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The Captain of the School


ALICE BARBER STEPHENS

The Captain of the School

By

EDITH ROBINSON

Author of "A Loyal Little Maid," "Penhallow Tales," etc.

Illustrated by

ALICE BARBER STEPHENS

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List of Illustrations

The Captain of the School

CHAPTER ONE

"COMING here on a visit, Colonel Jerome, who goes around everywhere, and is the nephew of the Secretary of the Interior!" gasped Chris.

"I don't care if he goes around like a top and is the Interior itself!" rejoined Nan, tartly, more for the sake of opposition than because she felt disposed to make light of the threatened crisis.

"If our mishaps and shortcomings were only dignified, or even tragic, instead of paltry and ridiculous, it would not be so bad," sighed Lou.

"I wonder how many Indians he's killed," observed Bobby, with sanguine interest.

"Tee-hee!" added Betty, whose usual tribute to any family discussion was giggles or tears, in inverse propriety to the occasion.

Silence followed the chorus of dismay as each gazed at its cause,—the letter with the Montana postmark, drooping in Chris's hands.

The "big brother," who in the years on the Western ranch had become little more than a name to the home

circle, was coming East in the early spring, and would be accompanied by Colonel Jerome, the commander at the neighboring military station and his best friend. It was the latter announcement that had dashed the cup of joy with bitterness, and changed joyous anticipation to something like consternation.

"As Dick remembers our home, we could have received any guest without qualms; but think of the mortification of letting a man like Colonel Jerome into the secrets of our wretched makeshifts and shortcomings," sighed Chris.

"When people once begin running down hill, there is a moral momentum that accelerates their speed till they land in splinters and tatters at the bottom," added Nan, with her usual gloomy philosophy.

"Think of the student lamp, with its chronic habit of bubbling and sizzling, now sinking into meditation and dulness, and then blazing up into a perfect fury of illumination," began Lou, who, notwithstanding her own unruffled calm of mind and demeanor, had a habit of making bad matters worse, of ferreting out the worst possibilities of a situation, that at times drove her family to the verge of distraction. "Consider the carpet pieced out with that of another pattern, the cracked and mended, nicked and missing china, the fragmentary table linen, the door-bell that remains in the hand of the dismayed caller, the damaged arm of the sitting-room sofa that thunders to the floor at the least unwary touch."

"I 'll kick it off for a salute when I see him coming,"

proffered Bobby. "He 'll think it 's the cannon's bloody roar."

Betty's giggle, checked by the frowns of the family, subsided into a whimper, that presently developed into sobs, as Bobby began to paint in lively colors the presumable appearance of Colonel Jerome, in wampum and war-paint, armed with bowie and six-shooter, and his habit of lassoing children who talked too much in the presence of their elders.

"But we 'll do our best by Dick's pard," he added. "He shall have our one trustworthy chair, the solitary cup that boasts a handle, the napkin kept sacred for company; we will place him where he can feast his eyes on the one good breadth of carpet, and will give Betty timely instruction not to giggle if his martial glance wanders from headquarters."

"I 'm going to sit up as late as Lou does every single night Colonel Jerome is here," announced Betty, the first to perceive a glimpse of the silver lining of the portentous cloud.

"You would contribute more to the pleasing effect of our hospitality by observing the proper occasion for giggles and tears," suggested Bobby. "Now mind, Betty," he went on authoritatively, "when I kick you under the table — so — you are to laugh, and when I wink — like this — you must cry." He accompanied these instructions by practical illustrations that produced a prolonged howl and a rubbing of the shins on Betty's part, and a hobgoblin contortion of coun-

tenance that would have made gravity difficult in the presence of the most august.

"And you 'd better not bring those old mud hens you shoot into the sitting-room, and you need n't clean your bicycle in the dining-room and leave all the greasy rags on the sideboard," retorted Betty.

"Do be quiet, Betty," said Nan, sharply. "If you had any bringing up, you would not be so ready to talk on every occasion. If Colonel Jerome comes, I hope you will remember that children are to be seen and not heard — and that it is n't absolutely necessary they should be seen, either."

"Betty is my charge," retorted Chris. "While you are polishing up the family manners, you 'd better leave off that big apron — if you can bring yourself to part with it for five minutes — and that hideous black sweeping-cap that makes you look like the hangman's victim, and don't be so much in the clouds as to forget to order dinner!" — an allusion to a bygone episode that was a stock weapon in her warfare with Nan, and which never failed of effect. "And don't have rice pudding for dinner more than seven times a week," she added with personal rancor.

"And don't you be so elegant and finicky as to think of nothing but your clothes, and talk to Colonel Jerome the gossip you get out of the society columns of the Sunday newspapers, as though you 'd been at every function of the past week when you don't even know the people by sight!" answered Nan, breathlessly.

"And Lou is to put a bridle on her tongue, and not say any of Punch's things that had better be left unsaid," added Bobby.

"We cannot make up to Dick for that which he has truly lost," said Chris, presently, in a softened tone; and with the words the frowning faces grew thoughtful and the ill humor that had settled about the breakfast-table seemed to melt away.

"We can at least try to make Dick's home-coming pleasant, and welcome his friend as — as she would have done," said Nan, with a little choke in her voice.

"She would just have made the best of things, and been so sweet and lovely that nobody would have thought of the gone-to-pieces aspect of everything, within and without," added Lou, partially forgetful of her usual rôle.

"We're snobs for caring, anyway; and if Colonel Jerome is an officer and gentleman, he'll see what good fellows we are, and not mind a rap that we, the descendants of Governor Thomas Dudley, are living on our name and traditions," said Bobby, energetically.

"Listen!" said Nan, to whom in her exalted moods no glass mountain was impossible of ascent, "this house must be made presentable between now and Easter. Much can be done in six months."

"It might as well be six years!" responded Chris, partly from a confirmed habit of disagreeing with Nan, and partly because of an eminently practical nature. "Or perhaps, you think that china and glass and

table linen are to be provided with the words, 'Little table, spread yourself!'" she added crushingly.

Nan unwontedly let the gauntlet lie unheeded.

"We will earn all the money we can this winter. We will go without the new gowns we planned. We will not make any Christmas presents except, of course, to Betty," she added, as her little sister's brow clouded.

"I don't want any presents, either, if the rest of you aren't going to have any," declared Betty, stoutly. "And I'll save all my money, too, to have things nice and pretty for Dick and Colonel Jerome."

"Things will be wearing out all the time," observed Lou, thoughtfully.

"I'll try and make my hens understand the situation," said Bobby, cheerfully. "I'll declaim the Declaration of Independence and 'Horatius' to them, and see if it won't stir them up to patriotism and love of martial glory."

Each of the others had her private income, scanty though it was. That of Chris was derived from the sale of embroideries; Nan's from brush and pencil. Lou's pocket money was supplied by a small legacy left by the aunt for whom she was named. Betty's purse was filled from the rag-bag and a sheep on Dick's ranch, the sum brought by its fleece being regularly forwarded every shearing-time. To judge by the tone in which she referred to "my sheep," one might have supposed Betty the owner of all the flocks that grazed in the valleys of Montana.

"As though we had n't pinched and scraped already to the last turn of the screw, to the verge of the impossible," sighed Chris. But even in the uncompromising words lay the admission that another turn of the screw might be accomplished, the impossible achieved.

The circle of youthful faces grew grave as the sacrifices that would be required to compass the desired end arose before them. How could Chris dispense with the dainty boots and gloves that no ingenuity of needle or of "making over" could provide? Nan had a thousand ungratified wants, from a Dresden cup and saucer to art instruction abroad. Lou's ever-present longing was for a new hat when it was not for a bonnet. "Which, — hat or bonnet?" was Lou's life problem.

To be the most popular boy in Holbrook entailed expenses that would have borne heavily upon a better filled purse than Bobby's. The most serious item in Betty's private expenditure was the purchase of a certain confection known as a "jaw-breaker." This attractively named delicacy consisted of a granite slab in which were embedded fossils that in prehistoric times had been walnuts. In one respect, however, Betty's favorite dainty was richly worth its modest price, for a single "jaw-breaker" might have been warranted a supply for the soundest teeth, the most tireless jaws, for a good twelvemonth.

"*She* would not have thought it a sacrifice," said Chris, in the tone that now and again gave a glimpse,

faint and transitory though it was, of another nature beneath the girlish aspirations and petty strivings that dominated the present.

With the words, tacit consent seemed to be given by each and all that the effort should be made, the sacrifices consummated. For the voice that had somehow made itself heard above the loudest chorus would not greet Dick's home-coming. The face that had smiled from the head of the table would not turn fondly upon the boy who held the inalienable place of eldest born. The laugh that had chimed so readily, in its softer key, with the seldom silent mirth of the noisy brood, Dick would never hear again.

A glance at the tall old-fashioned clock in the corner warned Bobby of the approaching school hour, and the family conclave was broken up.

Time was when the Dudleys held their heads as high as did any of their neighbors. If they still did so, it was from the consciousness of past glories and of innate worth rather than from the present possession of worldly advantages. The fine old Colonial mansion, notwithstanding its crying need of paint and repairs, was still the show place of Holbrook. The roofs of the grapery and hot-house had long ago fallen in. What had been the rose garden, planted by old Governor Dudley himself, was now a thorny labyrinth, with here and there an abortive blossom to testify to former beauties. Of the rare shrubs and trees set out by successive generations there remained only the Judas tree, whose trunk,

describing a right angle midway of its growth, afforded an admirable seat, by sitting close, for the entire present family.

By unreckoned expenditure, and a mania for speculation, Paul Dudley had speedily reduced a competence to an income that ill-sufficed for the growing needs of a large family. A mortgage was laid upon the old house; the estate, with the exception of the garden and lawn, was cut up into building lots; opposite, a stately mansion, with stables and conservatories, arose to mock the ruins of the old Dudley mansion. Having got his affairs into inextricable confusion, Mr. Dudley characteristically died.

Chris and Nan were not yet in long gowns, the younger children were still in the nursery, when the day came on which they were indeed left alone.

When it was known that they intended living, as heretofore, in the home that had been theirs for generations, relatives and friends held up their hands — an attitude which is more natural to most people than to hold them out — and exclaimed, "It is not proper. They should have with them a Female Relative!" But one and all of the young people, whether wisely or no, scouted the phantasm of a chaperone as not only a highly disagreeable concession to conventionality, but unnecessary to their own condition. The two elder girls divided the domestic cares between them; Lou's part in the household economy was purely ornamental.

Chris was now eighteen. Long ago, Lou, in the

satisfaction of her golden hair and blue eyes, had said, "Chris, you can be good. I am a pretty little girl." To which her sister answered thoughtfully, "No, I am not pretty; but I can be fascinating." And that reply still embodied the elder girl's attitude at the age when the question of beauty is usually the paramount one in a girl's life. With practical wisdom, too, Chris made the most of the good points which in her impartial self-appraisal she knew were hers. Her eyes might be small of size and nondescript of color, her abundant dark hair amenable only to painstaking care; the beautiful full curves of her lips, perfect teeth, and a graceful figure might fairly be set on the other side of the account.

Nan was a year younger than Chris. As she would have been satisfied, for her own portion, with nothing less than the form and features of the Medicean Venus, she could see no beauty in her own honest brown eyes, nor in the silky hair, of curiously contrasted shades, that was always slipping from its confinement, partly by reason of its own weight and partly because its owner was too careless of her personal appearance to take time to secure it properly. Regret for the past, hurry in the present, and an inveterate habit of borrowing trouble for the future, combined with near-sighted vision to give two little wrinkles between Nan's brows that at times deepened to a frown with which she regarded all humanity.

Lou had the good looks of the family, her sisters were

wont to aver, unchecked by Bobby's indignant assertion of his own symmetry of form and feature. Into Lou's lap, too, had fallen such rare plums of good fortune as had been vouchsafed the young Dudleys. Besides the legacy, she had once been invited to the mountains for a week, by an old friend of the family, which gave her a certain prestige in the home circle, as one who had travelled. Having attended school at such times and seasons as seemed good to her, the preceding June she had packed up her books and declared her education finished.

Nature, aided by devotion to athletic sports, had given Bobby a breadth of shoulder and depth of chest that gallantly matched his height, so that the designation "our little brother" was one of affection and contradistinction rather than of fact. Bobby's eyes were always twinkling with the fun their owner made for himself and everybody else, and a mop of curly brown hair, of the season's fashionable length, seemed to promise immunity in the most hotly contested football match. Bobby was just entering his last year at the High School. He had returned, over night, from a summer's camping-out in the Rangeley Lakes in company with Harry Luce and Jack Burnham, his chosen friends.

After Bobby came a gap in the regularly descending scale of ages, and the ranks were closed by ten-year-old Betty, plump and rosy, with wide-open gray eyes and thick brown hair, smoothly braided into a pigtail. Her straight hair was the one cross of Betty's life. A

salient feature of her individuality was her boots. She never walked in them; she kicked and jumped and stamped and pounded. As with the Psalmist, who "was young and then was old," Betty's boots knew no intermediate stage of decay. They were new, with a nerve-rending creak; and they were old and full of holes. Their owner cherished a secret conviction that the Brownies in whom she had firm faith came by night and danced in them; but she had never succeeded in lying awake long enough to witness this unrighteous proceeding. Betty's relations with the rest of the family were somewhat complicated. She regarded Lou as her equal and playfellow, who "put on airs" when she refused to climb trees and promenade the tops of fences, or to become a member of the juvenile "Nine" lately organized in the neighborhood. For Chris she entertained the most unbounded admiration, regarding her as the very model of young ladyhood, whose words and acts were to be blindly imitated on every occasion. As both Chris and Nan looked upon Betty's bringing up as her especial affair, and as their ideas upon this subject, as upon every other, were diametrically opposed, the proper behavior of their little sister was a frequent source of strife between them, often fomented by Betty herself, who was not slow to perceive that she was sure to be upheld by Chris in whatever course was frowned upon by Nan. It was also Bobby's self-imposed task to see that his little sister trod the straight and narrow path of decorous young maidenhood. Betty settled

the vexed question of her education by growing up exactly as she pleased.

A few hours after the discussion at the breakfast-table, the elder girls were assembled in the sitting-room. The big mending-basket was by Chris's side. Lou was engaged in trimming a bonnet; Nan, floury and dishevelled from certain gala preparations in the kitchen, rested from her labors in the springless depths of the old sofa.

"There go Miss Courtenay and Miss Herbert!" exclaimed Chris. The younger girls crowded to the window.

"What a lovely hat!" ejaculated Lou, making sundry mental memoranda, as she scrutinized Miss Herbert's tailor-made array. "I might use your old turban, Nan, to make one like it."

"You might, if you could find it," returned her sister, with the promptitude born of past exigencies, for Lou's ideas of *meum* and *tuum*, when millinery was in question, were none too rigidly defined, and she sometimes took an unfair advantage of Nan's heedlessness to possess herself of stray plumes or forgotten ribbons. In times of especial stress Nan had even felt it advisable to take her hat to bed with her.

"Miss Herbert is awfully good form, but she lacks Miss Courtenay's charm, whatever that is," said Chris, critically.

"Is she pretty?" queried the cook, subsiding with unwonted meekness into the background, at Chris's sharp remonstance.

"If you would wear glasses, you could see for yourself that she is very handsome," was the tart reply, for Chris's equanimity was always disturbed by any ripple of social stir, however remote, that reached her lonely strand. Besides, Nan, detesting the formalities of social intercourse, and cherishing a grudge against the people who had possessed themselves of "our land," had declined to accompany her sister in the call enjoined by etiquette upon their neighbor's guest.

"The trouble with Miss Herbert is that she is a little too nice to be interesting," went on Chris, whose busk and buckram, carefully adjusted for society, or donned as armor in her warfare with Nan, was generally laid aside in the abandon of the home circle. "She pauses before every remark, to arrange its syntax and give you time to reflect what a fool you made of yourself by your last one. Holbrook will be gayer than ever this winter, there will be so many congratulatory teas and things," added the girl, wistfully.

"Who told you she and Mr. Louis Courtenay were engaged?" queried Lou; for Chris, despite her social isolation, contrived to be conversant with all the current gossip, and even to assume an air of authority upon it.

"Everybody says so," she answered, with her most positive air. "They came home on the same boat; the deck of an ocean steamer is a place where people always get engaged," she added, with the easy allusion of one who has "crossed" many times.

"How did she dare fall in love with him?" said Nan,

thoughtfully. "He is n't real. He is too perfect to be flesh and blood. Some day that well-groomed phantasm will vanish, like the false and fair Florimel, and leave only his girdle, or, more appropriately, his suspenders, behind. I don't believe his own mother ever calls him Louis."

"As Mrs. Courtenay never calls anybody or anything by its right name, it is quite as probable that she addresses him as Joseph," suggested Chris. "If I were Mrs. Courtenay, I think I could spend my time more profitably than in guessing Biblical conundrums, fondling that wretched poodle, and going to town to hunt for 'remnants.' There is n't even the crumpled rose-leaf in the Courtenays' life," the girl went on discontentedly; "Miss Meg would not wear that serene smiling face, if she knew anything of the petty vexations that beset other people!" Chris jerked her needle so sharply as to break the thread with which she was sewing up a jagged rent in Betty's frock. "I do wish Betty would take pattern by that ladylike little Maud Courtenay," she added, as a loud "Ul-la-loo-oo!" from without announced their little sister's return from school.

CHAPTER TWO

BOBBY was known throughout Holbrook as the champion at tennis and golf. He was stroke on the Holbrook crew in the interscholastic boat-races, he had been on the staff of the *Snark* — the school journal — since his entrance to the school, and this year was to be its editor-in-chief. For the preceding twelve months he had adorned the position of captain of the foot-ball team, an office never before held by a member of the Middle Class, and was pointed out to adoring Juniors as the fellow who on the first day of practice had dodged past half of the first Eleven and scored a touchdown, and who made the prettiest tackles ever seen on the field. But what were any or all of these distinctions compared to that of being Captain of the School, with rank proclaimed to the nether world by a glittering uniform, a sword dangling by his side — and frequently getting between his legs — and a decoration on his cap that held the eye of the beholder like unto the rising sun!

When "the slate" was made up at the caucus held just before the close of school, no other name than Bobby's was even thought of for the position. So, with mind at ease regarding his coming honor, and no important work being done in the school-room until

the classes were organized, Bobby had lingered in the Maine Woods with Lucy — at whose expense he was enjoying himself — while Jack Burnham had returned to be present at the formal election of officers, now a week ago.

"Bobby!"

As the word was passed from one to another, the boys scattered about the school yard gave the Holbrook yell with a vigor that caused Mr. Shattuck, at an upper window, to glance anxiously at the panes. A handshaking and back-pounding ensued that bid fair to demolish the object of its welcome. Bobby's voice and laugh were heard above the others as question and exclamation tumbled one upon another, no one pausing for response, till Bobby, whose eyes had been roving hither and thither throughout the merry hubbub, asked, —

"Where's Jack?" adding absently, "What's that about going West, Larry? Who's going West?"

A sudden recollection of something forgotten in the moment's excitement seemed to sweep over the boys and hold their speech. Lucy's high-pitched voice, from the edge of the crowd, broke the silence.

"Bobby — I say, Bobby! The fellows have gone and elected Jack Burnham Captain!"

The sense of the words was too incredible for Bobby to grasp, and his friend's name was all that reached his understanding. Where was Jack? Why was not Jack at hand to greet him? He gave the call with which he

and his chum were wont to signal each other, — repeated it again and once again. Jack could not be within hearing, for when, before, had that far-carrying yodel failed of its answer?

"Where's Jack — what's happened to Jack?" he questioned blankly.

The boys were looking at one another in an odd, questioning way. It was not even a vague conception of something wrong in the situation that held their speech, but merely a general feeling of embarrassment; each waited for his neighbor to speak. For the first time Bobby noticed that Taffy Dabney wore the straps of first lieutenant, and that Larry Lyman's sleeve bore the chevron of second sergeant.

"You didn't go by 'the slate'?" he queried with a surprise that seemed to surprise his fellows. "What made you change it?"

There was still no answer.

"Who are the other officers?" asked Bobby, with growing indignation that he, the acknowledged leader of the school, should have been ignored in this incomprehensible rearrangement.

"Lucy is first sergeant, and Peddy Seaton second lieutenant," voluntered Taffy Dabney, at last.

"And what have you done about Jack?" thundered Bobby, turning upon the last speaker. "Who told you you could be first lieutenant? If Jack has been left out in this precious muddle, you can get another Captain!" Bobby's clinched fists, as he confronted Taffy, looked so

ominously like business that the new-made lieutenant backed into the crowd, now on tiptoe with excitement.

"Here's Jack!" shouted Lucy, from the background.

There was an audible sigh of relief as the boys fell back to make way for the new-comer, who presently found himself, seemingly without his own volition, in the centre of the circle, face to face with Bobby.

Jack Burnham wore the uniform of Captain!

For the space of a few seconds Bobby stood silent and motionless; the glittering epaulets, the burnished sword, the insignia on the cap, seemed to be burning themselves into his brain. In some way not yet understood, but which would doubtless readily be explained, Jack had been elected Captain in his place. In Bobby's mind was no distrust of his friend; only a vague wonder that Jack did not speak and clear up the situation.

The crowd now included nearly every boy in the school. The girls were on the outskirts of the excited throng. The later arrivals, inquiring "What's the row?" without receiving any answer, were struggling to get near the chief actors in the scene. Lucy succeeded in thrusting and wriggling himself forward, till, red as a little turkey-cock, he stood by Bobby's side, confronting Jack Burnham. In moments of excitement, stammering got the better of little Lucy's powers of speech.

"You — you — you — cheat! You — you — li —!"

A heavy hand was laid upon his shoulder.

"Quit!" said Bobby, sternly.

"I won't quit!" sputtered Lucy, trying to wriggle

out of the iron grip and gesticulating frantically at the Captain. Bobby made only partial sense of the incoherent storming. Lucy was always mixing things up; but really, his present tempest was too idiotic to be worth noticing; Bobby laughed and relaxing his grasp of his little henchman, gave him a good-natured shove.

"Lucy, you make me tired," he said.

"Jack Burnham told the fellows you were going out West and so they put him in Captain instead of you," shouted Lucy, without punctuation, but forgetting to stammer.

Still Bobby refused credence to so monstrous a statement. Only from Jack's lips would he receive corroboration of such a yarn, and from him it was impossible. He turned, still half laughing, to his friend.

For the space of a few seconds he stood silent and motionless. Jack's face was deathly pale; his lips were quivering, his knees knocking together. The very unexpectedness of the revelation, that at the first shock stunned him, now sharpened Bobby's wits, and the whole situation was bare before him.

He had been tricked by his own familiar friend. Jack Burnham was indeed a cheat and a liar.

Bobby's hands clenched; he took a step forward. He did not know what held him from knocking Jack down and shouting the truth to the waiting crowd. The wild anger that surged through his brain rang in his ears and blinded him; a curious sensation of nausea almost overcame him.

"A new election, a new election!" shouted Lucy, capering about and gesticulating wildly.

Bobby's whirling brain re-echoed the words. A new election would infallibly make him Captain, and as inevitably send Jack Burnham to Coventry. How terrible a fate that would be to Jack, none knew so well as his friend. The crowd hung, breathless, on Bobby's word.

Unseen by any but Bobby, a look of piteous appeal had come into the eyes that were shifting before his own direct, scornful gaze. Bobby's hand relaxed. The word upon his lips was stifled. Somewhere, somehow, out of the reserve forces of his nature, was born his resolution, and quick upon it he acted.

"I am going out West," he said calmly.

The boys gave vent to their pent-up excitement in a rousing cheer, repeated and reiterated, and winding up with the Holbrook yell. There was no exhilaration in their voices. It was merely that something had dropped out of their throats and they had to yell.

Lucy took no part in the ensuing hubbub of exclamation and question. "Oh, Bobby, don't go! What'll the football team do? Who'll be editor? Who'll be Captain of the Canoe Club? Who'll be Captain of the Nine? We'll lose the tennis cup — and the golf cup. Wow, wow, wow!" While a feebler chorus on the outside of the crowd echoed, "Who'll lead the German? Who'll dance the two-step?"

"I'm going as soon as I hear from Dick. I've been

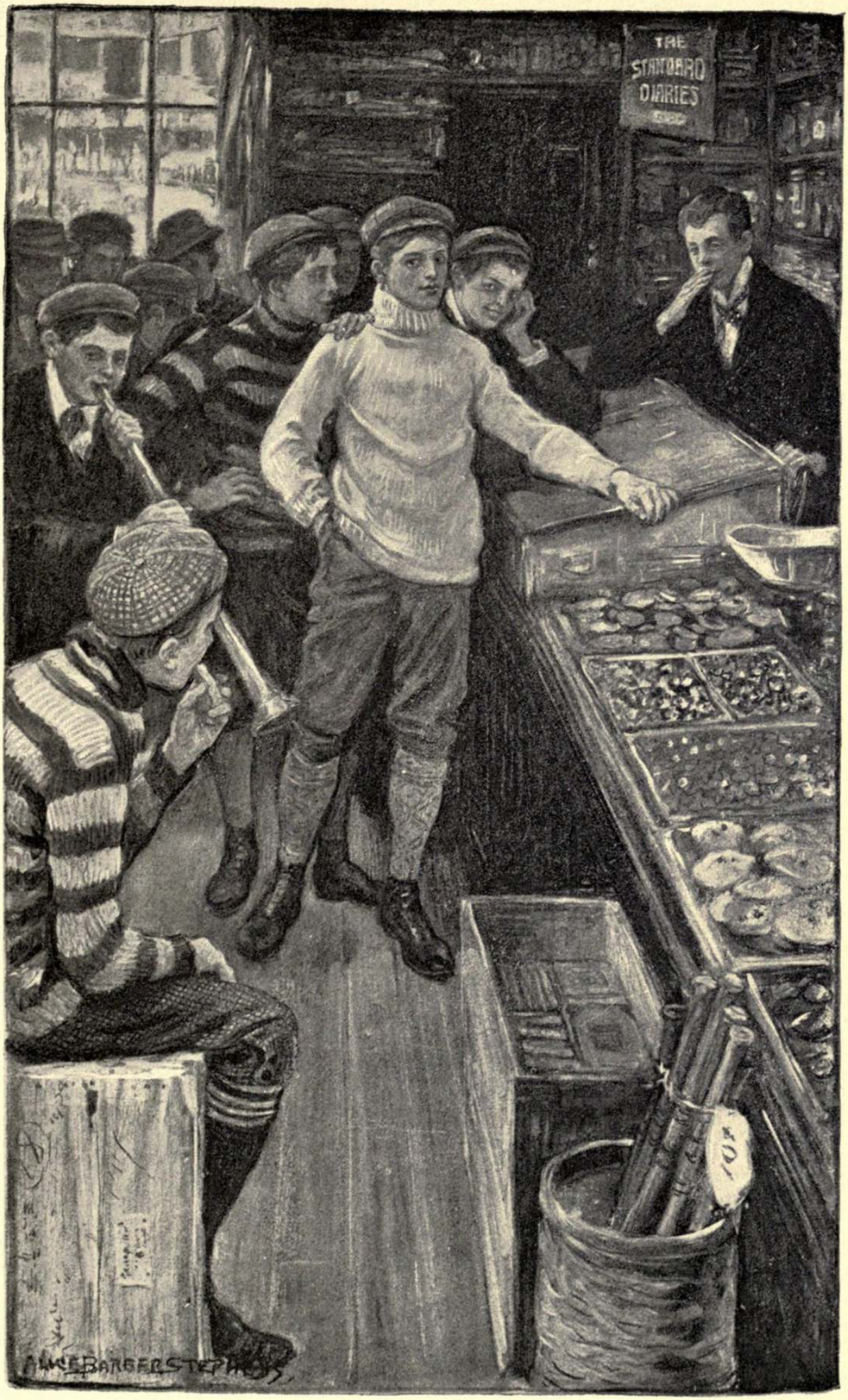
thinking of out West for ever so long. I thought I'd drop around and see you fellows to-day. I shall have my hands full, the next week or two, getting my outfit together. I say, Lucy, quit!" for Lucy was pounding Bobby's back in excess of emotion. "You have a fist like a trip-hammer."

"I'm going with you," cried Lucy. "I have some money in the bank, and I'll get a revolver and a horse and Western toggery. I'm almost as good a shot as you and don't scare worth a cent." His eyes sparkled as this happy solution of the question arose before him.

"You will do nothing of the sort," returned Bobby, crushingly. "You will stay at home and learn your lessons and grow up a respectable member of society. Besides, you would be homesick on the plains. There would be nobody for you to be smitten on but Indian squaws, who are old and ugly and smoke-dried, and gobble up little boys who run away from home."

Unobserved, Jack Burnham had stolen from the crowd.

At recess, Bobby, in the highest spirits, proposed a farewell "treat," and the horde of hungry schoolboys started on a raid upon the "Empire Emporium," — an establishment that catered chiefly to the demands of the boys, with a branch devoted to the tastes of younger patrons. In the one dingy little window was displayed the placard, "New and Original Novelties!" surmounting a four-in-hand necktie of "Centennial" pattern, tintypes of "Abraham Lincoln and his Family," and a few periodicals whose dates were carefully concealed from


THE
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DIARIES

the public view. The signboard of the Emporium bore the name "G. William;" but the proprietor — a hollow-chested, pink-eyed youth — had been promptly rechristened Griffith Bill, shortened for every-day use to Griff.

"Hi, Griff!"

The shopkeeper grinned with vacuous delight as he nearly doubled up under Bobby's thump on his back, and hastened to obey the mandate, —

"Turnovers for the crowd! Any root beer that did n't come over in the Mayflower? Griff, if you try to palm off your stale goods on us this year, as you did last, we shall transfer our custom to some other Emporium. You 're getting rich too fast. We can't have any more bloated aristocrats around here. Lucy is enough for one community."

Lucy, after strolling about the shop, thrusting his impertinent little nose into everything that aroused his curiosity, and accompanying his investigations by a running fire of tormenting comment, laid hold of a fish-horn and proceeded to make such a din that several of his mates wrested his possession from him. Then Bobby seated him high upon an empty shelf, where Lucy sat swinging his legs and whistling thoughtfully. Never had Bobby's fun and laughter been more contagious! At last, cakes and turnovers in hand, the boys rushed from the shop, leaving Lucy on his perch. Speech was a necessity with little Lucy, and he proceeded to pour forth his pent-up feelings into the first channel that offered itself.

"Griff!"

"Hi!" responded the shopkeeper, in a feeble, piping imitation of Bobby's ringing tones.

"You should say, 'What, sir?'" said Lucy, reprovingly, pointing his forefinger at Griff's waistband, and grinning with delight as the vacuous youth doubled up under the occult influence of this demonstration.

"'Something is rotten in the state of Denmark,'" proclaimed Lucy.

"I did n't know it, I 'm sure — "

"Sir," corrected Lucy, frowning.

"I 'm, sir, sure," repeated Griff, apologetically. "I have n't read the news. You see I have to get up pretty early to deliver the morning papers, and then I must open up here and be on hand to attend to trade. I did see that the Queen of Holland was married, though," he added, brightening.

"Are you a fool by force of circumstance, or were you born so?" queried Lucy, with fair and feigned solicitude.

"I don't know — I guess — I 'll ask ma," quavered Griff, who always lost the few wits he had under these scathing cross-examinations.

"I 'm going to tell you something, Griff," went on Lucy; "only mind, if you blow — " He slowly raised his index finger, and the miserable youth collapsed as though hinged in the middle. "Bobby is n't Captain, and there's been some trick played, I 'm sure, though Bobby pretends it 's on the square. You did n't know that

Bobby had a brother out West, Griff, because you don't know anything, and even that you 're not sure of."

"Bobby — going — out West!"

Griff's chin dropped, and a peculiarly vacant expression came into his eyes, as though they were turned inward.

"When you do that, you look more like an idiot than ever," said Lucy. It was seldom, indeed, that he was out of temper, but Bobby's theory that snubbing was healthy for his valiant little henchman had failed, that morning, to bear fruit. "Bobby did talk, when we were at Rangeley," he continued, "about going West. It was one morning, in particular, after we 'd been fishing. But I know he had no more real idea of going, then, than either Jack or I. That was why Jack was in such a precious hurry to get home, when Bobby and I wanted to go up the Cupsuptic. By cracky!" — a mysterious adjuration used by Lucy when laboring under the greatest excitement, "just you wait till I get the cinch on Jack Burnham! I 'll bet anything you like against your Emporium that Bobby never said a word to Jack at Rangeley that I did n't hear."

"Oh, no!" Griff hastened to reassure his guest.

"If you mean anything by that, come on!" said Lucy, doubling up his fists.

"Oh, but I did n't," answered the young shopkeeper, in alarm. "I — I never mean anything."

"Griff, I pity your family for having to live with such a creature," sighed Lucy.

"It was the way it was worked at the Chicago Convention," said Griff, with a puny effort to vindicate his intelligence. "Jack Burnham was clever."

Lucy slid from his perch, and almost choking with wrath, advanced upon Griff, who, retreating step by step, brought up against the wall, where he stood with shaking knees, while Lucy gesticulated threateningly before him.

"That's what you call clever, is it? It's no wonder that white folks won't go into politics."

"I — I guess I would n't say anything," advised Griff. "It 's generally best to let things go."

"Maybe it is — for worms," retorted Lucy, "and that is why they get trod on."

"If Bobby really goes West, I don't know what I shall do," said Griff, drawing a rag from his pocket and applying a corner to his red eyelids. "I know I — should — should — feel tur'ble."

"You would not feel 'tur'ble,'" returned Lucy, with decision. "There is no such word, and consequently no such emotion, in the English language. I wish you would pay more attention to your parts of speech, Griff," he went on severely. "That new placard of yours is really painful to the educated eye. 'Look! The Cheapest in the World! And Come In.' If you will tell me what that 'And' joins together — it is a rule of rhetoric that a conjunction should connect something — I 'd be eternally obliged. And your goods are not the cheapest in the world. They are the dearest — and

the worst. Besides," added Lucy, with flagrant disregard of his own strictures in the use of conjunctions, "what is it to you whether Bobby goes or stays? He never notices you unless you are under his feet. You could n't touch him with a ten-foot pole."

And the shopkeeper looked miserably aware of the truth of his tormentor's words.

After Lucy's departure, Griff took down his ledger and gazed long and lovingly at the list of items on a certain page.

"If Bobby does really go West," he thought, feeling for his handkerchief again, "I 'll make him a present of the receipted bill."

Bobby remained closeted with Mr. Shattuck for some time after the close of the session. It was no secret in the school that he was prime favorite with the gentle, kindly old man, who had presided over the education of several generations of Holbrook schoolboys. When a young man, Mr. Shattuck had taken his degree at the bar, but being penniless, had accepted the position of principal of the high school in his native town, hoping to work his way gradually into the practice of his legitimate profession. But time went on, and one day he made the discovery that he was past middle age, and that something had stolen over his ambition, — nay, his very faculties. He had long ago ceased to attend the Barristers' Club, of which he was once regarded as a shining light, and had lost sight of his classmates, with the exception of his former chum, Judge Luce, with

whom he still spent an occasional evening of reminiscent enjoyment.

"If you have fully made up your mind to go, God bless you, Bobby," said the old man, "although I hoped for another career for you. I have never had a pupil who seemed to me so fitted, by every natural endowment, for the Bar. I thought, too, that though active service was forbidden me, I might be permitted to aid in fitting out a substitute. My law library was considered, in its day, a fine one." Only the tremor in Mr. Shattuck's voice hinted of that dead ambition.

His sisters were awaiting Bobby on the piazza. Chris was flourishing her mending, Nan brandishing her apron, Lou waving the new bonnet, while Betty hopped wildly about, getting into everybody's way.

"You 'll look awfully swell in your uniform," cried Chris. "You 're the tallest Captain the school ever had; I wish you 'd cut your hair, a military clip is so stunning!"

"Everybody voted for you, of course?" queried Nan, eagerly.

"I drilled you, Bobby. I think you ought to make me aid," chimed in Lou.

"We 've real 'lection cake for dessert, Bobby," announced Betty. "It 's a surprisement. I helped stone the raisins. It has 'H. H. S.' in pink curlicues, on the roof. You 'll let me take a little teenty-tonty piece to school, won't you, for Evangeline? She does n't have plum cake at her house."

"I 'm not Captain," said Bobby, quietly, with one foot on the stairs.

"Not Captain! Who is?" came in an amazed trio, with the whimper, solo, "Ooo — hoo! Then — we — can't have any 'lection cake!"

CHAPTER THREE

A NETWORK of strings traversed Bobby's room, some apparently running wild, others connecting with mysterious arrangements of blocks and pulleys, by which Bobby, while in bed or at his labors at the desk, could by a dexterous jerk bring down the window-curtain, open the door, or cause a pillow, nicely balanced on its lintel, to descend upon the head of the unwary visitor. A string attached to a cracked dinner-bell was fastened to the head-board of the bed, and running through a hole in the floor, was secured in like manner in the room below. Lou was afflicted with the nightly conviction that the house was to be robbed, and that her room was the objective point of the burglar's covetous desires. Her last act, before going to bed, was to conceal her hat or bonnet on the top shelf of the closet, behind an artful array of boxes and bundles, being apparently possessed by the idea that the burglar wanted it for his wife. Then she sank to peaceful slumber, in undisturbed reliance on her little brother's stalwart arm and the weapon that reposed within its nightly grasp, — a policeman's billy without any lead in it, presumably deemed efficacious for the moral force that might linger about it; and in happy ignorance of the fact that Bobby had long ago removed the tongue of the bell, after being

aroused sundry times on false alarms by a discordant ding dong in his ears.

