotesque; a little indecorous, and, one might almost say, revolting. It was a coarse and unpleasing removal of the veils and mysteries with which our race has in the main loved to drape the forms of womanhood. Ninety-nine persons out of a hundred would have surveyed it with the same distaste which appeared in the faces of our two by no means fastidious spectators, Josephine Murray and Bradford.

"There is Drummond behind us, and she is making for him," whispered the Congressman.

An idea which was both practical and mischievous flashed through Josie's lively brain. She would obtain a business interview with her member, and she would cut out and torment that caricature of her sex.

CHAPTER XII.

PAYING COURT TO ONE'S MEMBER.

"INTRODUCE me to Mr. Drummond," whispered Josie to Bradford. "I want to make that creature know that she is a woman."

"Twofold cruelty!" smiled the young man. "Both Squire Appleyard and I will be wretched. But woman must have her will."

"Only I want you to see me again before I leave," she added, pressing his arm with her gloved hand, as one may surely press the arm of an old friend.

"Of course," nodded Bradford; and, before he knew it, he had returned the pressure, so quickly could this little witch arouse the male instinct of courtship. He looked down into her eyes intently, he was really loath to leave her. Then he turned, signalled to Drummond, presented him to Mrs. Murray, said a word or two to start conversation, and departed.

Mr. Sykes Drummond was one of those men whom a woman can not regard with indifference, but whom she must either like or dislike fervently, and that almost at once. There was about him exceptional power, which of course the feminine soul admires; but there was also exceptional roughness, which the feminine soul usually hates. He was not the iron hand in a velvet glove, but the iron hand without any glove at all.

Not only in his physical, but likewise in his intellectual structure he was a notable example of the brutal sort of vigor. His gait or action, whether of body or of mind, was swift, strong, rude, and noisy.

There was not a lazy bone in him; he was as energetic as the very devil; and by this comparison we mean that there was something disagreeable in his energy; that there

was even something which gave you an idea of the malign and diabolical.

Very different was he from Bradford, although both were potent organizations. In Bradford there was a poise, a graceful deliberation of power, as in the Discobolus of Praxiteles; while in Drummond there was a harsh, violent, exaggerated action, like that of the Fighting Gladiator. He was not as handsome a man in the face as his rival; he had nothing of the other's engaging mediocrity and sensibility of expression; neither were his features as classic in outline. Nevertheless, his physiognomy was very impressive, and, if you once learned to like it, it fascinated you. It had a sort of *beauté du diable*; it was bewitching, because it was so dauntlessly wicked; besides, it was really a grand aquiline visage.

People who admired it thought it all the handsomer because of the massive jaws, the obstinate, strong chin, the dusky glare of the black eyes, and the unconcealable gleams of passion.

Squire Nancy Appleyard, for instance, could not look at it without palpitating from beaver to boots, and considered it the noblest figure-head that she had ever seen on the shoulders of man or woman.

Josie Murray was soon in a turmoil about Drummond—in a turmoil, that is, over the question whether she should like him or detest him. He strode along with her like a tug-boat conveying a skiff, apparently not even thinking whether the pace might be pleasant to her or not, and shouldering aside crowded fellow-men without regard to their glances of indignation. If one of them uttered a grumble at being thus hustled, he looked around at him with the stare of a pugilist spoiling for a fight, while a smile of derision flickered along his flexible mouth.

Of all the five thousand souls who crammed the Treasury, he was seemingly, and very likely was in reality, the most arrogant and pugnacious.

"He is no gentleman," said Josie to herself, a little afraid of him, but also a good deal interested. "But isn't he tremendous?"

Her womanly divination was at work upon him, investigating his character and querying how it would serve her. She decided that, if he should only come to love her, he would be an incomparable protector, fraying a way for her through the throng of life, and lifting her into luxurious security, where she could dazzle and rule.

If he should come to love her! But could this bearish egotist ever truly and self-sacrificingly love any body? She somewhat doubted it, but she soon wanted to see.

Meantime they were talking mere Washington commonplaces. Their conversation was below the level of their possibilities, as well as below the level of their thoughts—at least, Josie's thoughts. What a bar the de-

corum of society is to dramatic action and speech in life! Two beings who would like at first sight to pummel or to embrace each other are obliged by respect for public opinion to keep their arms off each other's shoulders.

It is only drunkards, professional bullies, and perhaps the noble savage, who establish acquaintance on a sincere basis and come directly to the veracities of hugging and fist-cuffing.

But, after a few minutes of aimless babble, Josie felt sufficiently at ease with her representative to commence on subjects personal to him. She was habitually bold in this stratagem of talking to men about themselves, for she had discovered that it ripened intimacies with them rapidly, and, moreover, that it flattered their vanity.

"There is a gentleman who seems to be very anxious to speak to you," she said, archly.

"What gentleman?" asked Drummond, glaring about him in a way which boded small civility to interlopers.

Josephine waved her fan toward the feminine figure and manly raiment of Squire Nancy.

Drummond stared at Miss Appleyard's pleading face with a quizzical writhing of his lips, slightly nodded his Plutonian shock of long black hair in response to her bow, and then said to Mrs. Murray:

"That gentleman may wait. Haw, haw, haw!"

"He doesn't care for her a bit," thought Josie, much pleased. "But I wish he wouldn't laugh so like a hyena. It is enough to make one hate him."

She was fairly right there. A Southern Senator, the eccentric Judge Pickens Rigdon, had observed of Drummond: "By Jove, sir! if any man in my district laughed like that, he would get bushwhacked, sir!"

Mr. Drummond now turned his broad back full upon Squire Appleyard, and marched Mrs. Murray toward a distant quarter of the edifice. But here the lady presently laid eyes on somebody whom she did not care to come to speech with. Toiling through the dense crowd, and wearing on their wrinkled white faces an unmistakable expression of lassitude, there appeared the venerable Rector Murray and his still more venerable wife.

Josie judged, from their air of weariness, that they were more than ready to go home. Now, she had just begun her evening; she had not yet spoken about the claim to her member; she meant to be introduced to at least a dozen more legislators; and consequently she was by no means inclined to run a chance of departure.

"We will turn into one of these small rooms, if you please," she said, promptly facing away from her relatives. "I am tired of this maelstrom of promenading."

"The smaller the room the better," laughed Drummond, loudly. "I should like to find one which would only hold us two."

It was rather audacious, but still it meant a sort of courtship; and, in Josie's opinion, saucy courtship was better than none.

"You needn't look for such a room," she laughed. "Still, if we could find a place where I could ask you a serious question or two, I should like it."

"Come on, then," said Drummond, his curiosity aroused, as she meant it should be. "But I am dying to know what sort of serious questions you ask. Couldn't you hint at the subject as we go along?"

"Too many listeners," said Mrs. Murray. "There seems to be a quiet corner over there, to the left. Won't that do?"

"No, that won't do," smiled Josie, who was playing her usual trick of prolonging a *déroulement*, and so exciting curiosity as much as might be.

"The next room, then. It seems to me a thousand miles off."

It was jocose exaggeration, of course; and yet he was really interested. She had already made herself quite bewitching to him by her cleverness, by those side-glances of hers which were so much more sentimental than she knew of, and by certain seemingly accidental totterings against his shoulder. He had said to himself that she was a flirt, and also that she was deucedly well worth flirting with.

They toiled on from swarm to swarm; they passed through one populous room, and then another; but Josie could still find no place secluded enough for her catechism.

"I really believe, Mrs. Murray, that you mean to drive me deranged with curiosity," laughed Drummond.

"Don't lose your mind," she answered. "It would be a calamity to both of us, as well as to the country. Well, at last here is a corner where I can tell you my business. I don't suppose you want to hear it."

"I want to hear any thing that you will say, Mrs. Murray."

Thereupon, regardless of her pledges of secrecy to Hollowbread and Bradford, Josie proceeded to let out, little by little, after her inciting custom, the story of her claim. It was certainly ridiculous, this enormous demand for a ghost of a barn, and she felt it to be so as she made it. But Mr. Drummond, notwithstanding his hyena habit of laughter, and his hard-hearted scorn of most things human, did not listen with derision. He saw, even more plainly than Josie did, that the claim was a sham one. But he also perceived (and this made the matter respectable in his practical eyes) that there was a robust chance of getting the money. This little claimant before him was a woman, and that was a point in favor of her winning. Moreover, she was a very handsome woman,

and, in his opinion, singularly fascinating in her ways, and obviously neither timid nor fastidious in using her fascinations. Finally, she was socially a lady, related to a clergyman of some note, and to one of the most honored old officers in the army. It seemed to him that, with intelligent engineering, such a claimant as that could easily get a hundred thousand dollars or so. Should he devote a portion of his valuable time and labor to the job? Well, yes! he promptly responded, for he was a quick man at coming to a decision, and so capable of multifarious work that he never feared having too many irons in the fire.

"You have some dates and facts, I suppose—some affidavits relating to it—some record or other?" he queried.

"Oh, I have a lot of papers!" replied Josie, much pleased with his business-like way of going at the matter, and trying to be equally practical. "I have a letter from an old gentleman who remembers the battle, and several letters from people whose fathers have told them about it."

"I think we shall prove the battle without trouble," said Drummond, somewhat tempted to haw-haw. "But how about the burning of the building?"

"This old gentleman, Mr. Jeremiah, or Jedediah Drinkwater, remembers that distinctly, he says."

"I hope and pray that the worthy old hero may not be taken away before we can get at him. Well, now, Mrs. Murray, if I am to advise you, you must do me the favor to show me these papers."

"Oh, you are so good! I am infinitely obliged to you. Could you call on me at my uncle's?"

"I could, if you would let me. I don't think I should find the least difficulty in doing it."

"To-morrow?"

"The best of all days."

"Shall it be at one o'clock?"

"At one precisely," smiled Drummond.

The claim was a funny one in itself, and still funnier as coming from the house of the Reverend John Murray, brother of that most honorable old martinet, Colonel Murray.

Josie, too, was a little disposed to laugh; things were surely going on famously. She was to see Congressman Hollowbread at twelve, Congressman Drummond at one, and Congressman Bradford at three.

"Allow me one word of caution, Mrs. Murray," continued Drummond. "Too many cooks spoil the broth—haw, haw, haw! It would be well, for the present, at least, to leave this matter entirely with me. That is natural, you know. I am the member—the unworthy member—haw, haw!—from your district. Of course my guarantee for your claim would seem to be

better than the guarantee of any other representative. Don't you think so?"

"Certainly," nodded Josie. "But you, too, must be discreet," she added, not caring to have him compare notes with Hollowbread and Bradford.

Drummond promised secrecy, and he meant it. His brazen clangorousness and conceit gave him the air of a tattling boaster; but he was in reality far too able a man to let even his enormous arrogance beguile him into unwise confidences; and in political intrigues, especially such as concerned money, he could be as close as the cruel grave.

Just as this agreement had been reached their colloquy was interrupted. Mrs. Warden and Belle came up, the former on the arm of Mr. T. M. C. A. Smyler, and the latter on the arm of Bradford. Now, Mr. Smyler was a most exalted personage, for he held one of the loftiest positions in Congress. Consequently, Josie Murray was delighted to be introduced to him, and immediately began to do her best to enchant him. It was of no use; the grand dignitary was not to be mesmerized; his rôle in life was to mesmerize other people.

He bowed and he smiled ever so many times, and he uttered commonplaces in a low, sweet, ingratiating tone, which was all somehow amazingly flattering, at least to ordinary spirits. This was his forte; this was the chief secret of his success, this graciousness of manner. True, he was a man of fair ability, capable of hard work and adroit managings, and gifted in stump-speaking; but, after all, it was the bow, the smiles, the mellifluous voice, and the amicable unctiousness of deportment which had mainly brought him popular favor; he had won position by the same gifts which enable a clever salesman to win customers. On the whole, Josie felt that she was rather out-blandished by Mr. Smyler, and did not quite know what to do with him.

Mrs. Warden, who knew that the man was no gallant, and that there was nothing to be got out of him, except through political or pecuniary pipe-laying, looked on at this conference with sparkling eyes, much amused at her young friend's eagerness and perplexity.

"Mrs. Murray, excuse me for interrupting you," broke in Belle Warden, at last. "But we met your uncle and aunt, and they are very anxious to find you."

Mrs. Warden made a face at her daughter, and then whispered, "What did you tell her for? She doesn't care to know."

"But she ought to know," answered Belle, a right-minded young lady, who wanted to see people do the right thing.

"Oh, dear, how shall I ever find them in this crowd!" exclaimed Josie, looking about her for assistance, and perhaps hoping for

the arm of the great Smyler. "If I lose them, how shall I get home?"

"Why, go with us, of course," said Mrs. Warden, who had the sympathy of a veteran of fashion for a young lady who wanted to see a party out.

"Oh, thank you so much, Mrs. Warden!" cried Josie. "Now, if somebody could look up my friends and tell them not to wait for me! The poor old people must be horribly tired."

"Do go, Mr. Bradford," implored Belle, surrendering her young man at once for the sake of Mr. and Mrs. Murray.

"I know them by sight," proffered Drummond. "Do you skirmish one way, Bradford, and I'll skirmish the other. We will make the circuit of the rooms and meet here."

CHAPTER XIII.

A PACK OF ADMIRERS.

"THEY will be back soon," said Josie, smiling her thanks to Belle Warden, who could hardly muster grace to smile back again. "Meantime I suppose we must be rooted to this spot. And it is all on my account. I am so sorry!"

"I can not believe, Mrs. Murray, that any of the rest of us are sorry," observed Mr. Smyler, with that oily geniality which had made the sovereign people delight to honor him. "I find it very pleasant to be rooted to this spot."

"That is the proper sort of thing to say," put in Mrs. Warden, anxious to keep a hold on the skirts of the puissant functionary's attention. "But I must warn Mrs. Murray not to let herself be carried away. You are good to every body."

Again the great, sweet man bowed, and showed his beneficent teeth; there was evidently no limit to him in that direction.

"Are you very obliging, sir?" asked Josie, reverently. "Then I would like to ask you some troublesome questions."

Mr. Smyler intimated that she might ask, and he would answer, until they both succumbed with fatigue.

"I have been reading Trollope lately," she continued. "Mr. Palliser is so amusing with his labors as Chancellor of the Exchequer! Now, who is your Mr. Palliser in Congress?"

Her object, it must be understood, was to learn precisely who had charge of the public moneys, so that she might go to the proper quarter to obtain payment for her burned barn.

Mr. Smyler, being no novel-reader, did not know at all who Mr. Palliser was; but he got at the gist of her meaning through the phrase, "Chancellor of the Exchequer."

"Why, the position is somewhat divided with us, Mrs. Murray," he said. "It is shared,

I should be inclined to say, between three or more persons. The Secretary of the Treasury is properly our finance minister; but, then, he has no seat in the legislative body, as probably you are aware."

"I am so ignorant!" confessed Josie.

Mr. Smyler showed his teeth again, as though this were the most delightful information possible, although, in reality, it gave him neither satisfaction nor sorrow. His only reason for showing his teeth, aside from mere born instinct and life-long habit of grinning, was a desire to win adherents.

"Then, in Congress," he continued, "we have various committees which have to do with finance, and each of these committees has its chairman."

Thereupon he enumerated several honorable gentlemen, and among them Josie's friend, Mr. Hollowbread, chief of the Committee on Circulating Medium.

"Mr. Hollowbread!" exclaimed our heroine, wondering if he were the person who held her money, and regretting that she had manoeuvred herself out of his fiscal company.

"Yes, Mr. Hollowbread. You are acquainted with him? A very excellent, charming gentleman, and a man of great ability," declared Mr. Smyler, who spoke well of every body, and especially of every body in the political world. "One of our leading men in financial questions and debates."

"So Mr. Hollowbread is our Mr. Palliser?" inquired, or, rather, inferred, Josie, hoping that it might be so.

"Yes—I dare say—precisely," grinned Mr. Smyler, still unable to attach any precise idea to the word Palliser.

Josie's most urgent desire now was to find Mr. Hollowbread, and renew with vigor her hitherto idly treated duty of captivating him. But before she could rediscover him, she had to converse at length with several gentlemen; not a disagreeable task, by-the-way, to a truly womanly woman, and especially not to our heroine.

First appeared Mr. Hamilton Bray, a tremendously heavy young swell, with a long, thin, graceful figure, and a girlishly handsome face. He was surely not more than twenty-five, and his mustache was but a mere down of chestnut; but you would have judged from his air of wisdom and weariness that he was the oldest inhabitant of the political world: it seemed nothing less than a miracle that his brown curls had not turned to silver.

He was as bumptious in opinion as a spoiled child, and his tone of superiority was something either amusing or insufferable. It was a treat to watch him when he was presented to Josie Murray. He bowed with a mien of elegant condescension, and then threw himself into an attitude which said, "Admire me! Beautiful as she was, he hard-

ly looked at her twice, and seemed to expect that she should look at him.

The present occupation of this wonderful adolescent was to be the private secretary of that famous political leader, General Bangs. Of Bangs he spoke much, indirectly representing him as an able, though frequently erring, man, whom he (Bray) was engineering through the political world, and of whom he had hopes.

And yet the general was a prodigious creature, too, as compared with all men less intelligently guided. His fervent nature was constantly revolting against the mean world around him, and striving to evoke a new and hitherto unsuspected order out of chaos. He despised from the bottom of his volcanic soul the point-no-point policy of the men who now had the ear of the Administration. With God's help (and Bray's also, no doubt), he would yet overcome the point-no-point muddle.

In short, this youth talked very vaguely and bombastically and sillily. Such was his conceit, too, that unless Providence should give him some humbling hard knocks, it did not seem likely that he would ever talk much better. His enormous and protuberant vanity was exasperating, and did him socially great damage. He so obviously enjoyed hearing himself discourse, that, no matter what he said, no listener could enjoy it.

Even Josephine Murray, who could put up with as much from a man as any lady, soon got tired of Mr. Bray. Of course she did not quarrel with him; she was one of those wise women who never quarrel, except with an old friend who is unlikely to strike back; moreover, to do her justice, she was one of the most patient, amiable, courteous creatures that ever wore a bonnet. But she could not stand this "hifalutin" young egotist, and she got quit of him as promptly as might be without incivility.

Then came Mr. Calhoun Clavers, a shoot of the old landed aristocracy of South Carolina, but now glad to earn a modest salary in the office of Mr. Simeon Allchin, one of the great Washington bankers and railroaders. A tall, slender, dark young man, with a pointed profile, and coarse, black hair, he was far from handsome. But he was so graceful and self-possessed, so self-respectful and yet so sweetly considerate to others, so mature in the proprieties of life and yet so full of generous sentimentalism, that he touched Josephine with honest wonder and admiration.

Notwithstanding that he was no older than herself, and quite incapable of bringing her either a marriage settlement or Congressional appropriation, she talked with him for more than half an hour. She quite won the heart of this simple and chivalrous youngster, and from that time forward he

was ready to fight any one who spoke ill of her.

Next came Clay Beauman, another Southerner from farther West, whom she had caught a glimpse of two days before in the cars, and of whom she had thought that he was "too handsome for a man." He was an Apollo, with statuesque features, a clear olive complexion, curling masses of black hair, a perfect figure, the bearing of a D'Orsay, and the toilet of a Brummel.

As Josie stared at him, she said to herself, with a smile, "Actually, he is prettier than I am!"

Beauman was, of course, well used to feminine admiration. At that very time there were probably fifty women in Washington who were more or less cracked about him, and who took every decorous chance to let him know it. But, for all that, Josie was able to interest him, and to keep him by her for many minutes. What with her cleverness in small talk, and her risky audacity in little airs and signs of preference, and the half-meant, half-unconscious sentimentality of her sparkling eyes, she was dangerously alluring, even to a spoiled favorite.

Before Beauman left her, he had got an idea that she was in love with him, and that he was on the verge of falling in love with her.

"By Jove! that's an alarming little thing," he took the opportunity to confide to Bradford, who had just come up. "She has talent enough to be a second Catherine of Russia."

"It isn't exactly a pleasant comparison," was Bradford's answer.

"And yet it may be an apt one," said Beauman, pensively. "By Jove! there is a great deal in her, whatever it may be."

Bradford, it must be understood, had long since delivered Josie's message to her relatives. When he found them, Mrs. Murray was still toiling feebly through the crowd, supported on one side by her weary and tottering husband, and on the other by the colonel.

"Yes, yes, we must go, Huldah," insisted the rector, pettishly. "You are tired out, and ought to have gone long since. I am glad my niece has got word to us at last. We are very much obliged to you, Mr. Bradford."

"I am sorry I could not find you earlier," observed Bradford, charitably willing to give the impression that Josie had sent him to them long since.

"Oh, she has done as well as she could," interposed Mrs. Murray, who was a thorough lady at heart. "How could she help getting lost in this jam? Mr. Bradford, you are very kind; but couldn't you bring her to us?"

"I might—in time," he hesitated. Knowing Josie pretty well, he judged her capable of evading the bringing, and then these old

people would have another season of weary waiting.

"No, Huldah!" declared the rector, who was ready to cry as he gazed at the lassitude in his wife's wrinkled face; "I insist upon your getting home at once. The carriage can come back for Josephine. Julian can stay for her. Any body but you."

"No need, colonel," said Bradford. "I promise you that I will see your niece home in Mrs. Warden's carriage."

At last he induced them all three to depart, and made his way back to his own party.

At last, too, long after the flight of the Murrays, and quite a while after midnight, the swarms of the reception began to break up, and Mrs. Warden hinted of home.

"I am ready," answered Josie, who had recovered the chairman of the Circulating Medium Committee, and was now leaning on his plump arm. "Mr. Hollowbread says that we must go if we don't want to get caught in the crowd and kept here ever so long; and you wouldn't like to be kept here with me ever so long, would you, Mr. Hollowbread?" she asked, with a sort of girlish sauciness.

The old beau was jaded enough to want to say that he would like to get home as quickly as possible; but, being habitually gallant, and, moreover, anxious not to be considered elderly, and, furthermore, very much smitten with this lovely widow, he strenuously affirmed that he would rejoice to make a night of it. Meanwhile he kept sliding on toward the point of egress as rapidly as the eddying crowd would let him.

At this moment Calhoun Clavers came up with the information that the press around the door was frightful.

"It will need a cavalier to every lady," he added, wistfully. "I wish I could be of service."

"You may oblige me with your arm, Mr. Clavers," said cunning Mrs. Warden, who wanted to leave her daughter as much alone as possible with Bradford.

And now came a wrestle which was really tremendous, almost to the endangering of life. The enormous outer hall was packed with thousands of people, all pushing or pushed in various directions, some toward the ladies' waiting-room, some toward the masculine ditto, and some toward the great door.

This multitudinous variety of aim led to a vast unity of deadlock. It seemed as if the crowd had so tangled itself in knots that it would never get unraveled. There was a huge hum of amusement, or alarm, or anger, frequent bursts of hysterical laughter, occasional female shrieks, and some manly swearing.

It cost a struggle of fifteen or twenty minutes to get the ladies of our party to the

room which held their cloakings, and to force them into it. Then the three men slowly fought their way to the male dressing-room, with the hope of obtaining their own outward garniture.

They might as well have tried to get the moon and the seven stars. There were at least a thousand masculine maniacs there, yelling out numbers, signaling for surtouts and hats, pushing and hauling, and actually climbing on each other's backs.

"We shall have to give it up," gasped Hollowbread, whose breadth of beam and roundness of model put him at a great disadvantage. Even the two younger men were soon kneaded and hustled into the same opinion; and, all three hatless and cloakless, they scuffled their way back to their ladies. It was no easy matter to find them, and it was still harder to escort them anywhere. Obviously there was no present possibility of getting women out of the front door, through that huge drift and pack of desperate men who were making their suffering exit.

"They are jumping from the windows," called Josie Murray, all alive with the excitement of the occasion, and her young eyes lighted up with a gayety which seemed almost wicked to elderly and timorous people. "I am cheering up Mrs. Warden and Belle to jump. Oh, Mr. Hollowbread! if you will get out and stand under the window, I will jump down to you. It will be such an adventure! Do go!"

As a reflective soul might infer, Mr. Hollowbread was considerably alarmed by this romantic proposition. Jump out of a window into his arms, and, of course, square upon his broad waistcoat! She might lame him for life; she might knock the breath out of even his vast body; she might be the death of him. He would have argued against the mad proposition; he would have been more delighted than ever before in his life to speak against time; but before he could begin his oration, Josie withdrew from the door-way, and was seen hastening toward the Wardens.

"But, Mrs. Murray!" he shouted in a voice of desperation, which she did not or would not hear. "My God, what a notion! It's perfect lunacy. I won't go."

"Come along," laughed Bradford, towing and tugging him by the arm. "I don't see any other way, unless we wait an hour or two. Let Clavers stay here and watch events inside."

"I'll stay inside myself," declared Mr. Hollowbread, who, it will be remembered, had neither hat nor overcoat.

But Bradford was inexorable with the old beau, whose mature gallantries he, of course, laughed at in his soul, as young men always do laugh at the amative pranks of reverend seniors.

"I don't see how we can disobey Mrs. Murray," he said. "If you are a man, follow me."

Very unwillingly the chairman of the Circulating Medium Committee did follow, plunging into a prolonged rough-and-tumble which scarcely left wind enough in him for a hiccough, and emerging from it so heated with exercise that he was almost glad he had no overcoat, although it was a stormy night, and the cutting wind played remorselessly with his swallow-tail. The scene outside was little less bewildering and alarming than the one inside. There was a monstrous crowd; people in hundreds were pouring away; others were vainly trying to force a re-entry into the building; gentlemen were yelling for their coachmen, and coachmen howling for their gentlemen; it was a turmoil and an uproar as of a conflagration, or a street revolution. The few policemen present could do nothing to restore order, although they hustled and bawled manfully. Meantime the wind blew tomahawks; the air was full of small, rustling, keen, needle-like arrows of snow; it was uncomfortable to stand, and also, as Mr. Hollowbread reflected, dangerous.

"I shall catch rheumatism, consumption, and—every thing!" he groaned, as he tried vainly to button his party coat over his white vest.

"Come along!" shouted Bradford. "There is Mrs. Murray standing in the window."

"Oh, it's all very well to say come along," grunted Mr. Hollowbread, freeing himself with a push from a black boy who had just run into his stomach. "But with so many blasted people about—"

He was wrathful with the blundering negro, with the light-footed Bradford, with the weather, the hurry, and every thing. But he ran on, nevertheless; slipping wildly in a small drift of the dry, granulated snow; then taking a gallant slide across a brief glade of thin ice; and at last halting out of breath beneath a window full of crinoline.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HEROIC GYMNASTICS OF MR. HOLLOWBREAD.

WHILE the two Congressmen roughed it outside, the three ladies held an animated and even excited discussion within, as to whether they should jump out or wait a while and walk out.

"There are ladies going out by the door," asserted Belle, a mature creature for nineteen, and little given to pranks. "I would rather stay here an hour than dance out of a window. It is simply ridiculous."

"But just think of those poor men standing there in the cold!" urged Josie. "I sent

Mr. Hollowbread out to catch me, and I really must keep faith with him."

Then Mrs. Warden, who was naturally of a harum-scarum disposition, and liked still to do a youthful deed now and then, interfered on Mrs. Murray's side.

"My dear, venerable daughter, you can try it by the door with Mr. Clavers," she laughed. "We young people—Josie and I—will jump. It will be worth telling of some day."

"I wish you wouldn't!" begged Belle, ashamed of her mother's hoidenism, as she frequently was. But her pleading went for naught, and at last, in a downright, prim, respectable pet, she took Clavers's arm and sailed away.

Thus, when the two outside adventurers arrived beneath that window-display of millinery and haberdashery, they beheld in it the lithe, light figure and giggling face of Mrs. Murray, and behind it the dark visage, also "laughter-stirred," of Mrs. Warden.

"Ah, there you are, Mr. Hollowbread!" screamed Josie. "Are you ready? Can you do it?"

She had the skirts of her dress twisted about her dexterously and decorously, yet nevertheless she exposed a line or two of beauty which the old beau had never seen before, and which he could not help judging as very rare in their perfection. Under such circumstances, how could a man of artistic nature fail to stretch forth his hands and declare that he *could* do it? Moreover, the height was no great affair, after all; it did not appear to him to be more than six feet. So he elbowed his way through a group which stood beneath the window, signed aside a tall policeman who offered to relieve him of his venture, stretched upward his pulpy hands, and called, "Jump!"

With a scream which was half laughter and half hysterical fright, Josie leaped out like a little avalanche of draperies, and descended, fluttering and spreading, full upon the Congressional bosom. But she was not so light as she looked; there was a good, plumping nine stone or so of her; and, letting herself drive in that way, she knocked her gallant as flat as a flounder.

Of course Mr. Hollowbread, much as he might have desired a collision of this romantic sort, suffered a good deal by it. In the first place, it beat out of him pretty nearly all the breath that had been left in him by his previous gymnastics in the way of wrestling and running. In the second place, the snow just about there had been trampled to a damp sludge by many feet, so that, before he could extricate himself from his lovely incubus, at least a square cubit of his raiment had been wet through. He felt very much as if a giant had set him down violently in a humid mixture prepared for freezing purposes.

Nevertheless, he strove to bear himself bravely, and to treat the adventure as a good joke. His first words—a quotation from Daniel Webster's famous Rochester speech—these heroic and would-be jovial first words were:

"Two hundred feet direct fall!"

Before this noble sufferer could rise, Mrs. Warden had alighted, throwing herself so fairly as to be caught by the athletic Bradford without an overthrow, and doing no other damage than to dig her fan smartly into the face of a passing negro.

"Hi! yah!" shouted the freedman. "Pears to me women's flyin' roun' yere mighty loose." Then, turning to Mr. Hollowbread, he added: "I say, boss, has you got any mo' of 'em to catch? If you has, I'll catch em fur you fur a quartah apiece."

"Get out of the way, fellow!" responded our public functionary, with pardonable petulance. "Mrs. Murray, I hope you are not hurt?"

"Not a bit," answered Josie, taking his arm. "But oh, how we did come down!" she added, bursting into a scream of laughter, pardonable because spasmodic and irrepressible.

Mr. Hollowbread looked at her with a smile which had very little glee in it, like the puckered grimace which one may observe on the face of a very young baby. Conscious of cold chills running down his back; aware of a more than soggy spot in his vesture, and saying to himself that he hoped it would not freeze; possibly also a little shaken and confused by his late thump; he could not at once be heartily merry. It was not until they had been pushed against each other two or three times by other eager wayfarers that he recovered his spirits.

"But oh, it was too bad to knock you down," she added, noting his silence, and fearing that he was annoyed. "I was shamefully clumsy. I am so sorry!"

"I am not sorry at all," panted Mr. Hollowbread, and he energetically meant it, notwithstanding that plaster of dampness. "I should like to be knocked down in that style every day."

"It would be the death of us, Mr. Hollowbread."

"It would be a delightful death to me, Mrs. Murray."

"It couldn't go on more than a week without producing a quarrel, Mr. Hollowbread."

"Never on my part, Mrs. Murray."

"Besides, people would talk about it, Mr. Hollowbread."

"We must despise a censorious world, Mrs. Murray."

"I must refer you to my uncle, Mr. Hollowbread."

The Congressman burst out laughing, in approval of her promptness and pertness.

Even in this sort of free-and-easy badinage he had to admit that she was more than a match for him, notwithstanding his large experience in talk of that sort. She was his superior in every thing; she was a wonderful young woman; she was dazzling and she was fascinating. Notwithstanding his laughter, and notwithstanding his unpleasant consciousness of that freezing and stiffening poultice which clung to him, he was in a seriously tender state of mind with regard to this little lady.

He was, we must repeat, an old beau; that is to say, he had had a great number of flirtations and superficial love scrapes; but it must be understood to his credit that he had also had one or two heart affairs of an almost tragical earnestness; in short, he was one of those venerable coquettes who can really fall in love. His passions and affections had been hard used and even shamefully abused, but it is none the less true that they were honestly puissant.

Well, after a long search the Warden vehicle was discovered; then Belle Warden and Clavers appeared, having forced an exit by way of the door; the ladies were seated and Bradford offered the vacant place to Hollowbread.

"No—a thousand thanks—but no such injustice," replied the latter, who would have liked to go with Mrs. Murray, but dared not ride without his overcoat. "The honor is yours by right. Farewell, ladies."

Accompanied by Clavers, he now made a desperate assault upon the still swarming portal of the Treasury, and pushed on through a seemingly undiminished crowd to the masculine cloak-room. All the way they came upon lamentable cases of destitution and suffering. One gentleman, as respectably bald as the prophet Elijah, had no other covering to his intellectual pate than his wife's mite of a lace handkerchief, which he held on with one hand while he sustained his better half with the other.

Senator Pickens Rigdon was swearing his way homeward in an overcoat so much too small for him that he could only get it over one arm and shoulder. Scarcely any body could find his carriage; hundreds of ladies were footing it through the snow in their slippers; and only too many of them had lost their furs and pelisses.

Honest John Vane, the popular member from Slowburgh, was carrying his handsome, full-sized wife in his arms, while his friend and her admirer, Senator Ironman, ran ahead of them bareheaded, bawling vainly for his coachman. It seemed every moment possible to meet Æneas bearing Anchises on his pious back.

Inside there were similar cases of seriocomic deprivation and misery. Ladies, worn out with fatigue and afraid to face the winter wind uncovered, had thrown themselves

on the uncharitable, bare floors, awaiting a chance to find their wrappings.

In the gentlemen's cloak-room there were a fearful jam, turmoil, uproar, and scuffling. At least fifteen hundred male maniacs were engaged in this riot. Every one of them either had no hat and overcoat, or else had somebody else's hat and overcoat, and was raving about it. The checks were lost, the servitors were clean confounded and demented, and the floors were strewn with rejected garments.

Not by any dint of shouting, gesturing, and showing his number in all directions, could Mr. Hollowbread obtain his proper caparisons. Seeing Squire Nancy Appleyard in the main hall, marching off with a beaver sack-coat which looked to him like his own, he rushed out and claimed it in quite a hot argument. Squire Nancy eventually "peeled," exhibited her name on the lining of the garment, and strode away in triumph.

Then Mr. Hollowbread returned, grumbling, to the pandemonium of confounded wardrobes, and spent half an hour quite uselessly in quarreling over his grievances. Meantime many wiser gentlemen picked up what they could find, and made off with it, leaving a very poor choice for the fastidious, the conscientious, and the otherwise unready.

It was fully two o'clock in the morning when our veteran legislator walked home, with his dyed hair blowing in the wind, and with a seedy, old-fashioned, green surtout on, which could not possibly be strained to button in front, while the two buttons behind were high up his broad loins, as if they were bent on riding pickapack. Yet his mind ran upon Mrs. Josephine Murray quite as much as upon his own distresses and perils.

"That little woman will be the death of me," he said to himself more than once; and fully as often he added, "But isn't she prodigiously, amazingly fascinating?"

He was already pretty thoroughly bewitched with her. Her lively talk, her dazzling and yet tender eyes, her trim figure and graceful carriage, her adventurous and yet cultivated manner, had all impressed him deeply. Then such a revelation of grace and statuesque beauty as she had been when she stood in the window, with her drapery twisted about her in that audacious, Grecian way! But it was chiefly the soft, irresistible thump of that flying collision which had done the business for him. How enchanting and intoxicating the recollection of it was to the susceptible old flirt and *volage*!

Once he actually halted for half a minute, while the satirical wind played the mischief with his law-giving scone, to think it all over. There he was, admiring her;

there she was, laughing, holding out her hands, and calling "Catch me!" then down she came like lightning, a little, solid, lovely, capsize blessing!

He sighed softly, shivered to the backbone, cursed the overcoat that would not button, and hastened onward.

Meantime Josie Murray, far from thinking about him, was fast asleep. Reaching home about one, she was let in by a smirking mulatto handmaiden, who had been slumbering for an hour or two on the rug in front of the parlor-grate, and who was fully repaid for her slight hardship by an inspection of the fine raiment of the "little lady."

"I am afraid I kept my aunt and uncle up too long, Sarah," said Josie, while she shook herself out before a mirror.

"Oh, laws! Miss Murray, they's been abed this three hours," giggled Sarah. "They don't set up for nobody nor nothin'. Ef 'twas gwine ter be the resurrection, they'd go to bed all the same. You hain't worried 'em to speak of. I'll make it all right with the ole folks. I'll tell 'em somethin' or 'nother."

"But, Sarah, there was really an awful crowd, and I couldn't get home a minute sooner. You must tell them so."

"Of co'se, you couldn't git home no sooner, an' hadn't oughter. Young folks has to have some fun in life, I reckon. Don't you be a bit skeered 'bout the patriarchs. I'll fix 'em."

When Josie met her relatives next morning, they were so far from murmuring against her late re-entry, that they congratulated her on getting home at all.

"What a time you must have had!" exclaimed Mrs. Murray. "Sarah says millions of people walked the streets bareheaded till daylight. Of course, when she says millions, she means hundreds. But there must have been a great many shut out."

"Such a crowd!" said Josie. "I don't believe, uncle, that there was ever any thing like it, except when the animals went into the ark," she added, knowing that allusions to Scripture pleased her reverend relative.

"It gives one a new idea of the tribulations of Noah," smiled the rector. "I thought of bulls of Bashan, and beasts at Ephesus, and the rabble of Vanity Fair."

"Vanity Fair!" litanyed Mrs. Murray.

"If we had been animals we should have been better off."

"Better off!" emphasized and nodded the old lady.

"We, at least, shouldn't have trodden so much on each other's toes."

"Trodden on each other's toes," giggled his respondent.

"I never before felt a desire for hoofs, not to mention horns."

"Not to mention horns," added the wife, with excitement.

"There was a man behind me who put me in mind of the beast in Revelation that butted four ways, and knocked down the stars of heaven. It seemed to me we were all doing that."

"Oh, now, Mr. Murray!" protested the old lady, waking up to his meaning, and protesting against it; "when you get agoing, you are too severe. Society is society, and of course it has its inconveniences, but we must have it."

"So I think, aunt," said Josie. "The stars of heaven are safe, even though we do go to parties."

"But wasn't it wonderful that we should never be able even to set eyes on you after we lost you?" cried the old lady, throwing up her wrinkled hands over the surprising fact.

"Wonderful!" innocently assented Josie. "I would have given all my old shoes to find you," she added, without much exaggeration; for she set small store by old things, and liked new ones vastly better.

"Well, what did you see and hear?" asked Mrs. Murray, greedy for something to keep her mind awake, and to enter in her diary.

Thereupon our heroine rehearsed one of her incomparable narratives, sketching with wonderful minuteness and picturesqueness and vivacity the events of the evening, and making herself prodigiously interesting and amusing, although she said nothing of her flirtations.

Such a picture did she produce of her jump from the window, and her flooring of that full-bodied Hollowbread, that her aunt nearly had a fit with laughing.

"Mr. Hollowbread!" she presently repeated, easily recalling a name which she had in her diary, "I have heard of Mr. Hollowbread somewhere."

"It's the same man, aunt, who came with me from the station."

"Oh, yes, I recollect," hastily answered Mrs. Murray, eager to hide the vagueness of her memory. "Yes, it was Mr. Hollowbread. But did he speak to you?" she asked, with goggling eyes.

"He is a friend of the Wardens. We walked together for a while."

"A—friend—of—the—Wardens," repeated the rector, enunciating very slowly and distinctly, the better to impress this new fact on an understanding which was a little hard of hearing.

"Oh, yes—a friend of the Wardens," jerked out the old lady, getting the matter in hand. "Well, I dare say he is a very respectable man."

"I ventured to ask him to call, he has been so polite to me, and suffered so much on my account," laughed Josie.

"You asked him to call?" I am glad of it," giggled Mrs. Murray. "I should like to look at him."

"Mr. Bradford is going to call, too. Mr. Bradford is a distinguished Congressman, and a very old friend of mine."

"Mr. Bradford! Is he?"

And down went another name and fact on the old lady's memory, to be transferred to her diary.

"And Mr. Drummond will be here to-day. Mr. Drummond is the member from our district; and, of course, I had to be polite to him."

"Mr. Drummond?—the member for your district? I thought you said Mr. Bradford was—something or other."

The torrent of facts was flowing quite too rapidly to be contained by the decaying dikes of this ancient intellect.

"Mr. Bradford is her old friend, but Mr. Drummond is the member for her district," explained the everlastingly patient and affectionate rector.

"Oh, I see now!" answered the old lady, who seemed always to comprehend without difficulty what was said to her by her husband, so much did habit and love quicken her spirit.

And so the morning passed very pleasantly in the Murray family, notwithstanding the hardships and grievances of the previous evening.

On the whole, considering how many amatory scalps Josie had taken at the reception, how many Congressmen she had more or less interested in her claim, and what a favorite she had become with her respectable relatives, it must be conceded that her outlook in Washington was a promising one.

CHAPTER XV.

DELUDING AN OLD CONGRESSMAN.

JOSIE, we remember, was to see Mr. Hollowbread at twelve, Mr. Drummond at one, and Mr. Bradford at three.

We can judge what an impression she had made upon these three distinguished legislators by the extraordinary fact that each one of them kept his appointment, and was even scrupulously punctual as to time. Mr. Hollowbread, for instance, looked anxiously at his watch on heaving in sight of the house, and then pushed forward at such a killing pace, that when he planted his arctic shoes on the Murray door-mat, he was in an awkwardly short-winded, loud-breathing state, and felt obliged to rest a moment before ringing the bell.

For this sharp dash he would have been pleased to reward himself instantly with a little courtship; but Josie wanted to finish with him and get him out of the house before Mr. Drummond should come; so she hastily produced her claim documents, and set him to work on them. Seeing that she

"meant business," he mounted his eyeglasses astride his noble Roman nose, and carefully read the papers through, really giving his mind to them. It was a good mind yet; it could, when resolutely spurred, do a great deal of strenuous work; and in twenty minutes he had a sufficient grasp of the case to pass intelligent judgment upon it.

"There is no doubt that you have what claim there is," he said, at last, in a practical, positive, clear-headed way which made him appear quite solidly respectable. "You are the sole heir of your late husband, Mr. Augustus Murray, as appears by his will."

Here Josie thought that she had probably better put her handkerchief to her eyes, but on an instant's reflection, decided that she might as well omit that gesture, and did omit it.

"His father," continued Mr. Hollowbread, "was Henry Murray, the brother of Julian and John Murray, our good friends, the colonel and rector. And their father was Jared Murray, who, in 1810, was the head of the family, and who then owned a large tract of land in Beulah County, New York. On and around this tract of land the battle of Murray Hill was fought, and during that battle the barn and so forth were burned, either by our troops or the enemy. But it appears that in December, 1811, this Jared Murray died, leaving his landed property by will, etc., in trust, in four specified lots, one each to his wife and to his three sons. And, furthermore, it appears that the lot on which stood the aforesaid barn was, by this will, the property of Henry Murray, the father of Augustus. Consequently, Henry Murray and his heirs and assigns are the sole persons who suffered loss by said conflagration, and who can justly claim damages therefor. That seems to be a correct statement of the case. Is it not, Mrs. Murray?"

She looked up in his face with an infantile, pleading smile, the smile of an injured innocent who demands restitution, and sighed, "Yes."

Her child-like hand—she really did not seem to know where it was—had strayed, in a very touching way, upon his coat-sleeve, and was gently grasping it. Mr. Hollowbread gazed down upon her with almost as much of astonishment as of admiration and affection. He had never before seen a so exorbitant and seemingly unscrupulous claimant who was so young in years and had the air of being so guileless. The defunct barn had probably not been worth a thousand dollars; and here she wanted twenty thousand—forty thousand—eighty thousand, for it; wanted any sum that one was pleased to mention. It was one of the most audacious projects for swindling Government that had ever been recommended to his attention. Well, perhaps she did not half know what she was about; women are so amazingly ig-

norant in matters of manly business! She might think that every body did this sort of thing, and that, consequently, it was quite proper to do it. The Government, he had long since learned, was, in the opinion of many people, a legitimate object of plunder. "Is there any chance of getting my rights?" she mustered courage to inquire.

Mr. Hollowbread saw, with conscientious dismay, that he must take her in earnest; he also saw that he must decide to favor her monstrous suit, or give up pushing his own. He looked once more into the witchery of her splendid eyes; and they were too much for his really respectable legislative honesty.

"Yes, you have a claim," he repeated, slowly, meantime wishing, from the bottom of his heart, that she had not the ghost of one, or else had a great deal solidier one.

"Yes, I know I have a claim," she laughed, with a worrying cheerfulness. "But how much will it bring me, and how soon can it be got, and so on?"

Mr. Hollowbread perceived that she had not the least idea of his troubles of conscience, and feared that she looked upon him as unbusiness-like and dilatory. He wondered again if she were naughtily unscrupulous, or innocently ignorant; and he remembered an old doubt of his as to whether women generally are not less moral, at least in matters of property, than men; whether, indeed, they might not be fundamentally incapable of radical, unimposed, self-sustaining honesty. We must pardon this profane suspicion in a man who had seen so many intriguing, conscienceless, greedy, pilfering ladies as Mr. Hollowbread, and who had been so frequently obliged to witness or to combat their raids upon the United States Treasury. His error consisted in this, that he forgot, for a moment, the herd of vastly more potent and grasping masculine filibusters.

"How much will it bring?" he echoed, scarcely concealing his lack of good-will. "Let me see: how much was the barn worth? That is an essential point?"

"But can't you fix the value of it yourself? Or, can't I? I suppose some bars are worth as much as ten thousand dollars."

"More, Mrs. Murray. But we must know how much this particular barn was worth. We must have some affidavit or other trustworthy statement as to its value, by some person who has seen the building."

"Must we?" asked Josie, her handsome face taking on a shade of gloom, if not of positive annoyance. Then, after a moment of hesitation, she handed to him another document, which she had hitherto kept in her pocket. It was an affidavit, signed and sworn to by one Jeremiah Drinkwater, declaring that he had aided in building said barn, and knew the cost of it, and that said cost amounted to one thousand dollars.

"One thousand dollars," repeated Mr. Hollowbread, meantime smiling to himself at the thought that this pretty creature had hinted to him to fix the valuation at ten thousand. "Well, this is something solid," he added, cheerfully, glad to find that the claim would not be very outrageous in amount. "I should say that that might be put through without a great deal of difficulty."

"With the interest, of course, Mr. Hollowbread?"

"Oh yes!—the interest—yes, of course. Let me see: seven per cent., for sixty years, would be just forty-two hundred dollars; that would make the whole claim fifty-two hundred. Well, I think Uncle Sam ought to foot that, and say nothing about it."

"Fifty-two hundred dollars! Is that all? Why, Mr. Curbstone made it a great deal more than that. He said there were two kinds of interest, and I ought to have the biggest kind, or it would be a perfect swindle."

Mr. Hollowbread suspected that it would be a perfect swindle, anyway, especially if Mr. Curbstone's devices and counsels were followed scrupulously.

He did not want to demand compound interest on such a preposterous claim; it put him in mind of a lately exploded theory of indirect damages; it might end in making him ridiculous.

"Why, you must know what I mean," added Josie, whose sweet brow was puckered with an attempt at recollection. "What is that ridiculous word? Do think it up for me."

"Compound?" stammered the poor Congressman, not daring to counterfeit ignorance.

"Yes—that is it—compound interest," laughed Josie, with angelic delight. "Now, how much would it come to at compound interest?"

"Sixty years—seven per cent. on one thousand—say sixty thousand dollars," calculated the helpless Hollowbread.

"Oh, that is quite worth while, you see. That would be worth taking. Besides, I ought to have it. It would be a shame and an injustice to keep me out of it. I am so glad to find that you and Mr. Curbstone have figured it up to exactly the same sum. It must be right."

Mr. Hollowbread grew uneasy over this frequent mention of Mr. Fred. Curbstone. It might turn out that he would help this lovely being to a large sum of money, at great cost to the public treasury, and to his own tolerably respectable conscience, merely to make her a good match for that dandified young "scalawag" of a broker.

"I ought, perhaps, to warn you, Mrs. Murray, against Mr. Curbstone," he said, turning paternal for the moment. "He is an able

business-man and intriguer, but he has no more conscience than a catamount."

"I dare say he is sly," admitted Josie, with a good-natured, indifferent smile. "I suppose a man must be sly to succeed in business. But he was surely a good friend of mine to put me up to getting my own money when I didn't even suspect that it was due me. I don't care a single straw about the man himself, but I can't help feeling obliged for his kindness."

Mr. Hollowbread perceived (to use one of those picturesque idioms which give so much pain to critics of a certain bore and penetration) that he had put his foot in it. He had given her a chance to insinuate to him that he must be as kind to her in this matter as Fred. Curbstone, or she would owe him no gratitude. So, after having denounced the broker as a conscienceless intriguer, he found himself driven to back one of his roguish inventions.

"Of course—of course," he grinned, his eyes meantime being very pensive, and not at all like the eyes of a happy man. "Well, I hope to prove to you that I can be a better friend than Mr. Curbstone."

"Friend! Oh, Mr. Hollowbread, don't call him my friend in any serious sense. He is just useful to me, and I must say thanks. That is all. I accept you as a friend. I do, indeed, Mr. Hollowbread. If you succeed in getting my rights for me, or even if you only try without succeeding, I shall owe you a life-long gratitude. I don't know how I can ever pay it," emphasized Josie, looking tenderly in his face, and leaning slightly toward him. "But I assure you in all sincerity that I shall never, never be insensible to my obligations, and never cease to be your hearty well-wisher."

She spoke with an eagerness, with a sort of imaginative sensibility, which had the semblance of thorough sincerity, if, indeed, it was not temporary sincerity.

She kindled with emotion very easily, this dangerous little woman—as easily, we may perhaps say without injustice, as she cooled off. If she had not much heart, she had an intellect which could stir up, bring to the surface and exhibit whatever heart she had, and could thus give hers the appearance of an ardent nature. Her very talk illumined her feelings; she spoke so fluently and vigorously that she could impassion herself; only the passion was apt to die to ashes almost as quick as she stopped chattering.

But the result with regard to other people was that she seemed to like them immensely, and that she frequently inflamed them into a violent liking for her.

"Mrs. Murray, I will do all I can to obtain your rights for you," declared Mr. Hollowbread, throbbing to the core with loving agitation, and suddenly turning his back upon whatsoever legislative straightforwardness

had been left him by long grinding in the mill of politics. "I do earnestly and solemnly trust that I shall yet prove myself your best friend."

"Oh, I know you will," said Josie, breathing a fervent little gasp which sounded to him like a sigh of affection, and unflinchingly exchanging with him a squeeze of her hand.

It was curious, by-the-way, how little difference this girl made between one man and another, whether young or old, handsome or ugly. She seemed to have none of that instinctive aversion which youthful women generally feel toward the near proximity of elderly gentlemen who show a disposition to snuggle. A male creature was to her a male creature, and therein attractive enough, or at least bearable.

An ancient beau, with dyed mustache, gray hairs in his nostrils, crimson veins in his cheeks, and an ungraceful spread of waistcoat, was not "horrid" to her, even at fondling distance; she could look into his faded eyes as sweetly, and touch his hand as kindly, and brush her hair against his shoulder as temptingly, as if he were in the freshest prime of marrying manhood. It was a singular and almost an unpleasant trait in her, it made her seem so stale in feeling and so meretricious.

Mr. Hollowbread had sold himself for a hope, and he was full of joy in his bargain. He had made this young woman's acquaintance to flirt with her, and to carry the flirtation as far as he might. Now he was in love; he already wanted with all his heart to marry her; and he tremblingly believed that he might win her as his wife.

As for her claim, he would push it, of course; in fact, he could not help himself; he must push it. After all, why not? Claims as slight, and almost as absurdly stricken in years, had been nursed up to vast sums and triumphantly borne through Congress. One more would make no great difference with the reputation of that noble body, and ought not, therefore, to be an insupportable burden on his own conscience and political reputation. Yes, he would push it, compound interest and all, and be hanged to it!

But there was yet another trial awaiting his legislative sensibilities.

"Will there be any expenses in collecting my money, Mr. Hollowbread?" asked Josie.

"Well, there may be; we may have to hire a little help," he confessed, cringing at the thought of employing a lobbyist to bribe carpet-baggers and other purchasable Congressmen.

"Well, I have thought of a way to cover all the charges," she smiled, quite pleased with her own business cleverness. "You spoke of it yourself during our conversation in the hack. You could bring in a bill for the outbuildings and the horses and cows

that were burned. That would make a very handsome sum in itself. I should think it would pay all the expenses, and leave something nice for me."

For a moment Mr. Hollowbread was confounded and bothered by a proposition which he knew meant sheer brazen pilfering and perjury. Perhaps he would have had a spasm of firmness, and would have told Josie that her plan was one which no honorable Congressman could even discuss, only that he happened to look down into her bewildering eyes, sparkling with youth and tender with appeal. Then he said to himself that she was an unconscious swindler, and that her naughtiness was nothing less than bewitching, like the innocent roguery of an infant.

"I don't know about all that," he replied, with that broken little laugh which signifies embarrassment, and not merriment. "There is no mention in the papers of outhouses and cattle. Congress will naturally require us to stand by our record."

"But couldn't one stick in something—couldn't you?" ventured Josie.

No; Mr. Hollowbread thought he could not stick in something; he was not bewitched enough to go as far as that, at least not yet.

"Ah, well," sighed our disappointed heroine. "Then I must let it go as it is; only it does seem hard that I can't have all my own money."

"Yes, it is hard," conceded Hollowbread, ready to laugh outright, but also almost ready to cry, so worrying was this scaly business to him. "But still, sixty thousand dollars is a good deal of money. And I suppose we may possibly get that."

And now, as he had taken the claim upon his shoulders, he felt that he had a right to some reward in the way of courting the claimant. To this Josie would not probably have objected but for one circumstance; it was nearly one o'clock, and she wanted to get rid of Hollowbread before Drummond should appear.

"Oh! could you do me one little favor?" she suddenly asked. "I have a letter here which ought to go in the two o'clock Northern mail. I was so occupied with the thought of seeing you this morning that I forgot to post it. But it is very, very urgent. Could you possibly get it to the office before one? I would be so immensely obliged to you?"

He did not want to go, but how could he help it?

"Shall I take these documents along?" he inquired, with such graciousness as he could muster, while he gathered up his hat and gloves.

"Another time," she said, remembering that Mr. Drummond would need to see them, and also Mr. Bradford. "I want to read them over once more, and get the case by

heart. Perhaps I will bring them to you at the Capitol," she added, with a coaxing smile.

So Mr. Hollowbread put what tenderness he could into his parting, and then hurried himself out of breath to post a letter which was of no consequence whatever, and which had indeed been written with the sole purpose of getting shut of him before one o'clock.

CHAPTER XVI.

COAXING A YOUNG CONGRESSMAN OR TWO.

THREE minutes after Mr. Hollowbread had left Josephine Murray, Sykes Drummond was filling his place as courtier and counselor.

She was very glad to see him arrive, and eager that he should be content with having come; but, nevertheless, she was more distant with him than she had been with his mature, not to say overripe, predecessor.

He was a young man; there could be no pretense that she looked upon him as a father; nods and becks and wreathed smiles might count for too much when bestowed upon a gentleman of thirty.

We must not be understood as intimating that Josie laboriously and gravely thought this out, and, so to speak, studied her piece before reciting it to Drummond. Notwithstanding that she often did things which were audacious in a lady, she retained still a great deal of her original womanly delicacy and sensitiveness of perception, and so was capable of doing the nice thing with the promptness of instinct.

Besides, the younger Congressman was a more disquieting person in appearance and deportment than the elder one. His passion-haunted eyes, his trooper-like boldness of expression, his loud and domineering voice, his mien of roughness and hardness, all warned people not to be familiar with him, unless they wanted intrusion and conquest.

But Sykes Drummond was not easily kept at long range in conversation. The first thing that he said, after a word or two of salutation, was: "So you have already had the Nestor of the House with you?"

"Who?" asked Josie, knowing that he meant Mr. Hollowbread, and ready to burst out laughing at the nickname, but not caring to talk about the visit.

"Mr. Hollowbread. I didn't know him at first; he was making so much better time than usual—haw, haw! I congratulate you on the conquest," he added, emboldened by the amused twitching of her mouth. "He is a capital old fellow in his way. I mean to pronounce a eulogy upon him in Congress at an early day, and confer upon him the ti-

tle of Nestor of the House. I wonder if he would like it?"

Josie knew that Mr. Hollowbread would not like it, and she could no longer restrain a cry of laughter.

"Do pronounce a eulogy upon him," she said. "But make it a very nice one, to please me. And don't call him the Nestor of the House. It would be just the same as to say that he neglects his dress and doesn't dye his hair carefully."

Of course Drummond laughed here, and of course in his usual haw-haw fashion. It was always agreeable to him to hear any body else satirized.

But we must not relate this interview at length. Necessarily Josie flirted, as we know that she must flirt; and necessarily she opened that budget of business which we have already inspected.

The result of the dialogue was that Sykes Drummond impudently pronounced the claim a good one, declared his belief that it might be engineered through the House, and offered to take charge of it.

"Do you want to hand it over to me, Mrs. Murray?" he asked, looking her firmly in the eyes.

"Certainly I do," responded Josie; but she fluttered a little, for she had not yet decided who should have it.

"What did Nestor think of it?" he inquired, with an impudent twinkle in his dusky black eyes.

"Mr. Hollowbread?" she repeated, flushing to her forehead, for Drummond was certainly audacious. It just occurred to her also that she might yet find a master in this daring and rude man if she submitted herself at all to his guidance. "Well, he spoke favorably of it," she stated, judging that evasion was useless, but approving of misrepresentation.

"Well, and which of us is it to be?" "My own member, of course," she declared, blushing again under his keen, resolute gaze. "When you are so kind as to offer, surely I can not hesitate."

"Then I had better take these papers along."

"Oh, not to-day!" begged Josie, almost fearful that he would carry them off in spite of her. She did not seem to herself to be her own mistress, with this Sykes Drummond staring into her eyes. "I want to show them to one old friend, and ask his advice."

"Bradford, I suppose."

"I shan't tell you, sir," declared Josie, laughing, but uneasy. "I mean to have at least one secret from you. Suppose, after all, it was my uncle, Colonel Murray?"

"Then he hasn't seen it," inferred Drummond. "He had better not. The old gentleman won't like the case."

"Why not?" she asked, though she had

already guessed as much, and indeed been told as much.

"I have been in the army, Mrs. Murray; I served all through the war, and met quite a number of regular officers, and got at their ways of thinking. They are a curious people, very different from the sort of men prevalent in these latter days, especially in this great model republic of Vanity Fair—haw, haw, haw! I haven't much confidence in the judgment of Brother Christian and Brother Faithful of the regular army. They couldn't be brought to admire this sort of claim against the Government."

"I suppose they have their own stiff notions."

"Yes, they have stiff notions. But you were thinking of Mr. Bradford. He wouldn't like the case either."

"Why not?" again demanded Josie, rather sharply for her. "He is an old and good friend of mine."

"Bradford took to the regulars—wanted to be a regular. He would pay you the money himself rather than collect it out of the Treasury."

For a moment Josie enthusiastically worshipped Bradford, because of this imputed nobleness. She wondered whether she could not bring him to an offer of marriage, and then win his life-long admiration by giving up her claim.

"He is a bit of a Don Quixote," continued Drummond. "He has impractical ideas—for a man in politics."

"I never thought him very fastidious," incautiously remarked Josie, who had become aware of some dubious traits in her "good friend."

"Perhaps not," smiled Drummond, with impudent knowingness. "But you haven't studied him in money matters and in politics."

"It doesn't matter about him at all," she said, annoyed by Drummond's smile, and skipping away from the subject. "But still I want to look over the papers, and get them by heart, before I hand them to you."

"And you don't care to show them to that good friend, and get his advice?"

"You are so bold, sir, that you make me bold. I have the greatest mind to call you impudent," retorted Josie, with a flurried laugh.

"I wouldn't mind it a bit. But really, Mrs. Murray, my impudence is all for your good. You had positively better not consult Bradford, nor trust Hollowbread. The first won't do any thing, and the second can't do any thing."

"A chairman of a committee can't do any thing?"

"He is an old figure-head. He hasn't a stroke of good, earnest, telling work in him. You might as well expect an answer to prayer from a fetich as go for help to such a chairman."

"But it is the Circulating Medium Committee! And that is just what I want—circulating medium."

Drummond laughed outrageously; then he begged pardon ironically.

"The Circulating Medium Committee has nothing in the world to do with your business," he explained. "It is the Chairman of the Committee on Spoliations that you want to get at."

"Oh!" exclaimed Josie, roundly astonished and even a little humiliated, for she had begun to pique herself on her knowledge of Congressional matters. "Well, Mr. Drummond, you shall have the papers to-morrow. If you will give me your address, I will send them."

"Many thanks," he said, handing her his card. "I will try to be worthy of my mission. —And now I must go."

"So soon?" stared and almost pleaded Josie, who had meant to captivate him more or less before he departed.

"Sorry," he said; "but the business of the country—haw, haw! Good-morning, Mrs. Murray."

When this interview was over, Josie found herself very tired. She had done a hard day's work in the way of seeking to understand and to master business, and another hard day's work in striving to coax or dominate two men of unusual dignity and authority. At least it was all hard work for that fragile and sensitive child of lazy luxury, the fine lady of this century. She dropped wearily into an easy-chair, and said to herself that she wanted a good friend—somebody who would take care of her, and pet her, and love her—yes, perhaps a husband.

When Bradford arrived, she was almost ready to fall at his feet and let him guide her in all things as he wished, providing he would think for her and be kind to her, though but a little. She was in that humble, tender state of mind in which a woman is apt to accept the first offer that comes, and in which she is very likely to win offers.

Bradford was surprised and instantaneously touched by her air of languor, humility, and sweetness.

"The fatigue of last evening was too much for you," he said, sympathetically, as he sat down by her side.

"Yes, it was hard work—very hard work," she murmured.

There was something like a sob in her voice, she felt herself to be so alone in the world, and longed so to be pitied and petted.

Much doubting that he was doing a wise thing, he ventured to take her hand in his, as he well remembered to have done in other days, when, indeed, he had even less right to take it. She quivered slightly, but she did not withdraw her fingers, and there was no displeasure in her manner.

For a few seconds they sat thus in silence; she with her chin resting on her free hand, her long eyelashes drooped, and her eyes bent absently on the floor; he with his gaze fixed upon her unusually pathetic face, all the more attractive for its pallor and lassitude. He said to himself that she was exquisitely beautiful; and he was that kind of artistic man (a common kind enough) who can not see beauty without longing to possess it; and, furthermore, there was the tempting reminiscence of a make-believe possession in former days.

But this silence was getting to be entangling, dangerous, terrible. If it should last a minute, it would become a sort of personage in the drama, speaking with something like the voice of a protecting father or brother, and demanding a declaration of intentions.

All this Bradford felt; and, being not yet ready to propose marriage, he made an effort to break the spell. Still he could only speak words of kindness, verging closely on affection.

"I fear that you are unhappy, as well as fatigued," he said. "I am very, very sorry for the troubles that have come upon you in these latter years."

We all find it touching to be compassionate when we long for compassion. Josie's fine eyes filled with tears as she thought how she had lost a husband who was at least fond of her, however much he might be a fool in other respects, and who had put on flattering airs of protecting her, although he knew not in the least how to save her from the greatest perils of woman's life. Her voice actually shook as she answered: "You are very good to remember to give me your sympathy."

He was quite astonished, as well as moved, by this display of emotion. He said to himself that she had more heart than he had supposed, and that with a worthy husband she might make an admirable wife.

"Good! I am simply grateful for old kindness to myself," he said. "I should be a poor creature if I lacked grace enough to be as good as that."

"We were friends years ago—I hope earnest friends. It would be a pity if we could not keep up our friendship."

"It will be kept up, at least on my part."

"And on mine," whispered Josephine.

She felt this declaration so deeply, that she was tempted to lay her head on his shoulders, where she had laid it at least once in by-gone days. Had he made the slightest movement toward her, she would have risked this decisive audacity. Her cheeks, by-the-way, were no longer pale; there was a small fervid flush in the centre of each one of them; and this tale-telling spot was rapidly deepening in color and extending. He noted that glow of something

warmer than friendship, and it served him as a warning-beacon. He said to himself that he must look into the gulf of consequences before he leaped; and so, while still holding her hand, and finding much pleasure therein, he remained immovable.

At last Josie decided that he was getting more than he gave, and guessed that he was presuming on by-gone favors, which likewise had never been rightly paid for. She did not show displeasure, for she was not vexed with him, and desired not to annoy him, but she gently strove to withdraw her fingers. He let them go, yet not till he had raised them impulsively to his lips, finding it no great lift to overcome her resistance.

"Ah! Edgar! you mustn't," she murmured, glancing at him wistfully, to see how much he meant, and trembling with agitation and pleasure. "Remember that things are changed with me," she added, more firmly, fearing lest he had only meant to treat himself to a cheap luxury. "I have no longer a protector. I must be my own duenna, and forbid you to kiss my hand."

"I beg pardon," he replied. "But it was a great temptation. I may say that I couldn't help it."

"But you ought to help it. You must know that I don't want to risk vexing and losing the only old friend I have here by checking and scolding him. It is not fair of you to lay the whole burden of resisting your temptations upon me."

She was certainly a remarkable young woman; at least so Mr. Bradford said to himself. A moment ago he had supposed that he could be entirely at ease with her; and yet now she was forcing him to respect her, and that without angering him.

"You are right, Josie," he said. "I may use the old name, mayn't I?" he added, remembering that she had called him Edgar. "I shall be flattered and gratified if I may claim so much."

"You mustn't call me Josie in public."

"In that case you mustn't call me Edgar in public."

"I don't want to call you Edgar anywhere."

They both laughed; and henceforth there was a sort of understanding between them; they were on terms which might be at one moment friendship; at another, courtship in the second degree.

"But I must not forget your business," Bradford went on. "You wanted to see me about a claim."

Thereupon Josie, for the third time that day, told her story, and exhibited her documents.

"My dear friend, you frighten me," was his first comment. "There are prejudices—among certain very respectable people—against such suits. The claim is a very old one. Against an individual the debt would

be outlawed. It seems strange, therefore, to urge it against the Government."

Josie looked excessively distressed, and was so; her mouth twisted and trembled quite piteously.

"But if it is a just debt?" she pleaded. "And it is just."

It pained him so much to look upon this feminine trouble, that he turned his eyes to the floor, as he continued: "Moreover, it may have been paid once. Many of the claims of 1812 were adjusted long ago."

Josie cringed and quivered, so that her very vestments rustled. She had in her pocket, at that very moment, a paper showing that this debt had been liquidated, many years since, by a payment of two thousand dollars. She had thought of exhibiting the document to Bradford, and asking if it debarred her from making further demands. Now she suddenly resolved that he should never, never see it.

"But if it was paid once, that proves that the thing really happened," she did venture to argue. "And then, if there was scarcely any thing paid, and not half as much as ought to have been paid, why not ask for the rest?"

"Ah, well!" he sighed, in a troubled way, "I will look into it, to the best of my ability, and see if any thing ought to be done."

"See here, Edgar," she implored. "Why not help me more heartily than that? Augustus lost and spent nearly all his property. My father failed in one of the panics, and left nothing. I haven't enough to support me; I haven't six thousand dollars. What do I know about earning a living? What can a lady do? Isn't it a very, very hard case?"

Her mouth trembled ungovernably, and he pitied her with all his heart. Still he could not promise to take her part at all hazards, in defiance of that fastidious conscience as to the public interests, upon which he prided himself, and which was by far his most prominent point of honor. He was nearly ready to tell her that he would marry her, and support her himself, rather than push an unjust, or even a doubtful, claim through Congress for her benefit. But to that extreme he could not quite go as yet, although it seemed possible that he might soon reach it.

"I will do my best for you, Josie," he promised. "Can you let me have your papers for a day or two?"

"Yes," she said, after one anxious, pleading look into his pensive, handsome hazel eyes, which were just then as tender as a woman's.

And so she gave her precious documents to Bradford, breaking her promises to Hollowbread and Drummond. But what a nice couple of sweet-scented notes she wrote to those gentlemen, apologizing meekly to each

for not having sent him her package, asking a few days' delay for further reflection, and, of course, inviting them to call and see her!

CHAPTER XVII.

A FRIGHT AND A DISAPPOINTMENT.

JOSIE soon had occasion to know that one of her Congressmen had begun work in furtherance of her suit.

During the evening of the day in which she held her palavers with those three honorables, Colonel Murray dropped in at the rector's, and, after some talk about the adventures of the reception, propounded the following query:

"John," said he, in his easy, drawling tone, meanwhile stretching his long, lean legs over a chair or two, "do you know any thing about the ownership of a Murray barn in Beulah County which was burned by troops in 1812?"

Josie's heart set up a frightful thumping, and she felt that her cheeks were turning scarlet; but she covered her emotion by dropping a skein of embroidery-silk and making believe search for it.

"Barn?" marveled the reverend Murray. "No, I don't remember the ownership, nor the burning, nor the barn. What of it?"

"Why, a gentleman whose name I can't recall now—but he is an old wheel-horse and war-horse and high-cockolorum in Congress—a stout, red-faced Turveydrop of a fellow—stopped me in the street this afternoon, and wanted the newest, or, rather, the oldest, intelligence about it."

Yes, Mr. Hollowbread, supposing that the claim was to be put into his hands, and knowing that Colonel Murray belonged to the family which was connected with the barn, but knowing nothing of the old soldier's punctilious respect for the public monies, had made the mistake of applying to him for guidance in pushing a swindle.

"It was shamefully stupid of him," said Josie to herself; and for the moment she was angry with the sharp anger of fright against her thoughtless advocate; but of course her cleverness and self-possession enabled her to hold her tongue.

"What did he want to know? and what did he want to do about it?" eagerly queried the rector, interested himself, and hoping to interest his wife. Indeed, he looked at her and signaled to her at this moment, as was his custom when he desired to engage her wandering attention.

"He asked, was it actually burned, and whose property it was. I questioned him, of course, as to his object, but he hummed and hawed as those political fellows do when you try to pump them; and, in fact, he got off without telling me any thing. By-the-

way, I couldn't give him any information, further than that some barn or other was burned. I was only five years old then."

"Let me see; I was three years old; I recollect nothing," said the rector. "And Henry was a baby. I should like to know something about the affair. Huldah!" he called, with a sharp, distinct utterance, as we speak to one who is dozing.

Mrs. Murray, notwithstanding her seventy-eight years, and her decadence of mind as well as of body, had a wonderful memory for the transactions of long ago, and knew the family history pretty nearly by heart.

At the sound of her name from those lips which never spoke without awakening her interest, she started out of a reverie (one of the slumber-like reveries of age) with a tremulous, eager air.

"Do wake up, Huldah," said the husband, who sometimes reproved her playfully for her absences and torpors. "You are getting awfully dreamy and romantic of late. You mustn't read so much poetry."

"Why, Mr. Murray!" remonstrated the old lady, giggling nervously. "I don't read any more poetry than you do. What are you scolding about?"

"Here is Julian talking for the last fifteen minutes, or half an hour, or two hours, about a barn. An old Murray barn, which lies on his mind like a load of lead. It was burned by the British, or the Indians, or the Yankees, or the Salem witches, in 1812. A barn on the family estate in Beulah County—you understand?"

"Yes, yes, I understand. Well, what of it?"

"Why, we have got to come to you about it. Julian and I have lost our memories, like a couple of decayed old gentlemen. We want to know who burned the barn, and whether it was burned at all, and who owned it before it was burned, if it was burned."

Meantime Mrs. Murray went through a succession of starts and quivers, as though each of these repetitions gave her an electric shock, or as though memory were coming back to her in throbs and pulsations.

"Why, what nonsense! Oh! a burned barn!—in 1812, you say? Oh! in Beulah County!" she answered, by jerks, repeating the ideas after him. "Yes, yes, I understand. I was thinking— Oh, yes;" and here an expression of pleasure flickered over her puzzled face; she had caught a thread of recollection. "Why, yes, dear me, yes, it was burned. I remember all about it. Why, I remember it distinctly. How strange you should have forgotten it! Who burned it? Oh, that's what you wanted to know! Why, our troops—the American troops—burned it to drive out the British. The British were in it, and our troops set fire to it to drive them out. Why, old Jeremiah Drinkwater—you've heard of him, colonel!—he

was in the fight, and he told me all about it when I was a girl; and I believe he's living yet."

"Yes, he is a pensioner," said the colonel. "So there really was a Murray barn burned," he added, not in the least questioning the ancient dame's recollection, so sure was it known to be concerning the times of old. "But, Mrs. Murray, whose old affair was it? Was it our mother's, or Henry's, or John's, or mine? You know that our mother moved us all East not long after the war. About that time my recollection begins."

"Whose was it? I don't know. I think I never heard whose lot it was in."

"I should like to learn," observed the rector. "Then we might guess what this Congressman is at."

There was one person present who could have solved that doubt, but who was not one jot disposed to do it.

"It is possible that he has some pension case on hand," surmised the colonel.

"More probably some rascality," declared the clergyman, who was orthodoxically hard upon our fallen humanity, and apt to impute to it much unrighteousness. "You may depend that the devil is somewhere at the bottom of it."

Josephine quivered; she felt all the guiltier with regard to the claim because of her sly reticence; and just then it seemed to her very likely that the whole thing was indeed a piece of roguery.

"Do you believe in a real devil, uncle?" she asked, remembering that the two men were accustomed to quarrel over supernatural matters, and hoping to divert them from their present subject by the help of Apollyon.

"I do," affirmed the rector, positively. "This whole world, and especially the political part of it, is worm-eaten with deviltry. If you can't see distinctly what your neighbor is doing, you may report boldly that he is at Satan's business. I'll guarantee that in nineteen cases out of twenty you won't have slandered him. I don't mean out in the country, among our good, plain, old-fashioned American people—the simple, moral, godly people who make the strength of this nation, and who are the salt which, I trust, will eventually save it. I mean in our great cities—for instance, New York and Philadelphia, with their rings and their bosses—and especially this Satan's kingdom of Washington. How a man can live in Washington as long as you have, Julian, and doubt the existence of a real and most enormous devil, I can not see."

