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Title: How Hartman Won. A Story of Old Ontario.

Author: Bohn, Eric [Price-Brown, John] (1844-1938)

Date of first publication: 1903

Edition used as base for this ebook: Toronto: George N. Morang, 1903

Date first posted: 30 September 2010

Date last updated: 17 June 2014

Faded Page ebook#20101001

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HOW HARTMAN WON

A STORY OF OLD ONTARIO

BY

ERIC BOHN

TORONTO:

GEORGE N. MORANG & COMPANY, LIMITED

1903

WITH MUCH TENDERNESS I INSCRIBE
THIS STORY TO MY DEAR WIFE.

THE AUTHOR.

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HOW HARTMAN WON.

A STORY OF OLD ONTARIO.

CHAPTER I.

THE LUMBERMAN'S DILEMMA.

All through the sixties, Linbrook was a bustling and thriving village, although it did not contain more than three or four hundred inhabitants. It was situated within the margin of a considerable belt of pine forest; and the energy of its two or three business men, who combined the double interests of merchants and lumbermen, turned its natural advantages to the best account.

The village itself was picturesquely situated on the banks of the Powan river, which wound in a semi-circular manner through the valley. On each side were hills, and except for the clearings, which here and there made a wide cut through the forest, they were still covered with tall pines.

As in many other parts of Upper Canada at that time, nearly all the settlers for many miles around devoted their winters to lumbering. These winters were usually long and steady; and when the mantle of snow dropped on mother earth in December, it often remained without a break, notwithstanding the February thaw, until the snow-birds took their flight to make way for April blossoms.

Good sleighing was an all-important thing in those early days; and the settlers around Linbrook counted on its coming and staying, with even more confidence than they did upon the crop of fall wheat from amongst the stumps of their scattered clearings.

What was more, this sleighing was their life. True, the lumbermen gave but small prices for their saw-logs, and even that was in trade; but these little gains, by their gradual accumulation through the winter, enabled them to secure comforts as well as necessaries, which the clearings themselves could not produce. The people were satisfied; and, after all, is not satisfaction the half of living?

The Powan river, slow and narrow in the summer-time, fed only by the springs and marshes of the upper flats, and presenting during the winter a uniformly frozen surface, had a widely different aspect when the annual flood came. Then the little river became a mighty torrent, swollen wide and deep by the melting of the snows of winter; and it bore onward to the lake the innumerable piles of saw-logs which had accumulated upon its banks during the months of the sleighing season.

Our story opens in January, 186—. The morning is bright with a clear frosty air, and a temperature not much above zero. The sun shines down on the dazzling snow with keen brilliancy, the white sheeting extending everywhere, over housetops and hill and valley, hiding even the ice on the river from view.

Strings of teams, both oxen and horses, are descending from the uplands to the different rollways along the river bank, each hurrying in its burden of saw-logs from the forest. Sometimes a huge single stick, three or four feet in thickness, makes the load; or a pair, or even a trio, bound together with chains, are piled on the bobs and drawn by the one team.

But there is much excitement as they whirl one after another down the long slopes to the river. The occasional slipping of a break; the difficulty in controlling either the cattle or the horses, borne on over the smoothly packed snow, by the heavy loads behind them; the shouting of the drivers; the peals of laughter and the *bonhomie* of the men themselves; capped at intervals by the booming of the timbers, as they bound down over the skidway for a hundred feet or more, to be piled amid the ice on the river: all fill the air with music.

Young Robert Thornton was a busy man that morning. An expert and accurate measureman, he had for two years been tallyman for the Cartright Brothers, the big lumbermen of the village. This winter, however, his father had added lumbering to his general store business, and, as a consequence, Robert had withdrawn from the employment of the larger firm to become manager for themselves.

"That's a splendid log, Hugh," he exclaimed to a young man who had just driven to the rollway with a huge white pine butt.

"Yes," was the answer. "We never had a better in our bush. There are four more in the same tree; and the top one will be more than a 'standard'."

"Trees like that will pay both of us," said Robert with a laugh, as he tallied it with a hammer bearing his father's initials, "T. T.," for Theodore Thornton. "It measures four feet four inches at the small end."

The pair of bob-sleighs stood at a slight incline close to the skidway; and having loosened the binding pole and chains, the log was rolled off with a cant-hook. Gathering impetus from its weight, it rolled down the smooth skids, and bounding over the smaller logs, nearly buried itself in the ice toward the middle of the river dam.

The children out for intermission from the neighbouring school-house ran down to the opposite bank to witness the scene, and greeted it with a chorus of wild whoops.

Hugh readjusted his gearing, and drove on to make way for another team.

"Be sure to bring your sister to the toboggan slide to-night," Robert shouted after him. "And remember the hour, eight o'clock sharp. It will be a grand night, with a full moon."

"I will, if it's possible," was the answer. "It all depends on Winifred. Her school exhibition does not come off until Friday, so I expect we can come."

The logs came in large numbers to all the skidways that day; but Robert Thornton got his share, even if his father was a new buyer, and, but for the rising moon, it would have been dark before he had measured his last log. He finally pocketed his log-roll, and, throwing his hammer over his shoulder, returned to the store.

This was one of the old-fashioned kind, so commonly found at that period in the villages of Canada. It was a long two-storied frame building, with gable to the street; and served the double purpose of store and post-office, as well as family residence on the upper flat.

Mr. Thornton was busy with his books when Robert entered. A younger son was piling goods, while a tall young man, who in no way resembled the Thorntons, was waiting upon customers. The merchant himself was past middle life and not very robust in appearance. He had a gentle but worried expression of face; and his nervous, irresolute mouth was too characteristic to remain unnoticed by any keen observer. In these points he differed from his son, who, although bearing some resemblance in features, was cast in a different mould. Robert was above medium height, with well-poised head planted firmly on square shoulders. His blue eyes were less restless than his father's, while there was a firmness about the mouth which added strength to resolution, probably inherited from his mother. Robert was not a bad-looking fellow. He had a pleasant word for everybody, and carried his two-and-twenty years with free, unconscious self-assurance.

Taking in the situation as Robert entered, a word or two might be said in reference to the clerk already mentioned. Thomas Pettigrew, who had been in Mr. Thornton's employ for years, was past thirty, tall and wiry, dark in feature, with long narrow head, and deep gray eyes, placed close together. He had a habit of alertness that seemed as perpetual as the smile that wreathed his face like a mask. Added to this was the fact that his persuasive manner had won him many friends among the customers; and, as one of the eligible young men of Linbrook, many a fair and rosy maiden trimmed her hat and smiled serenely, with an eye to a possible future.

"You have had a busy day," remarked Thornton, as his son came up behind the counter to the desk.

"Yes," was the cheery answer. "A lot of logs came in. Some of them splendid fellows—clear stuff, white pines. A couple brought in by Hugh Finlayson were A, 1, the finest we've had since we started."

Pettigrew, who was at the opposite side of the counter, looked up at the mention of the name, fastened his eyes intently upon Robert for a moment, and then dropped them again.

"That's good news," commented Mr. Thornton; and lowering his voice he continued—"I wish everything else was as satisfactory."

Robert's face became grave. His look was an interrogation.

"We will talk about it afterwards," said his father. Robert turned to help his brother replace some goods, and it being the tea hour, the three went upstairs, leaving the clerk in charge.

The living-rooms of the Thorntons were neatly and pleasantly arranged. Mrs. Thornton, perhaps ten years the junior of her husband, was an active and thrifty housewife, and in features bore a striking resemblance to Robert. Beside her were

the two daughters, only one of them entering her teens, and both busy with their studies. Greetings of pleasure welcomed the entrance of the male members of the family; and Ethel and Alice, putting away their books, drew up the chairs to the table.

"Tea is just ready," said Mrs. Thornton with a bright smile. "I hope your head is better, Theodore?"

"Perhaps it is, Mary," was the answer, his face lighting up as he smelled the roast chicken. "How delicious!"

"Yes, and the scones are as good as I can make them."

"They are always that." Whatever his other defects might be, Theodore did not believe in letting a word of approval die on his lips unuttered.

In a few minutes they were all seated. A bright lamp encased in a handsome shade hung over the centre of the table, while spotless linen and pretty bits of china gave a beauty and charm not always seen in Canadian village life in those early days. Gradually the shadow, which seemed as the day closed to have fallen upon Mr. Thornton's mind, was lifted away; and before tea was over, they were all merrily discussing the prospective meeting of the young people's toboggan club.

"Yes, there will be a lot of us," said Robert. "I expect about fifty, boys and girls together."

"The slide is very steep," interposed Mrs. Thornton, "and as James is one of the youngest members, you must look after him well."

"I'll see to that, mother," rejoined Robert. "He has known the run for years, and the hours are only from eight to ten. Other boys will be there, too. It would never do to use James's bobs, and not have him with us."

While the mother and daughters were clearing the table, Mr. Thornton and Robert adjourned for a few minutes to the little parlour, James having gone to the store to release Pettigrew for his evening meal.

"You said you had something to tell me," said Robert as he closed the door. "What is it, father?"

"It is our wretched financial position," he replied, his worried expression returning. "You know that note of Grantham and Scott's, of Hamilton, for five hundred dollars. It was renewed two months ago, and will be due again on Saturday. That only leaves five days; and now they write that it must be met. Moreton, the drygoods man of Montreal, has two notes, both maturing inside of two weeks; and for the life of me I don't see how I can meet them. These are the most pressing, but not the only claims by a long way."

"Why did you not tell me more fully about this before?" Robert asked, his brow contracting, as the seriousness of the position became apparent. It had only been during the last few months that the father had taken his son into his confidence over financial matters at all. While engaged with the Cartrights, he had led his own life and, hearing no complaints, had supposed that everything was all right.

"I didn't see the use of it," was the answer, "and I expected to weather through somehow, as I have often done before. Now, I suppose it's too late."

The light fell upon Mr. Thornton's face, and Robert noticed its haggard expression.

"But I don't think it is," said Robert more cheerily, his heart going out in sympathy to the father, who had kept him at college in days when he really should have been his right-hand man. "They all told you that they would wait until you could realise upon your logs in the spring."

"So they did; but you see I had to buy more goods to keep the people supplied. This is something I did not count on when the bargain was made; and grain this year being a failure, I hadn't the cash to pay for anything."

"Oh, father, did you not explain all this to the wholesale men before we started lumbering?"

"I did in a general way; but I was never so astonished in my life as when I found how much we owed, and how little we had to show for it. I can't understand it. There's something rotten somewhere, but where it is I don't know."

Robert did not like to blame his father, although he winced severely at the position they were in, and which he felt sure

might have been avoided.

"What do you propose to do?" he asked.

"Try and raise another thousand some way," Mr. Thornton answered, burying his face in his hands and resting his elbows on the table.