Another string rang out of the window to enter, in a house not far distant, the room occupied by Jack Burnham. When some scheme of mutual interest required attention in the early hours, one end of this string was tied to the great toe of either boy, the plan being that the one who awakened first was to arouse the other by a vigorous pull at his end of the line. But however admirable in theory, the invention was not without its flaw in practice; for lulled into false security by the expectation of being aroused in due season by a friendly tug at his toe, both boys slept peacefully on till breakfast-time.

On one side of the room was a star formed by bats, foils, a paddle, and a tennis racket. The remaining wall space was covered with pictures of battles, executions, and shipwrecks, cut from the illustrated newspapers, and colored after a broad method, all Bobby's own, with paints filched from Nan's studio. At one end of the room was a bench piled high with bottles containing mysterious compounds of divers colors and densities, boxes of various sizes and unknown uses, coils of wire, tangles of string, nails, screws, carpenters' tools, old mustard cans, lumps of rosin, junks of tar, balls of clay, several jack-knives, — none with a complement of blades, — a jelly pot of flour paste with a silver tablespoon imbedded in it, a collection of bugs, a preserve-jar imprisoning a little green snake — and an unwashed kettle indifferently used to melt lead and to cook "pemmican,"

concocted after an original recipe, when a course of De Long and Nansen had inspired Bobby with ambition to discover the North Pole. Although derided in the home-circle, the "pemmican" would no doubt have been devoured gladly by the gallant Arctic explorer — in the stage of starvation succeeding that in which he had eaten his boots. Over this bench was a placard, in flaring letters, designed to ward off Chris's duster and Betty's prying fingers, — "Dynamite! ! !"

On the bureau was the photograph of a group of boys, eleven in number, clad in knickerbockers, and in sweaters emblazoned with a huge "H." A little fellow with dark curly hair and eyes with an unmistakable twinkle sat, Turk-fashion, in the foreground, with the big ball clasped lovingly in both arms. Behind Lucy was seated George Dabney, a fat boy with a solemn face and bristly hair that, erecting itself over round eyes and elevated eyebrows, gave him the appearance of having just seen a ghost. On either side of Taffy Dabney sat Frank Seaton, whose eyeglasses, stock of general information, and an omnivorous habit of reading had won for him the sobriquet of Pedagogue, shortened, for convenience, to Peddy; and Herbert Lyman, a pleasant-faced lad, commonly known as Larry, for no other apparent reason than because that was not his name. In the background stood the big tackle, Wilbur — or Hayti — Richards, the evolution of whose nickname presented a study in schoolboy philology, — Wilbur, Wib, Web, Cobweb, Cobby, Cuba, Hayti.

Towering above the other members of the football team, stood Bobby, with his arm linked in that of a tall, slender lad with a delicate oval face and fair hair cut straight across a handsome forehead; the mouth was beautiful in its curves of almost girlish sensitiveness, but the chin, though well moulded, receded too much for character. About the room were other photographs of the same boy in various attitudes, but always arm in arm with Bobby, and always, as though by some natural law of attraction and support, leaning slightly toward the more stalwart lad.

Conspicuous on the bookshelf was the "Life of Daniel Webster," a volume whose shabby covers and well-worn leaves testified to the devotion with which it had been read. Before the old-fashioned desk was a chair, forever glorious in the eyes of its present owner as having once belonged to the great "Expounder of the Constitution," before his name was spoken beyond the confines of a country village. It was a black-painted, ugly little chair, incommodious of seat and disquieting of motion, with short and stubbed rockers that might well have taught the incipient statesman the instability of human greatness. Somewhere in Bobby's mind, never expressed, and but vaguely realized even by himself, lay the thought that about the chair hovered all the poetry and possibilities of a pre-eminent manhood, as in that obscure New Hampshire law office, before Daniel Webster went forth to his great career.

Bobby's head had rested on his outstretched arms

since twilight fell on the letter upon which he had been laboriously engaged since his return from school.

"Robin, Robin!" called a voice at the door.

"Come in," responded Bobby, seizing his pen and assuming a preoccupied air.

"How can I come in when the door is locked?" queried Lou, plaintively. "Or do you expect me to enter like a witch, through the key-hole?"

The door was flung violently back.

"What do you want?" demanded Bobby, gruffly.

"Supper is ready. I thought you might be hungry," hesitated Lou. "You didn't have any dinner, you know; none of us would touch the cake, not even Betty. We don't want to sit down at the table again without you, Robin love."

Lou, who had tried to guard her lips from any expression of ungrateful sympathy, at this unfortunate slip turned to flee, followed by the response, made with labored indifference, —

"Didn't hear the supper-bell. I'll be down in a jiff!"

The others had learnt, ere this, who was Captain, from Susie Crossman, Lou's most intimate friend, who had been amongst the girls on the parade ground when the exciting scene of the morning took place.

Bobby entered the dining-room almost as soon as Lou, by way of a short cut over the baluster, with a jovial greeting that deceived nobody, and with hair belabored to such satin smoothness as to betray the fact that emotion had recently set it on end. He bore his part

manfully, both in talking and eating, throughout the meal, and when they were all assembled afterward in the sitting-room, fell in with Chris's suggestion that they play at capping poetry, — a pastime which she hated, but of which Bobby was inordinately fond. Then Lou proposed a game of checkers, which generally ended abruptly in a war of words, for Bobby was given to holding long legal dissertations at every debatable point, and Lou always insisted on her right to take back any move that afterthought showed to be unadvisable. But on this occasion she yielded meekly to every "No fair" from her opponent, and even allowed herself to be ignominiously beaten. Betty neither cried nor giggled, her only misdemeanor being to fasten round, immovable eyes upon her brother, in the pleasing hope of surprising him in tears.

Then Bobby and Nan declaimed in unison several poems. Both performers despised sentiment, and always selected for these elocutionary duets the most stirring battle-pieces, rendered at the top of their lungs. The entire family joined in "Ivry" with a solemn pause after the line, —

"'And if my standard bearer fall —'"

Thomas Dudley, gentleman and soldier of fortune, had fought under Henry of Navarre; and it was one of the young Dudleys' most treasured shibboleths that their ancestor was the very standard bearer alluded to in the poem.

"Now let's sing 'Captain John,'" said Lou, and stood aghast.

Silence followed, till Bobby gallantly flung himself into the breach; the others, one by one, joined in. But when the chorus was reached,—

"Vive le John, Vive le John,
Vive le Captain John!"

even boyish endurance faltered.

"I'm going to bed. Good-night," said Bobby, and bolted.

He dropped into the chair that had been Daniel Webster's, where he did all his work and thinking, and whence were issued those challenges that had brought a long series of glorious victories to the gallant Holbrook Eleven.

Vaguely it seemed to the boy as though a challenge against overwhelming odds had reached him from some distant, unknown field, which must be played backed by no gallant team, and stimulated by no plaudits from a ring of enthusiastic spectators.

He read the unfinished letter on the desk again and once again:—

DEAR DICK,—I have been thinking for some time that I should like to come out to the ranch. I have not said anything about it yet to the girls, beyond dropping a hint now and then, that the wild and woolly West afforded a better scope for my talents than these scenes of an effete civilization. But they do not take kindly to the idea of

being left without a masculine protector. You need not trouble yourself to answer this letter, as there would be no time. I intend to start —"

Slowly, very slowly, Bobby tore the letter to fragments, that, one by one, he dropped into the waste-paper basket.

"It would n't be the square thing!" he thought. "The girls have behaved like bricks. I can tell old Shattuck and the fellows that Dick is coming home, so they need n't think I 've backed down. I must face it out — somehow — and not blow on Jack!"

CHAPTER FOUR

"WHAT in the world is Betty doing?" demanded Nan, fretfully. "She has been up and down stairs a dozen times in the last ten minutes!" A tremendous thump at every step announced some burden in Betty's arms in her last ascent, and a prolonged giggle apparently greeted some one above.

"Playing with Evangeline and Maud Courtenay," answered Lou, who was hurrying to keep an engagement with Susie Crossman. Chris was in town on one of those afternoons of aimless wandering in which her discontent sought solace, and to which she was wont to refer as necessitated by "innumerable errands," with the preoccupied air of one whose time is amply engrossed by social duties. Nan presently left the house to sketch a certain favorite group of willows by the river, and the children had full sway at home.

Since Colonel Jerome's approaching visit had become the chief subject of family discussion, Betty had been the self-appointed chairman of a committee of ways and means for the proper entertainment of the expected guest. Her first project was to supply the requisite funds by writing a book. The title of the projected volume was "The Young Housekeepers, or Life in America."

"Nice comprehensive title!" commented Bobby. "Why don't you call it 'Girls, or Life in the World?'"

The first chapter of this work, of indeterminate length, was read to Chris, who responded with a warmth sufficient to have satisfied the requirements of any but a budding author.

"I don't want you to say it's 'very good,' or 'very prettily written,'" sobbed Betty; "I want you to say, 'It's perfectly splendid!'"

Literary aspirations thus nipped in the bud, the next scheme was to paint a picture, of heroic size, of which a public exhibition was to be given. The subject was "The Day of Judgment;" the imagery of the "Book of Revelation," as interpreted by the artist's imagination, supplying the data. The Flood was also represented, while, with magnificent disregard of anachronism, a whale, with Jonah's legs disappearing into his interior, disported in a lurid expanse of vermilion and scarlet lake. Water naturally suggested a bridge, and as that which spanned the Holbrook River was the only one with which the artist was familiar, an electric car was added to the composition. Unfortunately for the world of art, Nan discovered the larceny of her best brushes and most expensive paints, and Betty was left wailing over her unfinished masterpiece.

The crushed author and artist descended to trade. Molasses candy seemed to offer an easy and agreeable road to the wealth that was denied loftier aims. Betty and her chosen friend, Evangeline Bean, went into

partnership, forgetting to turn off the spigot of the molasses keg, to the unbounded disgust of Bobby, who on his next visit to the furnace found himself ankle-deep in a sticky morass. The two children set up shop with a toy dining-table and two big rocking-chairs, near a convenient gap in the hedge; without was displayed the placard, — "Merlassess Candy for Sail. Price One Cent."

It was in the contract that if either partner wished to regale herself from the stock, she should pay a penny to the other member of the firm. Neither Betty nor Evangeline could understand, when the financial basis of operations was thus sound, why at the end of an hour the candy had disappeared, and the entire assets of the firm should consist of the original penny in Betty's pocket.

Evangeline — or, as her mother had preferred to christen her, Evangeline Bean — was a preternaturally tall, thin girl with a shrill high-pitched voice, and not over-clean wrists projecting from sleeves fringed with soiled and tawdry lace. When she made her appearance at school, there was a general disposition to avoid her. It was not so much the fact that her mother was a washerwoman that told against her in the estimation of the Holbrook children — little aristocrats, in unconscious imitation of their elders, though they undoubtedly were — as her unabashed swagger in the face of the general disfavor, her open disregard of rules, — it was considered ill-bred in the "Dudley Primary" to disobey one's

teacher, — and a disagreeable trick of giving a "last tag" to any one in her vicinity, with a violence that sent the victim of her sport reeling.

But Betty Dudley, whom every one liked, and who lived in the oldest house in town, stood stoutly up for the plebeian new-comer. She insisted that Evangeline should be included in the games at recess; and if the other little girls did not greet her politely when they met, then "They need n't say 'Hullo!' to me, either," declared Betty. This valiant championship had its effect, so that the present haughty fling of Evangeline's skirts — that always made one side of her frock appear shorter than the other — testified to a social status equal, nay, superior to any in Holbrook. Particularly in her relations with Betty, did Evangeline feel that the maintenance of a proper dignity demanded the unfailing assertion of opinions diametrically opposed to any expressed by her friend.

Maud Courtenay, on the contrary, yielded meekly to Betty's sway, although their natural predilections were at variance. Maud delighted in playing "keep house," and in providing wardrobes, all in the latest fashion, for a large and interesting family of children. Betty had but one child, a rag baby whose lease of life was nothing short of miraculous, considering the hair-breadth escapes from Indians and shipwrecks, sharks and wolves, in which, with her dauntless mamma, she had borne a part. She had been flung as a sacrifice to heathen crocodiles; she had felt the wheels of Juggernaut —

represented by a wheelbarrow — pass over her tender body, and had many times given up her life upon the scaffold; Bobby's mechanical ingenuity of late having taken a sanguinary form, and Milly was a willing victim — at least, so far as her mamma was concerned — for gallows or guillotine. If, on a rainy afternoon Betty was beguiled into making a sorely needed garment for this worse than orphaned child, the task was accomplished by snipping a hole in a rag, slipping Milly's head through, and girdling her with a bit of twine.

Philly Carr — a fair-haired, dimpled little fellow, whose mission in life seemed to be that of being petted and "cuddled" — completed the dramatic company that Betty's tireless endeavor had now organized. Although too young for a speaking part, Philly was an invaluable member of the troupe, as he could be utilized as baby or Puck, cherub, pappoose, or newsboy, as the exigencies of the drama required. While the managerial staff, consisting of Betty and Evangeline, consulted regarding the preliminary arrangements, Philly pounded the floor with a pair of Indian clubs surreptitiously obtained from Bobby's room, and Maud tried the effect of the various wardrobe properties upon her pretty face and dainty figure, casting backward glances of intense satisfaction as she promenaded the room in Chris's best black silk gown. A new idea presently seizing Philly, he seated himself upon the trailing breadths, on which improvised sledge Maud dragged him up and down the room, to the speedy detriment of seams and gathers.

"Those of the audience who want a chair must pay two cents, while one cent should be the price for seats on the floor," stated Betty.

"They 'll all sit on the floor," retorted Evangeline. "The floor is about as good as a chair, when the chair has n't any legs or arms or back, and not much of any seat," — a proposition which, however incontrovertible in the abstract, plainly called for contradiction in the special instance.

"I thank you, if you please, Miss Bean; but we have plenty of chairs that have just as many legs as you have," answered Betty, who, too generous to retort unhandsomely, sought by superior elegance of language and manners to show Evangeline delicately, but unmistakably, the difference in their social status; but, unhappily, Betty's elegance frequently got in the way of coherency. "Besides," she added, "we prefer to put our old chairs in the attic, instead of in the drawing-room for best, if you please, for company to come down ker-splash on the floor," — an allusion to a recent catastrophe in the Bean drawing-room, which was also dining-room and kitchen, that momentarily silenced Evangeline. Betty was not slow to perceive and follow up so unusual an advantage.

"I suppose you never heard of Colonel Jerome, Evangeline?" she inquired with pitying condescension.

"Who might he be?" queried the guest, recovering her poise.

"He is a friend of my brother's, who is coming all the

way from Montana to visit us," explained Betty. "He is the nephew of his uncle and owns the interior of the earth."

"Is it there he lives?" queried Evangeline, with finely assumed interest.

"I guess if you knew all the gold and diamonds there are inside of us, you 'd wish you knew him!" Betty's imagination, fanned by Bobby's happy flight of fancy, took fire from her own words, and she continued: "All Colonel Jerome has to do when he wants money is to take his knife and scrape away the earth and dig up heaps of gold dollars. Perhaps you 'll see him when he comes down the street," she kindly held out the hope.

"How will I know him from any other man?" questioned Evangeline, with a manifest sarcasm that goaded Betty to higher flights of fancy.

"He is ten feet tall, and wears a buffalo robe over his shoulders, and carries a tomahawk and a big club," she described. As she spoke, she could actually see her brother's friend, in his classic-Indian attire, striding beneath the elms of quiet Holbrook. "He has epaulets on his shoulders that make him invisible," she went on, "and a sword a fairy gave him. When the nindians see him coming, they run. But he steps along after them, soft-gee-whiz, a mile a minute, and cuts off every one of their heads and kills them fatally dead. And then he shakes his big club at the rest and laughs 'Ha ha!'"

"I think it 's wrong to kill the Indians, when they welcomed Columbus so kindly to these shores," said Evangeline, taking refuge in virtue and history. "I presume likely that your brother has killed a good many, too."

"I thank you, if you please, but if my brother kills the nindians, my sister sends the loveliest bonnets to them," returned Betty, letting drop no corner of her dignity.

"Ho! for mourning?" queried Evangeline, with a show of reason.

"For morning and for evening," answered her friend, loftily; "she trims them for the oppyrah!"

Lou had once lent her talent to St. Barnabas' annual consignment to the Indians. An uprising in the neighborhood of Dick's ranch, that filled the home circle with alarm, was ascribed by Bobby to the effect of this millinery.

The utility man, who had been listening, open-mouthed, to the description of the Dudleys' desirable guest, rolled off his sledge with a howl of terror. "I want marmar," he roared, running to the door as fast as his fat little legs would carry him.

"Oh, no, Philly dear, the giant sha'n't get you!" cried Betty, putting her arms around the little fellow. "Besides, he 's a good giant, and he 'll give you a ride on his shoulders."

"Want a wide now," lisped Philly, drying his tears.

"Evangeline and I will carry you round the room in an easy-chair," proposed Betty.

By the time the third round was completed, Philly had forgotten his terror; his bearers, depositing him in an old crib, fastened him in till such time as his services should be required.

"I shall be Lady Katharine Douglas," began Maud. "I choose this feather for my hair," displaying a dirty yellow plume of which not much was left but the quill. Lou could never bring herself to part with anything in the way of feather or flower, although the treasured "millinery-box" was little more than a euphemism for rag-bag. "The lining of this quilt, with ink spots, will look like ermine, and that cape will make a lovely train." Maud eyed admiringly a mantle of bottle-green moire antique that might have dated back to the days of the Puritan founder of the house of Dudley. "There is a picture of Lady Katharine in the library at home," she added. "Sometimes sister Meg sits and looks at it without speaking."

"What did she do?" questioned Betty, who liked to hear stories as well as to write them.

Maud had listened to the dauntless deed of brave, beautiful Lady Katharine so many times that she could repeat the tale almost in her sister's own words.

"King James of Scotland rode forth with a great company to hold a feast at Perth," she began. "When he reached the river, he was met by an old woman, who warned him to go no farther; 'for,' said she, 'tis known that upon a November eve a King of Scotland shall be slain.'"

"How 'd she know?" queried Betty, practically.

"Witch," suggested Evangeline, succinctly.

"Sister Meg says there are no such people as witches," returned Maud.

"The Bible says so," maintained Evangeline, taking refuge again in virtue. "Besides, there 's 'Old Sukey'!"

"Old Sukey" was a personage who lived under the cellar stairs at school, lying in wait to seize by the legs and drag into captivity any unwary little boy or girl who ventured into the basement after dark. No mortal eye had ever beheld this uncanny old woman, but her existence was an established fact in the minds of all the Holbrook children, so that Evangeline's allusion was accepted as indisputable evidence of the existence of witches.

"Don't you interrupt again!" commanded Betty; "it is n't polite!"

"King James laughed the old woman's words to scorn," Maud resumed. "He reached the castle in safety; as midnight drew near, the revelry waxed loud and high, and none heard the tramp of mailed feet in the courtyard, till all at once arose the cry, swelling from a murmur to the loud, fierce demand, —

"'The King, the King!'

"Traitors were hot upon the track of King Jamie! Even at that awful moment there were some who did not lose their presence of mind. Behind the arras of the banqueting-hall was a panel that opened into a secret passage leading to the postern gate. The King might thus escape if only a few minutes could be

gained. Some of his friends rushed to secure the outer door, but the traitors had been before them, and the bolt was gone.

"Then Katharine Douglas ran to the door and lifting her arm, placed it as a bar. The next moment blows, hot and heavy, rained without upon the panels, but she did not falter until her arm was broken and she fell, senseless, to the floor. Then the traitors rushed in, but the King was no longer there!"

"Did n't they get him?" questioned Betty, breathlessly.

"Yes, they did, after all," answered Maud. "They set off in pursuit, and overtook him before he had gone very far."

"Poh! then what good did it do? Lady Katharine had her pains for nothing," scoffed Evangeline.

"It 's lovely to hear about, anyway," replied Betty, "and it makes me wish I could do something splendid for somebody, too! But there are n't any kings nowadays, and all the doors have locks."

"I 'd rather have been the witch," commented Evangeline. "She had more sense than to give herself away for nothing."

"I wonder which I 'd be?" pondered Maud.

"It 'll make a splendiferous tableau, anyway," said Betty, returning to business. "Philly can be the armed traitors and drum outside the door."

"I can drum Peter Piper," called out the utility man, enchanted with his rôle.

"But they didn't know Peter Piper in Scotland," objected Maud.

"It's my house," returned the stage-manager, firmly. "I don't care whether they knew Peter Piper in Scotland or not; if they didn't, they'd oughter. When people pay two cents for a show, they want their money's worth. I'm going to be the King. You can kick on the door, Evangeline, but don't you come in till I tell you to."

"If I'm going to do anything, I am going to do it before folks," rebelled Evangeline. "You needn't think you can poke us all into the entry and have the stage to yourself, if it is your house, Betty Dudley! I mean to be an angel. I'll be dressed all in white, with wings covered with red, white, and blue. We'll put Philly to bed, and I shall be bending over him, singing, 'Angels ever bright and fair,'" warbled Evangeline, at the highest pitch of her thin, nasal voice.

Philly, overhearing the allusion to the one event of his little life of which he stood most in dread, succeeded in scrambling out of the crib and made the best of his way home.

Maud, tired of "dressing up," soon after slipped from the room, and Betty and Evangeline, finding themselves deserted by the rest of the troupe, decided that the rehearsal should be considered at an end.

"Do you have ice-cream at your house?" queried Evangeline.

"What do you s'pose!" answered Betty, scornfully.

"We have it 'most every day for dinner and supper. We have chocolate and vanilla and strawberry; and sometimes we freeze bananas and cherries in it. Oo, oo!" and she pursed her rosy little mouth into an expression of ineffable rapture.

"Let's make some now," suggested her friend.

"We have it so much I'm sick of it," returned Betty. "I'll read you the 'Young Housekeepers,' instead."

"I guess you need n't," answered Evangeline, hastily. "I think I'll be going home now, since you don't dass make ice-cream. Last tag!" She held up two crossed fingers in token that a return "tag" would be innocuous.

Betty's thirst for society rendered the threat of "going home" an always potent one, while anything in the nature of a "dare" would have been at any time sufficient motive for her to risk her neck.

"Oh, well, Evangeline," said she, loftily, "if you would like some ice-cream, I don't know but what we'll make it. We'll take the freezer into the dining-room, because it's pleasanter than the kitchen — although I'm sure your kitchen is a beautiful room," added Betty, hastily. "Your stove is always so nice and shiny, and the clothes-horse is so kind of sociable. It looks just like a screen."

After prolonged effort, the two children succeeded in fitting together the several parts of the freezer. The ice was then put into napkins and well pounded with the pastry-pin.

"You must beat the eggs one at a time," announced

Betty, with a confused recollection of seeing Nan at work.

Evangeline followed these directions with so much vigor that the cup into which the egg was dropped was speedily shattered.

"Our only whole cup!" wailed Betty, momentarily forgetful of the family magnificence. "Put them in whole; eggs are eggs," she added philosophically. "I did n't tell you to put in the shells, too, Evangeline Bean."

"It slipped out of my fingers," explained Evangeline, fishing unsuccessfully for the fragments. "Maybe you 'd like to do some of the work yourself," she suggested, as Betty, kneeling in a chair, with her elbows on the table, continued to give forth her mandates. "Sugar and plenty of it. You must keep turning all the time, or it will stick. Let me taste."

After the mixture had been tasted to the extent of several liberal spoonfuls, Betty decreed that there should be more sugar. Evangeline thought the contrary. In the ensuing altercation over the sugar-bowl, each child tugging in a contrary direction, the pretty Wedgwood bowl parted. Evangeline fell over backward, with a wild clutch at the table-cloth, that brought plates and glasses with her to the floor; and Betty, in an effectual effort to keep her balance, plunged both knees through the seat of her chair. These mishaps put an end to any further experiments in ice-cream making, particularly when another peep into the can revealed the

fact that the specky, blotchy mixture was still liquid, the necessity of adding salt to the ice being unknown to either operator.

"A watched pot won't boil; maybe a watched freezer won't friz," suggested Betty. "Let's leave it and go play 'I spy.'

Meanwhile a stream of dirty water, impregnated with rust, continued to pour from the neglected bung-hole, hopelessly staining tablecloth and carpet. The rest of the family were assembled at the tea-table when Betty appeared, her rosy little face rising like a flower from its calyx, from out the Puritan collar that in moments of its wearer's excitement always inverted itself. A chorus arose like unto that which greeted "Little Golden Locks" in the house of the "Three Bears."

"Who spoilt our only table-cloth and reduced our last napkins to rags?" demanded Chris.

"Who ruined the one good breadth of carpet on which Colonel Jerome was to fix his gaze?" queried Nan.

"Who smashed the last cup and broke the seat of the only whole chair?" questioned Lou.

The glow left "Little Golden Locks'" face as she looked beseechingly from one to another of her sisters; her eyes began to fill.

"But it is not of the slightest consequence," asseverated Bobby, politely. "It was merely an idle impulse that led us to inquire. Life in the wigwam has, doubtless, led Colonel Jerome to despise table-cloths and napkins, as evidences of an effete civilization. He will

prefer a tin dipper to a cup; the thought that we have no whole chair to offer him need not weigh upon our souls. Colonel Jerome never sits down; he belongs to the standing army."

"Wha-at?"

"Betty, be silent!" said Bobby, warningly. "To have a joke explained is a blot that has never been upon our 'scutcheon."

CHAPTER FIVE

"MRS. COURTENAY called this afternoon and invited us, Nan and me, to a party to-morrow evening," announced Chris, at the supper-table. "It is just an impromptu little affair for Miss Herbert," she added, in the off-hand manner of one to whom "little affairs," formal or informal, were every-day matters.

"Dear me, I must make a note in my engagement book," observed Nan, caustically.

"Did n't she ask Lou and me, too?" demanded Betty. "I don't care, I call it mean!" she went on wrathfully, as Chris responded sharply in the negative. "The longer I grow older, the more I don't go out so much!"

"Betty," said Bobby, in a tone of gentle remonstrance, "an eminent authority has stated that 'the Greek became little and hungry and every man's errand-boy, all from his spirit of competition and love of talk.'"

"My precious Robin!" ejaculated Lou, who if her little brother had voiced sentiments of burglary, assault and battery, and incendiarism, would have still beamed fond approval.

"Mrs. Courtenay is a fat, waddlesome old lady," pronounced Betty. "Every time she sees me she asks how

old I am, and if I like to slide on the cellar door. I should think she 'd know by this time that I don't grow a year a day, and I never slid on a cellar door in my life!" After this ebullition of feeling Betty subsided into unwonted silence, listening eagerly the while to the discussion between her elders that followed.

"Mrs. Courtenay said that we were to be sure to come early," said Chris. "I consider nine o'clock quite early enough for any evening function," she added loftily.

"What shall you wear?" questioned Lou, with interest.

"Betty spoilt my black silk gown just as I had remodelled it," sighed Chris, her bright anticipations momentarily clouded. "One always feels prepared to go anywhere with a black silk dress in her wardrobe. But no matter," she went on, in her usual happy way of making the best of things; "they are wearing so many combinations and colors this winter that I can easily get up something pretty and picturesque between now and to-morrow night. You 'll go, won't you, Nan?" she added anxiously. "I 'm ashamed always to carry your regrets."

"You have n't had to carry them but once, because we 've never been asked anywhere before except to Mrs. Carr's to tea," answered Nan, who was sadly given to pricking the little bubbles of her sister's social aspirations. "And you did n't want to go there yourself, either, because you said Mr. Carr always conversed with you about St. Paul."

"'There is a worthy kind of man, with cobwebs in his head,
Who lives in sweet communion with the ages that are dead,'"

assented Chris, merrily.

"Besides, I've nothing to wear but year before last's gown," continued Nan. "But I'll help you," she added, with a generosity whose root may have been the perception that so handsome an offer would be a short and easy way out of any fancied necessity of going to the party herself. Chris gratefully accepted the proffered assistance, and began planning how to evolve something out of nothing.

Faithful to her promise, early the following morning, Nan entered her sister's room, to find Chris busily engaged in snipping at an old white corduroy coat of Betty's infancy, somewhat to the indignation of its whilom owner, who had claimed it for the rag-bag. Lou was lovingly turning over the contents of the millinery box, and Betty, having successfully begged for a holiday, sat on the edge of the bed, a deeply interested spectator of the gala preparations.

"I'm making it like that," explained Chris, nodding to a fashion book, open at a plate of an elaborate "picture" gown supposed to represent the costume of a court lady of the time of Sir Peter Lely. "Bobby's old green velveteen knickerbockers will make the vest, and the Marguerite pocket will hide the worn place on the front breadth of the skirt, the old figured taffeta that's been hanging in the attic for the last fifty years, you know," she concluded triumphantly.

"Shall you wear pockets on your elbows, too?" inquired Nan, with an air of polite interest.

"If you've come to make fun, you'd better go back to your paints and mud-pies!" retorted Chris, sharply.

"I've come to help," answered her sister, meekly, chafing her nose with her thimble by way of penance. "But just from weak-minded curiosity, would you allow me to ask what you are going to do about sleeves, or didn't Sir Peter like sleeves?" For it was the weak point in Chris's dressmaking that sleeves either failed to enter into her calculations at all, or by periodical fits of temporary insanity were cut both for one arm. For a moment she looked nonplussed. Then came inspiration.

"Betty, fetch me Great-Auntie's cape!" she cried. Betty, delighted to be of service, clattered up over the stairs and down again, bringing the bottle-green moire in which Lady Katharine might have defied the armed traitors. "It's a direct Providence," cried Chris, joyously, for the mantle proved a perfect match for the velveteen, and spreading out its voluminous folds, she added triumphantly, "There's plenty of material for those three big puffs," nodding to the banded balloon sleeves of the picture.

Even Nan was forced to an admiring admission of her sister's cleverness.

"Only, somehow," she added dubiously, "things look so different on paper from what they do made up. Your simple gowns are always a success, at least you

look like a lady in them, even if they are threadbare; but it requires a professional hand to fashion a gown like that and not have it rag-tag. Home society and home sympathy, although sometimes a little too pressing, may be very sweet; but when it comes to home dress-making and home millinery, my vote is for Foreign Manufacture and Free Trade."

But having thus freed her mind, she fell to work with such hearty good-will as to assure efficient aid. The slow-moving needle ill-suited Nan's impatient fingers; at the sewing-machine, however, she was in her element. It was as though a whirlwind had taken possession, when, with a vigorous turn of the wheel, and volts of energy directed to the treadle, she set off on a breathless race, unheedful of basting threads stitched in by the way, and sublimely disregardful of the necessity of fastening ends on a single-thread machine. But steadily as the two girls worked, it was not till after a hasty tea that the final stitch was taken, the last furbelow arranged, and Chris viewed herself complacently in the mirror by the somewhat uncertain light of the only lamp that happened to be filled, the student lamp having subsided into its phase of eclipse. In this twilight the image was one to give satisfaction. A soft little yellow feather in her hair harmonized admirably with the bunch of chrysanthemums, her own flowers, that she hugged to her breast closer than did ever the Spartan boy his ill-gotten gains, for much piecing and patching of the velveteen, that proved to be sadly worn about the

knees, had been necessary to insure the graceful folds approved by Sir Peter. Her fan, an elaborate affair of silk gauze, Watteau painting, and ivory sticks, a birthday gift of long ago, would be surpassed by none there, and her gloves, eked out to a suitable length by the addition of several "mousquetaire" wrists, collected from the family, did credit to her own ingenuity and Nan's vigorous scrubbing with crayon rubber.

By an unusual exercise of self-restraint, Nan refrained from criticism, Lou's encomiums were soul-warming, so that Chris set off for her first grown-up party filled with the pleasantest anticipations and the parting injunction to Bobby to call for her in due season.

As she approached the opposite house, she noted with momentary surprise that the drawing-room was not so brilliantly illumined as one would have expected for the occasion. Miss Meg came swiftly forward from the library with cordial greeting. It was not till Chris had thrown aside her "opera cloak" with airy nonchalance, saying, in her most pronounced "society" manner, "So good of you to remember us in this delightful way!" that a sudden wave of doubt swept over her. Miss Meg's attire was merely a pretty house-gown, and no buzz of conversation was audible from library or drawing-room. The thought whirled through the girl's brain, "Could she have been mistaken in the evening. Was it later than she supposed?"

As she beheld the elaborate gown, some fineness of intuition, aided by the sudden look of dismay on Chris's

face, may have given Miss Meg a clew to the situation, for she said quickly, —

"It was so good of you to come! I wanted Miss Herbert to meet our neighbors; there is so little opportunity of getting acquainted in the crowd and rush of a tea, you know, that I thought I would venture to ask you and your sister to spend a quiet evening with us."

Chris was hardly conscious of her reply, for at that moment to the agonized realization of her blunder was suddenly added the sight of her own reflection in the wide hall mirror. What a fantastic figure it was, as ridiculous as Betty, "dressed up" in cast-off finery! Yet even at that awful moment the girl's self-possession did not desert her, and giving smiling assent to Miss Meg's query, "Shall we join the others?" she followed her hostess to the library.

Upon its threshold a worse shock awaited her, and for a moment she stood in a sort of nightmarish paralysis. On the sofa sat Betty, very erect and very complacent, in the evident consciousness of suitable and becoming attire. What appeared to be the fleecy lining of an old quilt, liberally splashed with ink, was draped about her shoulders. An ostrich feather of which little was left but the quill was stuck into her braid at the nape of her neck, and depending loosely over her head, vibrated with every movement. Her hands, encased in an old pair of Bobby's white cotton drill gloves, from which a twisted length of finger tips projected like

a fakir's nails, wafted to and fro a huge feather fan, upon which was depicted a bird of Paradise embowered in cabbage roses.

"What will they think of us?" thought Chris, miserably, as, scarcely knowing what she said, she exchanged greetings with the others. At the first opportunity she made her way to the sofa. Betty's nonchalant air was a study.

"Go home this instant!" whispered Chris, sternly. "What do you mean by coming here like this, you naughty girl?"

"I thought probably Mrs. Courtenay forgot to ask me," answered Betty, in a strident whisper. "You know she always disremembers how old I am. Oh, how sweet you do look, Chrissy!" and Betty gazed into her sister's face with a fervor of innocent admiration. "The patch on your skirt doesn't show a bit, and nobody would ever guess that your waist was just nothing but Bobby's old knickerbockers, truly. My dress is like a picture, too;" and Betty nodded to a portrait over the mantel to whose costume her own array did, indeed, bear a sort of burlesque semblance. "When does the party begin, Chrissy?"

Miss Herbert became absorbed in her needlework. Grave Mr. Courtenay raised his newspaper to the level of his eyebrows. Young Mr. Courtenay coughed slightly, and Miss Meg arose, with the evident intention of coming to the rescue of her hapless guest. Chris, with a rapid change of base, made a last desperate appeal.

"Do go home, there's a dear, and I'll give you my coral necklace," she pleaded.

"Will you truly, for my ownty donty?" cried Betty rapturously, at the top of her voice. "Oh, yes, I'll go home just as soon as we have had the ice-cream and snappers. Besides, you know, you told Bobby not to come for us till quarter of twelve."

In the excitement of the munificent offer, Betty jumped from the sofa and set one foot firmly on the train of her sister's gown. Chris turned hastily, as Miss Meg approached. Crick went Nan's careless stitching, and a yard or more of the ruffles that had judiciously eked out the scanty breadths lay upon the floor. Betty, left mistress of the field, giggled with the peculiar zest that an accident always exerted upon her risibilities, and Miss Meg went down on her knees with condolence and pins.

How the remainder of that dreadful evening passed, Chris could not afterwards have told clearly. Miss Meg's efforts at conversation fell, one after another, to the ground. Miss Herbert palpably tried to reduce her remarks to the level of the intelligence of this shy, awkward girl, who seemed incapable of responding even to the veriest commonplaces. What could her friend have meant by telling her of those "three bright, pretty girls and the dear, funny child across the way?"

"The last resort for the stupid," thought Chris bitterly, as young Mr. Courtenay produced some foreign photographs, and with pleasant comment tried to interest the guest.

Meantime Betty, on the sofa, was watching her sister's every movement, copying with ludicrous fidelity each turn of Chris's head and wave of her fan, in such perfect faith that she could not go astray with so faultless a model, that every moment Chris grew more miserably conscious that it was only by a supreme effort of good breeding that her hosts were able to suppress their laughter.