This was an old field of battle for the two brothers, and the rationalistic colonel drew out his forces promptly.

"Oh, pshaw! Don't talk to me about a devil. Where did he come from? Who created him? Answer me that question."

"Yes; because you can't account for him by your doctrine of evolution—because you can't tell what monkey or what monad he was developed from—you deny his existence. That is what your science leads to. On the same principle you ought to deny the existence of man. Man's father-monkey and grandfather-monad can't be found; therefore there is no man."

"I ask you, who created the devil?" persisted the old soldier, not to be diverted from his point of attack. "Of course God created every thing, or there is some other creator, and consequently some other God. You won't deny that inference, I suppose. But if God created the Satan you believe in, then he created rebellion against himself, and he is responsible for it. But of course you won't admit that. Now, how are you going to get out of the dilemma? You had better abjure your devil."

"I don't see any dilemma at all," hotly answered the clergyman. "The simple Scriptures tell us how the thing came about. Lucifer was created heavenly, and fell from heaven."

"Oh, that's Milton," sniffed the colonel. "I have driven you clear through the Bible, and you rally behind the 'Paradise Lost.'"

"Don't, Mr. Murray!" put in old Mrs. Murray at this point, seeing that her husband was about to make some fiery response. "You do get so excited on these matters!"

"Well, well," said the rector, subsiding into a smile, and loosening his white neck-choker, for he perceived that he was becoming agitated, and knew that it was not good for him. "Julian must go his own ways, like his namesake in Roman history. But I do want to keep up a saving faith in the devil among this godless generation. As it is, men have grown so wicked that we can hardly get up the church-aisles without having our pockets piked; and if they should come to disbelieve generally in a solid, roaring, tormenting Satan our very lives wouldn't be safe overnight. We should wake up tomorrow morning with our heads rolling about on the floor."

"Oh, it's a good enough bugaboo to help control the vulgar," admitted the colonel. "I dare say the fetch and the obi are useful as restraining influences on the coast of Guinea."

And here, each holding firmly his original line of battle, these veteran antagonists sheathed their doctrinal swords, and the combat came to a close. But it had served the purpose of that adroit Josie; it had blown the burned barn clean out of the conversation.

As she did on this occasion, hiding her claim from her respectable elders and protectors, so she continued to do as long as possible; and that, too, although she received a letter from Bradford the next day, begging

her to lay the business before the colonel ere she pushed it further.

"If you should consult him on it," wrote the young Congressman, "I think you would find him disposed to disapprove of it, and perhaps very energetically."

"All the more reason for not consulting him!" exclaimed Josie, throwing the letter down in a pet. But she immediately picked it up, and read on as follows: "I am afraid that I can not bring myself to push the claim any further than it has already gone. I discover by the records of the Claim-office that it was paid once, and in full of all demands, namely, two thousand dollars."

"Oh, he has found it out, has he?" burst out Josie. "What did he go and look up that for?"

"To ask for further payment, after having been paid in full would be what is called a lobby job," continued that strange compound of moralities and immoralities, Mr. Congressman Bradford. "I would do almost any thing for you, my dear friend, but I can not bring myself to do this. I am a poor, crooked stick, but I must draw my line of proprieties somewhere, and I draw it on the confines of my official business. Let me humbly beg of you not to be offended with what may naturally seem to you absurd punctiliousness. I have it greatly at heart to obtain and maintain the character of a scrupulously honorable legislator, the exact opposite of so many rascally jobbers who disgrace our legislative halls."

"Oh yes!" gasped Josie, her eyes full of tears, and her cheeks hot with vexation, perhaps mingled with shame. "He can make love to a married woman, and his friend's wife, and expect her to let him make love to her; but when she wants him to get her own money for her he must have conscientious scruples, and look out for his character. Oh, Mr. Edgar Bradford, that is a gentleman's honor, is it?"

It must be confessed that our Congressman does not appear very admirable from Josie's point of view, or from that of more severe and less selfish moralists. Still it is better that a man should draw his line somewhere, though it be on the confines of official business, rather than have no line of honor at all. Doubtless there are many men like Bradford, who are sadly weak under temptations arising from temperament, but absolutely unimpeachable in all matters of public trust.

"I inclose your papers for you to act upon them as you see fit," the letter went on. "But let me beg of you once more to lay the affair before your noble old relative and natural protector, Colonel Murray. He is one of the soundest-headed and purest-hearted men alive, the perfect model of an old soldier, an officer, and a gentleman. He can give you a reliable judgment upon your

claim, not so much as to whether it could be prosecuted with success, but as to whether it should be prosecuted at all!"

"The hateful, horrid man!" sobbed Josie, while tears dropped from her long eyelashes. "How mean of him to lecture me and scold me, instead of helping me! I won't consult the colonel about it; he is just the man I don't want to consult. Oh, Mr. Edgar Bradford, to think that *you* should treat me so! The man that a woman wants to like best is always the man to make her cry."

Yes, she was actually sobbing and crying, and meanwhile her cheeks were hot enough with mortification to dry her tears, and, on the whole, she was an object to move almost any man's pity. Could she have gone just as she was to every Congressman, she might have had her claim voted through by acclamation. Had Bradford seen her, he would surely have been moved to compunction at making such return for a kiss which he had no right to take, and which, therefore, from his loose point of view, was the greater gift.

Josie crumpled the letter into a lump, and threw it across the room. Then she ran after it, picked it up almost tenderly, rubbed out its creases carefully, and read it through again. She tried to find some sweetness in it, but there was none; there were apology and pleading enough, but no real sweetness. It scolded her, it told her that she was trying to swindle the Government, and it positively refused to aid her in the swindle. Rummage through it as eagerly as she might, she only found disappointment and humiliation. She had hoped that Bradford liked her, and was on the point of seriously beginning to love her; but, if that were the case, he certainly would not fail to aid her when she so much needed aid. Such was her womanly inference.

"I don't believe he *ever* cared for me," she whimpered. "Oh, I was such a fool to let him talk and whisper to me!" she added, fairly grinding her teeth in remorse and shame. "And what have I got by it? Now he really doesn't respect me, and he never will really, really care for me, and I never shall have the first chance to—to—I don't know whether I would refuse him or take him."

Then she threw herself on her bed, and sobbed over her troubles, poor, pretty little sufferer, for several minutes. After a while the wrath in her heart was all sobbed out, and her instinctive desire to be liked resumed its full dominion.

Once more she read the note, no longer vindictive about it, but more full of yearning than ever. Was Mr. Bradford—was Edgar, she phrased it to herself—was he angry? Why did he address her through the cold medium of pen and paper, instead of coming to her? It looked as though he proposed to

keep at a distance from her forever after. It was dreadful. She had lost a dear friend, and perhaps a lover; and even the claim was hardly worth that. She pictured to herself at length how differently she would have taken his refusal if he had only communicated it to her in person, meanwhile looking kindly into her face with his handsome, meditative hazel eyes, and, it might be, holding her hand in his. She could have borne it then, and even liked him the better for such a sweet interview, and, perhaps—though not certainly—might have given up the claim. But he had not come in that angelic fashion, and it was woefully possible that he never would come at all. At last she sprung up, hurried to her writing-table, and scrawled him a darling note. It will be perceived from all this, that, although Bradford is not a praiseworthy person in our eyes, he was very admirable and attractive in the eyes of Josie, partly because she was less fastidious as to character than she ought to have been, and partly because she had long been more or less in love with him.

"MY DEAR FRIEND"—her epistle ran—"Why did you not take the kind trouble to tell me all that with your own kind lips? It would have been so much more friendly on your part, and I should have understood every thing so much better, and without the worry of long pondering over it. I do hope that you will call to see me soon, if only to assure me that you are not annoyed. Cordially, your friend, JOSIE."

"There!" she said, breathing forth a last little faint seraph of a sob as she sealed the envelope with her rosy lips. "And now that horrid Mr. Drummond must have the papers, or that horrid old Hollowbread."

CHAPTER XVIII.

GLORY IN SOCIETY, AND REPROOF AT HOME.

BEFORE Bradford received Josie's note he had been able, by dint of reflecting on the sinfulness of lobbying, and on the beauty of virtue in official business, to harden his heart against her in quite a meritorious fashion.

So he treated her cruelly, and, at the same time, one is grieved to add, slyly, after the manner of statesmen, perhaps. He wrote a reply, saying kind things and promising to call promptly; then he willfully broke his agreement and staid away for some days; then he dropped in at the Murphys' when he knew she was out. Thus a fortnight or so elapsed before she got another chance at him alone.

Meantime she plunged all over in Washington society, and made a really notable splash and uproar in it. During one special

week, surely remarkable enough to deserve mention, she attended twelve parties, made at least thirty calls, and received more than I dare state. The rector and his wife never went out with her by night after their martyrdom at the President's, having learned sufficient wisdom there to last a thoughtful old couple for one winter, if not longer. The colonel escorted her to three parties, and then retired on his hard-won laurels, remarking that he hoped his next scrimmage would be with Indians, and that he would rather lose his scalp than his wits. After that Josie campaigned chiefly with Mrs. Warden and Belle; sometimes, however, with Mrs. Senator Ironman, who took an uncommon fancy to her, and used her to eclipse and huff her own private rival, Mrs. John Vane; also, on two or three occasions, she went with gentlemen of known staidness and respectability, such as Mr. Hollowbread and Mr. Smyler.

Thanks to her beauty, her amusing conversation, and the repute of her Murray relatives, she sprung at once into currency, and even into request. Furthermore, she was greatly helped by exaggerated reports of her wealth, which, as it were, blow trumpets before her, and prepared the way for her coming. She was commonly spoken of as the rich young widow, and her poor six thousand of dollars was promptly magnified into sixty thousand, and even into sums far vaster. The world loves to believe in money, and stamps a great deal of it out of the waste paper of its imagination; indeed, if we could examine thoroughly into the solvency of our fellow-beings, we should stare to see how many purely fabulous fortunes there are. No doubt the fictions concerning Josie's opulence arose, in part, from the rumors concerning her claim.

Of this she spoke to many persons, always in confidence; and they naturally mentioned it to many others, more or less confidentially, and therefore more or less vaguely; and thus the tale of it both spread widely and got enormously misreported. People said that she would be richer than Mrs. Gaines; that by rights she owned more than half of Beulah County; that the Government owed her "simply millions."

Mrs. John Vane, who was a lovely woman of the greedy, extravagant, envious, spiteful sort, loudly declared that it was perfectly wicked in Mrs. Murray to bleed the Treasury in this frightful fashion, when she already had more money than she could spend. Mrs. Warden, anxious about her own claim, almost feared lest there should be no legal tenders left after Josie's exorbitant demands had been satisfied.

In short, the belief in our heroine's affluence, present and to come, was general, and, one may say, enthusiastic. Yet she was a social favorite, as, indeed, very wealthy people are apt to be, especially when they are

beautiful and good. A call from her, or even a simple card, sufficed to bring her any invitation she wanted; and ere long the printed billets on satin paper looked her up in such numbers that she could not possibly attend to them all; for the most energetic and able-bodied of young women can hardly manage three parties of an evening.

Meanwhile she picked up acquaintances everywhere and in every fashion. She got herself introduced to notabilities, and talked to them so brightly that they could hardly help being interested in her; or, if talking did not seem to impress their great natures sufficiently, she made her wonderful eyes at them. Moreover, if some demigod seemed to have forgotten her, she had no diffidence about speaking first, repeating her name with a sweet smile, and saying, "So delighted to meet you again!"

However, very few new-comers in Washington have the luck to be so easily recollected and so generally welcomed as Josie. Within a fortnight of her arrival she was acquainted with two or three great generals, two or three members of the Cabinet, quite a number of leading wire-pullers and rail-roads, and nobody knows how many Congressmen.

We can not possibly follow her closely through all this turmoil of combat and glory. We must imagine her plume and pennon as waving in the forefront of fashionable battle, beyond the boldest rivalry of our ambition, and almost indistinguishable to our sight. It would take volumes to recount her sayings and doings, yea, and her mere sufferings, during that memorable season. It was noble, tough, wearing work, and it was performed magnificently.

But we must not fail to state that amidst all her flirtings and flauntings she did not forget her claim. She urged it upon many lawgivers, and gained not a few supporters for it. To be sure, Mr. Hollowbread had the papers; yes, she had finally given them to the loving Hollowbread. But she had contrived to propitiate Mr. Drummond for this slight, and to keep him interested in her welfare, as well as scores of others.

Meantime she had troubles at home. It did seem hard that, when she was laboring so terribly and succeeding so splendidly, the elder Murrys should exhibit dissatisfaction. But they could not help feeling discontent, nor keep it from showing in those worn faces of theirs, the exponents of fragile health and sensitive nerves.

Accustomed for many years to a hum-drum tranquillity, the advent of excitement made them unwell, and consequently unhappy. It was truly dreadful for them to see a member of their household rolling off every evening in the chariots of fashion, to return only in the revered small-hours of the morning. It was equally awful for them to note

the swarms of visitors, nearly all unknown to them, worldly ladies and still worldlier gentlemen, who invaded the hitherto privileged sanctity of their home, and stirred with loud conversation the drowsy heat of their parlor.

Old Mrs. Murray jerked and twitched at every ring of the door-bell, as if the wire thereof had been affixed to her own gossamer anatomy. Meantime the rector groaned and fretted by her side, and could not proceed with the jog-trot composition of his sermons. As for himself, he could endure hardness, he nobly declared; but how was his beloved Huldah to survive such an everlasting racket? Now and then he hurried rheumatically to the door, and, with a horror which is pitiable when one considers the feebleness which caused it, exclaimed in a hoarse whisper,

"My dear, there is another caller!"

"I know it," Mrs. Murray would reply, with a convulsed smile, at the same time throwing up both her hands, so thin and veined that they reminded one of cobwebs. "I don't see how she can bear it."

"I don't see how *you* can bear it. I must speak to her. I must and will stop this abominable rioting," insisted the hyperbolic rector.

"Oh, let her go on—do, Mr. Murray, let her go on," begged the old lady, still retaining some womanly reverence for the toils and triumphs of society. "The season will soon be over. Then I hope she will settle down."

"I don't believe Miss Topsytrurvy ever can settle down," asserted the rector, who was much given, by-the-way, to clapping nicknames on to people. "She will never settle until the sexton has taken charge of her," he added, with the humor of a man to whom funerals are, in a manner, business.

"Well, we'll see, Mr. Murray—we'll see," says madam, her gray head and wilted body bobbing about nervously.

She was just a little like a jack-in-the-box, after one of his leaps for freedom, so alarming to small youngsters.

It will be perceived that Mrs. Murray was agitated by conflicting emotions and desires. This tintinnabulating run on her door-bell, and this almost scandalous swarming of strangers to her parlor, and these nocturnal absences of the pet lamb of her little fold, were all circumstances very trying to her nerves, but also savory to her curiosity.

Who was who, and which was the other, and what they said, and did, and related, were questions which held her mind awake all day, and kept her diary running a full stream. After every visit or party, Josie had a history to pour into her ears, so fresh, so fluent, so abundant, so sparkling with humorous description and observation, that the venerable dame would sit for an hour to listen and laugh till she cried.

Then came the delightful task—the imposed duty of youth, which had been rendered a pleasure through long performance—the truly conscientious though trivial labor—of setting down at least a summary of these marvels in her note-books.

She had pretty sharp writing to keep up with the incessant overflow of matter; perhaps no reporter in either house of Congress was driven so hardly. Eyes, too, were dim, even with the best of gold eyeglasses; fingers were tremulous and easily fatigued; the handwriting laboriously neat. Her history of those times amounted to little more than a catalogue of names—a directory, so to speak, of Josie's visiting-places, and entertainers, and callers. The rest—what was said and done—also who said it and did it—she strove and hoped—vainly hoped—to remember.

Well, worrying as all this was to the old lady, it was correspondingly occupying and amusing. She could not decide that she wanted the parties and calls to stop, or even to diminish—at least, not yet; and so she let them go on, having all the "particulars" narrated to her, and committing what she could to the custody of paper.

But before long her watchful and tender husband believed that he had cause to interfere. His wife, as it seemed to him, was in danger of simply gossiping and diarying herself out of the world. Now, she was all in all to him; he loved her tenderly, devotedly, beautifully; strange as this may seem, it is solemnly true. To this wife, who was fifteen years his senior, this codling man clung with a brooding, petting affection such as few young husbands grant to blooming brides of twenty.

Josie Murray, in her happiest days, never won such a treasure of love as the nature of the rector obliged him to lavish on his venerable partner. He could not see her grow weary and shaky from any cause without rushing to the rescue. At the same time he had not the heart to say to his Huldah, "You are breaking down, and I must stop it."

That would be a hint that she was aging; it would hurt her feelings, and might alarm her, and might kill her; and, consequently, such an idea must not be so much as suggested.

What he did was to commence fretting at Josie's dissipations as being irritating and harmful to himself. He could not bear it; he was suffering for want of sleep and tranquillity of mind; he was the weak one who needed peace, and must have it.

"I shall go stark mad, Huldah, if this sort of thing continues," he stated, in great excitement.

"Why, Mr. Murray!" giggled the old lady, quite pleased that he should make such a confession of feebleness, while she had not

uttered a plaint. "How can you be so sensitive? Well, if that is the case," she sagaciously added, "perhaps you had better drop her a hint."

"I shall certainly give Miss Topsytrurvy a piece of my mind," declared the rector, ruffling up with chicken-hearted ferocity.

"Now, do be gentle with her, Mr. Murray. You are so harsh with people when you go at them! Do consider that she is young and must have society, and can't help going to parties, they are all so crazy after her. Why, I never saw any body take people so," she added, with no little pride in the fact. "Now you must not be severe with her. Just tell her it's better for her health not to go out so often and stay so late. As for gentlemen coming to see her, why, we can't shut the door in their faces."

"I think I shall speak to her of her card-playing," said the clergyman, quailing before his duty as he approached it, and looking for some little and easily-handled tip-end to it. "She played cards the other night in my parlor! I never heard of such an outrage in my life. Played whist in my parlor, and asked me to take a hand?"

Mrs. Murray threw up her arms and dropped them in a curiously quick, jerking way, reminding one of the gesture of a dancing-jack when his string is pulled slightly.

The rector, we must explain, honestly hated card-playing, and often indulged in old-fashioned denunciation of it. He burst forth into one of those hyperboles now, as if to strengthen his tottering determination to scold Josie.

"A man who plays cards will gamble, and a man who gambles will steal, and a man who steals will commit murder, and all such shall have their part in the lake of fire and brimstone."

"Lake of fire and brimstone," mechanically repeated Mrs. Murray, after her manner of saying ditto to her husband, particularly when he sermonized.

Then the rector laughed a little, as if to say that he had somewhat overstated himself, and did not mean very strong brimstone.

He was naturally given to exaggeration, and it often took on a humorous character. Apparently he was aware of his propensity to extravagance of statement, and sought to give it a rational air by cloaking it with jocoseness. Under strong excitement, however, he sometimes became seriously and violently hyperbolic, and uttered declarations which would rouse denial in a lunatic asylum.

Well, the result was that something, a very gentle and roundabout something, was said to Josie in reference to whist. Did she flare up in rebellion, or even argue for her fire-and-brimstone diversion? Those who could suppose such a thing of her would

thereby show themselves little acquainted with her.

"It shall not be done again, my dear uncle," she said, with the sweetness of a good little child. "It never occurred to me that you would consider it wrong."

"Oh, I don't think that there is any thing wicked in the cards themselves—mere bits of pasteboard!" returned the rector, looking a little foolish over his easy victory. "It is just the—well, the name of the thing—that's about it, you know. And yet I must say that I don't quite like them," he concluded, remembering that he really did not like them.

So, the scandal of whist-playing in the Reverend John Murray's house came to an end. But the party-going, and the staying-out nearly all of nearly every night, and the influx of numberless uncertified gentlemen, continued as vigorously as ever. The rector resolved each day that he would reprove Josie concerning these matters, also, seeing that they were worldly, if not downright ungodly, in themselves, and injurious to Huldah. But, although he was much given to putting on airs of grumess, for instance, often boasting how he would govern and whip children, if he were so unlucky as to have any, he was at bottom such a soft-hearted and likewise rather timorous man, that he could not for a long time bring himself up to the scratch of his present duty.

Thus Josie did not lack for recreations, and those of a very occupying nature. She was engaged at once in twanging the bow of love and in driving the chariot of politics; and meanwhile she was followed by a whole herd of "wheel-horses" and "war-horses," all more or less eager to pull in her harness.

And now we must relate how she came to put her claim into the unwilling but unrefusing hand of Mr. Hollowbread.

CHAPTER XIX.

MR. HOLLOWBREAD'S SPIRITUAL DECADENCE.

"He comes not, he comes not, and I don't know what to do," Josie had confided to Mrs. Warden, three days after her unavailing note to Bradford.

"My dear, I told you not to trust to him," answered Belle's mother, hiding her satisfaction with difficulty. "Of all my Congressional friends, he is the most completely unsatisfactory in matters of business," she added, referring to private appropriations.

"I don't care a bit for him personally," fibbed Josie, guessing at Mrs. Warden's maternal jealousy. "He used to be a beau of mine, but I preferred poor Augustus," she declared, pulling a suitable face over the memory of that departed darling. "But I would like to have a man of his character and ability to help me in collecting my money."

"Nobody can get him to collect money out of the Government," snapped the elder lady, turning quite tart, as she remembered how vainly she had begged Bradford to forward her own begging suit. "He has a high and mighty ambition to deal only with great questions, and to get the name of being an unbribable statesman, like Charles Sumner. I must say again that I don't believe he will ever do a thing for you. Of course your claim is a just one—every bit as just as mine," she good-naturedly conceded, not believing it one tittle. "But Mr. Bradford hates the very name of special appropriations. Frankly, now, you may as well give him up. You must do like the Queen of England. When Mr. Disraeli won't answer, she sends for Mr. Gladstone."

Evidently Mrs. Warden's moral constitution was not of that rare kind which breaks down under other people's troubles. The briskness of her dark face and the lively glitter of her coal-black eyes showed that she bore her rival claimant's disappointments without flinching, and indeed with a cheerfulness approaching to joy, as though capable of much similar martyrdom.

Josie was sharp enough to see this, and for a moment she felt justly miffed; but she formed a less unfavorable opinion of her confidante than most persons would expect. Precociously clever in the study of selfishness, she was not accustomed to expect abundant and tender sympathy from any one, unless indeed that one were a man of the love-making age.

"Yes, I shall have to get another prime minister," she laughed, with an agreeable sense that the task would not be hard.

In response to this burst of gay confidence—the enviable confidence of youth and beauty and bellehood—Mrs. Warden's eyes snapped smartly.

Really liking Josie as one of her own sort, and finding much amusement, for instance, in seeing her flirt with twenty men at once, she still did not want to have her achieve solid triumphs, whether pecuniary or amorous. The thought that such a thing might be made her twitch with jealousy, both on her own account and on Belle's.

"But don't, for mercy's sake," she put in—don't take that Sykes Drummond—coarse, selfish, horrid monster!"

"Oh, of course not; I can't endure him," answered Josie, just about half sincere.

"Because he isn't trustworthy," continued Mrs. Warden, not feeling quite sure of her friend's sincerity. "By-the-way, there isn't one Congressman in ten who can be trusted. One has one weakness, and one another. Some are lazy, and some are cracked about party politics, or statesmanship, or whatever they call it; and some are thieves—absolute thieves, my dear. Why, one impudent creature had the face to offer to take

charge of my claim for—how much, do you think? Why, one-half of it! Only think of the impudence!—one-half of my own rightful money!"

"Shameful!" commented Josie, right heartily.

"And Mr. Drummond, I very much fear, is one of that sort," declared Mrs. Warden. "In fact, I know it. He engineered a bill for a poor old lady whom I know, and took nearly half of her money for his expenses, as he called them."

Josie again said "Shameful!" and meanwhile pondered. Though not disposed to credit all of her friend's statements, she did give considerable faith to this one, for Mr. Drummond "looked like it."

"There is Honest John Vané," suggested Mrs. Warden, remembering that that esteemed wire-puller was a married man, and so of little value to her Belle.

"I will think of him," murmured Josie, who had already settled upon Mr. Hollowbread, the tender, and consequently the true.

Of course it is to be understood that during the fashionable whirl of the last week or two she had repeatedly encountered this love-lorn Lycurgus. Always a society-man, Hollowbread now went to parties more than ever, for the sake of seeing Mrs. Augustus Murray.

He saw her, certainly; he fairly gloated and gormandized upon her beauty; he was more and more bewitched with it for every hearty meal; and by this time he was most uncommonly in love. Such attentions as were possible he had paid her, though sadly elbowed and put out by numerous rivals, some of them greater men than himself, and most of them younger. More than once he had said, with a truly touching anxiety to utter something agreeable, "Mrs. Murray, I trust the claim is coming on well!"

On each occasion she smiled delightfully, and begged him to forgive her for breaking her promise.

"I am so fearful," she explained, "of troubling you with a matter beneath your notice."

"Nothing which concerns you can be unworthy of my notice," answered Hollowbread, by this time woefully willing to smirch his really decent reputation for this siren.

And now, at last, judging that she could not do better by herself, she sent for him, and placed her valueless documents in his reverential hands.

"If you could be willing to help me!" she sighed. "I have been so timorous and so slow about it that I deserve to fail. Can any thing be done now? Is it too late? Oh, even if it is, don't say so!"

"Hope on, hope ever," said Mr. Hollowbread, whose experience in public speaking had furnished him with a few quotations. "It is never too late to do one's best."

"Oh, you are such a good friend!" exclaimed Josie, dimly aware that he was making a sacrifice of some sort for her, though not in the least regretting it. "Do sit down by me, and let us talk it over," she added, willing to reward his devotion with a scrap, or two of flirtation.

Mr. Hollowbread seated himself near her on the sofa, as promptly and gracefully as the tightness and complications of his costume permitted. For he was in wondrous apparel; tailoring had done its adorning best and its hampering worst by him; never was a pursy gentleman more elaborately and solidly bound in broadcloth. We shall surely be pardoned for dwelling at length upon a toilet which was the admiration of the greatest cutters and fitters of Washington.

The most remarkable feature of it was the system of machinery by which it was held in place. Coat, vest, and pantaloons were furnished with pads, straps, and springs; and I will not undertake to say that there might not have been a few cog-wheels and pulleys. It is confounding to think what might have happened had this marvelous raiment been buttoned together and dropped on the floor. It might have buzzed and scabbled away, of its own motion and internal force, like a clock-work locomotive. It might have lounged into a chair, and sat down on the small of its hollow back, and put its empty legs on the mantel-piece. It might have jumped out of the window, and set ladies a-screaming, and dogs a-barking. It might have taken a car to the Capitol, and claimed its accustomed oaken chair in the Hall of Representatives, there to play the part of a dignified and harmless political figure-head.

One is lost in conjecture as to what human beings would do in any of these cases.

Would a policeman arrest it as a vagrant without visible means of existence? Would a sergeant-at-arms admit it to the floor of the House, or cash a check for it? Experience and reason are dumb here, and even the imagination stammers.

All this mechanical apparatus was necessary to give shapeliness to the great man's figure, and render it a pleasing object for the contemplation of the feminine eye. It did, indeed, accomplish a vast deal for him in the way of modeling. When he first appeared to himself in the morning, he was nearly as dumpy and formless as the sculptor's lump of clay before work has commenced upon it. But by the time his drapery was all put on and screwed up he was a pretty fair, though fat, old image. One objection to the result was that the broad spaces of cloth which he presented looked alarmingly smooth and tight. It seemed horribly possible that, if he should cough or sneeze violently, or swell his molecules by going too near a hot fire, he might suddenly split open and quadruple in size, like a popped grain of Indian corn.

But all these things cease to be ludicrous when we consider Mr. Hollowbread as a potential statesman, seraphically in love, and satanically tempted. It is quite tragical for tax-payers to think that the hocus-pocus called "special legislation," enables such a legislator to juggle the dollars out of their pockets into the greedy porte-monnaie of such a useless ornament to society as Josie Murray. That is the dirty trick that he was about to set his hand to, just as surely as he took his seat on that conjuring sofa.

"I have looked into my claim myself, and I know a great deal more about it than when we talked it over last," declared Josie, proudly.

"More evidence?" inquired Mr. Hollowbread, cheerfully, for he did want the job to be nice.

"Oh no! No more evidence. There's enough, isn't there?"

"Too much," thought the Congressman, who had already discovered that the claim had been paid once; but he only bowed and smiled.

"I mean that I have been learning how to get things through Congress," pursued Josie, with the diverting simplicity of a greenhorn undertaking to teach poker to the captain of a Mississippi steam-boat. "I want you to put my appropriation into the Omnibus Bill."

"You understand it all, I see," Mr. Hollowbread grinned. "If ever we let you ladies vote, you will easily get control of the inside of politics, and put us on the outside."

"Ah, now you are laughing at me. Of course I am aware that there are mysteries in statesmanship which I never could master."

"I am not so sure of that," said Hollowbread, and quite honestly. He knew that she was dangerously clever in some things, and he did not know exactly where her cleverness terminated, and in his love for her he overestimated her capacity of expanding. Necessarily she was green in public affairs, and that discovery of the Omnibus Bill stratagem was amusingly stale, but there was no telling what she might not learn if she had a chance.

"We are not so monstrously wise at the Capitol," he continued. "There was a famous Swedish minister who sent his son abroad on diplomatic business, with these words: 'Go, my son, and see with how little wisdom the world is governed.' Now, a citizen of this model republic need not travel for that purpose; he can see it by staying at home, and perhaps see it best so."

"Don't spoil my delightful illusions," said Josie. "I prefer to have faith in your superhuman wisdom. Don't you prefer that I should?"

At the same time she made believe worship him with her eloquent eyes, and laid two trustful fingers on his protecting and

beneficent coat-sleeve. It is a solemn fact, incredible as it may seem to youthful readers of our history, that this veteran lawgiver and Lothario trembled in every vein under the almost imperceptible touch. No one who has not carefully studied such a phenomenon can believe how desperately the old can sometimes fall in love with the new.

"My wisdom shall do its best for you," he murmured, in such a husky, choked voice, that she looked up at him in surprise. Accustomed as she was to wield an enchanter's wand over men, and to see them quiver and change color and become stifled under its power, she could not realize that she had completely bewitched this sexagenarian.

"There is one unlucky circumstance," he pursued, clearing his throat with a hoarse ahem. "I am very, very sorry to find that this claim has been paid once."

"Oh dear!" exclaimed Josie, opening her eyes as if she had never heard of it before.

"But it was a very small payment—ridiculously small, of course—only two thousand dollars, interest included."

"Say it was not enough, Mr. Hollowbread. Of course it was not enough."

"But it won't do merely to say that. Somebody must swear to it."

"Couldn't you swear to it?" she asked, with sublime faith in the powers and privileges of a Congressman. Then, seeing that he appeared to be stumbled by the proposition, she added, heroically, "I will!"

"But you are not a witness," he suggested, with a patient smile, the long-suffering smile of affection. "This barn was burned forty years before you ever saw a barn."

Josie laughed merrily. She took the thing so lightly. He was almost fretted to see how gayly she bore it, when to him it was such a heavy burden, and might be a damaging one.

But with those lustrous eyes looking into his and cajoling his love-lorn senses, he could not show annoyance at her ignorant, child-like, yet charming, levity.

"We must do something else," he said, meditating with all his might.

"Perhaps the claim was paid in paper dollars, not worth so much as silver dollars, don't you know?"

"That is exceedingly clever, Mrs. Murray. But, unluckily, it fails in various ways to touch our case. The claim was paid in coin undoubtedly. We shall have to assert an under-valuation; I see nothing else. But the trouble will be to prove it."

"Yes, and the payment was for the barn alone; and there were the outbuildings and the cattle, and so on; they never have been paid for."

"All that would help," assented Mr. Hollowbread, with a sigh, for he was mortally ashamed of himself. This cooking-up of sham bills against the Government was un-

familiar business to him; and he had even prided himself on having evaded it. "I must try to get hold of your Jeremiah Drinkwater, and see if he remembers any cattle, outhouses, and that sort of thing."

"Why, he is an old man!" exclaimed Josie, forgetting that her counselor was far from young. "He must be in his second childhood. If I had him here, I could make him remember any thing, and swear to any thing."

This unscrupulous frankness was all the more dreadful to Mr. Hollowbread because the devil had already suggested the same thought to him, and he knew that it was a very wicked one. He looked at her with an amazed glance and a perplexed smile, and then replied, with cautious vagueness:

"I trust that Mr. Drinkwater will somehow be made useful to us. But it really does seem necessary to get at him before he loses too much of his memory—before he forgets how to breathe and speak, for instance. How can we reach him?"

"He lives at Murray Hill, Beulah County, just where the battle was fought. Hasn't Congress a right to send for persons and papers?" added Josie, making exhibition of a term which she had caught from Sykes Drummond.

"Congress doesn't do it very often in the case of private claims," answered Mr. Hollowbread, smiling over this adorable ignorance. "We shall probably have to make a pilgrimage to the venerable Drinkwater shrine, or pay for getting him here."

Josie became pensive. She had a woman's natural chariness about her own money; and then her income was such a wretchedly small one—not enough to dress her properly!

Her admirer noted her trouble, divined the cause of it, and made bold to offer her his purse. It would be the first step, he sagely and hopefully thought, toward offering his hand and heart.

"Mrs. Murray, pardon me one audacity," he said. "Until your claim is established, permit me to be your banker. It is a very small thing to do; it is constantly done in such cases. In fact, there are persons who make it a business to advance money on claims, taking a share of the proceeds in repayment, and a scandalously large share, too, I can assure you. I don't want you to fall into the hands of those disreputable harpies. Do, I beg of you, let me be a convenience to you in this matter—a mere convenience. I understand perfectly that you have a handsome fortune of your own, and don't in the least need what one would call a loan," he politely added, although he had understood to the contrary, having catechised Mrs. Warden concerning Josie's estate, and got a very low estimate of it. "But this is a mere question of convenience. I push the affair; I make what payments

are needed, keeping an account of them; then, when the claim is adjusted, you, at your entire leisure, repay me. What objection can you possibly have?"

"Oh, Mr. Hollowbread, you are so kind!" exclaimed Josie, blushing a little, partly with satisfaction and gratitude, and partly because she divined a coming demand for something more than a moneyed settlement. "But you must charge interest, Mr. Hollowbread."

"Oh, Mrs. Murray, interest from you!" And the noble old legislator and gallant looked the image of tender magnanimity. "I charge interest!" he continued, laughing the idea to scorn. "Do consider that I ought not to do it. I should make myself thereby a pecuniary sharer in the transaction, which would be a sort of official misdemeanor."

"Oh!" giggled Josie. "How very funny! Well, we can arrange it some way. I must work you several hundred pairs of slippers."

"It would be a misspent life for you," bowed Hollowbread. "I should be overpaid with one slipper. And I should prefer it to be one of your own," he declared, glancing at a visible toe of one of her little prunellas.

"You shall have one," she giggled again, nestling a little closer to him, and then rustling a little away. "Do you really want one?" she asked, stooping and removing a gossamer *chaussure* with a black rosette in it. "Really? really? Then you shall have that."

Mr. Hollowbread, blushing like a bottle of Port-wine in the sun, raised the fragile gift to his lips in silent adoration, and then deposited it in the breast-pocket nearest his heart, at the risk of bursting off a button.

"Oh, Mr. Hollowbread!" the young siren pretended to gasp, at the same time going through a form of shrinking coyly away from him. It was a girlish fashion of flirtation, such as belles of sixteen are apt to practice upon beaux of eighteen; and she could hardly keep from laughing as she drew its frail shaft to the head against this adorer of sixty. But there was no need of fear as to the effect of the little trick, and there had been no need even of using it. The great political financier and eloquent extemporaneous speaker was already moved to that extent that he could not speak for some seconds. The feeling of that warm slipper in his bosom so throttled him that he looked as if his neck-tie ought to be loosened. He called to mind also how he had once had the whole body of that loveliness in his arms, and he came very near thanking Heaven aloud for the exquisite pleasure and honor of having been knocked flat by her.

Meantime Josie had no emotions at all, and did not even consider herself under any great obligation to him, although she re-

membered, and remembered too with keen satisfaction, that he was to pay out his money in her cause. Had she not offered him interest, and had she not given him her slipper? Moreover, it is so easy to believe that others are rejoiced to serve us, and are fully repaid for their sacrifices by that joy, and by the contemplation of our merits.

"But we must get at Mr. Drinkwater," she said presently, reverting to business with a facility which pained him. "He is such an old man that perhaps he won't want to come on here. Ought I to go and see him?"

"But you will want a lawyer," cunningly observed Hollowbread, who was a lawyer himself. "I might find a chance for the trip during the Christmas recess. Would it be possible for us to meet there?"

"We could meet there if we went in the same train," laughed the audacious Josie, saying to herself that he was surely a sufficiently old gentleman to travel with properly, and that she could bind him to silence concerning the journey. Besides, it was clearly necessary that this Drinkwater business should be attended to, and that promptly.

"It will be the best way, and I shall be infinitely obliged to you, Mrs. Murray," declared Mr. Hollowbread, in a state of ecstasy, and floating somewhere between heaven and earth. It actually seemed to him that Josie Murray, in making that proposition, had encouraged him to offer himself as her companion in life's pilgrimage. How wonderful that an old Lothario, who had passed a great part of his life in trifling with women, should be so easily deluded by one! But, Lotharios or not, delicate-minded gentlemen or not, we can all be led blindfold if once we fall heartily in love.

Thus happened it that, while Josie longed to place her suit in the hands of Edgar Bradford, and while she had positively promised it to Sykes Drummond, she eventually confided it to Mr. Hollowbread.

CHAPTER XX.

MR. DRUMMOND'S VIEWS.

BUT Christmas was only coming as yet, and so there was time to be killed before Josie could take her adventurous journey with Mr. Hollowbread, if indeed, she ever should take it.

Meanwhile, as she was going constantly to parties and receptions, she could not well avoid meeting the deceived Sykes Drummond. Not that she sought to avoid him! No, no! Josie was no such timid and awkward intriguer as that; on the contrary, she was eager to find the young Congressman and make things right with him.

In her abundant dealings with our noble

but simple sex, she had discovered that the best way to treat a man whom she had deluded and humbled was to make a confession of error to him, and tell him she was "so sorry!"

In this manner she kept her friends and admirers, more especially such as were not worth keeping. It was an easy policy to her, for she was by nature remarkably cool-headed, even-tempered, and averse to quarrels, like many other persons whose affections are not deep, and who are what we call false-hearted.

Thus it happened that she was cordial to her saturnine friend whenever she met him, and caught at the first opportunity to tell him what mischief she had been up to.

"I am perfectly delighted to have a chance at you," she said to him when they encountered at the great and good Smyler's reception. "Won't you do me the favor to conduct me to some lodge in this wilderness of stupidity, where I can whisper a word in confidence?" And when they were as much alone as they could be in Mr. Smyler's dreadful jam of guests, she continued, "I have got myself into such trouble!"

"Oh no!" grinned Sykes. "Clever as you are, Mrs. Murray! It isn't possible! However, I am very credulous, and might believe any thing you say, if you say it long enough."

"But I am not at all clever, Mr. Drummond, and I really have made an awful blunder."

"I wish I knew all about it, Mrs. Murray." "I don't know that I can tell you, I am so ashamed of it."

"If I were not a healthy man, Mrs. Murray, I should have a fit with curiosity, and die on the spot—haw, haw!"

"But I assure you that it gives me great annoyance and anxiety. And here you are laughing at it!"

"Do let me know what it is. You shall have floods of sympathy."

"And help, Mr. Drummond?"

"Word of a Congressman—haw, haw!"

"Well—it is excessively annoying to think of—but I have had the folly to give my papers to Mr. Hollowbread—that is, to let him coax them out of me."

Sykes habitually held a pretty firm bridle-rein over his expression, but just now he could not help showing that he was considerably annoyed.

"There were some reasons for it," continued Josie. "You see he is an old gentleman—"

"Pretty hard, that, on Hollowbread—haw, haw!" interrupted Drummond.

"You mustn't!" said Josie, pressing his arm with her own, as if involuntarily. "You shouldn't laugh about it. A man who has lived as long as he has, has a right to be an old gentleman. But, seriously now,

don't you see that his age makes a difference to me? My friends and family would be the less likely to grumble at my putting my claim in the hands of a man old enough to be my father."

"But your enemies, too, would be the less likely to grumble. That also is worth consideration."

"What do you mean, Mr. Drummond?"

"He won't bring any thing to pass, Mrs. Murray. He can't. He wasn't born to bring any thing to pass. He is an old fetic and figure-head and wooden image."

"Oh, dear! And I knew it! And yet I did it!"

"Has he actually got the papers?" inquired Sykes, unable to fully accept such bad news at once.

"Yes," whispered Josie, as if horror-struck.

"What can I do?"

"Get them away from him."

"I will. I must. I will get them just as soon as I can."

And yet, far from meaning to get them, she distinctly purposed and intended to let them remain just where they were—at least for the present. She had a plan in her little head, and, by-the-way, it may be worth stating that much of her life was guided by plans, although her conduct generally had the air of being impulsive and little more than instinctive.

Her present project, however, was a simple one, and not greatly above the invention of a pussy-cat. It was to keep Mr. Drummond opiated with apologies and coquetries until it should appear plainly whether she needed his help or not. Mr. Hollowbread might turn out a "fetic," and do nothing; or he might labor hard and still accomplish nothing. Bradford, the man in whom she had most hoped, was already a deserter. When bowstrings of that tried and trusted sort failed, she could not have too many new ones on hand.

Well, the apologies and the coquetries did their business. Drummond was a hard man to keep in harness when he did not see it to be his interest to stay there; but in the present case he had a master-hand to tackle him, and he could not even desire to kick out of the traces.

A hard creature he was in every way: ambitious, selfish, unsympathetic, unsensitive, tyrannical, and cruel; greedy of power over his fellow-beings, and pleased to show that power by tormenting them; a man of rude commands, scornful laughter, coarse practical jokes, and blunt sarcasms. Persons of his own sex could exercise no influence over him, except through downright superior might of muscle or of intellect.

As for women, they had just one hold on him—the hold which a lioness has upon a lion: an appeal to his ravening passions. The intensity of his nature in this respect

appeared plainly in his hanging under-lip, his dusky and yet almost flaming black eyes, and his darkly pale, Oriental complexion. A woman of sensibility could not talk with him five minutes without feeling that she was called upon to engage in a struggle of sex with sex for the mastery. To some such women he was alarming and little less than horrible, while to others he was alarming and fascinating. The result of this characteristic of temperament was, that a coquette of unusual ability could, to some extent, rule him. Now, for possibly the first time in his life, he was made a tool of by a woman.

And Josie led him without liking him, which was something to her credit. Flirt and intriguer as she was, she had some fine feminine traits, if we may not even call them beautiful. Nature had given her a sensibility which was not so much moral as æsthetic or artistic, but which enabled her to distinguish perfectly between noble and ignoble characters, and to consider the former "lovely," and the latter "horrid."

She was exquisitely capable of discovering and appreciating lofty souls, and also lofty features of incomplete souls. She admired old Colonel Murray enthusiastically, because he had been a brave soldier and an honorable man. While she laughed at the rector for his whimsical devotion to his old wife, she liked him for that very devotion, and longed to tell him so to his face. Although Bradford's aversion to swindling legislation stood in her way, she respected him, and was all the more anxious to win his affection because of it. For the wavering Hollowbread she felt some contempt, and for the frankly wicked Drummond a good deal of dislike.

True, she was "possessed," and dearly loved to flirt with weak men and naughty ones, especially when they could be useful. But she was too clever, too instinctively intelligent and artistically sensitive, to be much dazzled by them. They were not as fine as the honorable colonel and the fastidious Bradford; they would not make such loyal and puissant protectors to a woman in the struggle of life: of this she was permanently sure, although the surety did not often influence her choice of company. For Josie was sadly controlled by that love of peril, and that monkey-like desire to be a danger and a mischief to others which we have expressed by saying that she was "possessed."

Well, the conversation between her and Drummond continued, and of course a certain amount of coquetry also.

"Tell me something that is pleasant," said Josie. "I have cried to-day over my silly blunder, and I feel woefully low-spirited."

"I can only tell you that you don't look as if you had cried at all," returned Drum-

mond, glancing with rude admiration at the lovely face which was turned up to his. "It is one of the handsome days with you, as I have heard women put it; of course, I mean one of the handsomest days."

"You are very good to tell me so. I get so few compliments! Now, you being a man and a Congressman, you fare differently. You have only to make a speech to see your name in all the papers."

"To see it blackened in all the papers—haw, haw! Here I have just made a speech against Hollowbread's stupid plan for issuing more debased money, and at least forty of our asinine journals abused me for it inside of forty hours. Every quarrelsome beggar who wanted some money cheap flew at me in print, or bribed his editor with ten dollars to fly at me."

"Do editors take ten-dollar bribes?"

"Yes, and five-dollar ones," declared Drummond, who was in an ill humor with the brotherhood of the Press, and disposed to libel it. "I have repeatedly got articles inserted as leaders for that enormous compensation—haw, haw!"

Josie's head fairly hummed with a plan to raise forty dollars somehow, and bribe the *Tribune*, *Times*, *Herald*, and *World* to come out for the claim. But she did not forget her womanly duty of entertaining Mr. Drummond, and she continued the dialogue without intermission, as became a born and trained queen of society.

"You shouldn't mind such pitiful criticism. You know you are right, and you shouldn't mind a five-dollar opposition."

"Ah! but it tells all the same. The mass of the people don't know how things are bought and sold inside politics; they take the theatrical sheet-iron thunder for the voice of God. Do you remember Carlyle's description of the population of Great Britain! Eighteen millions of people, mostly fools! It just covers our ground—haw, haw! The five-dollar per column opposition has its effect, and a prodigious effect. Nothing can beat it but an opposition at ten dollars per column. That is the main reason why we Congressmen are greedy for money. We get enough to live on, but not enough to bribe on. And, to bribe others, we must take bribes. I tell you, Mrs. Murray, that this state is rottenner than Denmark. Well, there is one comfort, it gives us a chance. If George Washington's Congress of old-style, high-stepping country notables was sitting now, you and I couldn't get our claims through."

This was a plainness of speech which Josie did not relish. In a general way, no woman wants to have the mask stripped off from things. If she likes wickedness at all, she likes it well covered and with a fine complexion, and revolts from a clear showing of the skeleton beneath.

But Josie did not exhibit her artistic dissatisfaction to Mr. Drummond; she only said to herself that he was "horrid," and talked on with a smiling face.

"I want to get Mr. Smyler to help you when you come to put in my bill," she observed. "Do you think I could coax him?"

"You could coax almost any body but Smyler. Mr. T. M. C. A. Smyler is an incarnation of prunes, prisms, and propriety."

"Oh!" muttered Josie, not much pleased with the insinuation that she was not a suitable person to influence proper men.

"Mr. Smyler can only be coaxed in one way," continued Drummond, without observing that he had said an unkind thing and made a disagreeable impression, so coarse was his spiritual texture. "He neither smokes, nor drinks, nor stays away from church, nor indulges in any other vice which societies have been formed to put down. He banks on his decency and orthodoxy. There is just one method of moving him—give him a check."

"Isn't it abominable!" exclaimed Josie, who had no check to give, and who also wanted to please the sarcastic Drummond.

"Abominable? Haw, haw! that's good. Why, it's the correct thing here, Mrs. Murray. Congress doesn't mind, because it is used to it; and the sovereign people doesn't mind, because it doesn't know it. Why, look at this prim Smyler now, as sanctimonious as Ananias! He has twelve hundred every quarter from one contractor alone, and no doubt other bonuses which I haven't yet discovered, but which all Congress more or less suspects. Do we think any the less of him? We can't. The people believe in him, and put him high in authority. We can only wonder, admire, and go and do likewise—haw, haw!—hoping to be rewarded in like fashion. There is nothing that succeeds like success."

Drummond honestly despised and hated hypocrisy, and valued himself much on that contempt and that hate. But he was far from being a good man, and indeed almost his only worthy trait was the frankness of his wickedness, if we may apply the word worthy to a truly satanic impudence of guilt. He was a thoroughly bad man, and extremely injurious to people whose morals were in a leaky state, leading them to believe that their wrecks of conscience were not worth saving and refitting. It was a bad sign for his district that it should confer its highest honor upon such an open-mouthed, brazen-faced sinner. It was a far worse sign for that district than if it had been deceived and cajoled into giving its vote to the demure, bribable Smyler. A hypocrite at least admits that there is such a thing as virtue, and accords a sort of homage to it. As long as he wears the mask of goodness, you may honor goodness by honoring him; but to

vote for such an undisguised, blatant, bragging scoundrel as Drummond is very much like voting open-eyed for the devil with his horns, hoofs, and tail on. It must certainly have been a very wicked district, or else a district inhabited mainly by idiots, which elected this diabolic youngster.

"Do you know I got a little tired of hearing so much about politics as I do hear in Washington?" presently remarked Josie, whose forte, we remember, was flirting.

"Haw, haw!" roared Drummond. "So hearing about hypocrisy and bribery is hearing about politics, is it? Well, that isn't bad—that is pretty near it. It's a good enough shot to let us quit the subject. Suppose we walk on, if you don't object? I am prodigiously proud of showing you on my arm."

"Then we are a proud couple," answered the ready Josie.

But she uttered the phrase with little heart, for as yet she did not like Mr. Drummond. Even the admiring gaze which he bent upon her struck her somewhat unpleasantly, so rude and domineering and greedy was it, so like the stare of a marauding soldier in a sacked city, or of a pirate aboard a rich prize. He indeed was pleased with her, and went on talking his rough brightest and courtliest. But we will not listen to him further at present.

Mr. Hollowbread passed them, as usual a radiant vision of tailoring, bowing to the lady as tenderly as if he still had her slipper in his left breast-pocket, and then looking after her cavalier with a countenance of jealous gloom. Next Pendleton Beauman and Calhoun Clavers went by together, receiving between them one of Josie's sweetest smiles, a smile rich enough to cut up like a bridal-cake and divide among many, and dream over. Then Hamilton Bray made a bumptious, condescending bow, and was contemptuously stared at, not to say grinned at, by Drummond.

Black-eyed, dark-skinned Mrs. Warden they saw in the distance, leaning on the gaunt form of the great General Bangs, and smirking almost hysterically in his hard, impudent face, as if she were pleading with that chief of all subtlety and swindling for her own cherished swindle. There were higher and worthier personages, too; there were men whose hands had never been soiled by a dirty dollar; there were Winthrop Leyard of the Senate and Stuyvesant Clinton of the Cabinet, and others of a stamp not yet lost, thank Heaven!

"And here is your adorer," said Josie, smiling involuntarily as she caught sight of the beardless face and manly costume of Squire Nancy Appleyard. "Dear me, doesn't she look at me savagely! Don't let us go near her; I know she'll step on my train."

Miss Appleyard was indeed staring at

them with a fixed, indignant, scornful expression noticeable to the dullest observer. What made the matter worse was that her singular raiment rendered her very conspicuous, so that she was the mark of many curious eyes.

"See here," said Drummond to his companion, "I must stop this impertinence at once. Would you object to taking Mr. Hollowbread's arm while I say a word to that young attorney?"

"Oh, certainly," assented Josie, quite excited with curiosity, amusement, and perhaps a little alarm.

So Hollowbread was beckoned to and made happy, while Drummond marched sternly up to Squire Nancy, obviously at that moment a most wretched Bloomer.

CHAPTER XXI.

MR. DRUMMOND'S UNDERSTANDING WITH SQUIRE NANCY.

BRIEF, though animated, was the scene at the Smyler reception between Sykes Drummond and Squire Nancy Appleyard.

"Will you let me alone this evening if I will see you to-morrow?" was the abrupt and business-like and unamiable salutation of the young Congressman.

"You simply want to get back to that Mrs. Murray without my knowing," gasped Miss Appleyard, her face turning from pallid to crimson with the effort of utterance, for she had been scared out of her breath by the gentleman's grim approach.

"I'll keep faith with you for this once," grinned Drummond, as insolently as a gorilla might grin. "I will call at your office to-morrow—say at five in the afternoon—if you will leave here at once. Good Lord! what are you standing in that style for?" he added, impatiently. "Take your hands out of your breeches-pockets, and try to look like a gentleman or a lady, one or the other."

"You are always quarreling with me," responded the Squire, in a whimpering voice, which she tried in vain to steady. "I don't see why you need quarrel with me so incessantly."

It was clear that the poor young woman, notwithstanding her virile broadcloth and boots, was tenderly love-lorn and wretchedly jealous; and that, like most persons in such a state of mind, she longed to have her love-quarrel out and bring it to a reconciliation without further anguish of delay.

"There, there!" said Drummond, dreading a judgment in the way of a flood of tears. "Don't cry before this crowd. If you do, I shan't. To-morrow at five, then. Good-evening."

So saying, he turned and left her, striding through the swarming promenaders with a

truculent look, as if he might knock down the first man who laughed. And the next day he kept his appointment, dropping in about dusk upon the enamored jurist.

Squire Appleyard's office was a little room in the basement of a commonplace dwelling-house, situated on one of the meanest side streets which abut on Pennsylvania Avenue. She would have liked a finer nest in a more public position, but the means were lacking to pay the rent thereof. Clients she had none, a misfortune which she attributed to the unjust fact that she had not been admitted to the bar, surely a sufficient reason. A few elderly dames, who petted her for the sake of countenancing the Cause of Woman and of showing their hostility to Horrid Man, were about the only persons who ever visited her sanctum. They were not capitalists, moreover, and never had any business in courts of law, and could not have given it to her if they had, because of her disbarred condition.

Thus Miss Appleyard found her income insufficient even for the modest style which she kept up. Her rent was sometimes behindhand; her tailor made her clothes on credit, and for the sake of the advertisement; and in her promenades she avoided passing the door of her unpaid boot-maker. Once or twice it had been necessary for the revered dames aforesaid to take up a subscription for Squire Nancy and the Cause. And things had gone on in this way for many months, until they had become quite discouraging. Appleyard talked of relinquishing her inhospitable profession, and was secretly cramming for a clerkship in the Treasury. Indeed, it is reported that she once applied to a certain Secretary for an appointment without examination, and on being refused burst manfully into tears in his horrid presence, and that the Secretary wept with her. But this tale, after careful dissection of its structural probabilities, we feel free to question, at least so far as concerns the sniveling of the Secretary.

Well, Squire Appleyard's office was as dim and narrow as her business prospects. There was a bare floor, an open coal-stove, two pitilessly hard chairs, and a plain pine writing-table. Miss Nancy met her visitor at the door with a promptness and a blush which showed that she had impatiently awaited his coming, and was only too zealous to welcome him. Drummond felt that his hand was pressed, but he took no kindly note of it. He tramped solidly forward, seated himself squarely in front of the stove, leaned back on two legs of his chair, stared at Miss Appleyard with a defiant grin, and said loudly, "Well, sir, here I am—haw, haw!"

Had the room been lighter he would have discovered a tear in her eye, and then he might have spoken more gently. Still, he could see plainly enough that she was a

woman, and rather a pretty one than otherwise, though so oddly accoutred. There, visible enough were the sloping shoulders, and the rounded, pulpy outlines, all signatures of a sex which is clearly doomed to rely for power upon its sweetness, rather than upon its strength.

But Squire Nancy did not make much use of her saccharine qualities; and of strength, whether physical or mental, she undoubtedly had no great store. She had placed herself at a disadvantage with men in assuming their costume; and Drummond was not a person to imagine her at her best, or to show her any pity in her eclipse.

"I am very much obliged to you for coming," she said, in her clear, contralto voice, and with a propitiatory accent. "I didn't use to have to say that," she added, the voice quivering somewhat. "Only a few weeks ago you could come without asking."

Drummond nestled uneasily in his seat, and maltreated the fire with the poker. Hard and coarse as he was, he felt that he had behaved shabbily to this young woman in pretending to court her, and especially in counterfeiting a desire to marry her.

"See here," he broke out, "we had better have a prompt and plain understanding as to what has been, and what is to be. Do you want to have me state the facts?"

"Go on, Sykes," answered Miss Nancy, seating herself in the vacant chair, and looking at him kindly, almost happily, so pleased was she only to have him there.

"Don't call me Sykes!" he exclaimed. "It is the name of Dickens's murderer. It is a beastly name."

It was quite a sweet name to the love-lorn attorney, but she dropped it at command, and murmured, "Mr. Drummond."

"Well, you think that I have paid you serious attentions," continued the honorable gentleman. "That is what you think, isn't it?"

Squire Appleyard could not at once answer. She started from her chair, walked once or twice across the room, and, finally, in her nervous absent-mindedness, seated herself upon her table, swinging her patent-leather boots smartly.

"You certainly did and said things," she at last stammered, "which would have made any lady think that a man liked her."

It was true enough. Drummond had whispered soft speeches to this light-headed, whimsical, vain creature. From that he had gone on to press her hand, and, alas! to kiss her. Finally, he had talked downright love, and had hinted at marriage under certain conditions. But all this he had done out of curiosity, out of a liking for coarse practical jokes, out of what people call deviltry. He wanted to see if there was any core of womanly tenderness and susceptibility inside of that masculine costume.

He relished the rude fun of whispering romantic nonsense into ears which were shadowed by a virile beaver. He desired to plague and humble a silly daw which had garnished itself in the plumes of the raven.

"Like her?" he retorted. "Like means love, I take it. How do you suppose I can love you, with you sitting on a table, and swinging your boots like a man?"

Dropping two unseen tears, Squire Appleyard descended from her elevation, drew the empty chair to a distance from Drummond, and sat quietly and meekly down in it, wishing, in spite of herself, that she had a silk dress on. Indeed, one can not be quite sure that she did not make a nervous gesture as if to draw some imaginary skirt over those denounced patent-leathers.

"And how could I suppose that you would take me in earnest?" continued the Congressman. "You laughed at love. You sneered at the susceptibility of your sex. You said that no true woman stood in need of the protection of marriage, and that you were no such slave at heart as to desire it. I had a right to believe that you were sincere, and that you would stick to your principles, hadn't I? Grant that I tried you a little with spoony nonsense, and went so far as to take a kiss. Weren't you a fair subject for philosophic investigation? You are a phenomenon, remember. You are the only woman I ever saw in coat, vest, trousers, and boots. It is enough—such a dress on such a figure—to rouse the scientific world to inquiry. I don't believe Darwin or Herbert Spencer could see you without wanting to take notes of you. Well, I took notes, and you let me. But when I found that you were really a woman in your tastes and inclinations, I prudently, and, as I claim, kindly, put an end to my studies. I was satisfied, but you were not. Since then you have been following me up, pursuing me from one public place to another, watching my smiles and tears—haw, haw!—and claiming ownership. I don't admit the claim, and I demand an end to the oversight. That is what I came here for—to say just that, and nothing more."

Lawyer Nancy Appleyard had spoken very little hitherto. Before the meeting she had had a great many ideas in her head, and had expected that she would give utterance to them with freedom and eloquence. But under Drummond's hard treatment her emotions had been too much for her, confusing her intellect and stifling her voice. Now, however, desperation and anger gave her strength to talk once more, and to talk to the purpose.

"You did speak the word 'marriage,'" she said, forgetting how often she had herself uttered that noble dissyllable in derision. "It is a word which no man who calls himself a gentleman ought to breathe to a wom-

an unless he means it. Yes, sir, you promised—you solemnly promised—to marry me."

"Solemnly!—haw, haw!" laughed Drummond. "Well, I did talk of it, after a fashion. But the wedding was to be on the condition that you should dress decently."

"I am dressed decently," affirmed Squire Nancy, turning hysterical, and whimpering outright.

Drummond surveyed her from head to foot with a grin of distaste and of mockery. But Miss Appleyard did not notice the grin; she was meditating a tremendous *coup de toilette*. It was a step the mere thought of which filled her with shame, as being a degradation to herself, and an apostasy from a sublime cause. She had adopted the costume of man partly out of vanity, admiration of her own outlines, and a longing for notoriety, but also partly out of a belief that her apotheosis in it would help on the cause of woman with a big W. This cause, whatever it might be or might tend to, she earnestly though vaguely believed in, and fervently loved. Her small head was full of wild notions about the early coming and the great glory of the millennium of female suffrage. When ladies should vote, go to Congress, sit on the bench of the Supreme Court, conduct banking, sail ships, and command armies, then politics would be pure, law infallible, business honest, war humane, and the world holy and happy. Of course, this result was desirable, as the meanest intellect could discover; and, of course, whatever would hasten its advent was the right and beautiful thing to do.

Now, if one woman with a big W should set the example of seizing what masculine privileges could be seized, and if every woman with a little w should promptly follow the lead of this Messianic spirit, then the whole blessed business would be accomplished in the twinkling of an eye—that I being the *ego* of Miss Nancy. A change of clothes was all that was necessary to renovate society; and surely nothing could come more naturally to the feminine nature. A change of clothes, and, lo! Tyrant Man would be dethroned. Woman would mount beside him or above him, and last, but not least, Squire Appleyard would be the greatest of her sex. The greatest and one of the revealed handsomest, for there was her figure in plain discovery, and she saw it to be a lovely one.

But, meanwhile, with the reformation only just budding, she had fallen desperately in love; and here she was crying at a man because he would not marry her, and would scoff at her Messianic costume. Moreover, she was on the point of telling a downright womanish fib, which we can only pardon because of the gentle motive which engendered it.

"I never said I wouldn't change my

dress," she muttered, by way of introducing an offer to make that alteration.

"My memory is a pretty good one," replied Drummond, who, indeed, rarely forgot any thing, and was, therefore, a formidable debater.

"If I did say so, it was only in an argument," she declared, meanwhile rolling her eyes at him in a tender fashion, which contrasted whimsically with frock-coat and trousers.

"Oh! that is the way you women argue: say one thing and mean another—haw, haw, haw!"

Miss Appleyard had hoped—so blinded can even a reformer be by love and longing—that if she offered to give up her reformatory and platformary raiment, this man would then appreciate the greatness of the sacrifice, and would clasp her to his overcoat. She now feared that she had been mistaken, and she became smartly indignant.

"You have broken your solemn promise, Mr. Drummond," she broke out—"your solemn promise."

"Nonsense! What is the use of exaggerating in that style. You knew perfectly well that I was joking."

"I did not know it, and you were not joking. You were perfectly in earnest when you said it. You have changed lately, but it's all because of that little Mrs. Murray—little brown wizened creature!"

"She isn't wizened at all," declared that infuriating Drummond, laughing at this outburst of jealousy. "Her arm is as large as yours, and she is as real as can be."

"Oh!" exclaimed Squire Nancy, in a jealous rage, and almost at the point of hysterics.

She picked up her beaver and dashed it on her head, as if she were about to fly out of the office; then she tore it off, threw it on the floor, thrust her hands into her pockets, and paced the room with grinding boot-heels. At last she did what would have been more touching in silk than it was in broadcloth: she covered her face with her trembling fingers, and burst into a hearty fit of sobbing and crying.

Drummond, hard-hearted as he was, looked a little ashamed of himself, and was ashamed. Nevertheless, he watched her coolly, and studied her intently, for he was an intelligent, educated, philosophic black-guard, taking a deep interest in singular manifestations of human nature, and capable of investigating them under trying circumstances.

"Will you keep your faith as a gentleman?" the young woman presently asked, struck by his silence and attention, and drawing hope therefrom.

"No, no," he said, speaking more gravely and pityingly, yet also more decisively, than

he had yet spoken. "This is sad nonsense, and we must have done with it. I took you to be a stronger head and a rougher heart than you are, and I treated you accordingly. It is necessary now to speak plainly, and once for all. Mrs. Murray has nothing to do with what you call my change. I never meant to pay serious court to you, much less to marry you. I never once thought of it, and you must stop talking about it. Moreover, you must stop following me, stop watching me. It will do no good, and will make you ridiculous. There, I have said what I came to say, and I hope you understand me. This is the last time, as I desire and trust, that we shall meet. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," answered Squire Nancy, in a broken voice, looking at him with tender anguish, while he marched firmly by her and out of the office.

Up to the last second she hoped that he would turn and speak some word of love; but he uttered nothing of the sort, and did not even give her a farewell glance; he simply slammed the door behind him, and went his way.

Then her disappointment and indignation broke out violently. She dashed at the door, tore it open with much noise, thrust out her flushed and wet face, glared fiercely at his disappearing figure, and called, in a loud scream,

"You are a villain!"

"That is my business," returned Drummond, grinning back at her as he turned the next corner. Then he drew out his kid gloves, put them on with as much care as he ever bestowed on his apparel, and went off to call on Mrs. Josephine Murray.

CHAPTER XXII.

SQUIRE NANCY'S SETTLEMENT WITH JOSIE MURRAY.

ALTHOUGH Squire Nancy parted from Drummond in great anger, and could at that moment have brought an action against him with more than professional satisfaction, she none the less loved him permanently and longed to win him.

It is wonderful what a fascination springs from the fact of being refused. The spite of disappointment and the agony of humbled vanity are changed by a wondrous spell into affection, or into some emotion which easily mingles with that blessed current and swells its waters mightily. The rejected one worships, bleeding and in the dust, it is true, but all the more passionately. The cruel object of the adoration appears, for the time at least, indescribably desirable.

In this admirable, though unenviable, frame was Squire Nancy, intensely indig-

nant at the false Drummond, but hungering after him ever so much. She did not believe that he had never cared for her, and that he had talked sweet things to her only in jest. He *had* cared for her; he had been attentive to her, and fond of her, until Mrs. Josephine Murray appeared on the scene; his present coolness was entirely the fault of that sly, mean, hateful little flirt. The more Miss Appleyard considered this explanation of her troubles, the more certain she felt that it was the true solution of them.

But how could the cup, which had slipped from the lip and fallen in fragments, be gathered up and mended? After meditating the matter palpitatingly, first, from her native-born, feminine point of view, and second, from such masculine point of view as she could descend to, she resolved to see Mrs. Murray, and have a personal settlement with her. She would be a Woman with a big W, and smash that woman with a little w. She would face her enemy, reveal to her, in burning words, the villainess of her character, and shame her into withdrawing her snares from the path of honest, though misled Sykes Drummond. Thus she thought and substantially said to herself, for, in consequence of a small head and imperfect education, she was disposed to be sophomorical in ideas, and just now a bursting heart had greatly inflamed the tendency.

Well, how should she get at the wretched little witch? To call on her in the palatial residence, and under the patrician patronage of the Reverend John Murray, seemed a rather formidable enterprise. For it must be understood that Squire Nancy traveled in the Bohemian ways of life, and was not received into aristocratic, or even into bourgeois circles. Somehow, hospitality did not open its arms to her plaited frock-coat; even the earnest dames who raised subscriptions for her, and otherwise cheered her in her mission, did not invite her to meet their relatives; the very receptions were shut against her, excepting, of course, the public ones. And, vain as she was, eccentric as she strove to be, these things quelled her conceit not a little, for she had woman's normal reverence for the grandeurs of society.

But courage, self-reliance, innate dignity, big W, and so forth! She decided that she would call at Rector Murray's, and face his niece. The occasion, however, demanded not only "God-given" qualities, but also human preparation. To begin with, she must look at least as well as Mrs. Murray, or she could not feel that she was meeting her on equal terms. So she arranged her glossy hair with special grace, brushed her becoming broadcloth carefully from head to foot, and took from its recess her best lace-edged handkerchief. Next, she put a phial of harts-horn into her pocket; there was no telling how tough the interview might be; one of

them might faint just in the crisis. Then a terrible inspiration struck her, causing her to laugh fiercely, and also to turn pale. She went to her table-drawer, produced various substances which had the look of drugs, compounded, with some difficulty, two large pills, put them in a box, and the box in her vest-pocket. It must be stated here that, before entering the law, she had made some brief studies in medicine, and had learned how to give a very bad taste to pellets of fresh bread. Being at last harnessed and provisioned for her campaign, she tremulously took the war-path by way of the avenue cars, reached the Reverend Murray's residence, and rang the bell.

"I have an engagement to meet young Mrs. Murray," she said, to Mulatto Sarah, who opened the clerical door. "Tell her that the gentleman she expected has called."

Sarah, having never before beheld Squire Nancy, mistook her for a very youthful gentleman, one of "Miss Josie's" many strange beaus, and delivered the message without hesitation. Josie herself being at all times in expectation of some man or other, and thinking that this was Bradford, or Hollowbread, or Drummond, came directly down to the parlor. One may imagine her complete bewilderment and considerable dismay when she confronted the plaited integuments and well-remembered face of Lawyer Appleyard. But she was not altogether confounded, for she had been called to account before by jealous women, and she guessed at once the motive of this extraordinary visit.

"Good-morning, sir," she said, mechanically, and yet with a certain sense (at least, as she remembered the matter afterward) that she was uttering something scornful and cutting. Almost in the same second, though not by any means in the same breath, she added what was half a suggestion and half a hope, "Some mistake, I suppose."

They were both standing, both panting quite noticeably, and both staring. Josie neither thought of sitting down nor of asking her visitor to sit, a circumstance which she spoke of boastfully in her subsequent rehearsals of the scene, representing it as willful and proper arrogance toward a vulgar and silly intruder.

The solemn truth is, that the woman in silk and the woman in broadcloth were about equally confused and scared. Miss Nancy, for instance, would have been glad to make a crushing answer, but merely succeeded in quivering forth,

"No mistake at all, Mrs. Murray."

"Ah!—indeed!" was Mrs. Murray's not very remarkable retort, the same being followed up by an awkward silence.

But, as we who know Josie may imagine, it did not take her long to regain self-possession, or, at least, to put on a show of it.

At first she had been as much alarmed by Squire Appleyard as if the latter were a real man; she had been daunted by the frock-coat, the pantaloons, and the boots; by the mere skia that usually distinguishes our lion-like sex. But the tremulous lips, the contralto voice, and the hysterical stammer of emotion, these womanish circumstances tended to re-assure her, and she began to recover her courage and cleverness.

"I have not the honor of an acquaintance with you, madam," she said, coldly, quite aware that both the tone and the statement expressed a claim of superiority.

"I don't want any acquaintance," replied Miss Appleyard, tartly, for she felt the sting. "I have no intention, Mrs. Murray, of requesting your acquaintance, or accepting it. I came here solely on business."

"I think you had better transact your business through my uncle, the Rev. Mr. Murray," said Josie, though with no intention of sending for that prudish protector.

"I won't see him," declared Nancy. "We are women together, Mrs. Murray. If you have in you any of the spirit and self-respect of a true woman—if you have done nothing that a true woman would not be ashamed of—you will talk with me."

Josie hesitated. By this time her heart had stopped thumping, and her curiosity was excited. The scene was an uncommonly odd one certainly, and would probably be very amusing to relate. The attraction of something whimsical, something extravagantly new and entertaining, was a great temptation to this adventurous young lady.

"Do me the favor to take a chair," she said, at the same time sinking with conscious grace upon a sofa, and rather ostentatiously arranging her rustling draperies, so much more expensive than trowsers.

Squire Appleyard was only too glad to accept the invitation, for her plaited pantaloons were trembling under her, and she almost needed her hartshorn bottle. But she was determined—blindly, dizzily, yet desperately, determined—to say her say, and to say it vigorously.

"I came about—Mr. Drummond," she went on, huskily. "I want you to know—I want you to fully understand—that he is engaged to me."

She did not fully understand it so herself; but if what she asserted was not exactly the case, it ought to be the case; and then, in her present state of turbulent feeling, something strong must be uttered.

"Mr. Drummond!" repeated Josie, somewhat confounded, now that the assault was actually opened.

"Yes, ma'am," insisted Miss Appleyard, tremulously, but also pugnaciously.

"I don't care if he is," said Josie, more and more bothered, so angrily did this odd vis-

itor stare at her. "You had better go and talk to Mr. Drummond about it."

"I have talked to him about it," declared Nancy, rising and pacing the room in a fashion which was almost terrifying, so manly was it. "And you, Mrs. Murray—you are standing between him and his plighted word."

"I don't know what you mean. It's all nonsense—and impertinent. I wish you would go away."

"Yes—go away!" echoed Squire Appleyard, by this time hysterically excited. "You expect him, I suppose. I am in the way, I suppose—ha, ha!"

"I don't expect him at all," affirmed Josie, which was not exactly true. "I tell you this is all very absurd, and I have nothing to do with your affairs."

"But you have with his affairs. Yes, I know very well that you have—I know it only too well."

"He isn't engaged to me, if that is what you think!"

"No; but he is about you. You are keeping company with him. You are doing your best to enthrall and enchant him. Will you dare tell me that you are not trying to hold him in your train? Will you dare tell me that you care nothing—nothing at all—for him?"

Now Josie dared to tell almost any fib, so far as the mere fibbing was concerned; but this statement, whether it were true or false, she did not like to make, for the reason that the jealous Bloomer would undoubtedly repeat it to the Congressman; and then he might refuse to assist in pushing the Murray claim. So, while she really had no liking for Mr. Drummond, she hesitated about saying so.

"I thought as much," hissed Squire Nancy, almost losing what little reason Heaven had fitted her out with. "It lies betwixt us two, then," she continued, at the same time producing that mysterious pill-box which has been mentioned. "Mrs. Murray, I am a druggist as well as lawyer," and by this time her voice was so hoarse and sepulchral as to be really terrible, at least, to Josie. "I am a druggist. I have here two pills made by myself. One of them is bread, and the other is arsenic. They shall decide between us. Take your choice, and I will take the other. The survivor shall have Sykes Drummond. The other," and here her utterance fell to a hoarse murmur which was all but unearthly, and would have been fatal to a sensitive listener—"the other—*die-as!*"

It must have been wonderful to see her poking her prescription at Mrs. Murray, and that lovely young person recoiling from it. For there is no doubt that she did recoil, and that she was at this moment considerably flustered. Indeed, if we may believe Squire Nancy's subsequent description of the scene,

Josie shed tears, babyishly, and said, in a contemptible whisper, "I can't take pills without some jam."

Our heroine, however, always denied the alleged weeping, and gave a much nobler version of her refusal to swallow. According to her account, she only said, "I can't take dry pills," and said it, too, in a tone of calm and cutting irony.