"I don't like that plan," said Robert. "It would only be postponing the evil day. The place is already fully mortgaged, and I don't see what available security you have to offer."

"Why not mortgage the saw-logs?"

"That, too, would be bad policy; and under the circumstances might be difficult to effect."

"Then there's no alternative. We shall be ruined and lose everything."

"Perhaps not, father. Have you talked it over with mother?"

"She knows everything but of the two letters I got this afternoon."

"Suppose we all talk it over when I get back to-night," suggested Robert. "I don't feel a bit like going to the slide after what you have said; but I specially asked some people from the country, and, as captain of the club, I am needed to see that no accident occurs."

His father nodded assent, and the two went downstairs.

Mr. Pettigrew soon returned from supper, and commenced preparing the mail for the morrow. Robert went to the desk to make his log entries for the day. One or two other customers and several loungers dropped in, whiling away the time in a desultory manner until the closing hour of eight o'clock.

Then Robert and James, well wrapped, for the night was sharp, left for the toboggan slide; the last loiterer called out "good-night," as he closed the door; and Mr. Thornton and his clerk were alone. The latter, as usual, after raking the embers in the stove, shoved in a large log to keep the fire alive for the night; and putting on his overcoat, stopped in front of Mr. Thornton on his road to the door.

"Are you going?" asked the latter, looking up from his writing.

"Yes," was the answer. "Everything is all right I guess. But do you know, Mr. Thornton, I would like to get away for a couple of days. I had a letter from Hamilton to-night. My uncle is very ill and would like to see me at once."

"That's unfortunate!" exclaimed Mr. Thornton with a start. "I am sorry to hear it, but can't you postpone the visit for a day or two. To-morrow, Tuesday, is always a busy day with us."

"I don't think I can," was the answer. "The call is urgent. Probably I could get Thompson in my place for a couple of days, if that would suit?"

Pettigrew knew very well that Thompson would not be accepted; but the offer was a plea in his favour.

"No, no," said Mr. Thornton. "If you must go, you must, and we will get on as best we can. There could not be a worse time, though. You will be sure to return by Wednesday night?"

"Quite sure, but it will take all my time."

"Good-night," said Mr. Thornton.

"Good-night," rejoined Pettigrew.

And as the clerk took his departure, Thornton soliloquised—"Everything is all right, eh? Much he knows about it, or much he cares either!"

CHAPTER II.

THE EVENING AT THE TOBOGGAN SLIDE.

This was the first regular meeting of the "Pines Toboggan Club." Robert Thornton had been elected captain, partly because he was the owner of a genuine toboggan, but chiefly because he was the originator of the club, and it was mainly through his instrumentality that it had been formed.

The "Pines" was the designation given to an elevated knoll, covered with standing timber, from which there was a steady decline to the river bank. It was situated in near proximity to the road, but clear of the saw-logs skidway, and had been a general resort for the boys for years back, as the scene of their winter pastime. One of the chief attractions was the fact that the slide struck the dam at a bend; and with the momentum given by the long descent, the sleigh, without varying its course, could spin over the frozen surface for a long distance.

With the buzz of merry voices and many a ringing laugh, the young people prepared for their first slide. Each sled was composed of a pair of short bobs, connected together by a plank, with long raves on either side for the feet of the riders to rest upon. Beyond this, there was a considerable variety in the display of taste, with regard to personal comfort as well as facility for steering. As they were getting in line ready to start, the last load of prospective riders arrived from the country; among the number being Hugh Finlayson and his sister.

"You are just in time," called out the captain. "Miss Finlayson, there are seats on the toboggan for you and your brother, as well as Miss Roberts. James, make room for Campbell and Miss Mathers on your sled. There are two yet wanting places."

"Lots of room for the boys on our sled," called out young Cleveland, who, besides having only boys, had the longest and broadest plank in the lot.

"Remember the rule," cried Robert in stentorian tones. He was standing on the brow of the hill—his toboggan being the last to start. "No one leaves until I give the word. That tree is thirty yards down the hill. When the first sled reaches it, I give the word again, and the next one follows in regular order. Remember, too, there is no danger if every steersman understands his business; and I believe every one here does."

"Ay, ay, captain! We're ready," shouted one and all. A moment's pause, and—

"One, two, three, and off," came the order, and with a cheer away glided the sled, swift and straight like an arrow. In another moment it shot past the tree.

"Off," again cried the captain, and another followed in quick pursuit, and the next was waiting for the signal. But the wait was only for the moment. Again and yet again was the signal given in regular sequence. It was evident that Robert knew what he was about. In his brief college life, he had himself been a leader where toboggans and not sleds were used. As the eighth and last, his own toboggan, drew up, he took his place.

"We're off, too," he said to Miss Finlayson, who sat immediately behind him, and away they sped.

It was a beautiful sight. Above, the deep blue heavens, dotted with innumerable stars; the full moon shining down through the still air in all her brilliancy; the earth clothed with its pure white mantle, and the hill-sides of the river valley shaded with woodland; while the tin spire of the village church glistened in the moonlight, as it pointed upward toward the home of that Father who was the giver of all beauty and all truth.

Then there was the charm, intensely human in its nature. The little barks gliding noiselessly and swiftly one after the other with regular rhythm, and charged almost to their utmost with the joyous laughing revellers.

For more than a hundred feet the grade was regular and smooth; then it became undulating, descending abruptly for a short distance, then on the level and ascending a knoll; down again for another hundred feet, along the level once more, and down the bank and away along the river.

The snow had been cleared from the ice for a hundred yards or more, and the force of descent was so great that the sledges, one after another, drew up near the very terminus.

"What glorious fun!"

"How it takes one's breath away!"

"Oh! How jolly!" were the screaming exclamations, as they rolled and jumped off the sleighs, each giving vent to feelings suppressed during the minute or two which had so excitingly passed since leaving the starting-point.

"It's awful dangerous!" gasped one young girl, who, white as a sheet, declared that this was the first and last time she would "ever slide on one o' them things."

"That's all fudge," exclaimed her elder sister. "It ain't a bit dangerous. You've got to ride again, or else sit by your lonesome till it's all over."

And, finally, of the two evils she chose the former.

"How do you enjoy it, Miss Finlayson?" Robert asked, as he handed her off.

"It's splendid fun," was her laughing answer; "but it's a new experience. You can hardly breathe at first, the descent is so fast. Then you feel so exhilarated that you almost wish the ride would never end."

"And suddenly mundane experience brings you to a full stop," exclaimed the platonic Miss Roberts. "One minute to fly down the hill, and five to climb up."

"Never mind, girls," cried out Miss Mathers. "We've got the best of it. Let us lead the way, while the boys pull up the sleds."

Miss Mathers was the lady teacher in the village school, and in some sense Miss Finlayson's rival.

"Well, let's have a race for the top," cried Cleveland of the long bob. "The boys against the girls."

"All right, away we go," called out the captain, and there was a general stampede. Along the flat over the ice it was pretty equal running. The weight of the sleighs was as nothing to drag over the frozen surface of the river, while the garments of the girls somewhat impeded their progress. Still they fled like deer, and amid screams of laughter commenced to climb the hill. Here they had the advantage. Most of their well-shod feet were protected by rubber soles which refused to slip on the ice, while the men had the usual tendency to slip half as much backward as they went forward, and the heavy uphill tug upon the sleds did its full share in slowing their speed.

By the time the girls had mounted the first level, it became evident that they would be the victors; and Thornton, wisely calling a halt, announced that the boys would give in.

"That's what they always do," was the ringing answer from above.

When they reached the top, a new arrival awaited them. There stood Mr. Pettigrew.

"You came after all, Thomas. Glad to see you," exclaimed Robert. "I think there is room on the long sleigh. If not you might squeeze in with us."

"There is room on our sled for Mr. Pettigrew," cried Miss Mathers.

"Lots of room here," shouted Cleveland.

"Thanks, awfully. I must accept Miss Mathers' offer. In my heart I could never refuse a lady," was the smiling answer.

A general laugh and one or two wild hoots followed; and in another minute they were ready to start again.

So the time passed, and as ten o'clock approached they had gathered together on the summit ready for the signal for the last run.

On each trip the Cleveland bobs had drawn nearer and nearer to the margin of a ravine lying to the left, and perhaps half-way down the slope. In the last trip it seemed on the verge of going over; and one or two of the riders now refused to try it again, without the owner would promise to keep clear of the danger.

"You run too much risk, Cleveland," said Thornton. "That's a dangerous gully. You don't want to smash your heads on the logs at the bottom."

"There's no danger at all," replied Cleveland, with a toss of his head. "I guess I know how to steer. I've gone over that there slide hundreds o' times, and I never touched the gully yet."

"Still, you've no right to risk other people's lives."

"Well, cap'n, I've carried seven fellows on my sled nearly every time. If any one of 'em is chicken-hearted and skeered, he can stay behind, that's all."

None of them, however, chose to show the white feather; and as Cleveland promised not to run too close to the ravine, they all returned to his sleigh. His was the last but one to start, immediately preceding Thornton's toboggan. He appeared to be steering all right, although still rather close to the dreaded gulch, when, just as the toboggan was leaving, the air was rent with a wild shout and they witnessed the half-expected catastrophe. The sled had gone over the embankment; and as Thornton's party shot past, they saw it turn over in its descent, throwing all upon it headlong into the snow and *débris* below.

"Don't move," said Robert quickly to those on the toboggan, fearing lest any rash act might result from the sudden excitement; and then to Hugh, who was steering—"but go right on to the flats. I'll drop off and see what has happened."

At the first knoll he rolled over into the snow, and then scrambled up the hill to the scene of the accident. There the full moon playing directly downwards revealed more of the ludicrous than the alarming. The chasm seemed to be a sort of wash-out water-course to the river, striking the side of the slideway almost at a right angle. It was filled with logs and saplings and brushwood; but owing to the bald nature of the hill above, and the belt of trees on the side, the drifting snow had filled the upper part of the chasm to the depth of many feet, and so saved the sliders from any very serious injury. Into it the young men had pitched pell-mell, two or three receiving pretty sharp bruises on the legs. One had been stunned for a moment and the skin peeled from his scalp as his head grazed a sapling. Others were almost buried in the snow; while Cleveland, in making a wild leap for safety, had his feet caught, throwing him headlong, and was sprawling heels upwards, his head and body lodged between two logs. Both legs were squirming in view, and his comrades were making an effort to release him, when Robert appeared.

"Cleveland is stuck, and we can't get him out," someone shouted.

"He's alive, though; see him kick," exclaimed another, who had been one of the objectors, and did not feel pleasantly disposed toward the supposed offender, even if he was hurt.

The depth of the snow made it difficult to get through it; but in a few moments Robert was able to realise the situation.