The appointed hour came and went; but Bobby did not appear, and when at midnight Chris faltered that she must go home, she had had a most delightful evening, it was young Mr. Courtenay who escorted her and Betty across the way, — Chris silent with mortification, and Betty chattering in high glee as she clasped their companion's hand. The elder girl's spirit had been brought too low for her to utter a word of reproach, and Betty went to bed supremely happy over her good time.

On Chris's tardy appearance at the breakfast-table, she was greeted by a shower of questions concerning the previous evening.

"It is the strangest thing that I cannot go anywhere without this entire family thinking they have the right to know everything that was said, done, worn, and eaten," she responded pettishly.

"Of course we expect it," answered Bobby, blandly. "It was part of our charter of rights and liberties, drawn up when we agreed to be a family, to have a free and full statement of all the acts, thoughts, and intentions

of every individual therein, to be delivered at the table, in common council assembled. This unprecedented and unwarrantable silence on your part conceals something which it is our duty to fathom."

At this moment Betty entered the room, still beaming with the recollection of last night's festivity.

"Did n't we have a be-you-tiful time, Chrissy?" she began. "Nobody wore gloves but Chrissy and me," she went on, turning to her interested audience. "There was nobody there but us. We had the party all to ourselves, did n't we, Chrissy?"

The direct appeal was more than flesh and blood could bear.

"It was very naughty of you to go, Betty," answered Chris, sharply, "and I was greatly mortified at the way you looked and behaved."

"And so was I mortified, too, at the way you looked and behaved," retorted Betty, wrathfully. "You dropped all to pieces, and Miss Meg had to pin you together, and you stayed so long that Mrs. Courtenay fell asleep in her chair and snored; and I don't care," wailed Betty; "you 're always telling me I must n't say 'What?' to everything, and you said it yourself four times when Miss Herbert asked, 'Were n't we having fine weather?'"

An expressive silence followed these revelations, succeeded by a chorus of laughter.

"I hope I shall be as much of a success when I come out," suggested Nan. "I told you the dress would be

ridiculous. You 'd better keep to the costumes of the present century and not rely on Sir Peter for the fashions."

"That you, hitherto regarded as the show member of our family, should thus bring discredit upon your fond and trusting little brother and sisters!" chimed in Bobby.

"There were at least six pieces in the wrists of those gloves. None of them matched," added Lou, reflectively. "I thought I would n't tell you, last night, because it might have made you sort of uncomfortable," she added, with sisterly consideration.

"There never was such a family! I 'm sure — it 's very unkind — of you all," said Chris brokenly, pushing her chair from the table. "It was a perfectly natural mistake," she added, with a futile attempt at dignity. "Mrs. Courtenay never gets anything straight, and how was I to know that when she spoke of 'company' she was n't referring to a party at all, but only to Miss Herbert?"

For a while Chris was exceedingly vulnerable to any allusion to that unfortunate evening; but by degrees she became less sensitive and even, at last, stonily indifferent, when Bobby offered excuse for his tardy appearance at the breakfast-table with the words, "A ball last night given by some friends in the 'Beyond' kept me up beyond our usual primitive hour of retirement at eight o'clock." Or prefacing his entrance into the room by thrusting his head cautiously through a crack of the

door, he would whisper, "Is there a party here? One is likely to stumble on a party, these dark nights, at any corner;" and slowly emerging into view in a robe fashioned from a Navajo blanket and announcing, "My picture dress!" with a flourish of an imaginary tomahawk, he would swoop upon Betty, who showed her appreciation of her brother's humor by a torrent of mingled tears and giggles.

But, undreamt of by Chris, a time of wonderful brightness was in store for her, and it was out of the darkness of that memorable evening that it was to dawn.

CHAPTER SIX

"SHOULDER arms. More snap. I saw you wink. Try that again. Don't breathe!"

Lou, with Bobby's "soldier" cap on her pretty head, went through the manual with the glibness of a drill-sergeant, till "Parade Rest" was reached, the company grounded arms and saluted.

"Very good, Robin. Colonel Jerome himself could n't do it better," said Lou, approvingly.

"Officers don't carry guns," explained Bobby, patiently. Not but what Lou, for a girl, was fairly conversant with military tactics and had already proved herself an efficient drill-master.

"More 's the pity," she responded equably. "I would carry a gun if I were a brigadier-general, — one of the kind that shoots the enemy before he 's in sight, and no fair shooting back."

"Let's go into the garden, and get some nuts for the candy," suggested Bobby.

Sunday morning all of the family went decorously to church. In the afternoon they followed the bent of their individual inclinations. Chris was at the piano warbling, with her head on one side, the fragment of a sentimental ditty, —

"Meet me to-night, dearest, down by the gate;
Longingly, anxiously, for thee I wait—"

Bobby had scoffingly supplied the remainder of the quatrain, —

"Hustle, because I have stood here a year,
Longing and anxious for you to appear!"

Nan bent herself to the recovery of articles "lost or missing" during the week, generally by reason of her own carelessness or absent-mindedness, but which she darkly hinted had disappeared by some one's connivance or through some mysterious bogy agency.

"I would keep memoranda of the places where I put things," she said despairingly, "only I should lose the memoranda too."

"So you would," assented Chris, laughing.

"You need n't be so ready with your response," retorted Nan, with unlooked-for acerbity. "One may make a prayer, but nobody wants the clerk to say 'Amen!'"

Lou had been conjuring up a faithful imitation of a bonnet seen during the morning service. Betty and Evangeline were making molasses candy.

The squirrels had already possessed themselves of the nuts, and Bobby and Lou, seating themselves in the crotch of the Judas tree, watched the little creatures as they chased one another along the piazza or over the lawn, in the happy immunity from harm that had been theirs for generations.

"Lou, I have an awful lot of worries," began Bobby,

and ran his fingers through his hair. Every morning could Bobby say, with Brutus, "This parting was well made!" But at the first mental perturbation the rebellious locks were reduced to the bang despised by their owner as "sissy," but regarded by Lou as the most irresistible of her little brother's attractions.

"I hope it won't make your hair fall out, Robin dear," she returned tenderly. "I could n't love a bald little brother."

"The fact is, Lou," Bobby went on, "I have not a penny in the world, and I am head over ears in debt, besides. I was under so many obligations that the other day, when I treated, I cleaned out the Emporium. But Griff can wait, and so can Lucy — I owe him a little jag, too. But I 'm in a regular fix about the *Snark*. There is no doubt but what it has been running down hill for some time. I 've such a lot to attend to, particularly now it 's football season, that I 've had to leave a good deal of business to the assistant editors. Taffy Dabney is business editor, you know. He can work to beat the band when he 's fit, but after he 's been stuffing with taffy and fudge, he 's good for about as much as a bag of meal. He has a wheel in his head, too, half the time, and then the affairs of the *Snark* get left. He does n't go the rounds after ads., he has n't canvassed the school for new subscriptions, or shown any enterprise in getting names outside. His private credit, too, is n. g., and that has reflected to a damaging extent on the paper. Last

year he borrowed a little jag of Lucy, who always has money to burn, then struck Hayti to pay Lucy; and when Hayti went for him, got a lend from Jack, till he'd gone through the class, the size of the loan increasing with each fellow he struck, till his rotary debt amounted to a tidy lot. He's working up the Juniors now, and I think it's a beastly shame!" concluded Bobby, warmly. "Taffy's smart — there's no doubt of that — and we thought we were doing a good thing when we made him business editor, but his methods are not o. k."

"Does n't Lucy pull fair?" inquired Lou, sympathetically. "He's exchange editor, is n't he?"

"It's Lucy who's going to be the ruination of the *Snark*," groaned Bobby. "He's a smooth fellow all right, except when girls are in it, and then there's no reckoning on him. Since he's been friends with Susie Crossman, we've been brought to the verge of bankruptcy. The public will not subscribe to a periodical conducted on our present system."

The last number of the *Snark* had contained a love story by Susie Crossman — who wrote under the *nom de plume* of "Psyche" — that had been dragging its slow length along since the journal had come under its present management. A full-page poem entitled "Drifting or Sailing?" moral enough to have swamped all the Sunday-school literature in the land, and several sonnets and "Monodies" considerately labelled "Thoughts," also signed "Psyche." In addition,

there was an article on the planet Mars, adapted by the exchange editor — who dabbled lightly in astronomy — from a recent article in the *Popular Science Monthly*. Into the meagre space that was left, was crowded the news from the ball field, a few paragraphs concerning the "Company," and a lively column headed "Personal," the last-named department bringing on, regularly, a pitched battle between the editorial staff and those honored by the journalistic notice.

"I wish the fellows would send more copy," Bobby continued. "It's no use telling them it's their duty to build up the paper, for the credit of the school. They say the *Snark* isn't a credit, but a crying disgrace; that all the other schools laugh at it, and it's only fit for a Sunday-school kindergarten, and they won't subscribe themselves, and are ashamed to ask their relatives and friends to subscribe. You don't know what an editor has to contend with! Besides, there will never be room for live up-to-date articles as long as Lucy is smitten on Susie Crossman. Look here!"

The harassed editor turned his pockets inside out, and disentangled several sheets of fashionable-hued paper from out a mass of nutshells, pieces of string, football keys, apple-cores, and "wobs" of linen, that had done duty, indifferently, as handkerchiefs, towels, bicycle rags, and bandages for bruised fingers.

"All this stuff is from 'Psyche,' — or 'Pishy,' as Lucy ignorantly calls her. I don't know why she should have chosen such a pseudonym, for her appearance is

less suggestive of the butterfly than of the grub. But if she would only be more cheerful in her literary style, I would overlook any extravagance in her conception of the fitness of things. Here 's a ' Requiem.' It begins, —

> ' Now wherefore this sorrow and sadness,
> And wherefore this heart-rending moan — '

" I wrapped the bait in some of the copy the other day, when we went fishing, and Lucy got mad and said our contributor's articles should be treated with more respect. But I think it was the worms who should have kicked. Here 's another, called ' Desolation,' —

> ' Oh, cooing dove in yonder tree,
> Had I your plumy wings of snow,
> I 'd spread them wide and soar and flee
> Beyond the reach of all below,
> From care and strife and sorrow free.'

" I wish she would soar and flee to — to Sirius, and that Lucy would soar with her, and do his billing and cooing in another than the solar system," groaned the editor. " Lucy calls that a ' gem.' He actually expressed that opinion in the editorial column ! The other fellows put it on me, and the exchanges have all been asking for more ' gems.' Lucy is positively so befogged by his love affairs that he takes all the chaff as a genuine tribute to ' Pishy's' genius, and is more puffed up in his own conceit than ever. What awaits us in the near future if this sort of thing continues, no fellow can say. If I beg Psyche to boil down her productions, you 'd think I was referring to

her grandmother; and if I venture to cut out a syllable from her poems, — some of the lines have as many feet as a centipede, — she won't dance with Lucy the next recess, and then he comes down on me like a ton of brick. If I don't read every article the instant it is received, and clap it into the next issue, Susie cries and Lucy says I 'm unfit for my responsible position. When I 've been goaded to desperation and have rejected a manuscript, he 's brought it back and said, ' Susie is awfully cut up about this. We really must take it ! ' I hate to say ' no ' to Lucy. Besides, I 'm under no end of obligations to him. I never have to put my hand in my pocket when he is around. Lucy has always treated me very smooth ! "

" Susie likes you better than Lucy," said Lou, not as one betraying a confidence, but as admitting to a precious secret. " She asked me, the other day, for a lock of your hair. I think that one at present dangling into your right eye would make her happy for life."

" Did you give it to her ? " demanded Bobby, fiercely.

" No, Robin love," answered his sister, soothingly. " You have n't had your hair cut lately, you know," she added. Something in her tone suggested the possibility of having acceded to so eminently natural a request had circumstances permitted, to which Bobby responded rather than to the actual words, with a determination like unto that which Samson might have displayed, had he foreseen the result of Delilah's wiles.

"I will never have my hair cut again! I will wear it until it is long enough to tie up with a blue ribbon. If I ever know of a single hair of mine being in the possession of Susie Crossman, I — I will scalp everybody in Holbrook, so that her idiotic desires may not be gratified," threatened Bobby, feeling that the way was indeed dark when such pitfalls lurked in the very sanctity of home. "Why does n't she transfer her affections to Lucy, who is pining for them, and would give her his whole poll if she wanted it?"

"I think Susie is lovely," cried Lou, loyally anxious to defend her friend, and considering "Psyche's" affection, misplaced though it appeared to be, too natural for reprehension. "She has written some lovely poetry about you, too; there 's something in it about your 'wavy bronze hair.' By and by she is going to publish a collection of her poems, and the one about you is to be the first in the book."

"Does it begin with 'Only'?" questioned Bobby, desperately.

"Every verse," answered Lou, reassuringly.

Language failed him, and Bobby could only groan.

"The fellows in the City High School, whom we licked out of sight in last year's match," he resumed presently, "have been lying low ever since, to get square with us. They have just got up an idiotic paper called *Cupid's Own*, 'devoted to the h'Arts.' I suppose they think they 're clever all right!" went on Bobby, in tones of the deepest disgust. "Everybody in town has been

asking me if I 've seen it. I would issue a big supplement, clean out all the stuff we have on hand and cut the concern, but I can't do that as long as we are in debt to the printer. Besides, the *Snark* is a school affair. It would n't be the square thing to give it up at present, and nobody would take the editorship while matters are in this condition."

"Would n't Lucy help you out?" suggested Lou.

"Lucy has been on the staff only this year," explained her brother. "The debt has been accumulating for two or three years — ever since I 've been editor, in fact. You know I was chosen exchange editor in the Junior year. Peterson — the printer — has never dunned us; but he is hard up himself, I suppose, and now that Lucy, whose dad has more rocks than any one in town, is on the staff, he has been pressing for payment. It is really a personal debt, you see, at least so far as Lucy is concerned."

"I wish I could lend you some money, Robin dear," said Lou, wistfully. "I have n't much, but you 'd be welcome to it; only you know we all agreed to save up against Dick's return."

"You 're a dear, Lou," responded Bobby, warmly; "but of course that would n't do, now that we 're all making common cause," — with a magnificence that took no heed of the gloomy state of his own finances. "Nan generally had some spare cash on hand, and was perfectly ready to lend it. Girls have n't so much use for money as fellows. Of course, I always

gave her my 'I. O. U.,' but in a day or two I would find it under my plate at breakfast. But now she wants every red, too. The hens have n't been laying lately, either. They always do go on a strike when they know I 'm hard up, — the beasts!"

Bobby's hens were a Plymouth Rock breed, that evidenced their Puritan ancestry by a narrowness and obstinacy past belief. They never came to their meals at the proper hours, preferred the chance pickings of every kitchen door in the neighborhood to the good, nutritious corn meal that was placed regularly before them — frequently followed up by the spoon with which the mixture had been stirred, when Bobby was goaded to desperation by their contumacy — and laying their eggs, when they condescended to lay any, in the most hidden and inaccessible places. They displayed a reckless disregard, too, for every canon of the poultry yard, giving utterance to a piercing 'cut-cut-cutdahcut!' whenever vainglory prompted, absolutely conscienceless as to the deceit thus practised, while the clarion call of the leader of the brood, Miles Standish, was as likely to sound at midnight as at morn.

"You see," concluded Bobby, shying a walnut shell at Priscilla, who, with her head coquettishly on one side, was giving vent to a cackle that might have signalized the Roc's egg, "since we resolved to do the smooth thing by Dick, I 've been kind of taking account of stock."

"I thought Jack Burnham was elected business editor last June," said Lou, suddenly.

"He was; but he resigned at the beginning of this term," answered Bobby, briefly.

"Susie told me that he had resigned from nearly everything. What is he doing?" Lou's interest in school affairs had not ceased with leaving school.

She was watching Bobby narrowly. Burning with curiosity though she was concerning the broken relations of her little brother and his friend, this was the first allusion to Jack Burnham that had crossed her lips since the latter's election as Captain.

"How do I know!" answered Bobby, impatiently. "Girls are always asking fool questions!"

Lou flushed and opened her lips to retort; but with an unwonted effort of self-control, she held her peace and said with apparent irrelevance, —

"Never mind, my Robin. Some day you shall be President of the United States!"

"I do not know that I am particularly anxious to be President," returned Bobby, "as *he* was" — in the reverent tones in which he always referred to Daniel Webster. "But I should like to stand in the place of Thomas Dudley. I should like to write my name, 'Robert Dudley, *By the grace of God Governor of Massachusetts!*'"

"Thomas Dudley, he," said Lou, in unconscious imitation of "Biglow Papers," "was an old Turk, and I should n't want to have a little brother like him. He wrote worse poetry than 'Pishy,' though he had sense enough to keep it dark till after his death, or he would

never have carried the gubernatorial campaign. For all he was so aggravatingly polite, he made everybody stand around for him in a way that makes me glad he is very dead. And every single one of this family" — Lou had a way of referring to "this family," as though she did not belong to it — "is just exactly like him, particularly Betty. Don't you remember how old Nurse Ransom used to say," she concluded merrily, "'The Dudleys are the perlitest children, but the sottest!' Let's go in, or Betty and Evangeline will have eaten all the candy."

CHAPTER SEVEN

"THE meeting will come to order!" said Bobby, with a thundering rap of the dumb-bell utilized as a gavel, and an emphasis that betokened anticipation of trouble in carrying out the motion.

The assistant editors, who had been lunging at each other with foils, obeyed the chief's mandate by dropping, the one on the bed, where he proceeded to make himself comfortable amongst the pillows; the other into the little black rocking-chair, whence he was unceremoniously ejected by its owner.

"I say, Bobby, you ought n't to do that, you know," remonstrated the exchange editor, sitting on the floor in his favorite Turk fashion and rubbing his elbows. "I might n't recover from the shock for the rest of my natural life. Anybody would think that that ramshackle old chair was the 'Siege Perilous.'"

"It will be for you, if you don't keep clear of it," returned the editor-in-chief, who never permitted any one but himself to occupy that throne of departed greatness.

"I never thought, myself, that the 'godlike Dan' was such very grand piano," asseverated Lucy. "It was his looks that did the business for him, and the boom boom of his voice. If I were as big as Mt. Washington, and looked as though I meant to have the whole sidewalk to

myself, people would clear the track for me," added Lucy, in an injured tone, his diminutive stature being a special grievance with him. "I really think, Bobby, that Daniel Webster isn't a fit example for you. You're altogether too much like him, as it is."

"Lucy, who ever heard of you!" retorted Bobby. "Daniel Webster would have walked over you without seeing you."

"The trouble with him was that he was stuck on himself," asserted Lucy, whose associations with that great name were chiefly represented by black and blue spots. "He always had his hand in somebody's pocket, and the principal plank of his platform seemed to have been never to do anything for himself that he could get another fellow to do for him."

"Where did you feel the worst when you said that?" demanded Bobby. "Don't you know some more libellous poetry about him?"

In a recent literature lesson a pitched battle had followed Lucy's recitation of "Ichabod," — a selection made with special reference to Bobby's hero-worship.

> "'When faith is lost, when honor dies,
> The man is dead!'"

spouted Lucy, defiantly.

"Your looks will never get you votes," said Bobby, witheringly; "so, if you have set your heart on being President, you'd better rely on your scholarship and lovely manners."


SAN JUAN HILL
ALICE BARBER STEPHENS

Lucy's rank was always the lowest in the class; he took the shaft in good part, however, merely suggesting that it was not the office of the editor-in-chief to constitute himself the censor of his aids' private affairs.

These preliminaries being settled, the staff of the *Snark* proceeded to business.

"As this is the first regular meeting of the season, it is important to get the policy of the paper well shaped for the coming year," began Bobby.

"Yes, just you wait. I've something awfully important to say," began Lucy, who could never be brought to use parliamentary language. He succeeded, at last, in dragging from his pocket a huge sheet of paper. "It's a petition from the girls," he explained; "they've made me their advocate."

"Of course," assented Bobby, ironically; while Taffy turned on the pillow with the request that he be awakened when all transactions relating to Lucy's love affairs were concluded.

"It is illegal for a quorum to go to sleep," objected Lucy; and Bobby, who was a stickler for parliamentary form, sustained the objection.

"Fire away!" added the chief, momentarily forgetful of the language of the occasion.

"The petition was drawn up by Miss Susie Crossman, and you will please to observe its extreme beauty of diction," began the girls' advocate, with much rustling of paper and flourish of gesture. "I helped," he added

modestly. "'Inasmuch as we, the girls of the Senior Class of the Holbrook High School, constituting a portion of the school and of the community; and feeling, therefore, that we represent to the public a part of the sentiment—'"

"All of it," interpolated the editor-in-chief. "Is there much more in this line?" he queried anxiously.

"Lots," answered Lucy. "Some of it is even lovelier."

"Any poetry?"

"There are some beautiful verses at the end," answered the exchange editor, turning to the last of the four closely written sheets, and keeping the intervening pages suspiciously out of sight. "They begin,—

'T is not our choice
That this our voice—'"

"We could n't stand all that," said Bobby, decidedly. "There seems to be considerable poetry scattered through it, too," he added, eying suspiciously the broken lines of the preceding pages, as Lucy unwarily turned the sheet. "Boil it down and go ahead, but leave out all the poetry."

"It is a pity that your talent for command should be wasted in so limited a sphere," suggested Lucy. "You should have enlisted as Admiral in the late war."

"If I had enlisted as common seaman," returned Bobby, composedly, "my distinguished merits would have made me Admiral before we sighted Minot Ledge."

Perhaps Lucy was conscious that the petition was of too great length to subject to the patience of his fellow editors, for he complied with his chief's mandate without further self-assertion.

"The substance of it is," he said, "that the girls think they ought to be represented on the paper. They wish to present, as associate editor, Miss Susie Crossman, long and favorably known to the public as 'Pishy,' the author of some of the choicest contributions that have appeared from time to time in our columns." At the last words Lucy kept a wary eye on Bobby, who was nervously fingering his gavel. "The conditions on which Miss Crossman is willing to accept this onerous position," he continued firmly, "are, firstly, that her name should be on the cover — "

"Would she be willing to have it first?" inquired Bobby, with withering sarcasm.

"I think she might possibly consent to have it bracketed with yours," returned Lucy, mildly.

"Perhaps she would like to have inscribed beneath, —

'Two lovely berries moulded on one stem,'

or

'Two souls with but a single thought,
Two hearts that beat as one,'

or even one of her own beautiful couplets," suggested the editor-in-chief, grimly.

"Secondly," resumed Lucy, with the manner of one who has heard nothing, "she expects to have all her

own contributions accepted, without alterations or suggestion of boiling down; and thirdly, to have the names of all her friends on the free list. That 's all. We really need another editor," Lucy went on earnestly, "for the strictly literary department. That would leave you free to devote yourself to the general management of the paper, and to the outside interests that the public unanimously confides to your care," concluded Lucy, with a side glance at the petition.

There was a show of reason in these representations, and Bobby answered seriously, —

"We could n't accept her terms, Lucy; she wants the earth. It 's bad enough as it is. If you half read the exchanges, you would see that every paper on the list has some mean little fling at us. If the girls were admitted to an active share in the management, they would want a fashion department and love stories. Anyway, I doubt if it would increase our circulation to have a distinctively female department. Girls will read boys' papers, but boys won't read girls' papers," concluded Bobby, voicing an axiom of the sanctum with the manner of one grown gray in feeling the pulse of public sentiment.

"But we should enlarge the paper and so make room for the new departments," urged Lucy, with a readiness that betrayed the fact that some such proposition as that now before the meeting had already been considered in all its bearings. "My dad has promised me a new telescope if I 'd save up half the money to pay for it; I 've

almost enough now, but I 'll use the cash, instead, to pay the debts of the *Snark* if the staff is reorganized in the manner proposed. Ah, now, do, Bobby," concluded Lucy, in his most wheedling tones.

It was a handsome offer. Nevertheless, its conditions seemed too onerous for immediate acceptance, and after some further discussion the decision was laid upon the shelf for the next meeting. Taffy aroused himself, at the demand of the chief, for a rendition of the business affairs of the *Snark*.

"There are no new subscriptions, and a number of our old subscribers have fallen off," he reported. "Judge Luce, Dr. Burnham, my dad, and some of the other old boys have sent in their dues, and that is about all the money there is in the treasury. No new ads. Griff asked for our first page, but he would only give his note in payment, and insisted on writing the ad. himself. It began, 'Rome's Chariot Races!' and went on to say that they were nothing compared to the rush of customers to his hencoop. Of course I would n't let him have the space. The only other ad. is of Miss Pettigrew's millinery shop.

"Then we offered a prize for the translation of the verse in Voltaire. You remember the story. The entire stanza, as written, was innocent. But by accident it was torn jaggedly across, and the fragment that fell into the King's hands read like high treason. Old Shattuck thought the double meaning could n't be rendered into English, and on the strength of his

opinion we set up that five dollars; but Peddy Seaton sent in the translation the first thing. Here 't is, —

'With fearful crime the earth has shaken
Upon the throne the King firm holds his place.
In peaceful time love still to war shall waken,
The foe alone to fear is no disgrace.'

"There was n't enough money in the treasury to pay the prize, and somehow those idiots on the *Up-to-Date* got wind of the state of our finances, and in their last number offered a prize of five cents for the most sympathetic essay on that touching poem, 'Mary had a little lamb,' adding a list of bankers who would make themselves responsible for the amount. Peterson has sent in his bill again with the note, 'Kindly remit;' he won't do the work for us much longer if something is n't paid on his bill. I 'll tell you what, fellows," concluded the business editor, "if this sort of thing goes on much longer, there 'll be nothing to do but ask for an assignment. That 's no more than happens every day on the 'street'!" In the vocabulary Taffy affected, "failure" was merely the obvious way of denying one's financial obligations.

"No school paper has ever been known to fail," said Bobby, soberly. "Ours is the oldest of them all. Judge Luce himself was the founder and first editor. Besides, think how that sneaking *Up-to-Date* would crow over our downfall!"

"You might offer premiums of a pound of tea, or our new sewing-machine; or take Griff on as associate

editor," suggested Lucy, addressing impartially both his associates. "My dad always used to read the *Snark* the day of its issue," he went on, Bobby's words having happily suggested a new line of attack; "but the other night he said, 'My son,' " — Judge Luce's stately manner was faithfully rendered by his irreverent son, "'it seems to me that new life might be infused into your paper!' He has always said, mark you," added Lucy, with emphasis, "*our* paper till lately; now it is *your* paper!"

Bobby winced, and Lucy, perceiving his advantage, wisely refrained from iteration.

"Let's have some strawberry nectar," he suggested; "I'll treat."

The editorial staff moved, unanimously, to accept, and proceeded to adjourn without delay to Griff's to carry out the resolve.

"Heave ahead, Admiral; fleet's under way!"

CHAPTER EIGHT

UNFORTUNATELY for the interests of the *Snark*, the private affairs of its business editor were at as low an ebb as those of the journal. Even as a very little boy, Taffy Dabney had had a mania for speculation, coupled with an aversion to work. He had swapped jack-knives and kites, and made "corners" in marbles and tops, before he was out of kilts; he had bought up the shabby dolls and baby-carriages of his girl cousins at bargains, restored them to something like their original glories by the exercise of a little paint, calico and ingenuity, and resold them to their unsuspecting mammas at a handsome profit. Later, he let out footballs and bats at usurious interest amongst the small boys of his acquaintance, and had once set up a lottery, with a bicycle for a prize, that for a time caused great excitement in the neighborhood and a general breakage of small banks. The scheme, unfortunately, came to an abrupt end through the interference of the home authorities, by whom Taffy's business acuteness was regarded with marked disfavor.

As he grew older, his heroes were the men who controlled the great "trusts;" he watched the development of "corners" with absorbed interest, and had a knowledge

of the stock market surprising in one of his years. In Taffy's dreams of the future, he beheld himself a power on "'change," operating to the extent of millions, controlling legislatures and ruling vast monopolies to the advantage of his own pocket, if not for that of the public weal. An idea had of late been revolving in his mind that would not only retrieve his damaged fortunes, but leave him with a handsome base for future operations. The following month the Holbrook Eleven was to play its annual game with the City High School. The tickets for the match were divided between the opposing teams, and their sale always realized a handsome sum for the respective treasuries. The girls, as well as the boys, were heavy purchasers, and always appeared on the great day with the school colors — green and white — displayed in their shirt waists, bedecking their hats, and flying in knots of ribbon from their button-holes. The coming match promised to be of unusual interest, for the City team was working hard to retrieve its disastrous defeat of the preceding year, while the Holbrook boys, goaded nearly to madness by the jibes of the *Up-to-Date*, looked upon its Eleven as the champions who were to avenge the accumulated insults of their rivals.

The rules regulating the sale of tickets restricted the number sold to any one person. Taffy availed himself, however, of an obvious evasion. The boys of the Junior class — those of the Middle and Senior having grown wary from experience — were readily induced, under the charge of secrecy, to act as agents in buying

tickets, either of the members of the team or at the Emporium. Griff was too guileless to entertain any suspicion from the unusual number of heavy purchasers among the small boys. These services were recompensed by a broken-bladed jack-knife or a dilapidated magic lantern, — Taffy having found a large stock of second-hand articles useful in his "deals;" by means of acquaintances in the city, he bought largely also from the members of the opposing team. The latter transaction would have been deemed "shady" in the nomenclature of the "street," but Taffy had reached a pitch of desperation when he would scarcely have hesitated at anything short of actual exposure. For these transactions of course ready money was necessary, and Taffy did not hesitate to make use of the trust funds in his possession, that represented a larger sum than he had given his associates to understand at the recent editorial meeting. Since he had been on the *Snark*, the business editor had found it convenient to borrow, from time to time, small sums from its treasury, always intending, of course, to replace them speedily. The first loan was merely for a postal card; many of the succeeding ones, too, seemed insignificant; but now, as he looked at the astounding sum total of these trifling "accommodations," his heart sank, and he felt that the success of his present scheme was necessary to save him from absolute ruin. Moreover his "rotary debt" had fallen into the hands of one of the "kids" who was gifted with a peculiar power of iteration. His dilation on the summer joys of "Cutty-

hunk Island" had won him the sobriquet of "Cutty." To be met at every turn by a piping voice, demanding, "Say, when are you going to pay me that money?" might have goaded to desperation nerves more case-hardened than Taffy's.

At last he was the possessor of fully three-fourths of the tickets to the field; and as he joyously reckoned up the premium these would command, he felt that he might await the issue of events with tranquillity.

Pending the football match, which, indeed, for the time being was relegated to the background in public interest, was another event, which promised this year to be of special interest. As soon as the ice was fairly broken, Holbrook River began to assume a lively appearance, and as the season advanced, every pleasant afternoon and evening its tortuous course presented a lively scene. The girls reciprocated the favors of the boat-club by embroidering the Club initials on the boys' white boating-flannels, and crocheting, in the Club colors, the Tam o' Shanters that were then the rage.

On Lucy's return from the Rangeleys, he had brought with him a canoe that was the admiration and envy of every boy in Holbrook. During the summer the three boys had become experts in the stroke in vogue among the guides of northern Maine, that was in marked distinction to that hitherto practised on the river. It was the introduction of the "new stroke" that was the special and growing interest of the approaching occasion.

Under the leadership of Susie Crossman, the girls had planned to present the winner of the race with a silk flag, fringed with gold bullion, and surmounted by a pennant embroidered with the Club monogram.

Judge Luce, Dr. Burnham, and Mr. Dabney were to act as judges; three canoes were to take part in the contest. Jack Burnham and Larry Lyman, in the *Kraken*, held second place in the public favor to the *Viking*, manned by Bobby and Lucy; Hayti Richards and Peddy Seaton, in the *Wassergeist*, completed the list of contestants.

"He is n't wearing my cap!" exclaimed Susie Crossman, in tones of deep disappointment, as Bobby appeared on the boat-house landing.

"He had thirteen sent him," responded Lou, pleasantly; "he never wears anything but that old leather jockey." So, from the outset, the leader of the girls was in an ill humor with "contests."

With what his fellows termed "Bobby's own luck," the *Viking* drew the lot for the best position. Owing to the peculiarities of the channel, the rule was strictly enjoined that the boats that elected to follow the race should await the canoes at the "Bend," where the turning-stake was placed, and preserve a stated distance between them and the contestants on the home stretch. From the start it was evident that the *Viking* was gaining rapidly on its rivals, and when the stake was rounded it was a canoe's length ahead. As the three canoes drew near the boat-house, there was the usual silence that

accompanies the close of a race. Bobby put all his muscle into a final spurt, that should send the *Viking* triumphantly to the landing. Unfortunately he underestimated his own great strength, and the fine spruce paddle snapped in twain just above the blade!

Before the crowd had fairly taken in the significance of the act, Bobby, alert to the necessity of relieving the canoe of a dead weight, had kicked off his shoes and jumped overboard. The thrust of his foot, slight though it was, upset the equilibrium of the frail craft, and it keeled over. Jack and Larry, perceiving their advantage, paddled steadily ahead, with set teeth, gaining with every stroke on the hapless *Viking*.

But the game was not yet up. Quick as thought, Lucy resorted to a trick learned from the Rangeley guide. Stretching himself at full length in the canoe and retaining a firm grasp of the paddle with his left hand, with the right he gave the gunwale a dexterous twitch, pulling the canoe over on himself. The light craft turned a sort of somersault and righted itself without having shipped a drop of water! Lucy calmly resumed paddling, and the *Viking* glided up to the landing amid the cheers and waving of handkerchiefs, leaving little Lucy the hero of the minute.

With one foot on the float, and one hand extended to take the coveted banner, Lucy turned abruptly from his triumph. Those nearest saw that he turned deathly pale, and an inexplicable fear communicated itself to the crowd. The plaudits suddenly ceased, while on the

balcony above was a threatened panic, as people stood on chairs, or endeavored to force their way to the front, to ascertain the cause of the evident alarm.

Bobby had not reappeared, only a few bubbles marking the spot where he had jumped.

CHAPTER NINE

IN a flash Lucy was swimming vigorously toward the spot where Bobby had disappeared. Interminable as the time seemed to the waiting crowd, he soon reappeared, puffing and blowing, and dragging Bobby by the hair. Both boys were promptly pulled into one of the boats that had hastened to the spot, and Dr. Burnham was soon engaged in bringing the half-drowned boy to consciousness; his sisters hovered tearfully near, and an anxious crowd waited without. It appeared that below the spot where Bobby had jumped lay two huge rocks, covered with a growth of rank river grass. Bobby was well acquainted with the treacherous bed of the stream, but one foot had unfortunately slipped into a crevice between the boulders, and his struggles to free himself had resulted only in the grass twining itself more obstinately about his ankles. Scatterbrain though Lucy was on every ordinary occasion, an emergency invariably found him cool-headed and capable. He was now working diligently under Dr. Burnham's directions. Jack, who was not infrequently called into his father's office to assist in some trifling operation, was pumping Bobby's arm on the other side, his face white and drawn with more than the shock of the occasion.

Bobby suddenly opened his eyes and met those of his quondam friend.

"You played a dirty trick on me," said he, distinctly.

"I know I did," answered Jack, humbly. "But, oh, Bobby, I didn't see you when our canoe went over you." He shuddered, and covered his face with his hands. "Don't give it away," he added, panic-stricken, for Lucy had ceased his vigorous manipulations and was eagerly listening.

Bobby's eyes opened again; he spoke with returning animation.

"You needn't be afraid I'll peach!" he answered scornfully.

The following day the Holbrook High School was thrown into consternation by the announcement on the bulletin board that "Dudley will be unable to play on the 20th, owing to a sprained ankle." Great was the rejoicing when the news reached the camp of the enemy.

"It's like that sneak of a Blaisdell not to be willing to postpone the match," said the disabled leader, as, lying on the shabby old sofa in the sitting-room, he consulted with his friends regarding the coming emergency. "I'd go on as substitute, but Dr. Burnham says I mustn't use my ankle for another week," making a futile attempt to rise in flagrant disregard of the doctor's orders. "We'll have to play 'em, but I hope they'll get such a licking that the *Up-to-Date* will be in mourning for the next year," concluded Bobby, with the feeling

with which Sheridan might have thought of "Winchester, twenty miles away," and no gallant steed to bear him thither.

"Cheer up! It might be worse," said Larry, when the council of war was at an end; but gloom had settled upon the countenances of all present, and was not to be lightly lifted.

The situation was unquestionably dark. In the late reorganization of the team, necessitated by Jack Burnham's resignation, it was generally felt that its strength was perceptibly weakened. Jack's place — halfback — had been filled by Lucy, who made long twisting runs and took full advantage of what interference was afforded him; but his agility and "sand" could not compensate for the natural superiority of Jack, who was built for speed. After long consultation, Peddy Seaton was promoted from the second Eleven to fill Bobby's place, — quarterback, — while Taffy, who had played fullback, was to act as captain. Considerable doubt was felt as to the wisdom of the last choice, but at such short notice it seemed the best available. For so heavy a fellow, Taffy was surprisingly lively; he was acquainted with the capabilities of the team, used his head well, when clear, and could be relied on — always with the one contingency provided for — to take advantage of every technical point. The rest of the Eleven made him swear, by all the adjurations held sacred by schoolboys, and accompanied by threats of the severest penalties they could invent, that he would abstain from candy till after

the match. Taffy, for the nonce fully alive to the responsibilities as well as to the honor of his position, gave ready acquiescence.