Indeed, the discrepancies of statement between the two ladies with regard to this whole interview are simply irreconcilable. We ought to avow, in fairness, that we have generally followed the paraphrase of Mrs. Murray, as being by far the most artistic and entertaining.

"You refuse!" exclaimed Miss Nancy. "You love him not—ha-ha-ha!—he-he-he!" (And Josie, in her delicious account of the matter, gave an imitation of the Squire's hysterical laughter which was absolutely irresistible, even to grave and fastidious listeners.) "Take your choice!" Here Miss Appleyard pushed the box anew under her rival's nose, her own hands and cheeks trembling the while, and her voice quivering. "Take your choice! Take—take!"

But by this time Mrs. Murray had recovered from whatever abasement of alarm she may have fallen into. She was angry, also—angry at having been frightened—as is frequently the case with women. She struck out at the box with the smart slap of a cat, knocked it from the grasp of Miss Nancy's unsteady fingers, and sent the pills flying across the floor.

Then there were a brief rustling and trampling to and fro, which reduced the two boluses to mere paste, faintly streaking the parsonage carpet.

"I will make some more!" gasped Squire Nancy, who saw that her invention had at least produced dismay, and who was determined to be horrid.

"You may make them and take them," declared Josie, running to the bell-rope and standing ready to pull it, though very unwilling to summon her sedate relatives. It surely would not be pleasant to have this ridiculous Bloomer rehearsing the Drummond affair to the nervous rector, and advancing no one could foresee what outrageous accusations of coquetry. Nevertheless, she added, with spirit: "Go away, now—go right away—or I'll call somebody."

"Will you give me an answer?" gurgled Miss Appleyard. "Will you give me an answer?"

"I won't give you any answer at all!" declared Josie, much supported by the bell-rope. "Only I will say that I don't wonder Mr. Drummond won't have a woman who is dressed as ridiculously as you are!"

"I am NOT dressed ridiculously!" almost shouted the apostle of the good time coming, half forgetting her love matters in the

feminine "main question" of costume. "It is you who are dressed ridiculously. Look at your ruffs and laces, and your frills and flounces, and your long, helpless skirts, and your graceless paniers. I know all that you've got on. I know where you're made up and squeezed in and padded out. I know where the woman ends and the millinery begins. You can't humbug me, as you can the silly blockheads of men, with crinolines and corsets and caterings and gorings. Do you call yourself a woman? That a woman!"—pointing at Josie with a gesture of scorn worthy of a teacher of elocution. "You are a mass of pins and bastings and flummery. You are a poor, empty, hollow sham. Oh, when will my sex free itself from the slavery and idiocy of these ridiculous—ridiculous—ridiculous fixings!" (This was very galling, by-the-way, this threefold repetition of the word *ridiculous*, and Josie keenly felt it to be so, and writhed under it visibly.) "Oh, when will woman cast aside her weaknesses and arise in her proper might and dignity, spurning all bondages!" continued the Squire, who, it must be understood, was at times a lecturer, and had now caught the thread of one of her discourses. "Oh, when will woman be different from the mean, paltry, pitiful thing which I now see before me?"

Now, strange as it may seem, all this was dreadful to Josie. She felt for the moment that her costume was somewhat frivolous, and that its alleged shams were absurdly transparent. Moreover, this Bloomer, by the mere fact of preaching at her, was claiming all sorts of superiority, artistic and moral and intellectual.

"Go away!" she commanded, stamping her foot. "If you don't go right away this minute, I'll send for the police," she added, lifting up her white jeweled hand to get a good grip on the bell-rope.

Then, a little frightened by the threat, and also worn out by her labor and deliverance of emotion, did the Squire break down. She covered her face, burst into a spasm of angry tears, and without another word tramped out of the room and the house.

"What a fool!" exclaimed Josie, slamming the door after the departed one. "What a fool, to go on so about my dress!"

Thereupon she turned to a long mirror, and surveyed herself deliberately from head to foot, meantime deftly arranging her draperies and decorations. What she saw was a lovely brunette face, all the handsomer for being flushed with excitement, and a trim, graceful, sufficiently plump figure, costumed in the finest gloss of the latest style. It was a spectacle which might well arouse the ire of a Bloomer, for it was capable of winning the admiration or desire of almost any man.

"I think I look well enough, if I am a

mass of millinery," she said, with a smile, as she turned to glance out of a window. "Well, that idiot is gone. What a fool!" and here she burst into a spasm of rather nervous laughter, for the interview had been not a little trying. "I do have the oddest adventures! and so many of them! Well, I hope I have seen the last of that idiot!"

But she had not seen the last of her absurd tormentor. Squire Nancy Appleyard was yet to follow her up a good deal, and to plague her not a little. There is no end to the useless perseverance of people who lack common sense.

CHAPTER XXIII.

COWHIDE AND PISTOLS.

ALTHOUGH in later days Squire Nancy narrated her assault upon Josie with great glee, and misrepresented it very much to her own glory, she was by no means hilarious and triumphant when she quitted the scene of battle.

Her idea then was about this: that she had made a very proper attempt to recover her man, her own plighted lover, from an unscrupulous flirt; and that in this attempt she had been foiled, defied, brow-beaten, and insulted. It seemed as if Woman with a big W were no match for woman with a little w, and never could learn how to be so.

For some days she remained in a tearful, fretful, gloomy frame, railing to herself at the meanness of her own sex and the meanness of the other, denouncing the wicked coquetry of Mrs. Murray, and the wicked faithfulness of Mr. Drummond. Of course she eagerly hoped that her own Sykes would return to her; and of course the real Sykes—Sykes's own Sykes—had not the faintest purpose of so doing.

At last she caught sight of him on the avenue, but only to behold him mount into the Murray carriage by the side of "that creature," and drive away with her toward unknown resorts. Then Squire Nancy wrote to him; she asked him "firmly, finally, and once for all," whether he would fulfill his promise; also she inquired whether he would or would not, "stop keeping company with Mrs. M——."

Drummond, a good deal irritated by this note, and likewise much cumbered at the time with public business, sent a Spartan reply, consisting of the one word, "No," signed, "S. D."

Thereupon the Squire became miserably furious, and resolved to do something desperate and conclusive. She thought of suicide, and mixed up no end of alternate bread and arsenic pills, occasionally tossing up a cent to decide which she should take, and, if it came up tails, tossing again. After a

few experiments of this sort, followed by a due amount of doleful meditation, she concluded that it was all nonsense. Suicide would be quite proper, if the right person would commit it; but the only right person in the present case was *that* Mrs. Murray; not by any manner of means the injured, the sinless, Miss Nancy. And, oh dear! if Sykes Drummond only *would* come back, there would be no positive need of any body's taking poison.

But he did not come; a week passed, and still he did not appear in the Appleyard office; and at last the Squire's wrath waxed exceedingly hot against him. She settled upon punishing him; upon castigating him violently and memorably; yea, upon cutting short his wicked life. She thought over all the cases of women who had slain such men as had trifled with their tender hearts, and who had been pronounced guiltless by justice and the world.

There was Mary Harris; she had shot the mysteriously sinful Burroughs, no one ever knew what for; and the jury had found her as pure as an angel, and her lawyer had bedewed her with tears of joy. There were many other cheering examples also, mostly in New York city or in California. It seemed as if any woman could kill any man, and, merely by saying that she did it for love of him, secure the approbation of society and become agreeably famous.

Now these were very alluring reminiscences to a young lady of small brains, who was as conceited as a peacock, and had a consuming passion for notoriety. The immediate horrid result of them was that Miss Nancy bought a pink cowhide, and borrowed an ivory-handled revolver.

With these instruments of justice in the drawer of her table, crowded among sewing materials, legal blanks, sheets of note-paper and law-manuals, she lay in wait for the slayer of her peace. Her office, by-the-way, commanded a small triangular square abutting on Pennsylvania Avenue, so that, without coming out of her ambush, she could survey a considerable space of that untraveled wilderness of a thoroughfare. If Drummond should pass in the direction of the Treasury, she could overtake him before he reached Willard's Hotel; if he should pass in the direction of the Capitol, she could skip around a block and confront him opposite the market. In either case she could, of course, flog or shoot him with delightful ease; that is, if she only made her assault unobserved, like Mary Harris and other heroines. And even if she did not kill him (which, it must be confessed, she did not quite mean to do), she would raise a swarm of scandals about the ears of that detestable Mrs. Murray, and perhaps worry her into flying from Washington.

Well, one day the noble deed was dared.

Josie had not seen Squire Appleyard for nearly a fortnight, and had recovered from whatever dread she may have had of her. She no longer confined herself to going out in the Murray carriage, very much to the relief of its philanthropic and fastidious proprietor, who hated to see his horses and coachman exercised regularly. She walked daily, and let us add willingly, for not only was she a healthy little body whose vigorous organization required movement, but she had an unusually pretty pair of Boston bootees to exhibit. It was also characteristic of this audacious young woman that she had the heroic taste to gather up her dress and "switch along," when every other queen of fashion felt obliged to "draggle."

Well, she was trotting up the avenue in this brave style, the wonder and admiration, as usual, of many masculine eyes, when she encountered Mr. Drummond.

"Ah! you are magnificent this morning, Mrs. Murray," said that gentleman, who had just stepped out of a wine-merchant's sample-room, and was in high spirits. "I will walk with you."

"And if I wasn't magnificent you would walk with some one else, I suppose," smiled Josie. "Are you going to the Capitol? What is happening there to-day?"

By-the-way, Josie had not yet got bewitched about the debates and become a regular attendant upon them, as happens to many ladies who reside long in Washington, and especially to many lady claimants.

"Oh, a tiresome deal," laughed Drummond. "Our friend Hollowbread is to make a speech."

"Not about my claim?"

"Not yet; he will reach that in the year 1900—haw, haw! It's about his greenback bill."

"He told me of it, and I was so mean as to forget it. You mustn't expose me. I ought to go and hear him. Who couldn't be interested in greenbacks? I never see them but what I think of shopping. And then, seriously, quite seriously now, Mr. Hollowbread is an able man."

"He has every characteristic of an able man except ability—haw, haw, haw!"

"Oh, there you are too hard on him," declared Josie, although she also laughed. "I should say that he had every characteristic of an able man except industry."

Drummond fairly turned short and stared at her in obvious surprise and admiration.

"You are exactly right," he said. "That covers Hollowbread's whole ground. In spite of some absurdities (and all the great fellows whom I know have their absurdities), he would be an able man, if he could only work. He is well booked; he has solid sense enough; he has keenness and wit enough; but he can't work. And that puts him into the second, or third, or fourth class—I don't

know exactly where, and it doesn't matter."

"You can work, Mr. Drummond."

"How about the rest of my character, Mrs. Murray?"

"I will tell you when my claim has been passed."

"Haw, haw!" roared Sykes, delighted with this pert sparkle of selfishness. "Of course. We must get that little hundred thousand dollar affair all right before we can have any compliments."

"I have a great compliment for you, Mr. Drummond."

"May I ask what it is?"

Josie hesitated, smiled archly, watched him a moment inquiringly, and finally whispered,

"A lady is desperately in love with you."

"What lady?" returned Drummond, with the simple frankness of a flattered man, half hoping—the partially bewitched creature!—that the enamored person might be Mrs. Murray herself, and that her eccentric audacity would lead her to make some further confession.

Meantime Josie actually exulted, as might be seen in the sparkling of her wonderful eyes, and might be heard in the agitated rustle of her silks.

It was a great thing to have kept the tale of her interview with Miss Appleyard from this domineering Congressman for a whole fortnight. It would also be a great thing to relate it to him now, and see him cringe under the ridiculous revelation.

Little did she guess how near the heroine of that adventure was to her at that moment. Revolver in pocket, and cowhide hidden under her caped surtout, Squire Nancy was just then hurrying through a back street toward the avenue, with the intent of facing this guilty couple at the end of the block.

"And she has made a confidante of me," continued Mrs. Murray, nearly laughing outright, as she remembered how the confidence had been vouchsafed.

"Of you?" stared Drummond, completely puzzled, and more serious than it was quite clever to be.

"With tears in her eyes, and frenzy in her voice. You would have been proud if you could have heard her."

She was a little afraid that he would be offended with her when the truth should come out; and yet she so loved fun and mischief that she could not help playing with the risky subject; besides, she might yet decide not to tell him any thing definite.

"Nonsense!" said Drummond. "One of your charming freaks of fancy, Mrs. Murray. I never made a woman cry in my life."

"She cried all over her frock-coat," giggled, or, rather, shrieked Josie, unable to keep back the joke any longer, and unable to disclose it without laughter.

"What—"

And with that unfinished query Drummond paused, asking no more until he should catch his breath. He understood at once that this meant Nancy Appleyard. He was confounded, humiliated, angry, yes, fairly tremulous with rage; but he was a tough, much-enduring man, and able to accept a blow in silence.

"Oh, do forgive me!" begged Josie, seeing instantly how keenly annoyed he was, and fearing evil results to her claim. "It must be a more or less disagreeable subject, I know; but I have had something to bear also—something to bear on your account."

"Ah! indeed?" said Drummond. A moment before he had been ready to turn his back on Mrs. Murray, and nearly capable of throwing a paving-stone at Miss Appleyard, had she been within bowling distance; but this new view of the matter, this suggestion that the lovely widow had suffered for his sake, this hint that their fates were more or less entangled, was a lip-salve to his chapped feelings. "Has—" he began, and stopped; but he might as well out with it, and so he proceeded: "Has that fool written to you?"

"Came to see me," murmured Josie, plaintively; "and behaved—oh, so absurdly! so outrageously!"

"By Jove! I wish I could meet her!" exclaimed Drummond, in great wrath.

In that moment, in that most inauspicious conjuncture for carrying out her adventure pleasantly to herself, Squire Nancy stepped from behind the corner of the block, and confronted the pair.

She could hardly be called a terrible apparition, but in the way of novelty and whimsicality she could not be matched, at least, off the boards of a theatre.

Her face was ashy pale; her eyes were dilated, and her mouth stood wide open, disclosing her teeth; one hand grasped her concealed revolver, and the other held aloft her cowhide. Moreover, she was screaming loudly, as, I believe, women generally do when they rush to battle, such is the hysterical nature of their pugnacity.

"I've got you!—I've got you!" she shrieked, and made a feeble, awkward, overhand cut with her whip, after which she screamed again, in piercing fashion, as if she had hit herself. Actually she had struck nothing but the air, and in the very next instant she had no cowhide.

Drummond was an uncommonly cool, quick-witted, courageous, and athletic man. It would have bothered a catamount to surprise him, and he had borne musketry and cannonade without flinching, while in strength he was a match for any ordinary porter or boxer.

He caught Squire Appleyard's instrument of flagellation with beautiful alertness,

twisted it out of her hand instantaneously, and jerked it over his head across the street.

Once more she screamed, and simultaneously with this noise out came her revolver, exploding the moment it left her breast-pocket, and sending a ball through the ragged hat of a negro urchin, who stood with open mouth contemplating the tourney. Then the revolver was gone also, for Drummond clutched and crushed her hand, took the weapon from her, and put it in his own pocket.

"There! now go home, you simpleton!" he said, sternly, giving her shoulder an angry push—such a push as a big boy bestows on a little one.

Squire Nancy uttered a last screech, signifying that the battle was over on her part, tottered a few steps in a soft, collapsing, nerveless manner, much like a decadent bolster, dropped in a sitting posture on the pavement, and burst into a flood of tears. Without saying another word, Drummond turned his back on her, ran to a street-car which was passing at the moment, leaped into it, and went on to the Capitol.

Squire Nancy, faint, sobbing violently, and disagreeably soiled, was picked up by a couple of spectators, led or carried into a neighboring druggist's shop, and left in charge of the spectacled proprietor. The great, manly, heroic adventure which she had brooded over for days was ended; and she was in gurgling, gasping hysterics, having her head bathed, and hartshorn held to her nose.

Moreover, she had failed, not only ridiculously, but utterly. Not a whack of the cowhide had alighted on that scoundrelly Drummond, and not a pistol-shot had lacerated so much as the skirt of his overcoat. Mrs. Murray, too, that other and even wicked enemy, had marvelously escaped all evil treatment, and even all exposure to public scorn.

Yes, Josie had got out of the mess with an adroitness and a celerity which were quite in keeping with her character and her history. In the very beginning of the contest, before the first aimless blow of the cowhide had been delivered, she saw, with a single glance, what was about to happen, and executed a skillful change of base. It took her scarcely a second to step into a shop which stood on the corner; then, without stopping to see what would befall, as a duffer woman might have done, she hurried to a side-door which opened upon the cross-street; a minute later she was around the block, and had secured a hack to take her home. Her little heart was thumping pretty smartly; but she had by no means lost self-control and an intelligent sense of matters, both past and present; and, once safe in her vehicle, she looked at her skirts to see if they were muddy, glanced out of the window

to see if she was pursued, and then lay back, in a burst of laughter.

"I do wonder what happened," was one of her thoughts. "Well, I am safe out of it, thank goodness! And I don't believe any body noticed me."

Meantime Mr. Drummond, journeying glumly toward the Capitol, had once more "soured" considerably upon the pretty widow, saying to himself that she hardly paid for the trouble she made. Of course he felt that he had been showing off to ridiculous disadvantage, and he more than suspected that Mrs. Murray was quite sharp enough to perceive and enjoy it. So, being an egotistic, as well as a truculent and vindictive, person, he was resolving that he would expend no more courtship upon her for a season, but would prove to her his value and desirability by absence.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A PIECE OF AMERICAN HUMOR.

IN vain did Josie hope and Sykes Drummond hope that they had got out of that Appleyard scuffle before any of its mud could stick to their garments.

Mr. David Shorthand, the local editor of the *Washington Newsmonger*, though not personally fortunate enough to see any portion of the tragedy, had the good luck to meet a gentleman who had witnessed the close of it. This person he interviewed, as the phrase is; then he interviewed the druggist and his clerks, and the dirty little negro whose scarecrow-hat had been perforated; finally he probed his way into Squire Nancy's office and interviewed that lovely sufferer.

It is certain that he would also have called upon Mr. Drummond himself for particulars, only that he remembered the young legislator as a fellow who had knocked him down some two or three years before, and feared lest he might take advantage of a renewal of the acquaintances to repeat the operation.

But from the above-mentioned individuals, and from his own abominably copious sewer of an imagination, he drew materials enough to give such a report of the affair as set all the low people in Washington roaring with laughter.

Remembering the Drummond fist, he mentioned no names; but he described the personages of his drama so vividly that it was not hard for people who knew them to recognize them; and, moreover, he used such distinguishing phrases as "the heroic Bloomer," "the lovely little widow," and "the young Lyeurgus of the Empire State."

The narrative was a masterpiece of that

rowdy, harlequin fun which does us such credit abroad as "American humor." It was as impudent as the letters of Major Jack Downing, and as hyperbolic as the relations of Mr. John Phoenix.

Such a fight as it made out! One round after another; first blood for the heroic Bloomer; first knock-down for the Empire State Lyeurgus; the lovely widow cheering on her honorable champion; the crowd hurraing for the strong-minded one: a full column of exaggerations and inventions! Mr. Shorthand wrote out of an intemperate imagination and a rapidly emptying whisky-bottle. For it must be understood that he was a poor blackguard drunkard; in person, a thin, pale, wizened, downcast-looking, sneaking, shabby scarecrow; in morals, an impudent, conscienceless, rascally, contemptible liar.

It is almost a scandal to confess that among the first persons to read this preposterous narrative were the Reverend and Mrs. Murray. We know how early they got up in the morning, and what a praiseworthy thing it is to get up early, especially when there is no cause for it. But all the sooner commenced the life-long marital task of finding amusement for a mind which was too weak to labor and at the same time too active to be patient of repose.

So Parson Murray took that dreadful sheet, the *Newsmonger*, and read it to his wife before breakfast just as regularly as he read family prayers after breakfast. They were both a little ashamed of it; they never alluded to it except among their most intimate and trustworthy friends; they commented upon its scandalous items in such phrases as, "Impudent! Perfectly outrageous! How dare he print such stuff!" etc.

But at bottom it was really relished, not only by fragile old Mrs. Murray, but also by her reverend husband. Their expressions of disapprobation and contempt very closely resembled the grimace and the wiping of the mouth with which an ancient drunkard apologizes for his dram.

Well, they read Mr. Shorthand's effusion nearly through, and laughed over it as much as people usually do laugh before breakfast, ere they began to suspect that it concerned their household. Of a sudden the old lady looked up with a start of frightened comprehension, and exclaimed:

"Why, Mr. Murray!"

"You—don't—think so?" answered the husband, catching her suspicion, and staring horror-stricken at her over the top of the now shaking paper.

"Why, it is! Why, Mr. Murray, it certainly is! Why, Mr. Murray, it's perfectly shameful!"

"It does read like it!" gasped Mr. Murray. "Lovely young widow; one of the belles of the season; related to one of our

most respectable clergymen. It does certainly read like it."

"And she knows that Congressman—I can't think of his name now, but I know who it means—she knows him and walks with him."

"I remember—Rimmon?—Crummond? What is it?" mumbled the rector.

"No, not Crummond. Oh, I've got it now. No, I haven't. Yes, I have. Drummond—that's the name—Drummond, Drummond," repeated Mrs. Murray, with her mind's eye fixed on the pages of her diary. "Yes, Drummond! She knows him, and she goes out with him. And so she is the lovely widow, and all this is about her! Oh, Mr. Murray, what shall we do? I can't stand this; I'm sure I can't. It is too much. It will make me sick!"

The emphasis and pathos with which she uttered this prophecy revealed a fervid instinct of self-preservation and an almost life-long habit of self-care. For thirty years and more a large part of her purposes and anxieties had been devoted to the problem of how not to grow old, not to be ill, and not to die.

But why should the "American humor" of the *Newsmonger* strike her with such dismay? Well, she was a "born lady," both in blood and in character; she had the honorable sensitiveness and the honorable though occasionally whimsical pride of that most worthy type of humanity; she had never herself done a deed which society could scoff at, and she loved to believe that her relatives were worthy of her. Both the Murrys and her own blood-kindred, they were all hereditary, infallible gentlemen and ladies, the objects of her veneration and the world's. The idea that her most respectable breed should, through the naughtiness or indecorum or imprudence of one of its retainers, become a mark for scandal and scorn was enough, as she afterward solemnly remarked, "to make any one sick."

"I am afraid it is the nature of the creature to have such things happen to her," groaned the clergyman. "There are the old stories—"

"I don't believe them!" exclaimed Mrs. Murray, who had already pronounced for her favorite against those accusations, and did not like being called on to reverse her judgment. "But this is dreadful enough. She must be inconsiderate. To get such a vile piece as that written about her, and us mixed up with it—it is too bad! I don't know what I shall do. I can't stand it. It will make me sick."

Indeed it seemed likely; she had been tossing her hands about in a wild way, verging on hysteria; and now she began to cry outright. Nor did Mr. Murray, although a man of good natural parts and of fair intellectual training, behave with much great-

er self-control. The spectacle of his wife's trouble acted upon his sensitive nerves as the spectacle of one lunatic's ravings acts upon another lunatic.

He did not walk the room in anger, for frequent rheumatism, and chronic muscular weakness resulting from it, made walking difficult to him, and he rarely used his legs except for the purpose of getting to some desired point. He sat still, with his slippered feet in a chair, softly patting his wife's hand; but mentally, the while, he was in a state of feverish action, talking loudly and wrathfully.

"I won't have it!" he exclaimed. "Don't cry, my dear Huldah; I wish you wouldn't cry. I won't have so many men here. I won't have her rushing about so incessantly. I will have some peace and order and decorum in my own house. I won't have a life going on around me which can lead to such adventures and such comments."

"Such adventures and comments," repeated Mrs. Murray, wiping her eyes. "Such a disgrace to the family!"

"I don't mind about that," said the rector. "The family may take care of itself, and can take care of itself. My ancestors are out of harm's way. But I will not have you tormented. You need rest. You have had excitement enough of late to kill a horse. I will allow it no longer; I will put a stop to it—an entire stop! an instant stop! It must be stopped. I'll stop it myself if no one else will. I say I will stop it—stop it."

It was a marked symptom of excitement, this frequent and eager and indistinct iteration of one word, this stammering of both mind and tongue. His face, too, was flushed, and his large features disturbed by twitchings, while his free hand was in constant movement. Had the family physician been present, he would probably have advised him to go to bed and have his feet soaked in hot water. Mrs. Murray, who knew him, of course, better than any doctor, soon noted his nervous agitation, and took alarm at it, to the partial forgetting of her own trouble.

"Don't, Mr. Murray!" she begged. "Don't say another word about it. I shall feel better in a minute."

But the rector's sickly outbursts could not be quelled at once, not even by the voice of the woman for whom he had lived a life of pure love.

"I can't have it—I can't have it," he babbled on. "I won't have it. I say it must stop—all stop. I say so, and when I say things I mean them," declared this mild old valetudinarian, who considered himself a stern and belligerent person. "I mean what I say. I mean it—every word of it—every word."

"Do stop, Mr. Murray," urged the old lady, becoming thoroughly frightened. "You are

so excitable!" she added, with a slight sense of grievance in that she had not been allowed to have her own excitement out. "I wouldn't mind about it now—not this time. I don't suppose she will rush into another such adventure. I do hope you won't say a word to her, at least not till we learn more about it—not till you know you must interfere. You get so excited when you go at people! You will hurt yourself: I am sure you will. You will have one of your attacks. And then—if you are taken down sick—what is to become of me?" she fairly whimpered.

This was an appeal never uttered in vain. The shattered man, whose affections could never be shattered, remembered that he must keep himself well in order to care for his fragile wife, and strove to bring his mind back to calmness. Nearly all of his childishness was for her sake; and for her sake also was much of his finest manliness.

Thus happened it that, when Josie Murray came down to breakfast that morning, she got no lecture from her protectors concerning her street misadventure, and was called upon for no explanation. The *Newsmonger* was, of course, hidden, as, indeed, it had always been hidden, from her, lest her innocent soul should be harmed by those readings which were so refreshing to elder and wiser people. She found the rector and wife jaded and indisposed to talk, and learned from them that their slumbers had been broken by the neighbor's dog, a fictitious animal of whom they spoke with great severity. It was wrong, of course, to tell such a fib; but, then, Mr. Murray must not be allowed to get excited; no, nor Mrs. Murray either. In fact, if Josie had committed a murder the day before, and the *Newsmonger* had contained all the harrowing particulars, these two frail old people would scarcely have spoken to her about it, for fear of making themselves sick.

Besides, she was an immense amusement; and they really liked her very much, especially when she was present; and would have been sorry to give her pain, unless it were likely to redound to their health. This morning she did her best to be agreeable, for there was a little fear in her soul lest the Appleyard adventure should get out, and she felt the need of help and of all her friends. So she racked her brain for tattle and stories, and was so prodigiously diverting, that Mrs. Murray soon fell to giggling, whereupon the rector laughed to see his wife laugh.

Meantime the article in the *Newsmonger* made quite a wonderful uproar in Washington society. Multitudes of people took that lampooning periodical, although nearly every body talked more or less in dispraise of it. So Dave Shorthand's sample of American humor was read and laughed over at

hundreds of breakfast-tables, and laughed over all the more, because the persons whom it displayed were generally recognized, and were notabilities. Of course, Squire Appleyard was famous, as any woman may be who will persistently wear trowsers, or as any man might be who should invest himself with petticoats. Josie Murray, too, was already well known as a leader of fashion and flirting, while Drummond had an enviable repute for ability, and a disagreeable one for other things.

Indeed, the Shorthand article promptly became a Congressional matter, at least so far as to be gravely talked over in committee-rooms. Mr. Hollowbread, dropping in upon General Daniel Bangs, the noted chairman of the Committee on Spoiliations, was much disgusted at finding that gentleman reading the history of the Appleyard combat, and guffawing to himself over it. The Shorthand style, with its slang, its harlequin wit, its coarse insinuations, and its Bowery impudence, was just the kind of writing to please the general. It bore a disagreeably close resemblance to the dashing, rollicking, billingsgate eloquence with which he was accustomed to defend thieves and murderers before juries, and demagogical swindlers before Congress. For the great wire-puller was by profession a criminal lawyer, and, as some plagiaristic jokers put it, a very criminal lawyer. To give the devil his due, by-the-way, we must not omit the fact that he had great power of speech, aside from his street Arab-wit. He could grasp the whole of a difficult case or a complicated bill; he could argue the right or the wrong side of either with admirable completeness of view, closeness of logic, and vigor of statement; he was not wanting, either, in the notes of high appeal, or, strange to say, of moving pathos; and, finally, his diction was singularly lucid, varied, and precise, for an extemporaneous orator. In fact, he was a very able man, and would, perhaps, have been a great one, if he had possessed any moral principles, or could have imagined them in others. His constant stumbling-block was this, that he believed that all his countrymen were rogues, and could be moved by merely roguish motives.

"By the Lord, I should think I had written that myself," roared the general, as Josie's advocate entered the committee-room. "Look here, Hollowbread, have you seen this neat joke on Drummond, Appleyard, and Co.?"

Mr. Hollowbread, who did not consider it a neat joke, but, on the contrary, a very foul-mouthed one, nodded rather grimly.

"And so Drummond got a sound cowhiding—ho, ho, ho!" shouted the honorable chairman. "It's astonishing. I thought he was a man of muscle and grit, who

wouldn't let even a woman whip him. I don't see how fellows put up with such assaults. If a termagant attempted to wale me in that style, I should just simply and forcibly knock her down. However, it serves Drummond right—cuts his comb for him."

"Mr. Drummond was not waled at all," answered Hollowbread, whose desire it was to demolish Shorthand's entire history, and destroy what little credit it deserved. "I have taken the pains to look into this babble. It is mainly a fabrication."

"Oh, is it?" laughed General Bangs, even more amused than before. "I dare say. The *Newsomonger* is up to any thing. It is a devilish clever paper. But what interest do you take in the business? You don't want to help out Drummond for any thing, do you? If it's all the same to you, I want him smashed. He is a conceited, impudent bully, and in every body's way."

Mr. Hollowbread did not say what he thought concerning this declaration of opinion and feeling. Had he been regardless of consequences, and had it been the fashion of this world to utter every discoverable truth on all occasions, he would have remarked on the curious fact that one conceited, impudent bully should hate another. But he was chiefly anxious to promote the welfare of Josie Murray, and to that end he desired to keep the good-will of General Bangs.

"I wouldn't perhaps mind smashing Drummond," he said; "or that idiot of a Nancy Appleyard, either. But I have an interest in seeing this whole invention exploded, for the reason that it casts insinuations upon another person, a lady whom I regard with profound respect."

He spoke the truth. It is a wonderful and almost a beautiful fact that he absolutely revered Josie Murray. She was a young flirt, and he was a practiced old beau and wire-puller, and yet he loved her so sincerely that he worshiped the very thought of her.

"Oh, the lovely widow!" exclaimed the general, changing his horse-laugh to a knowing grin, by no means respectful to Josie. "So it was *your* lovely widow, the pretty claimant? But how the dickens came she to be so mixed up with Drummond and the Appleyard woman?"

"She was not mixed up with them," asserted Mr. Hollowbread trembling and perspiring with wrath. "She was joined in the street by Drummond, who has the brass, you know, to join any body—to join the Madonna, or his Creator! She had scarcely walked a block with him, and was just turning into a shop to get rid of him, when that lunatic hermaphrodite appeared with her cowhide. All this I learned from Mrs. Murray herself, whom I saw not an hour

ago. As for the flogging, I have gathered from other parties that not a blow was struck, and that Drummond took away the whip, pushed the Bloomer into the gutter, and walked off. Nearly the whole story of the *Newsomonger* is a pure, simple, low-bred, scoundrelly fabrication."

"Exactly—I dare say," answered Bangs, accustomed to meet with fabrications and to make them.

As a criminal lawyer, he had fabricated evidence; as a general in the late war, he had fabricated accounts of victories; as a politician, he had fabricated slanderous letters and braggadocio telegrams. There was no end to his latitude of lying, and he honestly believed that his fellow-men were equally illimitable in that direction, especially when they belonged to the "brotherhood of the press."

"I dare say," repeated the general, meanwhile meditating tranquilly. "See here, Hollowbread," he added; "you came to me about this affair, didn't you? You have this lady's interests at heart? Well, something ought to be done. Such a story as this may cast a shadow on your claimant, and injure her prospects in the House. Let me give you a bit of advice."

CHAPTER XXV.

A LYING COUNSELOR AND A TATTLING STATESMAN.

"I SHOULD value any advice from you, General," observed Mr. Hollowbread, politely, for he was very anxious to please the potent chairman of the Committee on Spoiliations.

Mr. Bangs returned no thanks of any sort for this compliment, and did not so much as look at his colleague in legislation. He was a bearish, business-like man, eagerly intent all the while upon bringing things to pass, and not given to spending time or mind in courtesies.

Tilting back his chair, rummaging with both hands in his trousers-pockets, and staring at the wall as if he were seeing clean through it, he thought out a fabrication.

"Deny the whole thing," was his conclusion. "That is, so far as concerns Mrs. Murray. That's her name, I believe. Deny that she was walking with Drummond. Say that she was just going into this shop when the fracas occurred. Say that she had no more to do with it, or with the causes that led to it, than the people on the other side of the street, or the man in the moon. And, by-the-way, Drummond had better do the denying. I don't see why he shouldn't; he can't want to hurt Mrs. Murray. Besides, I can bring him to do the amiable

thing, I know. He often wants an axe ground in my committee."

Mr. Hollowbread, notwithstanding his deep anxiety about the matter in hand, could hardly help smiling at this wholesale proposition. The impudent mendacity of General Bangs was well known, not to say favorably known in Congress, and had become a sort of standing joke among his brother honorables. It was looked upon as characteristically humorous, like the droll exaggerations of Mark Twain or the whimsies of Artemus Ward.

People were as little surprised and as much diverted at hearing a whapper from Bangs as they were at reading an extravaganza in "Roughing It," or a cacographic quip in Josh Billings's "Alminax." I allude, of course, to people who knew the great wire-puller familiarly "inside politics;" for among the worthy citizens outside of that charmed circle there were hosts who held him truthful and noble. All his life he had lied; even in the army, that school of honor for most men, he had lied; at the head of patriots and heroes, he had trumpeted countless falsehoods.

We may be allowed, perhaps, to devote one brief passage to the career of this brassy being as a soldier. Early in the war, and while yet a complete ignoramus in military affairs, he had been appointed to high command because he was a man of parts, and because he proclaimed himself a man of influence. All through the struggle he had held eminent positions, giving orders to officers of far greater ability than himself, and to many thousand soldiers of far greater courage.

Never but twice had he been under fire, and then only by dint of blundering—a blundering promptly rectified. Never had he devised a campaign, and never overlooked a field of victory. His real battles were carried on in his tent, or oftener in superb quarters in the midst of cities, surrounded by a staff of newspaper correspondents. These heroes of the pen did for him all the fighting that he directed or knew how to direct. They did it on paper, and under his dictation. They wrote out his strategy and his tactics, and forwarded them for prompt publication. They put him at the head of columns on columns of print. No other general in history has won so many battles which were never fought, or which were fought under the management of others. They were devoted to him, these Dugald Dalgettys of the press, and for cause. He entreated them kindly; he was hail-fellow-well-met with the meaneast of them; they could always have access to his presence, whoever else was excluded; they could have tents and beasts and rations and commissary whisky for the asking. Greatest favor of all, he furnished them with important information—or rather he feigned so to do.

In short, he was the most wonderful general that the world had seen since the Golden Age, and it is not likely that he will be paralleled until the coming of the millennium.

And, strange as it may seem in view of this absurd history, Daniel Bangs was a man of ability, ambition, perseverance, and resolution. Where there was no peril of bodily harm, and no likelihood of ruinous defeat, he could show great mental and moral force. He had more wire-pulling cunning, more adroitness in managing men through their weaknesses and vices, than any other American of his day. He loved power dearly, enjoyed the exercise of it, smacked his lips over it, rollicked in it. He wanted to be President, not with the hope of initiating noble measures, but solely for the ostentation of the thing, for the pleasure of giving orders. He was the stubbornest puppy, and the most regardless of dirt, that ever tugged and snarled at a root. No labor could tire him; no succession of failures could discourage him; no exposure or scorn could shame him.

If he had possessed sense of honor enough to know how to appear honorable, and morality enough to perceive that most of his countrymen are moved by moral sentiments, he would have been a far more successful man than he was, and probably he would have been a greater one. As things stood, there was not the remotest hope of his becoming President; he could not climb so high as the Senate, but must stop in the House; and even there he could only preside over a third-rate committee.

Yet, in this minor sphere there was some authority, and consequently some joy, for this brawling, insolent man. It was a pleasure to him to see the comparatively respectable Hollowbread looking up to him for the sake of getting a naughty axe ground and a shabby subterfuge managed.

"I'll see that Drummond writes the proper letter," he promised, jovially. "We'll get the mud of this fracas rubbed off your lovely claimant. By-the-way, who is the author of the story in the *Newsomonger*?"

"It is a low, drunken beast named Shorthand," stated Mr. Hollowbread.

"Oh, Dave Shorthand!" laughed the general, who had an amazing memory for persons as well as for facts. "I remember the coon. He was one of my correspondents in the field. I'll send for him, and tell him to retract his nonsense, and slip his retraction into the *Newsomonger*. He'll do any thing that I want him to."

Mr. Hollowbread bowed his thanks cheerfully, and yet with an inner sense of humiliation; then, straightening himself up to the demands of his shoulder-braces, he took his departure.

Meantime there was a gabble and giggle about the Appleyard *mêlée* in society proper.

Perhaps we can best give an idea of it by reporting a brief dialogue which Belle Warden listened to during a call on Mrs. Senator Ironman. The persons whom she found there were the lady of the house, the middle-aged and dandified and Dundrearyish senator, and that dashing, sumptuous young brunette, Mrs. John Vane.

Ironman, by-the-way, was a fervent admirer of this rather loud and glaring Cleopatra, and frequently managed to be present when she made her visits. Mrs. Ironman, a lady of excellent temper and worldly good sense, was perfectly aware of her husband's infatuation, but made no attempt to dispel it, lest he might do worse.

When Belle was announced, the eminent legislator skipped to the door and waited on her into the parlor, for he had the manners of fine society, and was gallant to all pretty women. But as soon as the salutations were uttered, he turned eagerly to his favorite.

"I say, Mrs. Vane, why not go on with your story?" he pleaded, in his simpering way. "I dare say Miss Warden would be delighted to hear it."

"Some nonsense from the *Newsomger*, my dear," nodded Mrs. Ironman, who despised her husband's passion for small gossip, but let him enjoy it. He was incurable, she admitted; there was no doing any thing with such a goose. You might as well let him hiss and cackle as he was born to do.

"Oh, I dare say Miss Warden has read it," observed Mrs. Vane, who had the grace not to want to appear a tattler. "Every body has, I believe, except this benighted family."

"I never read the *Newsomger*," said Belle; and the respectable statement was true of her, though not of her mother.

"It's something about Squire Appleyard—that little Bloomer, you know—and a fellow in the House named Drummond, and that little Mrs. Murray, you know," interposed Ironman, impatient to get at his sugar-plum of scandal.

"Yes, and it's too funny for any thing," laughed Olympia Vane. "That poor Mrs. Murray! I don't see how she can stay on here."

"Oh, she's a rival of yours," observed Mrs. Ironman, who quite liked Josie, and who sometimes liked to quench Mrs. V.

"No rival at all; Mrs. Vane has no rivals," declared the senator, eagerly. "That is, among the new-comers," he added, remembering the presence of his wife and of Belle.

"You will see that she won't run away," persisted Mrs. Ironman. "Who ever leaves Washington for a scandal?"

Olympia, remembering, perhaps, that she had been talked about in connection with the senator, turned rather hot under this remark, and made no comment.

"I move that we proceed with the story,"

said the impatient Ironman. "Miss Warden must be dying to hear it."

"I can't do justice to it," Olympia responded, sulkily, for the hostess's insinuations had not pleased her, and she was one of the "huffy" sort.

She told it, nevertheless, and told it with minuteness and gusto, so anxious was she to put down Josie Murray. The senator listened with shouts and spasms of laughter; he threw back his little baldish head, and opened his weak mouth widely; he stretched out his long, thin legs convulsively, and nearly slipped from his chair. There never was a more jovial dignitary since the days when dignitaries kept jesters.

"So the Bloomer did the cowering, and the little widow looked on!" he shrieked.

"No, she didn't look on, she just ran right away—the more shame to her!" giggled the triumphant Olympia. "It does seem to me that I would not have done that. I would have tried to save my admirer."

"I do believe you would, Mrs. Vane," simpered the senator, admiringly and almost gratefully. Perhaps he imagined a scene in which Mrs. Ironman should attempt to flog him, and Olympia should come to his rescue.

"He was not worth the saving," declared the hostess. "A man who gets himself into such a position, and then does not know how to get out of it without being caned, should be left to suffer."

"He must be an enormously amusing ass, that Drummond," judged the member of the Upper House. "I think I shall have to have him here."

"No, no," objected Mrs. Ironman, with quiet resolution. "There are some things that I won't permit."

The senator seemed to perceive that on this question the majority was against him, and he succumbed at once with unremonstrating, unruffled good-nature, as he always did when his wife spoke in a certain tone. Meantime Belle Warden had not once smiled over Mrs. Vane's scandalous narrative. It was plain enough to her that that lady's desire in rehearsing it was to discredit a rival in society; and for such a motive she was capable of feeling as thorough a contempt as the manliest gentleman that ever breathed. At the same time, having carefully studied Josie's ways, and judged her to be unprincipled, she had no wish to step forward as her champion.

"You don't care for this sort of trash, my dear," said Mrs. Ironman to her, with a glance of approbation which was very severe upon the other two. "I like it in you."

The senator, as impervious to contempt as an idiot could be, continued to giggle over the Appleyard farce. Mrs. John Vane, however, started in visible anguish and anger, and seemed to be upon the point of rustling out of the house. But just then a servant

announced Miss Elinor Ledyard, the daughter of the veteran and famous senator of that name—one of those Congressmen whom we may call statesmen, one of those who deserve the title of Honorable. Now, if Olympia desired any one thing more than all others, it was to be invited to this gentleman's receptions and dinners. Accordingly, the beautiful tuft-hunter composed her soul and her skirts to remain during the call of Miss Ledyard.

Elinor was a young lady of agreeable appearance, and yet not handsome enough to be considered a beauty. Her loveliness consisted largely in a thoroughly lady-like carriage, and in an expression of perfect purity and moral nobility. Her figure was too tall and slender to be altogether fine, and her forehead was larger and heavier than belongs to feminine grace. Her short-sightedness obliged her to wear eyeglasses, but she looked only the more interesting and distinguished because of them, as is the case with persons of patrician countenance. We ought to state, by-the-way, that this admirable young woman has no part to play in our history, and that we shall not even see her honorable father and the respectable legislators with whom he was familiar. It is the misfortune of one who writes the history of a claimant, that he can not be fastidious in his company, nor give much space to personages of high worth. We have introduced Miss Ledyard mainly to show that we concede the presence of delicately pure souls in the political circles of Washington.

It was curious to note that, although this girl was scarcely twenty years old, the full-blown Olympia Vane courtesied to her with an eager, smiling trepidation indicative of a palpitating desire to please. But Senator Ironman was too obtuse to note the presence of superior purity, or to be quelled by any revelation of womanly dignity. He soon alluded to the Appleyard scandal; he urged Mrs. Vane to tell it anew, which she, with a wink at him and a glance at Miss Ledyard, refused to do; finally, in an effort to rehearse it himself, he broke down like Lord Dundreary on the threshold of a "widdle." By this time the four ladies were in an awkward condition of gravity and anxiety. But the senator, conscious of his lofty position and quite unconscious of his low abilities, was not in the least discomposed.

"It's the drollest thing, by Jove, that I ever heard," he giggled. "Miss Elinor, what does your father think of it?"

"I do not suppose he has heard of it," returned the young lady, calmly, marveling at this wonderful lawgiver.

Not for the first time in her life, but for the first time in years, Mrs. Ironman blushed for her husband.

"My dear, do you suppose that Senator

Ledyard reads the *Newsomger*?" she said to him. "His time is valuable."

"Oh yes, by Jove! and all our time is valuable," declared Ironman. "But it isn't every fellow that can fag at it all the while, like Ledyard. By Jove, I don't see how he can stand such an amount of heavy reading—debates, history, political economy, international law, and all that sort of thing—positively fatiguing to think of. Now, most of us need a little recreation here and there—something to make a fellow laugh—something jolly, you know, Miss Elinor. And this Appleyard fracas is the jolliest thing I've heard of in a month."

"Since we must talk of it, I will say that I am very sorry for the Murrys," observed Mrs. Ironman. "They are thoroughly excellent and thoroughly respectable people. It is an insult to decent society that they should be annoyed by such disgraceful articles."

"I agree with you, Mrs. Ironman," said Belle, heartily. "They are perfectly admirable. It is a shame to drag them before the public in this way."

"Do you mean that young Mrs. Murray is admirable?" asked Olympia Vane, forgetting what little prudence she had, and taking up the cudgels for her scandal. "If she got into the affair, it is because she went into it."

"I have heard of her," observed Miss Ledyard. "People say she is charming, but gay."

"That is putting it very gently, Miss Ledyard," smiled Olympia, anxious to hold converse with the daughter of the greatest of all senators, and at the same time to injure her rival.

"I know nothing against her," disclaimed the young lady. "I meant no more than I said."

With these words she turned away from Mrs. Vane; and the latter, though not over-bright, felt that she was rebuked; indeed, she put it to herself that she was snubbed. Judging also that she had made an unfavorable impression upon Mrs. Ironman and Belle Warden, she squared her shoulders upon all three of the ladies, chatted a minute in her loud style with the senator, and then bridled out of the house.

Just at this moment Edgar Bradford dropped in, and Ironman resumed his babble about the Appleyard affair.

CHAPTER XXVI.

VARIOUS OPINIONS CONCERNING JOSIE.

"HAVE you heard any thing about it, Bradford?" was the inquiry of the millionaire senator. "Come, by Jove, tell a fellow what the exact truth is."

Bradford, who still considered Josie a

friend of his, and consequently did not like to have her the town talk, flushed a little, and spoke with noticeable excitement as he made his answer.

"I haven't inquired into it all, Mr. Ironman. But I don't believe there is much truth in it. The writer of the article, as I hear from Hollowbread, is Dave Shorthand. Now Shorthand is a drunken, malignant liar. I know something of him, for he was with us a while in the field. He was a correspondent of the *Personal Advertiser*, and just suited to his rascally journal. He would forage around every head-quarters after whisky, and get back to his tent too drunk to get into it. I have known him to plunge through the front-door, go clean out through the rear-flap, and sleep outside all night. Our general put him under guard for publishing official news, and he revenged himself by maligning our corps in his scoundrelly paper. He would lurk ten miles from a battle-field, under protection of the brave men who were bleeding and dying in the front, and write letters of solid slanders against them. Such wholesale lies, too!—simple, pure inventions of Satan!—not even a foundation of truth. At the Red River, where we fought side by side with the Sixteenth corps, he represented that we were broken through by the enemy, and that the Sixteenth corps had to march over us. At the Opequan, where we lost sixteen hundred men in stubborn fighting, he described us as lying down five miles from the battle-field, and refusing to advance. For mean and wicked malice I never heard the like of these stories. To malign gallant fellows who were at that very moment struggling and falling on the field of honor seems to me the most devilish and contemptible work with which a man could foul himself. The fellow well deserved to be horsewhipped to death."

Even the dull mind and shallow emotional nature of Ironman were stirred to indignation by this statement.

"By Jove, I agree with you!" he said. "I should think it was never too late to horse-whip such a fellow as that."

"Very likely this story about Mrs. Murray is equally false," continued Bradford.

"Well, perhaps so," conceded the senator, looking a little disappointed. "I'll—I tell you what I'll do; I'll inquire into it myself," he added, rising.

"Do oblige me by letting it alone," interposed Mrs. Ironman, with such firmness that the great man sat down again.

Shortly after this Belle Warden took her departure, and presently Miss Ledyard followed.

"They did not speak up for Mrs. Murray; they don't like her," observed the senator, with unusual keenness; to which remark his wife and Bradford vouchsafed no reply, and the talk about the Appleyard business ended there.

He was quite correct in his inference. Although Belle knew Josie familiarly, while Elinor Ledyard had only heard of her, they agreed in not approving of her. Women in general, whether nice women or naughty ones, were apt to dislike our heroine sooner or later. It is one of the most serious disadvantages of clever ladies of her style of cleverness, that they get the ill-opinion and ill-will of their own sex. Still a new-comer in Washington, Josie had won the repute of being an "awful flirt," a flirt who carried coquetry to the verge of the inexcusable, and who respected no other woman's rights.

We know already how she was hated by Squire Nancy Appleyard, and wherefore. Various other young women likewise disliked her, because she had more or less eclipsed and supplanted them. Mrs. John Vane abominated her as a rival queen of society, and Jessie Cohen wished her harm as a rival suitor for appropriations. Elinor Ledyard, who knew her only by sight and by hearsay, disapproved of her as a coquette and an intriguer, and did not wish to know her more familiarly.

Generally speaking, only the men liked her, and the ruder, wilder sort of men at that. To the men, therefore—that is, to Josie's natural companions and intimates—our story must return. They courted a good deal in those days, but not, as yet, with matrimonial intentions, barring the zealous Hollowbread.

Mr. Drummond, for instance, kept apart from her society for quite a time after the Appleyard *rencontre*. It seemed to him that Mrs. Murray beguiled him into more disappointments and scrapes than her mere society was worth. She had a smile which sowed wild hopes; her whole manner was full of promises of rich rewards; yet nothing happened to his advantage or pleasure. In the financial dialect of her other hard-used and ill-requited friend, Mr. Fred Curbstone, she did not redeem her notes. Moreover, Drummond suspected that she was quite capable of laughing at him for his absurd misadventure in the avenue.

To be sure, he took care of his own fame in that matter, and so necessarily did her a service. Looking up Dave Shorthand, he bullied him, collared him, shook his teeth nearly out of his head, and eventually gave him a contemptuous ten-dollar bill, thereby inducing him to sign and publish a complete retraction of his Appleyard history, to the effect that the alleged single combat was merely the invention of a hard-driven reporter. The editorial department added that this reporter had been discharged, a statement which Shorthand himself suggested to the manager, receiving therefor a slight gratuity and increased confidence.

But, although Drummond thus served Mrs. Murray, none the less did he avoid her for a

time. Of course this did not suit her, for while she did not like him personally, and was determined not to walk the street again with him for a season, she wanted his goodwill and his Congressional influence. So, when they at last met at a reception, she said to him, in a tone of plaintive reproach,

"How long it is since you have called on me!"

"It must be a week—haw, haw!" he laughed.

"That seems a long time," she murmured, lifting her eyes pathetically, as if such absences were difficult to bear.

"Business before pleasure," answered Drummond, who suspected that she was secretly making game of him, and felt little less than vindictive.

"My society can hardly be a pleasure when it gets people into trouble," was the next utterance of Josie's humility.

"Oh, that doesn't matter—that affair in the avenue," he declared, promptly. It had mattered a good deal, though; it had made a raw on his thick-skinned soul. But he did not like to have it supposed that any thing could get the better of him or make him wince. "It was a mere trifling farce, and will soon be forgotten."

Josie was indignant at his coarseness and selfishness. He did not allude to the fact that she, too, had suffered, and for his misdeed; he was certainly the most unmannerly and egotistic man that a lady was ever civil to.

But she showed no vexation, for she was an enviably even-tempered little witch, and always preferred to propitiate unpleasant people, especially when there was nothing to be got by fighting them.

"I was not thinking so much of that," she said; "I didn't mind it myself when I saw that you didn't mind it. I was thinking more of the fact that I have troubled you to look into my business without placing it in your hands. It will all be righted and explained some day. You have been very good and very patient. I don't know how I can thank you sufficiently."

How could even a sulky, sore-headed Drummond resist such persistent sweetness? He looked at her lovely face, and he felt that he must get away from her at once, or he should not be able to keep out of her snares.

"If Hollowbread breaks down, and you need other help in that job, don't fail to call on me," he muttered, making a movement to go.

"You must see me now and then," answered Josie, as he turned away. "Don't forget that you are my member."

Meanwhile she was a good deal annoyed by his leaving her, and could hardly help pouting with humiliation and disappointment. To lose even one man was always a grief to Josie, whatever shoals of other men

she might be fishing among at the time, and however successful her angling might be. In these very days dozens of Congressmen and department people had their noses to her hook.

Notwithstanding the retraction of the *News-monger*, the avenue scandal was pretty generally accepted as true by the knowing ones, and it made her a more attractive notoriety than ever. Every day some fresh man about town got himself introduced to her, and joined the pack of her more or less unlikely admirers.

These gallants did not find her what they had expected. What they had looked for and wanted was a wild hoiden, ready to be pleased with any rough-and-ready attention, and prompt to rush into any risky adventure. What they found was a woman of society, coquettish, but evidently able to take care of herself, and talkative, but alarmingly clever. It was impossible to despise her, except from a delicately fastidious point of view, a point to which these gentlemen had not attained. Indeed, they were irresistibly driven to respect and admire her, such of them as had brains enough to appreciate her abilities.

"An't she a stunner!" chuckled a certain honorable heavy-weight, Senator Pickens Rigdon, addressing himself to the Honorable R. L. Bower, a representative from his own State. "By George! I don't understand how a woman can be as bright as that in all the bloom of youth and loveliness. One expects it, perhaps, in an old girl like Dowager Ironman or Duenna Warden! But at sweet two-and-twenty, without a furrow on her brow or a blemish on her cheeks, it is simply and beautifully miraculous. I'll be blasted to everlasting blastation if she isn't a blasted sight smarter than half our Congressmen—yes, blast it, two-thirds of them!"

In justice to the strength of Mr. Rigdon's style, it must be stated that he used epithets far more vigorous than "blasted"—such epithets as Northern gentlemen of his social position rarely handle in these degenerate days.

He was a superbly tall and large man, with vast shoulders, mighty chest, and noble limbs, and with an erect, proud, and yet easy carriage. His head was very big; his curling, slightly silvered chestnut hair was long and abundant; his spacious chops were magnificently chubby and rosy; his hazel eyes were at once fierce and merry. In his breath there was a strong scent of whisky, tempered with tobacco.

Mr. R. L. Bower was a man of very different and much less agreeable appearance. Tall, slender, very haggard in feature, very swarthy and malarious in complexion, he had a watchful, saturnine glance, and an air of suave self-possession, which put one in mind of certain professional gamblers. He

likewise smelled very much like a bar where liquors have been spilled, and where cigar-stumps have been laid about. But his refreshments had not given him that joviality which twinkled in the florid visage of Senator Rigdon.

"Yes, she is brighter than some Congressmen," assented Bower; "and she might have more influence if she was under the right management. Heavens! how that girl might pull wires and haul in appropriations!"

"It would be a desecration!" growled Rigdon. "Bower, you are a carpet-bagger at heart, you know. You are always scheming how to fill the scandalous carpet-bag. I disapprove of you, and forgive you. These are evil times. The great, grand, sublime old Southern gentleman is no more. We, degenerate scions of a noble stock, must live and let live. It is an evil age; I hate it and bear it. I am in the condition of an Indian tied to the torture-stake. I say to the carpet-baggers and lobbyists, 'Begin ye your torments, your threats are in vain; for the sons of Alkmoonah will never complain.' But as for using this lovely widow, fresh from her eraped sorrows, to rob the public treasury, it is a desecration, and I denounce it. I admire and respect her with a Southern enthusiasm. I will do it. If any man tries to prevent me, I'll knock him down, blast him! There she goes now!—lovely Murray! I never see her pass without longing to sing, 'Thou, thou reignest in this boo-oo-som.' There, she has entered the supper-room, leaning and smiling on Turveydrop Hollowbread. Lovely Murray, fare thee well!"

Calhoun Clavers, who was passing at the moment, overheard the close of this vinous oration. We must call to mind that Clavers loved Mrs. Murray with all the passion of youth and all the chivalry of a long-staple region. Well, this admirably sentimental youngster, hearing his goddess apostrophized in a loud, free manner by a person who smelled of whisky, was instantly filled with beautiful indignation. He halted and faced Mr. Rigdon with such a stare of gentlemanly ferocity as might have turned a commonplace, peaceable American of the North into stone.

The senator could not help noticing the look, and being roused by it; he glared back at Clavers, as a mature grizzly bear might glare at a juvenile tiger. It was a gaze of inquiry and amazement, verging on wrath.

Possibly there would have been words, a quarrel, a challenge, and a duel, but for the providential arrival of the great banker, Mr. Simeon Allechin. Clavers lost sight of Rigdon behind the vast bulk of the financier, and decided to pursue his way without demanding explanations and apologies. Brave, pugnacious, sentimental, adolescent, type of

a *jeunesse* which is fast passing from among us, move on, and let us have peace!

"A nice little investment went by us just now, gentlemen," murmured Allechin, speaking with a rich, mellow, juicy voice, and a radiantly greasy smile, both of which had been very useful to him in banking. "That little Mrs. Murray would be well worth looking after."

"One wife answers my purpose," answered the senator, slapping the banker's tallow shoulder with perfect freedom, though his account was overdrawn. "How is it with yourself?"

An ugly light came into Mr. Bower's hollow black eyes, and for a moment he looked capable of knifing Mr. Rigdon. There was a vile charge of bigamy lying against him in court, and consequently he was sensitive to jokes about having more wives than one.

"Oh, I don't ~~make~~ ^{endeavor} to courtships and flirtations and dalliances—ha, ha!" hastily chuckled Mr. Allechin, taking care not to glance at the honorable Bower, and smiling in a way which was equivalent to paying out gold, so eager was he to make things pleasant. "Bless you, senator—ha, ha!—at my time of life, and with my development—ha, ha! But this little Mrs. Murray is really—really—ha, ha!" And here his spacious countenance became fairly puckered with cheerful cunning. "Really she is quite an investment—a good claim for one or two hundred thousand!—a good, sound, honest, genteel, lady-like claim! Why not help her through with it? Any advances that might be necessary I could furnish. Then, you see—I am a little selfish in the matter, ha, ha!—she could invest through me—invest to her profit and mine—a nice little thing all round, eh? Just consider it in confidence, you two gentlemen. We will talk it over some other time. Drop in to dinner to-morrow. A plate or two always ready for a friend. Good-evening."

And Mr. Allechin, pretty sure that honorable gentlemen, who were indebted at his bank, would not rage permanently against him for suggesting a profitable job, smiled and bowed himself away.

"Bower, these are evil days," grinned Senator Rigdon. "In these days a Congressman can be insulted by any body with impunity, and, by the Lord! with justice. But I am a born Southern, and, in a small, up-country way, a Southern gentleman, and I don't quite like it. I feel that the insult is just, but also that it is grievous. I decline the job which this money-changer proposed; but it may do for a born Yankee and carpet-bagger like yourself, Bower. And the young woman is pretty; moreover, handsome is that handsome pays. Puther in your carpet-bag, and go along with her."

"Mr. Rigdon," broke out Bower, his black eyes flashing again, "you recur a little too

frequently to my Yankeeism and carpet-baggism. If we were living in the old times—"

"Yes, Bower, if we were living in the old times, we would fight. I shouldn't be able to bear you. And you wouldn't be able to bear me. But misery makes strange bed-fellows. Here we are in Congress, which wouldn't have happened in the old times, and we mustn't fight, for fear of being laughed off the political stage. The world is more moral than it used to be, Bower; the devil has introduced a new kind of morality. God bless us! what is the nation coming to, when a couple of poor shoats can't kill each other, and thus do their best toward rendering humanity a service? Ah, there is the lovely Murray again! This time it is the beautiful Beauman who is inhaling her sweetness. And the talented Bray walks close behind, waiting for his chance to adore and be adored. And all around I behold Congressmen smiling and prostrating themselves. She will have small trouble in putting her claim through, and she will jilt a baker's dozen before the season is over."

Well, we have told enough of this sort of thing, perhaps, to give a vague idea of the impression which Josie made in Washington society, and of her chances of success in pushing her suit.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE MAN SHE LOVES.

In short, Josie Murray made a great and increasing sensation in Washington, and while she was much envied and hated and criticised, she was also much admired and petted.

The Appleyard fight did her little damage, partly because the tale of it was so promptly retracted by the *News-monger*, and partly because small scandals can not much hurt women of her peculiar celebrity. To be sure, it lost her the attentions of Sykes Drummond for a period; but on the other hand it brought back to her the attentions of Edgar Bradford.

She was exceedingly glad to see him, when he at last called with the intention of finding her at home; and so did find her. His staying-away had vexed her not a little, but it had humiliated and pained her still more. We must be allowed to say that it was rather a fine thing in Josie, this persistence in liking one old friend better than all her many new admirers—in liking him, too, notwithstanding that he thwarted her wishes and neglected her society. Sentiment is so much nobler than pure egotism, and fidelity so much lovelier than heartless forgetfulness, that we must accord them some praise even when they present themselves

in manikin proportions. All this time, while Hollowbread was her humble adorer and faithful advocate, and while nobody knows how many other men were panting to take the place of Hollowbread, she would have been delighted to have her old intimate back by her side, though at the cost of losing many flattering attentions, and at some risk of failing in her claim.

She had always liked him; she thought, at least, that she had liked him better than any other man she ever knew; yes, perhaps better, perhaps a good deal better, than poor Augustus. If this was not strictly true, it at all events appeared to be true; now that she had found him in a lofty position, and now that his nature had risen upon her in a new and nobler light. For it must be stated to her credit that his very scruples with regard to her suit had impressed her in his favor; possibly because she knew that such scruples are generally admired among men, and possibly because they made him a more difficult conquest.

At times she thought about him by the half-hour together, and in a way which would have been flattering to his vanity, had he known of it. Her general feeling was this, that she would like to win him, and then make him push the claim, or, if that could not be, push it herself without his knowledge, and yet keep him. Keep him how? Well, keep him as a husband; she loved him well enough for that; at least she very easily could love him well enough. Such being her state of feeling as to her former beau, it is quite natural that his visit should make her heart beat joyfully.

As for the young man, why did he call? Well, he had said to himself (and how should he attempt to deceive that respectable and sagacious personage?) that it was because of the *News-monger* scandal; because that rascally piece of American humor would hurt Josie's standing in society, and he ought to give her his countenance; because it would mortify and pain her, and he ought to console her.

Was he not her old friend and admirer, and under specially tender obligations to her, such as no man should forget? A gentleman who could win from a lady confessions of peculiar good-will, only to avoid her as soon as she demanded a service and needed protection, seemed to him a very shabby gentleman indeed. What a delicately honorable fellow he was, to be sure! And yet what a queer sense of honor it appears, on thoughtful inspection!

There were as many incongruities in it as there are in the British Constitution, and, like that instrument, it worked surprisingly well and surprisingly ill, yet, on the whole, not insufferably. The one great point in his favor was, that, as a public man, he was unselfish and thoroughly honest. Had it not

been for this, we should not have selected him for serious study, nor allowed him to take upon himself some show of being a hero.

Upright and wise as he was in certain matters, he could be a deceiver in others, though so far unconsciously as to deceive himself. The reasons which he assigned for calling upon Josie Murray were not the true reasons which moved him to that step, or, rather, were not the only ones. She was very fascinating to his imagination, and very attractive to his eyesight. That mainly was why he now came to see her, and why he always found her company agreeable.

"Ah! you have come at last! naughty old friend! false old friend!" said Josie, flushed and beautiful with pleasure, as she rustled up to him and seized his hand.

"I have been very shabby," he confessed, for there was no resisting her forgiveness, her good-nature, and her satisfaction at seeing him, not to mention her prettiness and grace.

"Do you know, I wish you were my father or my uncle! I should like to lay my head on some related shoulder. I have been so lonely!" sighed Josie.

She was so much the more enticing and perilous because she was not a mere counterfeiter of feelings, but really had strong and almost fervent impulses, evanescent though they might be. Moreover, these impulses were poured forth so briskly and fluently and graciously, that they flew at once to the nerves of him who tasted of them. She was like Champagne, which, because of its sweetness and its gaseous titillation, is intoxicating out of all proportion to its alcohol. Bradford felt the sugar and the carbonic-acid gas tingling along his veins and rising to his brain. He had a longing to put his arm around her lonely head and lay it on his shoulder, there to repose forever.

"If I had known that you were in low spirits, I should have been here before," he declared. "I ought to have come. You have a right to be vexed with me."

"I have not been vexed; only disappointed," said Josie. "I know that you must be, or ought to be, busy. Many people tell me what a fine stand you have taken in Congress, and that you are the most promising of the new members. I am proud of you, and want you to go on working—to go on and be a great man—a Charles Sumner. I shall be overtempted to tell a fib about you some day; I shall say I helped form your character. It won't be true—perhaps—will it? But it will be my only reward for wishing you well. You are determined not to reward me in any other way. It is too much to expect you to talk to me about your hopes and labors and measures. But you won't even come now and then to talk to me about trifles. It is rather hard."

Bradford could not resist the temptation of a fascinating imprudence. How sweet she had been once, and how sweeter than ever she was, and how her sweetness was manifolded by her cleverness! It seemed to him, the much-complimented man, that she talked amazingly well. Flatteries from such an able head were worth more than good-will from a far better heart. Under all this stimulus, from the past and the present, he took her hand in his and held it.

"You may boast of forming me as much as you like, if ever the result should be worth praise," he said. "I shall owe you something; I admit that."

"What?" murmured Josie, her voice choking a very little, and her face flushing with pride and pleasure.

"I have worked the harder to win your admiration. I have felt it worth while to get the notice of such a mind as yours."

"My mind!" returned Josie, too clever, and just then too full of feeling, not to be disappointed. Her heart, she femininely believed, was the strongest part of her, and it was that which she wanted him to aim at. When a lady is hoping for a declaration of love, how can she want to be complimented on her intellect?

Bradford, whose temperament was poetic, and whose brain, therefore, was sensitively receptive to impressions, felt at once that his utterance had given pain. He wanted to add something more kindly; but words at such a moment were perilous; perhaps a gesture would say enough, and yet not commit him. Reflecting thus, and moved also by a vigorous carnal hunger, he lifted her hand quickly and kissed it. It was a deed which he had done repeatedly before without finding that any thing serious came of it.

"Ah, Mr. Bradford," said Josie, drawing away from him. "I suppose it means nothing but friendship, and yet you shouldn't do it. When you speak English, I can understand you. But when you kiss my hand, I don't know where we are."

How easily he could have come to an understanding for life with her at that moment! And yet he had not been in the room five minutes, and had scarcely laid eyes on her before for a fortnight. It was always thus between them; alone with her, he could not possibly keep at long-range action; he was ever at close quarters, and that promptly. But many other men, we ought to state, in fairness to him, felt this same attraction in Josie Murray, and easily drifted alongside for a yard-arm contest.

"Can't you bear it from a very old and sincere friend?" he asked, and with some consciousness of hypocrisy, for he was not so very sincere.

"But you are always calling on me to bear it, Mr. Bradford. Have I got to buy your friendship all my life in this way?"

"I wish you would."

Josie burst out laughing. She was quick at catching a joke, and easily amused by one. It was one of the nicest traits about her, this ready perception of humor or wit, and this jolly responsiveness to it. Moreover, her laugh was so musical and natural and infectious, it was so prettily furnished out with coral lips and pearly teeth, that it became her wonderfully, and was very bewitching. Well, she laughed aloud, with a charming air of completely forgetting herself; and, in so doing, she blew away all the embarrassment which had arisen between them.

"Can I be of any service to you?" he asked, referring to the Appleyard slander, and the supposed need of helping her bear it.

"I—don't—know," she hesitated, supposing that he alluded to her claim, and wondering that he should offer help.

"I have seen you—hinted at in the papers," he added, nearly blushing for her.

It was, indeed, a very disagreeable thing to his mind that she should be babbled about in connection with such people as Drummond and Squire Nancy.

"Oh—that? Wasn't it shameful?" returned Josie, rather too carelessly to please him. Of a sudden, too, she laughed outright, as merrily as could be.

"So you don't mind it?" asked Bradford, gravely.

"I can't mind it much. The whole thing was too farcical to weigh on me. Of course I ought to mind it, and take on dreadfully. It is always supposed to be bad for a lady to get talked about, whether she is to blame for it or not. But I was no more to blame than the lamp-post on the corner. I didn't even see the show. I had but just spoken to Mr. Drummond, when bang! came that Bloomer creature, and I jumped into a shop. That is all I know about it," continued Josie, remembering to forget her flirtation with Drummond and her parlor-battle with Squire Appleyard.

"It was an abominable article," declared Bradford. "I heard a foreign *attaché* mention it as an instance of the degradation of manners characteristic of a democratic society. However, the *News-monger* has retracted it and apologized for it."

"So I have heard," said Josie, who had read every thing, both the scandal and the disavowal. "Do you think the affair is of much consequence?"

"It will wear off. But I fear that you might be annoyed by it, and I called partly to ask if you wished me to do any thing."

"Thank you! That is being a very good old friend, indeed. But I do not want you to do any thing. I do not want to work you at all, neither in this affair nor in others. You shall have all an old friend's privileges. Other people shall run on my errands, and you shall get the thanks."

"It's a nice easy berth, isn't it? It puts me in mind of some arrangements in the political world. I wonder how the other people will like it?"

"I wonder how *you* will like it?"

"Oh, I like it; all but the meanness and selfishness of the position—that I am heartily ashamed of. The fact is, that you have always kept me under obligations to you."

They both fell silent for a space. Each was thinking of the by-gone love-passages between them; the lady querying whether they would be renewed, and the man whether he should renew them.

With one feature of this interview—the fact that Josie had said nothing about her shabby claim—Bradford felt much pleased. He trusted that she had given it up; then, judging that such a resignation must have seemed a sacrifice to her, he decided that she merited his respect for it; and that being the case, he, as a just soul, whose business it was to countenance the respectable, wanted to reward her uprightness.

Well, she should have courtship; for he believed that she would certainly like that; he knew her so well! But how much courtship? He actually began to think seriously of letting himself slide into a proposal of marriage.

Of course that would stop forever the prosecution of the claim; of course, if she became his wife, he, the model of honest legislators, could not indulge her in a disreputable swindle; even if the bill were passed, he could not let her take the money. Would she be submissive to him in this little matter? Oh, undoubtedly! he decided; wives always bowed to their husbands in great affairs.

It is true that Josie had not always obeyed poor Augustus to his face, and that she had occasionally done things behind his back which he would have disapproved of angrily. But, then, poor Augustus was a sort of fool, and this very clever little beauty could not help seeing it. In the hands of a husband of reputation and character and ability she would be as plastic as butter. So a man flatters himself, and meanwhile woman supposes that it is she who has the superior judgment and distinction, concluding therefrom that it will be masculine duty and pleasure to exhibit ductility.

In spite of all these thoughts and emotions, the silence came to nothing. Bradford showed his sense of obligation no further than by acknowledging it. It is an easy way to meet a debt of gratitude, and often it is a curiously satisfactory one, not only to the indebted person, but also to the creditor. Josie would have been well pleased to have him thank her by telling her that he loved her dearly, and wanted her to be his wife.

Had he done so, she would have throbbed with great happiness; she would have bro-

ken her heart on his bosom and poured it out in pulsations of gratitude; she would have given him, or, rather, believed that she had given him, an immense affection and an unshakable troth.

He did nothing of the sort; and yet she was not in the least angry, nor disposed to call him hard-hearted and selfish; on the contrary, she felt only the more humble and subservient because he accepted so much and gave so little.

"If you want to repay me for my friendship, you must do two things," she said at last, with a faint sigh—a really piteous sigh, though it was scarcely audible. "You must be distinguished, so that I can boast of you; and you must not neglect me so completely and unkindly. I suppose that I know—at least I hope that I know—why you have staid away. You were afraid that I would ask you to push my claim. Well, I have not asked you to do that, and I never shall."

She stopped, being really quite worried with the thought that he would not help her, and also out of breath because of other more womanly and tenderer emotions.

"I wish with all my heart that I could assist you in that affair," affirmed Bradford. "But I told you why I must not. Mr. Hollowbread has it in hand, I believe?"

"Mr. Hollowbread is looking into it to see whether it ought to be presented," said Josie, telling her best-loved man a downright fib, and ready to cry over it. "If it is a wrong claim, there it ends. If it is a right one, why shouldn't I urge it? There was one payment; I know that well enough; but it was a very little one. Mr. Hollowbread thinks he can get proof that the property was worth a great deal more than one thousand dollars. If he can, then the Government really owes me something, and why shouldn't it pay me? I tell you this merely to be frank with you and to justify myself in your eyes. I don't ask you to help me. I know that you are sensitive and honorable, and I want you to remain so. But I want you to respect me also, and not look upon me as a sharp adventuress."

"My dear friend—I do respect you—and you must forgive me," stammered Bradford.

Josie broke down here; she could not help crying; only a couple of tears, to be sure; but they were very melting.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE MAN WHO LOVES HER.

BRADFORD was considerably moved by Josie's brace of tears, as men of poetic imagination and warm temperament usually are moved by feminine grief, especially when the afflicted one is fair to look upon.

"My dear child!" he said; and so far all went promisingly for her.

It was a phrase which he had never accorded to a woman whom he did not like very, very much, though, by-the-way, he had thus liked several—say three or four, or perhaps a dozen.

But even while he was talking and palpitating, a thought of the risks of marriage with such a flirt gave him a spasm of prudence, and he slackened his emotional speed rapidly.

"I will try to be such a friend to you as you deserve," he added, before the momentum had greatly diminished. "I will look into the claim again, if you wish it," he continued, changing his subject with truly hateful sagacity. "If I can find any solid grounds for it, I will support it with all my strength," was the peroration of this disappointing speech.

"No, you shall not!" exclaimed Josie, hastily, and with a good deal of feeling.

She was discontented and hurt, for she had been aiming at his heart instead of the United States Treasury, and would at that moment have liked a word of love better than a check for many thousands. Moreover, she did not want him to look into the claim anew, lest he should find that it was being pushed without regard to scruples, and lest he should even be moved to traverse Mr. Hollowbread's hopeful prospects.