"Get me out," cried Cleveland. "Oh! Mind my arm!"

"Come, boys, we must lift the log. Tait, you hold him still while we raise it."

"But we can't, it's frozen," objected someone.

"We must try. Now, all together!" But it wouldn't budge.

"Oh! there's a rail. Shove it under. Now lift again."

This time they were successful, and Cleveland was limp enough when they got him out.

It was evident that he was seriously hurt, and the faces of all became more grave.

"My left arm's the worst," he groaned. "I believe it's broken."

They soon had him on his feet, however, and finding that he could walk, helped him up the hill, his arm hanging by his side, as he could not bear to have it touched.

"Won't someone go for the doctor?" he asked, as they seated him upon one of the sleds, which by this time had been dragged to the top, the whole party having gathered round him. A dozen offered to go.

"It would be no use," said Robert. "Dr. Hartman intended to come to the slide to-night; but was called out on the 14th Concession.^[A] He told me he couldn't possibly be here before half-past ten."

^[A]*I.e.*, 14th Concession Road.

"What time is it now?"

"Just ten minutes after."

"He will probably pass here," said Miss Finlayson. "I heard he was to visit old Mrs. Sanderson near our place to-night. She is very low."

Robert looked at her for a moment.

"It would be better, perhaps, to make Cleveland as comfortable as we can where he is, and wait for the doctor's arrival," he said. "He can probably take him home in his cutter if he comes soon."

Turning to the young man, he went on—

"Let me bend your arm a little more and lay it on your knee. It will be more comfortable; there."

"Yes, that's easier," he replied. An extra wrap was put over his shoulders, and he blubbered out—"I hope you folks didn't think I was such a durned idgiot as to do that on purpose. The hickory bolt in the front bob broke, and swung the whole thing round into the hole, and that's how it happened. I'm glad none of the other fellows was hurt much, being as it was my bob."

"Cleve, you are a brick anyway! We knew you couldn't help it," called out one of the boys, and a chorus of approval was echoed by the group.

"I hear the doctor's bells," exclaimed Robert, and immediately a couple of young men ran over to the road to secure his services. One of them held his horse, while the other told the story as they walked back to the slide.

Dr. Hartman's voice had a cheery ring as he greeted the sorry revellers. He made light of the accident, and spoke of it as one of the things that might happen any time, and could not be helped.

"It'll be a holiday time for you, though, Cleveland," he commented, after examining the arm. "No more saw-logs for a while, nor bobs either."

"What's the matter?" exclaimed the lad, with a quiver on his lip. "Is it broken?"

"Yes; it's what they call a Colles' fracture, one bone being broken above the wrist and the other out of joint."

"I'm a daisy!"

"Yes, one that blooms in the winter," called out one of the boys.

"You won't go to seed, though," rejoined the doctor. "It will take time, but you'll come out all right. Are you hurt anywhere else besides that bruise on your face?"

"Not much, I guess, but it was a tight squeeze between them logs, and when my arm snapped the pain was awful."

"Well, you can walk over with me to my cutter; then I will drive you home and set it there. This will hold it in the meantime."

As he spoke he took a white woollen scarf from his own neck, and adjusted it round the boy's arm and over his shoulder, to support the injured limb during the journey.

All followed in a group to the cutter, and watched the doctor and his patient as they drove away along the village street.

"It's unlucky to have such a bad omen at the start," said Robert, almost with a sigh, for it was only by an effort that he had retained the buoyancy of his spirits during the evening.

"The old proverb says, 'Troubles never come singly,'" put in Mr. Pettigrew.

Robert glanced sharply at him, but made no reply.

"'The exception establishes the rule,' is a better proverb," said Miss Finlayson.

"That's right," exclaimed Miss Roberts, "but it's a pity to have the exception at all. When do we meet again, Mr. Thornton?"

"Say next Monday evening, if Cleveland gets along all right, and under the doctor's care of course he will."

The double announcement met with general assent, and the band dispersed.

For a moment or two Pettigrew remained in the background; then he joined Miss Mathers. This was not, however, until Thornton had led the way, accompanied by Miss Finlayson, Hugh having gone to the driving-shed for his sleigh.

"We can meet your brother as he drives over," said Robert.

"Yes," she replied, "a brisk walk for a few minutes will be pleasant after standing so long."

"You don't feel cold in this sharp air, I hope," he said, in some solicitude.

"Oh no, I am well wrapped. My furs keep me warm."

"It was very good of you to come," he said, "particularly after the fatigues of the school. Hugh tells me that one or two of the boys are very troublesome."

"I wish Hugh would mind his own business," she returned, with a light laugh. "'Very' is too strong a term. They are not any worse than they have been for some time. Still, they are bad enough, and I do not intend to stand it much longer."

"What do you think of doing, Winifred?" he asked. He never called her by her Christian name except when they were alone. They had known each other from childhood. "Will you call in the trustees?"

"Not if I can help it," she replied. "My position will be much stronger if I can keep control without any outside help, and I mean to try."

"You are a brave girl."

"I wish I always felt like one," she answered, pressing her lips together.

At this moment Hugh drove up. Robert tucked the ample folds of the buffalo robe around her, and bade them good-night. He stood still for some moments, watching the sleigh as it gradually disappeared in the distance. Then he turned, and walked moodily toward his own home, thinking of the accident, Winifred's school troubles, and, worst of all, the business difficulties that had yet to be dealt with that night.

CHAPTER III.

HOW THE SCHEME WAS FRUSTRATED.

Pettigrew was not long in reaching his home after leaving the toboggan slide. Miss Mathers happened to live in his direct route, and this was probably one of the reasons that induced him to offer to be her escort, for he was a man who always liked to husband his strength, without some tangible object could be otherwise gained.

Mrs. Pettigrew, his mother, had not retired, but was still waiting his arrival. His perpetual smile, usually so much in evidence, vanished when he entered the house; but, strange to say, it reappeared upon her face. Her features bore a strong resemblance to those of her son, while her figure, tall and spare, was bent over with her weight of threescore years.

"Home late, Thomas, but I waited up for you," she said, placing his chair by the stove. "Did you go to the slide?"

"Huh, huh!" he replied. "There was a pretty good thing happened there, too."

"What was it?" she ejaculated.

"Why, Bob Thornton got taken down a peg. He's captain of the club, and prides himself on his management. This is the first night, and, to show how he can fill the bill, one of the sleds got smashed, and all the fellows on it were pitched into a gully."

"He, he, he!" chuckled the dame. "I reckon Miss Finlayson wa'n't on that sled."

"No, she was on Bob's confounded toboggan."

"So you got riled, did you? Never mind, you'll be even with him yet, or my name ain't Deborah Pettigrew."

There was a moment's pause. Then, without turning toward his mother, he remarked—

"I am going to Hamilton to-morrow."

"What for?"

"Business of importance," was the laconic answer.

She nodded her head several times reflectively, and, looking at him again, asked—

"Does old Thornton know?"

"Yes, I got a letter to-night, and told him I had to go and see my sick uncle."

"Well, you're a good one."

Pettigrew was no laggard. To use his own sapient expression when conversing with intimates—"He had not lived thirty years in the world for nothing."

Whatever the object he had in view might be, it did not prevent him from securing several hours' sleep, and rising a good while before daylight. His mother was up too, and, crooning over the stove, quickly prepared his breakfast. By arrangement made the previous evening he was driven over to the W—— Station of the G. W. R. in time to catch the east bound train, and arrived in Hamilton not much after ten o'clock.

He had still well on to an hour before the time of his appointment with Grantham and Scott, the wholesale grocers, so he took a walk to add lucidity to his thoughts. Strange that he should forget the uncle so dangerously ill, and so desirous of meeting his loving and dutiful nephew!

Precisely at eleven he presented himself at the warerooms of the merchants. The clerk showed him into the private office. Mr. Grantham was alone.

"Good morning! Mr. Pettigrew, I believe," he said blandly. "Take a chair, sir. Glad to see you."

The visitor returned the salutation, and carefully closing the door, accepted the proffered seat.

"Ahem!" said Mr. Grantham. "I believe you wished to see us confidentially, with regard to the business interests of your employer, Mr. Thornton, of Linbrook?"

"You have not put it quite correctly, sir," replied Pettigrew, whose little gray eyes were closely scrutinising the merchant. "I think you expressed a desire to see me."

"Ah! was that it? At any rate it arose out of correspondence which originated with yourself," said Mr. Grantham, who in turn was taking a mental inventory of his visitor. "Mr. Scott spoke to me about your coming. He is on his way from Montreal just now, and won't be home until the evening; but I am at your service, and ready to advise with you."

"You can ask me any questions," said Pettigrew; "but anything I say will of course be confidential."

"Certainly, certainly; and under the circumstances I speak for Mr. Scott as well as myself. First of all, are Mr. Thornton's affairs in as deplorable a condition as we would naturally suppose from the tenor of our correspondence?"

"I did not exaggerate at all in anything I said," was the answer.

"Well, if Mr. Thornton were to fail in business, would you be prepared to carry it on in your own name?"

"That depends on circumstances," said Pettigrew, putting on a shrewd expression of face; "particularly on the figure that the present stock can be purchased for."

"What other creditors are there besides ourselves? Do you know?"

"Yes, I have with me an inventory of their names and the amounts of the respective liabilities."

"I suppose you do the book-keeping?"

"Not altogether, but I have done it together with Mr. Thornton for the past two years."

"Curious coincidence, that it is only during this period that Mr. Thornton has been going back in his payments."

As he spoke, Mr. Grantham wheeled his chair round on its screw, and looked in a far-off way at Mr. Pettigrew, who winced, but kept his face rigid.

"What a contemptible knave you have proved," said the merchant to himself, and then aloud—

"Well, if it should come to a deal, what amount of cash could you furnish?"

"I could pay a couple of thousand for stock and book accounts, and perhaps another thousand for new goods."

"Anything more than that?"

"That's all they are worth."

"Would you want a partner to go in with you?"

"No. I must have all or nothing."

"Hem! that's a characteristic motto!" exclaimed Mr. Grantham with an almost imperceptible sneer, "but business is business. You have lived long enough to know that, Mr. Pettigrew. We are all sorry for Mr. Thornton, or any other honest man, who struggles along successfully for a while, and then collapses and fails. Still, the work has to go on. And if he can't do it, somebody else must. And for my part I don't see why you shouldn't be that man. I don't doubt you in the least. It's only a matter of form; but have you papers with you that will establish your financial position?"

"Certainly," replied Pettigrew, displaying a number of securities, including vouchers from the Bank of Montreal, which he took from his pocket-book.

"They are all right," exclaimed Mr. Grantham, with a nod of gratification. "Your securities are undoubted. Now about Mr. Thornton himself. He has done business with us for more than ten years; and I shall be very sorry indeed if anything

happens to him."