But without Bobby, who in the direst straits had held the team together and inspired them with a dash and confidence that had never lost a field, who could reckon on the result?

Lucy lingered behind the others.

"See here, Bobby," he blurted out, "I heard what Jack Burnham said the other day; of course I knew it all along."

"Have you peached?" demanded Bobby, fiercely.

"No, but, by cracky, I'm going to," vowed Lucy. "I've got the cinch on him and every fellow in school is going to know the trick that was played."

"If you give Jack away, you'll get the thunderingest licking you ever came across," threatened Bobby. "Whatever you say, I'll swear it's only one of your stunts;" and by way of emphasis, Bobby kicked off the arm of the sofa, bringing Chris to the scene and putting an end to Lucy's denunciations.

But from that hour Jack Burnham's life became a burden to him. Before his fellows Lucy never neglected a salute, accompanied by a thrust of his tongue into his cheek and a significant wink at the resplendent visor of the Captain's cap; while, when alone, the query, "When are we going West?" never failed to bring the blood to Jack's cheeks.

In the world at large, interest in athletic sports was

chilled by the accident on the river. Susie Crossman declared that "football was a horrid, brutal game, and for her part, she did n't enjoy seeing people having their arms and legs broken. She would as soon think of going to a bull-fight!" Besides, of what interest was the game when Bobby was not to play? The beautiful banner had been coldly handed to Lucy the following day, but without the poem that was to have accompanied its presentation.

The hour that was to have been that of Taffy's triumph arrived. The announcement that tickets to the match were to be obtained only at a premium resulted in the intending purchaser, whose interest was already lukewarm, refusing to buy. On the eve of the usually great day Taffy found himself in the possession of a vast number of unsold tickets, a depleted purse, and confronted by the emptied treasury of the *Snark*. His hair arose more stiffly than ever, and to reinforce his faltering energies, he regaled himself on taffy to an alarming extent, with the result of awaking the next morning with a heavy head and a queer feeling in his stomach. As the day wore on and all remedies failed, he realized vaguely his unfitness for the work before him. There seemed no alternative, however, but to take his place in the field, and trust to luck and the play of the rest of the team to win the game.

It was a dark November afternoon; the ground was slippery with recent rains. A high wind had been blowing all the morning, that was momentarily increasing

in violence. As the rival teams appeared on the field, their respective friends cheered lustily. The Holbrook Eleven lined up well, and the underlying uneasiness as to whether the Captain would prove equal to his position began to abate. Quiet followed, as the result of the toss of the coin was anxiously awaited. Luck was with the Holbrook team, and they won the right to kick with the wind, now almost a gale. For the first half both sides played a good steady game; neither scored. When the whistle sounded, the ball was on the twenty-yard line, in the enemy's territory.

The second half began. For some twenty minutes neither side gained the advantage. Then the Holbrook team, forcing the ball slowly but steadily down the field, ran up against a stone wall on their opponent's twenty-yard line, where they were held for two downs and three yards to gain. The ball was quickly passed to Taffy, but not kicking high enough, one of the opposite side broke through and blocked the kick. Falling on the ball, the City team got it on their twenty-five-yard line. Lucy, who had been playing a strong game, now displayed his usual coolness in an emergency, and saved further loss by breaking through again and again, stopping any gain. It was now Holbrook's ball.

Excitement was high, as only five minutes were left to play. Both sides went at it with feverish energy. At this juncture Lucy was given the ball. Following his interference closely, he made a splendid gain of twenty yards, which was greeted by roars of applause.

The friends of the City team were evidently uneasy. Five yards more, and the game was Holbrook's!

Taffy conferred with the quarterback, who apparently disapproved, but, being a good soldier, obeyed orders and called off the signals. To the surprise of every one, the ball was passed to the Captain, instead of to Lucy, who had been making sure gains and in whom general confidence was felt. Taffy, already unnerved by the failure of his kick, juggled the ball. Blaisdell, quarterback on the City team, breaking through, seized the ball and started down the field, with the Holbrook team trailing behind. Even Lucy could not save the game now. The ball was carried across the line, and a goal was kicked.

The whistle sounded.

Unable to restrain himself, Lucy flung himself on the ground behind the goal, and digging his fingers into the mud, cried with mortification and rage. The City team were wild with exultation. Their yell arose again and again. Taffy slunk out of sight, and in silence and gloom, like a funeral procession, the Holbrook Eleven left the field.

The score was six to nothing.

CHAPTER TEN

DOUBTLESS Betty's dire revelations aided to give Miss Meg an understanding of the situation in the old house across the way, for soon after the "party" there was extended to Chris some of the very social opportunities for which she had spent so many futile hours longing. The festivities to which she was bidden might properly have been enjoyed by a girl still in the school room, but to Chris's dazzled vision they meant "society," and her sparkling eyes and radiant manner testified to a delight that may have repaid Miss Meg for her kindly offices. It was now an invitation to a Symphony rehearsal, or a matinée at the theatre; then a fair that had enlisted the sympathies of the fashionable world, followed by the reproduction of a classic drama to which only the chosen few were admitted. And all these favors were extended in a manner to suggest that it was Chris who was conferring the pleasure rather than receiving it.

Then came a delightful tea at Mr. Archie Blake's studio, at which Miss Meg presided. It was a very dream of a studio, with Spanish tapestries, carved chests, rare embroideries, and portions of shrines black with age, that the young artist had accumulated in his wanderings abroad. There were soft couches piled high with

cushions, and odd and beautiful bric-à-brac, and best of all, a throng of pleasant, well-bred people. Chris had never met so many people in her life before, although none would have suspected the fact, as she dexterously shuffled the jargon of those who affect art culture. Young Mr. Courtenay, who was Mr. Blake's chosen friend, went the rounds with his sister's young guest. Somehow Chris, although always assailed with an uneasy desire to assert herself in his presence, did not venture to chatter to him about "atmosphere," "color scheme," or "perspective," or express her enthusiasm over Monet and the "Japanese school."

Miss Herbert had become absorbed in the holiday preparations at St. Barnabas, and Miss Meg invited Chris to accompany her in her Christmas shopping. Morning after morning, the luxurious brougham, with its rigid, fur-clad coachman, rolled up to the Dudleys' door, and Chris was whirled away into fairyland. Miss Meg had such a delightful way of appealing to one's taste! Did her companion think that the Dresden coffee service or the silver-mounted cardcase would be the more acceptable gift for Miss Herbert? Would she prefer the etching framed in white and gold or the quartered oak; and which would please Miss Benton better, one of Mr. Blake's water-colors, or the choice edition of Balzac? Then how charming it was to dally over their luncheon, in some fashionable restaurant, where they were often joined by a friend of Miss Meg's and Chris listened, in happy bewilderment, to the swift, merry talk of every-

thing that was going on within the charmed circle of society.

But it was at home that the effect of these new influences was most perceptible. Chris's ideas, naturally projected upon a magnificent scale, expanded in this congenial atmosphere like the djinn shut up in the bottle in the Arabian Nights. The dollar that had looked so large to her a few short weeks ago shrank to the dimensions of a dime, and any mention by Nan of household expenses was met either by a look of blank indifference or by an impatient rejoinder. Then it happened that about this time there were several changes of servants in rapid succession, each of the dynasty, besides displaying general idiocy, being possessed of some individual mental aberration. Worn to the verge of nervous exhaustion by their vagaries, it was difficult for Nan to refrain from a sharp retort when Chris would say, with lady-like annoyance, —

"Really, I am afraid that Nora has n't been properly trained," when their maid-of-all-work, after listening, open-mouthed, to the chatter at the table, letting the gravy meanwhile drip over the carpet, burst into uproarious laughter at some pleasantry of Bobby's. "You would never know that the Courtenays' butler heard a word that was said before him."

Chris had always been given, by way of "introducing a little variety into the bill of fare," to culling recipes from unauthorized sources, generally of the kind that gives information of how to produce "a savory dish"

out of nothing and "a few bay leaves." Under the new influences, and perhaps also under an increased pressure in the domestic economy, these hints became of greater frequency.

"Why can't we have some of this?" she asked. "'A few shalots, a seasoning bouquet, a little muscade —'"

"What's that?" interrupted Nan.

"I should think you'd know; it's in all the cook-books," returned Chris.

"Oh, excuse me, I thought you took it from 'Alice in Wonderland.' You'd better keep your wonderful recipes to yourself till you feel like doing some of the cooking," retorted Nan; and as she was the only one of the family who possessed any culinary knowledge, Chris withdrew, silenced but unconvinced, leaving her sister irritated by the demands of an incomprehensible ignorance. Nor was it easy to keep one's temper when the elder girl, after a survey of the dinner-table, would say, with an exasperating air of forbearance, as of one who was aware she had to deal with dynamite, —

"We had mutton yesterday. I should think it would be possible by taking a little pains not to give us the same dish every day in the week."

"Yes, and I'm sick of boiled rice. Why can't we have plum-pudding?" echoed Betty, taking the cue as usual from her eldest sister.

"Because pudding requires eggs, and eggs are fifty cents a dozen," answered Nan, sharply.

"I do wish we were not forced to listen to these miserable details at every meal," observed Chris, toying elegantly with her spoon. "One never hears such things mentioned at the Courtenays'."

Under the ever-present need of economy, or the immediate probability of a famine in India, or the collision of a comet with the earth, or some other contingency that Nan's fertile imagination was forever conjuring up, there had been lately a surfeit of articles of "simple and wholesome" diet, notably in the form of rice, which all the family disliked, and for which Chris had a constitutional aversion. Bobby and Lou at last combined forces and hid the rice-box in the latter's closet, where it speedily attracted every mouse that rioted between the walls, to Lou's retributive terror for many wakeful nights.

A few days before Christmas, as the brougham rolled on its homeward way, Miss Meg mentioned her intention of giving a series of "At Homes," after the holidays. She would like Chris's help. Might she rely on her to "pour" at the first reception, and "assist" at the succeeding ones?

Such an invitation meant nothing less than being introduced to society under the most favorable auspices. But quick on rapture followed consternation. "What shall I wear?" thought the girl.

Her last winter's gown, sponged and pressed, and freshened with new trimmings — for which she had spent her last dollar — had not served her ill for the

small occasions which she had hitherto enjoyed. But for the formal functions that Miss Courtenay's receptions would undoubtedly be, a new gown was absolutely necessary. Its attainment seemed as far beyond possibility as a costume from Worth.

The common cause to which all had vowed themselves Chris had easily put out of sight, in the preceding weeks, by the reflection, "After Christmas I shall have the embroidery money from the holiday sales," and it had not disturbed her equanimity that in the pleasures of the past few weeks there had been neither time nor thought for needlework.

Miss Meg was quick to note and interpret the shadow that crossed the girl's face.

"Nothing could be prettier than a simple white gown," she said kindly.

Delicate as were her perceptions, it did not occur to her that her companion might find it difficult to compass even so modest an outlay as that suggested. Chris was always dressed like a lady and her manner gave no hint of any dearth in her home circumstances.

There arose before the girl a vision of herself in a dainty white gown, dispensing graceful hospitality in the Courtenay drawing-room. She forced back the tears as she faltered, —

"But — I have never poured."

"Of course not; it is your 'come-out' tea," answered Miss Meg, promptly, and with a delightful assumption that Chris understood the full measure of that which

was offered. "I will trust you to acquit yourself creditably," she added, and evidently looked upon the matter as settled.

Was there no way — must the gate of Paradise be closed in her very face?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"IT 's all Colonel Jerome's fault!" exclaimed Nan.

"Ever since his name was mentioned, the whole household has been turned topsy-turvy. He looms in my mind as the grim Visitor upon the Threshold, with flaming eyes, horns, and a forked tail, sent straight from Hades with all the trials that individually are the most burdensome to us, and infernally commissioned to goad us into the virtues we most abhor."

"This is the crossest family in the United States," said Lou, even whose equable temper had suffered under the spell of the coming Visitor.

"You 're the crossest person in it," wailed Betty, without much idea of what she was saying, but feeling called upon to contribute to the stormy state of the atmosphere, as she salted her porridge with tears, in anticipation of losing her recess for tardiness, — a prospective calamity that did not, however, accelerate her movements, always characterized by the utmost deliberation.

"I do believe, if the house were on fire, you would n't get out of it till you were ready," said Nan, whose temper was already ruffled by Chris's strictures on her housekeeping. The elder girl, who loved her bed, had come down to the breakfast-table to find that Monday

morning exigencies compelled her to the task of waiting upon herself. Betty, having essayed to gulp down a glass of water with her mouth full of toast, gasped and coughed till she was red in the face.

"There now, you want me to suffochoke," she wailed. "I need n't chokeocate myself to death even if it is washing-day, need I, Chrissy?"

"If you did, there would be one torment the less in the world," retorted Nan.

"Betty is my charge," said Chris, sharply. "I wish you would remember that you have nothing to do with her bringing up. Take your time, Betty, and I will write you a note of excuse."

"You 'll say it was disavoidable and that you don't want me to be kept in at recess, because my constitution requires fresh air at the same time as the other children," stipulated Betty, who always insisted that these frequent missives should be written on her sister's choicest billet paper, with what she regarded as the utmost elegance of diction, and with a scrupulous regard for commas and semicolons, notwithstanding Chris's representations that punctuation in letter-writing was out of fashion.

"Admirable bringing up!" commented Nan, as the elder girl gave impatient compliance.

Until the approach of Christmas all of the family had kept their vow to "abstain, renounce, refrain," with a heroism worthy of the cause. But even adamant may show the effect of the wear and tear of time, and as the air grew frosty, and the whispers of holiday joys and

secrets were audible on every side, it was hard to feel one's self shut out from the spirit of the season. In previous years, no matter at how low an ebb their private purses had been, Christmas had never passed without an interchange of gifts, though there might be only a ribbon for Chris, a pencil for Nan, the bonnet pin that was always an acceptable present to Lou, a ball of twine for Bobby, or the "jaw-breaker" esteemed by Betty an appropriate offering for every occasion, from a christening to a wedding. And the good-will and fun that had accompanied the gifts made Christmas festive.

"At all events, let no one mock my dearth by giving me a Christmas card," announced Nan. "I would much rather have a postal card. And let it be known throughout the land that I refuse to accept any 'Lines' with the 'n' left out — on the 'Holiness of Disappointment' or the 'Elevating Effects of Poverty' by Frances Ridley Havergal."

Each member of the family, too, cherished the conviction that he or she had been singled out as the particular victim of the spite of the coming "Visitor." Chris sat a Peri at the gate of a social Paradise, and she might not enter in; the pipers were piping unto her the latest entrancing waltz and she might not dance. Nan, with the anticipation of certain bills that would come in with the new year, found her every-day worries particularly burdensome; flour went up, the coal gave out unduly, the sugar-scoop knelled against the bottom of the barrel, and a threatened potato famine gave all the family

a sudden inordinate appetite for a vegetable regarded with general disfavor in the normal state of the market. Even Lou, hitherto deemed invulnerable to worry, went about with clouded brow. Her winter wardrobe had been stored, as usual, under the apparent conviction that all the moths and buffalo bugs in the United States had entered into a confederacy to devour her clothes. But camphor, mothballs, pepper, snuff, tar paper, and various other "sure preventatives" had seemingly been regarded as so many appetizing condiments for wool and fur. None who knew Lou could ever forget the spectacle as with monosyllabic tragedy, "Look!" she held at arm's length her beloved chinchilla muff and with a direful shake sent the downy fur flying in every direction, even as a dandelion puff is scattered by the ruthless wind. If that cedar chest, whose boasted properties had proved so frail, had contained the bones of poor suffocated Ginevra, or even her own, it could not have held deeper woe for Lou. Even the feathers on her bonnet took on a dejected droop, and the bow upon the hat, which, to assuage her grief, she immediately set about trimming, had no more the piquant set into which her deft fingers were wont to fashion ribbon.

Bobby had soon thrown away the cane upon which he hobbled after his mishap on the river; but the disastrous defeat on the ball field was a tragedy not to be lightly cast aside, and his difficulties with the *Snark* increased. The next issue of the *Up-to-Date* contained a paragraph to the effect that "the rumor stating that the football

team of the Holbrook High School, as well as its official organ, the *Snark*, had recently come under the management of the girls, appears to be well founded." Bobby contemplated, for a period, calling out the editor of his "esteemed contemporary" to single combat, but finally contented himself, after sitting up till midnight seeking inspiration from a volume of Webster's speeches, by writing an editorial that should demolish his rival even as the famous speech of his great Exemplar crushed Haynes. Then Lucy was showing an unprecedented contumacy in regard to Susie Crossman and her outrageous demands. "Pishy's" contributions grew more lachrymose and her verse had more halting feet, as each new acceptance, "thanking her for the favor," in the assistant editor's best handwriting, put a fresh leaf into her laurel crown.

Of the real and appalling financial condition of the *Snark*, Bobby had no conception. It had never occurred to him to examine the accounts, and Taffy, at the business meeting following the football match, readily evaded the request of his easy-going chief for a report. Bobby went on to point out, in vigorous language, that it was the duty of the business editor to make the rounds of the shops and offices in the city, soliciting holiday advertisements. But Taffy was ill-tempered under the continued strictures of his fellows at the loss of the game, and their jibes at the result of his "corner." Moreover the ever-present fear of his "defalcation" being discovered, seemed likely to result

in chronic biliousness. To his chief's peremptory language he retorted that Bobby "could do some of the work himself, instead of being so precious fond of ordering other fellows about."

So, after the "motion" had been duly proposed, seconded, and carried, it remained a "resolve," to be fulfilled on the day when the leopard should have changed his spots and Taffy cast his sloth.

Everybody in Betty's class was asking, "What are you going to have Christmas?" and it was mortifying to be unable to hint of the prospective contents of a plethoric stocking, even though a haughty silence might be construed to cover anticipations too large to be lightly dwelt upon. Besides the personal disappointment, it seemed wicked to Betty not to have Christmas presents. In particular did she covet a certain article in the Emporium as a gift for Lou. This was a box represented to hold dominoes, but from which, at the unwary touch, a mouse sprang forth with a terrifying squeak. Every day, after school, accompanied by Evangeline, Betty entered the Emporium, and standing on tiptoe before the counter, said, —

"I am not thinking of making any purchases to-day, Mr. G. William, but would you be so kind as to let me see the article I am considering, I thank you, if you please?"

Whereupon Griff would climb to the topmost shelf, remove several boxes of stationery and bales of calico, and set the simulated domino box before his courteous customer. Betty, giggling with as much zest as though

she saw the toy for the first time, shot out the mouse at Evangeline, and presently, with renewed thanks, left the shop, leaving Griff to climb to the top shelf again and replace the "article" in its appointed place. It was on one of these visits that another customer was attracted by the toy. Griff looked inquiringly at Betty; the child's face fell.

"Happy to place anything to your credit, Miss Dudley," said the shopkeeper, who showed his appreciation of Betty's politeness by always treating her "as though she were grown up."

But with eyes brimming over, Betty shook her head and hurried from the shop.

"Why did n't you get it?" queried her companion, tantalizingly.

"I wish you to understand, Evangeline," said Betty, in measured tones, "that I have plenty of income from my sheep in Montana — and the rag-bag," she was about to add, but feeling that the latter source of revenue reflected less lustre upon her social status than the Western flocks, held back the words. "I have another demand for my money at present, I thank you, if you please."

"Are n't you going to buy any more jaw-breakers, either?" questioned Evangeline, who had always been a greedy-eyed participant in the feast, when Betty, surrounded by half a dozen of her friends, seated herself on the doorstep of the Emporium, and with the aid of a rock and the exercise of all her strength pounded the flinty delicacy into equable fragments.

"Not at present," answered Betty. "I — I think so much candy is not good for my constitution." As she spoke, she cast a longing glance at the shop window; but perhaps luckily for her resolution, her little purse was at home. She had given up carrying it, of late, as the surest way of not yielding to temptation.

"Ho, I don't believe you 're going to give any Christmas presents — or have any, either," said Evangeline.

Betty's red face and unwonted silence betrayed the fact that the nail had been hit on the head.

"I expect a bottle of white rose perfumery," continued Evangeline. "Are n't you really going to have anything in your stocking? H'm, too bad!" she added, with an infuriating assumption of sympathy.

For the remaining time before Christmas she pursued Betty with that query, in season and out, alone and before her mates, while she was not suffered to pass the Emporium without a twitch of her skirt, and an insistent "Look!" till Betty was goaded to the pitch of desperation that hesitates at nothing.

An unrivalled opportunity presently offered to reinstate herself, not only in her own self-esteem, but in public opinion, as represented by Evangeline. It was this expedient that proved the climax of the trials that had already made the holiday season anything but a joyful period to the young Dudleys, and which was to prove the final tug to the strain to which the individual endurance of Chris and Nan had already been subjected.

CHAPTER TWELVE

IF Betty could not receive or give Christmas presents, and the latter deprivation bore the more heavily upon her, she would have the measles. Philly Carr was ill with that interesting malady, and a surreptitious visit to the rectory nursery had its speedy result in Betty's supreme satisfaction, and the following letter, written at the invalid's dictation: —

DEAR EVANGELINE, — I am very ill. Dr. Burnham does not know when I can go to school again. Maybe I never can. If I die, you may have my cornelian ring. If you come to my funeral, Evangeline, you must be sure not to giggle, and please don't cry on a handkerchief that has any of that smelly perfumery on it, because I can't bear it. Besides, my sister Chrissy says nobody but servant-girls use smelly handkerchiefs, and you know you have never been to a funeral at our house, so you must try to behave properly, or I shall be very much mortified.

Of course you have never had the measles, either. I have to lie abed in a dark room. It is very unagreeable. The doctor says I must not use my eyes. I wish you a Merry Christmas. I hope you will never have to go to bed in the daytime.

Your affectionate friend,

BETTY BRADSTREET DUDLEY.

P. S. I hope you will never feel so miserable as I am.

P. S. I have lots of lemonade to drink, and Dr. Burnham says I may have barley balls. They are ever so much nicer

than jaw-breakers. I have saved some for you. I presume you have never had any. My sister Chrissy sings to me, and Nan tells me stories; Lou makes paper dolls with the loveliest hats and bonnets you ever saw, and Bobby lets me cuddle his hares without telling me I'm choking them to death.

The last privilege represented an unlooked-for concession. Since Bobby had added four lovely fluffy Belgian hares to his list of pets, the task of keeping them prisoners had proved almost too much for his energies. "There go my hares," was the exclamation that cut short conversation at almost any point, followed by an exit through the nearest window. Betty was generally to be seen tiptoeing away in the opposite direction; the little creatures' quivering noses, pressed against the bars of the hutch, were interpreted by her as "queeking to be let out," and her tender heart could not withstand the entreaty.

The entire family, indeed, vied with one another in attentions to the complacent invalid, who, not very ill at any time, made such rapid progress toward recovery that in a few days she might safely have left her bed. But Betty was by no means inclined to relinquish so agreeable a position as that of the centre of attraction, and as her nurses began to relax in their devotion, she hit upon an expedient that should not only recall their recalcitrant sympathies, but whereby she might feel that she was enacting the pleasing rôle of invalid with due fidelity to the originator of the part. Instead,

therefore, of hailing Dr. Burnham's permission to get up with the expected rapture, she flatly refused to avail herself of it at all, and proceeded to give a faithful rendition of Philly Carr's plaintive manner of speech and "cunning little ways." As the doctor had given stringent caution regarding injury to the eyes, the sway that Betty exercised at all times over the household by reason of her easy tears was increased to high-handed tyranny.

"Me to tick, me to tick!" she moaned in every variation of tone and inflection, listening the while to her own accents with the most unbounded satisfaction.

She insisted upon having all her treasures piled upon a chair by the bedside; every morning, before dawn, she pried open with a crooked hairpin the contents of the little tin savings-bank in which she deposited her hoard, and at the top of her voice, with the effect of awaking every one in the house, counted the pennies, to see how much interest had accumulated over night. At last, after having apparently exhausted every ingenuity of wearisome device, she demanded, in the frenzied tones of a parent from whose fond arms her child has been ruthlessly torn, her "de' Milly" — metamorphosed from "Old Mill." A search from attic to cellar by the entire family, spurred by wailing accents from the sick-room, resulted at last in the discovery of Milly in a mud-puddle at the foot of the garden terrace, her lissome body nearly reduced to paper pulp and her once fair features run together in an indistinguishable blur of

red and blue. It appeared that Betty's imagination had recently been fired by "Marmion" and the fate of Constance de Beverley. The tragedy was consummated by utter forgetfulness of her child's unhappy end.

Milly was put into the oven to be dried as speedily as possible. She was taken out so shrunken and distorted as to leave room for doubt as to which were her arms or legs; a new set of features was hastily sketched by Nan and worked in red silk by Chris. It was scarcely surprising, goaded as the fellow artists were by the insistent voice from the sick-room, irritating as the buzz of a mosquito, that Nan's rendering of "beauty's matchless eye" was all too literal, or that Chris's needle should have wrought what was intended for a glowing smile into a frenzied expression of distrust and anguish — too well justified, alas! Nor was it, perhaps, surprising that when at last this transmogrified Milly was laid in her parent's arms, it was only to be denied recognition, and hurled across the room.

Betty had always had an insatiable appetite for stories, and when she visited other little girls, they frequently hid their books, knowing that if their playmate once possessed herself of an interesting tale, she was oblivious to everything else till it was read from cover to cover. She had devoured all the books in Bobby's library, "Mr. Midshipman Easy," "Westward Ho," and "The Rose of Paradise" being as dear to her as to their owner. She read Shakspeare, too, with all the avidity of a bright, imaginative child, poring over

the plays, of course, only for the stories, but finding in the high-sounding nomenclature and resonant lines the delight known only to the fantasies of childhood.

But her special joy was a certain fat and dirty volume of fairy tales that had been in the Dudley family for generations, and which contained, among other dear and forgotten stories, "Prince Percinet," "The Three Medlars," and "The Invisible Prince," of which Betty never wearied. She was at home in the entire realm of fairy lore, and whenever she broke a lucky bone or found a four-leaved clover, her wish was always for that boon of the good fairies, a "wishing ring." The sly glance at her hand revealing only the familiar cornelian band held real disappointment, for with never lessening faith she thought at each trial, "Perhaps this time a good fairy will hear!"

When Nan, whose reading was omnivorous, told her a story, Betty always insisted that it should begin "Once upon a time," no matter how well authenticated the date of action; while it must end "And they lived happy ever after," though disaster dire had overtaken everybody in the tale; no princess was to be regarded as truly of the blood royal who had not "long and beautiful curly golden hair that reached to her waist, and far below it;" nor was any prince deemed worthy of the title who was not "tall, fair, and handsome, and mounted on a snow-white steed that galloped like the wind." A steed Betty supposed to be something quite different from a horse.

But now her sole demand was for the nursery tale of the "Three Little Pigs."

"Tell itty dirl about piggy-wiggy!" she lisped.

"'Oh, no, by the hair on my chinny chin chin,'" wearily repeated Nan, who had been chosen the special victim of this new infliction. No matter how slight the variation, Betty was quick to note any departure from the accepted version.

"De naughty wolf could n't get in!"

"No, he could n't get in; the pig had locked the door," assented Nan, with stifled wrath.

"You left out sumsin," said the listener, detecting an attempt to abridge the narrative.

"Oh, do let me tell you something else!" implored Nan. "I see the wolf and the pigs in my dreams. I wake in the night, saying, —

> 'I 'll huff and I 'll puff,
> And I 'll blow your house in!'

I know a lovely story about a man called the 'Pied Piper,'" she went on, in honeyed accents; "it begins,

> 'Rats!
> They fought the dogs and killed the cats,
> And bit the babies in the cradles,
> And ate the cheeses out of the vat,
> And licked the soups from the cook's own ladles.'"

With a wild whoop the audience vanished beneath the bedclothes, whence issued the muffled words, —

"Rats! Me so 'f 'aid! Tell piggy-wig —" came the nagging voice, as Betty cautiously poked one eye from

beneath the coverlid. "Where's my handkercher?" she murmured huskily, as her sister showed signs of rebellion.

Conquered, Nan began again, till another malign prompting from the patient, —

"Piggy-wig had long, booful turly dolden hair that weached — "

It was too much for mortal patience. Nan arose to her full height.

"He had n't!" she screamed, and fled incontinently.

It was Bobby who brought on, at last, the dreaded catastrophe. He had recently bartered his telephone for a tiny alligator, with a mouth that curved gently into a tail that gave the little reptile's only sign of life in an occasional gentle wiggle. The alligator was in his winter torpor, and must be given nothing to eat till the spring, his former owner cautioned.

"See what I've brought you, Bettykins," said Bobby, and laid this attractive pet by his sister's side.

There was a prolonged howl, and a frantic jump out of bed.

"You don't mean to say," demanded Bobby, contemptuously, "that you're scared of that tadpole?"

Betty had clambered upon a chair, and was drawing her nightgown about her ankles. It was difficult to distinguish the words amid the torrent of sobs, —

"I'm — afraid — he'll — eat me up!"

Bobby snatched up the alligator, and giving the little tropical exile the warmth it craved inside his shirt-sleeve,

marched off to his den in high dudgeon at the reception of his offering.

The shock of terrified surprise soon merged into that of consuming curiosity, and the following morning Betty decided to get up. Waiting till Bobby was safely out of the way, she stole to her brother's room and had the supreme satisfaction of cuddling the "dear little baby alligator" to her heart's content. But alas! when Bobby returned from school, it was to find that the little tail had given its last wiggle in this mortal world and that the smile was fixed forever in celestial curves. Fragments of bread and meat near by rendered a post-mortem unnecessary.

Betty's grief at the untoward result of her kindness was so overwhelming that Bobby, after the first wrathful explosion, forbore reproaches.

"Never mind, Bettykins, you did n't know," he said generously. "I dare say it would have been lonesome here, all alone, for the little 'gator, and he would have been homesick if he 'd lived to grow up. I 'll stuff him and stand him on his hind legs, and put a tray in his forepaws, and you shall have him for your very own!"

But Betty only sobbed a heart-broken refusal of this handsome offer.

"We 'll have a nice little funeral, then," suggested Bobby. "Let 's throw him into the river. He 'll feel more at home there than if we buried him in the garden."

Chris gave the mourners her fan box, into which the

little defunct fitted to a nicety, and Betty, taking a mournful pleasure in the obsequies, cast the box from the bridge, while Bobby repeated an impromptu epitaph, thus refuting the dictum of his idol, that "no man can be extemporaneous with the occasion," —

"Floating down the Holbrook river,
With his tail stretched out behind,
And his head beneath the billows,
Steering straight before the wind!"

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

BOBBY was whistling "On the Banks of the Wabash," as he tramped his homeward way in the early darkness, his skates — Lucy's Christmas gift — slung over his shoulder, and his blood still tingling with the rollicking good time on the river. As he passed the Emporium, some vagrant impulse led him to kick open the door and fling in a cheery, —

"Hi, Griff!"

There was no response. Bobby perceived that the dim light came from the open door of the stove, before which Griff was crouching, apparently oblivious of anything that might be going on about him.

"Griff — Hi — hullo! I say — Griff, are you asleep?" announced the visitor. "Why don't you light up, instead of letting a fellow break his neck over your truck?" he demanded indignantly, rubbing his shins, which had come into violent contact with the coal-hod.

"Wait a moment," answered the shopkeeper, fumbling for the match-safe, which was kept on the top shelf, behind some bales of lining goods. Bobby meantime seized the coal-hod, and poured its remaining contents upon the handful of dying embers in the stove.

"It's colder than Greenland here," he grumbled. "Why don't you keep your ranch decently warm?"

"It 's — it 's all the coal there is," answered Griff, meekly, coughing behind his hand in a deprecatory manner. His voice was suspiciously hoarse; his eyes, as seen in the light of the flickering, ill-smelling lamp, were red and swollen to a degree not to be accounted for by even the heavy cold from which he was evidently suffering. Bobby seized him unceremoniously by his thin, shrunken shoulders, and twirled him around.

"Don't ee, Bobby," said the youth, blinking feebly under the fixed gaze that confronted him.

"You 're blubbering," said Bobby.

It did not occur to him to offer sympathy for Griff's trouble, whatever it might be; only the usual boyish contempt for tears was modified, in the present instance, by a vague feeling that anything idiotic or snivelling might be expected of Griff. The charge was too palpably true for denial. Drawing a rag from his pocket, Griff mopped his eyes, concluding by a dolorous blast on his nose.

He was half a dozen years Bobby's senior, but he could not remember the time when he was not afraid even to express to another a contrary opinion. He was too dull of wit and tame of spirit to resent, in telling retort or the swift blow with which Bobby would have answered an insult, the scoffs and jibes of his school-boy patrons. Bobby, with the half-kindly, half-contemptuous toleration of the very strong for the weak, had taken no part in this persecution, and always threw Griff a careless, pleasant word when the

horde of school-boys took possession of the little shop.

Bobby seemed to Griff like a being from another sphere, whose handsome face and lordly bearing were something to be wondered at and gloated over and speechlessly adored. For Griff had never dared voice his worship — otherwise, perhaps, than by calling its object Bobby — when Lucy was not present; on those occasions the endearing name was replaced by a quavering "Mr. Captain Dudley." It was, however, happiness enough to place before his idol turnovers and cream-cakes galore, and to watch them disappear with the celerity of a conjuror; while he was all alacrity and smiles when Bobby "treated" the crowd, frequently to the extent of exhausting the Emporium's stock of comestibles.

When the heedless throng, their hands full of cates, rushed from the shop, Griff stood at the window, straining his eyes for a last glimpse of Bobby, racing up the hill, always an easy length ahead of his mates. At the top he turned his eager, flushed face and awaited the oncoming of the others. Then shoulder to shoulder with Jack Burnham, Bobby's voice and laugh rising above the others, the merry squad tramped back to school.

There was no one in all the world whom Griff had envied as he did Jack Burnham. Merely to feel Bobby's hand upon his shoulder would have given him a happiness beyond anything he had ever known. Vaguely it

seemed to the hapless youth that the mere touch would infuse something into him that would transform his very nature. The strongest emotion that had ever stirred his feeble pulse was that of indignation on the day when Lucy told him of Jack's "dirty trick." That one singled out before all men by the gift of Bobby's friendship could have shown himself unworthy of such a boon was to Griff scarcely less than the fall of the archangels.

"What 's struck you?" demanded Bobby.

At the blunt words, and still more, the tone of surprise and curiosity and unbounded contempt, Griff, covering his mouth with his fingers, gave a vacuous little laugh, that suddenly ceased as he realized his temerity at doing anything without permission.

"Lemme go, Bobby," he quavered.

"Not till you 've told me what 's up," responded Bobby, enforcing his mandate by a shake that may have been intended to be gentle, but which made Griff's teeth chatter and his knees knock together.

But the shopkeeper stood his ground with unprecedented tenacity.

"Le' go," he gasped, making a futile effort to wriggle out of his captor's clutch.

"Tell me what you were howling about!" commanded Bobby.

His finely developed head, set squarely on his shoulders, was thrown slightly back, as was his habit when in earnest; his deep-set eyes beneath their level brows

held Griff's shuffling gaze. Yet it was less the masterful accents, or even that iron grip on his shoulder to which the cringing youth yielded, than the mere unconscious domination of the strong nature over the weak.

"Lucy — Lu —" he stammered.

"What has Lucy-lu been doing to you now?" inquired Bobby, mildly, but with a twinkle in his eyes that nearly caused another collapse of his captive.

"It was — about that notice — in the show window," quavered Griff.

Bobby's eyes strayed to the superb display of popguns, tin trumpets, and miniature flags, to which the attention of the public was called by the flamboyant placard, "Come, let us reason together."

"I know 't ain't just what folks expect for Christmas," pleaded Griff, "but I had n't spot cash to buy for the holiday trade," he spoke with a pitiful assumption of importance, "and the wholesalers would n't give me credit. I thought I could make the things do that were left over from Fourth of July. Advertising is the soul of trade, and I did mean to work up a holiday boom. But Taffy would n't print my advertisement — it was a fine one, sure to have brought a run of customers," interpolated Griff, regretfully, — "and just now — Lucy-lu came in and — and — said that that notice in the window was from the Bible. He 's — he 's — been asking me — if I thought the author of the text was calling the attention of Moses to the cheapness of things

in the gimcrack line. I—I don't know what to do—oo!"

Bobby's solution of the question was simplicity itself.

"If Lucy-lu comes poking 'round again, kick him out of the ranch."

"I — I — could n't," whimpered Griff, fearsomely looking over his shoulder, as though he expected the momentary appearance of the dread "Visitor" to whisk him off to perdition.

"Why in thunder could n't you? Lucy is n't up to my shoulder," returned Bobby. "Even you might lick him," added Lucy's friend, amiably unconscious of the uncomplimentary inflection.

"He—he pointed his finger at me," whimpered Griff.

Bobby sank on the nearest seat and laughed till he could laugh no more.

"Who 'd have thought you were a greater fool than you looked?" he ejaculated at length, faintly. And Griff did not even know that there was anything in the words to call for resentment.