"Promise me that you will not give yourself the least trouble about that poor little business," she went on, with the patience of a dove and the wisdom of a serpent. "I want you to be just simply my old friend and my comforter. You are the only man living whom I feel willing to cry at in my troubles," she added, with a pleading smile. "You are the only man who can make me cry. It is because you are my sole friend, and nothing more—I mean nothing less. Stay what you are. I like it best so."

Bradford was not in such a tranquil frame as to be able to study character attentively, or to weigh with accuracy the intellectual merit of conversation. But he felt—he had a quick and yet clear impression—that this young lady was in some respects his equal in brain-power, if not his superior. What a pity, he vaguely thought, that she was not as fine morally as she was intellectually! In such case, what a glorious woman she would be, and what a desirable, adorable wife she would make!

Well, was Mr. Edgar Bradford worthy of a glorious woman and adorable wife? Doubtful: at least he had rarely shown himself admirable in his treatment of women; his honor had mainly been for men and manly affairs. However, he none the less demanded perfection in whomsoever willed to marry him, and could not yet accept Josie Murray as fit for that exalted destiny.

Thus there were no words uttered in this conversation which decided that any body should take or be taken for better or worse. The final sentences of it were, "I shall call often" from Bradford, and a fervent, grateful "Do!" from Josie.

We ought to add that the gentleman kept his promise, and that henceforward there were frequent long and delightful interviews between them, to the great anguish of love-cracked Mr. Hollowbread.

This very day that gentleman had a turn in his sentimental inwards, in consequence of arriving at the Murray house just in time to see Bradford leave it, and finding Josie still marked by the sweet agitation of the interview. Her cheeks had a hot and almost crimson flush in them, and her dark eyes were strangely bright, humid, dreamy, and tender. Mr. Hollowbread faintly hoped that all this was because of his own coming, and yet he felt intolerably sure that it was because the other had come. Knowing that Bradford had been a favored admirer of Mrs. Murray, he found it distressingly easy to be jealous of him.

"I am so glad to see you!" said Josie, trying to look interested in his arrival. "Do take a seat and talk to me. Tell me what is going on—tell me something agreeable."

But the phrases were obviously mere commonplace of civility, and her eyes had an air of not seeing him—of looking beyond him.

"I will sit down, thank you," answered the Congressman, in his loud-breathing way. "But, as for any thing agreeable, it is rather a dull and sad world; at least, I find it so."

He looked more than gloomy; he looked positively glum. In short, he was suffering acutely from the thought that it would be useless for a man of his venerable figure to court Mrs. Murray in opposition to the courtship of the young and handsome man who had just quitted her.

"A dull and sad world!" repeated Josie. "Oh, Mr. Hollowbread, do you come here to tell me that? Why, I look to you for strength and cheering. Melancholy is a woman's business, and not a man's. I have had an awful day; I have cried at least two hours this very day. Oh, it has been horrid! And here you raise my spirits by telling me it is a sad world, and things can't possibly go well in it."

He was relieved, the poor man; yes, he was absolutely comforted. So she had had a bad day, and Bradford's company had been no solace to her; and no hand but his own could draw the iron from her soul! Mr. Hollowbread's spirits bubbled up at once, and brimmed over in a cheerful smile.

"I must congratulate you on one thing, at least," he observed. "You bear sorrow wonderfully well; it is even very becoming to you. I never saw you looking in better

health, or—do excuse me for being frank—or handsomer."

"Oh! handsomer! Well, that is good news!" laughed Josie, with an air of content which gratified him.

She was thinking of Bradford, and hoping that she had been handsome during his stay, and that he would remember it.

But this recollection and this desire did not prevent her from going on to say things which would naturally be agreeable to the old gentleman now present. She could not afford to have him dissatisfied with her, and consequently with the work which he had undertaken for her. She peremptorily needed his fervent devotion and his laborious fidelity; and to gain these she would flatter him and flirt with him, grizzled and dyed and strapped and padded as he was.

It was a wonderful performance for a woman of two-and-twenty, and, considering her as a mere social force, it does her great credit. Of course she was helped out in the matter by her native turn toward coquetry—a turn so vigorous that she could strive to attract almost any thing in the shape of a man, and, had men been lacking, might, perhaps, have made eyes at wax-figures and scarecrows.

But, furthermore, she had practical sense enough (and here is one proof of the unusual intelligence which I have imputed to her)—she had sense enough to see that a claimant in Washington must not stick to young men alone. Usually this is what the juvenile adventuress does, and this is why she so seldom secures her appropriation. She arrives in our earthly Jerusalem with the intent of pilfering a goodly slab of the golden pavement, and a large block out of the walls of precious stones. But although she earnestly means business, she does not know whom to apply to to get it done, or she lets her sentiments divert her from the necessary severities of her mission. She falls in love, perhaps; and, if so, she is pretty certain to pick out, as the object of her adoration, the youngest and handsomest bachelor member; we will suppose, for example, that she sets her cap at that "oiled and curled" Apollo of thirty, the graceful Potiphar.

But Potiphar is in the full tide of easy love-conquests, and naturally does not care to work hard or pay high for a new one. Moreover, he has his political character to make, and must not risk it for the sake of a tear and a smile. Finally, he has little influence; he has not won the ear of the House; he is on a fourth-rate committee. Thus, he desires to do little for his lovely suitor; and even that little is, perhaps, beyond his limited powers.

Meanwhile some wily, experienced, unfatigued adventuress, of thirty or forty, or, dear me! of forty-five, has gone straight to the thrones and principalities; she has

made eyes at those bald, time-worn, uncomely dispensers of gifts, General Bangs and General Hornblower and Senator Ironman, and with the greatest ease she has got her husband an office, and herself an appropriation.

Josie Murray, however, and her fortunate rival, Mrs. John Vane, were different from most of the young women who came to Washington with the hope of making money or a sensation. In many things these two noticeable ladies were unlike, but in one practical characteristic they were similar. There was something in their natures (and it is not quite an agreeable trait to dwell upon) which enabled them to be on kindly terms with elderly admirers, and that, too, without serious sentiments of disrelish.

"There is one great pleasure in being handsome, Mr. Hollowbread," continued Josie. "I do believe that it gives satisfaction to one's friends. Don't you like," she asked, archly and encouragingly, "don't you like to have me handsome?"

Mr. Hollowbread, with his heart in his mouth and in his boots at the same moment, replied that he did like it. In fact, he did not confine himself to that measurable statement, but signified as much more to similar effect as looks could express.

"That is what pleases me," declared Josie, though meanwhile she seated herself in the isolation of a chair, and not on a sofa, as when Bradford was present. "I don't care much to think myself pretty, but I do want my best friends to think me so."

"One of your best friends had the taste to think you so when he first saw you, and to continue in that mind ever since," asseverated Mr. Hollowbread, with a solemnity of emotion which did credit to his heart, however poorly it might speak for his noddle.

Josie smiled, and nodded her thanks, as she always did when any one paid her a compliment, whether that one were man or woman. At the same time she fixed her lustrous dark eyes upon her admirer's rather faded optics with an expression which he found singularly moving. It is strange to tell, but those eyes were scarcely less tender and melting now than when they had been bent upon the man whom she earnestly liked; and one is led to believe that she was not entirely responsible for the frequent sweetness and fervor of their utterances. However that may be, they often allured and entangled masculine souls when it did not seem natural that their owner could desire any such result. In the present case they bewildered and bamboozled and completely deprived of his common sense this really able Congressman, this fluent orator, whom many thought worthy of being the leader of his party in the House, and who, but for his laziness, might perhaps lead it to—say, the devil.

"Mrs. Murray," he gasped, vastly more

choked and affrighted than he would have supposed possible, considering his large and varied experience in making love.

Mrs. Murray, seasoned coquette as she was, also had a little spasm in the throat, for she saw what was coming.

"May I ask your serious attention for one moment?" continued Mr. Hollowbread, after he had cleared his voice by a deep and mellow ahem.

The natural purity, the tenderness and grace of fine-ladyhood asserted itself for one moment in Josie's face; it had a really beautiful and touching expression of alarm, shyness, and startled modesty as she mechanically and very gently bowed her head; it was just then a face which the noblest man alive might have revered without hesitation or stint.

"I am entirely unworthy of saying what I am about to say," confessed this venerable lover. "It is a piece of extreme and perhaps ridiculous presumption in me even to conceive of such an audacity."

Josie's coral lips moved, but gave forth no sound, not even a whisper. She did not want him to propose, for she felt that she could not, could not possibly, accept him, and she had not devised how she might refuse him without giving offense. To quarrel with him, to drive him away from her before he had secured her claim, was a thing too dreadful to contemplate. A vague, wild idea of taking him for the present, and jilting him as soon as he had got her money for her, came into her busy little head. But her prevalent impulse was to beg him to say nothing; to put the matter off somehow; to gain time. While she was in this uncertain frame of mind, Mr. Hollowbread pursued his elaborate way through his offer.

"But the truth is, Mrs. Murray, I have dared," he continued, "old as I am and insignificant as I am, I have dared—to love you. I have had the folly to fix my heart on the hope of winning you for my wife."

The murder was out, and Josie could have screamed. She had half a dozen emotions and impulsive desires in less than two seconds. Now that the thing had been said, now that the grasping, demanding, exorbitant word *wife* had been pronounced, she started with a violent shudder of negation, aversion, and dislike. She would have been pleased to run out of the room, and in case Mr. Hollowbread blocked her way, to slap his crimson face. But that sort of behavior would never do; propriety and the claim alike forbade it. She was equal to her complicated and hazardous situation, however, and after one throbbing moment, she uttered what was fitting and wise.

"You!" she said, remembering the speech of a heroine in "Pelham," and turning it to her own purposes. "I never suspected that you could think of such things. I supposed

that you were all occupied in the great affairs of man's life—in statesmanship and finance. Oh, Mr. Hollowbread, how you have surprised me! How could you care for such a child—such an insignificant trifle—as I know that I am!"

"I could, and do," he replied, with a simplicity and feeling which made him appear really fine, almost noble. "You are not what you say, Mrs. Murray. You are a lady of unusual intellect and remarkable character. You are worthy of my admiration and affection, and you have them. I am obliged in honor to add that you are worthy of the love of men far more desirable and admirable than myself. The sole question is, what am I worthy of?"

It was well said, because it was deeply felt. Josie raised her eyes to his face with respect, if not with a certain amount of kindly interest. Then she suddenly dropped them, and for a time looked at him no more. She knew pretty well how eloquent those eyes of hers were, how much more they were apt to express than she could feel, and how powerfully they often moved men upon whom they rested. Mr. Hollowbread must not receive their encouragement nor be exposed to their fascination.

"Let me add one word of what is merely fair and honorable explanation," he continued. "I am abundantly able to relieve you of any possible need of urging this perhaps uncertain claim. My property amounts to at least two hundred thousand dollars, as I shall be able to show satisfactorily to your relatives. Excuse me, Mrs. Murray, for mentioning this. I am myself not worthy of your consideration. But I can at least surround you with every comfort, and secure you from the meaner anxieties of life."

For the first time since he had begun his offer Josie vacillated in her feelings and pondered seriously the idea of an acceptance. Money she terribly needed; money her combined greed and extravagance led her to prize highly; and here was as much money as she could rationally hope to gain by marriage or any other means open to woman.

For a moment she queried, with oppressed breath and an almost motionless heart, whether she could surrender her youth and beauty to this man for his two hundred thousand dollars.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MR. HOLLOWBREAD ON PROBATION.

JOSIE gave Mr. Hollowbread one hasty and furtive glance, not unlike the look which we cast at a dentist's instruments when he invites us to sit down in his stuffed chair; then she decided, with a spasm of the heart (or, perhaps, it might have been only the

diaphragm), that she could not possibly accept him; at least, not that afternoon.

"I—can not," she faltered, speaking more frankly and conclusively than was polite or politic, so urgent was that internal recoil.

Mr. Hollowbread's massive and splendidly florid countenance turned to a bluish pallor. Strong-minded as he was in a general way, and inured to the vicissitudes of love-making by much experience, this refusal was a severe blow to him.

For a few seconds he remained paralyzed, with his piteous, dumb mouth a little ajar, like a young robin who has died in the act of asking for a worm. During that awful moment there was, perhaps, more vitality in the straps, pads, braces, and springs of his raiment than there was in the pulpy carcass which it kept in shape. This anguish was so unconcealably immense as to be sublime, startling, and even menacing.

Josie herself felt that it was no cheerful spectacle to see a Congressman in ruins. Moreover, she became suddenly fearful of losing her advocate, of changing him possibly into an enemy, and so of risking the success of her claim.

"At least, I must have time—you have so surprised me!" she added. "You ought, in fairness, to give me time to consider such a serious matter as this."

"I will, Mrs. Murray," gasped the drowning Hollowbread, clutching at the straw which she held out to him. "I am aware that it is a serious matter to you."

"It is such a great step—to propose to one—marriage!" sobbed Josie, tears springing into her eloquent eyes, though from what source of feeling we can not explain.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Murray!" begged the truly loving and therefore deeply humble Hollowbread. "I have been too hasty with you. I have behaved like a brute. I ask your forgiveness."

It was very touching, this tender-hearted meekness of a love-lorn old statesman; but Josie, although intelligent enough to perceive its pathos, was too selfish to be moved by it; she was looking at her own side of the worry.

"Then we will not think of it any more for the present, Mr. Hollowbread," she insinuated, cheerfully, as she wiped away her pair of tears.

"We will think of it, I hope," prayed the Congressman; "at least, I shall not and can not cease to think of it. We will not, however, speak of it until such a time as you may fix. I only venture to beg that it may not be set far distant."

"I shall want a great deal of time," said Josie, venturing one of her musical, roguish giggles, with the intent of diminishing the gravity of the occasion.

"Allow me to trust not more than a week."

"Oh, Mr. Hollowbread!—a week! What a hurry you are in! One would think we were not going to live more than a month or two. Do consider how hard it would be for me to settle a life-long matter so soon! Rome was not built in a day; and this is a Rome to me—a woman's Rome. I think—yes, I know by experience—that marriage should not be entered on lightly," she added, with an air of sad remembrance, as if poor Augustus had behaved worse to her than she to him. "And so you must have patience, and give me a chance to meditate—a long, long chance. Can't you guess how much time I want?"

"A fortnight," guessed Hollowbread, with a smile; for her manner was more encouraging than her words, and his courage had risen.

"A fortnight!" Josie laughed outright. "Oh, what a mannish man! Just like all of them—in a hurry to get, and in a hurry to throw away; now for this plaything, and now for that one."

"Ah, Mrs. Murray, you do me injustice," sighed Hollowbread. "I assure you most solemnly that my whole soul is interested in this matter, and that my life-long happiness depends on your decision. How can I help desiring to escape from suspense?"

"No, no; I don't do you injustice," declared Josie, determined not to let the dialogue drift back into the pathetic and strenuous. "I do you the justice to believe that you are so wise, so kind, so truly my best counselor and friend, as to want me to weigh your offer thoughtfully, and to decide my future carefully. Well, to do that I must have time—much more time than you speak of. I must have three months!" she concluded, remembering that by then the session would be ended, and the fate of her claim settled.

"It is a long period," gently remonstrated the deeply disappointed Congressman.

"It is long; but it is short compared with the rest of my life—at least I hope so, Mr. Hollowbread, don't you? It will be short to you because you will be absorbed in great labors and noble measures. And as for me, would you have me decide in a fortnight, at the risk of repenting in a year?"

"I would have you do what you believe to be best for yourself," answered the self-abnegation of profound affection.

"Oh, thank you!" smiled Josie, leaping adroitly at the martyr-like concession, and perhaps thinking the while that within a year she might be married to Bradford. "That is so like you, Mr. Hollowbread—so kind, so considerate, so good! I shall always be grateful to you for this great favor. And now one other thing—something very, very important. This must all be a secret—a profound secret."

"On my word and honor," bowed Hol-

lowbread, with the solemnity of a President taking the oath to support the Constitution. "And allow me, Mrs. Murray, to mention still one other thing, also, as it seems to me, important. I consider myself engaged to you until your answer is received. You are free, but I am bound."

Josie returned no response to this, and made believe not to have heard him.

"I shall wait, but with an anxiety which I can not express," he continued, anxious to get one cheering word.

"It shall be the previous question when it does come up," she laughed, quoting a Congressional phrase in the way of light-hearted slang, still with a hope of giving the whole transaction a humorous and trivial character.

"It is the only question with me," replied Mr. Hollowbread, heaving a grave and almost sorrowful sigh.

She saw that he could not be induced to make merry over his offer, and it seemed to her the part of prudence to change the subject.

"Are you doing any thing interesting in Congress?" was her next utterance.

"Nothing of any moment whatever," he answered, with a scarcely concealed impatience, being utterly unable at that moment to talk of legislative matters.

"When shall I get my money, Mr. Hollowbread?" she now asked, thinking it a good time to stir him up about the claim.

In justice to her intellect, I must add that she put this cruel question with a full knowledge that it was cruel. But why should she not demand hard things of him when he had demanded so hard a thing of her? In truth, she felt a little vindictive toward him because of his offer.

"Ah!" He fairly started, remembering all at once that she expected work of him, and judging that he must succeed in it or fail to win her. "Well, I am keeping the claim under my eye, and hope well of it," he faltered, knowing that he had not done much. "I have mentioned it repeatedly to the gentlemen of the Spoliation Committee, and trust that they will reach it in the course of a few days, or perhaps it would be safer to say in two or three weeks. The truth is, that I have not yet been able to fix upon the amount to be demanded," confessed Mr. Hollowbread, whose prime faults, as we recollect, were idleness and procrastination. "I want a great deal for you, but do not see my way clear to prove a right to a great deal."

"Why, claim what other people do," advised Josie, with a woman's breadth of view in giving counsel. "Claim two hundred thousand dollars, and get what you can."

"It is not a wise way, I fear," sighed Hollowbread, who mildly abominated such ways, and was ashamed to enter into them.

"Claims advanced in that manner are less likely to succeed than those which present a plausible case for the whole sum demanded. Moreover, I desire, and you desire, that your suit should be a strictly reputable one, and not open to newspaper exposures and Congressional investigations. Well, I have ventured to think that sixty thousand dollars might do; and that sum could easily be figured up by means of interests and proper conjectures of values; that is, if we ignore the first payment as insufficient and not worth considering. What I want and need is, to get word from Mr. Drinkwater as to whether he remembers any other burned property besides the mere barn. If he does, and will make affidavit to that effect, we are strong. We might demand sixty thousand, or thereabouts, imperatively; might perhaps go up to a hundred thousand, with good hopes of success."

"Oh dear!" sighed Josie.

She had heard all this, or pretty much the same sort of thing, over and over. It seemed as if Mr. Hollowbread and other high and mighty people could talk everlastingly about her business, and never bring it a bit the nearer to a satisfactory termination. Sometimes the subject, with its apparently immovable inertia, weighed oppressively on her young spirits.

"To-morrow is the last day before recess," she added, in a tone of discouragement.

"And nothing could have been done," declared Mr. Hollowbread, perceiving that he was blamed, and wincing under it. "During recess," he continued, "and properly during the latter part of it, so as to get Drinkwater here by the opening of the next sitting, somebody will have to look up the old gentleman. I have written to him in vain. I think I shall go on to see him personally."

"And I—shall I go too?" asked Josie.

She had once promised to take the trip, but that Appleyard fracas had shaken her adventurous soul a trifle, and made her somewhat afraid of exposing herself to public tattle.

"It would help me very much," affirmed the lover, hoping, of course, that it would help him to her hand, in which case he wanted nothing further of fortune.

"I will go," she said, with a gay little air of defiance. "It can be managed somehow without people knowing. I should enjoy the fun of arguing and coaxing evidence out of old Mr. Drinkwater."

It was all characteristic of her, the audacity of the promise, and the levity with which it was given. Josie's behavior was so habitually risky, that many light-hearted persons were always hoping she would commit some dreadful impropriety, and thus furnish them with a relishing oud of scandal.

Possibly a few of my readers are in this frame of expectation concerning the little witch. If so, I can hardly wonder, or blame them as uncharitable.

"But there is something else to be done," she went on. "There is the Committee of Spoliations to make sure of, and you never have let me come near it. Tell me, now, do you think that is quite judicious? I only know what people say. They say that in these affairs evidence is not the only thing necessary; they say that favor is the great point. If you want your bill, the honorable gentlemen of the committee must be made favorable. Other ladies attend to this; they see the honorable gentlemen, they interview them; and then somehow the honorable gentlemen become favorable. It does seem to me that I could interview them as effectually as any body. Of course, if they are favorable we can go higher in our damages, and not run any risk in doing so. Don't you think I had better see the honorable gentlemen?"

"I supposed that you might find it unpleasant to discuss your affairs with these people," mumbled Mr. Hollowbread, pronouncing the word "people" as if he would have preferred to say "fellows," or even "blackguards," and showing clearly in his manner that he did not fancy the proposed interviewing. "It might, I must concede, be well that you should do it," he admitted, not daring to tell his beloved a flat lie, and ashamed to expose his jealousy. "And yet I should be very sorry."

Sorry, indeed! He was honest there, honest and earnest. So "tender and true" was the love of this old beau for this young coquette that he held her in solemn reverence. She was the light of the world to him; he wanted to approach her with obeisances and genuflections; he could have burned candles before her and waved incense.

To such a devotee, such a ritualist *in posse*, it was dreadful to think of exposing his idol to men who would admire her without worshipping her, and who would probably pay her an audacious courtesy which to him must seem mere profanation.

The act, moreover, would be an admission of his own insufficiency as an advocate, and might be understood as conceding his own inferiority in influence compared with those fellows of the Spoliation Committee.

As he thought of carrying the queen of his heart before the potent and domineering General Bangs, he angrily compared himself to the menial and humble Nubian in Gérôme's picture, who sets down Cleopatra, nude, in the presence of Caesar.

It was partly because he had feared lest this degradation might come, and had looked forward to it with disgust, that he had plunged that morning into his proposal of marriage. He had said to himself that if she would ac-

cept his hand and his considerable fortune, then he could induce her to drop her wretched claim and all its attendant defilements. Possessed as he was by these feelings, we may conceive that he should be sorrowful and annoyed when Josie jumped gayly at the notion of interviewing the Spoliations Committee.

"Of course I had better see them," she persisted. "If they were ladies you could do best with them, but as they are gentlemen I shall do best."

"I am not so sure that they are gentlemen," Mr. Hollowbread could not help answering. Not wishing to appear unamiable or otherwise disagreeable to her, he said it with a smile; but that smile was much like the grin of a dog who sees another dog about to smell of his bone.

It was really exasperating just then to remember the last dialogue which he had heard in the committee-room about Mrs. Murray's affairs.

"Hollowbread," General Bangs had bary-toned at him, "you had better bring on your little lady; we want to ask her a few questions, and see whether she is worth encouraging at this expense."

Then General Hornblower had winked offensively, not to say disgustingly, at Bangs, and remarked, in his suave bass, "Certainly, general. Our friend keeps his interesting client too much to himself. We are not yet absolutely certain that there is a Mrs. Murray."

"Ah, that is important," was Bangs's repartee. "We must make sure that there is a claimant, and that the claimant is of the sex alleged."

To which Mr. Hollowbread had merely ventured to reply, trembling the while through all his pads and springs and compressors.

"Gentlemen, you will find that the claimant is a lady in every sense of the word."

"Are they so disagreeable?" asked Josie, in response to his sneer at these wretches. "I think I shall know how to manage them. Don't you think I will? Besides, I want to do something for myself. It is proper that I should, and it is artistic. I am the Hamlet of the play, and it won't do to leave Hamlet out of 'Hamlet.'"

"It may be best that you should talk with them," sighed Mr. Hollowbread, with the calmness of well-bred woe.

"Can't you bring them here?" she inquired. "That would help keep them on their behavior. I could see them in the entry, and have spittoons brought for them."

He was delighted, as she had intended that he should be, with this rough satire on his fellow-lawgivers.

"It would be well enough for them," he laughed. "But, unfortunately, custom compels them to transact their business at the Capitol. We shall have to bow to the prej-

udices of a stupid but stubborn world. When women come to vote, things will be better managed, and nicer."

"They will be nicer for the ruling dowagers and frights, perhaps; but for the pretty ones, they won't be as nice as they are now. The beauties will lose all their influence and empire. The probability is that they will be banished or beheaded, together with the young men who like them."

"I believe you are right," said Mr. Hollowbread, staring at her with an air of surprise and admiration, like one who gets new light on a dark subject. "The strong-minded movement is really a rebellion of the ugly against the rule of the beautiful. May that evil day when belles are to be extirpated not come in my time!"

"It would kill you," laughed Josie, returning his gaze with a glance of satirical approbation. "You would wither and die if you could not see pretty women about you."

"I should not have the patience to wither," affirmed the portly old bean. "I should commit the happy dispatch."

Josie laughed again, and right heartily. It was unspeakably comical to think of Mr. Hollowbread laboriously cutting through all that more or less visible padding and bandaging. One might easily imagine him as getting tired and sitting down to rest long before he reached his epidermis.

"When shall we go to see the animals?" she asked, presently, referring to the honorable committee-men.

"Well, I scarcely know," hesitated Mr. Hollowbread, very unwilling to show his menagerie.

"Now is as good a time as another," decided this persistent puss. "Let us go at once."

CHAPTER XXX.

INTERVIEWING THE COMMITTEE ON SPOILIATIONS.

As Josie and her Congressman entered the rotunda of the Capitol, they beheld the great Bangs standing (alas! not yet in memorial marble) near the centre of the floor, and holding converse with that artistic mendicant, Jessie Cohen.

"There he is," said Hollowbread. "And there she is," he added, with even plainer disgust. "The indefatigable little beggar! If she painted only half as ably as she passes around the hat, she would make a great name for herself."

"People must do what they can," responded our good-natured heroine, remembering that she also was a persistent beggar, but showing no anger. "I suppose she was created to pass around the hat, and not to paint."

"Yes, and of course she wants a living,"

conceded Hollowbread. "It is a sad fact, and especially burdensome to Congressmen, that every body does. Perhaps we had better wait here, and speak to Bangs as soon as she gets through with him, if she ever does get through."

"It is a poor place for her suit," thought Josie, glancing around upon the horrible wastes of "Plymouth Rocks" and "De Sotos." "How can any body look at these things and then vote money for paintings?"

"There, he has slipped away!" exulted Hollowbread. "No, she has got him again. We shall have to possess our souls in patience."

So they quietly watched the siege which was progressing, and, in spite of the distance, overheard somewhat of its clamor. Miss Cohen, to be sure, was plaintively low in speech, and, as they thought, tearful in countenance. But the general was as brassily sonorous as if he were on a platform, sounding forth his own praises or reviling a political opponent. They could catch a few of his noble phrases: "Sacred trusts, Miss Cohen"—"money wrung from the people"—"patriotism before art"—"use before beauty." Obviously he was giving the suppliant no hopes that she would obtain her five-thousand-dollar job through his resonant mediation. Obviously, too, he wanted to be heard by the sight-seers around; wanted them to know that he was bluffing the exorbitant Miss Cohen; wanted them to hear him bow-wow at the gate of the Treasury. Presently the little artist lost heart, put her handkerchief to her eyes, and fell away from him. As she passed our waiting couple they could see that her Oriental countenance was really stained with tears.

"Poor little Jewess," said Josie, with contemptuous pity. "They ought to give her something. Can she paint at all?"

"She has had something," sniffed Hollowbread. "And she can't paint. She couldn't make a recognizable portrait of one of Jacob's ring-streaked rams. Shall we go on?"

"Had we better? It seems to be a bad day for claimants. I don't want to be rebuffed and sent off crying."

"You will not be," smiled Hollowbread. "Bangs has merely been making a show of cheap virtue. He has nothing to do, by rights, with people who want appropriations. I don't see why the paintress should go to him; she ought to have known the ropes better."

Meantime he had signaled to Bangs, and that survivor of many a campaign on paper was approaching them, bowing and smiling with a graciousness which made one wonder how he could have been so hard to Miss Cohen. But the general knew whom to kick and when to kick them. There was at that time a reaction in the country against Jessie, the editors having attacked her as a

humbug in art and a brazen beggar, and Congress having bowed to the levin of the press. Meantime Josie Murray was a lady by blood, an acknowledged belle in fine society, and possessed of potent political adherents. So the knowing Bangs was ready to despise the one and equally ready to cleave unto the other.

When the introduction took place, our heroine had the wisdom to look her meekest and to make her most humble obeisance. She had divined, the singularly precocious young woman, that this exceptional man did not want to be flattered with, but only to be bowed down to.

"I am delighted to meet you, madam," said the general, in his penetrating, snare-drum voice. "I have seen you—and much oftener heard of you—leading our Washington society."

"I wish the spectacle were worthier, sir," answered Josie, really blushing a little, so agitated was she—about her claim. "I should like to do something worthy of your notice."

And so she went on; she did her cunningest. The war was the main subject of her remarks; she had watched his deeds of deriding-do with breathless interest; she had been, oh! enthusiastically appreciative of his matchless services. The general was even more gratified than she had hoped that he would be. His martial career was exactly the point in his history on which he most needed eulogy. Many persons had criticised a leadership which consisted in staying behind, and a skill which showed itself in keeping behind the range of musketry. He beamed and strutted; one might say that his face was on the top of his head; he seemed to be looking for his place among the geniuses of the frescoed cupola.

"You bring back old times to me, Mrs. Murray," he declared. "Great times they were, too, though terrible ones. I often feel that, if it were not for the wounds and the carnage and the misery, I should like to put on the armor again. But war, although magnificent, is shocking. I say, with our glorious chief magistrate, and doubtless with all who took a personal part in the struggle, let us have peace."

"Yes, let us have peace, and let us devote ourselves to healing the wounds of the war," said Hollowbread.

"Certainly," replied Bangs, comprehending perfectly that he was being led up to the claim, and simply anxious to facilitate the operation.

He was so ready-witted in catching the suggestion, and so prompt in assuming a business air, that it seemed as if his late expression of gratified vanity must have been mere cajolery. It may, indeed, have been so, for the man was not easily fathomed, and not easily deceived.

"Mrs. Murray is one of the sufferers, I believe," he bowed, helping on his brother Congressman, who, as we are aware, was rather slow.

"And she has begged me," continued Hollowbread, "to present her to you as the person who, of all others, is the most likely and the most able to see that she receives justice."

Josie was a good deal dismayed, but her fright did not prevent her from doing what was wise. She made a good little girl's bow, and uplifted a glance which acknowledged Bangs as an arbiter of her fate.

"I remember your claim perfectly," bowed the hero. He spoke with his finest graciousness, and very gracious indeed he knew how to be, though fonder of being insolent. "We have your claim under consideration, and think well of it. I have no doubt that it will get into a bill in course of time."

"Thank you, general," said Josie, ever so meekly and gratefully.

"Would you like to hear Mrs. Murray state the case?" asked Hollowbread. "Or do you require her presence before the committee?"

"Not in the least," trumpeted Bangs. "We have the papers. Mrs. Murray need give herself no trouble. I say that the claim is a good one, and a just one, and a holy one, and must be paid. I have no doubt that Hornblower and the others will take my word that it is all right."

He was perfectly satisfied. Due acknowledgment of his greatness and authority had been made, and the ostentatious tyrant wanted nothing more, not even a flirtation. Besides, he was a terribly busy creature, entangled in a hundred intrigues and plots, giving no little time also to real public measures, ever on the watch to hurt an enemy or even a non-adherent, bent furiously upon making himself a leader among men, and so having no leisure to toy with women.

"General, you are very good!" exclaimed Josie, quite overjoyed. "Do, I beg of you, remember me, and bear in mind that my family property was really, really destroyed, burned in actual battle with the enemy."

"Battle?" returned Bangs, with a start—"in battle! I really had not noticed that. Why, Hollowbread, you know, I suppose, that the Government is not responsible for property destroyed in actual conflict."

"Good heavens!" gasped Mr. Hollowbread, his jaw dropping, as if it would fall off. "Is that so! I suppose I knew it, but I had forgotten it."

"But that makes no difference, and it can't be so," put in Josie, trembling from head to foot. "Why, it has been paid for once, only nothing like enough."

"It was a blunder," said Bangs. "How ever—"

"Does Congress make blunders?" interrupted Josie, with excitement, or, one might say, with anger.

General Bangs burst out laughing, and even the anxious Hollowbread smiled.

"Every body, and every combination of bodies, makes blunders," sighed the latter.

"The Creator makes them," added the general. "But Congress had no right to order that claim paid. However—"

"Exactly," said Hollowbread, eagerly.

"What were you going to say?" grinned Bangs.

"I may as well say it. If the actual conflict status did not impede payment in 1820, why should it now?"

"Precisely so. Why should it? Of course it shouldn't. The first payment legalized the second. Or possibly the property was destroyed after the battle. It can be made all right, Hollowbread."

"Oh—can it?" faltered Josie, ready to go on her knees to him. "I should be so grateful!—oh, so grateful!"

"Certainly, Mrs. Murray. Leave it all to me. If any help is needed, I will let our friend here know."

Then there was a short silence, during which Bangs looked in twenty directions, as if he wanted to go twenty ways at once.

"We will not detain you, general," said Hollowbread. "I know, and Mrs. Murray also knows, that your time is precious. A thousand thanks for this interview."

"Good-day, good-day!" rattled the great partisan, and was off with the speed of a traveler who sees his train starting, waving a hand vehemently to some one on the other side of the rotunda.

"I don't like him at all," said Josie, who never fully liked such men as were not women's men. "He thinks of nothing but himself, and does every thing for the sake of himself."

"That is why he is one of the leaders of the House, no doubt. No pleasure and no emotion ever takes him off his work. And he works—amazingly! Such energy and such toughness!—such adroitness and such impudence, too! One of the meanest of men, and one of the greatest of demagogues. But I must beg of you not to repeat what I think of him, nor what you think of him. He is quite capable of taking vengeance for a word, and his good-will is essential to us."

"Then we needn't go before the committee at all?" said Josie, disposed to fret over that disappointment.

"Not for the present. Bangs is nearly supreme there. By-and-by, in case some colleague should rebel in favor of his own pet measures, he may want to use your powers of persuasion, and then he will send for you. I sincerely hope that there will be no occasion."

"So it goes. I am continually told that something is to be done, and then nothing is done."

Mr. Hollowbread might have retorted that

it was not he who had proposed a visit to the Spoiliations Committee. But of course he was in no mood to increase her obvious annoyance, and he preferred to introduce some placating generalities.

"Yes," he sighed, as if he regretted very much the way things had gone. "Such is Washington, such is Congressional life—a perpetual bubbling of hot water, with almost nothing else in the pot. Of the five hundred bills which were introduced at the beginning of this session, probably not fifty, and perhaps not ten, will pass. I believe that if the governors of the States should meet once a year for a fortnight, they and the Supreme Court and the departments could transact all the real business of the country. Congress used to be a law-making body. Now it is mainly an axe-grinding body."

"And I have an axe to grind," said Josie, not a bit ashamed of the fact.

"Yes," returned Mr. Hollowbread, smiling down upon her, as one smiles upon a naughty, pretty child, though secretly he wished that she would let her axe alone. "Well, we must do what others do, or we shall go without what others get."

"You don't like my claim a bit," pouted Josie.

"I must like your claim—all your claims, of every sort," replied the infatuated old lover, putting down the frail ghost of honesty in his soul. "I do like it, and will support it. You must know, Mrs. Murray, that I am devoted—"

"Oh, I believe in you, Mr. Hollowbread," interrupted Josie, fearful lest he should recommence "popping." "I am sure that you are a true friend. But this talk about the amount of business, with the confusion in it and the failures, is discouraging. I want all the while to be doing something and to see some result. Isn't there some wire which I can pull? Can't I lay pipe, as people say, in the Senate? Suppose, now, my bill should go through the House, and then be defeated in the Senate for lack of a word said beforehand? Why not interview some high and mighty conscript father? There is the immense and sublime Mr. Ledyard, for instance. I know his daughter."

Hollowbread smiled at the idea of influencing Mr. Ledyard through his female connections; it was such a truly womanlike notion, as he thought, that he could not help being amused by it.

"Senator Ledyard is always occupied with national questions," he stated. "I don't believe he ever touched a private bill in the whole course of his Congressional experience."

"What a selfish wretch!" laughed Josie, intellectually in jest, but emotionally in earnest. "Well, there is Senator Ironman. I have met him several times, and I know Mrs. Ironman well."

"It would be more to the purpose to know Mrs. John Vane," objected Hollowbread.

"I despise her," declared Josie.

And despise her she did, not merely because of the scandal which had been alluded to, but chiefly because Olympia Vane pretended to rival her as a queen of Washington society, and seemed to her coarsely and stupidly unworthy of the pretension.

"I am glad you do," bowed Hollowbread, not guessing the chief motive of her contempt, and regarding it as a sign of soul purity: a delightful thing for love-lorn man to find in the object of his affections, no matter how evil that man may have been before he was love-lorn.

"But I think I had better go after Senator Ironman," was Mrs. Murray's very next observation.

And go after him she did; for it was in her character to be persevering and masterful, as well as amiable; and bewitched Mr. Hollowbread was, of course, a mere tool in her puissant little fingers. But first, and while they were on their way to the Senate wing, they had another adventure.

Passing an open door, this feminine Don Quixote inquired what lovely apartment that might be, and poor Sancho Panza Hollowbread could not help admitting that it was the committee-room of the honorable gentlemen on Spoiliations.

"And there is General Hornblower," she whispered, gently forcing her victim to enter. "Do present me."

So Hollowbread had to pronounce a form of introduction over that suave chieftain, when he would have found a truer joy in devoting him to the infernal gods.

General F. G. Hornblower was another of those martial civilians who leaped from the platform of the popular orator into the stirrups of the general, and whose strategy and tactics lent to the solemn tragedy of our civil war a few scenes of farce, alas! dearly paid for.

Yet little beyond military ignorance and incapacity can be alleged against him. Probably he had his staff of newspaper correspondents, and saw to it that they sounded his praises through their organs. But at least he did not snuff the battle afar off, after the fashion of the discreetly valorous Bangs.

These eyes have seen him on the battlefield, sitting up grandly in his saddle among screaming, cracking shot, and speaking in magniloquent bass such orders as he knew.

He would have made a good soldier, a good captain, or a good colonel; but when more was demanded of him, the material thereof was lacking. Doubtless it was not his fault that he was not a Cromwell, able to know war after slight experience and by the light of nature.

But it was our misfortune. Alas! we had many such calamities. How often were we

beaten by commanders commissioned to beat our enemies! It was too much for troops when both their own leaders and those of the foe combined to outmanœuvre them.

There was a long conversation between General Hornblower and Josephine Murray; but it ran chiefly, indeed almost entirely, upon matters which she had not come there to talk about.

He was mellifluous in voice, bland in discourse, suave in manner, and, on the whole, agreeable. But he would not discuss the claim; he bowed it away, and waved it away, and smiled it away; however often it was brought before him, he gently got rid of it. General Bangs had taken charge of it, he was understood to suggest, and in Bangs's potent hands it would be advisable to leave it. Once, indeed, he so far committed himself as to hint that it was a very old claim; but he immediately added, with a smile, that "auld lang syne and the glorious deeds of old must not be forgot." In short, it was a diplomatic, evasive, inconclusive, unsatisfactory interview. When Josie at last left the room, trembling with the fatigue of anxious labor, and flushed with a suspicion that she had made no progress, she tried to cheer herself by whispering to Hollowbread:

"Did you see? He had not noticed that the barn was burned in actual conflict. I am so glad!"

"I don't suppose he has looked at the papers yet," returned the Congressman, who hated this whole business, and could not entirely conceal his hate.

"Oh, how discouraging you are!" fretted Josie. "Why can't you say something nice?"

"My dear friend, it is events and circumstances which are discouraging, and not I. We had surely better not deceive ourselves."

"I would rather be deceived," she half sighed, half laughed. "What I want is to hope and be happy."

"And now do you care to look up Ironman?" he asked, seeing that she was somewhat dismayed and wearied, and trusting that she would desire no more interviews.

Josie drew a long breath to repress a slight tendency toward a sob; then she rallied all the strength and courage that were left in her soul, and answered, "Yes."

CHAPTER XXXI.

AN EXPOSURE.

JOSIE and Mr. Hollowbread discovered Senator Ironman in his committee-room; but unluckily that admirer of all the handsome women in Washington was just then giving audience to Mrs. John Vane, whom he justly considered one of the handsomest; and furthermore they beheld Squire Nancy

Appleyard lingering about the doors, as if awaiting her turn for admission.

"I am not used to such low company as I meet in the capital of my country," scornfully smiled Mrs. Murray, as she wheeled away. "Couldn't you pass a law which should keep out at least such women as wear pantaloons?"

"They are the least bewildering of all," answered Hollowbread, also smiling, but with a disposition to sigh, for he had a sense that he had himself been woefully bewitched by feminine enchantments.

Josie made no answer to this speech, and probably did not hear it.

At that moment she caught sight of bustling, strutting, noisy General Bangs, engaged in conversation with another tall and gaunt gentleman, but of very different and much nobler aspect, who was no other than Colonel Murray.

"Let us get out of here," she whispered. "What can that hateful creature be gabbling about to my uncle? I hope it is not my business. Did you tell him not to mention it to the Murrays? Oh, you ought to have told him. I don't want them to guess; I want to surprise them."

"Yes—naturally," puffed and sighed Mr. Hollowbread, as they hurried away.

Speed and stairways necessarily worry a stout gentleman who wears a tight surcingle, and, moreover, this skulking evasion made him feel undignified, shamefaced, and guilty, and finally he remembered that he had himself blabbed the business to Colonel Murray. However, after they had got out of the Capitol unseen, Josie cheered him with a triumphant little burst of merriment. It seemed to him, when this pretty creature giggled and sparkled her bright eyes in his face, as if there were no distinction between right and wrong, between honor and disgrace.

Having thus confounded all his moral notions for him, she sent him back to legislate for our beloved country, while she betook herself light-heartedly to shopping. That evening she was to dine at Mr. Banker Allchin's, and Mrs. John Vane was to be there also. Now Josie fervently desired to eclipse, crush, and dethrone that queen of society, and she believed that to do it she must have a fresh outfit of small decorations. Hence the shopping tour, the eagerness, the gaiety, and the sudden forgetfulness of all trouble and evil.

The dinner took place, and was sumptuous. Our heroine held revelry between Senator Ironman and the honorable Smyler, and outshone with the greatest ease her somewhat uncultured rival. But the repast was amply reported in the *News-monger*, and we will not attempt to outdo the city editor.

During the evening Colonel Murray dropped in upon the rector and wife. If he knew

of aught which displeased him, the fact did not appear on his serene old visage. He carried his long nose in the air, and looked glassily through his large spectacles, and smiled in his deliberate speech just as usual. A tried soldier, and possessed of that important soldierly characteristic, an even temper, he habitually endured worries with tranquillity. No one could have inferred from his manner that he had heard all about Josie's swindling claim, and was exceedingly grieved and vexed because of it.

The two brothers were soon bucking and butting at each other over the questions of physical science as contentedly as if there were no other cause of acrimony in the world. We have not space to narrate the sublime combat in full, but we must positively describe the final rush of the gallant colonel.

"Once more let me recall your obligations to science," he said. "Just consider how much the theologian has learned concerning the greatness of creation—consequently concerning the greatness of the Creator, from the astronomer and the naturalist. Remember Galileo, Kepler, Newton, and Laplace; remember the thousands of worlds which you know of, and which the fathers knew not of; remember the microscopic revelations also, as well as the telescopic ones; then say that the scientist has taught you nothing about God. Why, he might fairly address you clergymen as Paul addressed the Athenians: 'Whom, therefore, ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.'"

Twenty minutes of discussion had already fired up the rector to the boiling-point. Moreover, he was not a logical man, but, on the contrary, an unfair-minded and prejudiced one, just in proportion as he was warm-hearted. Consequently he replied antagonistically, showing no gratitude at all toward science, but rather mediæval contempt for the same.

"Brother Julian, let me tell you a little story," he began, with a scoffing smile, as of one who instructs a perverse inferior.

"Oh yes—one of your apologues, I suppose—one of your parables," sniffed the colonel.

"There was once a good missionary," pursued the rector. "He lived in the dark, foolish old times when men knew very little, and merely had faith—an humble faith. He went out from his home to correct a heathen people, a sea-faring and piratical people, perhaps the Northmen. Well, these heathen pirates took him in their ships all round the world, and showed him how much bigger it was than he had supposed. Then they called upon him to adore the attraction of gravitation and abjure his blessed Saviour. It is my belief that the silly good man refused to gratify them."

"Oh, psshaw!" answered the colonel, indignantly. "There you go again with your

assumptions that scientists look up to nature, and not to nature's God."

"And so they do," asseverated the clergyman, his blood boiling higher and higher all the while. "You do yourself, Julian, as I fear. I am really afraid you do. I believe you do."

"Don't, Mr. Murray!" put in the wife, noting these repetitions, the heightened color, and other signs of agitation. "You will certainly send the blood to your head. Now, do not get so excited!"

"Well, well, then I must quit the subject," stammered the rector. "I can not talk about it patiently—I can not."

"Let us drop it, then," said the colonel, with a sigh.

He really cared about the matter. In his old age he had come to be aware of science, and to make a pet of it; and he had something like a pious desire to reconcile all men to its teachings.

"By-the-way, I came around to speak of something else," he added. "It is an affair which requires your instant attention, if you are not too tired."

Both the rector and Mrs. Murray pricked up their gossip-loving ears and asked, eagerly,

"What is it? What is it?"

"The old story of the claim again. You remember, a Congressman spoke to me about it—a claim for a burned barn."

"Yes—yes—exactly. What is it?" inquired the old lady, all eyes except what was ears.

The colonel went on to explain that General Bangs had been at him that morning about this barn-burning business.

"Howling and bawling in my ear," the old soldier put it, indignantly, "and making a disagreeable coyote of himself."

In short, Bangs had informed him that Mrs. Murray, Junior, had a claim before the Spoliation Committee to the amount of a hundred thousand dollars, more or less.

"Horrible!" exclaimed the Reverend John Murray, his pure and sensitive soul sending tremors of indignation through his weak, bloated physical part.

"Horrible!" echoed Mrs. Murray, beginning to understand that here was something to be wretched about, instead of merely a lively item for her diary.

"It is a shameful intrigue," pursued the colonel. "If it is carried through, it will be a disgrace to the family, a disgrace to each one of us. I can not stand it. I can not stand being blackened by other people, after the white man's life that I have led. I have always respected Government money. I have held it as a sacred trust. At least a million of it has passed through my hands first and last, and I have never stolen a dollar of it, never misappropriated a dollar, as I hope and believe. If ever a shilling has

been lacking in my accounts, I have always taken that shilling out of my own pocket and put it into the public chest. I tell you, John, that I would as soon have turned my back on the battle-field as have wronged the United States out of one penny. It is part of a soldier's religion, this feeling is. It is our eleventh commandment. And here I have got to bear more or less of the stigma of this swindle."

The old officer spoke with an emotion which in one of his habitual dignity and calmness was pathetic. In response, the rector nodded solemnly. Official integrity was not in his view as necessary to salvation as doctrinal correctness; but though it was hardly godliness, and certainly not orthodox, he held it in high respect.

"It is awful, Julian," he murmured. "It is hard upon you, and it is hard upon all of us."

"A swindling claim—by a Murray!" cried the colonel, his usually pallid old face (once very blonde) crimsoning with shame and wrath. "A hundred thousand dollars of Government money for a worthless old barn which had been paid for once! It is perfectly tremendous. I was absolutely stupefied. As soon as I could collect myself, I told Bangs that I disapproved of it with all my soul, and should oppose it by every means in my power. You may imagine the amazement of the low, humbugging black-leg. 'Why,' said he, 'it will be a fortune thrown into your family; it will take this expensive little lady off your hands.' And he is a legislator of the United States! has charge of money wrung from the American people! has taken an oath to do honestly and legally and purely. He ought to be in a common jail for conspiracy and perjury. I had the greatest mind to slap his impudent, leering face. I tell you, John, that the duel went out too soon. We need it in these very days to purify our political life. Honest men ought to have a chance to shoot the scoundrels who rob and disgrace them."

"Thank God, there is a hell!" murmured the rector. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."

"I will repay," echoed Mrs. Murray, saying litany rather inappropriately. The truth is, that she was confounded, not merely by the tale of this wretched intrigue, but also by the fear of losing a highly valued plaything. Notwithstanding that Josie was out too much, and showed too great a fondness for the society of uncertified gentlemen, the old lady set great store by her, and might even be said to love her.

"Thank God, she is not a Murray!" pursued the colonel. "There is no Murray blood in her veins."

"Perhaps she is not altogether in fault," answered the clergyman. He had caught a troubled glance from his wife, and had suddenly remembered how useful Josie was in

amusing her, and, so to speak, in cheering her venerable soul to remain in its body. "There may be some one else at the bottom of this," he added, hoping that it might be so.

"Mrs. Warden," suggested Mrs. Murray, eagerly. "She is a claim-hunter. I wish Josie wasn't so intimate with her. But you permit it, Mr. Murray, and you are friendly to Mrs. Warden yourself; you know you are!"

"She is a member of my church," pleaded Mr. Murray. "I can not cast her off, unless she falls into damnable sin and heresy. Besides, she is a silly, flighty, feather-headed creature, an object of pity. And there is her daughter, a worthy and lovely young woman, what I call a pious soul by birthright. She bears her mother on her back. For the sake of the Æneas, I can't shut my door on the Anchises."

"Yes, Belle is a noble girl," said the colonel. "She is fit to belong to the regular army. She is an officer and a gentleman. Moreover, as for Mrs. Warden herself, I question whether she would care to stir up and push on rival claims. There are other people who do that; there are people whose profession it is; there are people who live by the dirty trade. Probably there are a hundred men in and about Congress who thrive by inventing claims, engineering them, and sharing the loot. Some of these fellows may be responsible for our little lady's naughtiness. But all the same we must stop it."

"Of course we must," coincided the rector; and even Mrs. Murray echoed, "Of course we must."

"We have had godly ancestors and a decent race thus far," pursued the clergyman. "The only blot on our history, which I know of, is that first claim for this accursed barn; and that, so far as I can learn, was made by a trustee, and not by a Murray. I insist that the honor of our family never had a stain upon it. And I will have no stain now. We must induce Josephine to forego this business. I would rather give her fifty thousand dollars out of my own pocket than have her proceed with it."

Then he remembered that the great mass of his wealth lay in that undivided estate which had been the support and the pride of the Murray race, and which had, no doubt, done much toward preserving it from all taint of low greed or of dishonesty. Such moderate capital as he possessed outside of this charmed treasure was all willed to his life; and nothing on earth, in his opinion, could justify him in altering one word of that sacred testament.

"No, I can not do that," he said. "But, if Huldah is willing, we can give something. We might, perhaps, spare ten thousand dollars."

Mrs. Murray nodded. It was not a cheerful assent, for she valued money highly, as do most old and feeble people. Nevertheless, she did assent.

"I will double the sum," offered the colonel.

"But first we ought to talk to her," suggested the lady, possibly hoping that the money might be saved. "Somebody ought to tell her how we feel about this thing. I am sure she would be reasonable if she only knew how we feel. She is so pleasant! so amiable and cheerful—and amusing!" concluded Mrs. Murray, yearning over her favorite and her funds together.

"Certainly she will be reasonable," declared the rector, touched to the marrow by a pathetic tremor in his wife's utterance, and eager as always to spare her the smallest worry. "I will speak to her myself," added this chicken-hearted hero, wondering the while whether he would get the best of the interview or the second best. "Don't be in the least troubled, Huldah. I shall be firm with her, but I shall be mild. She must be spoken to. We can't have this kind of thing going on. It disgraces our family, and it disturbs you. I must and will stop it. But I will be gentle with her."

"You are so harsh, Mr. Murray," replied the old lady, who believed in his timorous threats, as a right-minded goose believes in the hissing and flapping of her gander.

"I am afraid, John, that you will find it a hard job to bell the cat," suggested Colonel Murray, well aware of his brother's non-combateness. "I know that she is a sly little puss, and I suspect that she has claws, notwithstanding her nice purring. Had not I better be your aid-de-camp, and deliver your message?"

But this proposition frightened Mrs. Murray, who knew that the old soldier always did his duty like one under oath, and who even stood herself in some awe of him. She turned to her husband with a nervous jerk and a glance of alarm, which caused him to object at once.

"Leave it to me, Julian," he said, lifting himself slowly out of his arm-chair, and balancing his portly form on his tender feet, as formidable as a ruffled hen. "I am able for her, God willing."

"I do think Mr. Murray had better attend to it," urged Mrs. Murray, turning her eyes imploringly upon the colonel.

"Very well, Huldah," nodded the latter, always considerate to the old lady, as he privately called her.

And, with this understanding, that Rector Murray should head off our sly and persevering little claimant, the interview came to an end.

Leaving the house, Colonel Murray chanced upon Bradford in the street, and held with him a dialogue worth noticing.

"Have you known any thing, major," he inquired, "of a claim which my niece by marriage, Mrs. Augustus Murray, is trying to push through Congress?"

"I have known of it," confessed the young man, beginning to color. "I have not aided it, but I was aware of it."

"Then I must say, major, that you have not done a friendly thing in failing to reveal it to me," declared the old officer and gentleman, in grave displeasure.

"I admit it, colonel," bowed Bradford, once, be it remembered, a staff-officer of Murray's. "I see it distinctly, now that you speak of it. I sincerely beg your pardon."

The colonel bowed, lifted his hat with solemn courtesy, hesitated a moment, and then said, gently, "We all make our mistakes."

However, he could talk no more about it; he added a dry "Good-evening," and walked away.

Bradford went to his rooms in low spirits, and never rested until he had written his former chief a letter of apology, with such explanations as he could add without attacking his former sweetheart. It was one of the best signs in this problematical character that he should set so much store by the good-will and good opinion of such a spotless gentleman as Colonel Murray.

CHAPTER XXXII.

REPROOF ON REPROOF.

SUPPORTED by his wife, or, rather, encumbered and trammelled by that venerable darling, the Reverend John Murray actually brought Josie to book about her claim, and, as he subsequently misrepresented the matter to the colonel, gave her a severe lecture.

"We can not stand it, indeed we can not," he said, trembling a little the while, partly through fear of a retort, partly through fear of scaring Huldah, and partly through fear of sending the blood to his own head. "A hundred thousand dollars for an old barn!"

"For an old barn?" repeated Mrs. Murray.

"There never was such a barn on this continent or in this universe. The claim is monstrous."

"Oh, that is a mere form, uncle," urged Josie, eager to make things pleasant, and not caring how she did it. "That is the way these suits are always managed. You ask a hundred thousand dollars, and you get two thousand."

"I know—I know," stumbled on the rector, also anxious to avoid a contest, but trusting that he might have his will without one. "You do as other people do—some other people. Of course you will hardly get any thing; you probably won't get even two thousand dollars; no, you won't get a cent—not a cent."

"Not a cent?"—from Mrs. Murray.

"Why, the old ramshackle affair was burned sixty years ago!"

"Sixty years ago!" litanied Mrs. Murray.

"I don't suppose it was really worth a thousand, to begin with, and it has been paid for once by the Government."

"By the Government," responded Mrs. Murray, keeping up with him.

"Yes, paid for twice over. The Government paid, you know, two thousand dollars."

"Thousand dollars," mumbled Mrs. Murray, showing signs of fatigue.

"And that, too, included interest and every thing."

"And every thing," added Mrs. Murray, by this time nearly out of breath, both in mind and body.

"And that ends the whole business."

"Business!" gasped Mrs. Murray, beginning to drop behind hopelessly.

"At least, so any honest man would say," the rector ventured to conclude, with a severity which astonished himself.

They had anticipated that Josie would get angry under reproof; that, if she did not scold back in some dreadful fashion, she would at least sulk; that in one way or another she would make the interview an unpleasant one.

But she received her punishment with such graciousness that they were instantly not far from ready to praise her for having deserved it. It will be remembered that she was strangely sweet-tempered, more so than most good people. Perhaps it was because she had no fixed principles, and very few strong likings or dislikings, so that contradiction neither roused her conscience nor galled her emotions. Perhaps it was because she had practical sagacity enough to be contented with working to have her way, without uttering that unwise note of warning, that declaration of war, "I will."

"I dare say I have been silly or wrong," she said. "I can't find out what is right and what is wrong. One great statesman tells me one thing, and another great statesman tells me another. How can you blame a woman for not knowing what to do, and for, perhaps, doing the wrong thing?"

It must not be supposed that she was thinking calmly and talking at her ease. She had been startled; she was afraid that her claim might even yet be wrested out of her hands; and consequently she spoke in real confusion of mind, and with a stammering tongue. If she had shown ability thus far, it was by sheer dint of hasty instinct.

"Of course—of course," answered the rector, smiling and rubbing his swollen hands amicably. "There are all sorts of confused and confounding voices in this Sodom."

"This Sodom!" emphasized Mrs. Murray, who had had time to catch up.

"They remind one of the uncertain and

blasphemous whispers that Christian heard rising from the mouth of the pit."

"From the mouth of the pit," giggled Mrs. Murray, pleased with what seemed to her her own satire.

"In such a trouble you should look around you for Greatheart. I am not much of a Greatheart," he confessed, with a modest laugh; "but I could have told you not to go into this kind of adventure. I am counselor enough for that."

"Yes, Mr. Murray is counselor enough for that," confirmed Aunt Huldah, compressing her wrinkled lips with an air of great strenuousness.

"But why shouldn't I go into it, Uncle John?" asked Josie, in a tone of child-like and confiding simplicity. "If this claim is a just one, then the Government really owes me the money, and ought in honor to pay it, and I am right in demanding it."

The rector stared; he had not fully convinced her, then; he must recommence his argument.

"If," he said—"if is a great word! If there were no hell, sinners would have no occasion to tremble."

"No occasion to tremble," reverberated Mrs. Murray.

"If your claim was just, it would be right to push it, though not magnanimous," continued the clergyman, much supported by these responses. "But is it just? I would not trust my own judgment in the matter," he declared, although he certainly would have trusted it. "But Brother Julian has looked into this wretched business, and his opinion can be depended upon. He says the barn never was worth any thing, to begin with." The rector, be it recollected, was a little given to exaggeration, sometimes humorous, and sometimes not. "He says it was paid for once at ten times its value, or, at least, twice its value."

"Twice its value," added Mrs. Murray, with a corrective intonation.

"So, as to asking payment for it again, and asking a hundred thousand dollars at that, he says it would be—of course you don't mean it—but it would be—scandalous!"

"Scandalous," repeated Mrs. Murray, in a mild murmur, as if the epithet were too severe, and she were disposed to except to it.

"Of course it would be scandalous, if that were the whole case," conceded Josie, a little cast down by this appeal to the authority of Colonel Murray. "But there were a great many more things burned than the barn, and they never were brought into the first account against the Government, and so never were paid for."

"How do you know that?" stared the rector.

"Oh, there is proof of it," affirmed Josie, who as yet had not a bit of testimony in

support of her statement, and only hoped to get some out of old Drinkwater.

"I never heard of it—I can't believe it," insisted the clergyman. "Besides, I don't care if there is," he added, rather unreasonably, though quite naturally. He hated the mere name and fame of having a claimant in his family, and, moreover, this discussion was worrying him, and the blood was mounting to his head. "If there were oceans of proof, I would not take the money," he went on, excitedly. "I abhor such means of gaining lucre. I want to teach you to abhor them. There are so many evil and low persons who are engaged in this sort of business! They have defiled it, and cast shame upon it, and made a defiling pitch of it."

"Defiling pitch!" litanied Mrs. Murray, though in a very small voice, for she noted her husband's rising agitation, and it frightened her.

"Their company in labor, whether one knows them or not, is degradation. I can not bear that any one of my household, any one of my name, should countenance their work, and share in a prosperity that resembles theirs. I would rather go to my grave in poverty, rather be buried from the alms-house, than ask one penny from the Government on a claim. It is a sin against honesty, against free institutions, against the best Government on earth."

He was exaggerating tremendously, as a child might perceive. Moreover, he was a little out of breath, so that it would have been a fine opportunity for Mrs. Murray to put in one of her responses, only that she noted his excitement and was afraid of increasing it.

"You must bear with me," he went on; "you must let me treat you as a child of mine. You carry my name into the world, and you are the wife of my nephew, the daughter-in-law of my brother."

Here his voice of a sudden faltered, and became gentler, like the step of one who discovers that he is treading on a grave.

Stirred by his emotion, Josie put her handkerchief to her eyes, and "poor Augustus" had the need of an honest tear.

Aunt Huldah also remembered the bereavement, and her tremulous eyelids winked and became reddened.

"I am sorry for your troubles, my dear," the rector continued, more softly. "I like you, and wish you all manner of prosperity; but in this one thing I must urge you to defer to my judgment," he insisted, forgetting that he had lately disclaimed all ability for judging, so inconsequent is humanity in a state of suffusion of the face. "I must require—I must beg leave to positively require—that this claim be dropped."

"And how am I to live?" whimpered Josie, though whether really in a tearful con-

dition, or only pretending to be so, finite man knows not.

"Oh, there will be some other way!" suggested Mrs. Murray, vaguely, though with generous intentions.

"You are our relative, and you shall not want," declared the rector, who was emboldened by his wife's hint to utter more than he would have dared without it.

"Oh, thank you!" gushed Josie, sweetly, and wondered how much they meant.

She was not their blood relative, and she knew that her husband had not been a favorite of theirs, and she had inferred that they would probably leave her little or nothing. Indeed, she had been positively told by Mrs. Warden that the Murray money would all go to the Murrays as long as they lasted, and then to churches, charities, and missionaries. Now for the first time they talked of supporting her, and perhaps of bequeathing her something. Would it be a great deal, or only a little? Would it be more than she could fairly hope to get from the claim? In any case it was obviously wise not to offend them by mere speeches; and the moment it seemed wise it seemed right, beautifully and alluringly right. Such is the goodness we inherit from Father Adam's undivided estate of original sin. We are able, after some experience and reflection, to love the virtue which pays.

"I know that you mean to be kind," she continued. "You have been already very, very kind to me. I know, too, Uncle John, that in this matter you mean for the best by me. Well, I must trust to your judgment; I must give the whole thing up."

"Oh, do!" giggled Mrs. Murray, almost hysterically delighted. "I am so glad! So glad you will give it up! I knew you would when you knew how we felt. It will be so much better. So much better in the end. I am so glad!"

Thereupon Josie, making a great effort to do what was judicious and disagreeable, rewarded the old lady with something very like a Judas kiss, and the rector with another, which she would have liked to change into a bite.

The fight was over or seemed to be over. Mr. Murray, looking upon himself as a victor, and a just one, was immeasurably content. By dint of getting into a fume and nearly having a fit, he had found courage to speak his mind boldly, and even to erupt some of his lava and scoria of hyperbole. By dint of this valetudinarian desperation he had succeeded, as he supposed, in belling his pussy-cat. With a full heart he thanked his Maker and praised himself. As for Mrs. Murray, knowing how women love to be recompensed for virtue, she promptly sent a servant down to Pennsylvania Avenue, ordered up a lot of shawls, and gave Josie her pick, at an expense of two hundred dollars.

To show how this generosity touched our heroine, and what a reformation it wrought in her character and purposes, let us relate a scene which took place the very next day between her and Bradford. He had hardly been with her five minutes when he remarked, out of a heart still sore from Colonel Murray's reproof:

"I called partly to say something unpleasant."

"Don't do it," begged Josie, archly. She had had a womanly presentiment of his object in coming, and she was fully prepared in spirit to fence with him and evade him. "Never do any thing that you meant to," she continued, gayly. "First intentions are always silly. Try a sober second thought."

But Bradford, being a handsome and successful young man, was more inclined to rule women than to be subject unto them. Besides, he was pushed forward by his official conscience and by his regard for his old chief.

"Colonel Murray is indignant about your claim," he persisted. "He has given me a lecture for hiding it from him, as I promised you that I would do, weak creature that I was!"

"You weak!" sighed Josie, plunging her splendid eyes to the very bottom of his, and putting on an air of studying him hopelessly for a frail spot. "I wish you were. But you are very strong; altogether too strong to be lovely; you would be lovelier and stronger, too, if you were a little weaker. So the colonel has lectured you? Well, Uncle John and Aunt Huldah have lectured me."

"Have they? My dear child, I am very glad of it."

"Naughty, hard-hearted man!" said Josie, smiling and happy at being called a dear child.

"I broke down under my lecture," he added. "I went on my guilty knees at once. How did you bear yours?"

"I went on my knees, too."

She did not look a bit penitent nor otherwise in earnest; and he did not know whether she meant to give up her claim or not. But he had to admit, as he gazed down upon her delicate features and sparkling eyes, that she was prodigiously fascinating. There was a roguish, child-like smile on her lips; there was in her face a faun-like expression of being naughty, or at least mischievous, without knowing it; there was throughout her whole being a glow, a glamour, a perfume, an intoxicating force, an enchantment; there were all the power and witchery of uncontrolled, wantoning womanhood. A voice seemed to come from her like the call of a dancing Bacchante, crowned with disheveled hair and vine-leaves, and waving a flagon of wine.

Yet he had just come from worshipping

at the shrine of that calm and pure Diana, Belle Warden. Alas! in this matter of dealing with women, Bradford was not a solidly, securely upright man, but swayed and changed with the company he was in. In regard to money and politics and other merely masculine matters, he was fastidiously honorable; but outside of that public highway of life his feet were apt to follow the lead and beckoning of temptation. Meanwhile he in general held firmly that such a woman as Belle Warden was worth many such as Josie Murray.

"You ought to admire me for my obedience," continued the little witch, gratified and emboldened by his steady gaze.

"I do," he declared, with the warmth of a man who finds admiration a luxury.

"Aunt Huldah gave me a shawl for it. You mustn't give me any thing for it."

He so entirely forgot Belle Warden, that he wanted to say, "I will give you a heart."

"Your admiration is sufficient," smiled Josie. "I sometimes think that I have lost all the good-will of my old friend. But you make me hope it isn't so, and that is enough."

"It is very little. I should like to do more." Then he checked himself, remembering that all this was perilous, and added, "So you have dropped the claim. I am very glad."

"I shall do nothing more about it," she murmured, by no means pleased with this change in the conversation.

"But you will withdraw it, of course? Otherwise it might go through by mere momentum, so to speak. You will have to withdraw the papers from the committee."

"Oh dear!" groaned Josie, half angry with him, and meanwhile, be it remembered, a good deal in love with him. "Will nothing content you short of making me cut my own throat?" she added, drawing a little hand athwart that prettily rounded object. "See here, Edgar Bradford, isn't mine a hard case? I was brought up on plenty of money, and now I am a poor relation. Do you think I like it? Do you think I like to have an empty purse—to look forward to a life of dependence—to expect to be a penniless old woman? Why can't I let myself have a chance, if the world wants to give it to me? Why must you urge me to take the bread out of my own mouth? It is very, very hard of you."

He was in a difficult situation. How could he push her to abdicate this possibility of a fortune without offering her his own estate and hand? How could a man who had more than once kissed that lovely face insist upon consigning it to the rusty bonnets of indigence?

"Oh, my poor—dear—child!" he faltered, really pitying her, longing to do much for her, and yet not daring to trust her with his happiness, nor willing to sacrifice to her

his honor. "I wish I knew what to say to you."

They were standing face to face, hardly a foot apart. His handsome hazel eyes, usually interesting by their pensiveness, and just now pathetic with compassion, were gazing steadily into hers.

Either they drew her to hope, or they compelled her to longing. Of a sudden she raised her arms, slid them gently, tenderly around his neck, and held him fast.

There was no resisting the warm touch of the little siren; he placed a hand on each of her temples, and eagerly kissed her forehead.

But that was all; there he had strength to stop. It was a cruel trial to a woman who had ventured so much, and who longed to win so much. Her head bent, her face a flame of startled blood, her eyes drooping in tender expectation, she waited a moment for him, while he neither stirred nor spoke.

For a moment Bradford staggered and nearly fell from such wisdom as he had. Then he remembered that if he joined his life in any serious manner with this woman, he could hardly avoid doing her work, and so ceasing to be an honest legislator.

"There!" he exclaimed, suddenly loosening her hold on him and walking about the room: "I can do nothing with you. You must have your own way, for all me. I must tell Colonel Murray that you are too much for me, that he can't depend on my fidelity to him."

"But you won't tell him any more?" whimpered Josie, humiliated by the failure of her appeal to Bradford's emotional nature, and at the same time alarmed for her claim. "You won't tell him that I may perhaps let it go on? You don't know that I will. You have no right to tell him so."

"Oh Lord! I shall have to be a rogue," groaned Bradford.

"Oh do—for my sake," begged Josie, startled by a spasm of hysteric humor, and smiling through her tears.

It was an unlucky speech for her; it ended the breaking of her charm. Bradford laughed aloud at her drollery, but in so doing he recovered his composure, and the danger of his becoming a very great rogue was for the present over.

"I shall have to be false to my old chief," he promised; and there all talk of a serious nature between them came to a close; the rest of the interview passed in banalities.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HOLDING ON TO MR. HOLLOWBREAD.

TEMPTRESS to evil as Josie was, it is difficult not to pity her, unless one is without a heart, or at least without an imagination.

The man whom she best liked would not

propose marriage, would not do any thing energetic or definite in the way of love-making, and would not even show as much friendliness and serviceableness as various less favored cavaliers.

All this troubled her much more than could easily have been guessed, either by those who merely saw her butterfly about society, or by those who knew her intimately.

Many times the thought of it brought tears into those eyes which any one would have judged beauteous enough never to plead or grieve in vain. There were days when she was by no means certain that she should not fall sick, and perhaps die of a disappointment in love.

But, thanks be to that Power which has made women stronger than they seem to be, her three or four fits of crying did not kill her; and when it became obvious that Bradford would not immediately take her to his arms and mould her destiny, she went on moulding it for herself.

To be sure, she came to no distinct decision, and lived, so to speak, from hand to mouth; but in spite of vacillations, and through mere drifting, she tended mainly in one direction: she held on to her claim, and held on to Mr. Hollowbread.

We ought to state, out of mere simple justice to her, that her prevalent purpose with regard to this enamored statesman was to use him to get "her money," and then to throw him away.

In order, however, to have many strings to her bow, and so "make sicker" of hitting some game or other, she kept all her men about her. The Byronic and bumptious Bray was encouraged to call often, to talk much confiding fustian about General Bangs's lofty soul and his own lefty soul, and to strut away in a peacock state of satisfaction, under the impression that he was a favorite.

The Apollonian Beauman, who wanted to be Minister to Portugal, and had no manner of claim to the position except that four hundred women in Washington thought him "perfectly beautiful," also dropped in frequently to try his magnetism upon the fairest lady of them all, and, mayhap, to receive a shock or two himself.

Young Calhoun Clavers, too, was a constant visitor. It was at this period that he laid his twenty years, his cotton-planting descent, his Southern simplicity, enthusiasm, and truth, his fervent, boyish love, and his slender prospects in life, at the feet of a guileless widow two years his senior. From a sentimental point of view the sacrifice was a rich one, but it was of very little consequence to Josie, and she kindly declined it. The soft-hearted and not yet very hard-headed youth did not know what a favor had been done him, and retired from the interview exceedingly sorrowful.

"I met a corpse descending your steps, Mrs. Murray," said Beauman, who entered a moment later; "and I recognized the deadly gashes of your dagger."

"You recognized nothing of the sort," replied Josie, with that light-hearted laugh of hers which was so deceiving, because it seemed so utterly unconscious of grave emotions. "You met Mr. Clavers with one of his malarious headaches. He is subject to them."

It must be understood that she quite liked Clavers; that she fully perceived what a fund of faithful love there was in him; and that, while perforce rejecting his impecunious offer, she felt grateful for it. Moreover, there was in her somewhat of that womanly honor, or wisdom, which will not reveal one man's heart-humiliation to another.

"And he was taken with his fit here?" continued Beauman. "So many men are! I think it would be imprudent for me to stay."

"As if I were a fever-and-ague district, Mr. Beauman! I don't think any thing would give you a headache, except failing to go to Portugal."

"Couldn't you lend me forty or fifty Congressmen to save me from that calamity? You could spare them?"

She laughed again, not a bit vexed with his fling at her multitudinous flirting, and satisfied at having drawn him off from the subject of Clavers.

"It would be wisdom in us to combine our forces," she added. "Suppose you lend me your forty or fifty Congresswomen."

"Useless. No woman will work for another," retorted Beauman, who felt himself to be the equal of any lady, and did not take feminine chaffing meekly.

Then Sykes Drummond dropped in, for he also had been lured again to the Murray shrine, notwithstanding his fretfulness over the loss of the Murray claim, and over the Appleyard rencontre.

"What, Beauman! not sailed yet?" he haw-hawed in his irritating fashion. "Well, I suppose it is only a question of time."

Beauman, who was accustomed to dominate Congressmen by dint of godlike beauty and lordly deportment, made no reply further than to gaze at Drummond with an impassive countenance, much as a Horse Guards swell might gaze at a forward grocer.

"Of course it is only a question of time," interposed Josie, always eager to keep her men on terms with each other. "Do you suppose, Mr. Drummond, that you are the only spoiled child of fortune? You might as well say at once that you wish him a pleasant voyage."

"I wish him a thousand," declared Drummond, exceedingly wroth at Beauman's stare. "But I fear it is of no use. You see, Beauman, you haven't graduated; you haven't

been through the regular mill; that is your weak point. Nobody gets a fancy office except broken-down Congressmen and secretaries."

"I believe the Executive and the Senate decide these questions," said the would-be diplomat, calmly looking down upon the representative of the Lower House.

"I have always understood so," answered Drummond, with a retaliative haw, haw!

Of course this sort of thing was too pleasant to last, and Mr. Beauman presently departed, with crushing dignity.

"What is the use of telling people the truth?" demanded Josie of her remaining admirer. "You only make enemies."