"So shall I," said Pettigrew; "but if he can't continue the business, he can't, that's all."

"As nearly as you can, tell me what his true position is."

"Well, the store is heavily mortgaged. You know the amount of his indebtedness to your firm. Then, besides smaller items, he owes more than half that amount to Moreton of Montreal for dry goods. A year ago he made a bad spec. in butter; and this fall another in wheat. To make matters worse, last year's grain was a partial failure with the farmers, and they have not been able to pay up."

"But I thought his son was carrying on a heavy lumbering business this winter, to balance off the crop failure?"

"That was the intention. There are some logs coming in; but young Thornton's a greenhorn, and what can you expect? Besides, if sleighing were to break up soon, lumbering, like the rest, would be a dead letter."

"You draw a black picture, Mr. Pettigrew. By the way, what time do you leave the city?"

"I have nothing to keep me further than this business."

"Well, as I said, I expect Mr. Scott to return to-night. If you can remain until to-morrow, we can talk the matter over with him. Let me see, can you not dine with us this evening at six o'clock? Mrs. Grantham, I am sure, will be glad to see you."

"Thank you. I shall do so with pleasure." And one of Mr. Pettigrew's broadest smiles appeared, as he bowed himself out.

He then left to spend the intervening time at his uncle's, whose imaginary illness was his pretext for leave of absence.

Punctual to the hour appointed, Pettigrew presented himself at the Grantham residence. Here he was wined and dined, and in due course escorted by his host to the house of Mr. Scott, that gentleman having returned to the city at the time specified.

Towards evening, however, the firm had received another communication from Linbrook, relative to the Thornton business, which put the matter in a somewhat different light. Mr. Grantham did not consider it advisable to mention this to Pettigrew; though he took care to have a long conversation with Mr. Scott over the whole matter, before they unitedly discussed the situation with the would-be purchaser.

As a consequence, in the general conversation which followed, they were too astute to commit themselves to any definite policy; merely affirming that if a change did occur, which was not unlikely, Pettigrew should have the first chance.

"And is this all I get for my trouble?" he asked, on taking his leave.

"It is really a good deal," said Mr. Scott. "Mr. Thornton's stand from a business point of view is one of the best of its kind in Upper Canada. I really don't see how it is that he has made such a mess of it. Any man with backbone and energy should have made it a big success; and you are lucky indeed to have the promise of the first option. The whole thing is unaccountable. There must have been a tremendous leakage somewhere."

"It has been shocking bad management," said Pettigrew with averted face. "And it is time there was a change. When you want to make it, you can call upon me, and I will be ready." Saying which, he shook hands with the partners and took his leave.

"That man needs watching," said Mr. Scott.

"I believe you are right," echoed Mr. Grantham, as they kept their eyes upon his retreating figure.

But there were others busy besides Thomas Pettigrew after the tobogganing was over that night. When Robert arrived home, he found his father in a very unsettled state of mind, discussing with his mother the prospective visit of the clerk to the city.

"Pettigrew going to Hamilton!" he exclaimed, when he heard the news. "What on earth is he going for?"

"He says his uncle is dangerously ill, and desires to see him at once. He received word by the evening mail."

"Strange that he didn't mention it to me. He was at the slide nearly all the evening, and I had more than one conversation with him; but he never hinted either at the illness or the visit."

"Perhaps that was because you and he are not particularly good friends."

"I wonder if his explanation was the correct one," said Robert. "His actions sometimes savour of duplicity. Did he tell you what was the matter with his uncle?"

"No. In fact I did not think to ask him."

"It is a long time since I lost confidence in that man," said Mrs. Thornton, who thought she had read his character more accurately than her husband had.

"But what special object could he have in view?" queried Mr. Thornton, who was slow to perceive that the claim for leave of absence could be anything but a genuine one.

"I don't know," replied Robert; "but the whole thing looks suspicious, when you remember that your most pressing creditors are in Hamilton, and that Pettigrew has been constantly saving money; while you, his employer, have been losing it."

"Well, whatever object he has in view," exclaimed Mr. Thornton petulantly, "we can't stop him from going. The vital question with us now is, how am I to appease these men, and put them off until we get a chance?"

"What do you think, mother?" Robert asked in a quiet tone.

"I am opposed to trying to borrow any more money," was her answer; "and though I have one thousand dollars invested, it is the last of my father's legacy, and I'm not willing to risk it. I'm determined to keep it as a reserve for my children, if things come to the worst. It seems to me that the wholesale men are the ones to look to. They are the men who during all these years have gained by us. If they will give longer time, you might pull through yet. If they won't, then let them wind up the business." There was a tear glistening in Mrs. Thornton's eye, but she spoke very emphatically.

"Mother is right," said Robert. "Suppose, father, you and I draw out at once a brief statement of assets and liabilities, and I add to it another of the probable cost and proceeds of the winter's logging; and send them to Hamilton and Montreal, asking for further extension of time. What think you?"

"It will be of little use. Still, we may try it," replied the dejected man.

"Another thing," said Robert, "to guard against any fiendish scheme that Pettigrew may have in view, I'll go myself on horseback to B—— and post it in time for the morning express for Hamilton."

"You may see Pettigrew himself on the way," said Mrs. Thornton.

"That is scarcely likely," was the answer. "Linbrook people usually go by W——. The road to B—— is a little longer, but the town is nearer Hamilton. I won't let him see me if I can help it; but if he does it can't matter much."

They commenced at once, but it took several hours to complete the work. The outlook was pretty gloomy, for when the accounts were investigated they proved to be in a worse condition than Mr. Thornton anticipated. Still the prospect was brightened somewhat by the favourable saw-log report which Robert was able to add.

It was this document, carried on the gallop by Robert over the hard packed road, even while Pettigrew was still asleep, that had the effect of modifying the views of Grantham and Scott. Robert reached the station before daylight. He had only half an hour to rest and feed his horse, for—without any sleep during the whole of the night—he must needs be back at the rollway, to tally the first logs that would be hauled in the early morning.

On the third day Pettigrew was back at the store again. His smile, if anything, was more noticeable than ever; for his uncle, to the surprise of the doctors, had taken a decided change for the better, and was actually out of danger! No wonder that Pettigrew rejoiced over the result; for was not this the uncle who had started him in life, and launched him

successfully as an educated clerk in the mercantile world?

A couple of days later, two letters arrived by post from Messrs. Grantham and Scott—the one to Mr. Thornton granting him an extension of time until the spring should open, thus allowing him an opportunity to raft his saw-logs to the lake and realise upon them—the other to Mr. Pettigrew, advising him to retain his situation, and while avoiding suspicion in any form, to keep a look-out and await results.

On the whole the prospective condition was satisfactory to both men, although each was unaware of the exact part that had been played by the other. Mr. Thornton was glad to obtain the extended grace. Who could possibly tell what the next four months would realise? Fortunately the future is, and ever will be, a mystery. And Pettigrew, although delayed in his little scheme of personal aggrandisement, was willing to wait and watch with lynx-eyed eagerness for any chance which the game of fortune might throw in his way.

CHAPTER IV.

FOR LOVE'S SAKE.

In the meantime Cleveland's arm was progressing favourably, for, rough and ready though the lad was, he willingly obeyed the doctor's orders. Still, it would be a weary wait before the limb could be strong again; and, unfortunately, Cleveland Rounce, although only seventeen years of age, was largely the support of his widowed mother. Her husband had been drowned while rafting logs several years before, and the eldest son—the rattle-brained Cleveland—had to be depended on as the principal mainstay of the widow and her children. True, she earned something as a nurse when occasion offered; but the chief income was from her son's wages as a teamster.

When, however, it became known that the boy's arm was broken, and that his occupation was gone for a couple of months at least, the sympathy of the people was aroused; and some of the widow's friends determined, whether Cleveland was to blame or not, that his mother should not suffer as a consequence.

The next day after the accident, at one of the quilting bees so frequently held in the village, the whole matter was discussed.

"I tell you what it is," said Mrs. Jones, who was noted for her sympathetic nature; "that poor woman has had more'n her share of ill-luck. To lose her husband one year, to have one of her girls die of typhoid the next, an' have rheumatis herself the third; and now, when Cleve's just old enough to earn good money, to have him go an' break his arm, makes pretty hard lines."

"She'll bear it like a saint, too," said Mrs. Jemima Smith. "She never yet asked help from nobody. Even when little Jennie was lying dead, she had enough money to buy her coffin with."

"My! what a pile o' nursin' she did too that year after the burial—all to gather up the money to pay the doctor," said another woman, who was stretching one side of the quilt and putting in the pegs.

"What astonished me was that old Dr. Hincks took it all," said Mrs. Jenkins. "He only throwed off five dollars—just what he'd charged extra for medicines. The bill was a mighty steep one for a poor woman to pay."

"He's not a bit like Dr. Hartman, that's sure," said Mrs. Jemima Smith. "You all know of Mrs. Tuttle, whose baby was born two days after her man was killed at Marstin's raisin'. Well! Dr. Hartman attended her, and through a long spell of sickness afterwards, and he never charged a cent."

"Dr. Hartman knew what he was about. He had his own kettle of fish to fry," exclaimed Mrs. Juniper, a thin-lipped woman, who had her hair carefully done up in a high bob at the back of her head. "It was just his way of canvassing for patients."

A murmur of dissent went round the room.

"That couldn't be it," said Mrs. Jemima Smith. "He was too busy at that time to need to canvass. But about Mrs. Rounce," she continued, for she had an object in view. "It was going out o' nights nursing that gave her rheumatism. She hasn't been the same woman since, and I don't see how she is going to manage now."

"Five dollars a week knocked clean off, with nothing to put in its place, and that in the middle of winter, will be a tough thing for both her and the children," exclaimed another woman, sententiously.

"I don't see no use for so much pity," said Mrs. Juniper again. "We all has our trials; and the Rounces has to have theirs. Up to now they've had a good livin' too, one way or 'nother; and if necessary I don't see why Jimmy and Johnny can't hire out. One's nine and the other's eleven. I know my man had to work for his livin' when he was their age, an' I had when I was thirteen."

"It's easy talking," cried out a little woman, who was stitching vigorously near one end of the quilt, and her eyes flashed as she looked up from her work; "but words are not deeds. Mrs. Rounce has been the very best neighbour that some of us ever had, both in health and in sickness. I go in for helping her now she's down, for love's sake and not for charity."

"Good for you, Miss Trowther," chimed in Mrs. Jones, "and I move that we all send her somethin' that'll come useful like, and do it this week, too."

"They say she's mighty pernicky," put in the irrepressible Mrs. Juniper. "Like as not she'll refuse to take what's given."