"I—I can't expect to prosper in business when it is n't my real calling. I 've always thought my vocation was something quite different till—" Griff glanced at the placard and showed symptoms of breaking down again. "No, if the ministry is n't my calling, either, it does seem as though there was n't any place for me anywhere in the world."

Bobby felt a faint stirring of pity for the blubbering

youth, of the kind he would have felt for a starving cat. But as he did not know just how to express his good will, he merely gave the stove another shake, and picked up the book over which Griff had been poring. He dropped it as though it were one of the coals in the now glowing bed of embers.

"The Bible!" he exclaimed.

The Bible was for church and Sundays. He would have said, perhaps, if he had ever given the subject a thought, that perhaps ministers and sick people and old women read it on week-days; but to find any one absorbed in its pages to the same extent that he would have felt himself in "Tom Brown" or "Westward Ho," struck him as a development of human nature worthy of a freak museum.

"I've kept it under the counter or in a drawer," explained Griff, shamefacedly. "I suppose that it was because some text was always running in my head that I put that notice in the window. You see, Bobby," he added solemnly, "I am the round man in the square hole. I was intended for a minister."

"I—I don't know that I ever heard you mention it before," remarked Bobby, tentatively, fearful of inducing another flood of tears.

"That was why ma named me Griffith," continued the youth, in a tone struggling between complacency and grief. "It means 'One having great faith.' After I gave up my hopes of the pulpit and got kind of discouraged, generally, I thought I had no right to the

beautiful name, and so called myself 'G. William,' till Lucy made me tell him my full name." Griff was speaking now under the necessity of a weak nature for pouring itself forth into the first channel that offered. The flood of confidences, once let loose, swept irresistibly on.

"I never cared to play with the other boys in our village. I hated rude, rough games, like football — "

"H'm," remarked the stalwart Captain of the Holbrook team.

"That is — I — well, it looks a good deal like fighting, you know," said Griff, in alarm. "My Sabbath-school teacher always told me that fighting was a sin."

"Worse than a sin; it is a blunder," acquiesced Bobby, in amiable rendering of the great Frenchman's dictum, "when you are the fellow who will get licked."

"Mamma says I used to be the perfect image of a little minister," Griff went on. "My hair was done in a long curl on the top of my head; and I had such a sweet way, she says, of sitting with my hands folded— so — the very image of the 'little Samuel.'" Griff rolled his eyes ceilingward as the finishing touch to this affecting picture, forgetting in his self-absorption the easily excited risibilities of his auditor. Bobby, however, was finding these revelations so entertaining that he was able to exercise an unusual control over his facial muscles. It would be nuts for the fellows.

"When I was five years old, my favorite book was the 'Memoirs of the Rev. Jedediah Mugridge,' by his

sister, the saintly Martha Ann Mugridge," resumed Griff.

"Who in thunder was he?" inquired Bobby, with an irrelevant thought of the well-worn volume of the "Life of Daniel Webster."

"He went as missionary to the Sandwich Islands, and there he passed away," sighed Griff.

"Did they eat him?" inquired Bobby, in animated tones.

"He took cold, one day, going to Sabbath-school without his overshoes. He was of a consumptive tendency, like me." Griff spoke with an assumption that pulmonary weakness and a call to the ministry were identical.

"He was rather an ass, was n't he, to go off in that style?" commented Bobby, his interest in the Rev. Jedediah suddenly subsiding.

"I used to preach sermons to anybody who would listen — "

"Who in time would?" interrupted his auditor, in blank amazement.

It was curious, again, that just then there should have come into his head his own fervid deliveries of Daniel Webster's speeches to an enthusiastic home circle. What did this wretched weakling know of ambition — of hero worship!

"Well, mamma," answered Griff. "She sewed for a living, but contrived to lay up a little money each year, so as to be able by and by to send me to the theological

seminary. It was about time for me to enter, when her eyes gave out and she had to take all her savings for doctor's bills and medicine. But she wanted me to be a minister just the same. She said she could die happy after she 'd heard me preach my first sermon. Then, just in the nick of time, — or so it seemed at first, — an old lady who was interested in the 'Society for the Propagation of Ministers,' offered to pay my way through the theological school."

"Old ladies should attend to their duties as grandmothers, and not be so precious fond of sending into the world to preach the Gospel chinless beings who say 'How?'" said Bobby, reflectively, and with no intention of hurting any one's feelings. "Go ahead!"

"Mamma said she could get along without my help," continued Griff, "but I knew what that meant,— sitting up half the night, sewing, and living on bread and tea. I thought and I thought, till my head swam, — my head swims kinder easy," he added apologetically. "Well, the end of it all was that I gave up the idea of being a minister, and began to look about for some way to support mamma and me. But there seemed no room for me in our town. At last I heard of the opening here, and by scraping together all our money, I bought out this shop and good will. But I 'm clean discouraged!" Griff fumbled at his handkerchief again before he went on. "It 's no use trying to keep my head above water any longer. I 've got to make a compromise with my creditors. Only, I don't see how

mamma and I are going to get along without the shop, little as it brings in. I 've been into the city nearly every day, going the rounds of the stores and offices; but I 'm too old for errand-boy, and too young for a place in the counting-room, even if I knew anything about book-keeping or could write a decent hand. I can't lift nor carry and — and somehow there seems something about me that makes folks mad. There 's no — room — for me anywhere — in the world!"

Bobby looked at him speculatively. It was a kind of revelation that there could be any one whose presence did not carry its own welcome.

"What did they say?" queried the popular boy, curiously.

"Sometimes all they said was, 'No,'" answered the boy for whom there was "no room." "But oftener they told me to 'get out,' or they 'd kick me out if I showed up again. I made the mistake, once or twice, of going to the same place a second time. Generally, going out, I tripped over a bale of goods or the waste-paper basket, and 'most always left the door open. Then they swore," narrated Griff. There was no rancor in his tone at the recollection of his treatment. Kicks and cuffs were his birthright. "I took cold 'long o' going without an overcoat and getting my feet wet, nights and mornings, delivering papers." The accumulated weight of his miseries was too much for Griff's slight remaining self-control, and breaking down, he sobbed unrestrainedly.

"How did you get your feet wet, and why did you

go without your overcoat?" questioned Bobby. The laughter was gone from his eyes now, the good-natured scoffing from his voice.

"I have n't any overcoat, and my overshoes leaked so that they were worse than none."

"You must n't ask for an assignment," said Bobby, after a prolonged pause. "We 'll give you a free ad. in the *Snark*, — I 'll write it myself," he added quickly. "Oh, by the by, I 'm owing you a little something; you 'd better send in the bill. How much is it?"

"I don't know — not much — it is n't of the slightest consequence," answered Griff, hastily. "Now don't ee mind about that, Bobby. I can wait just as well as not. I 'd — I 'd ruther."

"Get out your books," commanded Bobby.

Still mumbling a protest, the trembling youth obeyed.

"Now see what I owe you," said the masterful voice.

Twice, thrice, Griff attempted to obey; but the figures swam before his eyes and each addition gave a different sum.

"I can't," said he, at last, helplessly.

"Get out and let me," returned Bobby.

He glanced at the page before him and his look of surprise changed to one of incredulity. Then he, too, cast up the long rows of figures, again and once again, and Griff watched the handsome, resolute face grow white and set, and was too scared and abased and miserable to utter a word.

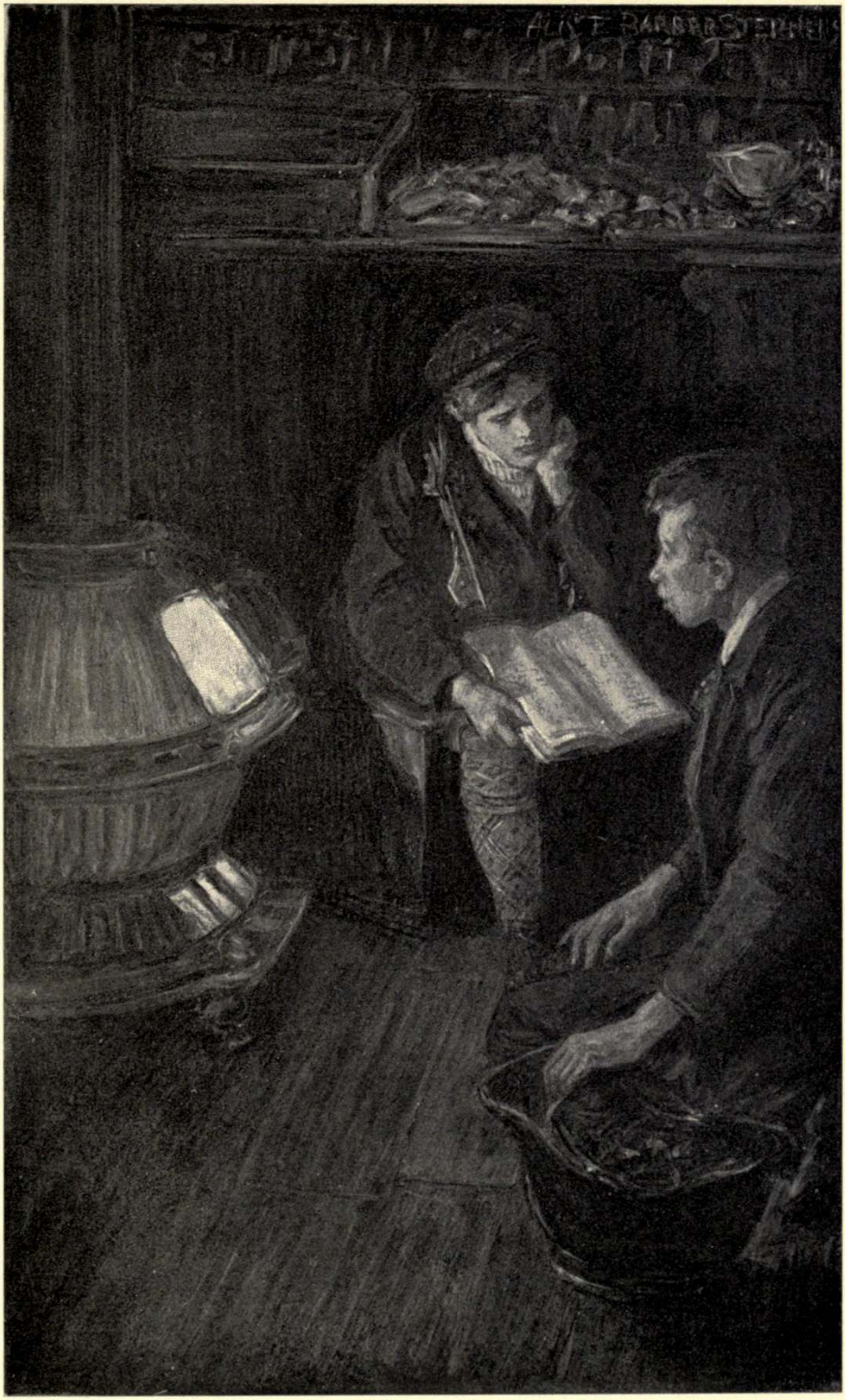
"I had no idea it was so much," said Bobby, at last, quietly.

"I never meant to ask you to pay, Bobby," faltered Griff, wishing with all his wretched soul that he had thrust the ledger into the fire before it had come to his idol's view. "I — I wish you 'd take it as a little present."

"Do you think I 'd take that sort of a present, — and from you, you idiot!" responded Bobby, without definite intention of giving pain, but speaking out of his own sore perturbation of mind. "There 's an ulster at home I 've outgrown that will fit you. You must not go around with the papers while you have that cold. I 'll take care of them for the present. The morning newspapers come out on the six-o'clock train, don't they? Oh, dry up!" he added impatiently, as Griff attempted an incoherent jumble of protest and thanks. It was difficult to refrain from kicking such an adorer.

In the worship of this cringing youth, who had gone without proper food and clothing that he — Bobby — might regale himself and his mates on pies and cake, he felt vaguely that there was something equally degrading to both giver and recipient. As he left the shop, he thought that, after all, he would not tell Griff's story to the fellows.

Immediately after supper he went to his own room, but not to study; when he tried to fix his thoughts upon the pages of "Iphigenie," instead of the German text, rows of ominous figures danced before his eyes.



At last he cast the book aside and gave himself up to a study of his difficulties.

The most obvious solution was to apply to Lucy. But though his friend under the circumstances was too generous to make stipulations, Bobby felt that so great an obligation would necessitate yielding the point on which his little henchman had set his heart, and admitting Susie Crossman to the editorship. That was a concession hardly to be contemplated. Besides, the afternoon's humiliating revelations had somehow placed even Lucy's favors in a different light, and school-boy honor revolted at the idea of borrowing money to pay for treats.

He leaned back in the chair that had been Daniel Webster's, and almost mechanically took down the treasured "Life." But for the first time its pages seemed to hold no inspiration, — to be, indeed, as flat and tame as the "Memoirs" of the Rev. Jedediah. Besides, Bobby felt sure that the great "Expounder" was never tormented by a girl who, if the situation were paltered with, might write poetry about his hair! Trivial, ridiculous though that consideration might seem, it was an element in the problem that could not be eliminated.

"Robin love," called Lou, "there 's a man downstairs to see you. His name is Peterson."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"I HATE to bother you, Bobby," said the printer, with genuine regret in his tones. "I've been here two or three times without finding you in."

The slip of paper he was twisting uneasily in his hands told his errand. Bobby felt that he was being baited in every direction.

"What do you think I generally do, afternoons,—sit at home and knit?" he inquired with unwonted asperity.

"I've done the work less for you than I would for any one else," went on the man. "But times are hard and there are always extra bills coming in with the New Year. I haven't been able to work lately, either, because of the grip. If you could make a partial payment, it would be a real help, and the rest of the account could stand awhile longer."

"I leave all the business affairs of the paper to Mr. Dabney," explained Bobby, magnificently. "If you will take the bill to him, he will no doubt make a satisfactory arrangement."

"I've been to him again and again," returned the printer, "but he keeps putting me off; there hasn't been a cent paid me this year. I've had to mortgage the plant to get absolute necessities. My wife is sick

now, and the doctor has ordered food and medicine for which I must have spot cash."

"It is all right," answered Bobby, reassuringly. "I don't understand why the bill has not been settled, in part, at least. But I will look into the matter without delay. I promise you a partial payment within a week."

"Thank you, Bobby," answered Peterson, as gratefully as though he had received a substantial favor. "We all like to see you come into the office, and you stick type first-rate for a beginner."

The following day Bobby lost no time in seeking his subordinate.

"Why in thunder have n't you paid Peterson?" he demanded in his most peremptory tones.

"How in thunder can I rake any money together when nobody will read the rot you print?" retorted the business editor, with equal emphasis. "Have you seen the last number?"

Bobby confessed that, being absorbed in the construction of an ice-boat, he had relegated to the exchange editor the duty of seeing the *Snark* through the press.

"Look here, then!" Taffy flourished a copy of the school journal in his chief's face. "Do you see that stuff on the first page?"

Bobby looked aghast at the editorial column. The "leader" modelled on the "Reply to Haynes" had been suppressed, and its place was filled with a poem by "Psyche" commemorating the incident at the "Bend,"

and dwelling, in the most tender language of the muse, upon the hero's hair, as it lay in

> "Damp and clust'ring ringlets
> On his wet and pallid brow!"

"I'll lick Lucy within an inch of his life!" exclaimed Bobby. "I never knew such an idiot. I wish I could burn the whole edition. I suppose the papers have all been sent?" he inquired anxiously.

"Every copy," answered Taffy, grimly. "Lucy took care of that, too; he seems to have been under the impression, lately, that he is the whole team."

"I shall never be able to live it down," declared Bobby, after a gloomy silence.

"I should think not, indeed," assented the business editor, with ill-timed cordiality. "Sweet pretty title, isn't it? — 'The Hero!' Compares you to Marcus Aurelius, jumping overboard to save your cause. I think we shall probably need an extra edition. Orders are pouring in from the City High."

Bobby read the poem through in rising wrath at his perfidious associate.

"I'll kick him off the ranch," he vowed hotly. "Something's got to be done about this account," he went on, when he could withdraw his thoughts, even momentarily, from Lucy's treachery. He produced Peterson's bill. "How much money is there in the treasury?"

"Not a red," answered the business editor, wrought to

a pitch of desperation by his chief's strictures and the long-continued strain of anxiety and secrecy. It was an actual relief to know that the crash was at hand.

"How 's that — what 's become of the money paid in by our regular subscribers and the old boys?" queried Bobby, sharply.

"I borrowed it a few weeks ago," replied Taffy, coolly. "The fact is," he went on, struggling to maintain his assertive attitude before the look of slow-dawning comprehension on Bobby's face, "I thought I saw a chance of making my pile. But things did n't come out as I thought they would, and I was cleaned out. I had a perfect right of course, as business manager, to make any temporary use of the *Snark's* funds that I saw fit. The law allows a director the use of ten per cent of the company's funds; if ten per cent, why not fifty or a hundred?" argued Taffy. But somehow, with Bobby's eyes fixed upon him, the argument was not so convincing as it had been when he rehearsed it to himself, as he had done many times within the past weeks.

"I believe that was the line of defence adopted by the President of the Peveril Bank," returned Bobby, slowly. Quick of understanding though he was on ordinary occasions, he had not yet grasped the fact that the business editor of the school journal had appropriated its money to his own ends.

Taffy winced. His father was one of the directors of the Peveril Bank, and he had heard expressed, daily, emphatic opinions regarding its late President.

"Men do it on the 'street,' every day, — smart fellows, too," he answered, striving to maintain his assured front.

"They sometimes wind up in State's Prison, as the result of their 'smartness,'" suggested Bobby, quietly, — very quietly.

"Of course I mean to pay back the money sometime," continued Taffy, misled by his chief's tone. After all, Bobby's never-failing good-nature could be relied on not to kick up a row. "Why don't you ask Lucy to pay Peterson?" he asked. "We could rub along awhile longer, if this crisis could be bridged." He spoke with an assumption of business importance that was inexpressibly irritating to the sorely galled temper of the editor-in-chief.

Then the storm broke.

"*We!*" repeated Bobby, in a white rage. "How dare you name yourself in the same breath with me! You know why I don't ask Lucy. Do you think it's pleasant to be made a laughing-stock of in this fashion? I've put up with this sort of thing beyond all bounds of decency and self-respect."

"You have, have you?" shouted Taffy, in an equal rage. "You'd better look to home! I don't know that the *Snark* has any reason to be prouder of its chief than of its assistant editors. It's a blooming sight better to borrow a little money on — on good security" — even Taffy's assurance faltered — "than to be always sponging on another fellow, and never paying your share of treats! Oh, you're a puller, all right!"

The last words had hardly left Taffy's lips before Bobby's fist shot out and the business editor was sprawling on the ground. The succeeding interview with Lucy resulted in a pitched battle, and Bobby was left sole editor and manager of the bankrupt *Snark*.

No one ventured, in his hearing, to allude directly to the leading article in that month's issue, but for many days Bobby had to endure admiring glances at his hair, or to witness a clasp of the hands, accompanied by a violent swaying to and fro, that may have been intended to represent the throes of love, but which the fellows assured him merely meant that they were cold. Once, to be sure, as he threw off his cap after recess and an unusually lively snowball scrimmage, Larry Lyman was heard to murmur something that sounded like "damp and clust'ring ringlets;" but Larry explained that he was merely trying to suppress a sneeze.

To the unbounded amazement of his sisters, Bobby suddenly developed a mania for early rising that might have called forth the encomiums of "Poor Richard" himself, — Bobby, from whose healthy slumbers it had hitherto required the united efforts of the family to arouse. Vouchsafing no explanation, he appeared every morning at the breakfast-table with a rush of frosty air and the appetite of a young Hercules. At any other time this unusual behavior would have aroused comment and question, — the home circle always resenting anything that looked like an effort on the part of any of

its members to conceal its private affairs, — but just now the others were too much absorbed in guarding their own secrets to pay heed to those of another.

How he was to meet the obligations that seemed piling up on every side was a question that appeared to Bobby to admit of no solution. He sold his skates to buy coal for the Emporium's depleted bin, but that sum represented but a small part of his obligations. The awful figures on Griff's ledger were constantly before his eyes; the insulting epithet flung at him by Taffy rang incessantly in his ears. "Blackguard," to a man, was a word that could convey no more degrading sense than to the boy did "puller." A partial settlement of Peterson's bill must be made within the week. But, worst of all, was the apparent certainty that the *Snark* must be given up. What would Judge Luce, Dr. Burnham, Mr. Dabney, and the other "old boys" say, when they heard that the journal in which they had retained almost the interest of their boyhood had been run into the ground by the incapacity, perhaps the dishonesty, of its present editor? For the school paper to die a natural death would have been a severe blow to the self-esteem of the editor-in-chief, but that it should actually "fail," that the memory of that last issue should live in Holbrook annals forever unretrieved, was a catastrophe that Bobby felt would darken his entire future. He mentally writhed as he thought of the columns of rhetoric with which its failure would be commented on by the various school

exchanges, and pictured the editorial with which the *Up-to-Date* would gloat over its rival's downfall!

The various expedients that occurred to him were only to be successively rejected. To enlist in the army or navy, to go out to Dick's ranch, were projects that had their special allurements; even more enticing was the thought of the "Klondike." What a triumph it would be, after a twelvemonth or more of exciting toil, with a few adventures with grizzly bears and Indians thrown in, to return to Holbrook the hero of the hour, pay off his debts, restore the old house and grounds to their pristine glories, and show Taffy and Lucy and — Jack, that he was become a man, while they were still little boys!

But the next moment he turned away from the attractive picture.

"I must stand by the girls; we've vowed a vow, and the man of the family must n't be the one to break it;" and though not for the world would Bobby have betrayed his loyal affection, the thought was followed by another: "They're the nicest girls I know. Of course I could n't care for Susie Crossman, after them! They never need to be told that the bell has struck to laugh."

The most immediate question was the promised payment to Peterson. To do Bobby justice, the thought of "backing out" of his agreement to the printer by pleading the unexpectedness of the situation never entered his mind. It was not now alone the onerous conditions

of the loan that held him from an appeal to Lucy; sooner than give any one cause to apply to him again that stinging epithet of Taffy's, he felt that he would have starved. Could it be that all the fellows had been dubbing him "puller"?

To be sure, he might state the situation to Judge Luce, Mr. Dabney, and others. A subscription, headed by a few such influential names, would soon restore the *Snark* to solvency; Holbrook was always responsive to any appeal to its public spirit. Bobby even went so far as to draw up a list of alumnæ whose aid could be relied upon; but after staring thoughtfully at the honored names for some minutes, he tore the paper to bits.

"They 're not the fellows to cry baby to. I 'll go it alone," he said, throwing back his head.

He had intended not to appeal to Nan, whose comparative affluence had won her, in the home circle, the appellation of "Mrs. Vanderbilt." But a little specious reasoning readily convinced Bobby that his sister had doubtless accumulated by this time a considerable sum in the common cause, of which she could easily spare him a portion. It was not "pulling" to borrow of one's sister. Besides, he would repay the amount before the arrival of the "Visitor." Struggling as Nan was with her own worries, however, for the first time her little brother's request for a loan was met by a sharp rejoinder. But before Bobby reached the door, his sister sprang after him.

"I did n't mean it, Bobby, honor bright!" she cried, holding out the shabby little leather purse that held her hoard. "There is n't much in it, but you 're welcome to every cent, honest true!"

"I don't care for it, thank you!" Bobby flung back the words haughtily, leaving Nan to return to her work with a heavy burden of self-reproach added to the weight of real responsibility and imaginary worries.

That others should give and Bobby receive was part of the order of the universe. To have such an arrangement even momentarily suspended was a condition to which Bobby could not readily adjust himself. From his very cradle his sisters had vied with one another in waiting upon him, and suffering the convenience of the household to serve his pleasure. If one of them chanced to cross his bonny humor, the others instantly combined to soothe his grievance. Nan had worn her shabby coat another winter that her little brother might go to dancing-school, and Chris willingly had gone without sorely needed boots and gloves herself that Bobby might be duly provided for the cotillion. Lou would drop her most inspired millinery to sew up a rent in a baseball or darn a mitten, and had stayed at home to toil on the sail for the new ice-boat, though she was longing to enjoy the first fine skating of the winter. Betty trotted uncomplainingly up and down stairs all day, on trivial errands of "his lordship," and relinquished her claim to another helping of pudding if Bobby expressed a wish for a third plateful. Even the substantial favors with

which Lucy showered him were never regarded as obligations. They were received in the spirit with which a feudal baron might have taken the tribute of a vassal, or Daniel Webster accepted the presents of his adoring constituency of State Street bankers.

It was not till Friday that an expedient occurred to Bobby that would enable him to meet at least part of his obligation to Peterson. At recess, a notice appeared on the school bulletin board to the effect that on the following afternoon an auction would be held in the barn on the premises of R. Dudley. These vendues were popular among the boys, although the articles put up for sale were usually so damaged or out of date as to call forth the derision of the bidders. Refreshments, consisting of crackers and cheese, with the accompaniment of sweet cider or ginger beer, aided to make the occasion festive.

At three o'clock the next day a knot of small boys stood before "R. Dudley's" barn door, inspecting with surprise the list of articles to be disposed of "regardless of sacrifice."

1. One bicycle. Best make, last year's model, fine Russia saddle, bell, cyclometer, and lantern attached.
2. One half share of ice-boat.
3. Stationary naphtha engine.
4. Tennis racket and golf clubs.
5. Four Belgian hares.
6. Nine hens and a rooster, pure Plymouth Rock breed.

7. Miscellaneous lot.

The last item consisted chiefly of a collection of minerals, ditto of beetles, ditto of butterflies, a microscope, a galvanic battery, a Kodak, and all the books on the little bookshelf — save one. The thought of parting with various treasured articles had given Bobby a pang; but the hope of securing even a temporary relief from his difficulties afforded too much relief for regret to find more than fleeting lodgment.

At the end of an hour the number of prospective bidders had not increased; with a premonitory sinking of the heart it dawned upon Bobby that the notice of the auction had been posted too late for its proper dissemination among the boys. In the ball season a close watch was always kept upon the bulletin board, but at present the chief notices were of articles lost or found, or an occasional sale of old text-books. Yesterday the boys had rushed off with hardly a glance at the board, that they might lose no moment of the precious skating. On former occasions, too, Bobby's special friends would have circulated the news, but unhappily haughty silence now prevailed between him and Jack, Lucy and Taffy.

At last the auctioneer mounted the old meal-chest that did duty as a rostrum.

"You see, gentlemen," began Bobby, with a brave attempt at pleasantry, "a wheel that can easily make a century run — within a century. Warranted not to pitch its owner into a ditch, or to collide with another

wheel as long as it is left in the barn. I assure you, gentlemen, there is no danger of this bicycle bolting uphill with its owner, or coasting anywhere but down hill. What is offered on this unusual wheel? Five dollars, do I hear? What! only five dollars on a bicycle that cost a hundred — do you understand, gentlemen, a wheel that — cost — a — hundred! Do I hear another offer?" But the auctioneer's inquiring glance was met only by blank faces. "Going — going — gone, to Larry Lyman for five dollars!"

The naphtha engine was sold at a corresponding discount, and the half share in the ice-boat — which had been the envy of every boy in Holbrook — went for a trifling sum to Cutty, in whose hands it proved subsequently a white elephant; for the home authorities forbade his using it in company with "that reckless Harry Luce," after that ingenuous youth with false cordiality had invited his new partner to a trip up the river, on which the ice-boat attained the speed of the Empire State Express. There was no bidding on the racket or golf clubs, — purchases out of season being rare among the boys. Only a few insignificant items of the miscellaneous lot were sold. The characters of the hens were too well known to find purchasers, and the hares had mysteriously disappeared.

Bobby's evidently engrossing business at the barn had aroused Betty's curiosity, and tiptoeing thither, she learnt what was about to take place. Without delay she bundled the hares into her skirt, and scuttled back to

the house as fast as her fat little legs would carry her. Betaking herself to the attic, she crouched beneath the eaves, where she remained dinnerless throughout the afternoon, her tears falling on the soft, furry heap in her lap, while she whispered, with much of the feeling that a tender-hearted abolitionist might have experienced in the days of the Fugitive Slave Law, —

"'Sh, darlings, don't cry! I won't let them have you. They sha'n't sell you. Betty 'll take care of you!"

After a brief consultation without, Larry Lyman and Cutty re-entered the barn.

"See here, Bobby," said the former, in a shamefaced way, "we don't want these things. I 'm speaking for the lot of us. I offered five dollars on the wheel just to start the bidding. I had no idea it would be knocked down to me."

"Say, I don't want the ice-boat, either!" piped Cutty.

But Bobby put his hands behind him.

"The auction was on the square," said he. "If you don't want the things, you can leave 'em. But I sha'n't use them again."

And with that reply the boys were forced to be content.

By "sprinting," Bobby reached the printer's shop just as Peterson was putting up the shutters, and thrust the money into his hands.

"Thank you, Bobby," said the man, gratefully; "I knew you were all right."

That night Bobby actually heard the clock strike

twice. He had merely deferred the day of reckoning. The sum paid the printer was but a fraction of the amount due him, and the figures on Griff's ledger seemed to dance in letters of fire on the darkness.

Suddenly he sat bolt upright, with a whoop that caused a frantic wagging of the tongueless bell at his bedside. An idea had occurred to him that was at once so simple, so practical, requiring no capital and involving no risk, that he could only wonder that he had not thought of it before.

"Who 's there?" demanded a terrified but sleepy voice from below.

"Do you think the burglar is going to send up his card?" called back Bobby, jeeringly.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

"CARRY one — twenty — twenty-seven," Nan added breathlessly the long columns, — a kind of mental arithmetic that was with her like running down hill. She must keep pace with the accelerated momentum, or she would lose her footing and go headlong. "Who would think that all those horrid little items could count to such a frightful sum?" She gazed with rueful anticipation at the ominous pile of paper slips near by. "However, I may as well know the worst. Bobby's dentist bill, Betty's boot bill — if she were a centipede, it could n't cost more to keep her shod. Cleaning range, new wash-tub, having clock repaired because Bobby tried to wind it up by electricity — oh dear, how much it does cost to live, and how little the game is worth the candle!" Nan's hand went involuntarily to her forehead, as though by smoothing out the wrinkles she could thereby remove their cause. Presently, with a long breath, she resumed her calculations.

"If I took some of the money I 've saved toward the interest on the mortgage — but no, if I did that there would be compound interest to worry about, and I can't carry any further weight there. The butcher's account must n't wait, either, and I ought to pay something on the coal bill — I sha'n't be able to settle the whole

amount this month. Oh, why can't I do as Lou does, and not worry, even if I do seem to be swallowed up in debt? Besides, what's the use of trying to keep things straight when everybody is pulling the other way?" — "everybody" in this instance meaning Chris.

Nan pushed the pile of papers from her and went to the window. The sky, an expanse of unbroken gray, seemed to press upon the earth; an early thaw had left puddles here and there upon the sodden ground; the remains of an occasional snow-drift were grimy with the settled impurities of the atmosphere. There was no more comfort to be found without, above or below, than within; but the girl remained at the window, lost in a kind of leaden dream.

Why give herself away for nothing? Why not be cannily wise, like the witch Betty was chattering about the other day, and take heed that expenditure never outstripped self-interest? She was of too brave and of too resolute a temper to think seriously of trying to shift to another the burden that at times seemed too heavy for her young shoulders; but look which way she would, there was only an endless vista of cooking and dish-washing and worry. If there were only some one who cared, some one who understood that behind the fretted brow, the impatience of suggestion, the intolerance of criticism, lay the thought for others that was often their very cause. As she stood pressing her aching forehead against the icy pane, the sorrow and bitter questioning of years ago welled up within her heart, mingling with

the every-day worries, the thwarted ambition, and the chafing against a contrary nature, till the girl hardly knew what caused the tumult of angry baffled feeling, or those pangs of intense loneliness that came and went like flashes of inspiration defying analysis.

There was a knock at the door, and Chris entered.

"Here is the January money," she said abruptly, placing a roll of bills on the desk.

The checks that represented the family income were made out to the eldest girl, whose responsibility ended with their endorsement.

"Why, did you go to the bank?" queried Nan, in surprise. "I did not know the check had come."

"It came yesterday," answered her sister, her voice trembling with some suppressed excitement. "You will find the amount somewhat short, this quarter," she added in a tone of would-be indifference.

"What has happened — what do you mean?" cried Nan, breathlessly. "The bank failed — somebody embezzled — tariff?" she stammered. Then, a vague suspicion entering her mind as she caught sight of the expression, at once defiant and self-exculpatory, triumphant and ashamed, on her sister's face, she cried, "What have you done, Chris Dudley?"

"I needed a new gown," answered Chris, trying to speak easily; but her tone outstripped her intention and was fairly aggressive. "It was all very well when I was a child to dress simply and inexpensively, but now that I am 'out' my wardrobe must be considered a necessary

part of the family expenditure. I have been very economical, however, and may not require anything more immediately," she added superbly.

Nan snatched up the roll of bills and counted its contents again, — taking painstaking care that no two bills adhered. She whispered the sum — it marked an awful deficit — to herself, her mind reverting to the bills over which she had been poring. The blood seemed to have settled in her veins, and a curious dumbness held her speech as she turned a white, appealing face to her sister.

"What are you glaring at me in that stony, purblind way for?" snapped Chris.

"A cat may look at a king," responded Nan slowly, perhaps too dumfounded to formulate original speech.

"You are looking at me more as a cat looks at a mouse," retorted the other girl. "I am the eldest, and have a perfect right to do as I please with the money," she added, her tones growing sharper, as she realized that in spite of herself she was assuming an apologetic attitude.

"Yes, yes," whispered Nan, hoarsely, hardly conscious of what she was saying.

"If you were capable of managing the house as it should be done, there would be no need of this everlasting talk about economy," went on Chris, goaded by that uncalled-for need of defending her action to yet sharper speech. "The trouble is you 're always jealous if you 're not number one, and you don't like to see me having

a good time. You ought to strain every nerve to get me a suitable wardrobe for my first season."

Nan put her hand involuntarily to her brow, as though there were some danger of the overstrained nerves snapping asunder. There was just the tiny grain of truth in Chris's last words that stung her to speech. In a sudden tempest of fury she turned upon her sister.

"If you want to know what I think of you, I'll tell you," she cried. "You've done the most abominable thing I ever heard of! You've no more right to that money, when we're owing all that," with a comprehensive sweep of her arm over the paper-strewn desk, "than though you'd picked Miss Courtenay's pocket. You're a thief, that's what you are, Chris Dudley!"

Chris, for once silenced, not less by her sister's words than by the expression in Nan's honest eyes, slammed the door behind her. She proceeded to nurse her outraged feelings in the privacy of her own room, and to such good purpose that when Bobby queried, at dinner, "Where's Nan?" she was ready with the answer, given in good faith, —

"Sulking in her room."

"What's up?" queried Bobby.

"General unpleasantness, that's all. It's bad enough to be poor, — it is for us all," said Chris, in a large-hearted way, — "but I don't see the use of making the entire family miserable, in addition, because we can't have all the things we'd like," she concluded, with the

air of one setting a worthy example in the matter of bearing one's burdens cheerfully.

"We won't mind, will we, Chrissy, if Nan is cross?" said Betty, trying, as usual, to comfort her eldest sister. "We 'll have plum-pudding every day and give all the rice to the hens!"

"If I catch you feeding them again, it 'll be the worse for you," said Bobby, with an unusual display of temper; for an autopsy, revealing crops filled with dry rice, had too readily explained the cause of the recent mysterious deaths of Priscilla and Mrs. Peregrine White.

"I dare say Nan does mean to try hard to manage, and you must not ask for too many things, Betty," said Chris. "But I am the head of the table, and Nan takes too much upon herself when she thinks that hers is the only voice in family matters." To which Bobby and Lou, knowing nothing of the real cause of the disagreement and accustomed to Nan's usual disposition over the monthly accounts, gave easy assent.

A few days before this episode, Chris had said tentatively, —

"Do you think there will be any money left over, next month?" and Nan had answered with a hateful laugh, —

"A few loose thousands! I was wondering whether I would better invest them in 'Calumet and Hecla' or 'Union and Pacific' bonds."

Chris, who had had some vague idea of telling her sister the situation, held back the words. Nan always

laughed at her social aspirations. Then came the thought that the money for the coveted gown lay within her reach. The idea of appropriating the sum from the household funds, at first repulsed, returned again and again, and by and by found harborage. When the check came, her plans were made.

Saying nothing to the others, she took the early train to the city. The bank was first visited. She had never cashed a check before, and as the cashier pushed the money across the counter, an intoxicating sense of wealth and power came over her. She looked at the throng on the busy street with a pleasant sense of being lifted high above the necessities that were driving these people to their daily toil. Instead of going to the department store where she had intended making her purchases, she turned her steps toward the more exclusive shop patronized by Miss Courtenay. When the clerk, recognizing the young lady who had accompanied one of his best customers, took out for her inspection a choice fabric, "the latest style and our own importation, madam," Chris, after examining the texture and looking at the shimmering folds, came to a swift decision. She could see that even the accustomed clerk looked respectfully at the roll of bills from which she took one — with three figures on it. The die was cast. There was no trace of hesitation in her mind, no comparison of qualities or prices, in her subsequent purchases.