"I can escape this one by going to Portugal," laughed Drummond. "He will never be minister there, or anywhere else. Barring some first-class selections, which must be made in order to get our real work abroad done, missions are for the General Hornblowers and the honest John Vanes, when they can't get elected any longer. Beauman is simply a genteel fellow of good parts and superior personal attractions. He never has held an office nor done partisan pulling and hauling. Any old political hack can beat him out of sight on this track. Why shouldn't I tell him so? It is a service to him and a pleasure to me—haw, haw!"

"Ah, Mr. Drummond! you are very hard," commented Josie, studying him with an eye which did not indicate unmixed commendation.

Yes, he was hard, he was boorish, he was domineering, he was thoroughly selfish. There was not, so far as she could judge, a tender or a sympathetic or truly courteous spot in his whole nature.

She could not want him as an advocate, much less as a lover, and by no means as a husband. Nor could she want the *dilettante*, delicate-handed Beauman, nor, should she want him, could she probably get him.

Clavers, too, so willing to give his all, but whose all amounted to mere heart-beats, was not a man to whom she could bind her destinies.

Against many others, whom she had thought of as her possible Greathearts, there were likewise objections, either as to devotion, or desirableness, or ability. The world was something like an army, very imposing and magnificent when surveyed in mass, but composed individually of commonplace, unattractive hirelings.

In short, until Edgar Bradford could somehow be secured, it seemed necessary to stick to the faithful and useful Hollowbread. It was the more necessary because there was that additional evidence to be obtained in support of the claim, and she knew of no one else who would be likely to do it so well and with so slight a prospect of reward.

So she clung to her eldest-born admirer,

and eventually went with him to Beulah County, and did a very strange thing there.

We must do her the justice to repeat emphatically that she was extremely averse to this audacious pilgrimage in search of old Drinkwater. She did not want to raid about the world in the sole company of Mr. Hollowbread, partly lest Dave Shorthand should show her up again in the *News-monger*, but mainly lest Edgar Bradford should hear of it, and never call on her more.

She tried to coax her venerable advocate to set off alone; but here she came in conflict with his really puissant *vis inertia*. He could not possibly be put in motion.

At last, having obtained a private interview with General Bangs, and learned from him that additional testimony must positively be had to make her business hopeful, she decided to risk the adventure.

Although the holidays were over and the session had re-opened, Mr. Hollowbread was only too glad to accompany her. He dropped his inflation bill as if it were the most mischievous of measures, which indeed it was; he turned his back on the prayers of office-seeking constituents, on the public woe and weal, and on his own glory. With Mrs. Murray's arm in his, he would have quitted Paradise and eloped to the infernal regions.

Josie meanwhile informed her relatives that she was called to New York by a matter of investment, explaining to her conscience that New York meant New York State, and that the investment was her claim. When the colonel proposed to accompany her, she would not hear to it, alleging that it was midwinter, and her dear uncle would surely catch cold.

As a security against tattle she left Washington alone, and Hollowbread joined her at the Baltimore station. Thenceforward they made the trip in company, though with due regard to speed and propriety, traveling by sleeping-car, and meeting only in public. It seemed to our love-lorn Congressman that the lady to whom he had proposed marriage, and whose decision he was even then humbly awaiting, treated him with cruel strictness.

Josie herself felt inclined to relax her monastic severity when she reached the small, bleak, snow-bound village of Murray Hill. In the first place, the hotel was a doleful little tavern, cold, windy, comfortless, unkempt, dirty, musty, and dispiriting, a lair calculated to cow any woman with a sense of isolation and helplessness, and to make her espouse the first man who would offer to carry her away. In the second place, old Drinkwater, bearing with him all her hopes of fortune, had departed into the unknown.

"Gone!" Josie gasped at the landlord, a large, flabby, shabbily-dressed man, richly scented with whisky and tobacco. "Gone where? Not dead, I hope?"

"Well, no," mine host opined, apparently surprised at the suggestion, and even considering it irrational, not to say injurious. He didn't think old Drinkwater would do any thing so hasty. He had lived to ninety-three, and got through the worst of it. What was the use of going back on himself and dying now? Any body who knew him would allow that he had prejudices against dying. And he was a mighty obstinate man—couldn't be shoved around by any body. But he certainly wasn't in the village. He had quit about a week before, and never told where he was driving to. Likely enough he was visiting some old covey somewhere or other. He was a lonesome sort of codger, of course, and knew ten times as many people in the grave-yard as out of it. Sometimes he would put off to see some deaf and blind old chap that he had been thick with seventy or eighty years ago. Last spring he had dropped in on old Squire Bunker, of Lockport, and challenged him to run a race round the block. "Why," says the squire, "I couldn't walk it!" If they wanted to find the old fellow, they had better hunt up the greatest patriarch they knew, somebody two or three hundred years old, and ask for Drinkwater. But, if they would stop long enough at Murray Hill, they would be sure to see him. He had been coming back to Murray Hill for the last century, and wasn't going to forget his way all of a sudden.

All this the landlord stated in the tone of a humorist who keenly relishes his subject and his own treatment of it. In narrating the Lockport incident, he imitated with startling energy both the stentorian bass of Drinkwater and the piping utterance of the decayed Bunker. Moreover, he went on to chuckle at considerable length over the fine preservation of the village Methuselah, the vigor of his lungs, eyes, ears, and members, and the unimpaired soundness of his noddle. But he could not give so much as a guess as to where he might be; nor would he, when pressed, affirm positively that he was still in the land of the living.

"Of course the old man might kick the bucket," he admitted, with rational candor. "He an't much in the habit of it, and nobody ever seen him do it once; but still he might, on great provocation."

From a great-grandson of Drinkwater's, a young farmer of about twenty-five, they learned nothing more positive.

"Great-grandfather had been talkin' about Lockport," he suggested. "But there's no tellin' where he'll fetch up, nor when he'll fetch round. When he's once out, he keeps agoing till he's tired on't. He an't offen gone's long's this, though. Dead? No, guess not," and he stared at the singular surmise. "Some folks think he's out on the Lakes. He follered the sea when he was a

boy—follered it for forty year or so—and he's had a hankerin' lately to git aboard ship once more. But I kinder reckon he wouldn't voyage in the winter-time. Don't think he's dead. And yit he might be."

Then came news, brought by a horse-dealer just returned from Buffalo, that old Jeremiah Drinkwater had really taken a trip in a lake schooner, and that there were fears lest he had suffered shipwreck.

The report was a terrible shock to Josie; her galleon of hopes had gone down in deep waters. She pushed aside her cup of milk-and-water tea, rose from the narrow, unsteady, barren table of the hostelry, and went to mope in the small, frowzy, scantily-furnished parlor, half lighted by a single kerosene-lamp, and half warmed by a swart, close-cylinder stove.

A doleful arena it was in which to combat the tigers of dullness, loneliness, and disappointment. It seemed to her that if there had been a bright wood-fire in the room she could have borne her sorrows with some fortitude, whereas that sombre iron demon, without a ray of cheering illumination, and giving forth its chary heat with a morose gloominess, only added blackness to her darkness. To what or to whom could she turn for sympathy and comforting but to Mr. Hollowbread.

"Don't you wish to smoke?" she had considerably asked, when they quitted that frigid Sahara, the tea-table.

Now, but for her he would have fled to the bar-room and consumed whisky-punches and cigars until bed-time, though in the main little given to such pastime. But the beloved of his heart he must not and did not desire to leave solitary, unless she plainly requested it.

"If you have no objection, I would prefer to remain with you, Mrs. Murray," he said, with that deference which he now always accorded to her, the truly enamored old Lothario.

"Thank you. Do stay!" responded Josie, gratefully, so low had she been brought by discomfort and worry.

Then there was a long discussion over the chances of the claim, the advocate distinctly conceding that they were somewhat dubious, and the claimant positively trembling under the thought that they might be so.

At last Josie dropped into silence, brooding over her suddenly darkened future, and querying what she could do to brighten it. It seemed to her, as it has probably seemed at times to every fortuneless woman, that fate drove her upon seeking a husband.

Well, here was one to her hand, respectable in character, eminent in position, wealthy, devoted, and only objectionable by reason of being forty years her senior. She glanced at him sidelong; the dim light of the kerosene-lamp favored him; it did not

appear to her that he looked insupportable. Portly he certainly was, and his visage had a rather too sumptuous rubicund glory; but sartorial cunning had done its best by his figure, and his massive Roman features were still comely. As for his age—well, there was a dim, funereal encouragement in that, too, inasmuch as whatever woman he married might shortly be a widow, and would, of course, have financial consolations. It was an ugly train of thought for a young lady to indulge in, and we will hope that she did not dwell upon it long or quite consciously. But the result of it was, that she found his size and his years somewhat the less distasteful.

Meanwhile, had she no recollection of Edgar Bradford? Yes, certainly yes; but she shut her eyes and bit her lips when his image arose before her; she strove with petulant energy to forget him. He had been unloving and ungrateful and unkind; he had not cherished her, nor even helped her, as he ought to have done; he had actually responded to her embrace by kissing her coldly, and laying her aside promptly. It was his fault that she was here alone with this old man; and as she thought of it she once more shut her lustrous eyes and bit her rosy lips. We are not sure, indeed, that there was not a dimness of tears in the one, and a faint stain of blood on the other.

All this time she was sitting in front of the grim stove, trying in vain to warm her tired feet at it, her white skirt showing across her delicate instep, her small hands clasped plaintively over her knees, and her Grecian head bent in sad meditation. She was a lovely, a very lovely, object to look upon, attractive enough to draw a long gaze from any one, even from a perfect stranger. Mr. Hollowbread glanced at her stealthily from moment to moment, and thought that he had never before seen her so beautiful, so fascinating. He painted her profile on his very heart; he so fixed it there that he never afterward forgot its smallest line; never forgot how she looked in that very moment. It must be understood, also, that, excusing his boldness by the chill of the room, he had ventured to draw his chair up to the stove, so that they sat very close together.

"Have we exhausted every subject?" she at last said, turning a dejected smile upon him.

"There is one subject of which I have promised not to speak," ventured Mr. Hollowbread, fearing the while lest she should request him to leave her merely for alluding to it.

The poor, tired, lonely, desperate little beauty gave him a quick glance, which was not a glance of displeasure.

"May I speak of it, Mrs. Murray?" burst forth the love-lorn, half-crazed man, his voice, his veins, his limbs full of trembling, and his

mouth twitching with emotion. "May I say to you that I have not changed—that I still await your answer—that I live for you?"

It seemed to Josie that some irresistible impulse seized her, causing her to do a thing from which she had hitherto revolted, and of which she was sure to repent the next instant. Without answering by word, she pushed her chair violently toward Mr. Hollowbread, laid one young hand on his old shoulder, and then laid her young head beside it, softly crying.

"Is it possible?" he gasped, almost out of his senses with joy. "Mrs. Murray—Josie Murray—my dear one! Is it possible that you accept me?"

"Yes," whispered Josie. "Oh dear, I don't know! Will you promise not to tell till my claim is sure? Yes, I do accept you."

Grief, loneliness, longing for sympathy, fear of consequences, egotism, revolt, and still acquiescence all were mingled together, and all were uttered. But Hollowbread was conscious of but one thing—the unexpected, the hungered-for, the priceless boon of acceptance.

Then his mahogany face bowed over her Grecian head, and his dyed mustache descended upon her girlish cheek.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MR. DRINKWATER'S TESTIMONY.

CLOSE upon the betrothal followed a blessing: that is to say, a lucky circumstance which had nothing to do with it in the way of cause and effect; and which therefore a certain class of reasoners would inevitably set down as providential.

On the very subsequent morning the missing Drinkwater turned up, just as dry as if he had never been reported drowned, and just as lively as if his works had been constructed to run two centuries. Having learned from his great-grandson that somebody at the hotel wanted to see him, this survivor of at least two thousand millions of human beings put on his box-coat without assistance, and stumped half a mile through the snow to find out what was stirring.

When Josie and her affianced entered the parlor after breakfast, they beheld a roughly-clad, heavily-limbed, huge-chested, harsh-featured, Roman-nosed man, who did not look to be above seventy-five, but who really was near twenty years older. His long and still fairly abundant tousled hair was hardly lighter than iron-gray, and his grim visage, although deeply wrinkled, had an air of permanent solidity as if it were carved in oak. Instead of sitting to rest, as most men of his age would have done, he was tramp-

ing up and down the room with strong, noisy steps, meanwhile swinging a hickory cane thicker than a policeman's bludgeon.

Having already inquired the names of his visitors, and had them pointed out to him through a crack of the dining-room door, he recognized them at once on their appearance.

"Sarvent, sir!" he shouted at Mr. Hollowbread in a voice loud enough to be heard at the top of the chimney. "I am Jeremiah Drinkwater. I heerd you wanted to see me."

"Oh!" exclaimed the delighted Josie, dashing forward and grasping one of the old fellow's enormous horny hands. "Oh, Mr. Drinkwater, I am so perfectly overjoyed to meet you! You don't know me, of course. I am Mrs. Augustus Murray—one of the Murrays that used to live here—one of the Murray Hill Murrays. Of course you remember them."

"I remember 'em!" roared Mr. Drinkwater, as if he meant that the deaf and dead should hear him.

What a voice the man must have had even in his mewling infancy! Forty years of sea-going, of howling commands and responses amidst the turmoil of tempests, had only increased his pneumatic bore and sonorousness. Thirty subsequent years of agricultural swearing at horses and oxen had but kept him in first-rate trumpeting condition.

"Sit down, my dear sir," begged Mr. Hollowbread, after he had taken his turn at the nearly centenarian fist. "You must be still suffering somewhat from your late exposure. We heard that you were shipwrecked. How did you escape?"

"I didn't go to sea!" bawled and "hollered" Mr. Drinkwater, without seeming to know that he was uttering a joke, and one as old as himself at that.

Josie giggled in her gayest and most musical fashion. The hale ancient diverted her, and she liked him immensely. He was so rough and tough, so burly and blustering, such a truly masculine old male, that all the womanishness in her went out toward him, and, to use her own tongue, she thought him "splendid." Indeed, he was little less than sublime. He reminded her of a he-lion, or a buffalo bull, or a mad elephant, and when he roared she felt as if she were in a storm at sea, with breakers all around her.

"My uncles remember you perfectly," she prattled on, stating what might be, rather than what she knew. "You must recollect them—the Reverend John Murray—Colonel Julian Murray."

"I've heerd of the colonel," admitted Mr. Drinkwater, in tones of thunder. "He became an officer, and fit well. That's right. I done my fightin' when he was a baby."

"You look as if you could fight now, sir,"

said Josie, surveying him with approval—an amused approval.

So he did. If I were on a helpless merchantman, which should be boarded by capering, yelling, slashing pirates, I should not be a bit surprised to see the blood-thirsty assailants headed by such a figure as old Jeremiah Drinkwater, and I can imagine myself as jumping overboard to escape his deafening charge. In very fact, he had diversified an existence which might otherwise have been stupid with a considerable amount of sanguinary adventure.

Driven from the seas in 1812 by the Britannia which then ruled them, he had enlisted in the army which defended his native border-land, playing a part, for instance, in the battle of Murray Hill, and thereby witnessing the conflagration of Josie's barn. Subsequently he had taken service in some South American warfare, and pirated about the Pacific or Atlantic in a free, impartial style, which brought him much profit, not to mention honor.

Of these filibustering feats, by-the-way, he was not disposed to talk, except to intimate acquaintance. This reticence, however, proceeded from old habits of caution, and not from any weak-minded sentiment, such as remorse. As we shall presently discover, the antique hero's manliness was adulterated with but a small dose of conscience, not enough to do Satan himself any harm. With regard to the world of final judgment, that solemn world which to many people seemed so alarmingly near him, it is doubtful whether he bestowed any more thought upon it than would a hearty rhinoceros of the same age.

"Yes, you look as if you could whip an Englishman yet," declared Mr. Hollowbread. "I wish I had half your health and strength," he added, with a vague idea that he was himself a youngster, though a weakly one.

It was well, of course, to say this sort of thing, if he wanted a favor out of Mr. Drinkwater. An old gent in good repair is usually as proud of his excellent digestion and circulation as a young athlete is of his biceps; furthermore, he is always, or nearly always, fond of life, and likes to be told that many years still remain to him. But our partially dilapidated Congressman spoke from honest impulse, as well as from policy. He fervently admired the stalwart patriarch; he regarded him with that wondering respect which we accord, for instance, to a Roman bridge two thousand years old and still traversable; he almost obsequiously contrasted this noisy vigor with the wheezy flabbiness which he himself exhibited, though in the heyday of sixty.

"I am pretty chirk for ninety-three," was the clamorous admission of the ancient mariner.

"I should really like to learn your secret

of life," continued Hollowbread, eager to know how to keep young, so that he might be worthy of a youthful wife. "You are attentive to the laws of health, I suppose? Very careful as to your diet. Allow me to ask what you eat?"

"Eat! I eat any thing I want to."

"Indeed!" stared the Congressman, who could not eat every thing he wanted to, not by a considerable bill of fare. "But what do you take at breakfast, for instance?"

"Ham an' eggs generally, or whatever there is on the table," was the valuable response. "I'm very fond of fried hasty pudding an' molasses. And always my good coffee!" concluded Mr. Drinkwater, smacking his lips.

"Bless me!" commented Mr. Hollowbread. "But no stimulants, I presume?" he inquired, remembering that he himself had been obliged to diminish his potations of late years. "No ardent spirits or other strong drinks, I mean. You are correctly named Drinkwater, no doubt," he smiled, with that readiness and originality of wit for which Congressmen are famous.

"I give up rum about forty year ago," bellowed Mr. Drinkwater.

As this left half a century or so during which rum had not been given up, the statement did not seem to throw much light on the temperance question.

"I drink ale," continued the old fellow.

"Oh, you do? But how about tobacco? Do you ever smoke?"

"No. Never did."

"Ah!" said Mr. Hollowbread, with the tone of a man who is coming to the facts at last. Here was something for his guidance; he would see if he could not quit his cigars. "Always chawed?" shouted and hurraed Mr. Drinkwater.

Josie burst into a laugh; she heartily admired the stormy old animal of a reprobate; she liked him all the better for his ham and fried pudding, his drinking and chawing. What she really fancied in him, as philosophical people will understand, was sturdiness—force—virility—the extreme of unwomanliness.

"Good heavens! I begin to believe there are no laws of health, after all," observed Hollowbread, with a sigh and a smile. "I presume, however, that you have led an active life, and given yourself plenty of air."

"Born hearty an' lived outdoors," answered the old man, stating one of the greatest of the laws of health, though without in the least knowing it.

Next our Congressman inquired whether the patriarch had any brothers or sisters still living.

"I have one sister," he replied, with a grimace of dislike. "I haven't seen her but once in ten years."

"Why, Mr. Drinkwater?" began Josie.

"She's an old Jezebel," continued Drinkwater. "She come up to me in Lockport yesterday. I heard a voice behind me that I thought I knew. 'Why, is this you, Jeremiah?' says somebody, all so smoothly. I turned round, an' there was Sallie. 'Hullo, you old Jezebel!' says I, an' went about my business."

As this was clearly a subject which riled the venerable man's temper, it did not seem judicious to keep him on it, and nothing more was said about Sallie.

This caution, by-the-way, is another proof of Josie Murray's cleverness, for her curiosity as to the cause, nature, and duration of the family quarrel was very great.

"Oh dear!" she said, for days afterward, "I wish I knew why his sister was an old Jezebel."

But at the time more soothing matters were broached, and Mr. Drinkwater was laboriously stroked back to amiability.

At last Mr. Hollowbread opened business; they had come about the Murray barn, etc., which was destroyed, etc.; what might be the approximate value of the same?

"I swore to that once," thundered Drinkwater, without hesitation, his memory evidently as sound as his voice. "It was worth a thousand dollars!"

Mr. Hollowbread hastened to the door, opened it, and sent away a boy who was lounging in the passage.

"Oh, Mr. Drinkwater! was that all?" pleaded Josie. "Surely it must have been more than that. Only think of it! A large, fine barn, full of hay, with carts and carriages and tools! Why, Mr. Drinkwater, do think again. All those things only worth a thousand dollars!"

"They was all lumped together," he asserted, though he glanced at her in a puzzled way. "They come to that."

"But, my dear sir!" interposed Hollowbread, "there must certainly be some mistake in this calculation. Please to remember that the Murrys were the wealthiest people of this region, and lived in a generous style corresponding to their abundant means. One could hardly suppose that they would have mediocre outbuildings. I venture to think it probable that this barn alone—the mere, simple, solid edifice of the barn—was worth a thousand dollars. The other articles named should have been paid for—were doubtless intended to be included in the payment—but were not. Now, according to the best of your recollection, is it not so?"

"What do you want?" boomed Mr. Drinkwater, after a prolonged stare at the Congressman.

Mr. Hollowbread, raising his voice to match a supposed deafness, began to repeat his suggestions.

"I hear you well enough," interrupted the

old man, fairly bawling him down. "What I want to know is what you're drivin' at."

A qualm of conscience and of shame caused the legislator to hesitate over the avowal of his fraudulent purpose.

But Josie Murray (that surely irresponsible agent, so innocent did she look in her immorality)—Josie Murray had no scruples and no sense of dishonor.

"We are driving at money, Mr. Drinkwater," she said, smiling like a seraph, and flashing her eyes at him as brightly as if he were a marriageable youngster.

"Gov'ment money?" was the next shout.

"Yes, Government money," avowed Josie, never ceasing to smile. "That is, money that the Government owes me. My money."

Mr. Hollowbread had been aghast at these bold confessions; but he saw now that his Josie had rightly divined the moral nature of Drinkwater; that the old fellow had not the least objection to fleecing his native country, and only wanted to be told how to do it.

"Yes, it is a claim," he bolstered up his courage to add. "It was paid once in 1820 to the amount of one thousand and interest."

"I recollect it," interjected the ancient, coolly, as if it were a common thing to remember what passed half a century ago.

"But that seems a mere trifle," continued Hollowbread, urged on by a coquettish glance and a roguish grimace from his betrothed. "It would seem as if it must have been simply the value of the mere barn."

"Barn, horses, oxen, carts, hay, an' every thing," fulminated the old carronade, with a violence which made Hollowbread feel as if he were being blown from the mouth of a cannon. "Money was money in them days. It wasn't paper rags."

"Oh dear! you must be mistaken, Mr. Drinkwater," protested Josie. "You didn't swear to that. Barn and appurtenances, you said. Those were your very words."

"Was them the words? I didn't read it myself," confessed Drinkwater.

"And so you see?" continued Josie, argumentatively—"you see that we can put in another claim for all these separate things. They must have been worth a great deal more than the mere barn and appurtenances. Of course they ought to be paid for. And, if you will swear to them as having been destroyed, then I can get my money. Don't you see, Mr. Drinkwater?"

"Yes, I see," admitted the veteran of 1812, with a promptitude which did his intellect great credit, and with an expenditure of racket which testified anew to the soundness of his wind. "So, you want another affidavit? There's something for witnesses, I s'pose?"

"One hundred dollars down is the usual fee," suggested Hollowbread, with a crimson face.

"And two hundred more when I get my money," added Josie, trembling all over in her eagerness.

"All right," said Drinkwater.

He was perfectly willing—the venerable freebooter, the unconscionable patriarch—to swear to any thing profitable. If he had been a child of this century, instead of the last, he could not have been more naturally a lobbyist, nor shown himself better suited for a career inside politics.

"You are fit to go to Congress, Mr. Drinkwater," laughed Josie; and Hollowbread made not even an inward protest against the remark, merely wincing under it in silence.

Then writing materials were produced, and an affidavit of painstaking minuteness was drawn up, the lovely claimant suggesting as many carriages, carts, steeds, and horned cattle as she deemed necessary to give her bill a respectable outfit, the heretofore patriot and pirate acceding to as many items as he judged credible, and the Congressman herding the whole multitude on foolscap.

Next the two men went to the office of a notary-public, and there Mr. Drinkwater helped him God in due form, subsequently receiving a roll of bills from Mr. Hollowbread, and tramping homeward well content.

Our Congressional lover now returned to his affianced with a guilt on his conscience proportioned to the joy in his heart; but whatever may have been his qualms, they were dissipated by the reception which she gave him as he panted into the tavern-parlor, holding out the affidavit.

With a little scream of gladness, she bounded into his arms, kissed his crimson and purple-veined cheek, and dropped her head on his shoulder.

Never, perhaps, was a sinful and remorseful legislator happier than Hollowbread was in that palpitating moment. Not for thirty years had he put so much heart into a kiss as went into the one which he laid on those rosy young lips.

The embrace, though fervent, was brief, for Josie soon had enough of it. She drew herself away from his protuberant advances with the somewhat frigid words, applicable, not to the hugging, but to the affidavit: "Oh, what a piece of luck!"

"To think that this good fortune should follow immediately upon our engagement!" said Hollowbread, whom love and happiness had made temporarily religious, or, rather, superstitious. It did not occur to him to suspect that, had the good fortune come first, Providence might have used it to prevent the engagement.

"How quick he was to agree to the right thing!" answered Josie, who could hardly have been in a pious frame. "It was I who brought him to it," she crowed, gleefully,

ignoring her advocate's part in the transaction. "It takes a woman to manage a man, even when he is as old as Methuselah."

"Yes, it was you who brought him to it," conceded Hollowbread, quite willing that she should have the whole of that woeful honor, but at the same time caressing her glossy locks with an approving and petting hand.

"There!" said Josie, drawing still farther away. "I mustn't let you muss my hair; somebody might come in. Now do sit down and cipher up what it will come to."

Somewhat hurt by this mercenary haste and coldness, Mr. Hollowbread took out a gold pencil, which had come to him from the cornucopia of Congressional stationery—a pencil which had often served him to scribble projects of laws and of amendments to our venerated Constitution—and proceeded to figure up the probable profits of Mr. Drinkwater's false swearing.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE TROUBLES OF AN ENGAGED MAN.

OUR Congressman was not quite as happy during his return journey to Washington as an accepted lover has a presumed right to be.

They were always in crowded conveyances, where betrothal bussings were out of the question, and squeezings of the hand scarcely more practicable; and, moreover, Mr. Hollowbread found—whatever other and younger gentlemen may have found before him—that Josie did not seem to be one of the snuggling sort.

She sat a little apart from him, with a wide crack of daylight always between them, keeping her fingers carefully gloved and beyond the reach of his pulpy grasp, and, in short, enforcing a disagreeably high-toned decorum.

Her talk, too, was of the same unaffianced character, consisting largely of remarks upon interesting objects by the wayside, and never intentionally approaching any topic more emotional than "her money."

If he spoke of his love, she answered him with merely a steady, studious gaze, and a smile which would have appeared to any one else either roguish or downright quizzical. If he pressed her to name the marriage-day, she laughed gayly and responded evasively; or she seized the opportunity to impress upon him once more a duty which he already held in abomination—the duty of keeping the engagement a secret until her claim should be secured.

"*Pour encourager les autres*," she explained, with a merriment that seemed to him almost heartless. "If people should find out

that I am promised to you, they might care just enough about it to vote against me."

Necessarily, even an old lover could not be charmed with these proprieties and precautions. To be sure, he thought her beautiful in all that she did, and fascinatingly clever in all that she said; but, nevertheless, he was not quite as happy during every minute of his betrothal as he had supposed that he should be. Then came a railroad accident. Two hundred passengers were tumbled off the track in a bunch, without damage, indeed, to life or limb, but with the loss of a connection.

Mr. Hollowbread and Josie had to take up for the night with such quarters as they could find in the Penn House, in the little town of Keystone.

He would have liked this detention immensely, only that his carcass had been bruised and his nerves badly shaken by the upset, so that he felt like anointing himself and going to bed, rather than sitting up to make love in a populous parlor.

Josie, also, was so far tired that she went to her hen-coop of a room early, forgetting, or deliberately neglecting, to press her lover's hand at parting.

So Mr. Hollowbread limped up to his own hen-coop, and made his somewhat elaborate preparations for rest. Among his necessities was a vessel of the kind known to Congressmen as a quart bottle. He surely needed something strong, if ever a man did; and he always carried his own strength, to be sure of a good article. This bottle he took from his carpet-bag, with sincere thankfulness that it had not been broken, and placed it on his almost imperceptible night-table, a diminutive skeleton with rattling lower limbs. Then he perceived that he had no ice-water, and rang his bell some minutes for a servant who did not come. At last, finding it chilly standing there without a dressing-gown, he gave the bell-cord a superhuman jerk, and got into bed. Shortly afterward heavy steps ascended the neighboring stairway, marched with provoking deliberation down the hall, and in due course of time marched by his room.

"I say!" called Mr. Hollowbread, out of patience and indignant. "I say!"

The steps halted, and then tramped loudly back; the door was flung open violently, as if by the lurch of some heavy body; and Mr. Hollowbread beheld before him an intoxicated gentleman of flashy costume, herculean proportions, and ferocious countenance.

"You say! What do you say?" roared this alarming visitor, advancing toward the sheeted and blanketed and counterpaned lawgiver, and shaking a huge bediamonded fist at his horror-stricken visage. "What do you mean, sir, by calling to a gentleman in that style? You say, do you? So do I

say, sir. I say you are an impudent ass, sir. What do you mean by lying there in bed, and hollering I say at a gentleman who is going by? Can't a man pass your door in a quiet, inoffensive manner, without your sass-ing him? What do you mean by it, sir? Do you want to pick a fight with me? Get up and go at it, then."

But as Mr. Hollowbread did not want to pick a fight, and was in no proper condition to get up to go at it, he declined the chivalrous invitation.

"I did not speak to you at all, sir," he said, with some appearance of spirit, though really he was a good deal scared. "I took you for a waiter."

"Took me for a waiter! Took me for a nigger!" exclaimed the stranger, with an emphasis on the word "nigger," which at once suggested a Southern lineage. "Took me for a nigger, hey! I've the greatest mind in the world to shoot you," he added, pulling out a revolver and aiming at our worthy member. "I could shoot you, sir. I could shoot you on the spot, sir. It's hard work not to shoot you, sir. By the Lord, sir, I don't know why I shouldn't shoot you."

"Good heavens! don't blow my brains out in bed!" stuttered Hollowbread, very eager, of course, to get a hearing.

"I won't blow your brains out in bed," magnanimously declared the flashy gentleman. "I'll blow your brains out of bed. What a mark your great red face is! I can hardly help firing at it."

The besieged legislator had an impulse to pull his face under the bedclothes, combined with a spasmodic desire to jump up and run out of the room. But, of course, the most natural thing for a dignified gentleman in a recumbent position to do was to essay further expostulation.

"I assure you that I was not speaking to you at all," he urged. "I rang for some ice-water, and when I heard you passing, I thought you might be coming. I am not the kind of a son to go about insulting people and picking chances to fight. I am a member of Congress."

"A member of Congress!" grunted the visitant. "That's nothing. I am a member of Congress myself. That's nothing. But you are a member of Congress, are you? Who the deuce are you, then? Why, good Lord, I believe it's Hollowbread! I'm glad to see you, Hollowbread. How the deuce should I recognize you in bed?"

"Is it—is it—Senator Rigdon?" asked Mr. Hollowbread, who knew that member of the upper house not at all, and had only taken note of his person cursorily.

"To be sure it is," answered the Southerner, beaming with joy. "Pickens Rigdon, at your service. Delighted—overjoyed to see you, my honorable *confrère*. Shake hands."

So they exchanged that sign of good-fel-

lowship, Mr. Hollowbread lying on his back, and looking up with some visible disgust at his new acquaintance, while the latter, revolver tucked under his arm, "weaved" dangerously over him, his inflamed face full of geniality.

"Are you drunk, too, Hollowbread?" went on the senator. "By-the-way, so am I. I came here drunk. I floated here on a pile of whisky. I meant to stop at Washington. But I missed it. Couldn't find Washington along the whole route. Washington is busted up and blown away. I'm sorry I left it. In fact, I don't know why I did leave it. Anyhow, I can't get back to it. Washington has skeddaddled and vomosed off the face of the earth. Never mind. The republic is saved. Wherever I go I find this great republic, overflowing with milk and honey, or, in other words, whisky. So, not being able to discover Washington, I came on here. Glad to find you, Hollowbread—I'll be drawn and quartered if I can't glad to find you."

It will be observed that Mr. Rigdon was more than half-seas over; was drunker by several seas, or one might say several oceans, than when we last listened to him; and, though still capable of conscious humor, was far beyond the line of sentimental speech and poetical quotation.

"I am sure I am pleased to make your acquaintance," murmured Mr. Hollowbread, meekly and falsely.

"Are you?" exclaimed the senator, joyfully, giving our friend's hand a fearful squeeze. "I'm glad of it—glad to hear you say so. I'll sleep with you, Hollowbread. By George, I will—if I can get my toggery off—and I will if I can't. You don't mind boots in bed, do you, old fellow? No spurs on. No; you sha'n't be kicked in your innocent slumbers; a member of Congress sha'n't run such a dishonoring risk. I'll ring for a waiter to undress me. I'll tell him I'm a fool and don't know how to take my toggery off. Lord! how the nigger will stare!" he chuckled. "Whereabouts do you conceal your blasted bell-rope, Hollowbread?"

"It is of no possible use ringing, senator," urged our friend, nearly as anxious to get rid of his caller as when the latter was threatening to shoot him. "What if the man should actually go to bed with him, and then pick another quarrel, or perhaps fire off a few barrels by accident?" "I told you," he added, "that I had been ringing half an hour for ice-water, without getting it."

"Can't get any ice-water, Hollowbread?" exclaimed Mr. Rigdon, with indignant sympathy. "My friend and brother legislator can't get any ice-water! By George, I'll see to that. I'll see that these lazy scoundrels bring you ice-water. I'll get you a hog's-head of ice-water."

He wheeled around, knocked down a chair

which upheld Mr. Hollowbread's raiment, and fell prostrate over that wondrous mass of broadcloth and sartorial machinery. Then he arose slowly and spent half a minute in trying to kick the ruin out of his way, while the owner thereof looked on in silence, trembling for his pads and springs and pulleys. At last the senator got into the hall, leaned in a most startling fashion over the stairway-railling, and commenced shouting to the regions below.

"Hi! Hullo down there!" he bawled. "Hurry up, you yardful of niggers! Here's a gentleman—here's my friend, the Honorable Mr. Hollowbread, choking to death for some ice-water!"

"Good gracious! will she hear the brute?" thought our affianced lover, referring to Josie.

"I say, where is that yardful of niggers? Hurry up with that ice-water! Hurry up, or I'll fire!"

No answer being audible (they were in the fifth story), he turned to his brother Congressman, waving his revolver in a manner which might have dismayed the bravest beholder, and said:

"Don't be anxious, Hollowbread. You shall have your ice-water. I'll go down there and get after those niggers. Be easy, Hollowbread; rely upon Rigdon. I'll have your ice-water up here if I shoot every scoundrel in the hotel, from the gentlemanly proprietor to the bootblack. No man shall suffer for ice-water while I can help it. You shall get your pitcher slopping full, if they have to freeze the ice for it. Don't be afraid, Hollowbread; I'll be back in a minute."

Then he was heard descending the stairs, threatening and swearing all down the four flights. The moment he was out of hearing, Hollowbread got up with an alacrity unusual in him, hurried to the door, shut it softly, and locked it.

Senator Rigdon made a tremendous row at the office, threatening to break the skull of every colored person whom he set eyes on, and was not pacified until the grinning clerk promised that every guest in the house should at once have a pitcher of ice-water, by way (the senator said) of acknowledgment and indirect damages.

This business transacted, he fell into an amicable conversation with the bar-keeper, forgot his purpose of sleeping with our hero, Hollowbread, and was eventually borne to repose in his own compartment of the attic.

Will it be believed that Josie Murray was an auditor of this drama; that during nearly the whole of it she stood holding her door ajar, listening and giggling; and that, far from abhorring the inebriated Rigdon, she perversely longed to make his acquaintance? She was all eyes and ears next morning when he stalked into the breakfast-room and took

his seat near them at table. Surely he would do or say something amusing, something to gratify her keen sense of the humorous and her taste for moral oddities. He disappointed her, he astonished her, and yet he pleased her. We have seen this specimen of the ruder Southern gentry "disguised;" we have seen him about as drunk as he could stagger; now we are to see him sober.

He recognized Hollowbread and Mrs. Murray at once, and, having some dim, awkward recollection of the scene of the night before, he would have been pleased to avoid them; but they were all three late together, and he was obliged to place himself near them at the laggards' table.

Josie, who easily divined his embarrassment, absolutely admired the manner in which he bore it. He did not speak; he did far better. He made a bow which was not a claim of acquaintance, but an apology for intrusion and for all possible offense, past or present. Then he sat him down unconfused, decorous, solemn, huge, and magnificent. A rude mountaineer by birth, he had nevertheless sought somewhat of the grace of the old-time Southern gentleman, that sedate, urbane, and chivalrous image which he had revered during all his youth, and which he still considered the noblest specimen of humanity conceivable.

Nor was there a break in his lion-like dignity while he remained at table. There was no noisiness and no fidgeting; he was as proper as a soldier on dress-parade; he was as calm as Buddha. His orders to the waiter were given in a mellow bass murmur, and with an almost elaborate civility of diction. He called the gray-headed fellow "boy," and yet he won his eager good-will at once. Doubtless this "boy" had been a slave; he had been ruled, bought and sold, perhaps whipped, by the sort of man before him; yet he recognized the old master-type with instant respect, obsequiousness, and friendliness; he needed but a word of kindness from it, and he was its bondsman once more.

Josie noted this circumstance promptly, and was much impressed by it. There is perhaps no surer passport to a woman's consideration than showing that you can easily win the respect of men. In our country one of the severest tests of this faculty is the securing of civil attention from the so-called lower classes. How they do love to take down the pride of gentlemen and the vanity of ladies!

This same "boy" had been negligent toward Mr. Hollowbread, and sulky with other guests; yet when the Southerner gently beckoned to him, he seemed ready to crouch and wriggle like a spaniel. Mrs. Murray could not help granting her esteem and admiration to this gentleman, who had been so ridiculously drunk the evening previous.

Even Mr. Hollowbread was impressed, part-

ly with the same feeling of respect and partly with satisfaction. He looked upon Rigdon's air of restraint and decorum as a sort of apology to himself for the spree in his bedroom. Moreover, the fellow was at any rate a senator, and it was well to have friends in the other House. So he at last decided to smile, and say:

"I believe, Senator Rigdon, that we have met before. Allow me to recall myself to you as Mr. Hollowbread."

"I am charmed to continue the acquaintance, Mr. Hollowbread," bowed Rigdon, without making any allusion to the previous meeting, concerning which he in fact remembered very little. "I have long wished to know you more intimately."

Next, obedient to a glance from Josie, Hollowbread added:

"Mr. Rigdon, Mrs. Murray—a niece of Colonel Julian Murray," he explained, with a little excusable pomposity over the respectable relationship. "Mrs. Murray had the good fortune to escape from the same railroad accident which detained me here. We shall go on to Washington together, I suppose."

"It will give me great pleasure to be allowed to join you," said the senator, bowing to Josie so gracefully and deferentially that she wanted to flirt with him at once. "I have often observed Mrs. Murray in Washington society. I hope she will pardon me if I confess that I have drunk to her in the words of Pinckney's famous toast. You remember how it runs, Mrs. Murray: 'A woman, of her gentle sex the seeming paragon.' I drank it at a distance and in silence. There is an air of exaggeration about it, you think? Well, I am a Southerner, and say what I feel. You must pardon me."

"I pardon," laughed Josie, meanwhile suspecting that he had taken a cocktail, though he had not. Perhaps the residuary fumes of last evening's whiskies had made him somewhat more audacious and fervent in speech than he would have been naturally. Perhaps the hyperbolic compliment was only an outbreak of that "hifalutin" which belongs to a certain uncultivated type of the eloquent Southerner. It is, however, the honest truth that Rigdon had really drunk the toast in question (and copiously, too), and that he fervently admired at least the outer womanhood of Mrs. Murray.

Well, the breakfast passed very pleasantly, and it was decided that they should voyage in company. Of course this was not what Hollowbread wanted, and he sought, in a timorous way, to evade it; but it happened all the same. Josie, the adroit little flirt, managed it easily.

"Oh, you brazen thing!" she said to her lover, when they were left alone at table. "You had a dreadful spree with that man last night, and here you meet as if you had

never seen each other before, and put on such a deluding air of innocence! Ah! you are all alike, you men. There is no getting to the bottom of you. Below each deep a deeper still."

In vain did Hollowbread protest his innocence of spicing, and tell the true story of his ludicrous bedroom adventure. She pretended for a time not to believe him, then she put on a pitiful air of trying to believe him, but in vain; and, dear me, such a touching look of anxious doubt as there was in her eyes! It seemed to Hollowbread that she was on the point of bursting into tears with affectionate terror lest he were deceiving her, and should prove to be a man of debauched habits. He was sincerely distressed by her sham suspicions, and ready to do any thing to soothe and please her.

"I am sorry I introduced the beast to you," he said, humbly. "The comradeship which Congressmen feel bound to concede to each other is my only excuse for it. We must try to drop him—give him the cold shoulder—get shut of him!"

"Oh, we can't do that!" cried Josie, with an alarmed dilation of her eyes. "We can't cut a senator, and my claim coming on!"

"But after his outrageous behavior last night, in the hearing of scores of people?" argued Hollowbread.

"That is the very reason," insisted Josie. "He would understand our cutting him all the easier. We must not have the least air of avoiding him. I think, in fact, that we ought to urge him to sit with us, and treat him in every way as civilly as possible."

So Senator Rigdon traveled with them all the way to Washington, sitting on the same seat with Mrs. Murray, and holding long coquettish dialogues with her, while poor Hollowbread puffed to and fro on her errands.

Actually our love-lorn legislator reached home without getting a kiss from his betrothed since that happy moment when he handed her Jeremiah Drinkwater's affidavit.

Nevertheless, he was her *âme damnée*; he continued to work at her scandalous business with the devotion which love inspires; he went before the Spoiliations Committee with a demand for something like one hundred thousand dollars.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

JOSIE SPEAKS OUT.

WEEKS passed, and Josie still held on to Mr. Hollowbread, though in a sort of arms-length fashion, much as one might hold on to a soiled but necessary walking-stick.

What did she want of him? Well, her desires might be described as "human wa-

rious," or perhaps we ought to say, feminine various.

When she was in low spirits about her claim, she feebly wanted to espouse him, to spend his income briskly, and to inherit his capital promptly. What else can a young lassie want of an auld man who insists upon being a lover?

In general, however, she merely wished him to secure her money for her, and then to take his dyed hair and corseted carcass out of her sight forever. There were moments when she looked forward to the possibility of giving herself up to him with a natural, plaintive, almost convulsive loathing, which calls for one's instinctive if not reasonable sympathy.

Meantime, she yearned after somebody else with a constancy and a fervor which were in themselves beautiful enough. Whenever she let Hollowbread kiss her (which blessing came his way not oftener than once a week), she had an abstracted, tender, dreamy look; she was thinking of Bradford. Through many a nightly hour, also, after her betrothed had taken his arctic shoes cautiously down the ice of the Murray steps, she lay awake to whisper the name of the man whom she loved, and to indulge in reveries about him which, could they have been known to the man who loved her, would have filled him with amazement and anguish.

Of course, Bradford seemed all the more desirable to this born coquette because she could not get him. What she was mainly in love with was the actual business of making love; and the more difficult any special flirtation appeared, the more it fascinated her. Had her longed-for Edgar gone on his knees to her in the humble and faithful style of that idolatrous old Hollowbread, it is likely that her eyes would soon have been wandering after other men, and that her little bigamist of a heart would have followed her glance.

But Bradford, though he sometimes came to see her, did not do much in the way of courtship. He was afraid of her; he dreaded lest, if he fell in love with her, she should make a lobbying member of him; and we remember that he wanted, above all things, to be an honorable man among men.

Is it not, by-the-way, very singular that he should have feared her power, when he was so well acquainted with her faults? He had watched her ways so long, and studied her character so carefully, that he knew her perfectly, in theory. He knew what a born and practiced flirt she was; he knew that she was pushing her claim in spite of her promises; he knew that she was ungrateful to the Murrys; he knew that she told fibs; he knew worse.

And yet she was so pretty, graceful, sweet-mannered, sweet-tempered, alluring,

inflammatory, that he could not dislike her, nor scarcely keep from loving her. It seemed to him at times that the most delightful thing in the world to do would be to shut his eyes to her defects and to let her deceive him into the belief that she was good, as she had deceived her husband. Now and then, also, there came up the old flattering delusion that for his sake she might become trustworthy and worshipful. Probably the only thing which kept him at a safe distance from her, spiritually, was her claim.

It is true that meanwhile he visited, admired, and in a manner worshiped that upright and candid soul which had its abode in the handsome figure of Belle Warden. But there also was a claim. Poor Mrs. Warden was intriguing with committees as scandalously as Mrs. Murray; and, moreover, she was such a grinning, frisking, flirting, worrying creature; such an unsuitable mother-in-law for a fastidious man and honorable legislator! In short, there were so great objections to both Belle and Josie, that Bradford could not for the present make up his scrupulous mind to want either of them.

The lovely Murray suffered from this state of things, but she had too much vitality to let it paralyze her. As Bradford did not do any courtship which could inspire a comfortable hope, she looked out a little, or, rather, a good deal, for other admirers.

She made poor Hollowbread very jealous by the way in which she flirted with Messrs. Drummond, Beauman, Bray, Clavers, even with the married Rigdon, and even with Mrs. John Vane's senator, Ironman. The audacity of her coquetties, indeed, was sufficient to fill with affliction not only souls which loved her, but also souls which merely love wisdom in woman.

With the Apollonian Beauman, for instance, she had an adventure in the cupola of the Capitol, which a certain tattling janitor narrated to Squire Nancy Appleyard, and which that imbibed Bloomer reported about Washington with outrageous exaggerations, believing the while all her inventions because they seemed to her probable. What the janitor actually saw was a masculine arm around a feminine waist; and, of course, it might have been there for the mere purposes of support and protection; so many people are dizzy in the gallery of the cupola!

But Josie, lady-like as she was in some matters, had a certain deserved fame for reckless sparkings, so that Miss Nancy's suspicions were partly justifiable.

There is an excuse for these coquetties of Josie's, quite aside from the fact that they were born in her and must make issue under temptation, like chickens pecking out of a shell at the summons of heat. Her engagement oftentimes weighed upon her like a witch

incubus, sucking the blood of gladness and hope out of all her life, and causing it to seem a flaccid failure. The past, with its flighty, imprudent, and unlucky "poor Augustus," with its short, foolish dream of splendor, and its awakening of impoverished widowhood, had not surely been enough of a success to suffice a handsome and clever woman. And how could the future look jocund, or satisfactory, or even tolerable to her, when it advanced upon her in the ponderous guise of Mr. Hollowbread?

Remember how the young, especially such as have no urgent and continuous work to do, are haunted by this consciousness or suspicion of failure! They had expected—these new-born and insatiable souls—that Time would bring every hour a fresh joy, and behold, he is often but a burden and a bore! It seems to them as if life were like one of those mocking goblets in which you can see the wine, but can not taste it.

Thus did Josie often feel, even when she forgot her sexagenarian betrothed; and when she remembered him, her dejection only changed in becoming a foreboding. At times she rose, or appeared to herself to rise, to the altitude of desperation. Were there no "snips and snails, and puppy-dogs' tails" of happiness to be picked up somehow? If it was not to be had in solid, inexhaustible veins, could she not snatch and steal a little here and there? Any thing to break the doleful spell of evasion and defeat. Occasionally it seemed as if the scandal of eloping with another woman's husband would be a relief; and more than once she caught herself wishing that some strong, willful, passionate man would irresistibly run away with her.

Such was her state of mind—a state which we can all of us imagine—a state through which some of us have passed, with or without shipwreck. The usual remedies for it in women are children and housekeeping; the usual remedy for it in man is steady, hard work to support the same.

But Josie Murray had no weapons whereby to fight this nightmare, except society and flirting. Hence the *furor* with which she gave herself to coquetry when she found herself alone with any one of the worldly gentlemen who delighted in her company.

Of course a pure soul marvels that the thought of the one man whom she loved, or whom she believed that she loved, should not restrain her!

Well, sometimes she said to herself, "It is all his fault," and therefore fell to trifling with a sort of vindictiveness. At other times the remembrance of him did act as a hold-back; then she had a quiet, pensive, ennobled demeanor, which seemed to put an iron grate between her and Messrs. Drummond, Bray, and Beauman; and then those gentlemen had a turn of depression, and

wanted—so strange is the human heart—wanted to marry her!

At last, feeling as she did about Bradford, the time came when she let him know her feelings. They were alone together, like Francesca da Rimini and Paolo, and they were reading one book, the book of human nature.

Edgar's manner of reading was to sit close by Josie, fix his meditative hazel eyes on her handsome face, and gently hold one of her hands in his, meanwhile talking Platonic friendship and giving advice. Her method was to return his gaze of benevolence with glances of gratitude, and to be in every other way as tenderly grateful as he was tenderly magnanimous.

We must hasten to say, however, that they did not look "spoony," nor dribble sentimentalities. They were both too worldly, and they had too much cleverness and sense of humor, to let themselves drift into the ridiculous. Much of their dialogue was as sensible as one is apt to hear in fashionable society, even between people whose object it is to make each other's time pass pleasantly.

"I hear that you have been driving out with Ironman," was one of Bradford's more serious observations, uttered with the view of introducing a lecture. "You have smashed Mrs. John Vane in society, and now you are attacking her stronghold. I suppose you mean to make a full end of her."

"Mrs. John Vane may be trusted to make a full end of herself," returned Josie, amiably, though she disliked to be coupled with that semi-vulgar lady, even as a victorious rival. "I don't see how Washington can put up with her long."

"Then why not let her fall the length of her own rope? Why trouble yourself to assist in the hanging?"

"Because, if I don't, she may last my time, and that would be just as bad for me as if she held on like Methuselah. Do you let General Bangs alone? You attack him at least once a week. Well, Mrs. J. V. is my General Bangs. She is a coarse corruptionist, and I mean to expel her from my Congress."

"I never believed in fighting fire with fire."

"I don't flirt with Mr. Ironman; I only entertain him."

"But people who entertain the senator get a name for being too amusing."

"You speak plainly enough. Well, I won't drive with him again, if you don't wish it."

By way of reward for this promise he pressed her hand slightly. He was always trying to reform her risky ways, partly because they had an unreasonable power for making him jealous, and partly because he really wanted to fit her for his right honorable affection. Yes, he was tenderly anx-

ious (at times) to get her good, and much pleased when he seemed to make any headway in his mission.

"Is the sermon over?" asked Josie. "You might give out a hymn and pronounce the benediction."

"You must remember that I am six or eight years older than you are. Age is a natural priesthood. The first priest was the senior member of the first family."

"What an awful senior member you would make! What an awful husband! You would be a despot always on his throne."

"I shall have to stop doing you good if you poke fun at me."

"I am not poking fun at you; I am really in fear of you. It makes me tremble in every limb to think what a husband you have the making of. How you could reprimand a wife!"

She smiled, but the smile was very submissive and tender, suggesting that she would bow humbly to his reproving, and would love him for it. The word *wife*, too, uttered in that shy, reverent murmur with which she spoke it, was an exceedingly alluring, though also a warning, monosyllable. He looked at her yearningly, thinking what a perfect wife she would be if she were only as good as she was pretty, and longing to try the adventurous experiment of proving how far perfect she could be. Under his significant glance Josie blushed, an unusual circumstance with her, for her skin was dark and her soul experienced.

He ought to have seen, and indeed he did know perfectly, that he had too mighty an influence over her to use it lightly, without subjecting himself to the charge of egotism and cruelty. But he remembered her sins against other men, and accorded her no more mercy than coquettes give.

It must be remembered that weeks before this she had forbidden him to kiss her, and it must be understood that up to this time he had respected the injunction. Now, however, tempted by that splendid color in her face and by her air of inability to resist him, he seized on the forbidden fruit. He drew the hand which he held; he drew her irresistibly against his shoulder; he kissed every rose-leaf of the blush, and her very lips.

Josie, throbbing and trembling from head to foot, was in a tumult of happiness. She scarcely struggled to get away from him; there was too much expectation and hope in her for movement; she waited for him to speak.

"I am obliged to you, my dear friend," was Bradford's disappointing and most ungrateful utterance. "We are on the good, sweet old terms once more."

With a violent start Josie broke away from him, flung herself upon an isolated chair, covered her face, and sobbed. Her

shame and distress ennobled her, and for the moment she had the beautiful dignity of great grief, the beauty which belongs to a Niobe.

"I have offended you, Josie," he said, not a little impressed. "I beg your pardon."

She dropped her hands, stared at him with indignant, sparkling, wet eyes; and broke out on him—as he deserved.

"You have degraded me!" she exclaimed.

"Why do you kiss me when you mean nothing? Don't you know that a woman who lets a man do that, lets him do it because she—likes him?—because she hopes he will not stop with a kiss? Is it generous of you to take advantage of such feelings, such hopes? Listen to me!" she commanded, imperiously, while a tear of humiliation rolled down her cheek. "I have something to tell you. I am ashamed to say it. But it is your fault. You drive me to it by your treatment of me. Besides, we are old friends, as you say; we can talk as men and women can not generally talk to each other; we act and hold hands and kiss like old friends, don't we? Why not say what we think, then? I think—I think—" And here she faltered, her mouth twitching pitifully, and her eyes avoiding him for an instant. "I think that you treat me very badly," she resumed, with an effort which turned her pale.

"You treat me badly in kissing me when you mean nothing by it. I let you do it, to be sure. But why? It is because I hope that each kiss will be followed by a word; because I hope you are going to tell me that you love me, and want me—want me to be your wife. If I had thought you never meant to tell me that, I never would have let you touch your lips to me—never—never!"

She clean broke down here, and fell into a violent burst of weeping, clenching her hands over her face, and sobbing and shaking convulsively, like any honest, little wretched school-girl. She was full of shame, grief, anger, love, too, agitations of all sorts, a tumult of emotions. There was no sham about it; she was not playing a part at all; that we must understand distinctly. Indeed, her power of flirtation arose largely from the fact that she really had the susceptibilities which some flirts only counterfeit, and that these susceptibilities were easily moved. True, they were transitory, if we do not misjudge her; she was one of the shallow skillets which quickly boil over and quickly cool; but, all the same, she could keep herself and her intimates in hot water. All the same, too, she was very scalding and thawing when she did undertake to gush over a man in good earnest.

Meanwhile, what were Bradford's feelings and opinions? Well, without trying to excuse him in the least, and judging indeed that he ought to have taken this victim of

his kissings, we must aridly state that he was not moved so to do. He seemed to himself to find out all at once that he did not love her one bit; and he could not feel a desire, nor even a willingness, to uplift her to his heart, and ask her to be his wife. At the same time he was painfully confounded and humiliated; he would have been glad to break through the floor and fall into the cellar. So he did nothing but stare at her bewilderedly, and mutter some inaudible, unfinished excuses.

"There! you can make me cry like a baby," resumed Josie, brushing away the tears with an angry dash of the hand. "Are you contented? Have you degraded me enough?"

"I have degraded myself enough," answered Bradford. "And you have pointed it out to me plainly enough. You might have spared me this. The better way would have been to send me off long ago."

"The better way!" she burst out. "Oh, you mean man! You have the face to reproach me now!"

"I do not," he interrupted her. "I have no right to reproach you. I reproach myself only."

Josie began to hope again. She waited eagerly for his next word. She still kept her hands pressed against her quivering face, but they were all ready to dart out and cling around him.

"It is your claim," he said, at last. "You promised to give that up, and you have not."

"I have given it up," she declared, in her desperation, making an effort to meet his gaze boldly, and failing. "I tell you I have."

"You have not," asserted Bradford, loud and stern, because he was indignant at such brazen falsifying.

"If they are prosecuting it, I did not know it," she whimpered.

"General Hornblower told me this morning that you called on him about it yesterday," was the overwhelming answer.

She looked so crushed—so mean, as he harshly put it to himself—that now he could quit her. He picked up his hat, muttered a "good-morning," to which she did not respond, and went off to call on Belle Warden.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A FAMILY QUARREL.

THE Murrays, as well as Bradford, discovered about these times that Josie was still pursuing her barn intrigue, and, like him, they manifested what she considered an unreasonable and disagreeable excitement about it.

It was not the young Congressman who had exposed her to them. His singular conscience often urged him so to do, but on the

whole he considered himself bound not to meddle. The informer was that strong-minded sufferer, who madly loved Sykes Drummond, and who hated our heroine as her successful rival. Miss Appleyard sent the Reverend Murray a long anonymous letter, revealing not only the persistent prosecution of the claim, but also some of Josie's audacities in the way of flirtation, as, for instance, her journey in the sole company of Mr. Hollowbread, her lonely drive with that rakish Senator Ironman, and her cupola adventure with the beauteous Beauman.

If the rector had been alone, and if he had been in the full vigor of his native sense and gentility, he would probably have stopped reading this document as soon as he discovered its nature, and either handed it to Josie or burned it. But he was almost never alone; and, moreover, he was in the habit of reading every speck and scrap of his correspondence to Mrs. Murray; and finally, by dint of long continuance in providing gossip for that lady, he had himself become a ravenous gossip-monger.

The two venerable, excellent people had a horrid, entertaining, wretched, savory hour over the vile manuscript. The rector mumbled a passage aloud; then he laid the letter down in indignation, saying that that was enough; furthermore, he denounced the writer as a low, mean, mischievous, lying creature.

Mrs. Murray repeated his words after him fervently, but could not help looking unsatisfied. Next followed a discussion as to whether anonymous missives ought to be burned, or whether they ought to be perused with unbelief, detestation, and scorn. Obviously, if the first method of treatment had the precedence, the second could not be tried at all. It seemed well to make proof of both, and see which worked the most satisfactorily.

So they read another page; paused anew for commination service, with responses; had a fresh discussion concerning proprieties and probabilities; went back for further light to the manuscript; finally finished it.

"I don't believe a word of it," said Mrs. Murray, with both her hands up. "Do you, Mr. Murray?"

"From Og, king of Bashan, and from Sihon, king of the Amorites, good Lord deliver us!" groaned the rector.

"But you don't believe it is true, Mr. Murray?"

"Oh dear! This is a wicked world. I am afraid some of it is true."

"Oh, Mr. Murray!" gasped the old lady. "So am I," she added, with a curious inconsequence. "I am afraid some of it is true. She is so highly-tighty!"

"I shall inquire into it," burst out the rector. "And if she is guilty of this, or the least tittle of it, I will turn her out of the

house, bag and baggage," he threatened, in his hyperbolic fashion. "I will not have you troubled and worried thus," he persisted, when his wife essayed some remonstrance against extreme measures. "I tell you, Huldah, that I must not have it."

And inquire he did, and learned only too much. At his request the colonel took up the train of the claim, and discovered that it was still being pushed with energy; while at the same time two conscientious old ladies of the parish brought in, of their own accord, a tale about Josie's flirtations. The joint result of these communications disagreeably justified nearly all the statements of the anonymous letter. Even Mrs. Murray, despite her strong liking for her clever and diverting young relative, was horrified and indignant. She fretted; she moaned that the family was being disgraced; she actually sobbed and shed tears. Her distress filled the rector with rage and nerved him to heroism; and he made such an onset upon the guilty Josie as to positively scare her.

"I insist upon your stopping that claim-business forever," he said, in a choking, stammering voice. "I insist upon a solemn promise from you that you will stop it. I insist upon your oath," he continued, pushing a Bible toward her. "I want your oath—your oath!"

It was too much, this tone of domination and of contemptuous reproach, even for Josie's cool temper and good-nature. With a smart little poke, something like the quick spat of a kitten, she thrust the heavy volume from her, tumbling it upon the floor.

The spunky gesture and the loud slam thoroughly startled old Mrs. Murray, who had prepared herself for the interview by two days' nervous anticipation of it, and was rather less fitted for it than was Bob Acres for his duel. She jumped in her chair as if she had been shot, threw up her hands in a hysterical way, and uttered a cry.

"There!" exclaimed the rector, as if all the mischief in the world had been done at once. "Huldah! Huldah!" he went on, getting over to his wife's side as quickly as he could. "My dear, be calm. No harm shall happen to you."

"You frightened her yourself," asserted Josie, too much stirred up to be wise. "If you would only keep your own calmness, it would be better for her."

But it was Josie who had alarmed the old lady, and the latter showed it in her countenance. She had the sensitiveness of invalids and other weak creatures, that timorous sensitiveness which, when it is hurt, becomes aversion. She gazed at the young woman, so lately her *divertissement* and pet, with eyes which expressed not merely fear, but also dislike.

"It is you," cried the rector, infuriated by Josie's charge that it was he who had trou-

bled his Huldah. "It is you who torment her with your managements and your violence. Huldah, be calm. Do be calm!"

But to be calm was more than Huldah could now do. She was too old and too feeble to control herself; she began to cry, and was soon sobbing spasmodically.

"Run and get the ammonia, quick!" cried the rector, calling on Josie without hesitation in this dire extremity. "She is going to faint. Oh, Huldah! Huldah!" he whimpered—yes, actually whimpered—his voice breaking like that of a weeping child. "Get the ammonia! Ring for Sarah! Send for a doctor!"

Josie ran: she did not forget that she had been scolded, and that she meant to leave the house; but still, in her good-nature, she ran eagerly to search for restoratives. She found Sarah, and sent her to the sitting-room, but not a drop of ammonia could be discovered high or low, and she returned to report the fearful deficit just as her aunt swooned away completely.

"No ammonia!" exclaimed the rector, with a glare of reproach. "Never let yourself be in the house a day with Mrs. Murray without ammonia!"

Josie often laughed afterward over this speech, but at the time she made no response, either in mirth or anger, and simply fell to work bathing the white face of the old lady. Meantime the mulatto girl had gone after a neighboring physician, with instructions to bring him at once, dead or alive. He arrived presently, took the mite of an invalid in his arms, carried her to her bedroom, and after long labor brought her to her senses.

During this interval her husband stood over her, a picture of affectionate grief and fright, wringing his hands, and groaning, "Huldah! Huldah!" At last, when his darling was to some extent restored, he came trembling out of her room and sought Josie in the parlor.

"She is better!" were his first words, uttered as if there were no other object of pity in the world, and no other topic of interest. "The Lord help her through with it! But we must—"

"We must part," Josie interrupted him, deciding, in the phrase of Balzac, "to go nobly down the stairs rather than wait to be thrown out of the window." "After what has occurred, I can not stay here."

"Yes, we must part—we must part," stammered the rector, confused and yet relieved. "I say it not in anger. I make no reproaches, and want no explanations. We simply can not bear it. We are too old and feeble, both of us. This is not the way, I know, to part from connections. But we can not help it. Go in peace. The Lord be good to you! Go when you can find it convenient. I can say no more. Good-bye."

Hastily turning his back to avoid further

speech, he tottered feebly out of the room and went to sit by his wife's bedside.

Josie remained alone. It seemed to her for a while that she was alone in the world. Within a few days she had lost the man whom she had best loved and the friends who had given her a home and a position in Washington society.

Lobbying and universal coquetting having brought such trouble upon her, it seemed all of a sudden as if they must be very wicked, and she had a pang of remorse. But it was too late now to think of changing her course, for her connections had cast her off in the most positive and irreversible manner; and lobbying and flirting were henceforward her only possible paths to prosperity, and perhaps her only means of existence.

Moreover, in her momentary abasement Josie doubted her power of reforming. She remembered how often she had resolved to be good, without the least permanent result; and in her despair she sobbed to herself:

"I can't, and I know I can't; and I won't try."

Her next thought was that she would marry Mr. Hollowbread, and then behave like the very witch, and serve him right.

Of course she was in a pet; even a woman can not very well be hurt, humiliated, and scared without fuming about it; even Josie's wonderful good temper could not sail smoothly over her present sea of troubles.

But, meanwhile, action was necessary; she must find a comfortable and genteel home at once. While she packed her trunk (putting away a few tears along with her dresses) she pondered as to whither she should betake herself.

After meditating upon hotels and rejecting them as expensive, after taking into consideration boarding-houses and revolting from them as low, she concluded to knock for admission at the door of her sister-claimant, Mrs. Warden.

"Going to leave the Murrays!" stared that lady, when Josie called upon her with her proposition. "I had an idea that you were settled there for life."

"My dear, it was only a visit," answered our heroine, who had decided to say nothing about the quarrel, at least for the present. "I was invited for a month, and I have already staid two. One must not ride hospitality to death. If they want me back, they can apply for me."

"They will apply for you fast enough. I don't see how the old lady can spare you a day. She has often told me what an amusement you are to her; how you bring her every thing that is stirring in society, all the pottage of gossip that she loves."

"Yes, that is it. They use me—just a little too much, don't you know? I should like a resting spell; I should like a vaca-

tion. They have been very good to me." (She said this with a swelling of anger and grief in her pretty fibbing throat, for, in reality, she felt just then that they had been outrageously hard with her.) "But they have also been exacting. You can't imagine what a despotism that household lives under in the way of cossetting and diverting that old lady. Not that she herself seems to demand it so very much. But her husband, the dear old rector, is perfectly cracked about her. He serves her himself constantly, and wants every body else in the same harness. I must tell Mrs. Murray every thing that I see, hear, say, do, think, or dream. I must be always on hand for her sick turns, no matter when she chooses to have them. I must walk tiptoe in the hall, and laugh in a whisper in the parlor. If my dress rustles as I go down stairs, Uncle John opens his door and glares out awfully to see who is making that deafening uproar. If visitors stay after ten o'clock, he behaves as if they were Indians come to scalp him. Sometimes he gets into the study slyly, and glowers through the hall at us without speaking, and then goes back to talk to Mrs. Murray about it. If he kept a gun, I should think he was going to fire at us, or at least to bang it out of the window, like old Mr. Brontë. I am perfectly certain that they have the longest and solemnest conversations with each other about my worldliness and levity and hoidenism and boisterousness. And then when I go to them I must tell it all, and they seem to like it. But the very next gentleman that calls puts Uncle John in a state again. Positively I sometimes think he is crazy. He thinks of nothing but his old wife; he wants to hush the whole world for her sake. He would like to make the omnibus pass his door at a walk. He goes to his front door and orders away niggers who are guffaving on the sidewalk. Once, when an expressman dropped a heavy package in the hall, he looked at the man as though he had dropped it on Mrs. Murray's head, and said out loud, 'There is a hell!' I have heard him talk for twenty minutes about some old granny who, ten years ago, or forty years ago, perhaps, bathed his wife's feet nicely in hot water and mustard; and he always declares, when he tells the story, that she will go to Paradise for it."

"Oh, but these are his jokes," laughed Mrs. Warden, who was quite fond of the old gentleman in her slighty way, and who, moreover, knew that he was an intelligent talker and humorous.

"Yes, they are jokes, but jokes right out of the heart. He is pretty serious in them, with all his apologetical smiling. He partly knows, I think, that he is irrational, and tries to cover it up and excuse it by joking. But he is clean added, all the same."

"It is hard for a woman to make mouths

at a man for being overfond of his wife," opined Mrs. Warden, who had long since decided that it was a misfortune to lose a loving husband, and that she should like to get another.

"I don't know about that," doubted Josie. "I don't want such a husband as my uncle is. I should fly at him. I would breathe without him. I would not let him breathe for me. It is a husband's business to support his wife, and protect her, and give her a position, but not to hold her in his lap forever, and make her sit there. Who wants to be kept in an egg-shell always? A woman needs to get hatched some time or other; and scratch and peck about a little by herself. That is what I mean to do."

"I rather think you will do it," smiled the elder lady.

"I rather think you won't attack me for it."

"No," admitted Mrs. Warden, who had herself pecked about quite independently, even during the lifetime of the patient man for whom she mourned.

"Besides, a woman who is worth sixpence wants her husband to be a great man," continued Josie. "She wants a chance to be proud of him. She wants to see him make other men bow down to him and to her. But how can he bring that about when he is always holding her in lap? Just look at my uncle's way of life, and what has come of it. He is a clever man; he has a big knowledge-box; and plenty of brains in it; when he isn't in a twitter about his wife, he can talk as wisely and wittily as any body in Washington. Then look at his other advantages—family, education, money, leisure—every thing that a man needs to work with. Well, what has he done? He has not even got to be a Doctor of Divinity. I don't believe he ever wrote a great sermon, nor so much as a hundred middling ones, such as he does write. He talks about exegesis, but I don't think he ever did any of it, whatever it may be. Nobody ever called him a scholar, not even for fun. He has just simply taken good care of one woman. He has spent years in traveling with her, when he should have been earning a bishopric. He has settled down to a church merely because she couldn't travel any longer; and now, when he, perhaps, wants to work, he can't. He has passed so much time in amusing and trying to keep alive one aging mind, that he has become a confirmed gossip-monger. He reads the newspapers; he begins where we do, with the deaths and marriages; then he reads all the city items, the fashions, the very advertisements—he reads the whole daily tweedledum and tweedledee aloud; he has done it for forty years, and he can't stop. What will he leave behind him to keep his name in remembrance? Nothing but his tombstone—an epitaph written

by a liar, and chiseled by a dunce! Isn't it a shame to have a head as big as a demi-john, and not let posterity know that you had a head at all? Do you call that doing your duty by yourself, and by your kind, and by your Maker? When the Lord calls him to an account, pretty much all he will be able to say will be, 'I have taken care of Huldah.' Now, of course, it is right and lovely to take care of Huldah; but is that all that a man of wealth and talents ought to do? Oh, there is a lot of humbug among us women about good, attentive husbands! Some of the husbands best worth quarreling for are husbands who are not a bit attentive."

"Every thing may be abused, even affection," observed Mrs. Warden, warmed up to a little more than her usual power of reflection by the friction of Josie's superior intelligence.

"Women don't think so, but it is true."

"Still, I like the rector. I like him for his very weakness about his wife. I laugh at him for it, and I like him for it."

"When you see close at hand how it works, you don't like him so well for it," affirmed Josie, who was naturally bitter against her uncle, and disposed to disparage him. "It almost makes him stupid. He is really a witty man, and yet for her sake he is not witty. His talk and his thoughts are constantly broken up by his explanations to her, and by her questions and responses. I really think he is often afraid to say the best thing he can, for fear she won't understand it. She isn't a fool; she does catch at a joke right smartly; but then he is so afraid she won't! And if she shouldn't, somebody might think she was broken, and that would kill him. The gracious deliver me from such a husband! When I lose my wits, I want my protector and blessing to tell me of it."

"I see that you have suffered," laughed Mrs. Warden. "The old people must have been very hard on you."

"Yes, I have suffered," emphasized Josie, whose heart was swollen all the while with indignation, although her speech was guarded and sensible. "A man has a right to sacrifice himself to his wife, I suppose; but I deny that he has a right to sacrifice other people to her. I know that he shall not sacrifice me. Well, I must stop scolding. You will think I have a bad temper, and I have not. Did you ever see me cross before?"

"Never," said Mrs. Warden, quite truthfully.

"And the sum of it is (I beg you never to mention it to the old people), the sum of it is, that I want to close my visit; but I don't want to leave Washington, and I don't want to go to a boarding-house, and I mustn't go to a hotel. Will you let me keep house with you, and bear my share of the expenses?"

Mrs. Warden did not like the idea, and yet she could not say no to it. On the one hand, she was afraid to receive permanently under her roof such a rival for Belle; on the other hand, the Commodore Hooker claim had been a costly one to launch, and had as yet brought in no booty; so that money was becoming scarce in the family locker, and financial help desirable. Josie could, no doubt, help face the butcher, and might be of use in the game of log-rolling.

"If you can make the change pleasant to the Murrays, it will be delightful to me," she said.

"I can make it pleasant enough to them," answered Josie, with a little grimace. "I wish I were sure of making it pleasant to you."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AUNT HULDAH RATHER FEEBLE.

THE condition of old Mrs. Murray at this time was such as to incline us to repent of having permitted disparagement of her husband for the fastidious care which he lavished upon her.

The thread by which life held to that aged and attenuated body was, it now appeared, very fragile. An excitement which would have been transitory with most persons, and a cause of irritation and humiliation which did not seem to concern her very conspicuously, were enough to draw upon her vitality alarmingly. The little cry and the long swoon with which she recoiled from the quarrel between her husband and her favorite were the first overt symptoms of a grave illness.

It was not an acute attack, for there could be no vigor or violence about that frail tenement, not even in the ruin which crumbled its time-worn walls. It was mere nerveless, almost pulseless, prostration; it was such a sickness as one might attribute to a ghost. She reposed, white and quiet, sleeping or dozing much of the time, looking at the figures on the wall-paper when awake, answering in monosyllables if spoken to, sometimes smiling mechanically. Body and mind seemed to be lying in placid, torpid wreck together. She reminded one irresistibly of the phrases, a living death, a body of death. If she had dropped into pale, dry dust, and become subject to the gentle motions of the sick-room air, the fact would hardly have appeared in the nature of a change, nor caused much surprise to the spectator.

Mrs. Warden called upon her, gazed at her with an astonishment which she could not conceal, and went away in a state of solemn bewilderment, like one who has seen something unearthly.

"Upon my word, she ought to be buried,"

she said to Josie. "Talk of leanness! It is not emaciation; it is being a skeleton."

"It is my belief that she was born a skeleton," replied our still embittered heroine. "There never was flesh enough on her to make a mummy of."

At this time, although Mrs. Warden had had Josie with her for nearly a week, she did not know the real history of her exodus out of the Murray house, nor so much as suspect that there had been a serious quarrel.

The rector had as yet said nothing concerning the matter to any one outside of his family. He might be cracked about his wife, and absurdly excitable as to the supremacy of theology over science, but on all other subjects he had good sense, and the delicate good sense of a gentleman. He would make no scandal about the adventuress whom he had exorcised; he would not expose her misdeeds to people who did not bear his name; in the common phrase, he washed his dirty linen at home. Moreover, looking upon Josie as the cause of his dear wife's illness, he was just now overflowing with wrath against her; and he knew that, should he once commence denouncing such a miscreant, he would not be able to keep himself within bounds of wisdom or decorum.

So not a word did he lisp of her evil doings to any one but his brother.