"That can easily be managed," said Miss Trowther gently but earnestly. "Let every one put on a slip of paper, 'For love's sake,' and fasten it to what they give, and I'll warrant Mrs. Rounce won't refuse it."

"Well, if that ain't original, I'd like to know what is?" cackled Mrs. Middlesize, who was herself a widow, though in comfortable circumstances. "There's Tim Towler and Joe Knox, they might send her a cord of wood and half a pig, for love's sake; just to remind her that they had gone through the same mill."

A ripple of laughter ran round the two sides of the quilt which was now nearly done, and more than one woman gave her neighbour a poke; but Miss Trowther was not to be sat upon.

"You may laugh," she said, colouring up a little, "but we were talking of women, not men. If we want to help her, and we know she needs it, let us do it in a way that will hurt her the least."

"Right you are, Miss Trowther," exclaimed Mrs. Jemima Smith—who insisted on the full name to distinguish her from Mrs. Hepzibah Smith, her next-door neighbour, with whom she had little in common—"and I suggest that Miss Trowther write off a whole list of slips, having those three words on, and nothing more. Then we each take one home with us, and send it in with anything we give. I'll undertake that my son Harry shall drive round with his sleigh on Saturday, and take all the things over at once. No one will know what any one else gives, and neither will Mrs. Rounce herself."

There was only one dissenting voice, and the feeling of altruism was too general to allow so slight an opposition to interfere with the plan.

In the little village, where everybody knew every other body's business, it was wonderful how quietly the little scheme of philanthropy was carried through, without the slightest inkling of its existence reaching Dame Rounce's ears. Saturday night soon came round. The temperature of the air had abated; so there was little danger of the perishable things being frozen. Just as it was getting dark, and at a time when the widow herself had gone on an errand to the store, the Smith sleigh stopped at her house. Speedily, goods enough to more than stock an ordinary-sized larder were carried in. Two or three hams, more than one bag of potatoes, another of flour, another of Indian meal, besides lard, apples, sugar, tea, and other things were quickly transferred to the little kitchen. Cleveland and the younger children were filled with amazement and asked a host of questions; but young Smith only favoured them with laconic answers, and jumping into his sleigh drove off.

The unlooked-for generosity touched a soft place in Cleveland's heart, and more than one tear was brushed away before his mother came in. As she entered and saw her kitchen piled up with household goods enough to last her for weeks, a look of consternation came over her face.

"What does it all mean?" she exclaimed, her brow contracting and her lips drawing in. "Where did these things come from?"

"Harry Smith brought them over in his long sleigh; but he wouldn't say where he got them," replied Cleveland.

She staggered slightly and took hold of the table for support, as the thought dawned upon her.

"We are not paupers, Cleve," she exclaimed with bated breath. "Surely we can live without charity."

"I know we can mother; but look at the labels." And the boy watched his mother with anxious countenance.

"For love's sake" was on the first parcel; but it was on the second and the third, and by-and-by the poor woman broke down. She threw herself in a chair, and while smiling through her tears, sobbed like a child.

"Oh my children," she cried out, as the two younger ones came close to her, "God is very good to us."

The next moment the cheery voice of the doctor was heard at the door. His quick eye took in the situation at once, and he burst out with a merry laugh.

"My conscience, what a bonanza! I don't know but what I'll go and break my own arm next! The worst of it is I'd get sick eating all the good things by myself. And that's where Cleve has the advantage."

CHAPTER V.

HOW DR. HARTMAN CAME TO SETTLE IN LINBROOK.

Dr. Hartman had been less than a year in Linbrook. He came fresh from college, and the opportunity to settle there occurred in a peculiar manner, which was an agreeable surprise to him.

One day just before his final examination, the secretary of the college, Professor Dwight, tapped him on the shoulder, and intimated that he would like to see him in his private room.

"Mr. Hartman," he said, as he took his seat at his desk; "we don't often have direct openings to offer our men when they graduate; but I am happy to say we have a specially good one now. It came two days ago, and the Dean and I have had a long talk over it. We finally decided to offer it to you as a man who had won our confidence, and who, we felt sure, was worthy of the place."

The young man's face flushed with pleasure, as he attempted to reply in suitable terms to such an unexpected offer.

"Perhaps you know the locality," continued Dr. Dwight. "It is at Linbrook, a large village near the centre of the Province in the County of Z."

"Yes, I know Linbrook. It is a thriving place in a lumber region on the Powan river. But are there not one or two doctors there already?"

"Yes, but they are said to be weak men, behind the times, and in whom the better class of the people place little confidence. Being a lumbering region, too, accidents will often occur, and, as a skilful surgeon, you should find plenty to do."

"I assure you, sir, I cannot be too grateful, and I shall do my best," said the young doctor. "How soon should I go?"

"As soon as you can make satisfactory arrangements after graduation," was the answer.

The requisition that had been forwarded to Dr. Dwight bore the signatures of a number of the leading men in the village, as well as those of several farmers living within a few miles of Linbrook, including that of Richard Finlayson, Esq., the father of Hugh and Winifred. The document promised the cordial support of the better class of the people to any good graduate whom the College authorities would send up to settle in their midst.

After passing his examinations, Hartman again sought an interview with Professor Dwight before leaving for Linbrook.

"Have you any special advice to give me before I go?" he asked, looking questioningly into the kindly eyes of the good doctor.

"You know it already," he answered, grasping warmly the young man's hand. "I will only remind you of the physician's motto—*Honus habet onus*. Be true to your *alma mater*; and remember that the old biblical teaching of 'Do as you would be done by' is a pretty good one for a doctor to keep in mind."

In Linbrook Dr. Hartman was received with much warmth. The houses of the people were thrown open to him, and he was soon driven round the country by the leaders of the movement, to be introduced to his prospective patrons.

Among the earliest of the farmers that he visited was Mr. Finlayson. He was charmed with the quaint house, sweeping orchard, wide fields, and verdant woods. Birds were singing in the linden tree and in the top of the tall maple, while roses and orchids were in flower along the pathway leading up to the open door.

Perhaps what gave additional significance to that first visit was the fact that it became fixed in his memory by a bright vision that suddenly appeared. As he sat in the little parlour, the garden gate opened, and a girlish figure, crowned with golden ringlets and a gipsy hat, tripped lightly toward the house.

She was a very composed young lady, however, for while her eyes sparkled when introduced to the stranger, she retained full control of herself, notwithstanding the expectancy with which she, and every one else, had looked forward to the arrival of the promised doctor from the city.

"My daughter teaches at the school-house, Section 5, which you passed in driving along the 14th," said Mr. Finlayson.

"That pretty white building down by the creek," returned the doctor. "Just the kind of one I would like to attend if I were a boy again."

"But you are glad that you are not, I am sure," said the teacher.

"When I was a boy, I did as a boy, I suppose; but now as a man I must needs put away childish things," he replied with a laugh. "Still, I assure you the memory of my school-days will always be a pleasure to me."

"I might say the same thing," said Miss Finlayson; "I really think most people feel as you do about it. The real task probably falls to the lot of the teacher."

"You are right, Miss Finlayson, if you have many large boys to control. I know from individual experience that they are an unruly lot."

"Several of my boys are as tall as I am," she said, drawing herself up to her full height; "but they behave themselves pretty well," and she smiled as she looked back at the doctor. Her lips were full and flexible, though firm, and, with her dark hazel eyes, gave to her face the expression of combined gentleness and strength, although one would judge that she had not seen more than twenty summers.

"Winifred is all right," said her father. "She manages the school very well, and the trustees say that she keeps better order than Mr. Cane did, although, of course, it is summer-time now, and most of the large boys are away."

A few minutes later the doctor took his leave, carrying with him a cordial invitation from Mrs. Finlayson to call again any time he should happen to be in the neighbourhood.

"It will take you some time to get acquainted," said that lady, as she accompanied him out to the gate. "We may be plain people; but the farmers on the 14th always welcome their friends."

"That is a compliment I hope to deserve," he replied, as he lifted his hat and drove away.

Dr. Hartman was not an impressionable young man. He had philosophically made up his mind not to fall in love with the first pretty face that he should happen to meet with in his practice; or, in fact, with any one for a good long time at least. But he was fresh from college, and had absorbed physiology with all his might and main at the feet of Bovell; and he smiled to himself as he thought of the apt illustration of the professor's teaching, which Miss Finlayson afforded.

She was at least seven years his junior, and in many respects the direct antithesis of himself. While her hair was divinely auburn, his was as black as midnight. Her eyes a chestnut brown—his were grey. Her complexion the fairest he thought that he had ever seen, while his face had the rich olive of a brunette. Oh, shade of Bovell! long since gone to that unseen world, which thy fancy painted replete with divine beatitudes!—if thy teachings were lived out in practical life, how different would be the issues! How much more of poetry, and love, and truth, in their essence, would be found in the lives of men!

Hartman smiled to himself almost audibly, for ideas such as these flashed through his mind as he drove home to the village in the afternoon of that beautiful May day, deeply impressed with what he had seen of the fair maiden of the 14th Concession; and although he felt convinced that there was no danger of his own affections getting entangled, he caught himself wildly speculating as to the possibility of her already being in love, and who the fortunate suitor might be.

CHAPTER VI.

A SCHOOL EPISODE.

On the morning following the toboggan slide, while Pettigrew was speeding his way by train to Hamilton to further his delectable scheme of self-aggrandisement, other events were occurring in and around the school-house on the 14th Concession.

Miss Finlayson walked briskly in the crisp morning air over the glistening snow to her daily duty. She was in deep thought. Her face was graver than usual, and her eyes bent on the pathway, save when she passed or was overtaken by scholars. Then her features would relax into a smile, as she returned their greetings.

Children were coming in from every direction. Some were muffled up, well wrapped against the fierceness of any wind that might blow, chatting and laughing and playing pranks upon each other as they hurried along the road. Others, more poorly clad, and feeling the keenness of the frost, were scudding schoolward, too intent upon getting beside the hot stove within the walls, to think of anything else.

At the cross-roads, a quarter of a mile to the north, two big lads joined each other from opposite directions. Their meeting seemed to be by pre-arrangement.

"We struck it all right this time, Pete," exclaimed one, as they shambled on towards the school-house.

"Huh, huh! I guess we did, Jack," was the reply. "But my! ain't it cold!"

"You bet; but it's just the day for a lark."

"Ya—ah! It sharpens a fellow up some, and makes him feel like doin' suthin'."

"We can do it all right," said Jack emphatically, while at the same time he made a flourish with his right arm. "I'll tell you what it is; this school-marm biz'ness through the winter in this here section must be stopped. When a fellow gets to be seventeen, an' half a head bigger than her as is put in to be teacher, it riles like the mischief to be bossed like a kid, an' I won't stand it."

The speaker was a big, shuffling, loose-jointed lad, and his companion appeared to be much like himself, as they talked and gesticulated along the road.