A shabbily dressed little girl, probably a dressmaker's

apprentice, was at the ribbon counter, as Chris approached. She was evidently overburdened with the responsibility of her errand, and possibly nervous with the sense of passing time. As she looked hesitatingly at a roll of ribbon of a glaringly dissonant shade from the pattern she was trying to match, she found herself suddenly thrust aside; not with aggressive rudeness, but with the calm assertion of accustomed wealth and fashion. The clerk, his attention distracted by the clear, decided tones of the new-comer, mistook the flurried gesture of the little errand-girl for assent, and asked sharply, —

"How much — ten yards?"

The child gave faltering assent, and received her parcel with brimming eyes, — perhaps with the consciousness that her blunder had cost her a week's wages. At the lace department Chris also bought largely. On her return home she spent a happy hour in looking over her purchases and studying the pages of the latest fashion magazines.

In the days that followed, intoxicated by the realization of her fondest dreams, Chris's eyes were held. Nan, always in extremes, not only refused to hold any communication with her sister, but allowed her resentment to overflow toward the rest of the family. Finding that Chris's representation of their quarrel was accepted by the others without question, mingled pride and an indignant sense of injustice stung her to silence in her own defence. While sternly attentive to duty, in

the time not occupied by household labors she shut herself up in her studio, and by dint of assiduous attention kept her wrath at boiling point.

Hitherto the quarrels between the two elder girls had always ended, insensibly, in the reassertion of sisterly affection; or some trivial circumstance had aroused mutual interest or laughter, and the cloud had forthwith vanished. But never before had the cause of the difference been so serious, or the subsequent ill feeling so deep and bitter. Under its spell the merry fellowship of the table vanished, Chris turned more and more for satisfaction to the great house over the way, while Nan, seeing her sister's unalloyed enjoyment of the fruits of unrighteousness, resolved that neither time nor circumstance should ever induce her to forgive.

Chris set off for the first "At Home" in radiant spirits. The pleasing knowledge that the new gown was a success, together with the excitement of the occasion, gave a flush to her cheeks and a sparkle to her eyes, so that when Lou said in tones of pleased astonishment, "Why, you look actually pretty!" Chris had not felt it necessary to contradict.

The following morning she was eagerly ready to render the expected account of her good time; at the first allusion Nan somewhat ostentatiously left the table.

"I never knew any one so perfectly lovely as Miss Meg," Chris began. "I thought her lovely before —"

"We have heard you mention your opinion once or twice on that topic," suggested Bobby; but his sister

went on, as one hardened to interruptions of a flippant nature, —

"But if you could have seen her as hostess! She made each feel that she was really pleased to see him, and was interested in what he was saying. Shy and awkward people forgot themselves with her, and blossomed into something like grace and brilliancy. She is n't so handsome as Miss Herbert, nor so brilliantly educated as Mrs. Carr, nor so intellectual as Miss Benton, whose book is the hit of the season. But there is something about her — I don't know what — that none of them have. Her fascination" — Chris repeated the magic word wistfully — "is something individual, unattainable, — what Mr. Blake would call 'occult.'"

"What 's that?" queried Lou, whose language, like her feelings, never quitted the every day and tangible.

"It means that a person can make a ghost of himself before he 's dead, or shin up a rope into the sky, or shut himself in a bottle for a thousand years and come out as good as new," explained Bobby, whose information on esoteric themes was drawn from the lively tales of Messieurs Crawford and Stevenson.

"Oh, did they do all that at the party?" questioned Betty, who had been an entranced listener to Chris's narration.

"They did n't last night, Betty, or I 'd have taken you to see the performance," answered her sister, laughing. "Mr. Blake came at once to my table, and in a fit of theosophic abstraction threatened to splash his tea over

my gown. Afterwards Miss Benton — she and Mr. Blake are great friends, although they always seem to be quarrelling — explained that every season he adopted a new religion. She says he cuts his hair to match his spiritual views; it appears there is an esoteric connection between theosophy and a vandyke; last season, when he was an ultra-ritualist, his face was smooth-shaven, and the year before — he was then a disciple of Tolstoi — he wore a full beard. He was evidently imparting some of his theosophical views to Miss Herbert, for she looked as though she expected momentarily to see him go off in a blue light."

"Did everybody inquire for me?" asked Betty. "You seem to disremember a very important part of the party," she frowned.

"Miss Meg asked very particularly for you," answered Chris, too happy to answer sharply. "She sent you some little cakes; they're on my table."

Betty clattered joyfully over the stairs, and Chris resumed, —

"Mrs. Courtenay was asking everybody what King of Israel had six letters to his name. As I have hitherto associated Scripture royalty less with the letters than with the wives they had to their honored names, I distinguished myself by suggesting Solomon. By and by she retreated to a corner, where she fondled Wee Willie with such an agonized expression of affection and solicitude, with distrustful glances toward Mr. Blake, that I ventured to inquire if Willie Winkie were ill. As

he had just devoured a plateful of ice-cream, the question did not seem out of order. But Mrs. Courtenay looked at me reproachfully.

"'My dear,' said she, in a whisper that could be heard all over the room, 'Wee Willie is so intelligent. He always barks at people he doesn't like. Didn't you notice when Mr. Blake spoke to me just now, how Willie Winkie barked? I've been told that that young man is a theosophist,—one of those dreadful people out in India, you know, to whom we send missionaries to teach them it's quite wrong to choke people to death with a cord. I could see by the way Mr. Blake looked at poor dear Willie, that he would like to choke him to death.' I'm afraid," laughed Chris, "that in that respect we were all Thugs—as Mrs. Courtenay presumably meant—at heart. For the remainder of the evening Mr. Blake hovered about the old lady with a devotion that nearly drove her distracted. Mr. Carr was there too, wandering about, rubbing his hands and conversing upon his usual timely topic of St. Paul."

"What did you have to eat?" asked Betty from the doorway, where she was stuffing the little cakes into her pocket to share with Evangeline.

"Oh, the usual things," answered Chris, languidly. "Tea and chocolate, orange frappé, cakes and salted almonds."

"Ho! do you call that a party?" commented Betty, scornfully. "What's a party without ice-cream and snappers?"

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE ice between Nan and the rest of the family — with the exception of Chris — was broken in an unexpected manner. Bobby had expressed a modest wish for some "Hermit" cakes, which Nan curtly refused to gratify.

"Never mind, Robin, I will make them," proffered Lou.

Accordingly, the following morning, she proceeded to the kitchen, unearthed an old cook-book, and set about her unwonted task with prolonged intervals of playing with the cat and chatting with Betty, who, kneeling in a chair by the table, was patting and rolling into shape a little clay-colored ball of dough.

"I wish Nan would be cross all the time," she commented gleefully. "You don't mind if I stuff my pockets with raisins and cinnamon, or say 'Run away' when I offer to help. I think your 'Hermits' are lovely, Lou. Truly, I like them such funny shapes, and I don't mind a bit if they 're all burnt up. It gives them such an — well, original flavor."

"Don't tell Nan they are n't good," said Lou, adding with something more than her usual hopefulness, "Bobby will like them; he won't mind if they are kind of hard," — for she had forgotten the baking-powder and had stirred in flour as long as her strength held out.

Betty was skipping wildly about the kitchen as Lou bore the platter of cakes to the cupboard, when Nan, overtaken by speedy remorse, appeared in the doorway. Lou brought up with a shock against Betty, with the result that the black discs were sent rolling and spinning in every direction. Lou's face of dismay at this unexpected betrayal of her culinary failure appealed irresistibly to Nan's sense of humor, a chorus of laughter cleared the air, — Betty, as usual, in convulsions of merriment over an accident, — and the three girls went down on their hands and knees to collect the scattered cakes, whose composition had been proof against the smallest fracture. That night, on the supper-table, "Hermits" galore, of spicy fragrance and symmetrical outlines, testified that peace had been proclaimed within the borders; and later, the battle notes of "Horatius" sounded forth, as Bobby sought the studio for consultation regarding an approaching school event of the first magnitude.

For weeks before the holidays Nan had racked her brain for new and telling designs for Christmas cards. The dainty pen and ink work tried her eyes sorely, and yet more sorely her patience, for a single false stroke of the tiny "croquil" meant the ruin of hours of painstaking toil. But each impulse to undue haste was restrained by the thought that the labor was for Dick, and abhorrence of the work that was "robbing her of all strength and breadth" was put resolutely out of sight in a toil of which the inspiration never failed. And so

grew slowly the pile of cards, and Nan had awaited the result of the holiday sales in blissful security that they would realize a goodly sum. In due time the check arrived, but without giving its recipient the expected joy. The money, together with all of her previous savings, must go toward making good the gap left by Chris's appropriation of the household funds. That was the end of Nan's hope of helping to make the old house presentable; for though there was a fairly steady demand for dinner-cards throughout the winter, the amount could not reach an appreciable sum in the short time left at her disposal. Besides, she was too disheartened by the untoward result of her labors to begin again.

Hitherto, in whatever trials had beset her, or however dark her hours of unreasoning depression, Nan had been upheld by the hope that some day her talent would bring her name and fame. But now, in her bitter disappointment, the weary struggle to find some way out of the worries that beset her, worst of all in the tumult of angry, vengeful feelings toward her sister, her hand seemed to have lost its cunning, and to-day's work was merely to destroy the labor of yesterday. If Chris had any conscience, Nan hoped she would feel its pricks every time she put on that new gown.

But just then Chris would have been impervious to sword-thrusts from the inward monitor. That first "At Home" of Miss Courtenay's was followed by invitations to other teas, receptions, dances, theatre and toboggan-

ing parties, so that all at once the desire of her soul was gratified, and Chris beheld herself a full-fledged "society girl." It was tacitly understood that she was to accompany Miss Meg to all these functions, so that the onerous question of a carriage was never raised. Among the throng of new acquaintances were many who gave her cordial greeting as the daughter of their old friends, or singled her out for special notice in an invitation to some exclusive luncheon or small whist party. Several times a tea was given in her honor, and more than once, in a flutter of gratified vanity, she heard herself called "one of the most attractive buds of the season."

Diffidence was too foreign to the girl's nature for her to betray awkwardness in her unaccustomed rôle. Besides, if she were ever at a loss for word or act, she had only to watch Miss Meg. She studied the very tones of her friend's voice, her manner of entering a room, her phrases of welcome and farewell. Yet, strive as she would, letter perfect though she seemed to be at times, there was a lurking dissatisfaction within herself at the clever mimicry. For there were moments when an inflection of Miss Meg's voice, an expression in her glance, seemed to throw the girl back on herself and make her sedulous seeking of her friend's charm mean and pinchbeck and servile.

Mr. Blake was present at most of the social gatherings in Holbrook that winter, and the preference he had displayed for Chris's society at their first meeting grew

more marked. Already their names were coupled in the general speech. If one was asked to an entertainment, it was regarded almost as a matter of course that the other should be included in the invitation. With the usual temper displayed toward actual or prospective lovers, people made opportunities for leaving them together. Mr. Blake was always so happy and merry, so quick of retort, and so unfailingly good-natured when one laughed at his esoteric fairy tales, that at first Chris accepted the young artist's attentions merely as one of the many pleasant things that had recently fallen to her lot. But as time went on, the long-cherished vision of a beautiful house and herself as a society leader began to materialize in this congenial atmosphere. Mr. Blake was undoubtedly a good match. He had a handsome income, independent of his profession; his last picture was on the line in the Salon, and though he carried his impressionistic theories to the verge of insanity, even conservative critics mentioned his name with respect.

By degrees, behind the merry by-play, a serious intention grew, and every night, as Chris laid aside her finery, a mental review of the day's pleasure always reckoned up her progress to the final goal of her ambition, — a brilliant match.

She was quite at home, now, in the great house across the way. Miss Meg consulted her in every plan. Mrs. Courtenay displayed all her latest acquisitions from the "bargain counter," and had in daily store a new Biblical

conundrum. Mr. Courtenay did not pay much attention to his daughter's young friend, except on their seldom meetings to regard her somewhat scrutinizingly from beneath his bushy brows. Chris's secret awe of young Mr. Courtenay had increased rather than diminished on farther acquaintance, while with unwonted humility she cherished a secret conviction that she was being continually weighed in the balance against Miss Herbert and found deplorably wanting. In her heart she greatly preferred Mr. Blake's society, in which she always felt pleasantly elated, to that of her friend's brother; but in the presence of Miss Herbert, for whom her first dislike had not lessened, an uneasy desire to assert herself dominated. It was at such times that she exerted all her natural and acquired powers of attraction to hold young Mr. Courtenay by her side. The impassive look on his betrothed's face deepened, and her heavy white eyelids were more scornfully lowered when Chris entertained the young man with a stream of merry small talk, in the art of which Miss Herbert was notably deficient.

As Chris entered the drawing-room the day of the last reception, somewhat before the arrival of the other guests, Miss Meg looked up, smiling, from a note in her hand.

"Mrs. Francis has just returned from Old Point Comfort," she said. "She writes that she will be here this afternoon. I am so glad that you will have an opportunity, at last, to meet her."

Everybody worth knowing was to be met at Mrs. Francis' house, where the society combined a dignified conservatism with the best of modern thought in literature and social progress. Her name was almost as well known abroad as at home; men of letters and of science, grand dukes, arctic and equatorial explorers, brought to her letters of introduction as the open sesame to the best that the New World afforded. For a young girl, to be noticed by Mrs. Francis was an honor; to be invited to her house was to receive the stamp of social prestige. Miss Meg was a prime favorite of the older woman, and in the little note that was presently read aloud to Chris, Mrs. Francis stated that she was "looking forward with much pleasure to becoming acquainted with the little girl in whom her dear Meg took such an interest."

As Chris expressed her gratification at the prospective meeting, Miss Herbert looked up in her "hateful, supercilious way," and Chris presently took the opportunity of saying smilingly, —

"I am only a poor ignorant little bud, you know. I suppose you have known Mrs. Francis a very long while indeed?" thus cleverly turning the tables on Miss Herbert, in the assumption that her own years in society entitled her to the acquaintance of Noah.

Mrs. Courtenay had retreated to the hall at the entrance of Mr. Blake, for the idea that the painter was bent upon choking her pet had taken full possession of her. There Willie Winkie contrived, by some contor-

tionist's feat, to squeeze his fat body through a space between the balusters, whence he dangled some feet below, kicking lustily and bouncing up and down like an animated return-ball, as he approached his end at the hands of his fond mistress; for Mrs. Courtenay, with a relentless grip upon the cord, and deaf to the chorus of advice about her of "Let go," was giving loud vent to her grief. Mr. Blake hastened to the tragic scene; whipping out his knife, he cut the cord and Willie Winkie dropped to the hall below, uninjured.

"My dear, it cannot be true that that young man is a theosophist or he would have been glad to see Wee Willie choke to death," whispered Mrs. Courtenay to Chris. "How we have misjudged him!"

Following the excitement and delay of this incident, a little crowd of arrivals entered the drawing-room and Chris caught the words in Miss Meg's clear, full tones, —

"My dear Mrs. Francis! How glad I am to see you after this lapse of time!"

She held by the hand with marked cordiality a tall, handsomely dressed lady of somewhat pronounced presence, over whose shoulder she was smiling at a modestly dressed woman, who had apparently slipped into the room in Mrs. Francis' wake. Motioning to Chris, Miss Courtenay murmured introductions, and turned to greet other arrivals. Ignoring the plainly dressed woman, Chris addressed herself to Mrs. Francis, and in her most winning tones asked if she would find

it pleasant to sit here, and might she bring her tea or chocolate?

In her triumph, she did not notice that she had turned her back upon the unassuming stranger, who after a moment or two of solitude retired to the embrasure of a window, where the heavy curtains partially concealed her from the other guests.

"Diffident and awkward!" thought Chris, as she brushed past the window. "She will enjoy herself most by watching the other people, poor thing!" Giving no further heed to the shy occupant of the lonely corner, she set about winning her way into the good graces of Mrs. Francis.

Her manner was the perfection of the deference due from a young girl to a woman of acknowledged character and position. She drew upon her best conversational powers; she paid graceful little compliments, and listened to her companion with an air of absorbed attention. It was an added note in her triumph that the numerous acquaintances of Mrs. Francis who were no doubt present had apparently observed and respected an evident wish for a *tête-à-tête*. The girl noticed with some disappointment, however, that Miss Herbert was not among the witnesses of her crowning success.

She did not see that Miss Herbert had espied the neglected stranger; nor did she note, as she escorted Mrs. Francis to the door and received her cordial invitation to call, that all at once everybody in the room seemed gravitating toward the window.

"I have had such a lovely time! I never had such a good time in my life!" repeated Chris, with girlish enthusiasm, as she stood by Miss Meg's side after the last guest had departed.

"You were a dear good girl to devote yourself to Mrs. Smith," answered Miss Meg, warmly. "I have so little time to give to any one person, you know, and she has so few acquaintances in Holbrook, that I am afraid she would have found it very stupid but for your kindness."

Chris's heart gave a thump and then stood still. Had she — could it be that she had made an awful blunder? Miss Meg's next words answered the unspoken query.

"I had the higher regard for you, dear," she added, and one of her sweet seldom caresses gave emphasis to the words, "when I saw you devoting yourself to making an uninteresting stranger happy, while you might have been enjoying the rare privilege of a talk with lovely Mrs. Francis!"

Chris stammered a modest disclaimer of this certainly undeserved praise, while horror descended full upon her. She had made herself agreeable to a nobody, and turned her back upon the society leader. In her own bitter self-reproach, even Miss Herbert's words were shorn of their sting, when that young woman took an early opportunity of saying, —

"What a pity you did not meet Mrs. Francis! *So* sorry!"

The day was not to be concluded without another

blow to Chris's vanity. There was no one in the hall below as she adjusted her wraps and awaited the uncertain appearance of Bobby, who could never see the necessity of his sister requiring an escort across the street, or who was liable to forget his promise to call in the stress of some business of his own. Mr. Courtenay's voice was audible from the library.

"A silly, affected chit! I can't imagine what Meg can see in her, except that Meg would find some good in the most arrant humbug! I thought there was no nonsense about the little girls I used to see sitting in the tree, or snowballing one another on the terrace."

Chris crept from the house out of sorts with everybody, and, worst of all, with herself. In vain did she urge, in response to her own self-arraignment, that her mistake was a perfectly natural one, — one that even Miss Meg might have made. Somehow she could not picture Miss Meg turning her back upon any one, however insignificant.

At supper that night, Betty came out, suddenly, of one of the brown studies to which she was prone, to ask, —

"I suppose if you saw somebody at a party who did n't know anybody and who was sitting in a corner all alone by herself, you 'd go right up and speak to her, would n't you, Chrissy?" The child repeated with odd anxiety, "You would n't turn your back on her, would you?"

"What ridiculous questions you're always asking, Betty!" returned Chris, sharply. "I might turn my back upon her, I suppose, if I happened to be going that way. Of course it is n't our business to see that other people have a good time."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

"WHAT 's struck Bobby?"

"How do I know?" responded Lucy, who had made several futile attempts at renewed good fellowship with his former chief; but Bobby, feeling that his late assistant's perfidy was not a thing to be lightly forgiven, persisted in holding him at arm's length. "Nothing 's any fun, now Bobby does n't show up," added Lucy gloomily. "Larry and Hayti have been after him, too, but it 's no go. Bobby 's got a wheel in his head — I don't know what."

"Bobby is n't the only pebble on the beach," said Taffy, sulkily.

"He 's the smoothest fellow going," asserted Lucy, sorrowfully. "Maybe you think you made better play than he could have done the day of the match?" he added significantly.

Taffy muttered something unintelligible. His "bull play" at the football match would never be forgiven him. Since that day it is not too much to say that he had been hated by his fellows. The other members of the team would hardly speak to him. He would be pointed out at future reunions, if he had the courage to attend them, as "the fellow who lost the match," and under that opprobrium his name would go down in the annals

of the school. He had a particular object just now in continuing the conversation with Lucy. The nagging voice of Cutty still goaded him like a visible conscience, and, worse than all, he lived in constant terror lest his "borrowing" be discovered at home. If that transaction came to his father's knowledge, Taffy trembled for the consequences.

"What 's been done about the *Snark?*" he asked, lowering his voice and glancing uneasily over his shoulder. It was now the eve of publication. "I suppose it 's been given up?"

"Ask me something I don't know," returned the late exchange editor, who in truth, since his own "resignation," had been doing his best to discover the purposes of the editor-in-chief. "I don't care in the least what becomes of the *Snark*," he added loftily, "except, of course, it seems a pity that it should be run into the ground by poor management. I expected to see the end of the paper when we resigned."

"Of course; so did I," echoed Taffy.

"Bobby is a smooth fellow, all right," Lucy hastened to add, "but it takes more than one kind of a fellow to run a paper. Cash is necessary, and an eye for acceptable items in the exchanges."

"And a business editor who understands the ground," suggested Taffy. "Bobby may do something at writing," he went on in a large-hearted way, "but when it comes to finances, he is n't there."

On his homeward way, Lucy took occasion to stroll into Peterson's shop.

"Bobby been in?" he inquired easily. He had waited without till he saw his former chief's unmistakable figure leave the premises.

"Just left," answered the printer.

"Yes, ah, yes, that's all right," responded Lucy. "Proof ready, Peterson?" It had been recently the office of the exchange editor to correct the proof; and Lucy boldly went on the assumption that the printer was not cognizant of the sundered relations in the management of the *Snark*.

"Bobby took the copy and the plate proof with him," answered the man.

"Who printed the *Snark* this month?" queried Lucy, a sudden glimmering of the truth coming to him.

"Bobby did it himself," answered the printer. "He's been in and out of the plant for some time, you know, but you would n't have thought he could have made such a neat job of it," he added admiringly. "Bobby's all right!"

"Of course he is!" ejaculated Lucy, who found it difficult to keep up the weakest semblance of animosity against his adored chief. Only the thought of Susie's frowns could have enabled him to preserve the haughty front demanded by self-respect. "Have you the galley proof?" he asked eagerly.

"See if you can find any of the *Snark* proof," Peter-

son ordered the office boy. "'T ain't everybody I'd let fool 'round the plant," he added; "they'd knock everything into pi. Yes, here 't is;" and he handed Lucy a roll of besmudged slips of paper, with margins richly inscribed with cabalistic signs.

The ex-editor crammed the proof eagerly into his pocket and fled. Reaching home, he got no farther than the hall before smoothing out the crumpled sheets and eagerly inspecting their contents.

Bobby's pen was unmistakable in every line.

"By cracky!" ejaculated Lucy, "Bobby beats the band. If he has n't been the whole team!" and forgetful of all resentment, Lucy capered about the hall in exultation over his chief's prowess. Then he soberly read the leading editorial and consternation followed. "What will Susie say?" With rueful prescience he answered his own question. "She 'll say it 's all my fault."

The forthcoming issue of the *Snark* created a sensation among its school constituency. The leader read: —

"'He that cannot say "no," that is, is of so good a nature that he cannot deny anything, or cross another in anything is not fit for business.' — PEPYS.

"The Editor of the *Snark* begs to state to our subscribers and to our honored list of contributors, that this periodical will henceforth be conducted on the business principles indicated by the above. Good, live articles, of a nature suited to the interest of its patrons, will always be acceptable. Articles cribbed from *The Starry Heavens*

or the *Popular Science Monthly* will be instantly consigned to the wastepaper basket.

"Poetry of a sentimental nature is herewith respectfully declined. Not from lack of merit, — that which is unsuited to our columns will no doubt be acceptable elsewhere, — but the large quantity of mellifluous verse already on hand compels the editor to regretfully decline much that would otherwise be gladly retained.

"Humorous poetry will receive our prompt attention and always find a ready place in our columns."

"Gladly" had at first been written "rapturously;" but Bobby reflected that the latter expression was perhaps "going it too strong," and might cast doubts on the editorial veracity.

"I don't know where such stuff would be acceptable, though, except to the junkman," he thought, with a sigh of relief at his release from thraldom. "'Pishy' must throttle her muse, for her poetry has reached a depth no self-respecting journal would tolerate. She ought not to get mad, when I've said it all so politely, and poulticed the wound with that handsome suggestion about funny poetry!" and Bobby leaned back in his chair as far as its unstable centre of gravity would permit, feeling that he had displayed a degree of diplomacy equal to that which had finessed the Ashburton Treaty. "Still, there is no knowing what a rejected author — worse, an enraged poetess — will do!" he added, as one to whom the sanctum had revealed intricacies of human nature hardly more astounding than discreditable.

The next day Susie Crossman appeared at school with red eyes and a manner expressive of the deepest injury. Lucy's foreboding proved too true. His little sweetheart cut him dead because of "that mean, hateful editorial!"

"The rest was bad enough," she sobbed to Lou, "but to think of his telling me to write funny poetry!"

The result of this decisive action did not end, however, with those immediately concerned. Susie's friends rallied around the insulted poetess, and bore themselves with marked coldness toward the boys, whom they chose to regard as being in a confederacy, based upon literary jealousy, against the girls. Dancing at recess was given over, and they stood in knots about the corridor, in haughty indifference to what the boys were doing; while the boys amused themselves on the parade ground, with great apparent success, if much talk and loud laughter told a truthful tale. The friendly relations, the mutual give and take, that had always existed between the Holbrook boys and girls seemed at an end, before either party fairly knew how it had come about.

Several times a week Bobby went to the city — walking to save fares — to solicit advertisements for the *Snark*. His success in this direction was limited, for it was the dull season; but everybody received him with a smile and a pleasant word and the suggestion, "Come again!" Who, indeed, ever said, "Get out!" to Bobby? He sat up till midnight writing editorials, incidents connected with school life, class jokes, the

latest blunder in recitation. A serial story, though strongly flavored with Henty and Conan Doyle, had at least the merit of action, for the number of hairbreadth escapes and marvellous "clews" followed up to the villain's undoing might have been warranted to keep the blood of the most phlegmatic reader at fever heat. Lucy, who kept a watchful eye upon his ex-chief's movements, saw him, one day, emerging from the church, and questioning the old sexton, learned that Bobby was acting as his assistant. He discovered, also, that Bobby was shovelling snow from the sidewalks all over town, sawing wood for any one who needed such service, and helping about the Holbrook stables wherever extra help was wanted.

As reporter, business manager, and compositor, Bobby might have indulged in pleasing reminiscences of Benjamin Franklin and Horace Greeley, but the conduct of the *Snark* was only a small part of the business that absorbed his time. His gains were small, but they were steady, and every Saturday night saw a reduction in his indebtedness to Griff. To the young shopkeeper this weekly visit was the one bright spot of his life. As soon as Bobby was gone, he began to reckon the days and hours before he should see him again, dreading to think of the time when the debt should be paid. One stormy night, when he had been a little later than usual in carrying the papers, Bobby lingered a moment by the stove, and Griff hastened fussily to shake it. Bobby placed his hand on the other's shoulder, with

the mere unthinking impulse with which he would have patted the head of an ill-treated cur that sought to lick his hand. Griff vaguely felt all this. Nevertheless, with that careless touch, something of new hope and manhood seemed infused into his being. Perhaps, after all, there was room for him in the world.

Lou was the confidant of Susie Crossman regarding a new school journal that was presently to make its salutatory, to be called the *Spinster*, — its name defiantly announcing its management and policy. The other girls were nobly seconding the efforts of the editor to produce a journal that should so far outshine the *Snark* as to show the repentant editor of the latter periodical what he had lost in declining feminine co-operation. The editorial desk of the *Spinster* was already stuffed to repletion with sentimental and tragic tales and reams of gloomy poetry.

"Those horrid boys will make fun if I print it, and Alice will get mad if I don't," thought the editor of the new school journal, as she laid down another tale that ended in the misery of everybody concerned. "I wonder if she would ever speak to me again if I changed the ending and let them marry and live happy ever after."

The editor of the *Spinster* signed herself "Susan L. Crossman."

One afternoon as Chris was returning from a round of calls, to her amazement she beheld Bobby emerging from the back door of the house whose front entrance she had just left. His sooty hands and hair prematurely

gray with a liberal sprinkling of ashes indicated even to his unsuspecting sister what his business had been at the house of one of her most fashionable acquaintances.

"What are you doing?" she exclaimed in horror-stricken tones.

"Taking care of the Forbes' furnace," answered her brother, easily.

"What for?"

"For the fun of it," answered Bobby, with a brevity indicating that confidences were not in the order of the day.

"What will people say? What could have put such an idea into your head? Don't!" entreated Chris, as her brother strode along by her side, his appearance in startling contrast to her own dainty costume. "How can you do it?"

"Muscle," answered Bobby, succinctly. "Brains don't count for much under thirty, but brawn always commands its price," he added, feeling of his biceps in a self-gratulatory way. "I shook the furnace out of gear at St. Barnabas the other day, and Mr. Carr begged me not to emulate Samson."

"It 's such dirty work," gasped Chris.

"But it brings clean money," retorted Bobby.

"If you 're trying to earn money against Colonel Jerome's visit, the whole idea is absurd," went on Chris, irritably. "It was simply one of Nan's impracticable schemes. Colonel Jerome must take us as he finds us."

Bobby began whistling the "Walrus Chorus."

"Mr. Courtenay is going to give me a job in his office," he said presently.

"Well, if you want to earn money I 'm glad you 're going to do it in a respectable way," returned Chris, somewhat mollified. "What did Mr. Courtenay say when you asked him?"

"Oh, I did n't ask him," returned Bobby, easily. "I 've brought his trap around once or twice lately when Mike was busy; the other day he looked up as though he saw me for the first time and said they needed an extra hand in the office. I 'm to give Saturdays to it, and afternoons the rest of the week. Old Courtenay is a brick," added Bobby, speaking with enthusiasm, even if with something of disrespect, of his prospective employer.

But Betty's secret was the most momentous of all.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

EVERYBODY in Betty's school was her "intimate friend," from the big girls in the first class to the little toddlers just learning their a b c's. She shone more in this extended social circle than in the class-room, where her diligence was chiefly directed in such short cuts to learning as were embodied in the lines, —

> "In fourteen hundred ninety-two,
> Columbus sailed the ocean blue,"

or,

> "First William the Norman,
> Then William his son."

But she was so unfailingly and elaborately polite to both teachers and scholars, so fertile in excuses for unlearned lessons or ingenious in her attempted answers, always accompanied by a beaming smile as though assured of well-merited praise, that she was as much of a favorite with Miss Lang as with her playmates, notwithstanding the frequent necessity in her recitations of reproof or punishment. Betty's sociability, too, brought her into frequent trouble; and many and bitter were the tears she shed at losing her recess or having to remain after school, — penalties which as depriving her of society represented the severest punishment that could

be inflicted. Zealously as Betty had striven, she had never attained a place in the "Banner Row," as the seats were called on the extreme right of the room, where, in proud isolation of virtue, sat those little boys and girls who had refrained from whispering a whole month. Betty always meant "never, never to whisper again, truly honest," particularly when a talk after school with her teacher had reduced her to a Niobe state of contrition; for she dearly loved Miss Lang, and always meant to be a "little help" to her, instead of — as she called herself in those moments of tearful, but alas impotent penitence — "a great bother."

In pleasant weather the children played at recess in the schoolhouse yard, where Betty and a half-score of her particular friends walked up and down with arms intertwined, discussing school affairs and exchanging "secrets." The little girls in Betty's class had a secret society like the girls in the upper room, known as the "K. P. Society," — "Keep Private," — of which the badge was a blue ribbon tied into the top buttonhole of the left boot; a happy arrangement for the President, as the top button of her honored boot was usually missing. This badge of eternal fidelity had lost something of its pristine freshness by splashes from mud-puddles, reckless scaling of adjacent snowbanks, and falls on the ice, — there was always a beautiful long slide from the schoolhouse steps to the gate, worn to glassy smoothness by the swift passage of many little feet. It was difficult to

say at any given time what the "secret" was, for it was changed at frequent intervals, and never in any case remained a secret long.

On stormy days the children had recess in a basement cellar, where they played "Button, Button," "Hunt the Squirrel," and "Little Sally Waters," the chorus rising to so shrill a crescendo at the closing lines, —

> "Turn to the east and turn to the west,
> And turn to the very one that you love best,"

as would effectually have scared the little god of love from the premises. But the favorite amusement was playing "keep house," for which the cellar afforded exceptional facilities. Before each of the three furnaces was a recess sufficiently large to afford lodging — albeit somewhat crowded — for a family comprising parents, eight or ten children and an unlimited number of infants represented by sticks taken from the woodpile and wrapped in handkerchiefs. Betty, of course, was the head of one family and usually selected Maud Courtenay for her husband, the latter being of too gentle disposition for the demands of the maternal rôle. Not content with ruling her own household with a rod of iron, Betty laid down the law for the community. The relations between the several households were always complicated and frequently inimical, for each family stood rigidly upon its dignity, and an unceasing strife for precedence kept life in the cellar areas from stagnation.

The selection in the School Reader beginning,

"Burnt Marmion's swarthy face like fire,"

was a favorite with Betty, who had accordingly elected to call herself and husband Mrs. and Mr. Burnt Marmion, — cellar etiquette prescribing that the lady's name should precede that of her spouse. The family in the adjoining recess were known as King and Queen Zenobia, while Evangeline set up housekeeping under the style and title of Mrs. Thanatopsis.

To every new-comer in the school Betty extended the chubby right hand of good fellowship; she introduced her forthwith to the other little girls with the formality prescribed by the most punctilious etiquette, inducted her into the games, admitted her to membership in the "K. P.," and gave her timely warning of "Old Sukey." One day there was a knock at the schoolroom door, and those who sat near saw Miss Lang hold a brief colloquy in the hall with a shabbily dressed woman to whose hand a little girl was clinging. The new scholar was presently given a seat next Betty. She was a pretty little girl with large, soft brown eyes that she raised appealingly to the face of any one who addressed her, and curly golden hair that reached below her waist, — veritable fairy princess locks that aroused Betty's fervent admiration. She smiled across the aisle at the new-comer and with difficulty forebore from whispering a welcome. Betty had set her heart upon getting into the Banner Row that month; her efforts seemed, at last,

about to be crowned with success, for some three weeks of the time of probation had already elapsed, — a longer period than she had ever before stood the test. Miss Lang observed the sudden flush, the quick tightening of the lips, as well as the look of welcome, and laid an affectionate helping hand on Betty's shoulder; and the child smiled up at her teacher and thought for the hundredth time that she would never again whisper or do aught else that could trouble Miss Lang.

It was speedily known that Lassie Brown lived in the "Beyond," as an outcast settlement on the borders of Holbrook was called. Not without forethought had she been given a seat next Betty; for though the little girls of the "Dudley Primary" were too gently bred, with the exception of Evangeline, to treat rudely any one less favored than themselves, Miss Lang knew children too well and had read the sensitive pale face of the newcomer too clearly, not to be aware that questioning glances and thoughtless words might wound as well as deliberate unkindness.

Betty lost no time in fulfilling the congenial office of chaperon, and that very recess, after she had duly gone through the requisite formalities, invited Lassie to be her husband, coolly telling the late Burnt Marmion that she could be cook, — a position, however, under the social order that prevailed in the cellar, not perceptibly inferior to that of wedded lord. But the sudden and violent intimacy in the next house proved a cause of offence to Mrs. Thanatopsis, who forthwith showed her

resentment by neglecting to return Mrs. Burnt Marmion's greeting when his lordship's household were out on a constitutional by the coal-bin. This ebullition of ill-feeling made Betty's display of affection for her spouse more marked than ever, so that at the close of recess she had even exchanged her cornelian ring with one of Lassie's, fashioned out of a bone button, as a pledge of everlasting friendship.

It was about this time that surprise parties came into vogue. Betty was invited to several of these entertainments by her friends in the upper class, and being greatly pleased with the novel festivity, would gladly have "surprised" every man, woman, and child of her acquaintance, at the head of a basket-laden troop, at three o'clock Saturday afternoon, — that being the fashionable hour for the new function. Besides the pleasure of the actual occasion, there was — what was even more enjoyable — the previous mystification, the whispered confidences concerning what one was to wear or intended to contribute to the entertainment, subsiding into frantic giggles as the proposed victim came within earshot. Betty, of course, was not long in organizing one of these festivities. Maud Courtenay was selected for the honor of being "surprised." Mrs. Courtenay gave assent, and Miss Meg kindly promised co-operation and secrecy. In this new and absorbing interest the slide was neglected, the games were abandoned, and even "keep house" forgotten. Mrs. Burnt Marmion and Mrs. Thanatopsis buried their feud, and the "K. P.

Society" tied new ribbons in its boots in honor of this latest and most stupendous secret.

But the one who was the most interested of all in the coming event was Lassie Brown. She never wearied of listening, open-eyed, to the reminiscences of other parties, — what dresses had been worn, what games played, and what they had had for supper. Her questions were innumerable, and her gratitude for any information was unbounded. Betty not only gave her protégé the benefit of her own wide social experience, but kindly undertook to coach her for the approaching occasion.

"Have n't you ever been to a party before, Lassie?" began this *blasé* young woman. "Dear me, where can you have lived all your life?"