Finally he was laboriously occupied, he was completely absorbed, by his precious invalid. Even the origin of her sickness was of light consequence, in his estimation, compared with what might be the result of it. His distress and solicitude were full of pathos, and almost towered to the height of the tragic. It was impossible for a right-hearted person to laugh at him now, except as one may laugh in acute personal suffering, with a hysterical paroxysm of humor, a smile on the lip and a tear in the eye. To stand by the sick-bed, and hear, as it were, the throbings of this dismayed watcher, was perhaps more sobering than to stand by the gaping finality of a grave amidst the sobs of mourners.

The rector's care of his wife, considered in itself and without regard to his duties toward others, was admirable. For her sake he neglected every thing, his own comfort and welfare—yes, and all alien comfort and welfare. He forgot his meals and renounced his rest; he hired a young clergyman, at his own expense, to attend to his pastoral duties; he did nothing but watch and guard that adored incarnation of helplessness. He kept the whole house in a whisper; he was angry with the servants if they went to bed early or got up late; he lifted up his eyes when a burst of laughter was heard in the far-away kitchen.

How could any one but a monster be at ease or be joyous while his Huldah suffered? It was pitiable to see him trying to drop

medicine with his trembling fingers, or shuffling about the house on his swollen feet to bring hot water the sooner. Sometimes, just for a moment, he thought of Josie kindly and wished her back again, so intelligent and alert was she, so light of foot and sure of hand, so able to help in this great crisis.

But he never uttered the thought, nor mentioned her in any manner. He admitted now that he should not have divulged her misdeeds to his wife, nor fought his necessary and holy battle with her in that venerable presence. It seemed to him a perfectly rational and probable supposition that if he should once breathe the word Josie in the hearing of Huldah, she would have a paroxysm and die.

At last, to his amazement and fright, the sick woman herself spoke of the outcast.

"Where did she go?" Mrs. Murray asked, in a feeble voice, her skinny forehead puckered with some eager desire, or fear, or other emotion, perhaps not altogether definite to herself.

"I believe she is staying with Mrs. Warden," answered the husband, without adding either a good word or an ill one, so fearful was he of giving annoyance and causing excitement.

"With Mrs. Warden?" repeated the old lady. "Why don't Mrs. Warden come here? What does she keep away for?"

Mrs. Warden, as we know, had already dropped in, but Mrs. Murray had either not noticed her presence or had forgotten it. She was now, after much deliberation and a long discussion with the medical man, sent for by the rector. So that swarthy and somewhat haggard face, with its excitable black eyes and unsteady expression, was soon bending over the sick-bed.

"You don't call here now," said the invalid, with a disquieted, peevish glance, very pathetic, as coming from such feebleness.

"My dear Mrs. Murray, I call oftener than usual," palavered Mrs. Warden, smiling away with all her teeth, and overdoing it aggravatingly. "I have been here twice this week. I am always at your service."

"I thank you," replied the punctilious old lady, incapable of neglecting the minor forms of civility, though she were at her final gasp. "Is she staying at your house?"

"She—who?—Belle?" answered Mrs. Warden, who had by this time guessed out the fact of a family quarrel, though as yet ignorant of its cause and virulence. "Yes, Belle is with me."

"I mean Josephine Murray," said Mrs. Murray, in the petulant tone of a weakness amounting to pain.

"Oh yes! she is with me," acknowledged the visitor, with a pretense at sudden recollection. "She is staying with me for a few days."

"I thought she was going to leave Wash-

ington," sighed the sick woman, in a tone of disappointment.

"Not at once; very soon, I suppose," was the conciliatory response. Whatever would be likely to be pleasant this diplomatist was ready to state without hesitation or scruple.

"When is she going?"

"I don't know precisely. She has not fixed any day in particular."

The sufferer's countenance fell at once, and assumed a look of despairing languor. She had turned against Josie; she regarded her as a dishonor to the family and a disturber of its peace; and, what was even more influential with her, she identified her own illness with the young woman's misconduct. The one strong desire of her soul, aside from the mere instinctive longing after health and life, was that Josie should leave Washington, and never be heard of there more.

The rector, who was watching his wife intently, and who noted with terror her lapse into ghastly weakness, now said, eagerly, "Huldah! don't fatigue yourself."

Then he cast at Mrs. Warden a supplicating glance, which caused her to depart without a word further.

"She is staying here!" groaned the sick woman, as soon as the room was clear. "She is staying here. I knew she would. I told you so. She will stay here and disgrace us."

Then came a burst of sobbing, which convulsed her venerable face and shook her fragile figure until her husband wept with fright. He ran for restoratives, screamed loudly for the nurse, and rang up all the servants.

But no soothing or stimulus could arrest the agitation, though a buffet might have destroyed the vitality which fed it. It only ceased when it had run through paroxysm after paroxysm of hysterics into the death-like peace of a swoon. She recovered her consciousness at last; there was still life in the feeble old body.

But the rector now believed that life could not remain in it long, unless Josie were driven from Washington. In his brief dialogues on the subject with his brother he was venomous against our pretty and clever heroine. He called her "that woman," "that creature," "that sly little serpent," "that murderess." He compared her to Aspasia, Cleopatra, Messalina, Marozia, Lucretia Borgia, Joan of Naples, the Marchioness of Brinvilliers, and other females whose renown is not altogether agreeable.

"She has poisoned Huldah," he asserted. "She might just as well have mixed arsenic in her cup. And she meant it."

"Oh no, John! Not quite that," protested the rational old colonel. "She is a selfish, dishonest, deceiving little puss. She wants to grab a fortune, and would about as lief get it by swindling and perjury as in any

other way. But there is no malignity in her, I take it. She has done Huldah great harm, no doubt; but it is unlikely that she should mean it."

"Oh, you don't know her!" declared the rector, as if he knew her, or could fully know her. "When you have studied human nature as carefully as I have, Julian, you will be able to understand these wicked wretches, these children of this world and Satan," went on this innocent, this man of mere emotion and affection, this most unphilosophic and unjudicial spirit. "She does wickedness and loves it. She will kill my wife and break my heart, and rejoice over it."

"No, not rejoice, I fancy," the colonel persisted in doubting. "I don't believe she means to tie you to the torture-post and jump around you. She is not an intentional Apache. You forget how people (especially women," added the old bachelor, parenthetically) "look at things entirely from their personal point of view; how they judge questions by their feelings, which, of course, means not by other people's feelings; how they snatch at whatever they want, without a thought of their fellow-creatures. For instance, I am in the cars, and I want my window open for the sake of air, and the man behind me catches a horrible cold in consequence; and yet I don't mean it. In fact, when he asks me to close the window, I am disposed to consider it hard in him, and to look upon him as a selfish fellow. Now, I dare say that Josie, so far from thinking herself cruel, regards us as cruel. Possibly enough she is crying at this very minute over our supposed unfriendliness in trying to head off her claim and in breaking with her."

"Nonsense! She can not be so blinded. I have treated her with every kindness, and this is her return. You are always making excuses for Satan, Julian, and trying to show that he doesn't mean to do harm, or hasn't done any. But I know what I know! I have nourished a serpent in my bosom. I have been stung by the pang of ingratitude."

The colonel fell silent for a moment. He was aware that his brother had not spent three hundred dollars on this serpent, and that she had worked pretty smartly for her wages in the way of services and attentions, so that the charge of ingratitude was not very solidly supported. But he guessed that, if he should say this, it would only add to the fragile man's excitement; and what he wanted was to soothe him and keep him from falling sick, or perhaps going mad, over his troubles.

"I am sorry she is at Mrs. Warden's," he said at last, remembering his favorite Belle, and fearing lest she should get no good from Josie.

"I am sorry she is anywhere," snapped the tender-hearted rector.

"I wish we could get her away from there."

"I will tell Mrs. Warden that she must turn her out and send her from Washington, or forfeit our acquaintance."

"You can't do that, you know. You can't cut your parishioners because they entertain your relatives."

"No—I suppose I can't," groaned the Reverend Murray, feeling that the clerical bands were indeed heavy ones.

"The main thing is to induce Josie to give up her claim and clear out," continued the colonel.

Just then he was interrupted by the entrance of Sarah, who handed the rector a scented envelope—an envelope redolent of Josie.

It must be understood that Mrs. Warden had ventured to remonstrate with our heroine on the subject of her quarrel, and had obtained from her a statement of the case, which contained a considerable amount of truth. Softened as the tale was, it was extremely disagreeable news to Mrs. Warden. She did not want to be at variance with the Reverend Murray, whose mere acquaintance was a social help to her, nor with Colonel Murray, who was not only respectable, but marriageable. So she put Josie up to making an effort toward reconciliation; and the result was the perfumed epistle now in the hands of Huldah's husband.

"MY DEAR UNCLE" (he read),—"I can not tell you how keenly I regret that any difference should have arisen between us. I assure you that I set the very highest value upon the good opinion and friendship of yourself and my dear, excellent, generous aunt. To recover your consideration and kindness I would do more than for any other object which I can conceive. I feel all this the more deeply because I hear that your wife is ill. Is it possible that I have been in any way the cause of her sickness? If so, it would comfort me very much to be allowed to see her, and to tell her of my regret and my lasting affection. Could she grant me this favor, and could you sanction it? Do pray have the goodness to let me know whether this may be. Very affectionately, your niece, JOSEPHINE MURRAY."

"Read this!" exclaimed the rector, trembling with indignation, with sub-acute rheumatism, and with nervous prostration. "See how a serpent can write!"

The colonel put on his gold-bowed spectacles, and went carefully through the manuscript twice.

"It is a very remarkable letter," he said, lifting his tranquil eyes with an expression of wonder, if not of admiration. "I would not have supposed that any human being of twenty-two years of age could, under the

circumstances, have written such a calm, judicious, self-respectful, and yet conciliatory letter as that. She doesn't re-open the quarrel, and she doesn't defend herself. It is dignified and expressive. She is a most talented young woman when she stops to think. She is fit to be at the head of a bureau."

"She is a monstrous hypocrite," affirmed the clergyman, disposed by nature and by the habits of his profession to look at the moral rather than the intellectual aspect of things and of people.

"She is an incarnation of misapplied ability," answered the colonel, still shaking his wondering head over the letter. "What couldn't she do if she were good? She might run the whole Murray family. We should be glad to let her run it."

"Thank God that the wicked have no power over it!" exclaimed the rector. "Thank God that he has not made us like those who put on willingly the yoke of sinners!"

"Yes, thank God for that!" assented the old soldier, with obvious feeling. "We have been helped, John, by our circumstances. We belong to honorable professions. I often think that matters could not have gone very badly in those old-time societies which were ruled by soldiers and priests. But what do you propose to do about this letter? Are you going to let Huldah see the girl? If she could bear it, it might help."

"Never!" the rector burst forth, volcanically, ready to emit flames and pour out lava—a very tremulous old Stromboli, by-the-way. "The mere sight of that serpent would kill Huldah. I wouldn't risk it for millions."

"But the thought of Josie's staying in Washington hurts Huldah, you say."

"It is the sole cause of her sickness," asserted Parson Murray, in his inflamed, wholesale, hyberbolical fashion, forgetting that his wife was nearly eighty.

"We talked a while ago of giving the girl something to make her drop this claim, and be all that is nice. Perhaps it was a mistake not to do it then. Hadn't we better do it now?"

"And help her in her intrigues, and reward her for her wickedness!"

"And get her to go away," said the colonel.

"And then come back again."

"We might make it an income on trustee property, the income to cease if she returns here, or if she pushes her claim."

"Yes," said the rector, struck by the practical wisdom of the idea, though much averse to bargaining with sin.

So, after some further discussion and denunciation, the colonel was commissioned to call on Josie, and "see what she would take to clear out," as the veteran plainly expressed it.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

BUYING OFF A CLAIMANT.

It is a terrible thing to be an invalid: it is to have a double who is always giving one a vast amount of causeless trouble: a double who pulls his original two ways at once, and cuffs him whichever way he goes.

Scarcely had the colonel stalked out of the presence of the rector ere the latter was assaulted by one of those irrational terrors which vex the souls and perplex the wills of valetudinarians. It occurred to him that Josie might take deep offense at the effort to get her out of Washington, and might, in revenge, perpetrate some deed of desperate ferocity, such, for instance, as ringing the door-bell with violence, and so killing Mrs. Murray out of hand.

Strange as it may seem to the healthy mind which dwells in a sound body, this whim-wham struck him as a real and imminent peril, and completely daunted him. He actually ran to the street-door with the purpose of calling back his brother, and begging him not to risk an interview with the family Messalina until they could discuss the enterprise more fully, and decide that no harm would come of it. But the colonel, knowing all about the rector's timorousness and vacillation, and bent upon doing promptly what he believed must be done, had made a forced march of it, and was out of sight.

He found Josie at home. She came down briskly and cheerfully into the little Warden parlor to receive her visitor. He was a pet with her, as we remember; she liked his genial, kindly disposition, and his simple, child-like manners; and she was intellectually capable of respecting his solid sense, his manliness, and his uprightness. Moreover, in her present state of abandonment and of depression, she felt that she more than ever needed the good-will of a reputable and honest and stalwart soul.

"The dear old man!" she said to herself, as she smilingly descended the stairway. "If he were twenty years younger I would fall in love with him."

And at the moment she meant it, although she did not invariably mean all that she said, nor, indeed, all that she thought.

Meanwhile she was a bit afraid of him; he might have come to give her a scolding. But she was used to scoldings, and, in general, could take them with disarming sweetness, and had often turned them into loving reconciliations, so that she dreaded them less than most people. Besides, the colonel was not a womanish monomaniac like his brother; he had that excellent common sense which belongs to uncommon people; and she felt sure that he would at least hearken to her defense of herself.

"Good-morning, Uncle Julian. I am de-

lighted to see you," she said, and kissed him at once, a very endearing criminal.

The kiss softened him somewhat, as womanly kisses are apt to soften mankind, especially when they drop from such a shapely mouth as Josie's. The change of feeling was sufficient to surprise him, only that we are never surprised at our own changes of feeling, at least not until we meditate upon them afterward.

Ever since the last revelation concerning her naughtiness, her breaking of weighty promises and her persistence in scandalous lobbying, there had been in his heart a continuous and, as he supposed, an unalterable anger against her. He had said to himself that she was an unprincipled adventuress, a beguiler of souls into the ways of fraud and perjury, and a disgrace to the Murray name. Had any man done what Josie had done, he would have desired to slap that man's face.

But the moment he heard her cordial greeting, and felt her youthful kiss on his withered cheek, it seemed to him there was one code of honor for men, and another, far less exacting, for women. Moreover, there she stood, smiling at him; the prettiest little tremulous humming-bird that could be; perfectly lady-like in her bearing, and sparkling with intelligence. How could it be that one so agreeable to look upon would persist in wrong-doing knowingly and against wise remonstrance? He began to think that she had not been dealt with aright, and to hope that she might yet be made all that a Murray could be.

"How is Aunt Huldah?" she went on. "No better? I am so sorry! Have you come to tell me that I may see her?"

"Not to-day," he smiled, quite amiably and almost apologetically. "John received your little note; but Mrs. Murray is not strong enough to talk, and he—you know him—he is in a worry about her."

"You know, of course, that they have quarreled with me," continued Josie, eager to state her side of the matter, and hoping to make the colonel her ally. "You can be frank with me. I don't want to evade the subject; I want to talk about it."

"Yes, Josie; I know all about it," he said, with that smile which people put on when they mean to utter a petting remonstrance. "I dropped in on purpose to give you a scolding."

"You shall scold me all you want to, Uncle Julian," Josie smiled back. "I consider a scolding from you more of a compliment than praise from most people. It shows that you take an interest in me, and wish me well."

She meant to disarm him, make him captive, and enroll him under her banner, if the thing were possible. Moreover, there came into her head an odd notion, which, amazing as it may seem to normal humanity, we must

positively and frankly report, because it illustrates her strange character.

It struck her, then, that she might so far bewitch Colonel Murray as to make him fall in love with her, and that it might not be a bad thing to take him for a husband. He was sixty-five years old, to be sure; but her betrothed, Mr. Hollowbread, was sixty. He was, at least, half as rich as Mr. Hollowbread, and quite as high in the respect of men, and five times as worthy of their respect. As for his being the uncle of her "poor Augustus," that would, of course, make a queer business of it; but somehow she had a fancy for queer doings. She actually smiled as the whim passed through her head, and said to herself, "I wonder how it would seem to be my own aunt?"

To this singular young woman there was an especial attraction in the novel, in the unheard-of, in the forbidden.

"You are right, Josie," said the colonel. "I do wish you well. I take an interest in you because you are a Murray, and I take an interest in you personally."

"I thank you with all my heart," declared Josie, so honestly pleased and grateful that she looked as good as an angel. "But you must not forget your scolding. Just what is it about? Is it because I left Uncle John's? I was turned away, you must know."

"I know it," he actually stammered, quite sorry for her, as he noted a flush of spiritual pain in her cheek, and half disposed to concede that she had been treated overharshly.

"And he scolded me, and I didn't answer him back until the very last," continued Josie.

"I don't suppose, my poor child, that you did. You are amazingly good-tempered."

"Because I am very wicked, probably," she smiled.

The colonel was bothered. It seemed to him that he should never be able to begin his reproof; and he actually had to cast about him for reasons to push himself to it. Presently he recollected that he was there to wrestle for the life of his sister-in-law, perhaps also for the life or reason of his brother, and certainly for the honor of the Murray name.

"It is this foraging business of yours, Josie," he resumed; "this raid on the United States Treasury. You are prosecuting it still. I have called to remonstrate against that."

Now that the assault had come, Josie quivered under it; but she rallied her forces, and said what she had planned to say.

"Uncle Julian, suppose you were a poor man, with no trade or profession, and saw a chance to get a competency out of the Government, would you take it?"

"If it was a dishonest chance, I would starve first. At least, I pray God that I might starve first."

"But suppose you were a poor woman without a trade or profession, would you take it?"

"The temptation would be far greater, I must admit."

"Yes, it would be very far greater. If you were a woman, you would find it a really prodigious temptation. And now, suppose you did not think this chance to be a wicked one?"

"Do you mean to say that you consider your claim a just one, Josie?"

"Several Congressmen tell me that it is respectable enough. A good many people (and some of them are considered good people—pious people) are pushing just such claims. Any number of such claims have been passed by Congress. They have come to be an admitted thing, a respectable thing. And it is not strange, either, that it should be so. There is something of the sort in almost every trade and profession. Bankers sell doubtful stocks to their customers, and don't hold their heads any lower for it. Officers draw pay for servants when they employ soldiers for servants. The heads of departments—some of them, at least—keep carriages at the cost of the Treasury. Does their Uncle Sam scold them and turn them out of house? Why, our American life is full of these things. There are ever so many men who are drawing irregular allowances, and who have come to consider them regular. Are women to have no such chances?"

"The country is fearfully rotten, Josie. But, so help me Heaven! I will not countenance its rottenness, especially when it invades my own family. Your claim is a rotten one. It is a demand for a hundred thousand dollars where not a cent is owing."

"Old Mr. Drinkwater has sworn to a great deal as being burned besides the barn, and the barn is the only thing that was ever paid for. Now, that was paid for; that was a just claim, therefore; so why not the rest?"

"The barn should not have been paid for. The Government is not responsible for property destroyed in actual conflict. There was some mistake or some swindle in the claim. I am glad it was a trustee, and not a Murray, who presented it. As for old Mr. Drinkwater, I do not believe him. He is either an old dotard who has lost his memory, or an old scoundrel who does not stick at perjury. Until he made his last affidavit, there never was any such property heard of as all these wagons and flocks and herds, enough to fit out a train of emigrants, or the Israelites in the desert, and all crowded into one barn. Nobody in our family ever heard of it. There isn't a trace of it in any of the family letters and papers. Brother John's wife, who was eighteen years old at the time, and whose memory for the days of her youth is extraordinary, never heard of any such property."

Josie, the whole claim, with its interests and its compound interests, is an enormous fabrication. I will use the proper word and call it a swindle. It is a new outrage upon a fearfully fleeced and tax-ridden people."

"It is only a quarter of a cent a head. The *Crédit Mobilier* took a dollar a head. There are Senators and Representatives who take as much every session as I ask only once in my life."

"They are simply abominable villains. I despise them with all my heart and mind and strength."

It must be admitted that it was pretty hard upon Josie to denounce her job and her abettors in it with such uncompromising abhorrence and scorn. But she bore it with her temperamental sweetness, merely flinching a little now and then, as a lady might under an unmeant indecorum, and showing not the first sign of resentment.

"There is another view of the case to be considered," added the colonel. "This business is absolutely worrying to death my poor old sister-in-law; and you may be sure that if she dies her husband will not survive her long."

Josie quivered again, and her young forehead puckered into wrinkles of pain; the blow was such a severe one.

But she could not, of course, look upon the decease of Mrs. Murray and her husband as the colonel looked upon it. To her they seemed to be very old people, who were approaching or had overpassed the natural term of life, and who were somewhat in the way of younger folk.

"Uncle Julian, they are invalids," she said. "Every grasshopper is a burden to them. Your Darwinism is a burden. They should not care so much about my doings."

"They can't help it, Josie. You should consider that."

"I can not afford to consider it," Josie confessed, in a low voice and after long hesitation.

"I have been too slow in coming to that point," nodded the colonel, glad that he had at last reached it. "We propose—my brother and I—to make you an allowance."

Our heroine crimsoned with joyful hope; perhaps here was a hundred thousand coming to her without further labor; perhaps she could secure it, and still at some future time push her claim. At all events, there seemed to be a way of escape opened to her from the marriage-ring of that old Hollowbread. No wonder that the conscienceless little beauty glowed with gladness.

"We propose to set aside for you twenty thousand dollars," continued the colonel, without noting how Josie's countenance fell as he mentioned the modest sum. "That, with what you have now, will give you an income of eighteen hundred a year, which is a respectable support. It is about the pay

of a lieutenant. A lady can surely live on it."

"A milliner might!" thought Josie; but she did not speak, and continued to watch him graciously. It might be that behind this skinflint proffer there was coming a hint of legacies and of a share in that undivided Murray estate.

"Necessarily there would be a consideration and some sort of a guarantee," the colonel went on, stretching out his long lean legs in a way which merely indicated embarrassment, but which seemed to her just now rather offensive. "I will be completely frank with you. This sum will be trusted for you during life; you will have only the income. But that makes it all the safer for you; you will never lose the income. By-the-way, you shall have something more than that. It is only fair that you should have the right to will this property, and I will see that the trust is so arranged. Well, in return, we want an agreement from you that you will give up your claim forever, and also that you will reside elsewhere than in Washington. If that agreement is violated, then, by the terms of the trusteeship, the income will cease, and the principal revert to us."

Josie made no answer. She had hoped that she was winning the colonel over to her side, and here he was as unchangeable as destiny, severe and cruel and insolent. Disappointment, humiliation, and anger caused her mouth to twitch like that of a grieved child, and rendered her incapable of speech.

"I am sorry if I have pained you," said the old gentleman. "The conditions seem unkind to you, doubtless. But they are aimed at a result which we believe to be for the good of all; for your good as well as ours. We want to get you away from this lobbying temptation. It brings ugly company."

"So hard! so insulting!" whimpered Josie.

The colonel might fairly have told her that unscrupulous people ought not to esteem themselves insulted because they do not get such treatment as is accorded to persons of high honor and truthful utterance. But being as yet in full possession of his temper, the courteous and sagacious old man did not say all that he thought.

"As if you could not believe my promise!" continued Josie, really and honestly hurt, just as if she were not a fibber. "You have no right to make such insinuations—no right to abuse me in that way."

"But, my dear, you forget!" protested the old soldier, rather too bluntly. "You forget that we have had your promise, and that it amounted to—very little. The thing slipped your memory, I suppose," he concluded, in a simple way, which might have been satirical.

Now, while Josie did not object a bit to lying, she did object decidedly to being told that she was a liar.

"I promised nothing," she asserted, tartly. "It is all nonsense about my promising and breaking my promise."

"Let us pass that by," said the colonel, suppressing an indignation which turned his white face to a deep pink. "Will you accept our offer as it is?"

"I can not—I must not—I will not," answered Josie, stammering through her refusal, and a good deal frightened by it.

"Then I must warn you, Mrs. Murray," broke out the honorable man in honorable wrath—"I must warn you that, if you persist in pushing your claim, we can have nothing more to do with you, and shall cast you off as a disgrace to the family."

For once, at least, Josie lost her self-command, and answered back in open spite and retaliation.

"Colonel," she said, "please to remember that, if I am a connection of yours, I am also a woman."

"I beg your pardon, madam," responded the old gentleman, rising. "I will remember that you are a woman, and forget that you are a connection."

And off he strode, daunting her considerably even in his retreat, so grandly scornful was his manner, and so much money did he carry away with him.

Did Josie at the moment perceive and admire his moral loftiness? Well, she could hardly appreciate it when he was not an obstacle; but divinity itself, as an obstacle, would not have seemed worshipful to her. Does it to any of us?

Presently she ran up stairs to Mrs. Warden, and gave her a garbled account of the interview, magnifying her own nobility in refusing the Murray greenbacks, to all which her auditor listened, for the most part in silence. Only at the last this impoverished, wearied, and oftentimes hopeless claim-hunter sighed out, "I wish somebody would try to buy me off."

"I will," laughed Josie, with make-believe gayety; "that is, when my ship comes in. Whichever of us wins shall help the loser. We will bank together."

And Mrs. Warden, feeling that her young friend's luck was better than her own, decided to stand by her for the present, even at the risk of a quarrel with the Murrays.

CHAPTER XL.

BETTER AT LENGTH.

OLD Mrs. Murray had never heard of the scene between her brother-in-law and Josie; but she inferred from the silence of her hus-

band respecting the claim that it was still afoot.

No doubt this scandalous business did its part in hurrying her frail being toward that chasm which yawns at the crumbling base of the declivity of years. The rector, who was always ready to attest, and perhaps to believe, that his old wife had "as good health as any body," asserted constantly that it was the claim which was killing her, and that it was her only ailment. Something, undoubtedly, was working her evil; she failed, visibly and rapidly, from day to day. She, too, thought that Josie's suit was the cause of her illness, and fretted a great deal over the irritating supposition.

Several times she said to her husband, with a peevishness of utterance which seemed beyond her strength,

"That woman will kill me."

Yet, had there been no claim, something else might easily have worried her feeble life out; she might have died of listening for the street-noises, or of counting the specks on the ceiling; for at the last moment in the race every little obstacle is able to trip the tired foot. That one pre-eminent annoyance, however, swallowed up all minor troubles, and threatened to devour her also.

In these latter days, by-the-way, she laid a heavy burden upon her husband. She could no longer take thought of his weakness, and control her own agitations for the sake of keeping him tranquil, as she had done so often for so many years. Nor was he strong enough to endure his load without a reeling and a fretfulness which increased her trouble. They worried each other incessantly, without the slightest intention, and yet with great cruelty. They were two pure, honorable, pious people, and nevertheless they led a profoundly wretched life, more unhappy than the mass of the "unco' wicked." It seemed very unjust, and it was surely very pitiable.

A single one of the brief, doleful dialogues which they held with each other will exhibit sufficiently the sombre nature of their existence.

After one of her long fits of speechless languor, resembling insensibility and nearly counterfeiting death, Mrs. Murray roused herself, turned her faded, watery eyes in search of her husband, and gasped, pettishly,

"That woman will kill me!"

By-the-way, it must be understood that, although she uttered this prophecy very dolorously, she did not utter it with full sincerity. Life had been, on the whole, delightful to her, and she was far from being willing to part with it, or from supposing that her departure was really near. Had some authoritative messenger proclaimed to her that death was not far away, the revelation would have been not merely a keen affliction, but also a startling surprise. Never-

theless, she would persist in declaring, from time to time, "That woman will kill me."

"Oh dear!" groaned the husband. "This is Satan's own world. His children have power to slay."

"I don't see how she can do so," murmured the old lady, her brief pulsation of strength beginning to pass away.

"It is wonderful and dreadful," sighed the prematurely old man. "It is one of the mysteries of sin."

"Mysteries of sin," repeated Mrs. Murray, in a whisper, still ruled by her affectionate admiration of her husband, and still capable of saying litany to his utterances.

"But we must not talk of it now, Huldah," he added, suddenly alarmed for her. Indeed, he had already greatly overtaxed her strength, or, rather, permitted her to overtax it.

Her head was sinking lower on her pillow, as if some supernatural abyss were sucking her down, and she would disappear presently from his sight. Her small, wilted, puckered face turned whiter than its accustomed whiteness, and her lips parted dumbly and inexpressively, like those of one lately dead. Then came one of his spasms of terror: shouting for the nurse in the adjoining room, ringing for all the servants in the house, sending wild messages for the doctor, and all the while whimpering, "Huldah! Huldah!"

It was a torturing life, painful to look upon. There were scenes of distress and despair too pitiable for description, and which seemed to belong, not to this earth, but to some world of unmingled sorrow and lament. How could it be otherwise when a sick man undertook to care personally for a sick woman whom he tenderly loved?

Any chance observer would have said that the rector ought to have been sent away and kept away. But nothing short of force could have debarred him from that bedside; and, had he failed from it, all the sooner would it have become a death-bed. Since their marriage these two people had never been separated for a day; and to have divided them now would have been to slay the weaker at once, and the other shortly.

Outside of the sick-room the rector's conduct was as strange as within it; it was of a piece with his unsteady gait and his spasmodic or relaxed features. People do not imagine odder things in reverie than he did in reality, only that (as usually happens, too, in reverie) he mostly left his purposes uncompleted. It might be said that his life now was a series of transitions from one broken, disturbing dream to another.

He wrote a letter to Josie, summoning her to "come and look upon her murderous work;" but he never sent it, lest she should appear, and the sight of her should kill his wife. He wrote another letter to request

the attendance of a distinguished medical specialist in New York, and burned that also, for fear his precious invalid should suspect that her case was a desperate one. He commenced a memorial to Congress against the Murray claim, but stopped, fatigued and dizzy, in the middle of the second sentence. Then he fell to studying medical books and quack advertisements in newspapers, with the hope of finding a remedy which would set old age on its feet in full vigor.

Meantime he would admit to no one that Mrs. Murray was ill, or even noticeably weak. She would soon be about again, he said; she was stronger than himself, and much stronger than most young women; she had a constitution of iron, like all her ancestors. Yes, he flatly fibbed about her health, as indeed he always had done. Even to the colonel he recited these absurd tales, although he must have known that his listener would not credit them, and could not make believe to credit them without difficulty.

The dialogues of pretended confidence which he held with his brother at this period were both whimsical and pathetic. The one told as true what he wanted to have true; and the other, sure that it was false, expressed his pleasure at hearing it.

Once, when Julian called on John, he found him searching for some sovereign cure in an ancient, many-colored basket, full of pill-boxes with broken crowns, and phials with smirched physiognomies, the hoardings of Mrs. Murray through many years, and consequently the veneration of her husband.

"This must be it," said the rector, picking up with tremulous eagerness a little flat-tish, circular package. "Julian, I wish you would read that inscription for me. My glasses don't seem to work of late."

The colonel put on his spectacles, bent over his brother's quivering hand, and read, in the round, formal writing of Mrs. Murray, "Top of pomatum-bottle."

"Ah, yes," said the rector, almost gladdened by this memento of happier days. "It is a bottle which got broken some years ago, and Huldah put away the stopper."

"What a bump of order she has!" responded the colonel, scarcely repressing a smile. "I never saw any body who beat her for assorting and pigeon-holing and indorsing. She ought to have been in the War Department."

"Oh, she is a wonderful woman," sighed the husband, in perfect good faith. "Every little loose article in the house is folded up and neatly tied, and legibly labeled in just that way. She is a person of immense industry and oversight. Every thing has its place and its superscription. Whatever you find, you can tell at a glance what it is, just the same as if you saw it."

"Only, if there had been no envelope on this affair," Julian could not help suggest-

ing, "we should have known it for a piece of pottery without our specs."

"But this is so much neater!" said the rector, almost ready to shed tears of admiration upon the package while he replaced it. "It is so like her! She has kept all our affairs of every sort in the same order," he added, and with a considerable accuracy of statement, for Mrs. Murray had been a wise woman financially, and in her prime a sensible one every way. "If it had not been for her, I should have made ducks and drakes of our possessions long ago."

"Yes, you were extravagant once, John, and Huldah has been of great service to you," conceded the elder brother, wondering the while at the strange ways in which men are led to good or to evil.

He had feared, when John married a woman fifteen years his senior, that the result would be speedy disillusion, quarrels, and perhaps scandals. But it had only been a life-long content, and an exemplary, a wondrous, affection.

Such is the power of character, of instinctive, and, one might say, irrational, tendencies, over circumstances and hinderances.

"I should have gone to utter wreck, body and soul, for this world and for the next, without her," was the rector's next loving hyperbole. "And even now, if she should be taken away, I don't know what the end would be with me," the shaking old gentleman declared, as if he were still capable of dissipation.

Presently another package was found, likewise neatly folded in white paper and legibly legended. The colonel took it and read aloud, "Leaves of a rose given me by Mrs. Augustus Murray on her wedding-day."

"That creature!" exclaimed the rector, slightly recoiling, as if from the preserved venom of a serpent. "Julian, I had better destroy those leaves, don't you think so? She never could look upon them again; they would give her one of her faint turns. I really think I had better burn them." Then he checked himself. "No! She put them up. I had better leave them just there. What do you think, Julian?"

The colonel, after pondering for a moment, and saying to himself that John was surely losing his reason, replied considerably that the matter might perhaps be referred to Mrs. Murray when she should get about again.

"Precisely," nodded the rector, gravely. "Julian, I feel as if I had been handling a dose of deadly poison," he added, shaking his fingers with a shudder, and a shudder, too, of profound feeling. "I can not think of that woman without thinking of the Marchioness of Brinvilliers. She has put hemlock and arsenic in my wife's cup of life. She has been the cause, the sole cause, the wicked and willful cause, of Huldah's illness. Not that it is dangerous. Thanks be to the

mercy of Heaven, it will soon pass away. But it might have been dangerous. I shall always hold her responsible for all that has happened, and for all that might have happened."

It seemed to the colonel that he ought to remonstrate once more against this exaggeration of Josie's malign enchantments. He did not specially care to defend the character and life of a young woman whom he now regarded with no little contempt and with some anger; but he had an instinctive desire to state the cool, judicial truth on all subjects whatsoever, and, moreover, he wanted to prevent his brother from sliding into the chasm of a monomania.

"It appears to me that you rather overstate that case, John," he began. "Josie's conduct has no doubt agitated Huldah, and been one cause of her—of her sick turn, in short. But not the sole cause, I should say. Your wife was not strong before. It would be only fair to attribute somewhat of her present weakness to—to—in fact, to declining years."

The rector's revolt from this suggestion was violent, and it led him to make a statement which was surely very remarkable, at least in view of his character as a clergyman.

"She is not old enough to account for such an attack," he broke out in an agitated voice. "She is only a year or two older than myself."

"Well, well, you know best," muttered the colonel, pacifically and almost apologetically. Then he said to himself as he had said a hundred times before, "John is just like a woman, and always was."

"She has more solid health than nine young women out of ten," repeated the rector, for the twentieth time in the last week. "She has a constitution of iron."

But all this affectionate and piteous fibbing about Mrs. Murray's age and health could not deceive Death. One day he came, the tigerish separator and destroyer, cruel to the victim of his stealthy creepings, still more cruel to the maimed and sorrowing survivor. Unheard and by surprise he came; up to the last instant he had lurked from covert to covert; even when he was sucking away the life-blood, no spectator of the tragedy divined it; no, not even was the dying one aware that his fangs were fastened upon her, never to be loosened.

Her husband had often noted changes in her face which startled him; he noted one such now, and was alarmed by it; but no more than usual. He was sitting near her, fanning her gently by moments to give her easier breath, and by moments ceasing lest he should chill her feeble life.

Her eyes were closed, but he knew that she was not slumbering, for now and then the wrinkled lids parted slightly. It seem-

ed to him as if she were looking to make sure that he was there before she could dare to loose her hold on waking consciousness. He was uneasy, and wanted often to say "Huldah," but still restrained himself for fear of disturbing her.

There was a blessed hope in his heart (a vague and flickering but still comforting hope) that she would fall healthily asleep, and awake greatly refreshed by some marvel, and then be quite herself again.

Of a sudden he observed that ominous change in her visage; or was it only a darkening, a passing tremor, of his wearied eyesight? He cast an impatient glance at the curtained window, and then bent forward eagerly to study those precious, faded features.

"Are you better, Huldah?" he whispered, too anxious to keep silence longer.

Observe the tender, cheering form of the question; he never, by any chance, asked her if she were worse.

"Yes—better," she whispered back, opening her eyes merely to close them, and becoming the while swiftly other-world-like.

Yes, she was "better at length," better "of the fever called living." She had bent her last earthly gaze upon her loved one, and spoken to him her last mortal syllable.

Crowding drops of perspiration gushed out upon the bereaved man's high, bald, ashy forehead. He spoke to his wife again; he took her hand to see if it was cold; he pressed it, drew her by it, kissed it.

But these gentle solicitations and timorous urgencies elicited no echo from the mysterious distances without horizon which had rushed in between him and the soul which was lately his comrade.

The thought crossed him that he was alone in the world; that he was floating on the frail wreck of his life alone. This thought came upon him suddenly, like a murderer, and struck him a torturing, crazing blow.

"Oh, Huldah, Huldah!" he called aloud, in a high, quavering scream, meanwhile clutching the arms of the lifeless body and shaking them with maniacal force.

There was no protest against the violence, and no return from the far-away refuge. There was nothing but the unconscious placidity and the unresisting meekness of death.

Then came loud, hoarse shouts for assistance—for the nurse, for Sarah, for all the domestics by name, for persons who were not in the house—for Julian and the doctor.

One would have said that no such voice had ever been heard before on earth, so strange and unhuman was this broken, indistinct, and yet stentorian, bellowing. It was like the cry of great animals in pain, or of newly created, nondescript, monstrous creatures.

Help arrived promptly. There was a

wild application of stimulants and other restoratives; messengers were sent for the physician and the colonel. Meanwhile the bereaved husband shouted directions in the thick speech of a paralytic, and then suddenly dropped on his knees by the bedside, there to pray in sobs and whisperings.

But prayer was not enough; it seemed to him that human remedies might still avail; and, tottering to his feet, he recommenced a labor without hope. When the colonel arrived he found his sister-in-law quite dead, and his brother striving with stimulants to bring her out of a swoon.

"John, it is useless," said the old soldier, taking the clergyman by the arm. "John, be a man and a Christian! John, surrender to your God!"

"Oh, if the Master would but call us both together!" implored the widower, in a harsh, piercing whisper, lifting up his shaking hands to heaven. Then recollecting, perhaps, how he had exhorted others to bear their bereavements with submission, he added, in the same strained, exalted hiss: "But I will summon *all* my strength and say—His will be done!"

"It is done," answered the colonel, bursting into a sob—his first sob for near half a century.

"No!" exclaimed the rector, in a loud scream of despairing denial, and fell senseless to the floor.

CHAPTER XLI.

HOW JOSIE BORE IT.

"I UNDERSTAND that your claim killed the old lady—haw, haw!" Mr. Sykes Drummond had the indiscretion and the bad taste to say to Josie.

Able as Drummond was in the coarser and wicked business of the world, he was in some matters stonily stupid, owing to a want of sensitiveness which incapacitated him from sympathizing with others, and so prevented him from guessing their feelings and their resulting opinions.

"If it did kill the old lady, it has helped the old gentleman," Josie answered, promptly, though with a flush of vexation and pain on her face. "The dear old man is freed from his servitude. He will now take a rest, and have a good time. The next we shall hear of him will be that he is frequenting the theatres, and traveling all over Europe, and courting a young lady."

In these words she uttered the common opinion, but not her own opinion. She was too clever in divining the tendencies of emotional people, and she had studied her widowed relative too closely not to suspect that he had received a deep wound, and perhaps an incurable one. But a series of vicious

circumstances had so hurt and angered her, that for a moment she lost her self-possession and spoke vindictively.

She was indignant at Drummond—indignant because of his coarse joke, and his hint that he knew somewhat of the family quarrel—so indignant that she actually thought of marrying him merely to get a chance to torture him.

Furthermore, she was offended with the poor rector and his brother, because they had inflicted a social stigma upon her, and shown what she considered indelicate hostility by failing to invite her to the funeral.

The blame of this slight, by-the-way, must not be imputed to the colonel. He had thought and ventured to urge that Josie should receive an invitation, rather than have all Washington gossipdom wondering over her absence and nosing after the reason of it.

But the rector could not take a rational view of the subject. He insisted that she was the fiendish murderess of his angelic Huldah, and that it would be horrible to let her come to gloat over her work; in short, he so raved that the colonel passed the girl over without a billet.

So she had felt herself driven to fib about it; to explain that illness had prevented her from attending the obsequies, and to counterfeit a bedridden state for a day or two.

Of course the whole ugly business had been exceedingly rasping to her, and she was not in a temper to speak of her relatives with judicial fair-mindedness. It was characteristic of this able young creature, however, that, even under the irritation of Drummond's gravely speech, she did not utter an overtly angry syllable, nor expose her feelings by so much as an acid intonation. Her prediction as to the cheerfulness of the rector's widowhood was delivered with a pleasant countenance and a musical little laugh. Excepting those palpitations which prompt to love-making, Josie was, to a wonderful extent, mistress of her feelings.

"So you think the old fellow will want to marry again?" said Drummond. "I can't see it in that light. When a man has had a rough time with one wife, it doesn't seem probable that he should want to try another in a hurry."

"My uncle never knew that he had a hard time. He was distractedly fond of his old lady."

"I thought you called it a servitude."

"So it was. But he served willingly, and considered it a privilege. He was like the loyal negroes of old times who worshiped their masters."

"I can't imagine his being fond of her."

"You can't imagine any body being fond of any body, I suppose."

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Murray. I can imagine myself as being very fond of you, if

I might be allowed the privilege. But your worthy relative was very different from you; she was very old and very plain, and a domestic tyrant."

"The tyranny doesn't hinder. In fact, the better people are governed, the more contented they are."

"I believe you are right there," said Drummond, glancing at her with a sort of respectful surprise. "It is not a favorite doctrine in America, but I believe it is a true one. The more severely our volunteers were disciplined, the less they grumbled at their officers. How the deuce do you find out these things at your age?"

Notwithstanding the compliment, Josie was not pleased with this speech. She found the word "deuce" objectionable, not as being a profanity or a vulgarity, but as being a liberty. Mr. Drummond had to be checked all the while, and it seemed to her that he ought to be checked now.

It may be remembered that she used to be afraid of him during their earlier interviews, but she had long since discovered that she could control him by a judicious mixture of coquetry and huffing, and she stood in awe of him no longer. It was usual with her to be thus moved by men on first encountering them, and to learn afterward to treat them as the frogs treated King Log the Great.

"I learned ever so much by studying the hard case of Miss Nancy Appleyard," she answered, well knowing that he hated the subject. "There is an instance of love growing under discipline. The more you ill-treat that poor creature, the faster she runs after you. And if ever you marry her (as I suppose you will some day), and if ever she gets the upper hand, then you will worship her."

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Drummond, with counterfeit merriment. "By-the-way, I have something new to tell you about Squire Appleyard. She—or he, haw, haw!—had the courage to come to my boarding-house and take her meals there. I told her decidedly that it would not do, and that one of us two must leave. I murmured that tender sentiment in her ear over our very first breakfast in company."

"And how did she bear it?" giggled Josie, forgetting all her bitternesses in the fun of this story.

"De buckwheat cake was in her mouf, and de tear was in her eye," quoted Drummond. "But she deferred to my opinion, and tore herself away."

"You did your landlady a favor. I understand that Miss Nancy pays, just as weak-minded women do, in promises. Of course it is not her fault. How can she have a practice without clients?"

"It is a pity she hadn't a barn in her family," grinned Drummond, who wanted to punish Josie for introducing this Appleyard topic. "Your little claim goes on swimming-

ly, I suppose, in spite of Mrs. Murray's ghost. We are impenitently hell-bent on it, eh?"

"Gentlemen should not use profane language before ladies, my dear lawgiver."

"That is news to me—haw, haw! You don't object to Senator Rigdon swearing by the bale in your presence."

"Senator Rigdon is a character—a humorist. I don't so much object to a man's swearing when it is a part of his circulation. The Senator doesn't mean any thing disagreeable by bad language, any more than Mr. Hollowbread does by breathing loud. Besides, he is a member of the Upper House."

"You seem to be in a tomahawking and scalping humor to-day," grumbled the humiliated member of the Lower House. "Perhaps, if I should go away it might be a comfort to you."

"You had better stay and behave pretty," said Josie, coolly, but granting him a twinkle of a smile.

And Mr. Drummond, though he had been considerably tomahawked and scalped, did stay and behave his prettiest.

During the whole of this chitchat and light banter Josie was impatiently expecting a letter from one or other of her uncles. She had not wanted to part with her husband's wealthy and patrician relatives; and, now that Aunt Huldah no longer ruled the family, she was eager to return to it.

Remembering how completely the rector had lived for his wife, she inferred that he had only opposed the claim in the natural course of marital obedience, and that Mrs. Murray was the real author of the opposition. With her death, of course, all that hostility might have died out, and the widower might receive with pleasure an offer of reconciliation. No doubt he was full of sorrow, but bereavements sometimes softened people's hearts, and made them welcome any one who brought gifts of sympathy. Moreover, a week had passed since the funeral, and a week was surely enough to lay a ghost, especially a ghost of eighty. It seemed reasonable to hope that she could appease the lonely old man; that, were she but once housed with him, she could become his diversion, his comforter, and his ruler; that, in short, she could make herself the mistress of the situation and the heir of the future.

Thus had Josie argued herself up to the venture of writing to the weeping, half-crazed mourner a delicately worded letter of apology, consolation, respect, and affection.

The response came while she was still holding light discourse with Sykes Drummond. In great agitation she tore open the envelope, and read with extreme difficulty, so tremulous was the handwriting, a misgiving which had the tone of being a message from the other world.

It no more resembled the usual sane and

genial epistolary style of the rector than the ranting of a table-rapper's Socrates resembles the philosophizing of Xenophon's sweet teacher. It was a letter which well deserved to be put in a strait-jacket and confined within walls of cotton padding.

The general character of it may be inferred from the fact that it opened with this raging sentence, "I summon you before the bar of God to answer for your crime as a murderess."

Josie fairly uttered a kittenish spit as she crumpled up this piteous extravagance and thrust it into her pocket. So indignant was she, that for an instant she lost her prudence, and exclaimed aloud,

"The old fool has gone stark crazy."

"Who?" laughed Drummond. "Mr. Hollowbread, I bet. Has he been popping?"

"It isn't Mr. Hollowbread; it is an old gentleman in New York," declared Josie, with admirable presence of mind, not to say absence of morals. "What a goose!"

"You are not very complimentary to the Nestor of the House—haw, haw!" insisted Drummond.

"The Nestor of the House isn't such a silly as you take him to be," smiled Josie, remembering for perhaps the first time that day that she was engaged to Mr. Hollowbread. "I don't believe he would marry the Queen of Sheba."

"Nor I, either, so long as you live."

"What nonsense!" giggled our heroine, who was trying hard to forget the rector's ravings. "You are not tall enough to see the whole stature of Mr. Hollowbread. He is simply a monument of platonic friendship. He is as lofty as the Washington obelisk."

"And as unfinished about the summit," haw-hawed Drummond, who was jealous of the Nestor, both as a legislator and as a lover.

"Why don't you say something hateful about Mr. Beauman, or Mr. Smyler, or Mr. Bray, or General Hornblower?" asked Josie. "I know over so many gentlemen besides Mr. Hollowbread. Or couldn't you demolish a few ladies of my acquaintance?"

"Oh, willingly; but it isn't necessary. You demolish ladies enough yourself to fill a man's heart with pity."

"I am not one bit satirical or scandalous, and you know it. What do you mean?"

"I mean that you are breaking Mrs. John Vane's heart by sitting in curtained alcoves at parties with Senator Ironman."

"Oh, she has no heart to break. I dare say it hurts her vanity and makes her jealous, and that she slanders me awfully to pay for it. But it doesn't matter. Every one knows that she is a mere animal, and that her opinion amounts to no more than a horse's. I will venture to say that she never complains of my alcove-dialogues to her husband or to Mrs. Ironman. Of course you

know what I interview the Senator for. I must look out for my claim in the Upper House, as I dearly love to call it, just to tease you."

"I don't think you need fear for your claim. You are the most potent and petted lady that ever came to Washington to seek her fortune. You eclipse even the old stagers—the women who have grown gray in pushing their bills and their husbands—the claimants of twenty years' standing."

"Old, painted, ogling, loud-talking, manish creatures! Have the goodness not to compare me with them."

"You can lead up twice as many votes as Mrs. Griper, and four times as many as Mrs. Warden."

"Poor Mrs. Warden! She works so hard and spends so much and gets so little! Belle really ought to help her."

"Aristides Cato Bradford is about the only Congressman whom Belle will say a nice word to."

To this statement Josie made no response further than to manipulate her handkerchief with severity.

Bradford never came to see her nowadays; had not called at the Warden house since her advent into it; had once or twice joined Belle in the street, but never herself. His conduct pained her more than any thing else; more, even, than her banishment from the Murray family circle; infinitely more than the death of Aunt Huldah and the grief of Uncle John.

"You think, I suppose, that you have complimented me prodigiously," she said, presently, making a violent effort to continue the conversation with gayety. "You have represented me as the Queen of the Lobby. If I had been here ten years, and got as crazed about Congress as Mrs. Warden and some other women are, I suppose I should feel grateful to you. As it is, I am not one jot flattered by what you tell me, and rather think I ought to be very angry."

"Oh no! Congressmen are men, after all; their scalps are worth taking—haw, haw! I humbly hope that mine is. Well, you have been on the war-path outside of the Capitol also. You have had an offer within a week, and I know who made it."

"I have not; and you don't know any thing about it."

"The great secretary *in futuro*, the immense, embryonic statesman, the grand, gloomy, and peculiar, has been at your feet."

"Whom do you mean?" giggled Josie, meantime casting about for some evasion.

"The scrivener of General Bangs, the noble, talented, and beauteous Bray—haw, haw, haw!"

"What an absurd guess! There is not a word of truth in it, from the bottom to the top."

"You deny it so promptly and flatly that

I know it is true. Besides, the elegant sufferer has himself revealed his venture and his disaster."

"I don't believe he has told any such silly fib."

"He has. He elocutionized it to Beauman, and Beauman snickered it to me."

"I think you and Mr. Beauman might be in better business than talking gossip about Childe Harold Bray."

"So I think. Sometimes we are in better business. But, all the same, Bray has brayed his sorrows out loud, just as I tell you."

"What an awful fool!" laughed Josie, neither denying nor admitting the fact (for it was a fact) of the young man's offer. "He ought to wear a dunce-cap for telling such a story."

"It is no use calling it a story. He swears himself that it is a true story. Come, Mrs. Murray, make an honest confession for once, just to see how it seems."

"I never was so surprised in my life as when he spoke to me," conceded Mrs. Murray, seeing at last that denial was useless. "He had not paid me a spark of real attention, so far as I knew. Probably he thought I had been waiting for him, and that he had only to speak the first word. What did he say to Mr. Beauman?"

"I will tell you if you will tell me the exact oration which he made to you."

Josie was very curious to know the particulars of Bray's avowal, and would have immensely enjoyed laughing over their extravagance. But, as we have heretofore stated, she had that honor, or that caution, whichever it may be, which causes women to shrink from revealing one man's love-making to another man.

So, after a moment of meditation, she replied, firmly:

"I won't tell you any thing at all. There is nothing to tell."

"So it was a secret session, was it?" answered Drummond. "Well, I admire you and praise you for your discretion. When my head falls at your feet, cover it with the same merciful mystery. Let it be sepulchred and forgotten."

"I will forget it," smiled Josie.

Here let us close our report of this dialogue. It seemed worth narrating, because one may draw from it an idea of our heroine's situation after her exodus from the Murray circle. She was prosperous, a belle in society, the object of matrimonial desires, a favorite with our patriotic lawgivers, and hence likely to secure her hoped-for "steal."

Nevertheless, as her claim was not positively a bird in the hand, and as the only man whom she really cared for was quite positively a bird in the bush, she kept up her secret engagement with the sexagenarian Hollowbread, and flirted much with Drummond and certain others.

CHAPTER XLII.

A FERVENT FOE AND A FERVENT FRIEND.

BUT swimmingly as Josie seemed to get on, she had made herself an earnest and potent enemy, who was capable of driving her to measures which she detested.

"She is a bad little woman," pronounced Colonel Murray, in talking of her to Bradford. "I don't mean to assert that she intended to damage the feeble chances of my poor sister-in-law for longer life, or to plunge my brother into his present condition of wretchedness and semi-insanity. I don't feel quite positive as to her knowing distinctly that it is wicked to tell lies and break promises and cheat the Government. She doesn't seem to have had any moral discipline at all, or any ethical base to start from."

"It is such a pity!" said Bradford, who still at times hankered after Josie's diverting and inflaming society. "She is amazingly bright, able, and agreeable. If you could believe a word she says, or have the least confidence as to what she would do, she would be perfectly delightful."

"You have to treat her as you would an Injun," declared the colonel, a contemner of the Quaker commission. "Be always on your guard, and fire at the first movement. Well, whether she means to do wrong or not, whether she knows what wrong is or not, she has worked a great deal of mischief. But I want to stop her from working more. I must leave here for a while, and take my poor brother on a journey; but before I go, I desire to have a shot at this little Comanche of civilized society. I want to punish her, and I ought to punish her. It is every honest man's duty to trounce people who do wickedness and work mischief. Honest men are the commissioned officers of society. If they fail to punish evil-doing, the criminals soon come to believe that their conduct is proper enough, and the whole community loses in some measure its sense of right and wrong. Besides, this barn swindle is a disgrace to our family name, and a personal disgrace to me, an old officer!" emphasized the colonel, straightening himself superbly.

"I am sorry you take it so much to heart," Bradford said. "It will not be easy, I fear, to stop it. These jobs of special legislation are a veteran and prosperous abuse. A fat job, with a clever and pretty woman to push it—or, indeed, with only an impudent swindler to push it—is a hard thing to beat. Jobs are generally beaten, not by Congressional virtue, but by rival jobs."

"I must beat this one if I can," affirmed the colonel, with a stamp of the foot. "And I want you to help me. You are a Congressman; you are a man under oath to see that the country's faith in its legislators is not abused; you are capable of doing duty without fear, as I know—without favor, as I hope.

I want you to go with me before Bangs's committee, and aid me in protesting against this dishonoring swindle."

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Bradford, wishing with all his heart that he had never taken a kiss from Josie. "She is an old, old friend of mine, and I hate abominably to fight her. But, by Jove, I shall have to give her up. She is doing too much harm to let one keep patience with her. Well, let us go before the committee."

They set off for the Capitol, and on the way encountered Josie. She was a block and a half distant when they first saw her; but the trimness of her figure, the grace and taste of her costume, and the pretty lithe-ness of her walk, were perfectly distinguishable; and Bradford's naughty heart gave a jump of longing and of dismay at the spectacle.

"I shall tell her my opinion of her, and then cut her forever," said the colonel, as calmly and sternly as if he were sitting in general court-martial.

"Gracious!—I can't do that—I can't listen to it," returned Bradford. "I will meet you in the Rotunda," he added, hastily, and skulked shame-facedly down a cross-street to hurry around the block.

Josie recognized him; guessed, of course, that he was dodging her, and felt like sinking into the earth. She walked on in a dazed, tingling state, her cheeks spotted with a flush of disappointment and humiliation, and her muscles trembling so that it seemed to her as if she had no feet. But she was one of those women who spring up from downfalls quickly, and who, losing one man, instinctively jump for another.

Before she reached the colonel she had recovered hope, and she had formed a plan. Her lover had avoided her; that was lamentably clear. But it was also clear that her uncle had refused to follow the lead; and therefore she inferred that he meant to recognize her, and perhaps to speak to her kindly. She would greet him with a smile, and inquire plaintively after poor Uncle John, and so renew the broken chain of affection.

But in Colonel Murray's present state of mind it was of no use to try to gammon him, gammoned she never so wisely.

"My brother is very ill," he replied, coldly. "Mrs. Murray, I have a question to put to you. Will you give me your positive and solemn promise to drop your claim?"

It was too much. Josie had just been badly hurt by one man, and here was another flying at her. Partly to see if a show of grief and resentment would not help her, and partly because of that natural impulse which leads most people to recoil from an unexpected attack, she started aside, drew down her veil, and passed slowly by him, all in silence.

No doubt she hoped that he would follow her and apologize for his abruptness, thus giving her a chance to recommence the interview on more genial terms. But the colonel's patience was even more completely exhausted than hers; and he let her know it at once.

"Very well, madame," he said, loudly. "But this ends our acquaintance."

She turned promptly, but he was making off with long strides toward a horse-car; and, before she could decide to call to him, he had plunged into it and was beyond hearing.

In the Capitol the colonel found Bradford, and they repaired at once to the den of the Committee on Spoiliations, where they made such an onset upon the Murray swindle as confounded even the brazen Bangs.

"Am I to understand," stared that renowned wire-puller, "that you do not want this hundred thousand dollars to fall into your family?"

"I certainly do not," replied the colonel, with something like sparks coming out of his flint-gray eyes. "I told you a while ago that the claim was a humbug."

"I remember," grinned the general, amused as well as puzzled. "But people sometimes change their opinions under such convincing circumstances. However, never mind about that; you are not like most people. You have your army ways of thinking, no doubt. The war and navy departments are the last refuges of chivalry. When the dove of honesty flies forth to seek a resting-place on earth, he will take his flight from one of their windows. But what we have to consider in this case is not your chivalrous sensitiveness, but the evidence."

"The evidence shows that the property was destroyed in actual conflict, and every one knows that in such cases the Government is not responsible," argued the colonel.

"Ah, indeed!" nodded the general, who had already seen to it that Josie's bill should reveal nothing of the sort. "Your law is indisputable."

"And I believe I can prove that this last affidavit of old Drinkwater's is a piece of pure perjury. Give me time to prove it; let the claim wait till then."

"Certainly—very good," bowed and smiled Bangs; but as soon as the two men left him he sent for Hollowbread.

"This is a bothering job of yours," he grumbled, at Josie's advocate. "Here is this old Don Quixote of a Colonel Murray fighting his niece's cause in complete armor. Your little lady certainly ought to take care of her own relatives. We can't expect to get on with her work when we are ridden down by the very people who ought to back us. Why doesn't she poison the excellent old blockhead?"

"Of course she can't poison him," sighed Hollowbread; "and I suppose it is equally

certain that she can't convert him. An old officer of the regular army can no more be deluded than an old maid."

The general roared with laughter.

"You shouldn't hate old maids, Hollowbread," he said. "They have all been flirts in their younger days. But to return to our business; you must head off the colonel somehow."

"But what am I to do?" groaned the lately honest statesman, who already found the paths of corruption so devious and perplexing.

He breathed louder than usual, and had a more than ordinarily apoplectic splendor in his face, and was obviously sad, wearied, and discouraged. It was a dreadful thing to this timorous man and would-be honorable legislator to have the guardianship of one of the most thoroughbred swindles (though by no means one of the greatest) that had ever been pushed in Congress. And to be threatened with exposure, to be menaced by the protests of such an Aristides as Colonel Murray and the denunciation of that young Demosthenes, Bradford, made the matter all but insupportable.

"Do?—why, dodge?" answered Bangs. "Get the thing ready to slip it into another committee, if the opposition grows too heavy here. A juggler must have more than one thimble to keep his pea under. While they are looking for you in the Spoiliations, you must be going through in the Navy, or the Ways and Means, or the Appropriations. It would be the best of all jokes," he guffawed, "to slip your affair into the Army Bill, and carry it under the old colonel's nose."

"Yes, I must devise something of the sort," sighed Mr. Hollowbread, who could not laugh over the matter. "I am obliged to you, general," he added, though he felt particularly ungrateful, as men often feel toward their mentors in wickedness. "Well, good-morning."

Meanwhile Josie was at home, unaware of the perils which lowered over her claim, but musing sadly concerning troubles which she did know of. She had been out in the street by the man she most heartily liked, and by the man whom she most sincerely respected.

Some of her most desirable acquaintances had become obviously less cordial since her exit from the Murray house. Miss Ledyard (daughter of the great senator), that shy, blushing, and yet lofty patrician, the only girl in Washington who ruled alongside of married ladies, a queen of society who seemed to consider good people alone as truly "good style"—this young noble had absolutely ceased bowing to Josie.

Moreover, our heroine's boarding-place was not all that a heroine's home should be. Mrs. Warden, it turned out, was a little wearying when one lived with her. She

fretted about her own disappointments, showed a snappish jealousy of her lodger's popularity, and wanted her, as well as every body else, to worship Belle. As for that young lady herself, she disapproved openly of claim-hunting, and, what was far more provoking, took long walks with Edgar Bradford. Belle, also, as Josie asserted, had a temper; and doubtless there was some lamentable fraction of truth in the allegation: so many women have one, or, what is worse, half a dozen a day! Josie, by-the-way, herself gifted with a singularly even disposition, is responsible for the above remark concerning her gentle sex.

"I hate women," she often said. "They are as fretful as tired children. It is partly because they are feeble, and partly because they are fools. The only friend you can get on with smoothly is a man past thirty, and all the better if he is some other woman's husband. He has found out that his wife is a failure, and so he doesn't expect too much of us."

Well, she was reflecting gloomily on her situation, and perhaps shedding a precious tear or two over its asperities, when her betrothed arrived to tell her how Colonel Murray and Bradford had been assailing her barn.

Josie stared with horror. Her uncle had indeed taken a terrible revenge. He might succeed in beating her out of her claim; he might drive her to a step which she still recoiled from. Her gaze of dismay was not fixed upon vacuity, but upon the gross form and inflamed face of her affianced.

"It is an ugly business," groaned Hollowbread, breathing noisily, somewhat like a pumped-out horse, as he always did when worried. "I really begin to fear that I may not be able to carry the bill through for you."

He actually seemed to be disgusted with the enterprise, and to be minded to wash his hands of it. Josie's heart almost stopped beating as she thought, What if he too should desert me? And then, immediately on this consciousness of his importance, there came a sentiment of gratitude, and of favor. He had surely worked bravely for her, and it did seem that he ought to have some reward, or at least some cheering hope of one. Besides, would it not be well to make quite sure of this man and his money, in view of the chance that her bill might fail? An open betrothal would nail him, while it would not positively nail her. If woman has no political rights, she has *en revanche* many social and sentimental ones, including the right of breaking an engagement.

"But I shall always keep you as a friend?" she asked, with an imploring, piteous smile. "My relatives have turned against me. Shall you?"

"Mrs. Murray—never!" exclaimed this venerable Antony, stretching out his hand toward the hand of his Cleopatra.

She returned his grasp, and gave him a look—such a look!—one of those indescribable ones—a look worthy the heroine of a melodrama. It was a prodigious feat of humbugging, and she knew it to be so while she performed it. But it was just as effective as if it had come straight from the heart; indeed, it struck fairer than similar glances of hers which had really come from the heart: I mean the glances which had fallen harmless from the armor of Bradford.

"I am bound to you for life, Josie!" continued Hollowbread, lifting her hand to his lips. "I wish to Heaven that all men knew of it!"

Is it possible that a man of sixty could talk in this style, or, talking thus, could mean it? We must allow that it would be impossible with many; but this particular sexagenarian was an exceptional one, and almost a prodigy. From the grayish matter of his brain to the dye of his carefully curled hair, and from the pulsings of his battered but fervent heart to the polish of his boots, he was fearfully and wonderfully made. He was an amazing complication of shams and sincerities. His costume, as we already know, was an unwrinkled deception, meant not so much to clothe his figure as to disguise it. His coat was worthy of exhibition in a sartorial museum; it ought to have been hung up in the Patent Office by the side of the finest models of machinery; and had it been made the subject of a report in *quarto*, that volume alone would have justified the franking privilege.

In politics, also, he was at least as much of an unveracity as in the matter of wardrobe. He stood ready at all times to propose any measure which he thought the public desired. He was capable of arguing for contraction on Monday and for inflation on Tuesday. He was one of those fierce protectionists, who are liable to turn free-traders at a week's notice.

But inside of all this variability and duplicity there was one flaming centre of constancy. In the business of getting bewitched about a woman, he might almost be said to lead his generation. Amativeness had long been his ruling passion, and now, if no longer a passion, it was a monomania. Like all other monomaniacs, his possession was both comic and pathetic. From the ridiculous to the sublime, there was but a single step in the love-making of the Honorable G. W. Hollowbread.

"Yes, I wish that the whole world knew of my affection for you," repeated this made-up old dandy, this weather-cock politician, this infatuated lover. "It is my greatest honor. I feel that there is nothing else in my life which so ennobles me. If I never gain another distinction, I ought with this one to be content."

"Do you mean it? Do you mean all of

it?" whispered Josie, touched by this humility of whole-souled adoration. "Would you really like people to know that you are so silly as to care for me like that?"

"Mrs. Murray! my dear, dear Josie!" burst out Hollowbread. "If you wish to do me one immense favor—if you wish to make me your grateful slave for life—accept me at once openly. I should go out of this house little less than mad with pride and happiness."

"Ah, George! you are irresistible," sighed Josie, dropping her shapely head on his wheezing breast. "You may say that we are engaged. I will say so myself."

CHAPTER XLIII.

SYMPATHY, COURTSHIP, AND COUNSEL.

THE announcement of Josie's engagement made a stir in Washington society, and there were plenty of comments upon it, and some very curious ones.

Chivalrous young Clavers turned ashiere than the Spanish moss of his native lowlands when he heard the tale, and subsequently declared to a bosom-friend that never since the hoary ages began their sorrowful course down the fading track of time—never had there been such another sacrifice of a beautiful, noble woman to an unholy, selfish, shameless dotard.

The grand, gloomy, and peculiar Bray walked thrice around the room in which he received the stunning information, halted suddenly, rolled his eyes at the ceiling, and exclaimed: "Infatuation! 'Whom the gods mean to destroy, they first make mad.' As for him, I shall belong to that House some day, and I solemnly swear that I will vote against every measure he proposes."

The Apollonian Beauman saluted the news of the betrothal with a bland drawl of "Oh—ah—indeed!" but nevertheless felt a nettlesome little pang at his heart the while—such a pang as is apt to sting a woman-killer on such occasions, and make him conscious of his own vanity. "Well, I must bear it the best I may," he added, with a smile. "I will not try to hide the fact that I shall lay awake over it for five minutes to-night. But poor old Hollowbread! how will he bear it?"

Probably the person most tenderly and gratefully moved by the tidings was Squire Nancy Appleyard. She made no public remark upon it, but she turned such a lovely rose-color as lawyers seldom exhibit, and straightway sought the rarely disturbed seclusion of her office, there to have "a good cry" of joy, and to hope for the return of her beloved Drummond, alas! evermore a *volage*.

"Hollowbread going to marry the pretty widow!" grinned General Bangs. "By Jove! what will he do about the claim now? By

Jove! what a fool he was to let out his engagement before he got that job through Congress! I'll be hanged if I would trust such a dunderhead as that to manage a ward caucus. Either he is playing a deeper game than I can understand, or he is the 'biggest ass that ever blundered inside politics.'"

"Hollowbread now has an opportunity to do a very taking thing," was the opinion which rolled from the mellifluous tube of Hornblower. "He is opulent enough to say, I accept the woman, and I resign the claim. If he should cover that money back into the Treasury, it would send him to the Senate. I doubt whether Hollowbread has the originality to hit upon that course of action, or the force of character to carry it out. But that is precisely and emphatically what I should do."

Mrs. John Vane, when the engagement was told her by Senator Ironman, leaped from her sofa in rowdy delight, took a polka up and down the room, slapped her informant smartly on the shoulder, and laughed out, "Oh, that old man! Good enough for her! I am so glad!"

"Yes; but, by Jove! he ain't so very old," answered the senator, repressing a spasmodic impulse to cover with his hand the bald spot of his own cranium. "And he's pooty rich, too, Hollowbread is, and he'll spend his money for her like blazes."

"But he won't spend it for her here," hoped Mrs. Vane, spitefully. "That claim of hers will sink him like a millstone, and he won't be re-elected. Oh, she is done for in Washington."

Well, our friend Hollowbread was hefting this millstone, and wondering how he should get his political neck free of it. He had not thought of its density and thickness when Josie gave her consent to a public engagement. He had thought of it previously, and failed to see a hole through it, and put aside the troublesome meditation, as was his indolent, procrastinating manner.

But in that blessed moment of full and overt acceptance he could not, of course, remember any thing besides his goddess, and the cornucopia of happiness which she was showering upon his dizzy head. Ere long, however, the claim arose before him again, reminding him that he would soon be called upon to espouse it at the altar, and asking him if he would dare thus to acknowledge it. He decided that he dared not; that it would probably drive him from political life; that it would certainly dishonor him in his own estimation; and that he could not make such sacrifices for it.

Let me repeat emphatically that he did not consider himself a dishonest man, but rather an eminent instance of unselfishness and scrupulousness, for a Congressman. There were members, and personages of great popular note, too, who bragged much of be-

ing the champions of the sons of toil, who introduced eight-hour laws and all that sort of buncombe, but who yet burdened the Treasury and increased the taxes of the poor by their lobbyings and stealings. One such brawler, as he knew, had taken twenty thousand dollars in bribes before the holidays, and would bag at least a hundred thousand by the end of the session.

As for himself, the only stain upon him, at least during his last two terms, was the smut of this Murray barn. That had vexed and shamed him considerably, even while he bore it for love alone. But now it would be imputed unto him that he had pushed the nasty claim with the intent of marrying it. He thought that he could not stand such an accusation, and he mustered up courage to hint as much to his darling Josie.

"We ought to have kept the engagement a secret," was her stunning answer. "I told you so all along," she added, with a look of reproach. "But you would have your way."

Mr. Hollowbread had the air of a dog whose master stands over him with an uplifted cowhide.

"Why didn't you think of this before?" she continued. "How did I know? How could I know all about Congressional rules, and decorums, and prunes and prisms? It would be very hard in you to make me suffer for your mistakes."

"I would cheerfully settle a similar amount upon you," said Mr. Hollowbread, imploringly.

"But it would still be only two hundred thousand between us," she sighed, partly touched by his self-abnegation and generosity, and partly vexed by what she considered his lack of foresight. "I must say, my dear good man, that I prefer three hundred thousand. Besides, I don't want to plunder you. I prefer my own money."

Her own money! What a phrase to apply to the proceeds of a theft! But even if Hollowbread could have brought himself to despise her for any cause whatever, he had to recollect that there were plenty of claimants far more greedy and dishonest than she was, and that the more they asked, the more civility they got from Congressmen.

"Could I not persuade you somehow to give this up, my dear child?" he begged, meanwhile trying gently to take her hand.

"When you urge me to give it up, you urge me to give you up," returned Josie, with a spasmodic setting of her lips.

"That would kill me," he said. "Well, since your heart is set upon it, you must have it—and you shall!"

"Oh, George! I knew I could trust you," murmured Josie, laying her hand gently on his shoulder and filling him with comfort.

But she did not trust him, at least not entirely. From this day she began to see more than ever of Sykes Drummond, and to talk to

him confidentially about her claim. Drummond had, of course, his motives for calling punctually in answer to her little notes, and for at least pretending to give her his best advice. He wanted to make trouble for the man who had cut him out of his fat job, and had also carried off the belle; and very likely he was at times disposed to do an ill turn by Josie in order to punish her for neglecting her own member. But his actual business intent was to get the claim out of Hollowbread's hands, put it under the care of his own special lobbyist, Mr. Jacob Pike, and so win for himself a portion of what money and honor there were in it. Afterward, if fortune continued to bless, he might espouse the wealthy young widow, who would doubtless prefer him to a dyed and strapped sexagenarian. It had scarcely occurred to the insolent creature that, if Mrs. Murray should get her hundred thousand dollars, she might pay him with a mitten.

The visits from Drummond soon became so frequent, and so very confidential, that Mrs. Warden took note of them.

"Mr. Hollowbread is exceedingly good-natured," she roughly remarked one day to the betrothed.

"It is his greatest charm," replied Josie, perhaps making a cut at Mrs. Warden's uncertain temper. "I perfectly adore good-natured people."

"Of course you do. We all do when we don't laugh at them."

"I won't have you laughing at my dear man. It is the one thing that would kill him—to be laughed at."

"We shall have to kill him, then."

"The idea of taking a man's life because he is good-natured!" said Josie, who guessed what Mrs. Warden was driving at, and preferred to evade the topic.

"It will be all Mr. Drummond's fault," continued that clever lady—very clever, though wanting in good sense.

"Do you think I see too much of Mr. Drummond?" asked Josie, giving up a useless tactic of dodging, and assuming the rôle of an *ingénue*.

"Well, no—not that precisely," answered Mrs. Warden, shrugging her shoulders, a frequent gesture with this nervous creature. "You don't see a bit too much of him, if that were all. But there is the betrothed. And there is Mrs. Grundy."

Mrs. Warden was sweet and low, like the wind of the western sea. Her contralto voice, which could on occasion blow like a storm, was attuned to the mellowest reedy breathing of a clarinet. But she was at heart very much in earnest. She was, one might almost say, disgusted with her lodger. She had hoped that, now Josie had got a man all to herself, she would stop flirting, and give other young women a chance.

True, Edgar Bradford was, of late, quite at-

tentive to Belle; and if he could be brought to propose, no one else was wanted. But that result was not yet certain, and meantime it might be well to keep Drummond on hand, in the way of a sober second choice. It was disagreeable, therefore, to have Josie coquetting with Sykes in this absorbing fashion.

"I just allude to it out of friendship, and out of regard to your peculiar position," continued Mrs. Warden. "You know, of course, that I am not so absurd as to object to sweet-hearting in itself."

"And of course I am obliged to you," answered Josie, not wishing to quarrel with her hostess, and be driven to a boarding-house. "But the positive, solemn truth is that I am not sweethearting one bit with Mr. Drummond. He comes to see me entirely on business."