"You bet your life I ain't goin' to stand it uther," replied Pete. "Winifred Finlayson's had too easy a game of it, and it's time for her to larn suthin'. I tell you, Jack, if me an' you 'ud jus' go in, we'd make it so hot for her and the blamed trustees, that she'd be glad to quit, an' that mighty soon."

"That's so, an' the quicker they all know it the better."

"That's what I say. Now if us two make a bold face of it, how many of the other fellows can we build on?"

"That's where the fluke comes in. The worst of the darned thing is that all the kids like her. Still, there's Tim Thompson and Ned Laven, they'd stand by us, sure."

They turned the corner, and were within a few rods of the school-house when the bell stopped ringing. The rest of the scholars had gone inside, and as the two approached the door they made a final halt.

"Suppose we start by holdin' off, and doin' nawthin' she tells us to?" suggested Jack.

"All right," said Pete. "Then we'll lay low for whatever happens."

And cocking their heads a little higher than usual, the two public school philanthropists opened the door and went into the school-house with a bang.

Winifred's face was still grave, but it was strengthened by a look of quiet determination, as she opened school that morning. Although she had been teaching for over nine months her position had not been an unpleasant one until very recently. But, unfortunately, she had followed a male teacher, who possessed little force, and under whose control some

of the larger boys had become very unruly; and it was the return of these boys that caused the trouble.

At the time we speak of, the use of the rod in schools was very prevalent. The master who could swing it vigorously, and terrify his scholars into obedience, was often considered the best teacher although he could only teach by drill, and never dreamed that it was his duty to develop the reasoning powers of his pupils.

When Winifred, fresh from the Normal School of Toronto, accepted the position of teacher in the 5th school section of her native township, she decided to make an effort to reverse the old plan, and by the use of milder but firmer measures to accomplish better results. This was not done in a day. But the calm, firm face and kindly eyes added much to the words she uttered in evolving order out of chaos, and attention and interest out of carelessness and unconcern.

Her success during the summer months had been very marked, not only in securing order but also in encouraging the scholars to study, and, perhaps what was still more satisfactory to the trustees, in largely increasing the number of the average attendance. It was the latter fact that greatly induced them to urge her to continue in charge for the winter, as the increased attendance meant increased Government allowance, and diminished direct taxation upon the property owners of the school section.

Miss Finlayson was naturally flattered by the offer, particularly when the trustees likewise stated that they would advance her salary, to remunerate her for the increased labour and responsibility. So, in spite of personal misgivings and numerous family warnings, her services were engaged for another term.

Whether it arose from the excitement of the toboggan slide, coupled with Cleveland's accident, or thoughts over the impending school difficulties, which for some time she had felt coming, Winifred could not tell; but sleep scarcely closed her eyelids that night, and during the long wakeful hours she thought out a plan, and by the time she reached the school-house was prepared for action.

Following out the custom authorised but not enforced by the Board of Education, Miss Finlayson had always made a practice of opening the school by reading a passage of Scripture, going systematically chapter by chapter through one book after another, usually confining herself to the New Testament, the Psalms and the Proverbs. This was so much a matter of custom that many of the scholars brought their Testaments with them, to follow her through the reading. This time, however, although she had just commenced the second book of Corinthians, she had decided for once to break the rule.

"Order, please," she exclaimed, as the scholars took their seats. "I shall read this morning part of the fourth chapter of Proverbs, and I want you all to pay particular attention."

Then she commenced in a slow, clear, determined voice: "'Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life. Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee. Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand or to the left; remove thy foot from evil.'"

"Now, scholars," she said, standing very erect at her desk. Pete and Jack were sitting together at one side broadly grinning; but she paid them no attention. "This passage of Scripture applies to girls as well as boys. Now all of you except those in the first book are old enough to vote upon it. The scholars in the second, third, fourth and fifth books who believe this teaching to be true, hold up your right hands."

Immediately a body of hands shot up into the air. Those that were chary began to look around, and when they found the vote to be nearly unanimous, they also joined the number. Finally, with the exception of the two rebels, all were up save those of Tim Thompson and Ned Laven.

To the two former she paid no attention.

"What, Timothy!" she called out in a cheery voice. "Are you not going to vote? Don't astonish me, please."

The lad's face grew as red as a beet, and slowly his hand slid up past his ear. He was sitting in front of Jack and Pete, and could not see exactly what they were doing.

"And Edward!" but his hand was up by the time she had mentioned his name, for he usually followed Timothy's lead.

"Now, scholars," she called out again, "all have voted in the right way but two. We'll not mention their names; but just call it unanimous, for I'm sure if they didn't vote for, they wouldn't vote against."

All eyes were at once turned towards the two refractories, whose faces commenced to flush.

"This way, scholars," she called out again; "no looking round, please. Now for your lessons, boys and girls. Let all do your best, and remember the last Proverb that I read is to be your motto: 'Remove thy foot from evil.'"

Jack and Pete sulked away all forenoon; but no attention was paid to them by the teacher. She gave them no orders. If they cared to come out in their classes they could do so. If they didn't they could refrain. Their presence was practically ignored, and as the morning wore on, a general aloofness seemed to develop between them and the rest of the scholars.

At eleven o'clock intermission came, and the two big lads slunk off, to have a huge guffaw outside. At first they tried to badger Tim and Ned, but it wouldn't take, so they wandered off into the woods by themselves.

"Anyway she's game," muttered Pete, as soon as they were out of hearing of the other scholars.

"You bet your life."

"She don't give a darn for us."

"She's cute as they make 'em. Who'd a thought that she'd go an' read them there tex's, just to clean us out."

"The deuce of it is the whole school's laughin' at us."

"It's the darndest thing I ever see in all my life. P'raps we'd better slide in. We're sure to larn with her if we try; and she don't give a continental if we don't. As for the kids laughin', let 'em laugh. Who cares?"

That afternoon the tables were turned a little. The sapient youths had decided to give in, but slowly.

Miss Finlayson saw the way the wind was blowing, and so indicated no desire to have them lay down their arms openly. They did it by degrees, and in their own rough way; but in a few days they became as diligent and well behaved as almost any in the school.

"Well, how did you bring your big boys to order?" Robert asked the next time he met Winifred.

"Oh! I'd no trouble at all," she replied with a ringing laugh. "They just subsided." And that was all she would say about it.



CHAPTER VII.

A NIGHT DRIVE INTO A SNOW-DRIFT.

Dr. Hartman's office was a front room in a rambling old house on the main street. The location suited him, and the landlady with whom he boarded did her best to make him comfortable. The apartment was roomy and homelike, and often, after his day's work was done, he would loll for a while in his easy-chair as he turned the leaves of a book on Practice, or of some recent medical journal.

The doctor's life had quickly proved to be a busy one. The multitudinous duties of physician and surgeon as well as dentist had all been thrown upon him; and often when evening came, being supported by a large and willing *clientèle*, he felt tired enough to have been engaged in professional work for several years instead of only one.

Although he did his best to rise to the occasion, the responsibility was frequently pretty heavy for him. To depend entirely upon his own limited experience in calls where life and death were involved, and when it was impossible to summon mature and reliable counsel to his aid, was something for which his three years of college life had but meagrely prepared him.

Still the responsibility was not without its effect, for it made him more thoughtful and self-reliant.

One evening, a week or two after Cleve's accident, when the moon was in its last quarter, he returned wearied in mind and body from the country.

The day had been stormy, with a temperature of several degrees below zero. Mrs. Sanderson, of the 14th, had been dying all day; and the doctor, when he made his afternoon visit, yielding to the solicitude of her friends, useless though it was, had remained until all was over, and then drove five miles, after nightfall through a blinding snow-storm, home to his office.

He had thawed out his stiffened limbs somewhat, and was regaling himself with a hot supper, when the jingling of bells and the rush of feet announced the arrival of some one else requiring his services.

In another moment the door opened, and a man, muffled to the eyes and covered with snow, came in accompanied by Robert Thornton.

"I'm glad you're home, doctor, and sorry to ask you to go out again on a night like this," said the latter, with a frank apology in his manner as well as his words.

"It's a beastly night," said the doctor. "What and where is it?"

"This man can tell you better than I can. He has hauled saw-logs in for us all winter, and it's his brother he would like you to see."

The man, who had been shaking the snow off his coat, turned now and exclaimed in an excited tone:

"It's Fred who's hurt. He's got an awful gash in his leg. It's me who done it. Him and me was choppin' when it happened, an' he nearly bled to death before we got him to the house."

"How far is it from here?" asked the doctor.

"Guess it's eight miles up the street."

"That's out of my regular beat. Could you not get a nearer doctor?" Hartman asked. He did not relish the idea of another long ride in the teeth of the storm, and in the dark too, for the moon was about gone.

"Father sent me to Dr. Jessop, of Dilbury, first, and he came; but he says that Fred's leg has to come off, an' he needs help, an' he sent me for you. Won't you come?" he pleaded in an agonised tone.

"Armstrong drove up as I was closing the store," said Robert, "and I offered to come over with him. I know Fred Armstrong very well. He's a worthy fellow, and I shall be glad if you will go."

"Certainly I will; but it's a bleak prospect, I assure you. Where did you say the cut is?" he inquired, turning to the man.

"I'll tell you just in a minute. My horses is nearly druv to death, an' I want to put 'em in the shed and feed 'em a bit. I'll be back in no time and tell you while they get your nag out. Must I tell the ostler you want him?"

The doctor nodded assent, and the man disappeared.

"This is one of the heaviest storms we have had this winter," said Robert, "and I'm awfully sorry to ask you to go out on such a night as this."

"It can't be helped," said the doctor, with a shrug. "The surgeon is the servant of servants; but it is an honour to be able to help a man—'*Honus habet onus.*' I think there'll be more drifts to-night. They were bad enough this afternoon. When I was in the Sandersons' I saw Miss Finlayson pass with her scholars on her way home. She seemed to be almost blown away."

"It is fortunate for her that her school-house is in the line with her own home," said Robert; "the east and west roads don't drift, but the north and south ones do."

"It is lucky then that my drive to-night will be west," said the doctor; "north or south would be impassable."

"Quite true. By the way, did you hear of Miss Finlayson's victory over her rebellious scholars?" Robert asked.

"Yes; it is the talk of the country-side. She's a plucky little woman, and the school section should be proud of her."

"We all are, for that matter," said Robert.

In another minute the man was back again. This time he took off his hat and scarf, and throwing his mitts on the floor, spread out his hands over the stove to warm them.

"It's a mighty nasty slash he's got!" he ejaculated; "an' as I said, it's me done it."

"Tell me about it quick," said the doctor; "my horse will be out in a minute, and I cannot have him stand in the cold."