As Lassie's existence, previous to going to her "lovely home in the country," had been passed in the city slums, her opportunities for parties had not been many. A Fourth of July on the Common, when she had seen the balloon rise and had some pink lemonade, and a car ride to the park, where she heard the band play and saw the electrical fountain, made up the list of her festive memories.

"Well, you may go with me," went on Betty, "and if you don't know what to do, just watch me and you will be all right. In the first place, you are shown to a room where you take off your things and smooth your hair. Then you go downstairs to the drawing-room, and walk up to Miss Courtenay and Maud and say, 'How do you

do, Miss Courtenay?' and she will say, 'I am very glad to see you, Miss Brown.'"

"Shall I say, 'Hullo, Maud'?" queried Lassie, anxious to do her friend credit.

"Of course not," frowned Betty. "'Hullo' is just for school; it is n't for parties and Sundays. You must say 'How do you do?' to Maud too; and remember not to giggle when you say it."

"I think I could do that," murmured Lassie.

"What you observe does n't matter so much as the way you observe it," returned Betty, loftily. "That is all I have been in the habit of saying, but I asked my sister Chrissy, who is very elegant and very much admired in society, if she said anything else; and she told me she generally answered, 'So glad to come to your delightful house, dear Mrs. Courtenay!'"

"Please stop a minute. Let me see if I can say that," said Lassie, puckering her pretty arched brows. "'So glad — so glad — you 've come to my delightful house —'"

"Lassie Brown, you have n't got it straight, and you must n't say that anyway, 'cause I 'm going to," cried Betty, indignant at this flagrant infringement of copyright. "You 'd better just smile and get out of the way as quick as you can. If one is n't used to society, it is n't safe to put on too many frills."

"What comes next?" questioned Lassie.

"We play games. You can play 'Geography' splendidly," went on Betty, encouragingly, "because you al-

ways remember all the hard names. I am apt to get excited and think that 'Jersey' begins with a 'G.' It 's like a spelling-match, you know; we choose sides and each side tries to think of all the cities and mountains and rivers that begin with a certain letter. Now what are you going to wear?" went on the Mentor.

"I have a lovely pink sateen" — Lassie pronounced it "satin" — "that a lady who goes out scrubbing gave to my sister Agnes. She says I may wear it."

"I 'll lend you my Roman sash; it will just match," proffered Betty, with anticipated pride in her protégé's appearance.

That afternoon, on her way to school, Betty was overtaken by Evangeline, whose sharp eyes instantly descried the parcel in her friend's hand.

"Lemme see what you 've got there," said she.

"It is n't for you," answered Betty, indignantly.

"It 's for Lassie Brown," returned Evangeline, quickly.

Betty vouchsafed no reply.

"My ma is n't willing for me to 'sociate with a beggar child," went on Evangeline. "If she goes to the party, I dunno as I shall go."

"Lassie is n't a beggar!" cried Betty, indignantly. "She always has her lessons better than you or I, and she has n't whispered once since she 's been in school. She 'll be in the Banner Row next month."

"Poh! so could I be there, too, easy as wink, if I wanted to," retorted Evangeline. "I dare say Lassie

has n't stood up lots of times when Miss Lang has asked for those who whispered."

"Lassie would n't do such a thing," maintained Betty, stoutly. "She 'd know it was n't polite."

"H'm, polite!" sniffed Evangeline. "I b'lieve you think all folks have got to do to get into heaven is just to be polite, Betty Bradstreet Dudley!" with a haughty fling of her skirts, that spoke, louder than words, of her contempt for social upstarts. Then she struck upon a sensitive chord. "Only think how mortified your sister Chrissy will be to have Miss Courtenay s'pose you go with folks in the 'Beyond'! Like as not, Lassie eats with her knife and does not know what to do with a napkin. I presume likely Miss Courtenay will send her right straight home."

"I don't believe Miss Courtenay would do that," responded Betty, faintly, as the two children reached the schoolhouse door.

There was time to slip the parcel into Lassie's hands before school began and to receive from her a look full of love and gratitude. The sash was more beautiful than anything Lassie had ever seen; it was even lovelier than the rainbow whose colors it seemed to have borrowed. She tore a tiny hole in the wrappings, through which she could twist the soft fringe about her finger, and sent little loving looks across the aisle more eloquent than words. Of Thanksgiving Lassie had never heard; Christmas was only a name to her; over her birthday none had ever rejoiced. The party was

one and all of those blissful epochs of childhood in one to her. She thought of it by day and dreamt of it by night, and its anticipation was to her as the foretaste of heaven. With the possession of the Roman sash her cup of happiness ran over.

In spite of herself, Evangeline's stinging words repeated themselves over and over again in Betty's mind as she bent over her geography lesson. She began to have grave misgivings, too, about that "pink satin." Lassie had shown it to her yesterday, as a precious secret "between us two," and even to uncritical eyes the dress looked as though it had seen service in the "washerlady's" vocation before descending to Agnes. Besides, its present owner was tall and lanky, and it was to be feared that the frock might not adapt itself to Lassie's round little form as the dresses of "Alice in Wonderland" were adjusted to the growth or diminution of that adventuresome little girl.

But the rankling thought below all the rest was, What would Chrissy say to her introducing at the Courtenays' as her own particular "intimate friend" a little girl who lived in the "Beyond"? Chris had described with such amplitude of detail the gowns that were worn at each party, she had dwelt with such enthusiasm on Miss Meg's "lovely manners" that to Betty, in her unquestioning faith in and admiration for her eldest sister, a beautiful gown and the glib utterance of conventional phrases were all that were demanded even of grown-up people who went to parties. Only the

night before, pondering these weighty questions, the happy thought occurred to her of asking her sister what she would do in a like emergency to that which was now puzzling her, and Chrissy had answered, oh, so crossly, —

"Of course it is n't our business to see that other people have a good time. I 'd turn my back on them if I were going that way."

Betty's forehead had nearly touched the troublesome map questions, when, suddenly raising her head, she met that glad, loving look of Lassie's. Forgetful for the moment of everything but her friend's happiness, she whispered, —

"Tie it in a big bow."

The selfsame moment the consequences of her thoughtless act flashed across her. She had lost her place in the Banner Row. On the last day of the month, at almost the last hour, when she had worked so hard for four long weeks. It was all Lassie's fault!

Even the party was forgotten, as Betty, putting her arms upon her desk, gave way to a flood of tears that bid fair to convert the Desert of Sahara into a pink and watery waste. Not even Miss Lang's gentle words of regret and attempted encouragement could lighten the bitter disappointment, and when the ten minutes' duress after school had expired, it was with red and swollen eyes that Betty made her appearance in the school-yard.

A group of little girls were gathered by the gate, Lassie standing somewhat apart from the others, with

a look of anxious expectancy turned toward the schoolhouse door. As Betty emerged, Evangeline's shrill, high-pitched voice was saying,—

"Who asked you to the party, Lassie Brown? Who do you think will speak to a beggar child from the 'Beyond'?"

Lassie raised her soft brown eyes to Betty's face with a look that was at once appealing and trustful. Her lips were quivering, one arm was slightly raised as though to twine itself about her friend. Betty met the look stonily, brushed past the extended arm, and turning her back full upon Lassie, entered into eager discussion with Evangeline. The "beggar child" stood for a moment like a little statue with extended arm, hearing no one, seeing no one but Betty. Then, without a word of surprise or remonstrance, she walked slowly away, holding to her heart, tightly clasped in both hands, a tissue-paper parcel.

The following afternoon Maud was as much surprised and delighted as one could expect a hostess to be on entering her drawing-room and finding a score of her friends seated on the edges of as many chairs in a state of suppressed giggle. Betty was in high feather, not only at the success of the "surprisement," but at taking the leading part in every game throughout the afternoon. She retained the last seat in "Jerusalem," she was chosen as the brightest in "Compliments," and so far distinguished herself in "Geography" as to save her side, at the critical moment, by an opportune recollection

of a remote hamlet on the coast of Siberia, whose name no one else would have ventured to pronounce.

"That isn't fair; there is no such place!" cried Evangeline, who headed the other party.

"Yes, there is," answered Betty, with her usual confidence. "It is used as a depot of supplies in case anybody wants them," and could see no reason for Miss Meg's laughter.

In the dining-room a surprise awaited the surprisers. A number of little round tables were decorated with ribbons and flowers and colored candles in pretty shades. There was a button-hole bouquet for every boy and a basket of bonbons for each girl. The last requirement of a party was fulfilled when there appeared ice-cream and "snappers." Miss Meg herself pulled Betty's bonbon with her, and smilingly fitted the Puritan cap it contained about the rosy little face. "Like some Betty Dudley of two hundred and fifty years ago," she said. A merry hubbub ensued as all the children arrayed themselves in the quaint Normandy bonnets, befrilled aprons, and ruffled capes, and flocking into the drawing-room, wound up the happy afternoon with an impromptu German. When the time came to say good-bye, Betty quite forgot her elegance, and putting her arms around Miss Meg's neck, cried rapturously, —

"Oh, dear Miss Meg, thank you ever so much! I've had the beautifulest time that ever was!" And Miss Meg did not seem to mind the absence of "company" manners.

If the recollection of a beseeching little face obtruded itself more than once into the midst of her good time, Betty thrust it from her with the thought, "It isn't my business to see that other people have a good time!"

Soon after the party Betty's "Whats" increased so alarmingly that Chris, fearing her recent illness had affected the child's hearing, took her to Dr. Burnham. The assurance was speedily given that Betty's ears were in a healthy condition.

"Is there much illness in Holbrook?" inquired Chris, casually.

"Very little in Holbrook," was the answer. "Several cases have broken out, however, in the 'Beyond,'" added the doctor, to whom the condition of affairs on the other side of the railroad track had long been a cause of unavailing warfare. "The worst cases are in a family who have recently moved in, named Brown. The youngest little girl died last Saturday."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

BETTY cried at the top of her voice all the way home, hanging at arm's length to Chris's hand, and unheeding her sister's remonstrances and attempts at consolation.

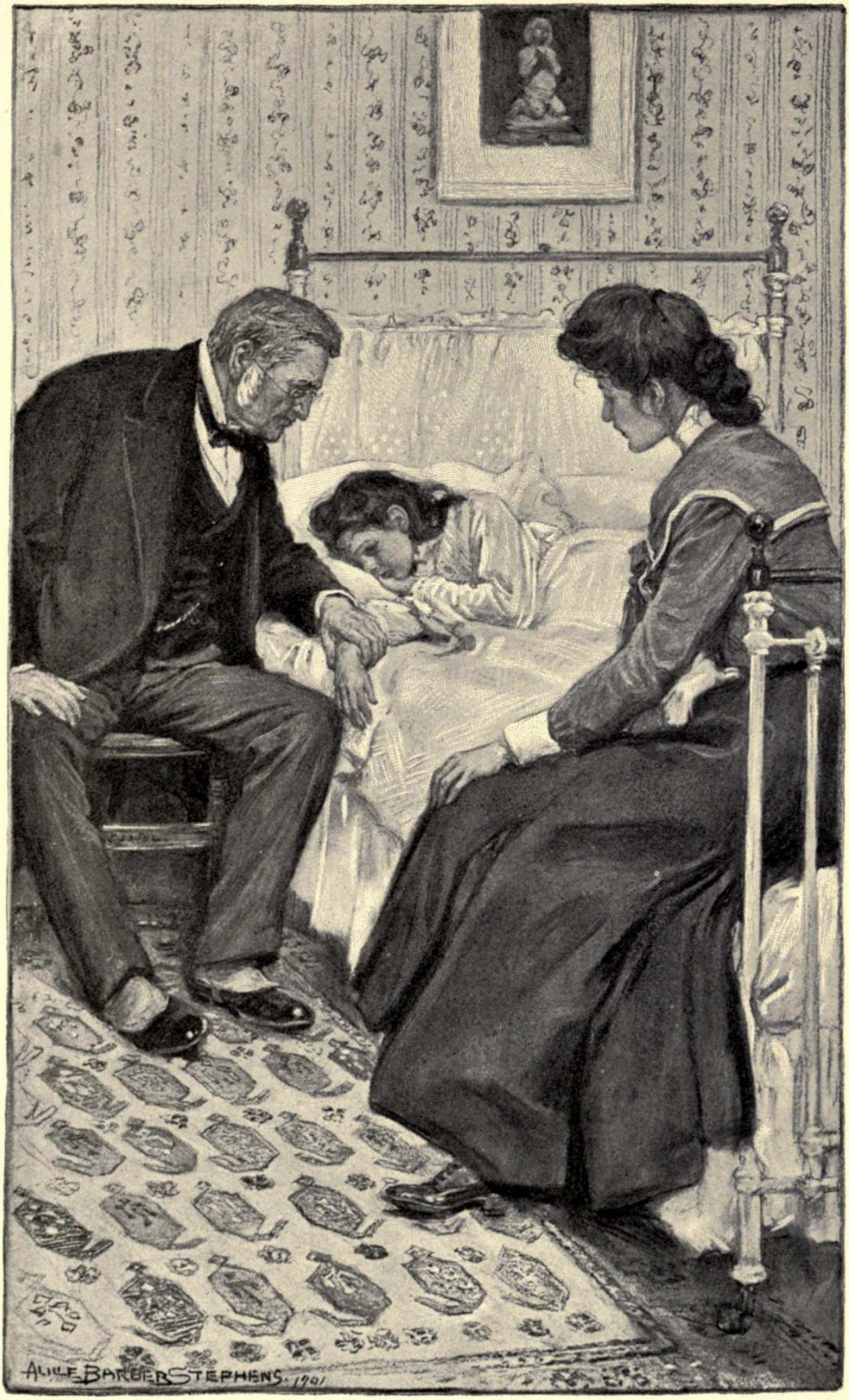
"I did it! It was n't her illness that killed her. Her heart was broken and it was I who broke it. I feel just as I did when I killed the dear little baby alligator; only it 's ever so much worse to kill your friend."

"Do stop crying till we get home," pleaded Chris. "Everybody is looking at us." She had indeed, passed several of her acquaintances; and just then Miss Herbert, across the street, bowed and smiled with a somewhat ostentatious display of ignoring what appeared to be a family fracas.

"Oh, Chrissy, Chrissy, how could you say it was n't our business to try to make other people have a good time — and she a little stranger girl who did n't know anybody and who had never had a good time in her life!"

"If she had gone to the party, you might all have had the fever," suggested Chris desperately.

"I wish we had, and all died together," sobbed Betty. "She looked at me so sor'ful!"


ALICE BARBER STEPHENS. 1901

Those words remained the burden of her cry. She refused supper and sobbed herself to sleep, to awake the next morning with a fresh burst of grief; announcing her intention of "lying there till she died," she turned away from even the luxury of breakfasting in bed, for which she always clamored when any slight ailment seemed to offer the pleasures of an invalid.

In vain Chris proposed a ramble through the shops in town, usually the most enticing prospect that could be held out. Nan's suggestion of stories fell on deaf ears; equally in vain did Lou coax and cuddle, and Bobby bring to the bedside two lovely pink-eyed white mice. At her wits' end, and fearing that the child would really starve herself to death, Chris sought the advice of Dr. Burnham. Exhausted with crying, an occasional quivering sob shook Betty from head to foot. At the sound of approaching steps she buried her face more deeply in the pillow, and murmured huskily, —

"G' way, g' way! Leave me alone to die!"

"Betty!" said a quiet voice by her bedside.

Though unrecognizing, something in the tones compelled attention, and Betty blinked one eye at Dr. Burnham, who, ostensibly to feel her pulse, took her hand, and holding it fast within his own, the quivering breath grew calmer, and by degrees the sobs ceased.

"I want to tell you about your little friend," began the doctor. "At dusk, Saturday afternoon, Lassie did not know those who were around her. She thought she was still at school and that she was going to a party

with Betty. There was a bright sash beneath her pillow which she said Betty had lent her; throughout her illness she never once let go her hold of the sash. She talked to it and stroked it, and twisted the fringe about her fingers. Once her mother tried to take it away, but Lassie pleaded so piteously, saying she could not go to the party without the sash, tied in a big bow, as Betty had said, that none could have had the heart to take it from her. By and by she fell asleep, her cheek resting on the pretty sash. Toward midnight she suddenly opened her eyes and looked surprised and very glad.

"'Oh, is this a party?'" she cried, and almost instantly closed her eyes again.

"That was all."

"Did she wear the sash when she went to Heaven?" queried Betty, eagerly. "Maybe she'd have a better time, you know. The other little girls would n't — think her — a beggar-child then, would they? — or — or turn their backs upon her?"

"I am sure they would not," answered the doctor, with grave sympathy. "I thought you would wish her to keep the sash," he went on. "At the last she wore it, tied in a big bow, and her little face was bright and peaceful. Now you are to go to sleep, and when you awake, you will want something to eat."

"Yes," answered Betty, mechanically, but speaking for the first time in her natural voice.

She made her appearance at the supper-table, where she displayed a ravenous appetite, and even vouchsafed

a watery little smile to Bobby's unwonted amenities. The following morning she went to school, but was unnaturally quiet and subdued for many days. That month she attained the Banner Row, but with an alarming increase of conscience she only sobbed, —

"'T is n't because I 've been made good, dear Miss Lang. It 's just 'cause there 's nobody left in the world to talk to!"

Only once, in those early weeks, did Betty display something of her wonted spirit. On her first meeting with Evangeline the latter "tagged," with a swing of her skirts more assertive than ever. Drawing herself up with a haughtiness that her Puritan ancestor could have no more than equalled, Betty turned upon her quondam friend, and said, in a tone loud enough to be heard by every one in the schoolyard, —

"I thank you, if you please, Miss Bean; but if my friends are not good enough for you, then you are not good enough for me!" and walked away, leaving Evangeline for once silenced.

No longer upheld by the most popular little girl in the "Dudley Primary," Evangeline was studiously avoided by every one. Even her not over-fine sensibilities were not proof against this general coldness, her absences became more and more frequent, and before the end of the term her attendance ceased altogether.

The trouble in the "Beyond" speedily attained a serious aspect. The city authorities, urged by Mr. Courtenay's powerful influence, took stringent measures

of relief. Miss Courtenay proved Dr. Burnham's most efficient aid, superintending the work of the trained nurses she had herself installed, while the Courtenay kitchen and hothouses were laid under unstinted contribution for the supply of nourishing food, no less requisite than skilled medical aid. But notwithstanding every exertion the fever spread with increasing virulence, till it assumed the character of an epidemic, and scarcely a day passed that did not see a black cortège wind from some house in the "Beyond."

To Chris those unwonted weeks of social gayety under the chaperonage of Miss Courtenay would doubtless have had their inevitable reaction, but combined as this condition was with the stinging self-reproach left by Betty's grief, she was reduced to a limp and nerveless condition of mind and body, in which existence seemed an unprofitable thing indeed. She could not attain the resolve of offering her assistance in the settlement work, sorely though she knew it was needed; any qualms of conscience on the subject being speedily silenced by the thought that she did not want to see poverty or unhappiness, — she had enough of both at home. The days were spent in wandering about the house like an unlaid spirit, or in taking long, aimless jaunts into the city, whence she returned more restless and dissatisfied than ever.

As there seemed no particular object in getting out of bed, her morning appearance became later than usual, with something more than the customary results. One morning after a particularly sharp passage at arms with

Nan, she sat at the deserted breakfast-table, nibbling cold toast and trying to sip lukewarm coffee. Betty came into the room, to ask how many buttons of her coat she should fasten, — an inquiry she never omitted. Moved by her sister's forlorn aspect, she put her arms around Chris's neck, and whispered, —

"Never mind what naughty Nan says, Chrissy. You are the head of the table!"

Chris pushed her plate from her. Another mouthful would have choked her. The childish words seemed to precipitate all the partially formed thoughts and nebulous regrets that for the past few days had been floating in her mind. The "head of the table"! How, indeed, had she filled the place? By the utterance of those thoughtless words that had borne her little sister such bitter fruit; by selfishly pursuing her own ends, forgetting Dick and the sacrifices he had made for them these many years? All the others had kept true to the compact. Even heedless Lou had scrupulously put aside every cent of her tiny income. Nan's purse must be well filled, thought the girl, with a twinge of jealous irritation. Bobby's mysterious business was doubtless to the same end. Abandoning all her magnificent schemes of achieving wealth at a bound, Betty had patiently devoted herself, throughout the winter, to picking up the smallest scraps and shreds that could go to the rag-bag; creeping about on her hands and knees, after any dressmaking, for the least thread that might increase her store and insisting upon a sale whenever a

corner of the rag-bag was filled. Chris recalled, remorsefully, how sharply she had spoken on more than one occasion when, as she was entertaining callers in the drawing-room, a stentorian voice from above shouted, "Stop that ragman!" followed by a clatter over the stairs as of a cavalry regiment at full charge. It was an inscrutable mystery why Betty should invariably be on the house-top when one of the craft came in sight. Perhaps, like Sister Ann, she went up into the tower to lie in wait for them.

She wondered what Nan had done about the deficit in the winter's income, and brought to mind, for the first time, how pale and harassed her sister was looking. The insistent words rang in her ears, "You 're a thief, Chris Dudley, that 's what you are!" The money she had appropriated to her own use, insignificant as the amount looked at the time, now seemed a colossal sum. There was no way by which she could replace it, at least before Dick's return, for art needlework, her only resource, was slow and unremunerative at the best; and it was now the dull season. Besides, only original designs were profitable, and under existing circumstances she could not ask Nan's aid. All at once a solution of the question flashed upon her. Her skill with the needle might perhaps be turned to account in another way. Miss Meg had casually mentioned, not long before, that she wanted a dressmaker who would come to the house to make Maud's spring frocks and remodel some of her own gowns. The idea of applying

for the situation had been at the time as far from Chris's mind as that of offering herself as a missionary to China; but the longer she dwelt upon the plan, the more feasible did it appear.

A dressmaker commanded good wages. If she offered herself for the — situation — Chris handled the word timorously — the employment would last a month at least, and in that time she could surely earn enough to replace the "borrowed" money and perhaps even have a little surplus to devote to refurbishing the house.

But on the other hand, how could she go, a paid dependant, to the house where she had lately been a petted guest? Miss Herbert had once alluded, in her hearing, to somebody who looked like a "little dressmaker." Chris fastened a pincushion at her waist and held ostentatiously in her hand a shabby black "reticule" that might be supposed to contain patterns and a "chart;" thus arrayed, she surveyed herself critically in the glass to see if there were anything in her appearance that might be supposed to characterize those who "go out by the day."

Miss Herbert would turn upon her that cool, critical gaze and be more scrupulously polite than ever. How she would sink in the estimation of young Mr. Courtenay, who would probably ask her to mend his overcoat and darn his gloves. Did the Courtenays allow the dressmaker to come to the table with the family?

That afternoon, in response to a somewhat imperative pull at the bell, Chris opened the door herself.

"The coal man has come for the bill," she reported to Nan. "He said it was the third time he had called. I should think you would be ashamed to let him dun us!" the irritation of the moment getting the better of her half-formed repentance.

Nan flushed, but vouchsafing no reply, took out her own shabby little leather purse, cherished as a Christmas gift of long ago from Chris. The sight touched some sensitive chord in the elder girl's heart, and adding another item to the list of her self-reproaches, gave the crowning touch to resolve. At dusk, summoning all her courage, she slipped across the street.

Miss Meg had just returned from the "Beyond" and was in the library. Whether because of her friend's smile and outstretched hand, or because it was the hour that invited confidences, Chris forgot the tactful way in which she had intended to lead up to the subject; simply and directly she made known her request.

"I think I could satisfy you," she added; "I have always made my own gowns and Betty's frocks."

The proposal was received with a warmth that left no doubt as to its acceptability. The question of remuneration, too, was soon settled, although its amount was so far beyond Chris's expectations as to draw forth a protest.

"I am sure your help will be worth all that," smiled Miss Meg. "It will be a great relief to me to leave the matter in your hands," she added, with a confidence that made the girl feel as though the inspiration of Worth

glowed within her. "The trouble in the settlement will occupy most of my time for some weeks to come," she added gravely.

"I wish I could be like you!" exclaimed Chris, with a little irrepressible burst of girlish enthusiasm.

Just then the fire flashed out a single gleam, lighting the picture of Lady Katharine Douglas above the mantel, to which Miss Meg's eyes were uplifted. In that space Chris seemed to catch a glimpse of something so true and sweet and high that in its mere presence her own life was mysteriously touched to finer issues.

"Dear," whispered Miss Meg, "one may still give her right arm to the King in loyal, loving service!"

CHAPTER TWENTY

NAN was giving the last touches to a drawing upon which she had been at work for weeks past, in such intervals of ardor as was permitted by her disturbed condition of mind. Sometimes, indeed, it almost seemed to the girl that out of the very fulness of her need for help and sympathy was the conception born. She was goaded, now, not only by her usual finishing devil, but by the knowledge that the hours in which she could complete her work were numbered. Close at hand lay a copy of the *Connoisseur* open at an announcement at which the artist glanced ever and anon for inspiration, —

"The *Connoisseur* offers a prize of One Hundred Dollars for the best design for an Easter card." Certain restrictions and specifications followed, concluding with the words, "All designs must be sent in before the first of March."

"If I should get it!" thought Nan, leaning back in her chair for a moment's well-earned rest, in which she drew up a mental list of the uses to which that elastic one hundred dollars should be put.

"Nan — Na—an!" called Bobby's voice, from below.

"Oh dear, another interruption!" thought Nan, stifling the impulse to disregard the call or return an

impatient answer, and shuffling her work out of sight beneath the confusion of watercolor blocks, papers, stumps, charcoal sticks, and smudgy rags on the table.

Bobby ran up the attic stairs, two at a time, singing "Nancy Lee" at the top of his voice.

"If you would couch your admiration in prose and in a lower key, it would be just as acceptable," suggested Nan mildly, as her little brother blocked the door with a voluminous pile of papers in his hand, and the words spoken with simulated indifference, —

"Want to hear my plea?"

"Of course I do," answered Nan, heartily, and prepared to give all attention to the orator as he mounted an impromptu rostrum, constructed out of a big Japanned tray — whereof most of the Japan had vanished — laid across an empty soap-box.

The Holbrook Debating Club was to hold its open meeting to-night. The occasion was not only a notable event of the school year, but it was regarded by Holbrook at large as a social function of the first magnitude. Local pride was aroused, for the Debating Club was almost coeval with the Holbrook High School, and that, as every one knew, was the oldest endowed school in New England. Tickets to the debate were sold by subscription; the committee included the most distinguished names in the town and there was an imposing list of patronesses, who came on the great night in gala attire laden with bouquets for the favored orators. Following the debate, every one present voted upon the

merits of the question under discussion. "Which side are you on?" was a query that was heard on every side, among the old boys on the early train, as well as at social functions of afternoon and evening.

This year the question was, "Resolved, Our Country is too Free." The affirmative side was upheld by Bobby and Taffy Dabney. Probably the latter's unpopularity would have lost him the position but for the stand taken by Bobby.

"He 's the best fellow for the place," insisted the latter, regardless of personal animosities. "We 're not going to risk our cause, are we, because we 're down on a fellow for something that does n't affect the present issue?"

Somehow, despite the fact that Bobby had almost vanished from their midst, his influence among his mates was greater than ever, and his voice now carried the day.

"I say, Bobby, that was dandy of you," said Taffy, almost humbly.

"Keep the change," returned Bobby, with a magnificent bow and turning his back upon his "honorable colleague."

Jack Burnham and Lucy were on the negative side; the latter, spurred to unwonted endeavor, covered sheet after sheet with flowery eloquence, to the end of reinstating himself in the good graces of his little sweetheart and incidentally of "preserving the liberties of our country."

The girls meantime, besides their partisanship in the debate, had their own side issues. They were all heartily tired of the feud — at first exciting — between themselves and the boys, but were not sufficiently versed in worldly tactics to know how to make up without loss of dignity.

"It 's stupid dancing with girls for partners," said Susie Crossman, dejectedly; "we 've lost the skating and tobogganing too. I really think, girls, we can afford to be magnanimous," brightening as she thought how nobly the feminine contingent of the Holbrook High School had vindicated itself. For the *Spinster* had proved a success, although some of its constituency were openly suggesting that a masculine department would be acceptable.

Wisely taking their mothers into their councils, the debate was suggested as an occasion when a friendly interest in the boys' affairs might express gracefully a desire for renewed good feeling.

"Of course I shall vote for you, my darling Robin," said Lou, when Bobby would have explained the question to her. "So you need not trouble to make me understand what it is all about. If you would like to say that Voodooism — whatever that may be — is the best form of government, you shall have my vote, one and indivisible, survive or perish! I guess I could n't think all winter about Dick and forget my own precious little brother at home. Besides, you don't suppose I 'd vote for a horrid boy who — " Lou bit back the words, as she

had done similar ones many times the past months, and contented herself with adding, "I'll vote with both hands — stuff the ballot-box — that's the phrase, is n't it? — if I get the chance. But oh, Bobby, I do think that if Taffy were not quite so fat, he 'd have more votes from the girls. You will wear your hair banged, won't you, Robin love? It's awfully fetching, and it does n't make you look a bit sissy, truly."

To which petition the future legislator responded, with a keenness and brevity that would doubtless win many a future forensic triumph, —

"Rubbish!"

Nan, on the contrary, had stoutly maintained the opposite side of the question. For days past she and Bobby had not met without launching upon the vexed subject, till the others begged them to confine their discussions to the studio. There the battle waged high, neither party yielding a point, and when breath failed, proceeding to settle the question by single combat, with swords fashioned out of broomsticks. Bobby had written and re-written, revised and polished his plea, spurred to further researches, or even to the recasting of an entire line of argument by one of these discussions.

He had just finished copying his speech for the last time.

The argument was compact and well sustained, the illustrations were few and apt, and the orator's gestures spare, partly by reason of a careful study of effect and partly because his present rostrum was not calculated to

bear the gesticulations of fiery eloquence; till at the climax he made an unwary movement and with a wild swoop of his arms was precipitated to the floor, with a bang and clatter that hopefully prefigured the plaudits of the nations.

"It 's perfectly splendid, Bobby!" cried Nan, when she could speak for laughter. "I 'm not convinced, but I know you 'll get the verdict; and oh, Bobby when you knit your brows and put out your hand like that, you look just like the picture of Daniel Webster in the Athenæum."

Eulogy could strike no higher note, and Bobby, though scorning to betray his gratification, nor the fact that he had spent hours before the glass posing in the characteristic attitude of the great statesman, allowed a smile to cross his face, as he responded, —

"Now let 's say 'Horatius!'" and off the two started on the stirring "Lay," Bobby sounding a tocsin on the tray as an accompaniment to his favorite lines, —

> "'When none were for a party,
> And all were for the state!'"

The great evening came. The hall of the schoolhouse was filled to its utmost capacity. The Senior class had been given a place on the platform, and were buzzing confidentially among themselves. Heedful of the excitement among the boys, the dignified old head master admonished them that they were gentlemen and he expected them to behave as such. The violent

demonstrations of the ball-field would be out of place on the present occasion.

Chris, Nan, Lou, and Betty had secured seats in the front row; while Miss Meg, who was one of the patronesses, smiled her interest and sympathy close by. Early in the evening four choice bouquets, with a card attached to each, had arrived from the Courtenay hothouses. Betty nearly sniffed her violets to pieces with mingled rapture and excitement.

The audience settled itself to attention as Lucy appeared on the platform. He acquitted himself admirably and sat down amid a storm of applause, the conviction that he had won the case for his side, and, best of all, a bunch of red and white carnations from Susie, who had been wavering between a lingering fondness for the leading affirmative and a conviction of wasted affections in that direction. As the little speaker labored with his big words and grandiloquent gestures, she remembered, all at once, how unfailing had been his admiration of her own literary efforts, and how untiringly he had fought innumerable battles in her behalf. So, with a beaming smile that betokened unmistakably the renewal of good feeling, she bestowed her posy upon him.

Taffy Dabney now arose for the affirmative; anxious to retrieve himself in the estimation of his fellows, he had done his honest best; but though his argument was well conceived and couched in excellent English, it fell short of its effect by reason of the orator's defective

delivery and clumsy figure. In the intermission that followed, the opinion was generally expressed that thus far the negative side had shown itself the stronger. The audience turned toward Jack Burnham with an interest that betrayed its realization of the fact that the real significance of the contest was now before them.

With the glowing words of the speaker, it was involuntarily felt that such generous sentiments accorded best with youth. There was a genuine heart-throb among the audience as Jack, with a gesture toward the flag that draped the back of the platform, turned to his mates with the closing words, —

"Shall the stars and stripes lose the meaning that has made them, the world over, the synonym for liberty? Shall ours be the stigma, — 'In that day and generation America ceased to be — sanctuary!"

Then came Bobby's turn. As he stepped upon the platform, there was an instant's hush, followed by an involuntary murmur of admiration at the boy's superb figure and handsome, earnest face. Taken by surprise, Bobby stood vainly searching for the first line of his speech, while the audience, perceiving his embarrassment, gave another encouraging round that only succeeded in completing the orator's bewilderment. The silence had become painful when Bobby, catching sight of Nan's pale, frightened face, seized upon the thought,

"I 'll think I 'm in the studio again, and that she 's going to say, 'It's perfectly splendid, Bobby!'"

So, keeping his eyes fixed upon the one face, address-

ing the one person out of all the audience, the spell was broken, and once launched upon his theme, he forgot everything but that he was there to win men's minds and hearts to larger thought and sounder sentiment.

As he dwelt on the race to office of those who forgot friendship, principle, honor, in the mad desire to win the highest place, there was more than schoolboy rhetoric, — there was the depth and passion of personal experience in his words; his voice rang with the spirit of the gallant, uncompromising old Puritan Governor, and he spoke as one who felt himself the chosen champion of that heritage of truth and honor and unswerving devotion to an ideal that made the Puritan Commonwealth what it was. But to Bobby himself, still seeking Nan's face, it was the dear home life, mysteriously interwrought with the great life of the nation, that throbbed in his closing words, —

> "'When none were for a party,
> And all were for the state!'"

He took his seat without applause; only no one noticed its absence. The silence remained unbroken as the committee, consisting of Dr. Burnham, Mr. Dabney, and Judge Luce, retired to count the votes. A nervous restlessness pervaded the assembly; the tension was too great to admit of talking, and there was an audible sigh of relief when Judge Luce appeared on the platform, holding a slip of paper, from which he read, —

"Number of votes, four hundred and sixty-three.

Necessary to a choice, two hundred and thirty-two. Negative, thirty-seven. Affirmative —"

The report was cut short in an unlooked-for manner. Mr. Shattuck started into the aisle, and gave the Holbrook yell!

It was the signal for such a tumult as had never before been known, even on the victorious ball-field.

"What 's the matter with Bobby! He 's — all — right! Who 's — all — right? Bobby! Rah, rah, rah, st, boom, tiger! *Hol*-brook! Bobby!"

There was a simultaneous rush for the platform, and Bobby disappeared from view, to be lifted high, the next instant, upon the shoulders of his companions. A hand-shaking followed that made even the orator's practised biceps ache. Lucy, contentedly sniffing his posy, strutted around the hero of the hour, admiring him from every point of view, and rejoicing far more in Bobby's victory than he would have done in his own.

The glow and excitement had left Bobby's face as he broke at last from his rejoicing mates and ran down-stairs to the dressing-room. At the very climax of a triumph greater than any of which he had dreamt, he had caught sight of Jack Burnham's face on the edge of the crowd.

What mattered the shouts of the multitude when Jack's voice was not heard? What did he care to be borne aloft before all Holbrook when it was not Jack's shoulder that upheld him? Of what value were these grips on every side, when Jack's hand was not first to

clasp his own? In all the sea of admiring faces turned toward him, Bobby saw only Jack Burnham's. Not frightened, nor resentful, nor even evasive, as it had been through the alienated months of the winter, but sorry and wistful and full of a pleading that could not be misunderstood.

Some one was standing on the threshold of the dressing-room, — some one who was twirling in his hands a cap upon which was the glittering insignia of its owner's rank.

The two boys looked at each other in dead silence. Bobby held out his hand.

"Jack, old boy!"

"Bobby, old fellow!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE others had gone to bed, but Nan could not defer congratulations till the morning and waited in the chill sitting-room for Bobby's footsteps. The last notes of "Comrades" — whistled in duet — died away, and she turned an eager face toward the door.

"I voted for you, Bobby, after all," she cried. "Of course I would n't have voted against you, whatever I thought, but I had no idea of going over to your side till after your speech. When you are up for Governor of Massachusetts, I shall cast my vote for you, no matter what your platform is — even if it 's as rickety as an old tin tray. Oh, Bobby, I was *so* proud of you!"

She was in jubilant spirits. Bobby knew that none other of his sisters could enter into his triumph as Nan could. Boon companions though he and Lou were, there were subjects upon which he never touched with her. But he always felt, instinctively, that Nan would understand, in those rare moments when mind and soul outstripped his years and he thought and felt as one who had put away childish things.

Too full of pride and rejoicing to note the unusual quiet of her little brother's mood, Nan began repeating the compliments of the evening.