"I thought Mr. Hollowbread was attending to that."

"One can't have too many helpers. You know it as well as I do, Mrs. Warden."

"Oh, certainly," assented the elder lady, conscious that her own sociable manners and customs were alluded to, and deciding that she must for the present suspend her monitions.

Let us now see what sort of business calls Sykes Drummond made upon Josie Murray. To save time, we will commence our report at the moment when the gentleman rises to take his long-deferred departure.

"I believe an Italian lady allows a visitor to kiss her hand at parting," he remarked, after having essayed that form of salute and failed to accomplish it.

"I never heard any thing to the contrary," said Josie. "It is an interesting piece of information. I believe a Chinese gentleman wears his hair down his back in a long cue."

"But that doesn't help my case at all," answered Drummond, trying to hide his disappointment and discomposure under a horse-laugh.

"And neither does the other story, for I am not an Italian lady."

Now it must not be supposed that Josie had not allowed Drummond to kiss her hand since the engagement. She had accorded him that favor once; but the rough creature had haw-hawed triumphantly over it, and blurted out something about "what would the old man say?" and, in short, he had disgusted her by his noisy, unmannerly, conceited gratulation. So, on the present occasion, he got no fingers to mumble at.

"I wish you were an Italian lady!" pleaded Drummond.

"Perhaps I will make believe that I am one, some day. Only you must help more and demand less."

"I demand very little compared with our friend Hollowbread, who is the greatest extortioner upon earth, in my opinion."

"But Mr. Hollowbread gives all that he has. He is a model of devotion. He is the one bright spot of unselfish loyalty in the whole world."

"Only grant me a chance, and I will outshine him. But, really, as to this matter of the claim, I can do nothing unless I have the whole business in my hands, and am allowed to manage it in my way—the only effective way."

"People do talk so about those lobbyists! Mr. Pullwool, and Mr. Jack Hunt, and your friend, Mr. Pike, have the most dreadful reputations that I know of!"

"Professionals always have their own code of honor, and that code is rarely admired by other people. But you can not do any thing in any line of action without professionals. You have to put up with their fashions of work, if you want their results. The world talks against the lobbyists, does it? Why, Mrs. Murray, I tell you, for the hundredth time, that Congress itself is a nest of lobbyists," declared Drummond, exaggerating the facts of wickedness, as wicked men are wont to do. "I tell you that the position of senator is well known to be worth one hundred thousand dollars a year. I tell you that there are leading members of the House, heads of important committees, who make quite as much. Half our real work is special legislation, or, in other words, private thieving. You think, perhaps, that because these men gather in such harvests, they ought to let you glean willingly. But great part of their income, their stealings, their plunder, comes from dividing with claimants. It is a game of tickle me and I'll tickle you. You can not get your claim through without feeling somebody. If Mr. Hollowbread thinks he can do it, he is simply a dunce. You had better drop him, before he brings your bill to a vote and gets it defeated. Put it into Pike's hands, and pay him his percentage. It will cost you less in the end. He must charge you something, of course; but, for my sake, he won't charge you much."

"How much?"

"I think I can get him to do it for twenty thousand dollars."

"Twenty thousand dollars!—all to himself?"

"No," laughed Drummond; "the greatest part to others—to the trusted and chosen ones of the people—to the men whom Columbia delighteth to honor."

"But that will leave me only eighty thousand—only fifty-six hundred a year."

"I will drop in at the Lobbitt House as I go along, and see if he will undertake it for less. I will insist upon ten thousand."

"Do," begged Josie. Then, after a moment of pondering, she added, "But Mr. Hollowbread must not know."

"The idea of telling him—haw, haw! Do

you think I am his intimate? Not under existing circumstances—haw, haw!"

"But don't go to Mr. Pike to-day," urged Josie, still meditating. "It is too sudden. Come and see me to-morrow about it, and I will decide."

"Very well," assented Drummond, smiling with manly superiority over this womanly vacillation. "And now?" he asked, taking her hand again, and slowly bending his head over it.

She surveyed him thoughtfully while he pressed his lips to her fingers, and then said, with a smile:

"Are the Italians as long about it as that? There, that is enough; the rest some other time; good-bye."

CHAPTER XLIV.

A CONGRESSIONAL AGENT.

JOSIE'S perfidies and duplicities are so numerous that one begins to wonder whether she could help them; a medical observer might easily conclude that they were connected with her circulation, or in some other way idiosyncratic and symptomatic; while to the ordinary spectator they gradually become characteristic, humorous, and almost comic.

Scarcely had Drummond departed from her, with the understanding that he was to make terms for her with Mr. Pike, ere she dispatched a messenger to the Lobbitt House with a note for that eminent medium of private legislation, requesting him to call upon her at once "on strictly confidential business." Mr. Pike received the note as he was taking his soup, and in ten minutes more he was on his way to Mrs. Warden's house, having, nevertheless, done full justice to what he called his "feed."

This fact gives one an idea of the rapid deglutition and other business-like faculties of the man. It also shows that he recognized at once the name of Josephine Murray, and held it in no small respect, according to his method of respecting. For it must be understood that, far from being an unemployed soul sadly in need of a job, he was a hardly worked, and indeed overworked one, who had a great many irons in the fire, and whose time was worth money. True, he never seemed to do any thing but saunter about the streets and into bar-rooms and through the Capitol. But ever and anon, amidst this apparent loafing, you might see that he had some politician by the button-hole, and might guess, if you were wise, that he was laying pipe, or rolling logs, or pulling wires. What must have been Josie's repute in the lobby, when at her very first beck this gormandizer of financial garbage flew to her as eagerly as ever a turkey-buzzard flapped toward a carcass!

She was indeed well known in the so-called Third House. Often and often had Jacob Pike talked over her case with Jack Hunt, and Ananias Pullwool, and Darius Dorman, and other equally abominable angels of this nether region. They all thought her claim a pretty one, and a dead sure thing to win ("Considerin' the gal's good looks, you understand?" emphasized Jack Hunt), if she would only employ an agent, and the right sort of an agent. Equally positive were they that it would be beaten, and resolved also to stir up an opposition which would beat it, if she trusted for success to Congressmen alone. If George W. Hollowbread, or any other member, could put through a job all by himself, what was to become of "gentlemen brokers?"

"It would be a bad precedent," asserted Pike.

"It would be next door to unconstitutional," grinned Dorman.

"It would be the sort of thing for a President to veto," chuckled Jack Hunt.

"It would be a case for the Supreme Court," greasily smiled Ananias Pullwool.

But with the right man to care for it, they admitted, the claim was a blazing good claim, and might safely be backed to win, and ought to win. Concerning the lovely claimant herself, her supposed nature and imputed doings—these brazen scoundrels discoursed with a freedom which would have been distressing even to so independent and audacious a flirt as Josie. But just here their sabbatical conversation becomes unendurable, and we must not venture to report its graceless innuendoes and assertions.

Our heroine had been curious to look upon Mr. Pike, and disposed to receive him with some reverence and even fear. When he appeared before her, stiffly and awkwardly bowing his way athwart the little Warden parlor, she stared at him with surprise and disappointment.

It did not seem possible to her that a creature of such commonplace appearance and expression could influence dignitaries, and carry or defeat enactments. She forgot for the moment what ordinary persons many of our Congressmen are, and how eager they are to be moved in the direction of money-making; she forgot that she herself, a lady, and well-educated and very clever, was putting herself into the hands of this same unpolished intriguer for the sake of pelf.

Mr. Jacob Pike—or Jake Pike, as most people called him—was a slender, bony man of forty-five, with deep, furtive gray eyes, a small, beetling forehead, a shortish nose, a wide, straight mouth, a square chin, broad cheek-bones, a dusky, mottled complexion, and stiff black hair, thickly strewn with gray. He was not coarsely vulgar in figure, costume, or bearing, but he was universally plebeian, commonplace, "ornary." In his

expression there was some slyness, but also much nervous energy. It showed no sense of guilt or shame. Probably he did not look upon himself as a scoundrel. What unthreatened criminal ever does?

"Is this Mr. Pike?" asked Josie, not quite certain that the right man had come, and naturally anxious not to talk to the wrong man.

"Yes, ma'am," he said, stiffly and shyly, for he was somewhat afraid of ladies, or, rather, afraid of exhibiting his own lack of familiarity with the delicacies of etiquette. "I got a letter from you."

"Ah, yes?" she smiled. "Have the kindness to sit down, Mr. Pike. I believe I mentioned that it was on private business."

"Strictly private, ma'am," answered the lobbyist, with an air of taking an oath.

His voice was unemotional, monotoned, wooden; a perfectly suitable voice to his wooden face and demeanor. His pronunciation was uncultivated, but not strictly boorish; it seemed rather to be marked by some broad provincialism as vague as the illimitable West; and, like every other of his characteristics, it was thoroughly commonplace and uninteresting. Josie's fear of him was already gone; she had taken thus promptly his limited measure of intellectual force, and she believed that she could twist him around her fingers.

"You are a—Congressional agent, I understand," she continued. "I wanted to see you concerning a claim which I have before Congress. Do you know any thing about it?"

"Well, I have took a cussory view of it," replied Mr. Pike, whose grammar, though generally human, sometimes dared a flight as wild and free as that of the American eagle.

"Will you please to tell me what it amounts to?" asked Josie.

"Well, barn and horse," he replied, not understanding her query, and thinking that his knowledge of the matter was doubted. "Paid once, in 1820, two thousand dollars. New account presented on account of insufficient payment, for a hundred thousand."

"I mean, what do you think of the chances?" interrupted Josie, not quite pleased at hearing her impudence put so frankly.

"Well, it's a good, merchantable claim," admitted Mr. Pike. "But what its chances are depends on who runs it."

"Well, I have sent for you to see if you can run it."

"Well, I think I can."

Josie noticed this repetition of the word "well," and said to herself that she would never open another sentence with it, so as not to be like Mr. Pike.

"I wish it to be understood distinctly that the fact of an arrangement between us is to be kept secret," she added, fearing the wrath

of Drummond and possibly the jealousy of Hollowbread.

"Egsackly," he promised, with remarkable emphasis, as if he mispronounced the word on purpose, by way of greater solemnity. It is an odd fact, by-the-way, that Josie believed him, although she constantly broke her own pledges and promises.

"I think I may want you to help me," she said. "That is, if we can agree upon terms."

"Well, I thought you would come to me sooner or later," smiled Mr. Pike, supposing that she had found success with her present backers impossible, and that he was sure of the job. "In the end, people always learn that the regular way is the easiest and certainest way."

"But what are your terms?"

"Well, in such a case as this—a good, merchantable case—fifty per cent."

"That is very little," stared Josie, wondering if he really meant fifty cents, or what small sum he did mean.

Although by this time respectably, or, rather, disreputably, familiar with the trickeries of the claim industry, she still retained much lady-like ignorance concerning the mysteries and phrases of ordinary business.

"Well, most people consider half about right," smirked Mr. Pike, not quite at his ease just then, as thinking her ironical.

"Half?" exclaimed Josie, horrified and alarmed. "Oh, not half!" she demurred, timidly; then more boldly, "I couldn't think of giving you half."

"That is the regulation figger, Mrs. Murray. Every body in my line does business on those terms."

"I needn't pay it, I know. I have powerful friends, who tell me that my claim is sure, and that I really don't need any further assistance."

"Congressmen, I suppose," said Mr. Pike, with a slight sneer. "Fellows that are pecking round after something besides their salary. What we call roosters."

"Yes, Congressmen," declared Josie, loftily, somewhat huffed by this belittling of her retainers.

"Well, you'd better not believe 'em," continued Mr. Pike, with excitement, like a man in authority who hears of insubordination among his subjects. "The smartest thing you can do, Mrs. Murray, is not to believe 'em. If I was your oldest friend, if I was your own brother, I'd give you that same advice, nothing more and nothing less."

"I don't know why they should deceive me, or how they could deceive themselves," returned Josie, almost indignantly.

It did not please her at all that Mr. Jake Pike should speak of her, even in the way of supposition, as his sister. That specimen of nature's gentleman meanwhile was not in the least suspicious that he had given any cause of offense.

"Well, they do deceive you," insisted the lobbyist, as fervent as any man could be in the cause of truth and in the duty of warning innocence. "They know better than to talk such nonsense. One Congressman, or six Congressmen, or twenty Congressmen, is nothing against us Congressional brokers. You can put your twenty men, say, to pulling for your bill. Very good. It looks, on a cussory view, like a chance. But then we can put our fifty men, say, or our hundred men, say, to pulling against it. Well, where's your chance now?"

"Do you mean to say that you will oppose me if I don't employ you?"

"Got to."

"I think that is sheer plunder, Mr. Pike," declared Josie, with what she felt to be virtuous indignation.

"It's all plunder, ma'am. But there an't plunder enough for every body. If we let other people plunder without our help, and, so to speak, independently and irregularly, perhaps there's nothing left for us and our prodigies (*protégés*?). You see, that would ruin business. A man might as well cut his throat. But how much did you think of allowing, Mrs. Murray?"

"Why, I thought of proposing—" hesitated Josie. "No, I don't want to propose any thing," she added, afraid of mentioning any sum, lest he should agree to it, and it should afterward prove too liberal. "You must tell me what your very lowest terms are."

"I'd like to hear a proposition from your side—just to get at your notion—just to find a basis."

"I would rather not furnish a basis, Mr. Pike. You know all about this business. You must speak first."

"I don't know, but I might squeeze along for thirty-three per cent.; that is, you understand, one-third."

"Oh! but even that is too much. Just consider; it is my own claim. It is not your money; it is mine."

"It won't be yours if you don't get it."

"And it won't any of it be yours if I employ somebody else."

Mr. Pike flinched in his secret heart, but he kept up a bold countenance.

"Expenses are awful—scandalous," he said. "Let me tell you something about it, Mrs. Murray. Only, remember that this is confidential. I wouldn't say what I'm going to say, if we wa'n't in the same boat. I shall have to pay a lot full of members, and they are extortionate as the—*the* dickens. They ask higher and higher every year. It costs tremendous to harness in enough of 'em to pull through a bill of this size, or any respectable bill. Why, our great national highway had to spend half a million before it got a charter; and what it paid out before it was built there's no figuring nor calculation. Members knew there was money in it,

and they would have it. I tell you, Mrs. Murray, they are a crowd of extortioners," perorated Mr. Pike, with the sub-excitement of an honest man who suffers by evil-doing, but sees no refuge from it except in patience.

"But you *must* take less than one-third," pleaded Josie, indifferent to these moans of virtuous anguish.

"My time and my knowledge of the biz are worth that," insisted the broker. "Besides, it an't an easy case—a horse and a barn. There's no end to the horses in Congress—Floridy horses and Kansas horses (freedom-shrieking horses, I call them), and Oregon horses and Southern horses—roadsters and trotters and plowing creeturs and thorough-breds—all sorts and denominations of horses. All ages, too—some last war, and some last but one, and some war before that—and yours is one of the oldest. Well, I wish it was any thing but a horse and a barn. Couldn't you make it a yoke of oxen, now, or a drove of sheep?" inquired Mr. Pike, very gravely and seriously, although his suggestion sounded to the inexperienced ear like sarcasm.

"It is *not* a horse and a barn!" snapped Josie, vexed at hearing her claim thus cheapened. "There are *ever* so many horses in it. You said a while ago that it was a very good case; and it is a much better case than you know of. A number of horses and an incomplete payment on the barn, and a family-carriage, and some cows, and lots of other things!"

"Oh!—that so?" asked Mr. Pike, surprised and struck with sudden respect, though he could scarcely believe her. If she stated facts, then the claim had been furnished up wonderfully since he last looked into it, and was in much better hands than he had supposed. "Fresh evidence!" he immediately added, with an air of knowingness which would have been wicked if it had not been so wooden and commonplace. "Well, I was talking of the old case—the one that was settled. If you've got up any thing fresh, it might work easier."

"Of course it will work. Several Congressmen tell me so."

"I dare say," nodded Mr. Pike, obviously not much impressed. "Of course they are tollable judges of a claim. I was a Congressman myself once; that's the way I started in this line. But I wasn't so good a judge of a claim then as I am now."

"You a Congressman?" stared Josie, astonished out of her civility. "From the South?"

"No; not a carpet-bagger," smiled Pike, a little embarrassed by the depreciating query, but not seriously annoyed. "From Kansas. Yes, I've served my term, as the State-prison birds say. They threw me off the track on my second trip," he added, his countenance darkening suddenly as he remembered his

wrongs. "Then I was backed for a foreign ministry, but somebody got me ruled out. Oh, I have had my ups and downs, Mrs. Murray, and my enemies. A man can't climb the ladder, to any great altitude, without exciting envy. Yes, I've had my enemies. Well, I've mounted some of 'em, and I'll mount more."

Josie surveyed him with contemptuous curiosity and wonder. There, in this lowly lobbyist, was the wreck of a promising demagogue, a man of blighted hopes and disappointed ambition, a man who had had a rise, a grandeur, and a decadence! And he complained of fate; he thought himself the victim of injustice; he grieved over the fact of unappreciated merit; he feelingly bemoaned his lost authority and dignity! Even to our sadly wise heroine, who knew so much of the corruption and degradation of Congress, it seemed amazing that such a thoroughly narrow-minded, plebeian, and scampish intriguer could consider himself fit to represent the American people, or any inconsiderable outlying portion of it.

But she bestowed no serious thought upon this phenomenon, so worthy of our weightiest and sorrowfullest reflections. She did not stop to say, "This is the fruit that universal suffrage bears when the industrious and virtuous cease to care for politics." She hardly considered the public career of Mr. Pike for an instant, or by more than a single careless glance of her quick intellect—a glance of amazement and of disdain. She was young, a thoroughly womanish woman, and had an axe to grind. This last circumstance led her to utter a few words of sympathy, very vague and by no means heartfelt, but sufficient to touch the heart of our fallen functionary and draw out his confidence.

"Yes, it is hard, Mrs. Murray," he replied. "It comes pretty rough on a man who has worked his way up from the bottom, this being hauled down by the heels does. I am a self-made man. I began life as a teamster. Many's the horse I've rubbed down and tackled up! I rose by my own exertions, without so much as the start of a common-school education, to be a member of Congress. I think I ought to have been left there and kept there, if only to encourage self-made men. And to be histed after all! It riles me to think of it. It's enough to rile any body to think of it."

Josie made believe that she was moved, but of course she could not care one straw for Jake Pike, a man obviously unfit for love-making.

In reality, her sole reflection was that, since he had been "histed" once, he must be a pretty light weight, and might be "histed" again, if she should give her mind to it.

"If I were you, I should never forget nor forgive," she said, with a most pitying face, and a heart as hard as a pebble. "But, to

return to our business: I will give you one-tenth."

It was now the lobbyist's turn to stare with surprise and dismay.

"One-tenth!" he exclaimed. "It couldn't be done, ma'am, for twice that. Just think of the outlays. Why, besides members, there's other brokers that I shall have to quiet off with something, and the newspaper chaps, and more outsiders than I can tell of. I'll be—bothered if I don't believe the Congressional chaplain will come in for his share some of these days, or threaten to pray a fellow's claims out of winder. Oh yes, members, newspaper-men, moneyed men, no end of men! Dave Shorthand will want his fee, and old Allehin, the House banker, will want his, and so on."

"Mr. Shorthand can have five dollars," said Josie, well remembering that historian of the Appleyard fight, and how easily he had been silenced. "As for Mr. Allehin, you may tell him from me that I will invest through his bank."

"You know all these fellows," smiled Pike, lifting his heavy and meaningless eyebrows.

"You know the ropes."

"I do," said Josie, meaning to impress him and daunt him. "I know *all* about special legislation."

Mr. Pike smiled again. The subject was an agreeable one to this ignorant, small-headed, conscienceless, scheming creature. It was his specialty, and it had become his hobby, and he liked to talk about it. Although he called lobbying plunder, and looked upon those features of it which diminished his profits as extortion, still he held it in respect and almost in veneration.

From his point of view, it was a kind of public life; it was more completely "inside politics" than even electioneering or legislation; it was, as he believed, the very germ and main-spring of statesmanship. A leading lobbyist knew exactly how the world is governed, and for what purpose it is governed.

We have now laid our disrespectful, but surely not sacrilegious, hands upon the key of Mr. Pike's contemptible character. He was a born intriguer, a man who instinctively loved devious and plotting ways, a man given to trickery, and worshipful of it. This is why he had originally crawled and wriggled into politics; this is why, when laid on the political shelf, he had dropped into lobbying.

Although many people supposed that his ruling passion was covetousness, the belief was an error. He seemed slaveringly greedy for money; but that was because it helped to success in chicanery, and was the signature and crown of success; because, when he had picked a fellow-creature's pockets, he could triumph over him, and could hire him to pick other pockets. His real, or at

least his main, purpose in life was to outgeneral people, to get the better of them, to "euchre" them.

It might be supposed that it was avarice which had brought him so hurriedly to Josie at her first signal. But, while a desire for pelf had influenced him somewhat, his chief motives had been an honest love of jobbery and a noble desire to be the "boss" of the lobby. He wanted to keep this famous claimant from falling into the hands of Pullwool, Dorman, and Jack Hunt, and to "run" her himself. He would be a greater man in their estimation and in his own if he could obtain the guardianship of the Murray case. He was willing to do the job cheap, willing to sacrifice something on it, if he might thereby secure it.

He had already figured his profits down to the lowest percentage which he thought he could accept without injuring his reputation and diminishing his self-respect. He had decided, in fact, to accept Josie's offer, humiliating as it was to a man of his position and aspirations.

Meanwhile, feeling resignedly sure of the case at such a moderate figure, he found it pleasant to dally a moment over the charms of his specialty, and to express his crude, dull ideas concerning its marvels and mysteries.

"It's a curious business, this special legislation, isn't it?" he remarked, meditatively. "It's as full of holes, and under-ground passages, and places to catch your feet in, as a parairie-dog village. I've seen more than one old political wheel-horse go all a-wallow into it, and never come out again on the right side of an election. On a cussory view, and without considering the campaigning expenses of a public man, one can't help wondering how members dare travel such a road. Some of them do try to ride clear of it for a while. And some bolt right there, the first smell they get of it. It's really curious."

"As long as they can do it, they can be made to do it," said Josie, who had thoroughly studied the question of temptation.

"That's so," nodded Mr. Pike, with great emphasis and approval, evidently much struck with her intelligence and her knowledge of his low world. "That's the whole secret. You never can stop jobbery in our Congress until you stop special legislation altogether. Well, Mrs. Murray, I have such a respect for you that I will do for you what I wouldn't do for any other person I know of. I'll take your offer—ten thousand dollars."

Josie immediately repented of having promised so much, and said to herself that he was undoubtedly cheating her, and that perhaps she would not pay him at all in the end.

"But no advances, Mr. Pike," she replied. "You must take your own risk—though, by-the-way, there isn't any risk."

"All right, ma'am. No vote, no pay. I want nothing more than a written agreement and something in the way of long paper."

"No! You must trust to my honor."

"But the check will be deposited, you understand, with some impartial third party. I am only to have it when the bill is passed."

"You must trust to my honor," insisted Josie. "I trust to yours."

"Then I bolt," said Pike, rising, with a look of anger, for he had an unhappy temper, a sad drawback often to his success in fraudfulness. "And if I do bolt, I shall work against you."

"If you do, I will work against you," declared Josie, with a sublime inspiration of impudence. "I will fight every bill of yours that I can hear of."

The lobbyist grinned, but it was with a perplexed air. He knew what handsome and clever women could do in Washington; and this one was very beautiful, and, as he judged, uncommonly intelligent. He feared that she might indeed be a formidable foe; and it was not his interest to raise up any enemy unnecessarily.

"Well, if you have conscientious scruples against signing long paper, I give in," he smiled, covering his retreat with a heavy joke. "I s'pose I must take your word for the payment."

"Certainly you must. The idea of treating a lady otherwise!" returned Josie, pursuing him closely, and making mince-meat of him. "And now I will tell you how I want you to manage this business."

Mr. Pike inclined himself to listen in respectful silence. This pretty and adroit young woman had, after a sharp struggle, got the upper hand of him, or, as he afterward expressed it, had got him in harness.

The truth is that, outside of the trick of making gross offers of money to needy or greedy souls of a coarse texture, he was a man of exceedingly limited intellectual resources, as well as an uneducated boor.

"I want you to be very, very discreet," she continued. "Don't tell Mr. Hollowbread, nor Mr. Drummond, nor any body, that I have engaged you. Don't go to the committees, not even to ask which one has got my papers. When you want to know where they are, I will inform you. They are now in the Spoiliations; but they may go to the War or the Judiciary. When they do change, I will let you know. My Congressmen will push the bill through the committees, and make all the speeches necessary. What I want of you is to get up the votes."

"Egsackly, ma'am," bowed Mr. Pike, completely subdued, and anxious to make this great woman his friend. "Just my idea. You shall have the votes, Mrs. Murray."

From pure instinct, or by mere inveterate

habit of flirtation, she shed one of her finest smiles over this vulgar minion. But he had no notion of coquetry, and he merely responded by a wink, thereupon taking his departure.

"Hech!" exclaimed Josie, with a little splutter of disgust. "I think even Mr. Drummond might have picked out somebody not quite so low. However, perhaps the lower the better, considering the people to be dealt with."

CHAPTER XLV.

TRAINING AN ADMIRER.

MR. PIKE soon informed Drummond of his interview with Mrs. Murray, and of the convention which he had entered into with her.

"She wanted it kept shady," he added, "and I, of course, told her she might rely on me. You have to be roundabout with women to get along with 'em and manage 'em," he explained, putting on an air of having been too much for his fair client, though painfully conscious that she had driven a very hard bargain with him. "But you and I, Sykes, have wagoned it too much together for me to do any thing underhanded by you. When a man is a man's partner, he ought to lead so as to let his partner know what he's got in his hand."

"Yes, there is such a thing as honor," guffawed Drummond, brutally relishing his own irony, and even gazing at Mr. Pike with undisguised contempt. "And, besides, it pays in the long run to play fair with Congressmen, doesn't it? And, besides, you will want my help in this chore."

"Undoubtedly," admitted Pike, with a ceremonious pronunciation and a glum countenance, showing that he was not pleased with this satire. "You seem to be rather irascible about something to-day. I should like to know if I haven't done the right and correct and honest thing?"

"Confound that little shuffler!" broke out Drummond, thus revealing the real cause of his ill-humor. "So she wanted to count me out? By George! I never saw the beat of her for trickery. She is prodigious. I never saw her equal."

"Well, nor I neither," agreed Jake Pike, not without admiration for the trickster, so fair-minded was he. "I call myself a mid-dling capable business man. You know, Sykes, there ain't more than a thousand or two of my friends can euchre me in a bargain. But she run me down from fifty per cent. to ten per cent. before I knew where I was sliding to."

It was a painful, degrading confession, and he had hated to come to it. It seemed to him that he had shown small dickering ability, and had been cheated in a manner

which made him ridiculous. Had a man thus sheared the golden fleece of his profits it would have annoyed him, but that a woman should do it gave his vanity a very tooth-ache of humiliation. Now, however, that Drummond acknowledged Mrs. Murray to be prodigious and hard to beat, he could find courage to confess how she had docked his commissions.

"Ten per cent.!" laughed Sykes, uproariously. "Well, you were lucky in getting that," he added, promptly, not wishing the matter otherwise. "How did she manage to shave you, old man? Make eyes at you?"

"Eyes! She made mouths at me, rather than eyes. Argued me all about the room. Threatened to work against me."

Drummond burst into another roar of laughter; it always pleased him to see any one else beaten.

"We shall have to knock under," he said.

"We shall have to give her her own way."

"Well, yes. We shall have to let her deal," conceded Pike. "If I was never en-chured before, I am now. But where are these papers?" he asked, not quite trusting to Josie's statement concerning them.

"In the *Spoliations*. Under the wing of the greatest of jobbers."

"Oh, him!" said Pike, with a look of alarm.

"Why, he'll want twenty per cent. himself."

"At the last minute it will be popped into some other committee. I will tell you which and when."

"All right, Sykes," yawned Mr. Pike, gaping and stretching at his ease, as if all this were the simplest and safest business possible. "Covering up tracks. Bully for you! Wake me early! But I thought old Hollowbread held the cards?"

"He thinks he does, and I do. There, that's enough. I have something else to attend to. Go and train your watch-dogs of the Treasury—haw, haw!"

The next day Drummond was to call on Josie, and he did not fail to keep his appointment. He walked rapidly, as determined people are apt to do when angry, and he fully intended to rush in upon the perfidious one boldly, and to reprove her openly. But when she met him with one of her sweetest faces, rustling and swaying daintily in one of her most becoming dresses, he gave her a glance of admiration, and was as civil as he could be.

"I am so glad you came!" she observed. "You need not speak to that Mr. Pike about my claim. I would rather you shouldn't."

"What a pity! He would have been so useful to you!" answered Drummond, unable to help grinning as he said it.

Josie guessed at once that he had heard of Pike's visit, and she changed her tactics with bewildering rapidity.

"Because I have spoken to him myself," she added, laughing and making mock

courtesies. "Oh, Mr. Drummond! oh, my poor member! If you want any bargaining done, do let me manage it for you. You thought Mr. Pike would want twenty thousand dollars, and he has agreed to take ten thousand!"

"No!" exclaimed Sykes, in feigned astonishment. "It is the cheapest thing of the kind I ever heard of."

"I thought I would try what I could do with him. You see, I have been frank with you."

"Perfectly. I take it as a compliment. Well, I am glad you have made such a bargain."

"Don't say *well*. Mr. Jake Pike says *well*, or, rather, *wal*. I suppose he thinks that all's wal that ends wal. He repeats and drawls the word abominably. It is enough to break a nation of the habit. He is a commonplace, plebeian creature, and he is very ignorant and very stupid. I don't see how you came to choose such an agent. I don't see how he can accomplish any thing."

"Work does it; pulling does it; impudence does it. This man works and pulls all day, and his impudence would armor a ship of war. He believes every body on earth can be bought, and consequently he buys a great many. He is one of the most successful members of the nether house."

"It speaks poorly for the taste of the upper houses."

"I don't know that any body ever claimed any taste for them. However, putting all this trifling aside, you have done a clever thing. Jake and I will draw famously together in your harness."

"He shall hire the votes, and you shall make the oration, and Mr. Hollowbread shall pull the committees."

"An excellent plan, leaving Hollowbread out—haw, haw! But I suppose a lady must let her betrothed help her, or make believe help her."

"Oh, I will tell him what committees to pull, and you shall tell me. All the wires shall be secretly in your hands. Won't that satisfy you? It must."

"I will be satisfied with any thing that you decide upon, barring your marriage with Mr. Hollowbread."

"And why not with that?" asked Josie, roguishly, after a brief hesitation, which did her conscience some little credit.

Then there was a scene of cooing and wooing, which Drummond carried as far as she would permit, and farther than Mr. Hollowbread would have permitted.

The young Congressman had fully determined to win her for a wife, if he could do it. The claim, being at last in skillful hands, seemed to him secure; and what with her beauty, social position, and cleverness, she was indeed a prize. So he courted her in cold blood—no, not precisely thus, for the

current in his veins was of an ardent nature; but, at all events, he courted her intelligently and with a set purpose.

Now, Josie was one of those, we will suppose, rare women who would rather be courted by any sort of man than by no man. Bradford had deserted her, most of her other beaux had cooled since the promulgation of her engagement, and thus the constant Drummond had enhanced in value through lack of competition.

Once, as we know, she had disliked him, and even now she did not fancy him over-much. But he would do in a pinch; and, moreover, his thirty years were more enticing than Mr. Hollowbread's sixty; and finally, she needed his Congressional—alas! for the degraded word!—yes, his Congressional services. So she endured soft speeches from this surely unlovely rough, and even allowed him to kiss her patrician, her betrothed hand.

He would have got on better with her could she have trusted his discretion. But his emotional fibre was so coarse, and so little susceptible of sympathetic bruises, that he often made dreadful blunders among the delicacies of intimacy, just as a bull inevitably commits damaging mistakes in a china-shop.

We have already related how he offended her by his bovine ejaculation, "What would the old man say?" And she did not feel at all sure that he would not some day utter a bellow in Mr. Hollowbread's ear about the cordiality with which he was favored by Mr. Hollowbread's betrothed.

Then there would be a quarrel among her legislators, and her claim on her country's strong-box might suffer thereby. Moreover, what if Bradford should hear of these fondlings, and should utterly despise her! There was a thought which made her cringe with honest pain, so nearly could she come to loving purely and truly.

"All this is as a friend," she said, to the finger-kissing Drummond once—at least once. "But other people might misunderstand it. It is all strictly confidential, as the phrase is. You must be very discreet, sir!"

"You must take me to be no gentleman," he answered, with his characteristic self-assertion and want of tact.

"Your faults run that way, Mr. Drummond," she retaliated, speaking very calmly, however, and looking him softly in the eyes.

It was a terrible rebuke, and yet it sounded like the pleading of an admirer who wishes to amend in order to admire more entirely. For a moment the bull in a china-shop had a feeling as if an axe had been driven in between his horns.

"Is it possible!" he murmured, for it seems that he had been very ignorant of himself, as probably each one of us is. "Perhaps I

am a little rough. I beg your pardon, Mrs. Murray, for all my doings and sayings in the way of being obnoxious. I will try to mend my manners."

"They are your greatest defect," she went on, surveying him with unflinching good-nature, like a patient surgeon watching an unwilling patient. "You put down people, and then you exult over them. It makes them want to fight you, or to get away from you. If you would only be as gentle as you are strong, if you would only say soft things to people instead of hard ones, you would double your power of influencing women—yes, and men, too. And when you win a favor, you should not blow a trumpet over it as if it were a triumph. Now, I tell you all this in kindness. I like you well enough to want you to succeed. I want you to be a popular man and a great one."

"Thanks!" bowed Drummond, for once in his life agreeably humble. "I assure you that I am sincerely obliged to you, both for the whipping and the motive. And now I should like to state something which may explain and excuse, or at least palliate, this antagonistic tone which you find in me. Let me tell you a story. Once upon a time a soft-hearted old gentleman found a little boy crying on a door-step. 'Youngster,' said this old gentleman, 'what is the matter?' 'Oh!' blubbered this little boy, 'my mammy died, an' my papa married agin; an' then my papa died, an' my mammy married agin; an' now 'pears as though I wasn't any body's son.' Well, that bereaved urchin, that proverb of misfortune, was myself. I have had a combative life. It was a series of buffetings at the start, and it has been a struggle ever since. What I have had I have fought for. You can understand, perhaps, how I grew up somewhat pugnacious, and also somewhat disposed to celebrate my victories."

"I don't blame you," said Josie. "But you are victorious now, and you must be magnanimous. It will be the wisest way."

Thenceforward they got on better together. By an immense effort of intelligence, thoroughly appreciable only to those who have sought earnestly to discover and amend their faults of demeanor, Drummond divined that his triumphing laugh was offensive to human ears, and labored diligently to break himself of it, as well as of other forms of self-assertion. Josie, on her part, saw that she had influenced him, and liked him because of it. Besides, now that he said few disagreeable things and uttered an occasional compliment, he was at times positively attractive. She, of course, did not know, she was too young yet to have learned how difficult, how almost impossible, it is to change character.

We are the sons of our ancestors; we are our ancestors over again. One may say that

there is never a new, a perfectly individual temperament born upon earth. Circumstances and education vary the transmitted type more or less in exteriors, but not at all in its inner nature. Leave the plant to itself, and it reverts to its primal character, producing the hereditary fruit of its kind. This Sykes Drummond, for instance, no matter how he might strive to polish his manners, would always be, in emergencies, and in forgetful moments, coarse, insolent, and masterful. He came of a breed remarkable for its energy, arrogance, and combativeness.

However, these two now got on nicely together, much to the grief of poor Mr. Hollowbread. He did not receive any revelations from Sykes, not even in the way of snorts of triumphant laughter; and much less did he glean any disturbing hints from the conversation of our clever and considerate heroine. But he saw things which worried him; he found an envelope addressed to Drummond in his betrothed's adored handwriting; he encountered that gentleman several times in the Warden parlor; he beheld him from a distance entering the house; he caught him leaving it.

Old men engaged to young lassies are always jealous, and perhaps justly so. Mr. Hollowbread was so troubled in this way that he could not get his due and essential allowance of sleep. He rose from wakeful pillows with aching bones, a dizzy head, and watery eyes, absolutely unable to see what his breakfast was without glasses, and not much better able to taste it.

He would have remonstrated with Josie as to Drummond's visits, only that he loved his little jilt dearly, and was therefore afraid of her. Occasionally, indeed, he dared to hint his dissatisfaction by talking little, looking "grumpy," and sighing. But it amounted to just nothing at all. The man kept coming, and she kept receiving him, and, in short, it was dreadful.

At last—oh dear! that a conscientious narrator should have to tell such things!—at last our poor Hollowbread beheld Drummond kissing Josie's hand.

Did he speak? No, he choked; he came as near as possible to having a fit on the spot; and, mixed with his griefs, he felt a sudden terror lest he should die; yes, die and lose his Josie.

An afflicted person in such a state of health could do no better than to close the door softly and go straight home.

That night he had to be sat up with, his feet in a tub of hot water and mustard, and a bandage soaked in chloroform around his capacious noddle. His servitor in this extremity subsequently reported that "Mars Hollowbread had a most awful newralgic, an' cried like a baby."

It was in the bosom, however, that our friend suffered mainly. Was his adored one

false to him, or was that kiss a mere Drummondish impertinence? Reason as he might in favor of the latter supposition; he could not help fearing that his Josie was an incurable coquette, and that, even after their marriage, she would continue to flirt. Should he summon up all his self-respect and fortitude, and tell her that he freed her from her engagement?

"No, no; I could not do it!" groaned and whimpered this pathetically earnest and humble lover. "I am happier with her playing the deuce with me than I would be without her."

Well, he did not die; nor did he quarrel with his affianced because of the kiss; nor did he ever say a word to her about it. As nothing of the kind ever blasted his sight again, he soon learned to hope that Drummond had relinquished those obnoxious oscillatory habits, and at last half persuaded himself that he had never seen what he did see.

Meantime he kept on working faithfully for Josie's claim, hoping thereby to win her gratitude, and so keep her heart. Not a thought now of statesman-like honor; not a compunction as to robbing the treasury of his country; not a throb of regret as to increasing the burdens of a tax-hampered people. He was a degraded marauder of politics, fighting from the ambushes of special legislation: a bewitched old Lothario, sacrificing others and himself for a passion.

CHAPTER XLVI.

EDGAR BRADFORD'S CONFIDENCES.

It will be remembered that Colonel Murray was obliged to take his widowed, sorrowing, half-crazed, and failing brother on a journey.

The poor rector traveled far—farther than the colonel could, accompany him—farther than any man has yet voyaged and returned. A week after his body had been laid in the family vault under an old gray church of ante-Revolutionary date, the surviving Murray of that generation re-appeared in Washington with a weed around his tall white hat, and a new furrow or two athwart his long white face.

Bradford met him on the broad sidewalk in front of the War Department, and spoke to him twice ere he could call him out of a reverie.

"My dear colonel, I am glad to see you," he said, joyfully. Then, noticing the saddened countenance and the mourning, he added, "I hope that all is well."

"All is well that survives," replied the old gentleman, struggling to control a spasm which twitched his thin lips.

"What?" exclaimed Bradford.

"Yes—my brother failed under it," continued the colonel, his gray eyes fixed on vacancy with a strangely mournful stoniness, reminding one of sepulchral granite. "He was bound up in his wife. Well, let us hope that they are together again."

"It is very sad—and surprising," sighed Bradford. "Many people hoped and believed that the result would be different."

This was true enough. Many of the rector's acquaintances had predicted that, once he was fairly rid of his sickly burden of a wife, he would proceed to "have a good time." Mrs. Warden, for instance, had insisted that he would marry again, and had perhaps contemplated the possibility of an offer coming her way.

"He was too heavenly-hearted to live after he had ceased loving," said the colonel, clearing his throat. "It seemed to him that his work in life, his responsibilities and uses, were gone. Probably it was a mercy to him that his physical nature was so weak."

"People will blame Mrs. Augustus Murray for this result."

"They will be but partly just," replied the rational old soldier. "She hurt him; hurt them both. But I don't know that I can condemn her for this ending. Life is a battle. You get your ball, and it does for you. But the man who fired it did not aim at you; was acting blindly and to save himself; he bore no malice. Josie's faults are selfishness, dishonesty, and lying. She is not malignant. But let this pass," he added, shaking himself, or, perhaps, shivering. "What is the news with you, Bradford?"

Then there ensued some talk concerning Congressional schemes, hopes, and labors.

"Have you any further report concerning that barn-burning swindle?" the colonel eventually asked.

"Bangs assures me that the bill has been thrown out by his committee. I don't feel obliged to believe any statement of his, but I think it likely that the thing should be so. It was an audacious job. Mrs. Murray is still staying with the Wardens, but I never see her."

"You haven't felt obliged to cut Belle, I hope?"

"No," said the young man, coloring in a becoming manner, and looking very handsome, and very good, too. Then, after a moment of hesitation, he continued, "Colonel, I should like to make a confidence to you. I think I can give you a pleasure. If Miss Warden will accept me, I shall marry her."

For the first time in a month an honest, hearty smile broke out on the old man's face. With an almost parental air of petting and blessing, he placed one of his gaunt, wasted hands on Bradford's shoulder, and said,

"I am glad to hear this. You are two young people whom I like and respect. I

think it would be the best thing either of you could do to fall into the great column which is charging on the unknown alongside of each other."

"She is my superior," declared Bradford, who was in a tender and worshipping temper. "She is fit to be my officer. She will uphold me. This is a place of horrible temptations, colonel. She will be just such a wife as a Congressman needs. She will not let me do an unworthy action. I may not love her as much as she deserves—it is not easy to be noble enough to do that; but I know that I shall reverence her."

"I know that you will," replied the colonel, wonderfully touched for an old soldier and an old bachelor. "I feel assured, Bradford, that there is good enough in you for that."

"I thank you, colonel; you give me great pleasure," declared our new lover, all alight and aflame with fine emotions. "Well, good-bye."

"Good-bye, and success to you!" called the old man, divining why the young one strode away so rapidly.

In the heat aroused by this confession, and by the satisfaction with which the colonel had received it, Bradford went straight in search of Belle to tell her his love. He was in that agreeable state of excitement which often follows upon a fine decision, and accompanies the first eager steps of resultant action.

There was a delicious warmth in him, like the warmth of summer mornings, full of balminess and of warblings. His emotions, his intellectual forces, and the very currents in his veins, down to the tiniest throbbing rivulet, were all tropical.

It seemed to him, and it undoubtedly was, the happiest and most splendid moment of his life. Never before had he laid down every ounce of nature's egotism, and completely preferred another being to himself.

Thus lightened of all selfishness, he rose somewhat above the normal level of humanity, attaining to the altitude of spirits capable of sacrifice, and coming within vision of angels.

At first thought it seems a grand pity that this lofty self-forgetfulness of the lover can not last throughout his existence, and can not become a universal characteristic of our race. But there is sad chance that so heavenly a state of mind would be ill-suited in the long run to a brood which must struggle with the physical difficulties of this planet. In some such a state poor old Rector Murray had lived, with the result that he did no worthy work beyond comforting one woman.

If we were all divested of self-preserving egotism, and robbed for life in the innocent swaddlings of unmixed love, we should probably lose our civilization, dress in fig-leaves,

and become extinct. We should meet the fate of that famous tribe of monkeys who sat in each other's laps until they all starved to death.

Bradford was soon at the Warden house, and alone with Mrs. Warden. He had no fear of being discouraged by her, and not much fear of being rejected by her daughter. On the contrary, he felt able to make self-respectful terms with the elder lady, and to offer himself to the younger with almost as much confidence as willingness.

"Mrs. Warden, I wish to speak to you of Belle," he began. "And if what I am about to say is agreeable to you, I shall then wish to speak to her."

The lady's large, dusky, and, one might almost say, smoky-black eyes sparkled and danced with intense satisfaction.

"I don't think, Mr. Bradford," she replied, "that you could say any thing of Belle, or to Belle, which would not give me pleasure."

It was uttered with an impulsive promptness which revealed vividly her liking for him and her adoration of her child.

The answer and the manner nearly bewildered him; nearly made him forget the terms which he meant to impose. But they were tremendously important; they were essential, as he thought, to his honor as a bridegroom and a statesman; and, after wavering for a moment, he swung back to them with a firm grip.

"I think Belle is worthy, and much better than worthy, of being my wife," he continued. "I desire, above all things in the world, to win her for a wife."

In her joy Mrs. Warden smiled, bowed, fairly leaned toward him, and colored deeply. There could be no doubt that she thought him the finest of young men; and once more he nearly flinched from his task of imposing conditions upon such a welcome.

"But I must ask two favors before I ask this greatest of all favors," he managed to proceed. "I must beg of you to let Mrs. Murray look for another home."

"It would be quite proper," murmured Mrs. Warden.

Of course; it was her business as a mother to rid Belle of a companion who might prove a dangerous rival; and, furthermore, it was natural that a freshly engaged man should hate to meet daily an old flame with whom he had perhaps been very, very intimate.

It was characteristic of the lady, by-the-way, and shows how deeply her moral sense had been seared by worldliness, that she should make this last reflection with the utmost composure of mind, and without passing severe sentence upon either Bradford or Josie. She did not sit in judgment on them; she did not find them either guilty or not guilty of improper demeanor; she did not

care one straw whether they had been guilty or not. In all such matters she was as indifferent as Gallo, and as, immorally unprejudiced as Machiavelli.

It seems impossible at first glance that such a woman could have a daughter like Belle, whose chief spiritual trait was strenuous and almost uncharitable uprightness.

But here we come again to the miracle, or, rather, to the law, of hereditary character. James Channing Warden had been a man of fastidious truthfulness and purity.

"I thank you for your very great kindness, Mrs. Warden," pursued Bradford. "But I feel bound to ask one thing more, and, I suppose, a much harder thing."

He hesitated, and she trembled. Could it be that he would wish her to give up her claim? An old gambler, who is urged by puissant circumstances to forswear gaming, can imagine her emotions. Her voice was weak, and her swarthy cheek faded, as she asked, "What is it?"

"It is this, that you will withdraw your claim from before Congress, with the understanding that it is never to be renewed."

Mrs. Warden had to summon all her fortitude to suppress a groan, and to keep herself from turning faint. But, infatuated as she was with claim-hunting, she still had a few scattered atoms of common sense left, and she knew that it would be madness to reject this demand. Her small fortune was nearly gone; her longed-for appropriation seemed as far beyond her grasp as ever; and here, if she would resign that shadow, was a brilliant and wealthy son-in-law.

"I will withdraw it, Mr. Bradford," she whispered, with a sensation of having been bled deeply, and lying helpless in the surgeon's hands. "It has worn my life out," she added, venting her petulance on the ungrateful delusion which was now escaping her. "I shall be glad—glad to stop it," she gasped on, almost weeping. "Of course, I pledge myself not to renew it—oh, willingly! willingly!"

"This gives you pain," he said, walking up to her, and taking both her hands. "I will see that you never regret it."

She jumped to her feet, drew him close to her with characteristic animation, and kissed his forehead fervently, almost passionately.

"You are the noblest young man in the world!" she exclaimed. "I shall be unspeakably proud of you. There! Now I will send Belle to you."

Running hastily up stairs with the glee of a child who has lost one plaything and found another, she dashed into her daughter's room, contemplated the girl with sparkling eyes and a triumphant smile, and at last burst out laughing, being a trifle hysterical with conflicting emotions.

"What has happened, mamma?" asked our Juno, not even raising her head from her

work, and only lifting her long lashes from her calm, lucid blue eyes.

"Belle, go down stairs and entertain Mr. Bradford," was the reply, uttered in the most nonchalant contralto tone possible, for Mrs. Warden had suddenly conceived the delightful idea of giving her daughter a surprise. "He has come to make a call."

"I don't see the joke of it, mamma," said Belle, rising at once, with a heightened color in her blonde cheeks.

"He wants you to go on a picnic with him—to the Happy Isles, or somewhere. He will tell you all about it. I don't object, if you don't."

"A picnic at this season!" marveled Belle, and rustled innocently down to meet her fate, though prepared in heart to bow to it, yes, and to do it reverence.

When she entered the parlor, she saw Bradford coming slowly to receive her, with a peculiarly grave, tender expression in his meditative hazel eyes, and with both hands cordially extended.

"What does this mean? A picnic?" she smiled, while suffering her fingers to become entangled with his.

"Your mother told you that?" he replied, with a low laugh, a laugh which struck her as deliciously musical. "She wanted me to surprise you," and for a moment he adored Mrs. Warden. "I hope, my dear beautiful girl, that it will be a pleasant surprise."

"Oh! what do you mean, Mr. Bradford?" gasped Belle, her heart suddenly beginning such a thumping that she could scarcely breathe.

"My dear, it means—" And here he lifted her hands to his lips. "My very dear one, it means—"

And then he told her the old, beautiful story, the fairy tale which has given a thousand-fold more delight than all others, the tale of worshiping and loving which ends with asking in marriage.

"Yes," was Belle's answer, not spoken so much as whispered, or, rather, breathed. "Could you have feared that I would say any thing else?"

"Yes. I could."

"You need not have feared: not for months back. You are good and honorable. I love you for it."

"Not very good. But I will be better; for your sake."

"I am satisfied with you. Perfectly."

"No. I will better—gentler, and purer. Heaven help me!"

"You frighten me. I shall never be worthy of you."

"Oh, my noble one! How sweet of you to say so!"

They misjudged and exaggerated each other, no doubt; but they were the holier in feeling and purpose because of this hyperbole of appreciation; they were in that pos-

session of enthusiasm, faith, hope, and expectation which inspires so many great and beautiful deeds: that superhuman extravagance of the heart which always deludes, but which always uplifts.

CHAPTER XLVII.

JOSIE'S FRESH TROUBLES AND COMPLICATIONS.

WHILE the two lovers mingled their hearts in the parlor, Mrs. Warden hearkened from the top of the stairs in a conflict of emotions.

"If she refuses him, I do believe I shall pound her!" she muttered, shaking her fist in the air, while she leaned over the banisters and strove to catch some sound which should reveal how the wooing was speeding. "I wish I had told her to mind what she was about, and not make a fool of herself."

It is a fact—a very odd one, surely, and yet, probably, a very natural one—that this eccentric woman looked upon her upright and straightforward daughter as extremely queer. Belle was not like other girls, she insisted; there never was any telling what she would think or what she would do; never yet had she held her mother's opinions or wanted to do her mother's bidding. She had seemed to like Bradford very much, and still, at the last minute, she might not take him.

Nor, while saying all these things to herself, could Mrs. Warden forget her now out-cast claim, or quite fail to grumble at the young Congressman for condemning it. But to a woman, and especially to an interested mother, a betrothal is always an occupying and august subject, capable of administering vast consolation. When our anxious mamma overheard how nicely matters were going below stairs, she forgot that Belle was singular and irrational, forgot that her appropriation must miscarry, and was one of the happiest of mortals.

She joined the two loving ones as soon as her sense of the proprieties of the case would admit, and kissed them and blessed them with the sensibility of a heart which was as fervid as it was wayward.

After Bradford had departed, and after she had talked over the rose-colored future with her daughter, she set herself to the task of cutting loose from her lodger.

Josie had just returned from an absence of some hours, and had been heard to go directly to her room. Mrs. Warden dropped in upon her with a smile, and caught her wiping away a tear.

"My dear, you are looking very tired," she said. "I am afraid you overdo yourself with these long walks."

"I am awfully tired," responded poor Josie, who had come near to meeting Bradford

in the street, and had seen him evade her. "It isn't the walking, though—that rests me; it is listening to those long-winded creatures at the Capitol," she rattled on, trying to conceal her agitation. "I couldn't help thinking how much more interesting they would be if they were deaf and dumb, and only made signs. And, oh! the manners! General Bangs sat on the small of his back, with one leg over his desk. Honest John Vane combed his hair with a pocket-comb which must have cost twenty-five cents. Mr. Sharp cleaned his long, yellow teeth with his handkerchief. It is worse than the Japanese ambassadors playing with their toes."

"What is up to-day? Who spoke?" said Mrs. Warden, who, as we remember, was clean cracked about Congress.

"Mr. Sharp, Honest John Vane, Mr. Hollowbread, and I don't know who else."

"Mr. Hollowbread! You ought to have been interested."

Josie made a face. Mrs. Warden burst out laughing. It was perfectly understood between them that Mr. Hollowbread was something of a bore, even to his betrothed.

"Oh, he does very well, you know," added Josie. "It was all rounded and finished, and polished and balanced and Blaired. It was as genteel as the gait of a gentleman of the old school. He spoke better than any body else, and he was applauded, too; but it was about contracting and inflating the currency; and who cares about contraction and inflation? I saw Mrs. John Vane there, waving her handkerchief at her husband—to show that it was all lace, I suppose. She ought to have gone to the other wing and waved it at Senator Ironman, who probably gave it to her. They did almost nothing. They passed one appropriation bill, but nothing for us. Twenty-five millions to the navy! Dear me, what a lot of money there is wasted! Three hundred millions a year, and nothing for you or me! I wanted to get up and say that it was wicked, and that things would go differently when women voted, and all that sort of nonsense; but I saw that poor, demented Nancy Appleyard bloomerizing opposite me, and staring at Mr. Drummond, and I gave up the idea of making a speech for fear it should please her."

"And were there no private bills?" asked Mrs. Warden, with a faint hope that her appropriation had passed somehow—passed by accident, by miracle. "Are you perfectly sure?"

"Not one; not so much as the vurth of Mr. Stiggins's umbrella; nothing for Emmanuel," replied Josie.

The descendant of Commodore What's-his-name sighed; then she turned to the business of evicting her tenant.

"I am so sorry to tell you that we have got to part," she said; and really she was a little sorry, as well as not a little glad.

"Part! What is the matter now?" demanded our heroine.

She spoke with an unusual tartness, for not only was the suggestion vexatious, but that dodging of Bradford had been irritating, and her heart was still sore from it.

"My dear, I am so sorry," palavered Mrs. Warden. "I hate above all things to lose you. But circumstances have occurred which render it absolutely necessary that I should have the whole of my house."

"I thought we were to live together and work together?" muttered Josie, almost at the point of whimpering, for she did not know where to go.

Mrs. Warden hesitated and pondered. She had not by any means lost all hope with regard to her appropriation, and this reference to it made her long to keep friendship with her tenant, that able and indefatigable wire-puller. Still, one thing was certain: it was absolutely necessary to get Bradford's old flame out of the house; and so she presently added, not without a sigh,

"I have dropped my claim."

Our heroine looked up sharply; she knew that something very extraordinary must have happened to account for such a decision, and she began to divine what it was, and to tremble.

"The truth is, that Belle is engaged to Edgar Bradford," burst forth the proud mother, unable longer to hold in the splendid revelation.

Perhaps it was the most crushing and torturing piece of news that had ever fallen upon Josie's heart. She had partially expected it, and yet it came to her, as death or any other giant calamity always comes, with stunning and inclement suddenness. Her face turned marble-white, and for a moment she could not reply, not even in a whisper.

"And so you see, my dear, it will be really necessary that we should soon have the whole of our house," continued Mrs. Warden, meanwhile surveying her victim steadily, not with any purpose of inflicting pain, but with the unmeant cruelty of curiosity.

"Certainly," murmured Josie, speaking, as it seemed to her, out of a dream, or rather a nightmare. Then she made an immense effort, and added, "I congratulate Belle."

"When should you fancy going?" asked Mrs. Warden, somewhat anxiously.

With this pretty woman in love with Bradford, and ready, doubtless, to fling herself at his head on the first opportunity, it would be well to get quit of her as soon as possible, and perhaps well to quarrel with her.

"I will go as soon as I can," quavered Josie, rising in anger. "I will see about a lodging-place at once."

Mrs. Warden murmured that she was "so sorry," rustled hastily out of the room, looked up her daughter, and whispered, "I have

told her every thing. She is dead in love with him."

"Mamma! Stop!" hissed Belle, unable to bear that any other woman should dare to love the sacred man of her heart. "I will not hear a word about that!"

"Never mind. She is going to-day. The sooner the better."

There was a sudden revulsion of feeling in Belle, an outburst of pity for her unhappy rival. In that joyous day, and for many joyous days to come, it must seem to her that a disappointment in love would be the fearfullest of calamities, worthy of the profoundest compassion.

"Poor Josie!" she said, pressing her hands to her eyes and wiping away tears of sympathy.

"Nonsense!" laughed the mother. "She can stand it—with all her men to help her."

Meantime, Josie had left the house with the noiselessness of a hall-thief, anxious to evade every eye. After an hour she returned, almost as pale as when the engagement was revealed to her, and obviously in a state of exhaustion. Immediately Mrs. Warden hastened to her room to conclude a matter of business—the price of board.

"I have found a place," said Josie, who was packing her trunk, and who continued to pack without looking up. "I hate boarding-houses, but I must try one for the present. I shall go to-night."

"And as to our—our common expenses?" suggested Mrs. Warden, who had no confidence in debtors, especially female ones. "I thought, my dear, that perhaps we had better settle that matter while it is convenient."

"We never fixed upon any terms," mumbled Josie, whose porte-monnaie was nearly empty, and no dividends due for some time.

"Ah! yes—don't you remember? You were to pay one-third, my dear. Now our expenses are about four thousand a year, and for one month that would be three hundred and thirty-three dollars."

"Four thousand dollars! Goodness gracious, Mrs. Warden! But that must include your private expenses. You surely don't mean to make me pay for your dresses and jewelry?"

"Oh, exactly!" stared the lady of the house, honestly confounded. She had gone through the whole of this wonderful calculation without once suspecting the error which vitiated it. "Why, certainly! How could I forget that? Isn't it funny? Well, as to my mere housekeeping expenses, I don't know in the least what they are. It would take me forever to find out. Perhaps Belle would know something. She pays all the bills."

She flew down stairs and consulted her daughter.

"I certainly think," she said, "that she ought to pay forty dollars a week."

"Oh! mamma! And you say she really loved him!" returned Belle, who had come to regard that fact with solemn sympathy and tenderness. "How can you chaffer with her? Take any thing—take nothing. We will pawn our furniture to get along."

"And how will I ever buy you an outfit?" groaned the impoverished descendant of Commodore Hooker.

"What! are we so poor as that? Well, I will be married without an outfit. I will ask my husband for dresses to begin my married life," declared the heroic Belle, shedding a few of those tears which generally accompany feminine heroism. "But one poor woman must not rob another. It is worse, almost, than robbing the Treasury. Mamma, don't you ask her more than ten dollars a week. That will more than cover the cost of her food. I suppose she would rather pay it than be under an obligation."

Mrs. Warden hurried back to her lodger, closed the door behind her carefully, and smiled ever so sweetly.

"I think forty dollars a week would be right, my dear," she said. "That would be one hundred and seventy for the month, which is only half of the three hundred and thirty-three we spoke of. We are perfectly willing to take off half."

"Mrs. Warden, that three hundred and thirty-three ought to have been divided by three," suggested Josie, who had been ciphering in her head.

"Oh, that is nonsense!" broke out Mrs. Warden, confounded again, but none the less irritated.

"It is *not* nonsense. There are three of us, are there not? And I must say that it is very strange of you to try to saddle the whole expense of the family upon me."

Mrs. Warden was tempted to tell Josie at once that she was a bad woman, and that she had killed her aunt and uncle, and that every body said so. Her next impulse was to fly down stairs and refer this knotty problem to Belle, who, as our readers have doubtless perceived, was her real head-piece and counselor in times of perplexity. But, remembering that that young lady's decision had already been given against her, she stood irresolute, and only snapped her black eyes at Josie.

"I think it is just a piece of extortion," muttered the latter, packing away with hysterical vehemence.

"It is *no* extortion," retaliated Mrs. Warden, her contralto voice bursting forth in its deepest notes of indignation. "It is just simple fairness and honesty. And I think, Mrs. Murray, that you are not the person to judge and condemn other people. You make trouble wherever you go. You worried your poor old aunt and uncle into the grave, and now you come here to worry me into mine."

"What ridiculous nonsense!" exclaimed

Josie, very much refreshed and supported by what seemed to her the absurd injustice of this accusation. "My aunt and uncle died because they were superannuated and feeble. And as for you, you look more likely to murder somebody else than to be killed yourself."

"That will do, Mrs. Murray," gasped Mrs. Warden, sitting suddenly down and pressing her hand to her heart, as though some great physical pain had smitten her. "I have nothing more to say to you."

"I shall be very happy to hear any thing rational from you," declared Josie, with the cheerfulness of conscious victory.

After a number of labored breaths, Mrs. Warden murmured something about ten dollars a week. Josie produced her porte-monnaie, counted out lingeringly forty-three dollars, and laid them on a chair in silence.

Mrs. Warden returned no change; she did not know, indeed, that any was due; she merely took the money and sailed out of the room. Once down stairs, she threw the bills into her daughter's lap, and sobbed out,

"Oh, that woman! She has insulted me abominably. Belle, if you go near her she will kill you."

Not in the least believing this tremendous statement, but startled by a fear (an old fear) concerning her mother's health, the girl sprung up, passed her arm around the crying woman, led her to her bedroom, and made her lie down.

Half an hour later, when a hack came for the departing lodger, Mrs. Warden jumped off the bed, rustled enthusiastically into the hall, threw her arms around Josie, and kissed her violently.

"I am so sorry to have you go!" she exclaimed, exactly as if there had been no quarrel. "I shall miss you dreadfully."

"We shall meet now and then, I suppose," returned Josie, who had a sharper grief to struggle with than Mrs. Warden, and could not feel the parting very keenly. "Good-bye, Belle," she added, merely shaking hands, for it was beyond her strength to embrace her victorious rival.

Then she left the house with tears in her eyes, tears of sorrow and also tears of rage. Not to mention her love-trial, this was the second home which she had been driven from within a few weeks, and she felt that she had a right to be angry with somebody.

That evening, however, Sykes Drummond came to see her, and alleviated the lonesomeness of her new residence. She was quite plaintive with him at first, and yet humorous and shrewd withal.

"I am doomed to wander," was one of her observations. "I shall never live long enough in one place to take root there, or to collect two trunksful of baggage. It is dreadful to move; at least, it is dreadful to a woman; it is so stripping and so vulgariz-

ing. It knocks off all the knickknacks and decorations of life; and what is life without decorations, to a lady? I had just begun to deposit my sediment, and here I am all riled again. Just see what a cluttered, rampagous, disgusting state this room is in! I didn't mean that you should see it until I had got it into shape. You had no business to rush up here as you did. What if every gentleman should follow his card on the full run in that style?"

"I will be house-maid, or lady's-maid, and put you to rights," he offered, quite pleased with the chance.

"You mustn't shut the door," she ordered, after he had closed and latched it. "What would people say?"

"How can I move things about, then? Let it stay shut. Don't you mean to receive calls in your room? It is common enough in Washington."

"If you stay, you must work. Help me get up my lace curtains. I must try to hide these dowdy, dusty, musty draperies. Put a stool in that chair, and climb up on it, and break your neck for my sake."

"I would rather break Mr. Hollowbread's neck for my sake and yours. As for mounting that cricket, I shall drive it through the chair."

"Then help me up. I can hammer, and you can steady me."

He helped her up, and he steadied her. It was evidently very agitating and unsteady business for both of them. Drummond's muscular hands trembled, and Josie's lovely face was soon deeply flushed.

The work went on in silence, or with only a few hastily breathed words, the silence and the speech alike significant of emotion.

Of a sudden Josie slipped, uttered a little cry, dropped her hands on the young man's shoulders, and fell with her full weight into his arms.

Enormously strong, and no doubt prepared for some such collision, he received it without staggering, caught her firmly, let her slowly to the floor, and still held her.

"Mr. Drummond!" she gasped, thoroughly frightened and paralyzed, looking up bewildered into his fierce black eyes, and feeling incapable of resistance, no matter what he did.

"You are mine," he answered, in a choked, hoarse, scaring voice. "You must be my wife."

And then he began to kiss her neck as if he would devour it, or at least bite into it.

"Mr. Drummond—stop!" she begged, for she could not command. "Oh, do."

And then she lost her breath, and could not even beg.

"Will you promise to be my wife?" he presently asked, bending her head back over his arm, and looking down into her hot face

with savage longing and domination. "I am going to be your husband."

"Oh, Sykes!—I don't think I can—I suppose I must—yes," was the wonderful answer.

And so it was done; she was engaged to two men at once; something uncommon even with Josie Murray.

A minute later, after she had got loose from him and recomposed her trimmings and furbelows, she suddenly burst out laughing.

"Here I am in a pretty fix!" she said. "What am I to do with Mr. Hollowbread?"

"Why, throw him over," answered Drummond, somewhat astonished. "Give him his passports."

"My dear friend! I dare not. On your account I dare not. What will become of my bill? He gives respectability to it. Just now I dare not lose him."

There was a long argument, but it ended in her having her wickedly sly way; and the fact shows not only her powers of coaxing and persuasion, but also Drummond's coarseness of feeling.

"Very well," he said, at last, indulging for the first time this evening in his characteristic "haw, haw!" "I don't mind your putting a joke on him. We will keep him in play until you have got your money."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE EXACT WORTH OF THE BARN.

ENGAGED as she was, and engaged to two men at that, Josie went to sleep crying about a third man, and ready to kiss the darkness whenever she thought of his name.

To lose that dearest one finally and utterly, and to know that he had given to another that heart which she had begged for in vain, made up a trial which was both rack and pillory, both anguish and shame, even to this seasoned coquette. It gave her more suffering than she could bear without winning out of her usual character, and shying into strange behavior.

When she awoke in the morning from a sleep of turmoils, her head aching, and her nerves crawling, and her face so pallid that she hated to look at it, she was not an even-tempered, genial Josie, and for once she wanted to wreak a vengeance. Her feeling was that somebody was always abusing her; that she was constantly being glowered at, or frown at, or turned off, or circumvented; that she had borne her fellow-creatures' evil usage too long with patience; that sweetness did no good, and that she must fight. Yes, she would set to work to hurt somebody, and in particular she would do a damage to the Wardens. They had cut her out and driven her forth; they had been insolent and

had tried to be extortionate; they deserved a hard setting-down, if ever any body did.

When she next saw Drummond, she asked him where was Mrs. Warden's claim, and what were its chances.

"The old girl has been making great headway with it since her daughter got engaged," he replied. "By George! I begin to think that Bradford must be working for her," he added, without noticing how Josie's lip quivered. "There's no telling. He may be helping her. The stillest cats lap the most cream. Or else she is using his character unbeknownst to him. Anyhow, she has got her swindle before my honorable colleagues of the Blood and Thunder Committee. I shouldn't wonder if it went through on a gun-carriage."

"In the army bill!" exclaimed Josie. "That silly, impudent claim in the army bill! Why, there isn't the smallest chance of its passing, and it may call attention to mine. Oh, Sykes, I do wish it could be got out. It may ruin me. Don't you think you can get it out?"

"I believe you are right," judged Drummond. "Yes, it might hurt you. A stolen horse will carry one rider easier than two. Well, I will do my best to assassinate your friend."

"What an ugly way of putting it!" laughed Josie. "I wonder you didn't haw haw over it. But you have given up that Mephistophelian habit, and you are very serviceable and sweet, and here is a kiss for you, on the tip of that finger. Only you ought to come and see me oftener. The idea of winning a lady's hand, and then not calling on her for two days!"

"If you knew how driven I am!" he said, while he kissed her. "I am at full speed, body and mind, from morn till dewy eve; yes, and into the small hours."

"And how you bear it!" exclaimed Josie, gazing with admiration at his stalwart frame and trooper-like visage. "You could wear out a dozen ordinary men, and the same number of extraordinary women. There, go and work like a tiger. I am proud of you."

Off he strode in furious haste, for he was in reality terribly busy. The end of the session was approaching, and he had a score of rascally peas under thimbles, and scores of fellow-jugglers to guard against. So occupied was he with his special legislations that for the next three days he had no leisure to call upon Josie; and it had been agreed between them that he should not speak to her at the Capitol, for fear of rousing Hollowbread's suspicions. Meantime, that deduced old gentleman visited his betrothed regularly, and was received with a cordiality beyond all praise, and got his stated allowance of frugal caresses.

At last the postman brought Josie an en-

velope, addressed in Drummond's handwriting. It contained only his card, but on it was scrawled this cheering sentence:

"The other jockey has lost his seat."

"Mrs. Warden's rider has had a fall," she laughed, as she tore the bit of pasteboard to pieces.

She was heartily glad of it, not merely because it seemed to hurt her lucky rival, Belle, but mainly because it helped herself. As a rejected one, it was still possible for her to be malignant, but it was far easier for her to be simply selfish.

A day or two later, on the awful closing day of the session, she repaired to the gallery of the House, there to await her sentence. The Apollonian Beauman, not having yet seen his way clear to Portugal, amused himself by acting as her escort. In the halls she met the banking and rail-roading Allechin, who bowed over her like a man-mountain, grinned at her as if she were a bag of specie, and hoarsely murmured a prophecy of success.

"If you will only invest outside of politics, Mrs. Murray, as wisely as you have invested inside of it, you will be a millionaire," he smirked. "I shall look to you for lessons in finance."

"If ever I get any thing we will take care of it together," smiled Josie, as she rustled away from him.

"He would soon relieve you of all business cares," whispered Beauman, who, though not a suitor, wished her well. "He would place your money where you would never spend it."

Then that sham Aristides, Honest John Vane, encountered them, and made one of the happy speeches for which he was famous. An adroit man inside politics, and a superficially courteous one in society, he frequently said things which showed how vulgar had been his starting-point in life, and how much more fat than brain there was in his huge cranium.

"I shall have to pitch into you to-day, Mrs. Murray," he bowed, with a buttery smile, as if he were saying something agreeable. "I hope sincerely that you won't take it as an expression of personal hostility. I only object to your claim for public reasons."

He must have supposed, judging from the genial, confiding way in which he beamed upon her, that he could attack a woman's swindle and still be on good terms with her.

"I court investigation, Mr. Vane," replied Josie, with praiseworthy self-command and good-humor. "You will find my affair in the Judiciary."

"Oh, in the Judiciary!" returned Honest John, marveling at her simplicity, and attributing it to feminine ignorance of politics. "I understood that it had got into the General Appropriations. Then it comes on this morning."

"What a goose!" muttered Josie, as she hurried along. "That big head of his reminds me of those large safes which one sees exposed for sale, and which never have any money in them. I suppose his wife has ordered him to attack my bill, and then he comes palavering and smiling at me, because he doesn't want to make enemies."

"Honest John aspires to be called a watchdog of the Treasury," was Beauman's explanation. "He stays in the fold and devours a sheep every night, and then bow-wows at whoever carries off a bone."

"I wonder where he has put his own jobs," said Josie. "I wish I could smash every one of them."

"And keep Mrs. Vane from giving parties—oh, no!" laughed Beauman. "What would the wives of some Congressmen do if the golden stream of special legislation should run dry? How economical and dull Washington society would be!"

Presently they were in the seats which Mr. Hollowbread had managed to reserve for them. There Josie remained for four mortal hours without being conscious of fatigue.

She attracted much attention, and received plenty of visitors. But they were men only: among all the people who were with her that day, there was not one lady; she had not, just now, a single female intimate.

Beauman, handsome enough to defy public opinion, staid by her throughout. The Carolinian Clavers, still holding her the noblest of her sex, dropped in to pay his boyish, chivalrous, pure-hearted homage, and to receive a smile of intelligent, appreciative, honest gratitude for it.

The grand, gloomy, and peculiar Bray kept at good glaring distance, being that sort of man who gets a delicious cup of wrath out of rejected love. Various others, whom this story has not had occasion to mention, happened along from time to time with words of civility or gallantry.

Not a quarter of an hour passed without bringing its two or three or more of bowing, smirking, cajoling gentlemen. Pickens Rigdon came to support her with the stimulus of his high-flavored breath, and to inform her, incidentally, that Stubb's old white-wheat whisky was the best brand in the market.

Senator Ironman, who had likewise dawdled into the House and caught sight of her from the floor, sent up a page with a flattering message and a bouquet.

This coming and going of callers excited much staring, notwithstanding the noisy turmoil of law-making below. People from the country imagined that our heroine must be an ambassador's wife, or a duchess, or an actress. She was the envy of scores of ladies who did not know her, and, what is more pity, of scores who did.

Mrs. John Vane, sitting almost unattended near-by, glared and sneered and pouted and tossed, and at last sailed angrily out of the gallery. Had she known that Ironman had sent Josie that bouquet, and that her husband had essayed his dull best to be civil to her, she would have given those gentlemen a piece of her mind, meaning not her intellect, but her temper.

Her vacant seat was greedily seized by an odd-looking man, whom the strangers present stared at in unspeakable bewilderment, but who was known to all Washingtonians as Squire Nancy Appleyard. Squire Nancy glowered at Josie with hate, and then gazed down into the cockpit below with love.

Drummond was there, fighting gallantly on his dughill of Special Legislation, and sending forth his brazen cock-a-doodle-doo defiantly. She was ready to wave applause at him if he chanced to turn her way, and then ready to hiss him if he turned in the direction of Josie Murray. She hoped every moment that he would look up, at her, and the stony monster never looked up at her once.

Behind Squire Appleyard, wedged into, and almost hidden by, the listening crowd, sat a lady so thickly veiled that it was impossible to see her face. This domino in tissue was the prospective mother-in-law of the Honorable Edgar Bradford.

Yes, there was Mrs. Warden, still hoping that her claim would survive, and brooding over it as the mother of Moses watched the ark of bulrushes. The promise to Bradford counted for naught with a woman whom nature had fitted for a claim-hunter, by an abundant dose of extravagance, and whom four years of lobbying had ripened into a monomaniac. So completely was she disguised that Josie only recognized her by a familiar gesture or movement of fatigue and impatience. It was an unpleasant recognition; it put our heroine in mind of her one sharp disappointment in love; and during one moment she gasped for breath, and wanted to get out of the gallery. No doubt, also, Mrs. Warden saw her, and gnawed her bitter nail at that surrounding of admirers, and tried to console herself by remembering Belle's engagement.