"Well, we was both choppin' on the same log at each end of the crotch, an' my axe caught on a twig on the down stroke, swishing it round and buryin' the blade of the axe in his ankle. He dropped in his tracks an' bled awfully. We bound it up tight and got him home. Then I druv like mad for the doctor. He says the big artery's cut, an' he can't save his life without he has another doctor to help him."

"When did it happen?"

"Just at dark, when we was goin' to quit. Now you know the road, doctor. It's right on the 14th, near ten miles due west. It's first house on left side after passing the big Ma'sh. But it'll be lit up, an' you can't miss it, for they'll be on the look-out for you."

"But you will drive out before me and lead the way?"

"I'd like to, but my horses is bushed. They were workin' all day, and then I had to drive 'em like sin for more'n sixteen miles, an' they're used up. I was thinkin' I would follow you right away, but kinder slow."

"All right; if the road is open I will try it. But ten miles is different from eight. Are there any drifts?"

"Just at one place, before you come to the tamarack bush, the road is drifted up a bit, an' you'll have to turn to the left into the field as you go out. You can't miss it; the fence is down, and there is a good track right alongside of the road through the fields. Then the fence is down again right before you, an' you turn into the road again just as you come to the woods. There's no trouble about it at all; it's just as straight as a string. When you get pretty close to the tamarack bush the road jogs a little to the north, an' that's where it is. Look out for the fence gap, an' you'll be all right."

The doctor mentally took note of his instructions, and started out on his journey. He pulled his fur cap down over his ears, tightly adjusted his gauntlets, and tucked the buffalo robe closely around him. For awhile he got along all right. His horse was a good stepper, and, although coming in late, had been well fed and groomed, and was fully equal to another journey. The intense cold, however, was very penetrating, and as he had been out for several hours the night before

attending an obstinate case, it was not long before the doctor felt an inclination to drowsiness.

The storm had abated, and although the bells jingled merrily and the horse trotted briskly, the doctor's eyes would occasionally close, to be opened again in a few seconds by an uneven motion of the rig. As he neared the tamarack bush he roused himself more thoroughly to look out for the opening to the left. Along this portion of the road there was more general drifting, so that it was a little difficult to keep the exact path.

Soon a new difficulty presented itself. A huge drift loomed up in front of him, standing as high as his horse's head, and bevelling off gradually to the left, until even in the darkness he could see that it joined the stake and ridged rail fence at an acute angle. By the time he had made this discovery he found that he was gradually wedging in toward the fence itself, and the next moment the cutter was pitched over against the rails and the horse was plunging in the snow.

"Whoa there! Steady, boy!" he called out, as he scrambled over the outer side into a big snow-bank. "Whoa, Charlie! Steady, I say, steady!"

Snap went one of the shafts, and some of the gearing gave way, as the horse continued to plunge. But Dr. Hartman was a good horseman, and notwithstanding the awkwardness as well as danger of the position, his cool, firm voice soon quieted the beast.

Not a house nor a light was in sight. Huge banks of snow could be dimly seen in the darkness—for the sky was still heavily overcast—and the dilemma was certainly an aggravating one. The question was: Had he passed the gap? or was it still ahead of him? The former seemed to him most probable, as it was unlikely that the immense drift that he had encountered could have formed since the man who came for him had driven over the road.

A quick glance around into the darkness, and a moment's thought, made the Doctor's course clear. He first detached the animal from the rig, and then commenced to take down the fence. After the first minute or two the horse seemed to take in the situation. He stood still, and turning his head around, watched the doctor in his work. In a few minutes the pine rails were thrown down; but to lift the cutter unaided through the deep snow over into the field promised to be a difficult task. He pulled, and tugged, and lifted, and notwithstanding the intense cold, had commenced to perspire in the effort, when he heard in the rear the distant tinkling of sleigh bells.

"Thank heaven," he fervently ejaculated; "whoever is coming, I shall now learn where the road is."

Several more minutes elapsed before he saw a span of horses attached to a light sleigh turn into the field not a hundred yards off, indicating where he had missed the way. Fortunately it was on his own side.

"Hello!" he cried out.

"Hello, doctor!" was the response. "What has happened? Horse run away?"

While the doctor explained, the man stopped his team, and came over to his assistance.

"I don't see how in Sam Hill you missed the gap," he exclaimed with a low guffaw. "It stands there as plain as a pike-staff."

"I was a fool to start without you," replied the doctor a little nettled. "How could a man be sure of a gap on a dark night like this?"

"Guess you took a nap for a gap, doctor! But never mind. I'm awful sorry it happened. Anyway, we can fix up your shaft with one of my straps, an' you'll get through all right."

In a few minutes they got the rig together again, and the horse attached once more.

"You won't have no more trouble now," said the man. "There's no turnin's at all, except to get out on the road along the beaten track."

"You think I'm going to lead again?" exclaimed the doctor. "Not one step. You can drive as fast as you like, and I will keep up; but no more gaps for me."

"Guess the nags can stand another run now," cried the man; "they're kinder rested," and with a crack of his whip he led

the way at a brisk trot.

In another half hour they arrived at the house. Dr. Jessop, a man of about fifty years of age, was walking up and down the long low room in which the patient was lying. His face bore a set, severe expression.

"Glad you've come, doctor," was his greeting; but it was in a suppressed tone. "Come into this bedroom and I will tell you. This is a very bad case. Prompt amputation will be needed, for the arteries and muscles on the outside of the leg are cut right down to the bone. He has bled terribly, and there is danger of mortification. The leg is getting very black already."

"Have you got it bandaged tightly?"

"Oh, yes! The moment we loosen the bandage at all the hæmorrhage commences again. Did you bring your instruments, Dr. Hartman?"

"Yes, but perhaps amputation will not be necessary."

"But it will. What is a limb to a life?"

By this time Dr. Hartman had divested himself of his wraps, and they went in together to examine the patient.

He was conscious, but pallid, and comparatively bloodless. The toes of the injured leg were of a purplish hue from the tight binding, while blood was still trickling through the bandages wrapped around the wound.

"Has he had any brandy?" Dr. Hartman asked.

"No," said Dr. Jessop. "I was afraid it might increase the flow of blood."

"Well," said the young doctor, smiling, "I would give him a good stiff horn now; and, if you like, I will remove the wrappings and examine the leg."

"That's just what we want," was the reply.

"There are too many people in this room, don't you think?" said Dr. Hartman. "The air is close. I would keep these two men to assist, and send every one else out."

"Exactly," responded Dr. Jessop, "the very thing I intended to do," and he moved about carrying out one suggestion after another as indicated by the younger man.

As the wraps were unfolded, the foot being held firmly by one of the men, a stream of bright arterial blood jutted out forcibly from the wound. But Hartman had placed a tourniquet loosely over the great artery of the thigh, and was prepared for it, ready to tighten and arrest the flow the moment it was needed.

"Glad you brought it," ejaculated Dr. Jessop. "I didn't have mine with me."

"How could we amputate without it?" was the quiet comment.

On examining the injured limb, a deep, almost perpendicular wound into the upper portion of the ankle joint was laid bare, severing muscles, blood-vessels, ligaments, and bone itself—almost dividing the joint into halves. It was a terrible gash, and the foot hung limp beneath it. The removal of the bandages permitted a return of venous circulation, and was a relief to the cyanosis of the foot.

"I think I would amputate as close to the joint as possible, in order to retain a useful leg," suggested Dr. Jessop, who always liked to be in at a capital operation, although he never did one himself.

"Had we not better try and retain the limb altogether?" said Hartman, while he grasped the severed end of the artery with bull-dog forceps. "Doctor, slip on this ligature, please. There, now loosen the tourniquet a little. Ah! I must tie the lower end too."

Two or three sprouting vessels of smaller size exhibited themselves, to be treated like their predecessors, and then arterial hæmorrhage ceased.

"If I can suture the two ends of the long peroneus muscle together, it will help the joint," said Hartman, as he examined the wound more closely.

"Possibly," said Jessop coldly, for he was in no way pleased with the trend matters were taking.

But without delay Hartman drew down the retracted muscle and sutured it with silver wire to the exposed end on the foot. Then he washed out the wound freely with tepid water, bathed the cut surfaces with brandy, and making a drainage tube of the long ends of the sutures, stitched up the wound.

This was at a period prior to the date of antiseptics; but "cleanliness and elevation and rest," as taught by Aikens, were not unknown to the young doctor.

After the dressing was finished, at Jessop's suggestion, the two men adjourned to another room.

"That's very nicely done, young man," said the former with some dignity; "but I tell you it's a mistake. That terrible wound, with bone and muscle and ligaments and arteries all cut, will produce fever and suppuration, and will cost the man his life; while a clean amputation, which you could easily have done, would have saved it."

"I am glad to think that you are mistaken, Dr. Jessop," replied Hartman. "I believe the wound will heal, and the man will get well, having two feet instead of one. The only thing will be to keep the fever down, and that can be done by having clear cold water drop constantly on the oiled silk over the wound, and allowing it to run away into a pail beneath. Your plan would be a good one, but the one that you and I have adopted will be better."

"Well!" said Jessop, mollified a little by the implied compliment, "I am willing to follow out any further treatment you may suggest; and I sincerely hope it will be successful, for the man's sake as well as ours."

"Thank you," said Dr. Hartman; and as the day dawned he started again upon his long drive home.

In due time Armstrong's leg did get well, and he drove over to Linbrook to pay the doctor his fee, and to thank him for a saved limb—something which money alone could never adequately compensate him for.

But the quick weeks of winter were soon over, and events both gay and tragic chased each other in rapid succession. When the days lengthened and the snow was melting, Hartman put away his cutter and got out his wheels, for spring was coming. Little rivulets were chasing each other down the fields, under the fences and over the road. There was slush everywhere, and the doctor looked regretfully at his polished rig and the muddy street. Just as he was getting into his buggy, however, something more important attracted his attention. A note was handed to him. It was from Miss Finlayson, inviting him to their "sugaring-off," which was to take place the next night. The whole view point changed, and he felt an unusual thrill of pleasure as he scanned the lines of the neat little epistle, and then he smiled at his own folly. Why could he not platonically take it as a matter of course?

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SUGAR CARNIVAL.

It was past the middle of March when the logging season closed that year. There had been no thaw long enough to destroy the sleighing; but the heat of the sun, increasing from day to day as the season advanced, together with the wearing effect of the timber traffic upon the beaten roads, had worn away the snow, so that practically the sleighing was over before the slush came.

But the sugar season followed the lumber season in quick succession, and there was work galore for the men to do. The still air, the cloudless sky, the warm sun day after day, with white frost each night, made the sap rush madly through the trunks of the maples—a sure token of coming spring; and many of the settlers round Linbrook, as soon as the saw-logging was over, hastened to reap their sugar harvest.