"Mr. Dabney said he was proud of you, and declared your speech was the finest that had ever been delivered in that hall, and that it would do credit to a trained advocate. Judge Luce said, 'Our young men of family are sorely needed in the public life of to-day. Bobby does credit to his inheritance of principle and intellect. Holbrook will some day be proud of Bobby.' Think of that, from Judge Luce! Dr. Burnham shook hands with us all — Betty insisted on shaking hands twice — and his face glowed! Mr. Shattuck — was n't it funny, his giving that yell!" ran on Nan, breathlessly — "said, in such a tone, 'I congratulate you!'"

"Nan, I suppose you 'll think I 'm off my base," began Bobby, in a dry, husky voice; "but the fact is, I 'm in doubt as to whether I shall go in for the law, after all!"

"Why, what do you mean — what else could you do?" exclaimed his sister, incredulously. "Are you afraid of making a failure of it — after to-night?" The echo of the evening's triumph was in her laugh.

"Of course not," returned Bobby, superbly. "It is n't from lack of nerve," he went on slowly, "nor because" — more slowly still — "because I don't care for the distinction that, more than any other, the legal profession confers."

"You 've meant to be a lawyer before you could even speak plain," went on his sister, in amazement. "Don't you remember your oration on 'Murder' when you were in kilts, after you 'd been reading Webster's argument in

the White case — how scared Lou was, and how Nurse Ransom came tearing to the nursery when she heard you cry 'Murder!' expecting to find us all in a bloody row, like the King's daughters in 'Hop-o-my-Thumb'? Have you forgotten how you've learnt Webster's speeches by heart and would never declaim anything else in school, and have quoted him and sworn by him on every occasion, till we've sometimes wished Webster had never been born. You've always said that the bar was the most direct path to public life!"

Bobby did not answer immediately.

"There's such a thundering lot of lawyers," he said, at length, with averted face.

"It was Daniel Webster who said, 'There's always room at the top!'" answered Nan, in a choked voice. "Are you forgetting — Daniel Webster?"

"I should be ready for college this fall," said Bobby, jerkily. "It would be a pull to go through, although, of course, I should help myself." He threw back his broad shoulders with a gesture that held, perhaps, a little too much of self-confidence. "But I could not hope to earn much money the first year, before I had learnt the ropes. Even after I had been admitted to the bar, some time would necessarily elapse before I could make even a bare living at my profession. All these years I should be pulling on somebody, for it would be impossible to earn an adequate income, meantime, from other sources; the Law is a mistress who will not tolerate divided attention. Lucy's dad says that

old Shattuck was regarded as the one man of his class who was sure to make his mark, and look at him now!"

Bobby spoke with a grasp and succinctness that betrayed it was not the first time he had thus reviewed the situation.

"We 'd all help!" said Nan, tremulously.

"That would be the worst of the rub," returned Bobby sturdily. "Dick has enough on his shoulders, as it is. Pinching and scraping at home might keep me at Harvard, but how would it be with the rest of you? Maybe I 've learnt a thing or two this winter," he added soberly.

"It would be such a disappointment to us all," pleaded his sister. "Truly, Bobby, I 'd be willing to work my fingers to the bone and live on bread and water — I 'd give up gladly all idea of studying art or going abroad, to see you what you were meant to be, — what you should be by right of inheritance as well as of inborn talent, — 'Robert Dudley, *By the grace of God Governor of Massachusetts.*'"

Bobby winced. Involuntarily his eyes were raised to the portrait of Thomas Dudley on the opposite wall. The face of the old Puritan Governor was unmistakably that of a man in whom love of power was dominant. But whatever his errors of passion or of judgment, in whatever age or land he had lived, to proud old Thomas Dudley the words "party politics" could have had no meaning.

"I 've something to tell you, Nan, if you 'd care to

hear," said Bobby, with a watchful eye on his sister's expressive face.

"I 'll listen," answered Nan, with a kind of snort that betokened scant toleration for further confidences of a nature like those that had preceded.

"Lucy begged his dad to let him tell me," began Bobby, slowly. "It was hatched out between Judge Luce and Mr. Shattuck; you know he and Lucy's dad are old cronies. Lucy said his father found him with the new issue of the *Snark*, and Lucy told him that I 'd been the whole team. His dad walked off with the paper and read every word of it!" Bobby could not keep the triumph out of his voice. "Lucy told him the whole row, and afterwards — well," added Bobby, modestly, "that is about all there is to it. To-night, after the debate, the two immense old fellows put their heads together, and — Judge Luce has offered to pay my expenses through Harvard and the Law School!"

Nan was sitting bolt upright, with sparkling eyes.

"Oh, Bobby!" was all she could say.

"If I accept," added her brother, "I am to take the entrance exams. with Jack and Lucy and the other fellows. We should go through college, as we have gone through school, together."

"*If* you accept," repeated Nan, with an incredulous laugh. "I should n't think it would take you long to decide."

"I did think, for a moment, that it was my luck," said Bobby, whose self-confidence not infrequently took

the form of belief in a lucky star. "But I haven't decided yet."

"If you prefer a business career, you might go into partnership with Griff," suggested Nan, with a disagreeable laugh. "Is that the opportunity you are pining for, instead of the law?"

"Yes, I had some thought of going into business," answered Bobby, jerkily. "Mr. Courtenay has offered me a steady job. If I take up with his offer, I am to begin work as soon as school closes, and learn the business from the start. After all," he went on, pleadingly, as Nan's eyes filled with tears that were rare indeed, "it is not as though I meant to give up the thought of public life. You know that I have regarded the law rather as a means to an end than as the end itself. *He* said, 'Boston should send commercial men to Congress!'"

"He probably said it as a pretty speech to the solid men of Boston after they had made up another purse to pay his everlasting debts," retorted Nan. "If you don't go to college, all I can say is that it's the worst thing that has happened this winter. Colonel Jerome has proved a worse bugaboo than our old spectre, the Female Relative!" Without waiting for a reply, with a gesture that indicated she washed her hands of Bobby and his affairs, Nan hastened from the room.

Bobby went to his den with the all-important question weighing heavily upon him. It was not alone because of the approaching examinations that he felt he must

decide his future career before he slept. He had in truth reached the "parting of the ways" to which each, sooner or later, must come. His thoughts went back to the hour on the parade ground when he had saluted the false captain. Afterwards, when the glow of generous impulse had been replaced by the dull, unrequited strain of every-day endeavor, he had guarded well the secret of Jack's perfidy, and in such magnanimity he thought he had done well. But since that never to be forgotten hour there had been other acts of self-abnegation, new thought for others; in his manful struggle for independence had come a strengthening and a tempering of the fine metal of his character, so that, unconsciously to himself, the boy who that hour had clasped Jack Burnham's hand in full forgiveness and forgetfulness was on a higher plane than that on which he had stood a few short months before.

He stood looking at the chair that had been Daniel Webster's, of which he had made a very fetich, held from seating himself therein by a strange feeling that in some way the act involved his entire future. From his very cradle the impelling impulse of his life had been to

> "Learn his great language, catch his clear accents,
> Make him his pattern to live and to die!"

Could it be that for the first time the thought of Webster held for him no illuminating impulse, no inspiring example?

In involuntary mental review, the great life passed

before him. Of all the attributes that make for power, what lacked this royal man? Yet when the issue came on which turned the crowning ambition of his life, men refused their trust to the greatest statesman of his day, and Daniel Webster died a disappointed and embittered man.

In his petted boyhood how calmly he had accepted the sacrifices of all around him, as though by right divine of his fivefold talent! His education was obtained at the supreme cost of another. Throughout his towering manhood, when he was a nation's idol, still the keynote of his life was self, till the zenith of his intellectual strength was the nadir of his moral weakness, and the Seventh of March speech struck the knell of Daniel Webster's better fame.

With the clairvoyance that comes in some supreme moments, the boy read his own possible future in the light of his shattered idol. He sank into what was truly his "Siege Perilous," — the seat of Daniel Webster, — crying in his boyish heart, as did Galahad of old, —

"'If I lose myself, I save myself!'"

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

CHRIS had merely said, regarding the coming weeks, that she was to "help Miss Meg." As she had "helped" in so many of their neighbor's pleasant plans, no suspicion was attached to this announcement, even by her vigilant family, the only comment being the inquiry from Nan, "Shall I send your trunk after you?"

Miss Meg met her in the hall with outstretched hands, saying, —

"I know how prompt you always are, so everything is ready. But, first, would you mind coming into the library while I write a note?"

Presently she read aloud the little missive, with an air of holding consultation, so that by the time they were ready to go upstairs, Chris had been made to feel that she had come to lend her aid in a friendly way as she had done at the various social functions of the winter. Materials and fashion-books were outspread on the bed in Miss Meg's own room, where Chris found, gratefully, she was to work instead of in the remote sewing-room. In deciding on the way in which Maud's spring frocks were to be made, an hour passed quickly; when Miss Meg departed on her daily visit to the "Beyond," Chris fell to work in actual enjoyment of her new rôle.

But unhappily, not for long was she left in peace. Mrs. Courtenay presently appeared, drawn thither partly by the amiable wish to keep her young friend from being "lonesome," — a calamity that she always thought overtook a person if left for five minutes to her own society, — and partly by the desire to ascertain "what five letters spelt the name of an ancient city of Phœnicia, the home of a wicked princess, who set up the worship of the false god Baal." As Chris could not enlighten her on this interesting point, Mrs. Courtenay fetched a Bible and Concordance, and seating herself in a rocking-chair immediately before the dressmaker, began swaying violently back and forth, accompanying the dizzy motion with fragmentary quotations from the Concordance, in the intervals of a disjointed stream of talk.

"I 've wanted so much to consult Mr. Carr about that point. I suppose he 's very busy in Lent, but I think he ought to attend to the spiritual needs of his parishioners, whatever the season. 'So the posts that rode upon mules and camels went out.' It 's really very strange that he should be out so much when I call and he a clergyman of the Episcopal Church and I dare say will some day be bishop. I hope he won't wear knickerbockers, as some bishops do, or call himself 'Holbrook,' because that was the name of the man who died the other day in state's prison or — somewhere. But then, there 's no knowing! Things turn out so strangely nowadays, and that is the reason I never leave home

without taking Wee Willie with me; the house might catch afire or burglars come on from New York. Things are so much cheaper in New York than here; such bargains after the holidays!" and Mrs. Courtenay heaved a cyclonic sigh. "What's the matter, my dear?" she inquired, as Chris uttered an exclamation.

"Nothing," answered the girl, faintly. "You were speaking of a wicked princess — the opera — Medea —" with her brain in a whirl at the awful discovery that she had cut both sleeves for one arm.

The material was a remnant, of an "up and down" pattern and a "right and wrong" side; these trying conditions had necessitated, in the first instance, the most careful planning, and not a scrap of the material remained, as she well knew. Nevertheless, in forlorn hope, she searched the floor, the bed, and the tables; she scrutinized every corner of the room, and even looked behind the window draperies, — "as though I expected to stare some of the stuff into existence, like the old Begum and the teacups in Mr. Blake's fairy tale," she thought, with a gleam of humor felt to be as misplaced as at a funeral. Mrs. Courtenay, meantime, having somehow become possessed by the idea that the dressmaker had lost her scissors, was on her knees before the fireplace, narrating to somebody up the chimney how a treasured pair of shears of her own had once mysteriously vanished, and after having been mourned as lost for a twelvemonth, was discovered behind the cushions of her rocking-chair. Fired by this recollection, she

proceeded to search the chair she had just left. Perhaps she deemed it a magnet for wandering steel.

"Never mind, dear Mrs. Courtenay!" said Chris, sweetly. "Perhaps you would be so kind as to lend me your scissors," she added, for to her guilty consciousness it seemed evident to everybody that Maud must appear at Easter with a sleeve that was upside down and wrong side out.

To her inexpressible relief, Mrs. Courtenay presently announced her intention of calling on Mr. Carr.

"I know it's his sermon morning," she added benignantly; "but then, he won't mind me."

Hardly was her ponderous back turned, when Chris whipped the evidence of her guilt into her pocket. But peace of mind was gone, and the remainder of the morning was spent in a fruitless endeavor to think of some way out of her difficulty. On her return from school, Maud was called in to try on the frock. While the skirt was being adjusted, she stood on either leg, like a stork; and when Chris tried to fit the waist, hitched her shoulders, screwed herself into the attitude of a contortionist in the endeavor to see the back, and anon wriggled out of the dressmaker's hands to preen up and down before the mirror, dragging an imaginary train.

"Where's the other sleeve?" she demanded.

"It isn't cut," answered Chris, hastily taking out the pins.

"I want to see how I'm going to look. Where's the other sleeve?" reiterated the youthful Nemesis.

"Never mind now, there 's a dear," pleaded the hapless dressmaker.

Fortunately, at this crisis, Mrs. Courtenay returned from a fruitless call at the rectory, and Maud's pertinacity was checked.

"What a diffident little woman Mrs. Carr is!" observed Mrs. Courtenay. "I only just mentioned how nice the addition to the rectory looked, and how convenient for Mr. Carr to have an independent entrance and exit, and she turned quite scarlet, my dear."

Miss Meg returned at noon only for a hasty luncheon, but her words of encouragement enabled Chris to persevere through the afternoon instead of confessing her blunder and retiring to a convent for the rest of her life. She went home feeling that there were trials in the path of the breadwinner of which she had never dreamt.

That night she turned and tossed on her bed, seeking some way out of her dilemma, and when at last she fell asleep, it was only to troubled slumber. She opened her eyes just as the outlines of things in her room were becoming visible, with a vague sense of something awful that had happened. The next moment she sat bolt upright with wide-open eyes. Sleep had seemingly brought inspiration, and the solution of the question was clear before her. She would go in town on the "tin pail" train, match the material, and be back in time to present herself at the Courtenays' only a little after the appointed hour. Dressing herself with all speed, she

slipped, breakfastless, from the house before any one else was astir, — Chris, who had never before been known to leave her bed before the world had fairly rubbed its eyes open, — and made her way to the station in the gray light of the piercing March morning. The car was filled with laboring-men with dinner-pails and clerks and shop-girls hastening to their respective places of employment. Most of the latter looked cold and sleepy and underfed; a queer little thrill of fellow feeling presently moved Chris to offer her seat to a girl of about her own age, who entered the train at a forlorn way station, and whose pale face and sunken chest showed her ill prepared to begin the long day by weary standing in the crowded aisle.

Chris entered the first shop as the covers were being taken from the counters and cash boys were scudding hither and thither. She made her request known to a clerk whose faculties seemed not fully aroused from their night's torpor.

"This was a remnant, madam," he said; "we have nothing like it," and added, out of the fulness of his heart, "I don't believe you 'll be able to match it anywhere in town."

Prophetic words! From shop to shop Chris wended her way with her "sample" and her query, her steps growing ever heavier as each successive clerk returned the fated sleeve with the like reply. She even looked, equally in vain, in places off the beaten track of shoppers, where limp linen dusters and tawdry calico

wrappers swung in low, dingy doorways, placarded with dirty scraps of pasteboard. The hours had flown when she entered the last shop. Her heart gave a bound as the clerk unearthed a pile of odds and ends from beneath the counter and produced a small piece of the desired goods. Chris hastened to the station with a hatred of "bargains" that she felt would be lifelong.

It was after luncheon when she made her appearance at the Courtenays'; to her relief no comment was made on the delay. How sick and faint she was, as she worked, fasting, through the long hours of the afternoon, trying to make up for lost time!

That first day was, in many respects, like those that followed, except that the novelty of the situation soon wore off, and the work resolved into steady, unremitting toil, that sent Chris home with tired fingers and wearied brain; lingering sleep brought visions of breadths and gores, Biblical conundrums, a swaying rocking-chair and a poodle that she grew to hate with a virulence unequalled since the days of "Snarleyow, the Dog Fiend." Light as were the chains, they were still bondage. When tired of hemming the interminable ruffle, she could not refresh herself by running to the piano and thrumming a waltz; if the skirt betrayed a tendency to hitch, she might not thrust it out of sight to await a more favorable opportunity. Nor must she betray impatience at Mrs. Courtenay's chatter nor chide Maud's overweening vanity. When the day's work was done, scarcely more tired from the unaccustomed

toil than from the tumult of new thoughts, she crossed the street, accompanied unfailingly by young Mr. Courtenay.

"There was no need, it was scarcely dark," she faltered; but the young man, with his quiet, grave courtesy, that always contained a certain suggestion of masterfulness, put aside the demur. In her new humility there came to the girl none of the gay speeches and bright nothings with which she had once sought to attract her companion. But the little attention was unspeakably grateful to her in the thought, "He treats me as though I were still their guest!" and in a strange sweet sense of rest and comfort that she did not seek to analyze, and which was too precious to be broken by words.

"Good-night, Mr. Courtenay."

"Good-night, Miss Chris."

Then he went back to his beautiful home — and to Miss Herbert; and Chris entered the shabby old house, realizing, with double weight, that she was tired and dispirited and longed to go to her own room and have a good cry. It was not easy, instead, to try to make the supper-table bright and cheery with her chatter and to answer without impatience all Betty's questions as to "what Maud was going to wear;" for of course Maud had told Betty what Chris was doing at her house, and of course Betty had promptly informed the others; but to Chris's surprise and relief, Bobby had not pounced upon the situation with every ingenuity of

tormenting query and suggestion; Nan opened her mouth only to shut it again; sometimes, in the days that followed, she looked at her sister in a questioning way and insensibly her chilling demeanor altered. Lou, too, looked as though she would like to know more, but forbore to speak.

Since the uncomplimentary remarks of which she had been the object, Chris had dreaded meeting Mr. Courtenay, and in her goings and comings slipped quietly past the library. But one day he came forward with outstretched hand and with so kindly an expression in his keen gray eyes that Chris straightway forgot her fear, and never afterward passed the library without pausing for the greeting that always awaited her.

She seldom saw Miss Meg, except at luncheon. But even in that brief interval there was always time for a sympathetic smile, an interested query, or a few helpful words, that sent the girl back to her work with new strength and courage; as her fingers flew at their task, the image of a lovely, gracious womanhood was with her in the upper chamber, and words from some forgotten source floated in her mind, —

> "'T were like a breach
> Of reverence in a temple, could I dare
> Here speak untruth, here wrong my inmost thought.
> Here I grow strong and pure, here I may yield
> Without shamefacedness the little brought
> From out my poorer life, and stand revealed
> And glad and trusting, in the sweet and rare
> And tender presence which hath filled this air."

She marvelled sometimes that she had hitherto seen in her friend only the woman of wealth and fashion, who even in the moments of her most unbounded admiration had not appealed to her as did the Miss Meg who was being slowly revealed in the light of a new understanding, a more sympathetic insight. The words spoken in that quiet hour in the library repeated themselves in Chris's mind, with ever deepening meaning, —

"Dear, one may still give her right arm to the King in loyal, loving service."

Miss Herbert, dividing her time between the work in the "Beyond" and the Lenten services at St. Barnabas, was rarely seen by Chris; but in these glimpses even she appeared in a new aspect, and beneath the frigid demeanor and punctilious regard for etiquette were discerned a true heart and a standard that demanded as much of herself as of others.

Miss Meg had insisted that Chris should leave her work every afternoon for fresh air and exercise, and Mr. Blake found it convenient to take his constitutional in the same direction, at the leisurely pace enjoined by the Buddhistic code. What change had come over Chris she could scarce have told, but, marking the evident trend of the young man's words, she affected to treat them as part of the nonsense they had bandied back and forth all winter. But one afternoon he spoke with a seriousness that could not be lightly turned aside; and quietly and seriously, too, she made answer in a gently framed "No."

"You can't mean it! I've taken you by surprise. I thought you knew — that you understood from the first how much I liked you," repeated the young man.

"I'm so sorry — but — I couldn't care for you — at least, not in that way," faltered Chris.

"I don't see why not," answered the young man, prepared to argue the case, if the objections were so shadowy. "We've hit it off fairly well together thus far. I think I'm not such a beast that a girl couldn't get along with me. And although I know it's the last question that could ever come into your head, I've rocks enough for us to rub along on very comfortably."

"Don't, oh, don't!" cried Chris, hastening her steps.

"You needn't run away," said the young man, with new bitterness.

They walked on in silence, till they neared the Courtenays' house.

"Can't you, Chris?" asked the young man, earnestly.

"I couldn't," she answered, with a gentleness that for an instant recalled Miss Meg's own manner. "Sometime you will see it as I do, and then you will be glad that I answered you as I have, instead of as you would like to have me."

"You are the only girl I have ever cared for, or ever shall," asseverated the young man, gloomily.

He would have taken leave of her in the porch, but as the door was opened, Mrs. Courtenay chanced to be passing through the hall. Since Willie Winkie's rescue from a tragic death, the old lady referred to Mr. Blake

as "a hero." It was difficult to evade her pressing hospitality; so the young man entered, and being just then in a rudderless mental condition, remained through the evening; he went home thinking that henceforth he would live for art. And by the by what a classic profile and faultless coloring Miss Herbert had!

To-night, with a goodly sum in her pocket, Chris would pick her way through the mud for the last time. She wondered that the thought did not bring more rejoicing. When she looked at the clock her needle lagged, as though she would thereby stay the rapid hands. At six o'clock there were still the finishing stitches to be taken in Maud's ulster — bought in three pieces — so that it was considerably past the usual hour when she at last descended the stairs.

The gentle click of silver and china was audible from the dining-room. Chris could catch a glimpse of Miss Herbert's black lace gown, that set off so exquisitely her firm white shoulders. Young Mr. Courtenay was doubtless at her side. It was the brilliant light that brought the mist to the "dressmaker's" strained eyes, and after fumbling in the umbrella rack, Chris buried her face in a certain overcoat that hung near by and tried to wink away the troublesome moisture.

"I have your umbrella," said a quiet voice; and young Mr. Courtenay stood before her, arrayed in ulster, and hat in hand.

"I — I thought you were at dinner," stammered Chris.

"Did you think I would let you go home alone through

the rain?" returned the young man. And if Chris had not been so perturbed, she might have noted a tone in his voice unusual in addressing even the most respected dressmaker.

He piloted her across the street, for the last time — the last time, the very rain-drops were saying. It was not till they had nearly reached the opposite house that the silence was broken.

"What were you crying for?" asked young Mr. Courtenay, abruptly.

"I — I — could n't find my umbrella," answered Chris, huskily. "I am — so fond — of my umbrella —"

The object of her tearful affection was suddenly dropped, and a blast of wind whirled it down the muddy driveway to the utter disregard of its owner.

"I — must go in," quavered Chris. "It — is raining!"

"Don't go, Chris," cried the young man. "I want you, dear, I want you for always!"

"But — but — I don't understand!" In her bewilderment, the last vestige of self-control vanished and — how it happened she did not know — she found herself sobbing on young Mr. Courtenay's shoulder. "Miss — Herber-bert!" she gurgled.

"What of Miss Herbert?"

"She and you — she and you — and she," sobbed Chris.

"Listen, dear," said Mr. Courtenay. "Miss Herbert is one of the nicest girls going. She has always been my sister's friend and mine, too, and she knows how

fond I am of her. But neither of us has ever really cared for the other, and we've both known that, too. Besides, shall I tell you something? Miss Herbert's engagement to Archie Blake is just out."

"Oh, but I think you must be mistaken in thinking it's Mr. Blake," urged Chris, in a wobbly voice. "She'd as soon marry a Thug. Why, she's a High-churchwoman; she even goes into retreat—and he is a theosophist!"

"They have decided, no doubt, to unite their predilections," suggested the young man, "and will 'retreat' in future, together, to some Thibetan fastness, on a peak of the Himalayas 'high' enough to suit her proclivities. But the world—just as it is—is a good enough place for me, with you to live with! Will you, Chris, will you?"

Perhaps the look on Chris's upturned face spoke louder than words, for the young man drew her more closely to him and bent his face to hers.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

CHRIS'S announcement was followed by a dead silence in which the family stared at her open-mouthed, with an expression that was at once incredulous and disapproving. Betty pushed her chair from the table and burst into tears.

"You 're just as mean as you can be!" she sobbed. "We were all going to be married on the same day and start on our wedding journey in the same hack. I don't know as I 'll come to your wedding, so there! You 'd oughter have waited for Lou and me."

"Me, too," asserted Nan. "No, I withdraw from the family compact. There must be a vestal virgin in every family, and the lot has fallen upon me in this one."

"What did he say?" questioned Lou, eagerly. "Did you tell him 'yes' at once, or did he have to ask you two or three times, as they do in stories?"

"I don't believe he asked at all," supplemented Bobby, as Chris warmly refused an answer to these graceless questions. "I shall demand an interview with Mr. Louis Courtenay and find out the exact state of affairs. I cannot have my sister's young affections trifled with."

"They never do ask directly," said Lou, sagely. "They give you to understand."

"I sha'n't leave things at such loose ends when I ask my young woman," declared Bobby. "I shall not give her a chance to cry off. I mean to say, politely, but firmly, 'Yes or no, and be quick about it!' and have my stenographer on hand to take down her reply. This unjustifiable reticence," he went on, turning to Chris, "leads me to fear that the bridegroom's eloquence did not rise to the occasion. Did he couch his offer in terms like Wemmick's, — 'Hello, here 's a ring'?"

"You 'll let me wear it sometimes, won't you, Chrissy?" asked Betty, eagerly, emerging from her napkin, as she realized that even this portentous cloud was not without its silver lining.

"Have the wedding in June, do!" urged Lou; "the place is so lovely then."

"If you wish me to grace the occasion, the nuptials must come off before vacation," mentioned Bobby; "'Courtenay and Son' may be unable to spare their new partner later, particularly as Courtenay's Son will be gallivanting over the country with you. If you go to Europe, take me with you. I 'll be courier. I would much rather shoulder the trunks than do the lovering."

"I 'm going, too," announced Betty.

"We will all go," assented Bobby. "We will charter a steamer instead of the proposed hack. I will explain to brother Louis," adopting his new relative with amiable alacrity, "that our sister would pine away without our cheerful society, particularly that of her loving little brother."

"It will be so sweet to have Miss Meg for an elder sister," murmured Chris.

"We, who have always enjoyed the inestimable blessing of an elder sister, congratulate, while we do not envy you," said Bobby, with a Chesterfieldian bow.

"I shall sit at the head of the table when you 're gone," said Betty thoughtfully, as the alleviations of the situation began to grow upon her, accompanying the words with a defiant look at Nan.

"Hush!" said Chris, gently; and Nan, more in response to tone than words, added merrily, —

"We will henceforth consider the table a Hydra, Betty. It has six heads."

Yesternight, when Chris had appeared for her belated supper, Nan was alone at the table. The elder girl slipped a roll of bills into her hand. Nan looked up with eyes that were wet and shining, and Chris, answering the mute appeal, bent down and kissed her.

Presently, in response to the postman's ring, Betty returned with an imposing-looking missive. After spelling out the superscription, letter by letter, ignoring the impatient calls from about the table, she said with her utmost deliberation, —

"I — guess — it 's for Nan," and handed it to Chris.

Nan hastily tore open the package.

"It 's a picture!" she exclaimed. "Why — why, girls, it 's mine! Oh, here 's a letter!" She ran her eye over the accompanying writing. "It 's a mistake,"

she gasped, "a horrid joke! Send it back, quick, somebody, before I spend it."

Bobby promptly seized the extended letter, and read it aloud: —

DEAR MADAM, — We have the pleasure to enclose herewith our check for one hundred dollars, the amount of the prize offered by the *Connoisseur* for the best design for an Easter card. Accompanying is our lithographed reproduction of your drawing, which we hope will meet your approval.

Very respectfully yours,
The Editors of the *Connoisseur*.

The others looked eagerly over Nan's shoulder at the picture.

The sun, from out the violet mists of early dawn, threw into bright relief the outlines of a marble cross. Within the cross's shadow, as it rested upon a long low mound in the foreground, primroses, emblems of immortality, were opening their blossoms, and nestlings were uplifting a joyous carol, in the hope of Easter.

"Really, it 's most as good as my Day of Judgment," said Betty, encouragingly.

Nan paid no heed to the questions and comments with which she was showered. She had forgotten the money. At that moment even gratified ambition held no place in her heart. She scarcely recognized the work as her own. It was, indeed, a hothouse blossom of her nature, but that she did not know. She only knew, for a fleet-

ing instant, that the power to do was hers, and that henceforth, no matter how the light might be obscured, something of the radiance of that moment would linger upon her path.

"Let us all make our purchases to-day, so that the room may burst into full radiance at once," suggested Bobby, presently. "Besides, it will be better to have the edge taken off our elegance or we may be unable to behave with our usual freedom from haughtiness."

If Bobby's share in the prospective offerings was less than he would gladly have made it, he had the satisfaction of knowing that the last cent of his debt to Griff and to the printer had been paid. The *Snark* would be handed on to the coming class a self-respecting journal on a paying basis. It was confidently reported that, the next year, the *Snark* and the *Spinster* would be combined. Bobby had been aided in his struggle with the nearly expiring journal by the unexpected action of Taffy. Perhaps Bobby's own course was not without its influence; something, too, of Taffy's self-confidence had vanished since his recent disastrous "operation," and the contumely visited upon him as "the fellow who lost the game" made him grateful for even speech from Cutty. Something must be wrong, indeed, when he turned with positive loathing from taffy — that somehow seemed the cause of all his misfortunes. At last he mustered courage to go to his father and make a clean breast of the whole affair, asking to borrow the money he had stolen from the *Snark's* treasury and

promising to work out the sum that summer in the office of "Dabney and Co., Architects." To his surprise, his father did not "blow him up;" but he did talk long and earnestly with him, which had the unexpected effect of making Taffy feel worse than the anticipated severity would have done. It would be dull work, drawing up plans and specifications through the hot weeks, when the other fellows were enjoying themselves in the woods or at the seashore; but Taffy held manfully to his resolution, cheered by the thought that he would be able to enter college, in the fall, with a clean record.

Bobby's proposition was received with acclaim. It was Saturday, so that he and Betty, as well as the others, could devote the day to the purchase of their offerings. Not that time for consideration was necessary, for all of the family had long ago decided upon the special gift to which to devote their hoards. Only, upon so momentous an occasion, it was felt that any appearance of haste would be unseemly. Chris was to replace the dining-room carpet with a handsome rug. Nan had planned a dinner-service, — there was one in a certain show-window to which she made a pilgrimage every time she went to the city. Bobby intended to make a lamp his offering, and Lou would buy table linen for her share.

Betty had resolved to patronize local enterprise. The Empire Emporium had taken a fresh lease of life. Its window had blossomed into an array of emblems suitable

to the season, and the tintypes of Abraham Lincoln were replaced by lithographs of contemporaneous heroes. Within, the shelves were filled with "new spring stock" that was not a barefaced fiction; there was an enlarged case of pies and cakes and a fresh supply of walnut sticks. This general rejuvenation was announced to the public by a placard over the door, reading, —

"Come and See! Do not wait for the Crowd! An hour may be too late! Remember that but one Chance comes to Men!"

If the last words held an inner and tragic meaning known only to Griff, the minister that was n't to be was no longer without hope in the world; the rejuvenation that had come over him was no less remarkable than that which had taken place in his stock. He stood upright and did not blink when spoken to, while Lucy's finger had lost its dire effect upon his waistband.

Among the new stock was a set of finger-bowls. They were very red, very ugly, with a wiggly physiological sort of design, suggestive of intestines. Betty's own conception of her brother's friend, aided by the constant family reference to him as a "Bugaboo" had taken immovable lodgment in her mind. The giant at the "Zoo" always wore a red necktie and flourished a red bandanna handkerchief; it was therefore deducible that red was the favorite color of giants. Betty had hailed the finger-bowls with a rapture that held no doubt as to the gratification the gaudy glass would afford the coming "Visitor."

Nan was the first to reach home after the day's shoping. It occurred to her, as a kind and sisterly deed, that she would take up the dining-room carpet and get the floor in readiness for Chris's offering. Accordingly she arrayed herself in the indispensable adjuncts to her labors in whatever field, — the big apron and the hangman's cap, — and, armed with the hammer, fell to work, jerking, pulling, clawing, and ever and anon falling over backwards in whatever is the equivalent, in carpet ripping, of catching crabs. The disordered breadths were gathered together and piled in a corner of the room. Washing the floor was next in order. Disdaining a mop as a half-way measure, a mean-spirited compromise between cleanliness and dignity, Nan went to work on her hands and knees, and the dirt was speedily converted into mud. The wash-pail and scrubbing-rags were deposited under the table. It was time to begin preparations for tea; the stove was black and cold, Bridget having elected to participate in the general holiday. The frenzy that had possessed Nan all at once departed, leaving her limp and nerveless. Seating herself on the inverted coalhod, she sat hugging her knees, and waiting for the others' return. It was not long before Chris and Lou entered the house; they went upstairs more quietly than usual; doubtless they, too, were tired. Presently a pounding and shuffling on the piazza announced Betty, while a prolonged giggle, merging into a wail, indicated that Bobby was with her. All entered the kitchen together.

"The lamp is coming out by express," said Bobby. "It's a beauty. Will your things be here to-night, too?"

Nan smiled feebly, Chris gazed at the ceiling, Lou looked at the floor, Betty burst into a howl.

"There, see what I've done!" she cried, tugging at a huge parcel with which her pocket bulged. With a wild shake she scattered its contents far and wide.

One — three — ten — fifteen — thirty-two jaw-breakers! She had bought out the Emporium!

Strange to say, no one paid the slightest heed to this performance.

"Oh, girls! oh, Bobby!" gasped Nan.

"'Oh, fire and coal scuttle, and shovel and tongs and fender and ashes and dust and dirt! Oh, everything! Oh, nothing! Oh, my eye!'" spouted Bobby. "Have you been reading Walt Whitman?"

"I don't know what possessed me," groaned Nan. "I never went near the china shop. I went straight to the bookstore and bought the beautiful new edition of Browning."

"And I didn't go to the linen shop, either," chimed in Lou, breathlessly. "I went to all the spring openings at the millinery stores. I had the most beautiful time! I was simply starving for the sight of a bonnet — I always did hate a hat. I bought such a lovely one — just the thing for Easter. It's upstairs. I'll show it to you."

"I didn't get the rug," said Chris. "I went around

hunting for bargains. I found a lovely piece of black silk."

The silence that followed was the longest in the family annals.

"It 's just as I 've always said. Girls are bound to be the ruin of any enterprise they 're in," said Bobby, in tones of unmeasured disgust. "Only — I did think better of you! What struck you all?"

"Beggars on horseback. Temporary insanity. Reaction is equal to action and in the contrary direction. Repression begets revolt," suggested Nan. "Luckily, we 're all in one boat, and none of us can ever twit the others of this futile end of the winter of our struggles!"

There was a peal at the back-door bell. Only Bobby had strength of mind to answer.

"It 's the lamp!" he cried, and flinging open the door, shouted, —

"Hi there! Look out how you fetch her!"

It was not the expressman. It was Dick. They knew him at once, despite the years of absence, and as with one impulse, fell upon him. Chris had a hand upon his shoulder, while Nan grasped an arm as though fearful of his vanishing, bodily, from their midst. Bobby was shaking hands with the apparent intention of keeping on till the end of time; and Betty, mindful of the presumable neighborhood of the giant, laid hold of her elder brother's coat-tails for protection, while she murmured weepingly, —

"Don't let him get me! I 've bought him some

sweet pretty finger-bowls. Oh, no, I have n't! oh, no! so red — so sweet — so pretty! But I have n't them!" The wail ended in a howl that had the effect of bringing every one but Betty to some approximate realization of the situation, and simultaneously they let go their hold of Dick. Upon the threshold stood, at last, the dread Visitor. Lou was the only one who retained command of her powers of speech.

"How do you do, Colonel Bugaboo?" said she, with awful distinctness. Happily for herself, she was unconscious of her fall from grace, and entered into conversation with the "Visitor," whom she apparently did not find "dread" at all; an upright, military bearing, a handsome face, and pleasant voice made up a list of attractions to which it was easy to see that Lou was not unsusceptible.

"'We have done the things we should not have done,'" murmured Nan, hysterically.

"What is there for supper?" articulated Chris.

"Nothing but half a pan of stale gingerbread," answered Nan, with the calmness of despair. "I forgot to order anything this morning."

Both girls spoke in tones they fondly imagined to be whispers, but which the deafest colonel of cavalry would have had no difficulty in overhearing. That this particular officer heard was evidenced by the twitching of the lip half hidden by a heavy moustache, followed by an irrepressible laugh. They might learn to like Colonel Jerome for all those sterling qualities for which Dick

valued his friend; but it was the laugh that won him instant admission to their hearth, their home, — most sacred of all, their table! Lou actually rose to the occasion.

"Do you like gingerbread?" she asked prettily.

"Above all things," answered Colonel Jerome, with the appearance of truth.

"Then you shall help me cut it."

Bobby and Betty retired to the pantry to peer at Lou and her companion in the chaotic dining-room.

"Lou always did like soldier boys," said Betty, thoughtfully. Then, as a new idea struck her, she whimpered, "I don't care, I call it mean. I don't believe Lou means to wait for me, either!"

. . . . . .

"Say not, 't was all in vain.
Love thrown upon the waters comes again,
In quenchless yearnings for a nobler life."

THE END

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