With what emotions must these two women have listened to Bradford when he obtained the floor for ten minutes, and made a violent onslaught upon the whole system of special legislation! The immediate cause of his philippic was a "rider" which had been tacked to the Judiciary bill, awarding a million or so of damages to a speculator who had forfeited a mail contract. He denounced not only this particular roguery, but all other similar abuses of the enacting power.

"The treasury is plundered and the general body of tax-payers is defrauded every ses-

sion for the benefit of private schemers and of business corporations," he declared. "The sums squandered in this manner every year range from ten millions up to fifty millions. A single railroad has taken forty millions at one swoop, and another is laying its plans for securing as much more. There are scores, if one may not say hundreds, of men in Washington who live by devising and pushing bills of which the end is theft and the means bribery. There are members of Congress whose chief and almost sole labor it is to earn these bribes and abet these thefts. There are members whose dishonorable perquisites amount yearly to fifty thousand and a hundred thousand dollars each. Congressional legislation will soon be a synonym for corruption, not only throughout this country, but throughout the world. If we do not wish to see republican institutions discredited; if we do not wish to see their spread arrested, and perhaps turned to collapse; if we do not wish to see the industrial prosperity of our native land impeded and stumbled, we must proceed at once to combat this extravagant, unjust, and dishonest wastefulness; we must check it, we must extirpate it, we must render it impossible.

"Legislation for the benefit of individuals or corporations ought to be done away with and put beyond the power of Congress. A Court of Claims should adjudicate upon all claims of damage, all demands for relief because of losses incurred in the public service, all financial questions between the citizen and the Government. The President should have the right of veto over every separate section of each bill, while approving of the remaining sections. There is no possibility of reform and honesty short of these radical and sweeping precautions. As long as men have the power to rob the public treasury, they can be coaxed or bribed to rob it. I give gentlemen notice that I do not mean to cease urging this matter. I have introduced a bill to put an end to special legislation, and it has been consigned to the limbo of waste paper, but not to forgetfulness. So long as I remain a member of this House, it will continue to re-appear from its tomb and to demand attention."

Amidst a hum of voices—the mere disorderly hum of miscellaneous conversation—he resumed his seat. There had been the same hum all over the House during his whole speech, and it had decidedly increased in loudness from the moment that his object became manifest.

"They don't seem to have heard him at all," murmured the palpitating Josie, turning to Beauman.

"Many of them would rather not hear him," was the answer. "He hit too many birds with his stone."

"Do you think he spoke well? I didn't like him as much as I expected to."

"After that, how can I praise him? Perhaps he was a little too lofty and solemn. But I suppose he feels his subject, and then he had to say much in little. I must insist, moreover, that he told some abominable truths."

Josie struggled to suppress a sigh of discouragement. Every body whose good opinion she cared for seemed to be against her at heart. Every body who was morally any body looked askance upon claim-hunting.

"He has beaten this job," resumed Beauman. "His motion has been seconded and carried. The mail contractor's swindle is dead."

"That is rough on Honest John Vane," laughed Senator Pickens Rigdon, who was breathing his old white-wheat whisky over Mrs. Murray's shoulder. "It was John's richest lode for this session."

"Oh, I am so glad!" exclaimed Josie, really quite jolly over Vane's defeat, though frightened all the more for herself.

"There goes Vane on his legs," added Beauman. "Can it be that he has check enough to demand a reconsideration?"

"No," said Rigdon. "The Judiciary Bill is up now. There, do you hear him? There is brass! 'Sound the loud timbrel o'er Egypt's dark sea.' He is supporting Bradford; denouncing special legislation, like Satan rebuking sin; going for somebody else's job. By George, Mrs. Murray, he is pitching into you!"

"He said he should," gasped Josie, trembling all over, and forgetting in her terror that her claim was not in the Judiciary.

Honest John showed as bold and smiling a front as if he had not just been beaten out of a villainous swindle; and in his commonplace, ungrammatical, slangy way he made a really fair speech, or, as he would have called it, an effort. He was bombastically severe on "under-ground legislation," and dully facetious on "one-horse bills," alluding to Josie's roasted chargers.

When he had finished, General Bangs made a retort in kind, which brought down the House. He vindicated the right of the poor and lowly citizen—the sufferer who had not the means to sue an unjust government in court—to appear by his representative before the bar of his country, and demand, without expense, his lost property. As for the bill in question, he declared that it was "a two-horse bill, with a big dog under the wagon," a stroke of humor which set two hundred Congressmen in a roar. Finally he stated that this claim was not in the Judiciary appropriation, and closed with repeating the ancient history of the potash-kettle which was paid for, which was returned, and which was never borrowed.

There was renewed legislative hilarity, and honest John Vane looked up wrathfully

at Mrs. Murray, wondering whether she had played a trick on him, or had simply blundered. But he was completely squelched for the time, and had no more to say concerning her affairs.

Thus law-making went on for hours amidst a monstrous and confounding hubbub, members shouting and almost fighting for the floor, the majority engaged in nearly continuous conversation, and the Speaker's hammer whacking through all. Meantime Mr. Jake Pike was dodging about the legislative machine, and pulling his rascally wires.

When the Army Bill came up, an unexpected helper made his task the easier. Mrs. Warden, supposing her appropriation to be therein, and fearing the opposition of her future son-in-law, devised a plan for carrying him off the scene.

She struggled out of the gallery, crammed her veils into her pockets, ran down to the door of the hall, dispatched a page for Bradford, dragged him aside to talk of feigned business, and kept him as long as babble could do it.

Just then, too, Mr. Jake Pike so managed matters as to bring John Vane into the lobby and involve him in a long discussion with his disappointed mail contractor.

During this interval the Army Bill was gabbled over in the House. There was a great confusion, or rather it seemed to be a great confusion to Josie, who was in something like a nightmare. At last Beauman turned to her with a smile, shook her by the hand, and said,

"Remember me in your will!"

CHAPTER XLIX.

MISERERE!

GREAT had been the amazement and consternation of Mr. Hollowbread when he found that Josie's swindle was not among the appropriations for carrying on the justice of his country.

He hastened over to Bangs as soon as he thought he could do so without attracting notice, and asked in an excited whisper and with an unaccustomed oath where his section had gone to.

"Ah, precisely," answered the general, when he could be brought to pretend to remember what his friend was talking of. "Mrs. Murray's little joker? Well, Jake Pike is taking care of it. You had better stand by the army."

Excessively angry and humiliated; angry at Bangs and at Jake Pike, and at whomsoever had inspired them to this impertinence; humiliated by the fact that the claim should be taken out of his hands without even consulting him or warning him; in such a turmoil of emotion that his very springs and

surcingle throbbed with it, Mr. Hollowbread returned to his seat and stood by the army.

Meanwhile he dared not call on his client and explain matters to her, or, rather, beseech an explanation. He simply sat confounded, heard the Murray appropriation enumerated among the defenses of the republic, and speechlessly voted for it.

Not until the business was settled and the House had taken up its next bill did he dare to steal into the gallery and congratulate Josie. He had supposed that she would not be grateful to him, and had feared that she might be fault-finding and scornful. On the contrary, she was all sunshine, smiles, thanks, compliments, content, and joy. She had never looked prettier or more loving than when she leaned forward with flushed face and sparkling eyes, pressed his hand, and whispered,

"Isn't it nice?"

He decided that he would ask no questions then, and he went back a relieved, happy man to his arm-chair, hoping to vote honestly for the rest of the session.

In the halls he passed Mrs. Warden, rustling hastily to and fro, flurried and eager. Was her appropriation in the Army Bill? she bluntly and excitedly asked him. When he replied courteously that he regretted not to have noticed it there, she turned away from him abruptly and ran after some other legislator.

We can imagine the poor woman pursuing her inquiries, tremulously fearing lest all had gone wrong, yet wildly hoping that all had gone right. One godsend had befallen during the day, which at any other time would have made her happy. She had received a check for one thousand dollars from Colonel Murray, with a note begging her to use the money for Belle's wedding outfit. The check she had deposited as she came to the House, and there it was in bank to her credit, dispelling many anxieties.

But what was a check for a thousand, if the Army Bill did not contain her section, and she had lost—yes, lost—a fortune? Her calamity was too monstrous to be believed, although many people assured her of it. She would hope on until morning, and then read her opulence in the printed record.

The night passed over her, but not on wings of balm. With that uneasy heart of hers beating so strangely, and that flighty head fluttering through so many reveries, it was not easy to sleep. For hours no rest, but only a perpetual tossing, feverish and full of pain. Hour after hour she counted the strokes of the church clocks, first one and then another—counted them fretfully, forebodingly, and gloomily, as if they were tollings for the dead. She would have sought unconsciousness in chloroform or in opiates, but she had a sombre reason for dreading

them—a reason of which she never spoke. That ugly heart-beat, which more than any thing else kept her awake, was the well-known symptom of an old disease.

At last a sweet, warm delusion, a waking agitation which was like a delightful dream, stole to her pityingly and soothed her. It was a feverish delirium, but it was as cheering as wine. She had a feeling of success and triumph, like one intoxicated with Champagne. She had won; she was rich, very rich; she was happy, perfectly happy. Trusting that so it would be in the morning, she slipped with many starts into slumber.

On waking she found herself unusually jaded and pallid, while her mind was so confused and numbed that she could hardly apply it to the most common purposes, such as the task of dressing. The events of the previous day came back to her with such difficulty, and so dimly, that it seemed as if they had not happened.

Once it struck her that she was like a dead person, trying almost in vain to remember the by-gone life. She half trusted that there had been no day before; that she had only dreamed its futile hopes and disappointments; that her final struggle for wealth was yet to come. She recollected the cheerfulness with which she had fallen asleep; but it had vanished now, and could not be made to return. Languid, aching from head to foot, unable to think consecutively, unable even to handle things aright, and utterly depressed in spirit, she slowly finished her attiring.

Then she sat down to rest, breathing rapidly and laboriously, like one who has been pursued.

After a time she took a check from her table, and filled it out for the one thousand dollars in bank, making it payable to her daughter. Three checks were used before this could be done; she spoiled the first two by errors in writing or signing. Then, picking up the paper with a trembling hand, she carried it down stairs and gave it to Belle.

"What is this for, mamma?" asked the girl, with disquietude. "I don't like to take it. I want you to spend the money for me. Of course the colonel expected that. Mamma, I will not take it."

"Don't be so silly!" said Mrs. Warden, pettishly. "I would rather have the money lie in your name. I insist upon it."

"Mamma—are you unwell?"

"Do stop, Belle! I hate such foolish questions," responded the ailing woman, with downright asperity. "I never can do any thing my own way but you go to supposing that I am sick."

To quiet her, the daughter gave way, and silently put the check in her pocket.

"Has the *Newsomonger* come?" demanded Mrs. Warden.

"No. Somebody must have stolen it. But do sit down and take some breakfast."

"Jane!" called Mrs. Warden, in loud irritation. "Where is that lazy blackamoor? Jane, what did you let the *Newsomonger* get stolen for? Why don't you get up earlier? There, take that money and run out and buy one."

She was sipping her coffee in silence, and had not yet tasted a mouthful of food, when the servant returned with her favorite journal.

"Mamma, let me read it to you," implored Belle. "I want you to eat."

"Oh, Belle, you worry my life out of me," said Mrs. Warden, snatching eagerly at the *Newsomonger*. "If there is any good news, I want to find it myself."

"Good news! What good news?" asked the daughter, suspecting at once that the claim was meant, and flushing deeply.

Mrs. Warden replied not, but read on greedily, her face likewise deeply flushed, and her eyes angry. Of a sudden she found what she sought; there was a look of agonizing anxiety and longing; then she turned as pale as a corpse, and dropped the paper. She had read her sentence of disappointment—her sentence of death!

"Mamma! mamma!" shrieked Belle, springing up and running to her; but before she could reach the stricken woman the tragedy was over. Mrs. Warden had clutched her hands to her heart, and rolled out of her chair upon the floor, perfectly dead!

We will pass over the remainder of this scene; the nature of it is only too easily imagined.

Some hours later Bradford found in the *Newsomonger* the following passage, deeply marked by finger-nails, as if in anger or in agony:

"Among the notorious jobs which received their quietus during the closing bombardment of the session was the so-called Commodore John Saul Hooker claim, a venerable seventy-four, rated at eighty thousand dollars, and not carrying a cent. Report says that it was warped into the Army Bill, a week since, by the personal exertions of the proprietor, and sent adrift again, only two days later, to make room for a newer and prettier rover of the seas of legislation. What is certain is that it failed to put in an appearance, and so has once more gone to the bow-wows, let us hope, forever."

"That reads like Shorthand's work," judged Bradford. "And yet it probably tells the truth. How could she break that promise?—poor woman!"

He could hardly regret her, and but for Belle he would not have pitied her, so severe is a soul of a single virtue. It was substantially this young man's moral code, that people who tell lies, and people who try to get

money dishonestly, are the great sinners, and almost the only sinners, of earth.

But he was building just now better than he knew. He was gathering some fresh sweetness and nobleness into his heart, by dint of using it; he was filling much empty comb of his nature with the honey of sympathy.

It astonished him, certainly, to find that Belle grieved passionately over the loss of her false and frivolous mother; to find that a girl who was upright and truthful and wise could love a woman who was a sharper, a fiber, and practically a fool; to find that a noble nature could, like a kittenish one, respond with affection to the affection of the unworthy.

But he adored Belle all the more for her sorrow, and did his love-lorn best to comfort her, and so enlarged his limited moral boundaries and sweetened his spirit. There was possibility of a far better and more beautiful life in him than he had lived yet. There was a chance of his existing for others, in heart as well as in mind, for their sake as well as for his own.

We can grant but a brief and desultory hearing to the conversations of Belle and Bradford. Every one can imagine how consolation is given by a man full of affection to a woman who craves that affection and returns it.

A head laid on a shoulder, a kiss falling upon a forehead, a tear wiped gently away, murmurs of pity and constancy, answering murmurs of gratitude, all these things are easily imagined.

In such interviews broken sentences and detached words suffice. The heart fills up the intervals, and says more than lips could utter, and hears tenderesses unspoken.

"I must beg your forgiveness for my poor mother," said Belle, in one of her calmer moments. "She broke her promise to you. But the claim was a monomania with her; she was almost irresponsible on the subject. You must pardon her memory."

"I do: For your sake, and for hers also. It was for you, much more than for herself, that she was fighting. So I believe now, although there was a time when I did not think of that, and judged her hardly."

"She thought it all so necessary! From her point of view it was the case of a mother seizing a loaf for her starving child."

"One is tempted to be angry at those who stand in the way of such a loving theft."

"I suppose some one stood in the way of this," murmured Belle. She suspected her betrothed of being that one, for the scoffing passage in the *Newsomonger*, with its hint at Josie Murray, had been kept from her. "I do not condemn him, whoever he was," she added. "No doubt I ought to praise him."

"It was a woman—at least report says so," answered Bradford, who did not care to

shield Josie from blame, and who, indeed, had come to abhor her. "It is supposed to have been your late lodger."

"Josie Murray! You astonish me. I would not have thought her to be malicious. I did consider her—ought I to say it?—unprincipled. But this looks like revenge, and I never judged her bad-tempered. You must know that there had been causes of quarrel. She and mamma had some words, and I think she was vexed at going away, and, in short, it was an unpleasant parting. But even yet—well, it is hard to talk about it—I don't know what to say."

Belle was stammering by this time. A recollection and a sudden suspicion made the subject a delicate and daunting one to her. She remembered that Josie had been in love with her love, and she guessed, from a change in his face, that he, too, might know of it.

Of course he did call the now displeasing fact to mind; and, as he wanted to hide his consciousness, he turned cool and analytic.

"I doubt her malignity," he said. "I don't believe her capable of any deep or long-winded passion. A monkey who sees another monkey about to seize a cocoa-nut might push him off the branch and break his neck, all without the least hard feeling as well as without compunction, and thinking of nothing but the cocoa-nut. That, I take it, is just Josie Murray. Well, she has got her cocoa-nut," he added, willing to change the topic. "She is worth one hundred thousand dollars, deducting her commissions to the lobby."

"I don't envy her," answered Belle, for whom this subject of her rival—the woman who might have stood in her place—had a fascination. "I don't know but that I pity her. Yes, I do pity her, and sincerely. With all her beauty and cleverness, it seems to me that nobody really loves her—at least, not long. She throws away her chances—as fine chances as a woman could easily have—and all for the sake of novelties. It is the bird in the bush that ruins her."

"She is frivolous and selfish," pronounced Bradford. "She has a great power, and she abuses it. She is an egotistic tyrant, and gets a tyrant's measure of loyalty. If she should win a man," he added, thinking of his own escape, "and if she should even love him, she would soon tire of him. I take it that a beautiful woman's greatest temptation is inconstancy. Josie Murray does not even try to resist it."

"She is engaged to Mr. Hollowbread, and he is infatuated with her."

"Well, she will break his heart, if he has one that is breakable."

"Oh, my dear, what a wicked world it is!" sighed Belle, to whom the breaking of loving hearts seemed the greatest of crimes.

"And how much too good you are for it!"

he replied, doing her reverence with all his soul.

"You must not think me so good. You will be disappointed. You frighten me."

"You know what I mean. I worship you!"

CHAPTER L.

MR. HOLLOWBREAD IN THE BOSPHORUS.

ON the closing night of the session, on that carnival night of confused, headlong, blinded, bedlamite legislation, which costs the tax-payer so dear, Mr. Hollowbread went to bed from his protracted vigils and labors with aching loins and a dizzy scone.

Next morning he was absolutely driven to get himself together with a cocktail before he could rouse appetite enough to so much as nibble at a belated breakfast.

But love is the greatest of stimulants; it beats hate, it beats avarice, it beats whisky; it can make the sexagenarian arise and walk. Long before noon, our mature and indeed overripe Congressman was tripping into the apartments of his betrothed. We say apartments, and we mean the plural word in all its sumptuousness.

Josie had lost no time in forestalling her money, and had enlarged her boundaries that very morning. It was into a handsome private parlor that Mr. Hollowbread was ushered.

He came in all the splendor which modern fashion concedes to a gentleman—even to a youthful one. The modeling of sartorial art and the coloring of tonsorial art had done their daintiest by him. Positively he did not appear to be corpulent, although he was normally five feet around his equator.

Josie, after an approving glance at his mustache and hair, was upon the point of saying, "How young you look!" but it occurred to her that when a man dyed as nicely as that, it was ungracious to call attention to it; and so what compliments she tendered him were wrapped up in a smile, like *bonbons* in silver tissue.

There was a kiss, too; but it was not of her devising or doing, nor did it fall on the spot which he had picked out for it. He aimed it at her precious, precious lips, and she caught it on her noble, noble forehead. Mr. Hollowbread did not find that forepiece hard, nor did he think in a ghastly way of the skull within, as a less love-lorn man might have done. But it did seem to him that when he returned from political wars a victor, after long and laborious, not to say dirty, campaigning on her account, he ought to have had a tenderer salute. It was no comfort to say, the nearer the bone the sweeter the meat; and indeed he did not so much as think of the vulgar, carnal phrase. He

had been received coolly, and he knew it, and was alarmed.

"You are satisfied and happy, I hope?" he said, with an humble smile, which in a man of his age was painfully pathetic.

"I am in the seventh heaven. I can scarcely believe it. I am trying to realize it. I am trying to keep my senses," she rattled on, with an exhilaration natural enough in a gay and extravagant young woman suddenly made rich. "You must dance with me," she added, seizing him by the arms, whirling him around the room as fast as one could whirl a man of his tonnage, and humming a waltz over his shoulder. "There, sit down and catch your breath," she laughed, plumping him upon a sofa and slipping away from his claspings. "You want to kiss, kiss, kiss, all the while. You mustn't do it, with a stitch in your side. Do you think that I have gone wild? You never tried getting rich in a single night. My hundred thousand dollars have flown to my head. I am effervescing with plans. I can understand the Bacchantes. I should like to swing a bunch of grapes, and caper with the Dancing Faun. What do you think of this for a Grande Duchesse?"

Here she threw herself into one of the wildest attitudes of Tostée, looking for a moment superlatively wicked, as well as bewitching.

"Superb!" gasped Mr. Hollowbread from his sofa, though he was not less frightened than breathless.

He seemed to himself to see her dancing away from him, never more to return.

"Who wouldn't frolic in my place?" she babbled on. "Oh, the pleasure of being rid of all anxieties! Oh, the pleasure of jumping out of dependence! If I want any thing," throwing out her arms superbly, "I can buy it. If I want services and reverences and obediences, I can hire them. A woman who has all the money she needs is somebody, and, more than that, she is something. It is all very well to be handsome and clever; but if you are rich in addition, ah! the rest doubles. I can imagine people looking at me from a more respectful distance than formerly; standing aside to let me pass, as if I were a duchess instead of only a pretty woman; pointing me out from a distance, as if I were a procession or a ceremony. If you are rich, you are more than a single individual. You stand for all the people that you can hire. You represent a multitude. It is like being President. You can comprehend that, can't you? Oh, it is such a victory and such an inauguration to be rich!"

"Yes," Mr. Hollowbread absolutely sighed, for he did not like this complete content, this bound-breaking excitement. "But the feeling will soon pass away. Then you will want some deeper and more lasting senti-

ment to make life continuously happy. I have held wealth long enough to know that wealth alone is emptiness. Moreover, dollars have wings, especially when they are in the form of irredeemable paper," added this public advocate of "more greenbacks," and private believer in minted bullion. "By-the-way, we must see to it that your fortune is invested safely."

"Mr. Allechin has spoken to me a dozen times about that," replied Josie, dropping back to earth from her mad paradise.

"Mr. Allechin? I'll poison him!" broke out Hollowbread. "Don't have any thing to do with that—that footpad. He is a risky, dangerous speculator; or, rather, he is a sly, conscienceless scoundrel. He respects nobody, not even his personal friends—not even his patrons. He would put off his rotten stocks upon his own sister, or upon the President. He would cheat a country clergyman or a wooden-legged pensioner. Let me tell you a story about Allechin. Our friend Drummond, who is a practical joker of a painfully practical sort," he parenthesized disparagingly—"was served in some matter by a good Quaker, who afterward asked him for employment. Drummond, in mere jest, recommended the man to Allechin, who replied, 'Certainly; send him along—give him an agency.' But when the applicant put in an appearance, and Allechin saw that he was an honest Quaker, he nearly laughed in his face. 'Ah! we are full now,' he smiled, in his greasy way. 'We really couldn't employ a person of your—your calibre.' Of course, he could not. No use for Quakers or scrupulous men in general. How could such fellows hawk his rotten eggs about? If the apostles had applied to him for work, he wouldn't have accepted them, unless it might be Judas. No, no, my dear child; for pity's sake, don't trust Allechin!"

"He promises twenty per cent.," replied Josie, meditatively.

"That means that he will take eighty and leave you twenty. There is no safety outside of legal interest, and not much inside of it, in these days of watered currency and watered every thing."

"But I want twenty thousand a year."

"My dear, between us both you will have more than that!"

Josie looked at him sidelong out of a corner of her dark, lustrous eye; and a very beautiful glance it was, though just a little snaky and minatory.

"I am under obligations to various people for pushing my claim, and I have got to pay them," she said.

"What does it mean?" exclaimed Hollowbread. "What did it mean? The thing was taken out of my hands at the last minute, and without my knowledge. It was not necessary; I had every thing safe. I could have pushed the bill through without the

cost of a dollar—to you," he added, remembering that it had cost him something. "There was, I assure you, no need of going to others for help. Don't understand me as complaining of it, my dear child. I have no fault to find if you wished matters thus; but I do beg that you will not hold me responsible for failing to carry you to the end when I was all prepared to do it, and could have done it with certainty."

"The thing was taken out of the Judiciary Bill, and you did not know it till every body knew it," said Josie, pensively, for she was gravely pondering her next step.

"I had Bangs's solemn promise that it should go into the Judiciary," declared Mr. Hollowbread, loudly, for he was furious with the general at that moment. "I had his solemn promise. My dear child, may I ask you one question? Who did this?"

"Mr. Jacob Pike," replied Josie. "I thought it best to go to him. Every body goes to those people."

"Ah!—well!" sighed Hollowbread, somewhat relieved, for he had suspected the interference of Drummond. "At least, it has turned out luckily," he added, lugubriously. "And no one could be better content than I. I trust that you are at least satisfied with my efforts, my desires, to be of service."

A long pause followed—a pause bodeful of tragedies. Josie had not been in the least moved by these eager pleadings, and this piteous humility of a fairly able and widely respected old gentleman. It seemed to her that the proper time had come to put him in a sack and drop him into her Bosphorus.

"I am partly satisfied," she said, stammering just a little—"I am satisfied with the past, but not with the future."

There was another long silence, which told of a soul in terror, too smothered to speak. It was such a stillness as befalls in the chamber of torture when the inquisitor lays his instrument on a tooth, and says, "That must come out."

For a moment our heroine trembled. It was her womanish way when undertaking a cruel deed to falter at the threshold; but, after the first step, and especially if there were no resistance, she always gathered boldness, ruthlessness, and, perhaps one may say, ferocity.

"I think we have made one great mistake," she pursued, with her eyes on the carpet, for she could not yet face her victim.

Mr. Hollowbread, fearing lest she meant the engagement, and vainly striving to hope that she did not mean it, was in too deep waters for instant utterance.

"We ought to have remained friends," continued Josie. "Simply and honestly friends," she pieced on, after another pause. "We should never have gone further."

Mr. Hollowbread saw his fate arise before

him, and struggled with the feeble strength of nightmare to escape it.

"I can not think it, Mrs. Murray," he answered, in a feeble, gasping voice, such a voice as the Arabian fisherman must have had when he sought to persuade the Afrit not to eat him up. "No, no—so help me Heaven!—I never can think that."

"But I must think it, Mr. Hollowbread. Oh yes! indeed, I must, and do! We made a great, a fatal mistake in becoming engaged. I must beg your pardon for having led you on to such an error."

He made a feeble gesture of dissent, a gesture which was pitifully deprecating, but which did not touch her.

"We respected and admired and liked each other, and so far all was well," persisted Josie. "But when we went further—when we ventured a betrothal—the cord snapped. We thought there was love between us, and now I find that there was only friendship."

"Not with me," protested Mr. Hollowbread, beginning to recover the use of his organs. "It was more than friendship with me—incomparably more—infinately more. It is so still. I love you with all my heart and soul and mind and strength. I shall love you all my life."

"It is a great compliment," returned Josie, who by this time had stilled her heart-beating and got her intellect under command. "I shall never cease to thank you for it. But if you really love me, you will wish me to be happy; you will be willing to sacrifice yourself just a little for me; you will not force upon me a discontent which might—I can not say how, but surely somehow—might drive me desperate—might drive me to ruin."

"Oh, Mrs. Murray! Are you not oversteating this matter? How can it ruin you to be the wife of a man who adores you, who will never trammel your liberty, who only asks to be endured, who will live altogether for you?"

Even Josie was a little shaken by this plea, and remained silent for a few seconds.

"I shall not live long," added Mr. Hollowbread, with entire seriousness, and with a truly touching pathos.

"Perhaps I shall not, either," was the only answer she could devise at the moment.

"But you promised," urged the trembling old man, for he was really old just then, though only sixty. "You pledged yourself, Mrs. Murray."

Josie was meditating, but solely as to how she could shake him off, and at the same time not anger him. She wanted to get rid of him as a husband, and yet keep him as a friend and ally. Not merely her good-nature, but also her ambition and selfishness, inclined her toward this purpose. She had great schemes in her excited imagination:

vague plans for bringing forward her claim once more and demanding a thoroughly satisfactory settlement: wild hopes of drawing vast sums, possibly millions, from the public treasury. With these ideas in her head she once more faced her captive Tartar, and tried to coax him to let her go.

"But, oh dear! Mr. Hollowbread, you surely can't want a silly young wife, so completely unworthy of you," she pleaded. "How can you care for me? I don't want to get rid of you altogether. I want to keep you—as a dear friend—my dearest friend. It is only the thought of marriage that I fear. It is only that which can separate us in heart. Now, do be nice," she begged, putting both her hands on his shoulder. "Do relieve me from an unwise promise! Take a kiss—a dozen, fifty kisses—and let us be friends hereafter, but only friends. Now, my good, kind darling, don't be hard with me."

"I can not—I can not let it go so," he sobbed, kissing her hand over and over. "No, my dear child, I could not say it."

"But do listen to reason, Mr. Hollowbread," she insisted, losing her patience a little. "Do consider just this one thing. I am not the same woman with the woman who accepted you. That poor little woman had no money and needed a support," she explained, with a bright, placating smile, which seemed to take all the wickedness out of this frank confession of egotism. "Now I am rich. Now I can take care of myself. Don't you see that it makes a difference? I have now the one necessary of life which before I had not, and which I was obliged to look to you for."

"I was only too glad to offer it," sighed Mr. Hollowbread.

"And I am sincerely obliged to you," answered Josie, perfectly unembarrassed. "It was very kind and good of you, and shows how noble your heart is. But now, when I no longer require your fortune, are you not asking too much to insist upon marriage? You are demanding every thing, and offering me what I don't need. Do reflect, Mr. Hollowbread, and see whether you think it is fair."

"It is not," he groaned. "But I ask truth and honor. It is life and death with me. I must ask them!"

"Mis-ter—Hol-low-bread—I—ca-n't," slowly responded Josie, her very hesitation and her very drawl adding strength to her words, and giving her decision an air of irrevocable finality. That dragging utterance, the grave consideration which it revealed, the audible desire to please, ending in recoil, it was an unalterable sentence.

"Oh, my God!—my God! My heart is broken!" exclaimed the poor man, staggering to his feet. "Mrs. Murray, you have ended one old man's life in sorrow. Yes, I am an old man," he whimpered, his voice breaking at last. "I admit it."

"Mr. Hollowbread, I am sorry," said Josie, cringing at the sight of this great distress. "I hope you are not angry with me."

"Angry with you!" he sobbed, turning upon her two dim and bloodshot eyes, blinded with tears. "I—don't—know. I don't know what I am," he repeated, wiping his wet face with his glove. "I don't know much about it. I am stunned."

"I hope you are not very angry," she persisted, following him to the door. "I have done what I am sure is for the best. If you will only think of it calmly, I am sure you will agree with me. I don't want you angry with me. I want to keep you as a friend."

"I must go," muttered Mr. Hollowbread. He seemed to be tottering in mind as well as in body. Then, as if recollecting where he was and what was becoming, he halted, turned, took her hand, and said, "God bless you! Good-bye!"

She gazed after him with a variety of thoughts as he passed out of the door. She was really sorry for him in that moment, and wished that he were twenty years younger. She wondered if he would look back at her, and hoped that he would not, being desirous not to see those woeful eyes again. The door closed softly, and she was alone.

"Ah!" said Josie to herself, drawing a long breath. "What a pull it was! Well, that thing is off my mind."

The trial over, for she regarded it mainly as a trial to herself, she dropped upon a sofa to rest. She was just thinking that she would soon have finer sofas than that hideous old speckled damask, when the door suddenly re-opened, and her rejected lover re-entered.

"Have you forgotten any thing, Mr. Hollowbread?" she inquired, with perfect good-nature and friendliness, jumping up to meet him, and glancing to see if he had left his hat.

Walking straight up to her, with an air of excitement which alarmed her, he said:

"Mrs. Murray, I ask you once more, solemnly and finally, to be my wife."

"Mr. Hollowbread, that is all nonsense," answered Josie, perhaps rather more petulantly than became a lady, even a pestered one. "Do stop talking about it. It is settled."

"I have a claim on your gratitude," he persisted, quite loudly. "I have served you—served you hard and faithfully—given you my services."

His face was excessively flushed, and he stammered strangely in his speech, as if threatened with paralysis. But Josie merely thought that he was threatening her, and merely desired to get rid of him.

"I know it," she said. "But others have served me, too, and I have got to pay them for it."

"You will pay them," he replied, confus-

edly. "You have paid me. You paid Mrs. Warden."

"I have nothing to do with Mrs. Warden," asserted our heroine, becoming angry at last. "She died because she had a heart-disease. I wish you would go away and let me alone."

Without another word he went out, and then she hastily locked the door.

Hardly, however, had she taken a seat and caught her breath afresh ere she heard some one fumbling at the knob.

"There he is again, I guess," she said to herself, quite composedly. "I wonder if he has come back after his seven wits."

After trying in vain to see through the key-hole, she called:

"Who is it? Is it you, Mr. Hollowbread?"

"Madam, I must speak ere you," responded the dolorous voice of that surely enchanted and bedeviled gentleman.

"Go away!" screamed Josie, in high excitement. "I won't let you in. I tell you, go away!"

And this time the poor, rejected, bewitched sexagenarian did take his love-cracked noddle and tottering person off the premises.

A minute later, Josie smiled, and murmured to herself: "I do wonder what he wanted to tell me. I wish I made him say it through the key-hole. It would have been so funny!"

She was, in the main, uncommonly clever; and still she had the thoughtless whims of a child.

CHAPTER LI.

JOSIE SETTLES WITH MR. JAKE PIKE.

IT was battle season with Josie; the great struggle with Hollowbread was followed by other tremendous combats; it seemed as if the winning of her claim were only the beginning of wars and tumults.

Her next fight, after dislodging and driving out poor Hollowbread, was with Mr. Jacob Pike. Josie did not at all want to have a disagreement with him, and she contrived to evade him for a while by messages that she was not at home, that she was out of town, and so on.

But at last, by dint of bribing a servant-maid, he obtained unheralded admission to our heroine's private parlor.

It was curious, by-the-way, to note what a change appeared in his expression when he came face to face with her. Believing that she had been trying to dodge him, and fearing lest she did not mean to pay him, he had ascended the stairs on menacing tiptoes and with a very glum countenance. Yet the moment he laid eyes on her, and heard her gracious salutation, he was re-assured and mollified. Josie, though both surprised and displeased by his advent, rallied her self-possession in an instant, and received him with

a show of cordiality which amounted to re-joining.

Mr. Pike, on his part, was honestly glad; he was even much more glad than she could look. He marched into the parlor with the cheerful smile of a good man who has done a worthy action, and of course expects friendly greetings and a fitting reward.

"Well, Mr. Pike, what is the news?" asked Josie, glancing with some secret timidity at his pugnaciously broad cheek-bones and solid jaws, and pondering the while how she could induce him to leave with the understanding of calling again.

"Well, ma'am, the news is, ninety thousand dollars to you and ten thousand to me," responded Mr. Pike, with genial humor. "Of course you know it, and I don't want to waste your valuable time in bragging of it. I will simply say, shortly and sweetly, that I've called to tattle."

"I don't quite comprehend you, Mr. Pike. What do you mean?"

"Why, ma'am, it's an old story. Something about a firm named Call & Tuttle. Fellow steps in and says, 'I've called to tattle.' What I mean is, that I've called to settle."

"But, Mr. Pike, I don't want to tattle," observed Josie, with a little laugh, partly of embarrassment and partly meant to gain time.

Mr. Pike laughed, too; it was very amusing, of course; wasn't she jolly! He began to think that he should learn to like her himself, and feel willing to do jobs for her at half-price, as he had done this one without feeling willing.

"Certainly," he guffawed. "There's nothing meaner than tattling. But such is business. We order, and then we pay, and somebody else pays us, and so it goes. You've found it a pretty good working rule so far, Mrs. Murray."

Now, if Josie had but got one hundred and ten thousand dollars, she would probably have allowed him the odd ten thousand without much delay, though not without regret.

But to dig into her round hundred thousand, to make it uncomely and incomplete and ragged, to huddle a corner out of it, was really dreadful. Since the passing of her claim she had set her mind on investing a solid hundred thousand, and drawing the full, undiminished, respectable, regal revenue of it.

"I don't think I can pay you at present," she ventured to remark.

"Hey?" inquired the Congressional agent, beginning to be anxious again.

"In fact, I don't think I can pay you at all," added Josie.

"Why, you've got the money, haven't you?" he asked, sharply. "You've got it, sure?"

"I mean that I don't owe you any thing, Mr. Pike," stammered our heroine, still a good deal frightened at her own courage, if one may so express it.

"Don't owe me any thing!" exclaimed the horrified and disgusted Pike. "Why, I carried your bill for you, didn't I?"

"Mr. Hollowbread worked for me," said Josie, not in the least ashamed of using that abused man's name. "And so did Mr. Drummond, and General Bangs, and Mr. Smyler, and ever so many more. And they voted for me, too. You have no vote, you know."

"Mrs. Murray, this is the first time that ever I heard any thing like this," remonstrated the ex-Congressman, with more regard for effect than for truth; seeing that many a time before had a wicked world sought to swindle him. "I've been in the job line now for four years, and I never was bilked yet, nor nobody ever tried to bilk me."

"I don't know what you mean by bilk. If it means taking advantage of people, I should like to know what you are doing. Five thousand dollars is a great deal to ask for a few minutes of walking about and whispering."

"Five thousand!" stared Mr. Pike. "It was ten thousand."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Pike; it was five," asserted Josie, just as readily and positively as if she were telling the truth.

"No, ma'am! Ten—I said ten!"

"Yes, I know you said ten thousand at first; but afterward you said five thousand. Oh, you said all sorts of things. You wanted half, and then you wanted a third, and then you wanted something else, and finally you came down to five thousand. I don't wonder that you don't remember exactly what you did agree to. As for me, I couldn't have forgotten, because this was my only affair of the sort. It doesn't stand to reason, Mr. Pike, that you should recollect one out of your twenty or forty bargains better than I can recollect my only one."

"Gracious Jehu!" gnashed the lobbyist, in despair over such an argument, which he knew to be as utterly unfounded as it was plausible. "Well, you did agree to five thousand, then?" he added, adroitly.

"I said that you agreed to five thousand," our admirable heroine promptly returned.

Mr. Pike stared at her for several seconds, with an expression curiously compounded of anger, perplexity, greed, and desperation. Then he re-opened his case, and pleaded it over from the beginning, step by step, and trick by trick, and rogery by rogery. He told how he had implored one member; how he had argued till he was hoarse with another; how much per head he had promised three or four leading "war-horses;" how much he had advanced out of his own pocket to certain "dead-beats." He recited the sums which were due to newspaper-men,

who, but for the same, would have "slaughtered the section," and to various brother lobbyists whom he had been obliged to divide with under fear of incurring their opposition.

This statement was so detailed and complete that it undeniably sounded like an accurate one, if we may not use the epithet honest. In fine, he figured down his own residuum of the commission to something less than a poor couple of thousands.

"And I'll leave it to any honorable man if that ain't little enough for the job, and five times too little," he concluded, with the energy of conscious integrity. "I'll leave it to any white man, any square-minded man, that you know. There ain't any other agent in Washington, nor nowhere else in all Christ's kingdom, could have got it through for twice the figger. You pay me ten thousand, and then credit yourself with ten thousand saved, and you'll just hit it, Mrs. Murray."

"It does seem so high," answered the unconvinced Josie. "Ten thousand dollars is a great deal of money, Mr. Pike."

"On a cussory view, yes. But when you come to look at it doggedly and *seriatim*, it isn't so much. This is in greenbacks, you know, and prices have risen since gold times, and Congressmen have gone up worse than any thing."

"But what was the use of spending and promising so recklessly?" recommenced our indefatigable heroine, a perfect master of the argument called repetition. "I was sure to get my appropriation. What was I asking for? Nothing but my own money. It was a perfectly just case, and every body knew it."

"There wasn't any justice about it!" burst out Jake Pike, losing his temper again. "There wasn't a two-spot of justice in my hand!"

That was the weakness of this otherwise estimable lobbyist; he lost his temper as often as ever an old lady lost her spectacles.

"And how do I know that all this money will go as you say?" continued Mrs. Murray, improving her advantage. "I am not acquainted with you as a business man. Before bringing in such a bill, you ought to show me the vouchers."

"Vouchers!" he laughed or gasped, for the idea excited him to both contempt and impatience. "Do you suppose members will sign their names to papers owning that they have took bribes? Come, now, that's pretty hard on Congressmen, that is! That's the same as saying you think they are born fools! Of course they won't sign no such papers. I'll tell you what I'll do," he added, thinking to frighten her; "I'll fetch the gentlemen themselves!"

"I won't see them," declared Josie, snappishly.

"I guess I'd better fetch them," contin-

ued Pike, believing that he had "got her," as he would have expressed it.

"If you do, I'll leave Washington; I'll complain to the police. I am not obliged to see all the low people whom you choose to bring here, nor to see you either."

There was no use in this threat, clearly; and he turned once more to persuasion.

"You ought not to damage me, Mrs. Murray. After all the good work I've done for you, you ought not to give me a gird. And you are damaging me bad. You are making me forfeit my word and lose my character. If these promises are dishonored, it will cut into my business. How can you expect members to stand by agents if they don't feel certain agents will stand by them? There ain't a claimant in Washington, or out of it, but what'll suffer more or less if this job of yours ain't settled for. You'll do a mischief that'll last for years and years. I tell you, Mrs. Murray, that I know all this, and I feel it. If you don't pay these little bills, I shall have to pay 'em myself."

"I don't care whether you do or not," responded the pitiless Josie. "You have made enough in other things to afford it. And as for these Congressmen of yours, they are low, mean, shabby creatures, and I don't care if they never get a cent. It was mere justice," she insisted, once more. "I don't want to pay for justice. Justice ought to be free."

"But how about injustice?" demanded Mr. Pike, thinking for the tenth time that he had got her.

"There hasn't been any," responded Josie, with admirable readiness, directness, and simplicity. He could make no progress; the discussion kept swinging back to where it started; the claim was just, and the money was hers.

"Look here, Mrs. Murray!" he began again. "Supposing I was a lawyer, and had won a great case for you—"

"But you are not a lawyer," she interrupted, with the readiness of a good logician. "And that makes a great difference. If yours was a regular profession and an honorable one, I would consider your extraordinary charges more patiently. But it is no such thing; it is an underhanded, shameful business; and I mean to give one lobbyist a lesson."

"By George, if you don't beat the deuce!" returned Mr. Pike, glaring in utter amazement at this impudence. "Look here, ma'am, I tell you what!" he broke out, giving way to his unhappy temper anew. "If you don't pay that ten thousand right straight down, every cent of it, I'll tell on you. I don't care what becomes of the business, I'll tell on you. I'll expose the whole history, the whole illegality and perjury of your job, I will, by thunder!"

"I don't care what you tell," snapped Josie, rather enlivened than daunted by these

threats. "You are a—nobody, and people won't believe a word you say. Every body knows what you are."

"And every body knows what you are!" retorted the ex-Congressman, meaning more and worse than he could have proved.

"I am a lady," said Josie, bridling and flushing, though she did not comprehend the broad bearing of his scoff. "I have simply got my own money, and I don't mean to be robbed of it. You have no right to say any thing against me because of that. And I don't believe you have a right to come here at all and demand things of me in this violent way. If I owe you anything, you should send your bill in writing, civilly, and not plunge into my rooms in this fashion and insult me."

"Send a bill!" exclaimed poor Pike, who was led on from surprise to surprise, and whose reason began to reel under such a succession of whimsies. "Nonsense and gammon! People don't send bills for this sort of service—not yet. I never heard of such a thing. It's just perfect, unmitigated nonsense and gammon."

"It seems to me that you might be more gracious in your language when I suggest an idea to help you along," replied Josie, with distracting composure and urbanity.

Mr. Pike had read of people tearing their hair, and had looked upon the alleged performance as a sheer, silly invention, only to be met with in illustrated weeklies. But he felt now that it would be a great relief to shove his hard hands into his brashy scalp and tweak the very seams open. He sat silent for a moment, staring at Josie in stolid despair, and trying in vain to see through his millstone in petticoats. She was the most contrary creature, the most indefatigably and unseizably contrary creature, that he had ever met with. She would not do, and could not be trapped into doing, any thing that suited his purposes. When he tried to argue, she snapped at him; and when he bristled up for a fight, she was good-natured. He was like a bandaged lubber in blind-man's-buff, who bangs himself against the furniture at every step, and never catches any body. And she was like the greased pig whom no grip can hold to, or like the famous spry little pig who could not be counted. He had run himself mentally out of breath after her, and she was still as fresh and as far beyond his reach as ever.

"If you came here simply to insult me," added Josie, by way of finishing her stunned assailant, "I should say that you had accomplished your object, and might feel free to go."

"Oh, come now, Mrs. M., don't let's quarrel about this!" urged Pike, placatingly, for he hated to leave without his pay. "If I've said any thing hasty, I apologize. Perhaps we could come to a little bit of a compromise

somehow. You asked me to put your claim through, and I done it. Now, what would you like to allow me for it? Just say your say, and then I'll say my say."

"I don't know but I would pay what you say you have paid out for me," returned Josie, after some pondering. "That is four hundred dollars, according to your account. Then, I will give you one hundred dollars for your trouble."

If Jacob Pike's face had been a slice of bacon toasting on a hot gridiron, it could not have writhed and shriveled more than it did under this offer.

"Why not put it the other way?" he smirked, or tried to smirk. "I'd rather settle honestly with my members than with myself. Throw out the five hundred; I'll get nothing and lose something; then you pay the rest. Come now, Mrs. Murray, I'll compromise on ninety-five hundred, and that's cheap enough."

"You might as well say ten thousand at once," was the intelligent response. "I won't do it," she added, with the noble tone of one who resists an imposition.

Then Mr. Pike arose in his wrath and his dignity, or, as he would have called it, his "dig." He had been an auctioneer not many years previous, and he lifted up his right arm as if it still wielded the fateful hammer.

"All or none!" he said, in an awful voice. "I ask you once more, ma'am, will you pay me that ten thousand? I ask you three times. Will you do it? Once—twice—thrice?"

Josie was a little startled by this ceremony, but she bravely said "No" each time.

"Then I am done with you!" fairly shouted Jacob, not knowing what to do but shout, unless he should dash his brains out against the wall.

"I am very glad to hear it," said Josie, with commendable spunk.

But although Mr. Pike stalked to the door and opened it, he did not leave. He meditated a moment, came back a step or two, and stared at her perplexedly.

"I thought you were going, sir," observed Josie, rising to her feet, with a vague hope that she could rustle and "shu" him out, as if he were a hen.

"I want that check," he sulked, quite hoarse and pale. "I—want—that—check!"

"Will you leave the room, sir?" she demanded, a good deal scared meanwhile, for his expression was menacing.

"Not till I have that check first."

"Then you may stay here," replied Josie, skipping deftly by him and out of the door. "I will see the landlady, and tell her to charge you the rent," she added from the hall. "And if there is any thing missing from my property, I shall hold you responsible to the police."

"Bully for you!" Jacob furiously bawled

after her; but she had already vanished into some room whither he did not feel free to follow her; she had probably not even heard his farewell explosion of rage.

Thus left to himself, he looked furiously about him, clapped his hat upon his wooden head, expectorated on the hired carpet, and, in short, insulted the little apartment. But presently he recollected how useless all this was, and, with a rather sneaking demeanor, quietly took his leave.

Meantime Josie, safely ensconced in the landlady's private parlor, and prattling easily of commonplace matters, waited to see him depart. So intent was she upon this event, that for some little time she did not notice a gentleman on the other side of the street, who had halted, and seemed to be wistfully surveying her through the half-opened window. He was a portly and rather elderly person, slovenly in dress, ghastly in countenance, and woe-begone in expression.

"I wonder who that gentleman is?" queried the spectacled hostess. "He is there every day—two or three times a day—walking up and down, and staring at the house."

The moment our heroine raised her eyes toward the stranger he took off his hat with an air of reverential respect, though also of profound melancholy. Josie nodded, smiled cordially, and called, in a sweet soprano: "Howdedy-o?"

Then she shut the window, and her rejected adorer passed sorrowfully onward, tottering a little in his gait, as failing elderly gentlemen are wont to do.

It was Mr. Hollowbread.

CHAPTER LII.

MR. DRUMMOND SUCCEEDS MR. HOLLOWBREAD.

MR. JAKE PIKE hastened in hot-footed wrath to expose to Sykes Drummond how he had been gouged and chiseled, as he poetically expressed it, by Josie Murray.

The tale was in itself so entertaining, and some of the narrator's resentful commentaries upon it were so whimsical, that the Congressman could not help laughing from time to time, in that rasping, snorting, startling haw, haw! of his, the counterpart of two hoots from a locomotive.

"Mr. Drummond, how much your laugh is like the cawing of a crow!" said Jake, getting irritated at this misplaced hilarity. "I never noticed it before; but really it is very like it. Haw, haw! Caw, caw! Exactly like it."

Rendered pensive by this comparison, which seemed to him inappropriate, disagreeable and ungentelemanly, Sykes suspended his merriment for a while, to the satisfaction and triumph of Pike.

"I rather look to you to make this account square," continued the lobbyist, speaking somewhat out of his fretfulness, but also believing that what he suggested was only justice. Unattainable justice, probably; but none the less a beautiful and alluring ideal; none the less worth asking for.

"Then you will look a great while," said Drummond. "I should be sorry to keep a man of your tender sensibilities in suspense. You made your own bargain, and you took your own risk. Besides, if you are out, so am I. Have I asked you to pay me?"

"No, but you'll borrow it of me some day, and that'll be the last of the business as far as my pocket is concerned. Besides, that ain't a complete and exhaustive view of this whole question. What I contend for, and have contended for for years, is that there ought to be responsibility somewhere, and that it should rest upon Congress. What I contend for is, that when a member recommends one of his constituents to his agent, he ought to be bound to see the agent out of the woods; and that, if the constituent fails to pony up honorably, then the member should make it good, or at least go his share on the losses."

"Yes, and have the jobs allotted by the President, so many dollars' worth to each district," grinned Sykes. "Double allowance to Senators, I suppose? That would be carrying the Congressional system a dence of a ways. I don't object to your plan, Jake, if it can be made general. But there's no such understanding afoot yet, and you may bet all your profits for this session that I shan't initiate it."

"I didn't expect you to, on general principles. It's a plan that will require combination and discussion before it can be rightly conceived, or, in other words, brought to a judicious inception. But, speaking of this particular case now, they say you are going to marry the lady. If so, what she saves, you save. It might look to some folks as though her chiseling me was a put-up job betwixt you two."

"Come, come, old man!" Drummond remonstrated. But he broke out laughing again, so callous was he to insinuations of dishonor, either against himself or against the woman to whom he was betrothed. "You are getting beyond the facts there, and even beyond your rights in stating fictions. However, just to soothe your feelings and make business pleasant for the future, I'll agree to one thing. If I marry the lady, I will pay you the ten thousand. And if I don't marry her," he added, with one of his confident grins, "I'll make good the four hundred you have spent."

"Let me have it on paper," said Jake. "By George! hereafter I want things on paper."

"Haw, haw!" roared Sykes, quite forget-

ting the corvine comparison. "Put it on paper yourself, if you are afraid of forgetting it. Stick it into your next relief-bill. Let it go on the record." By-the-way, I may as well step-around and see Mrs. Murray. Perhaps I can persuade her into paying you by agreeing to let her off from marrying me, haw, haw!"

"Keep your eye peeled," counseled Pike, seriously. "You'll need all the sight you've got to draw a bead on her. She suttently out-dodges and out-squats all the turkeys that ever I hunted."

So Drummond got rid of his jobber, and made a call on his betrothed. To her, however, he said nothing about her dues to Mr. Pike, that being an affair which could be easiest managed after the marriage, if indeed he should ever think best to come to it.

"I wonder you can stay in Washington," was Josie's first speech to him, surely a strange one for an engaged lady. "The place is horribly dull, now that Congress has broken up. I wouldn't have thought that those two or three hundred heavy gentlemen could make such a vacuum in society."

"Ah, you are out of work," said Drummond. "You are a busy little humming-bird, and now that you have nothing else to flutter about, you ought to turn your mind to the District Government. There is sweetness and light for you. Public building contracts, grading and paving contracts, banking commissions and interests—it almost equals national legislation. By Jove! when I look at the multitudes which are sitting down everywhere to the public loaves and fishes, I think that there will soon be no fragments to take up, short of another miracle. A John Bull told me yesterday that there is no such thing known in England as a municipal ring or a thieving mayor. That is what any American of the present day would set down as a fairy story."

"Dear me! there isn't a bit of liberty in England, is there?" smiled Josie. "See what it is to be ruled by a selfish aristocracy. But I hate your perpetual chuckling over our picking and stealing. It is all very well to live by it, if one can't live any other way, and if it is the fashion. But it isn't nice at all to talk of it so much, and to giggle about it. A person may do wrong, and yet want to do better, and so be tolerably decorous and decent, as I am."

"Hypocrisy is the established religion of some persons; yes, and of some nations."

"It is better than open bragging of naughtiness, and guffawing about it," affirmed Josie, reproachfully.

"You are very hard on your advocate and adorer this evening. Your advocate and adorer prostrates himself and asks pardon."

"Well, you deserve so many whippings, Sykes! You don't know the first thing about women. They like, above all things,

a fair outside. They admire the iron hand, to be sure, but they want the velvet glove all over it. Now, tell me something nice—something besides lobbyism—disgusting business! I never mean to speak to a lobbyist again as long as I live," she declared, remembering with indignation Jake Pike's extortions and impudence. "Is there nothing stirring which is pleasant? Is nobody married or dead?"

"They say that Colonel Murray is going to give Belle Warden fifty thousand dollars for a wedding settlement," said Drummond, thinking it wise to remind his betrothed that Bradford was lost to her.

"As a settlement!" repeated Josie, gnawing her heart in jealous pain. "Such things sometimes get unsettled," she could not help adding. "There's many a slip 'twixt cup and lip."

"Not often when the cup is so well gilded," laughed Drummond, imprudently.

As we have said, he had given up his haw, haw! in a great measure, unless he was in such vulgar and subordinate company as that of Jake Pike, where he felt perfectly at liberty to domineer. But sometimes, even in his affianced one's presence, he fell back into it through old habit and disagreeable instinct.

Out of the corner of her lustrous eyes Josie gave him a furtive glance, very pretty to look at, and yet almost menacing.

She remembered how her own cup had been gilded, and queried whether Drummond's lips were watering for the gold alone, or for her also. Bradford lost and Hollowbread dismissed, she sometimes wanted this man as a comfort to her heart and a protector to her loneliness, and sometimes, when he was particularly bearish, wanted to get rid of him.

"May I ask what you are reading?" inquired Drummond, suspecting that he had caused annoyance, and wishing to change the subject.

"*La Comtesse de Chalis*, and it is very interesting," said Josie. "Do let me finish the page."

She had just reached that wonderful passage where the noble and beautiful heroine makes a superb gesture of bravado, and then, "with a resolution perfectly cool, perfectly patrician," jumps upon the young professor's knees and throws her arms around his neck.

It was so entraining, the recollection of this delicious passage, that Josie of a sudden dropped her book, rustled over to her Congressman, and went through the same performance with him. Perhaps we may suspect that it was lucky for Drummond that he, and not some other young gentleman, was in the room at the time. However, not thinking of this, and being a person of an emotional temperament, he was properly touched by the demonstration.

"I am obliged to you, my dear pussy," he said, after some other lip-service of a thankful nature.

By-the-way, it is wonderful to think how many pet names this pretty creature had won since she was big enough to sit in masculine laps. She had been one man's darling, another man's dear child, another man's chicken, another man's pussy, and so on—quite a long string of them.

"You are very good and sweet to do this," continued Drummond. "But, do you know, it makes me impatient? When will you fix the day?"

"Oh, what a hurry!" returned Josie, with an alluring pout. "Can't you look at the morning star without wanting the sun to rise in the same minute?"

"I like the morning star. But I sometimes fear that the sun will never rise. What if I should lose you? What if my venerable rival should return in triumph?" he concluded, spoiling the whole speech with one of his characteristic turns of coarseness.

"You needn't worry; the poor man is gone for good," replied Josie, rising from her seat with a slight sense that it was a rough one.

"How did the old fellow bear it?" grinned Drummond, not even seeing that he had annoyed her, and much less suspecting how.

"He bore it admirably," said Josie, remembering with pleasure how she had been worshiped and clung to by Hollowbread. "He bore it so well, that I sometimes want him back."

"Come, pussy, you must not be angry with me," remonstrated the lover, divining her vexation at last. "I don't mean to be hard on Nestor for admiring you. I ought to thank him for it. He raises the value of the article—of my article. Won't you take your seat again?"

"I want to talk business," responded Josie, seeking relief in a chair. "How shall I invest my money? Lots of people are coming to me, and writing to me about investments, and sending me circulars, and advertising almanacs, and religious papers with puffs in them. I think they must talk of me all day, and dream of me all night. I could paper a room with their communications."

"Don't invest till I can look about and advise you. Almost every thing in the country is watered, and is as dangerous as the Dismal Swamp. You might as well invest in the Gulf Stream as in these advertised undertakings. We must look for things that are not puffed. Wait till I can find something solid."

"What do you think of railroads, ocean steam-lines, mines in Colorado, quarries of Florida marble, and that sort of trifles? I could buy millions of any one of them."

"Don't buy a cent's worth of any thing till I see it. Confound this herd of specu-

tors and swindlers! They have no right to follow you up in such a fashion. However, it is one of the penalties of being a successful claimant. Your luck has made a noise, I can tell you. All the cheats in Washington are talking about it, and half the honest people—that despised minority!"

"And savagely enough, I suppose?" queried Josie, wondering if Jacob Pike had complained of her. "Has any body abused me to you?"

"They wouldn't be likely to do that."

"Have you told of our engagement?" she instantly asked. "You must not—not yet a while. Only think of what a position it would put me in before the people! Off with the old love and on with the new, every body would say, and te-he and shaw-shaw about it at an awful rate. I have done just right, and just what any woman would do; but" (and here she laughed) "I don't want any body to know it, and no woman would. So we must keep our understanding to ourselves for a while longer."

"Certainly," guffawed Drummond, forgetting himself, and showing quite too much triumph.

That laugh of his, that conceited and defiant and insolent cock-a-doodle-doo, had probably done him more damage in life than all his blunders and his sins, such a revelation was it of his opinions, feelings, and purposes, as well as such an assault upon the sensibilities of others. In the present case, it informed Josie that he had boasted publicly of the engagement, that he had done it with a view to "nail her," and that he thought he had succeeded. She asked him no questions, but she took his guilt for granted, and she resolved to punish him.

It must be understood that, although she was a wild and headlong coquette, she did not want the name of being one, and supposed that she had somehow escaped that repute.

All sly and habitual sinners, providing they are not openly and sharply overhauled for their misdeeds, imagine that they deceive society. They believe in precautions which are transparently futile, and in explanations and self-defenses which are privately laughed at. The real reason why they are not haled to judgment is simply this, that the world has not time to attend to all its petty malefactors.

Well, Josie believed that Sykes had played her a trick and done her a harm. She chastised him by being "out" when he called, for two days together, and also by failing to answer the notes which he left for her. Remembering her flirtishness, and also what a prize she was in various ways, and being, moreover, considerably in love with her, after his taurian fashion, Drummond became somewhat alarmed.

Perhaps nobody but a very able man and

experienced wire-puller could have devised a greater blunder than he committed on this occasion, under the belief that it was an inspiration of genius. After deep meditation on the waywardness of coquettes, on their indifference to birds in the hand, and their hankering after birds in the bush, he put himself into the wild-wood in the following elaborate fashion:

"MY DEAR JOSIE" (he wrote her),—"You have not received me for two days past. May I ask, in all kindness, if you have tired of me? I must remember that your situation has changed since the day I was happy enough to secure the promise of your hand, and the gift, as I then trusted, of your heart. You were then in moderate circumstances; you, perhaps, stood in need of a protector. Now you are rich, and can suffice for yourself, and can do without me. Do not, I earnestly beg of you, suppose that I wish to get free from my engagement, or that I could part with you, even at your desire and for your good, without great suffering. I only wish to be kind, to be honorable, and to show myself truly loving. For this reason alone, and for the sole purpose of sacrificing myself, if need be, to your happiness, I set you free from your engagement. But to-morrow I shall call again, shall beg to see a lady who is now as much above me in fortune as in all things else, and shall renew my offer of marriage. Very respectfully and very lovingly, yours,
SYKES DRUMMOND."

It was a good letter, he said to himself. It was magnanimous and every way handsome; at the same time it was perfectly self-respectful and dignified; it would nail her, if any thing could. So, after much hesitation, after deciding for it and against it several times, he dispatched it by a messenger.

Well, the epistle hit its intended mark; it actually made Josie fond of him. She wrote back immediately:

"MY DEAREST FRIEND,—How could you so misjudge me? Be sure you keep your promise to come and see me.
"YOUR LITTLE PUSSY."

That night she lay awake for hours, wondering if he wanted to break with her, and saying to herself that she would not let him go, that it would make her wretched, etc.

The next day, by the merest accident, and meaning the while to greet him with a delicious love-scene, she happened to be out when he called. What could Drummond do (purposing, of course, to be self-respectful and irresistible), but scribble upon a card, "Unlucky to-day, hope to be happier to-morrow," and leave it for Mrs. Murray?

It was enough for Josie; she saw that she

could have him if she wanted him; and she found, with some little shame, that she did not want him. After very brief pondering she rallied the hardihood to write him as follows:

"Perhaps your first impulse was right—yes, it was wiser than mine. Your conduct in this matter has been sweet and noble; but, above all things, it has been wise. I fear that, if we should undertake life's great journey together, you would soon find me too exacting, while I might find you too masterful. Let us separate while we can do it in kindness, and continue the best of friends. I accept with thanks your release from our partial understanding, and remain your friend only, but sincerely your friend,
"JOSIE MURRAY."

Those who know Mr. Drummond intimately, and those who have had the startling good fortune to listen to him in his moments of *épanchement*, can imagine how he blasphemed over this letter. One comment, however, is sufficiently decorous for quotation, and sufficiently keen to be worthy of it.

"She does not even thank me for my services," he said. "In any body else I should call that singular ingratitude!"

CHAPTER LIII.

CAVE CANEM.

To show the different dispositions of Josie's two latest lovers, and also to indicate the divergent roads of feeling by which they departed from her, we must positively sketch a scene which befell between them.

One of the first things which Drummond did after his refusal was to look up the rival whom he had supplanted. They chanced to meet by twilight in the little square opposite the White House, a place which Hollowbread now frequented much in the dim and tender hours of the day, because there he had often walked aforetime with his Josie.

"Aha, old boy!" exclaimed Sykes, in his loud way. "Here we are in the same boat. Cheer up. I am a fellow-sufferer—haw, haw!"

"I don't understand you, Mr. Drummond," replied Hollowbread, glancing about him with a worried, eager expression, as if he would have liked to run away.

He looked the image of feeble wretchedness, dilapidated in body and broken in spirit. There were broad cloudings of gray amidst his lead-colored hair, a stubbly, grizzled beard all over his cheeks, chin, and throat, and a broad streak of white around the roots of his mustache. His face was fallen and flabby; there were furrows on each side of his mouth so fresh and deep that they

looked like wounds; and his dim, watery, timorous eyes were set in a net-work of tremulous, skinny puckers. It was obvious that he had lost stones of weight, and also that he had thrown aside his harness of springs and bandages. His arms no longer filled the sleeves which they had once fitted in such a noble, sausage-like manner, while his shrunken abdomen hung in a loose pouch which reminded one of the build of an opossum. That wondrous suit (the masterpiece of a conscientious tailor), which had cased so exactly a made-up man of two hundred and fifty, bagged awkwardly, and one might almost say sorrowfully, around a natural man of rather less than two hundred.

"You are not looking well, Mr. Hollowbread," observed Drummond, surprised into something like compassion.

"I can't get any sleep," answered the old gentleman, in a piteous tone of complaint—the tone of a broken man, of an invalid.

"Come, my dear fellow, let us be frank," continued Drummond, laying a hand, meant to be amiable, on a cringing shoulder. "I know why you stick in Washington, as well as why I stick here. We have done our best, both of us. But our term is over, and we may as well go home. We are both unseated by the same little game, and by the same little wire-puller. I have just been sacked by Mrs. Murray."

"You?" stared Hollowbread, his limp face suddenly reddening and twitching.

"Yes. You won't believe, perhaps, that I have been engaged to her. But so it is—haw, haw!"

"I don't believe it, sir—it can't be, sir—I won't believe it!" stammered the half-paralyzed man, hastily and almost incomprehensibly.

"It is just as true as the Constitution. I was engaged to her a month ago."

"It is false, sir—as false as hell!" responded Hollowbread, in something like a shout, his face perfectly crimson.

"Oh, that may do in Congress," said Sykes, recognizing and smiling at the familiar phrase of the honorable member who rises to denounce an aspersion. "I have used the simile myself, perhaps. But look here; here is her last note to me. Read that."

Mr. Hollowbread would not read; but he was so far crushed by this readiness to produce testimony that he could not help believing; nor could he quite suppress an indistinct groan of "Is it possible?"

"Oh, indeed it is possible and highly probable—haw, haw!" declared Drummond.

He was full of vindictiveness; he wanted to hurt the woman who had jilted him; he would have been glad to prevent her from ever again having an adorer. Fearful lest Hollowbread might yet go back to her, he was eager to inject into him some of his own venom.

"You didn't know her, my dear fellow," he continued. "I don't know her. I don't believe she knows herself. I don't believe she knows for two days together what she is likely to do, or what she wants. But one thing I do know—you have had a deuced good riddance. She is the most infernal—"

"Stop, sir!" hissed Hollowbread, fiercely, turning upon him, with one shaking fist uplifted. "I will have nothing said against that dear lady. I will not hear a word to her disparagement, sir—not a word!"

"Oh, very well!" nodded Sykes, with a stare of wonder, coolly amused with this extraordinary case of fidelity, of abused love which would not cease loving. "As you fancy, of course. But let me give you one piece of advice, my dear fellow. You are looking badly, and you need care. Go home to your relatives for the rest of the vacation."

Not deigning to reply, and feeling that he had spoken his last word to Sykes Drummond, Mr. Hollowbread wheeled slowly, and tottered away.

"By Jove! he is really in love with her," muttered the man of thirty. "Who would have thought an old fellow could love like that? Well, one learns something new every day—something new about one's fellow-idiot."

Then he, too, stalked off, walking with his usual firm, strong step, his pugnacious head bent forward a little, like a bull musing of battles.

Of a sudden, as he passed a thicket of evergreens, he ran against some comparatively slight figure and knocked it aside. By the dim twilight he recognized the rounded outlines and willowy movement of Squire Nancy Appleyard.

"Mr. Drummond?" exclaimed the Bloomer, in a gasp which confessed palpitating emotion, as well as the shock of the collision.

"Well, what do you want now?" demanded Sykes, harshly, for he was in one of his most unlovely tempers, and this woman had bothered him much.

"I want to know whether you ever think of your promise to marry me," was the answer—precisely the answer he had expected.

"I was just thinking of it," he said. "And what—" she began pathetically, fooled by her hopes.

"I was just thinking I wouldn't do it," he concluded, with a sardonic grin.

"Mr. Drummond!" shrieked the squire, putting her hand behind her, as if to draw either a weapon or a handkerchief.

"Look here!" he snarled. "If you pull any more popguns on me, I'll break them across your empty head. Now, mind!"

She made no reply, but she was evidently dismayed by his threat, and, after a short struggle to govern herself, burst out sobbing.

Not in the least pitying her, but rather

pleased to see what power he had over her weak nerves, he gave her another warning glare, and marched on. Scarcely had he gone ten steps, however, ere he heard the report of a pistol behind him.

He wheeled, ran back to Squire Appleyard, caught her by the arm, shook her soundly, and set her down hard on a bench.

"I told you not to fire at me, you idiot!" he said. "Where is the pistol?"

"It went off in my pocket," returned Miss Nancy, beginning to cry. "And I don't know but I'm shot."

"Get it out for me," he ordered. "I don't want to bother with the mysteries of that coat—or whatever you call it."

It was really dreadful. Here was a man who would not permit himself to be shot either by night or by day. There was no precedent in the history of American heroines for the treatment of such a willful, irrational, and brutal wretch. The Jael of California herself, that spotless and fearless *protégée* of the eloquent strong-minded, would have been perplexed to deal with a wretch who thus abused his superior strength.

After some tremulous fumbling, fearful lest there should be another awful bang, and sobbing the while as if her heart would burst with a report, Squire Appleyard produced the pistol.

Drummond took it, put it in his pocket, wheeled around in silence, and coolly tramped onward, with the air of one who had turned his back on something for life.

A minute later, however, as this rough and tough creature passed the "palatial residence" of that eminent banker, Allchin, he beheld a spectacle which made him start and palpitate.

A carriage drove up, and from it descended Josie Murray, magnificently arrayed, a vision of beauty to dazzle one. In the portico she turned, seemed to recognize him as he passed, shook her large fan at him amicably, and then disappeared within.

"A dinner-party, I suppose," muttered Drummond. "The old hyena will pick her to the bones. I wish him a good appetite—haw, haw!"

Let us follow Josie into the Belshazzar scene of revelry (we quote from a city item of the *News-monger*) which the great financier had evoked from the magic realms of his purse. The dinner was given in her honor as a queen of fashion, as a power in politics, as a successful claimant, as a goose worth picking.

Allchin hoped to furnish forth many entertainments out of the deposits which he expected to coax from his honored guest. He could do it without scruple, for it was his practice to look upon a deposit in his bank as so much clear income, and to use it accordingly.

This man was one of the wonders and

signs of our financial age. He was the incarnation of semi-genteel impudence, and of half-conscious, reputable dishonesty. The brass with which he could recommend a fraudulent stock to a widow, or a retired clergyman, or an old friend, might not be surpassed in lustre by any other banker of our times.

Language fails us in attempting to do justice to this instinctive, remorseless, and indiscriminate plunderer. He would cheat any body, old or young, gentle or simple, man or woman, saint or sinner, with the same bland greediness and impenitence. He had no more respect for age or sex or character, in his freebootings, than a pirate. He would have fleeced Ruth; he would have swindled Florence Nightingale; he would have been very glad to spoil Miss Burdett-Connors. Had he been one of the apostles, he would have played the part of Judas, and got a much better bargain, and never have hanged himself. Had he been one of the converts of the day of Pentecost, he would have gone "cathoots" with Ananias and Sapphira. In short, he was one of our greatest financial managers and railroaders.

"And this is the heroine of the session!" said Mr. Allchin, bowing his huge body over Josie, and speaking in a deep, mellow rumble, like a volcano about to lay waste some flourishing region. "This is the magician who turns Congressmen into apes and lapdogs," he added, with sincere admiration of the immoral witchcraft.

"I did use them, didn't I?" smiled Josie, unable to repress a little burst of vainglory, and amusement as well.

"Yes; and abuse them!" grinned Allchin, wagging his enormous head facetiously. "I must beware. I may get enchanted myself. I may become one of the—the victims," he concluded, after trying in vain to remember some poetical simile.

Then he presented his other guests to her. Some of them she already knew personally, and all of them by reputation.

There were three financiers and railroaders, sly, purring old cats of the business haymow, with very soft fur and very long claws, who were commonly supposed to mouse independently of Allchin, and even to be his rivals, but who were really engaged in a vast secret system of co-operation with him, each helping the other to prey, and all gobbling it together.

There was a New York broker, a dark, lean, trim, hard, alert gentleman, reminding one of a black-and-tan terrier, who had the fame of being as destructive in a "corner" as the other beast in a rat-bin, and who was the Wall Street agent of his entertainer.

There was a lawyer of great notoriety and really eminent ability, whose sole abominable business it was to engineer private bills through Congress, and who had earned fees

from all the other predatory adventurers there present.

There were the wives of these genteel "sports," some clever and gracious, some stupid and vulgar, but all magnificently arrayed in the spoils of financiering, and, on the whole, fine enough to add lustre to their husband's varnish of respectability.

Finally, there was a superb woman of thirty-five, who was no other than Mr. Allchin's own claimant; the claimant whom he swore by, and vouched for, and recommended to his wealthy friends, and backed, as he asserted, with his own money; the greatest claimant that had ever been known in Washington, or in all our favored country; a claimant who had no less than nineteen millions in gold due her. Yes, the whole of it was due her; she had never collected a cent of it.

Of course a lady who had such a fortune coming in some day would feel free to borrow all she needed, and could afford to be liberal in the matter of usury. A hundred per cent. was what she allowed, interest being payable when the note should fall due, and the note falling due on the collection of the first million. The loans which she had gathered in and divided with the noble banker who guaranteed her respectability were already beyond computation.

In short, it was a gang of affiliated black-legs, who had met to divide the winnings of the late session, and who were willing, by-the-way, to pluck the feathers of a lucky novice.

Will Josie escape them without being stripped of the golden plumage which she has filched from Uncle Sam's eagle? It seems hardly possible. If she dodges Allchin's marble quarries, there are the Arizonian mines; if these fail to engulf her, there are the tumbling, crushing stocks of

the Great Alaska Railroad; if she evades these, she may trip among the corners and margins of the New York Exchange; every gentleman present has his rascally trap of well-baited and fatal speculation.

Finally, there is the wonderful claimant, with her romantic story and her dazzling cent. per cent., no doubt the most dangerous tempter of them all to Josie, who has just pushed a claim to its goal easily and profitably, and who consequently believes in claimantcy. Alas for her, if she listens to these charmers! She will soon have to begin the world again.

Perhaps the reader may suggest that, if she lose her fortune, she may marry the rich and love-lorn Hollowbread. But it has been revealed to us that a legal obstacle stands in the way of this salvation. Mr. Hollowbread, on reaching his relatives (and heirs), presently made known to them a determination to will all his property to Mrs. Augustus Murray, and likewise exhibited other symptoms of what they considered—and justly considered—mental alienation. Thereupon they got out a commission *de lunatico* upon him, and had him placed under a conservator.

It is saddening to leave our heroine under the shadow of such threatening circumstances. She had her pleasing traits; she was beautiful, graceful, clever, entertaining, and amiable; if she had only possessed truthfulness and honor, she would have been admirable. One can hardly help wishing her well while conceding that she deserved ill.

But money easily and naughtily won is so often easily and foolishly lost! No doubt, too, Josie's head has been turned by her prodigious and facile success, and she will be exceptionally ready to fly in the face of ruin. On the whole, our hopes for her are feeble—feebler even than our good-will.

THE END.