Of all the sugar-bushes on the 14th, Mr. Finlayson's was considered to be the most picturesque as well as the largest. It covered the entire back-end of the farm. Throughout the centre of the bush extended an oval saucer-like depression, and through it from end to end, or as the natives called it, "cross-lots," were the windings of Huckleberry Creek. The peculiarity of the land formation on this portion of the Finlayson homestead was very striking. One would imagine on looking over the bush, when the leaves were off the trees, that, in some pre-historic time, the earth had gradually subsided over an extensive area, and had done it so gently that no irregular margins had been left to mark the event. Up above the Finlayson farm and down below it, the valley of the little creek was but a narrow strip, while through it the hard bottom was broad enough and rich enough to grow more than a thousand of the rugged sugar-bearing trees.

The big grey giants, with their wide-spreading branches and gnarled limbs, thickly studded the ground, while here and there the yellow leaves and smooth white bark of a beech gave variety and contrast to the scene. At intervals, too, a tall pine elevated its tufted top high and dry above the whole, as though, having lagged behind, he was stretching his neck to discover the direction which the forest of firs had taken.

People who live in towns and cities have no idea of the glory of the sugar-making season. All work is play when taken in the right spirit. There's the ploughing through the snow in long boots; the boring auger-holes into the trees; the making of pine spiles and driving them into the wood below the taps; the placing of pails or troughs made for the purpose to catch the flowing sap; the gathering in buckets and carrying to the huge cauldron; the swinging of iron pots and the boiling of the sap at immense gipsy camp-fires; and finally, the sugaring-off. There is a wildness, a poetry, a romance in the whole thing which will soon be forgotten—for it is fast passing away, never to return.

The Finlayson sugar-making was an annual event which had been noted throughout the settlement for years; for, besides the regular make from day to day from their unusually large bush, they had their annual "sugaring-off," to which friends from both village and country were invited—and their name was legion.

The whole scene was weird and picturesque, and each year the hosts, comprising the whole family, made an effort to surpass any preceding celebration.

As usual, the guests commenced; to arrive early. There was only a slight frost in the air. The sky was studded with stars, and the moon, at first quarter, was casting flickering shadows through the trees, lightening the gloom of the forest.

Soon it became like a huge gipsy camp. Four large kettles, each capable of holding from fifteen to twenty gallons of sap, were suspended upon poles; but only one had a big fire under it that night, casting a lurid glare upon every surrounding object. Round about were rustic chairs, and logs and planks for the guests to seat themselves upon; and over to one side was the tool shanty, half-filled with blankets and robes and eatables for the comfort of the people, and to help to celebrate the occasion.

Mr. and Mrs. Finlayson and Winifred and Hugh were all there, with a greeting and a laugh for every one; and while the women came trooping in, the men tied their horses to the trees and blanketed them before coming up to take in their share of the fun.

The members of the Toboggan Club, including Cleve (who had just discarded his sling), and even Pettigrew, had all been invited, and were there to the last man and woman, making a new contingent to the annual Finlayson banquet.

Dr. Hartman and Robert drove over together, arriving in time to help the young men arrange blankets and robes and cozy corners for the laughing maidens as well as their merry mothers.

All the while mine host Finlayson, while joking with this one or that, kept his eye on the finishing kettle while he diligently stirred its contents. As king of the feast he must keep to his post; for in sugar making he was a master.

"It'll soon be ready," he called out briskly at last. "Have your water-pans handy. How's that, Hugh?" And he dropped half a ladle of boiling syrup into his pail of water fresh from the spring.

A dozen heads gathered round as Hugh tested the congealing sugar. "Just about it, father," came the answer not a minute later.

"Come along then, one after another, before we swing the pot off"; and a couple of score of pans and pots, each half-full of water, were presented in quick succession for ladles of molten fluid. Then, when all were served, the father and son, with an adjustable crane, swung round the cauldron and poured out the finished sugar into flat pans to cool, while the young folks laughed and joked, as they pulled the taffy and regaled themselves over the sugar feast.

Swiftly an hour flew by. There were games and romps, and runs through the woods and in and out among the kettles. Then the whole company formed an irregular circle round the blazing fires, and the story-telling began.

"Who owns the dog?" called out some one, as a solitary yellow canine stalked backward and forward from one end of the camp to the other.

"It belongs to Cleve," was the answer.

"Well! Cleve must tell the first story," said Mrs. Finlayson, who was rocking herself to and fro in a chair specially arranged for her.

"I don't know no stories," was the lad's response.

"Yes, you do. Tell us about the dog. What's his name?" cried out James Thornton, who had come with him from the village.

"Six 'ears," was the answer, while Cleve's eyes slowly twinkled.

"Six years?" cried out one of the girls; "what an awful name for a dog!"

"Yes, it's curus," continued Cleveland, gravely wagging his head. "His name tells his age exactly; an' he'll never grow no older, no matter how long he lives."

"What a paradox!" exclaimed Winifred; "was he always six years old?"

"Allus."

"What nonsense, Cleve."

"Fact all the same," was the measured drawl, while the lad's eyes rolled meditatively toward the stars.

"Well, explain yourself," said Robert. "What's the mystery about your 'Yaller dorg,' anyway?"

"It's easy explained," replied Cleve, suddenly withdrawing his gaze from the illimitable, and looking stolidly round the group of laughing faces, "the dog carries the marks on his body for anyone to read, without any book larin' either. Just look at his tail. It's just as neat a six as Miss Finlayson could make on the black-board if she tried. Then his two ears stand out so prominent like. They are allus the fust thing you see when you look at him. So he's six 'ears as sure as shootin'. While he lives he can't alter 'em; an' if time has no effect on 'em, how in the blue blazes can he grow any older?"

"Not a bad beginning," said the doctor, after the laughter had subsided. "But right in the woods here, round the camp fire, why not have some Indian legends. I will tell a little one if someone else will follow:

"It is an ancient legend,^[B] believed by most of the Indians of the north. In the primeval days the world was nothing but a

vast ocean, wherein dwelt the great monsters of the deep. In the heavens above, however, there were any number of supernatural beings. One of these was a woman named Atamsie. One day while flying through space she fell out of heaven and down through the sky toward the primeval waters. Her descent was so rapid that it brushed off her wings, and when she came to the ocean she alighted on the back of a huge turtle, and that accounts for the flat backs of all the other turtles since the world began."

[B]"Legends of the Iroquois."

For a few moments the laughter stopped the doctor's story; then he went on again:

"After the woman had rested for awhile on the turtle's back, one of the water animals brought her some mud, and out of it she made the earth, and on it she lived and roamed. By-and-by Atamsie had a daughter, who grew up to womanhood, and had two sons named Juskeka and Tawascara. Then the daughter died and was buried, and from her body sprung up all the vegetation of the earth. Her son Juskeka was kind and good. He made the springs and rivers and lakes. Afterwards he created men, and taught them to make fire and cultivate the soil. He is still the master of men, and helps the hunter in his search for game. But Tawascara died young, and so he went to the happy hunting-grounds, where he rules the red men after they are dead, as Juskeka does while they are living."

"That Iroquois legend only accounts for the back of the turtle," said Robert, who also had some reputation as an authority on aboriginal folk-lore, "but it takes the Omahas[C] to tell how he got his head."

[C]Giffen's "Oo-Mah-Ha Ta-Wa-Tha."

"The story, the story!" was the demand from many voices.

Robert stretched out his legs, folded his arms, and commenced:

"There were three spirits of the Hereafter, roaming up and down through the land after it was made. They were Rabbit, with the magic skin; Umba, the light of the sun; and Ka, the turtle. The three walked on together until they came to where the herders were taking care of the buffalo and deer. A little fawn escaped from the herders, and Rabbit took it with him.

"Then they walked on again until they saw the man whom the Manitou had placed on the earth to take care of it.

"'You have come to challenge me,' said the man to Rabbit. 'What have you brought Ka the turtle with you for? He is always inventing tricks to deceive.'

"'Yes, I have come to challenge you,' said Rabbit. 'Let us fix a wager. What will you bet?'

"'We will play, and if you win you shall have all that I possess. If you lose, I will have your life.'

"'It's agreed,' said Rabbit, and they sat down to gamble with reeds.

"Rabbit won every time. He won the buffalo, and turned them out to roam at will. He won the deer and elk and all the people, and told them to go where they pleased. At last the man said:

"'Let us try something else besides these reeds.'

"'What do you want to try now?' asked Rabbit.

"'We will wager on walking in the same tracks,' said the man.

"'All right,' said Rabbit.

"'What animal will you use?' said the man.

"'My little fawn,' said Rabbit; 'and what animal will you use?'

"'The wild cat,' he replied.

"There was a clump of wild gooseberry bushes near by. It was agreed that round it the track should be made. Then Rabbit made the snow to fall, and the trial began.

"The fawn made his own trail and the wild cat his, and they went round and round in their circles for a long time.

"Ka the turtle got out of patience, and whispered to Umba, the light of the sun, 'That's enough.'

"'Ugh! let us do everything fair,' said Umba.

"Ka wanted to win by a trick; but Umba would not listen to him. Finally, after a great while, each animal always stepping exactly in his former tracks, Ka lost his patience altogether, and called out:

"'Come, make an end of this.'

"The man, who was sitting near, gave a little puff. Ka caught the little puff and turned it into a hurricane. The wild cat fell over and put his foot out of the track.

"'You did that,' cried out the man to Ka the turtle, and he struck him on the head with a great club. The blow smashed all the bones, and the brains ran out, and that's the reason why the turtle's head is full of little bones and has no brains."

The woods resounded with the clapping of hands as the legend was finished.

"I never believed before that the longest way round was the shortest way across, but now I'm sure of it," said Pettigrew, with a sneer.

"The legend may be mythical, but the teachings are true," said the doctor. "Rabbit's love of freedom would teach a lesson to all men, even if he was an Indian."

"Yes," said Robert, "and Ka's meddlesome interference deserved the punishment it received."

"A song from Miss Finlayson," cried the girls.

"Another legend," echoed the older people.

"Perhaps you have had legend enough," said Winifred with a laugh, "so I will sing:

"THE ELF OF THE HURON BRIDE.

"The night owls sing, and the wild woods ring
Of legends sad, and of lore;
And the Spirits' list at memory's tryst
As they dream of the days of yore.

"How one by one each warrior's son
Fell dead in the futile fight;
And the women sang, and the death-knell rang
For vengeance, for theirs was the right.

"How one dark bride stood still by the side
Of the Huron brave she loved,
For deep in the wood he had shed his blood
To die for the maid he had wooed.

"And now they are gone, chief, brave and son,
All slain by the white man's sword,
And never again in the deep maple glen
Will the Metis women be heard.

"But far and near, when the moon shines clear,
And maples and pines are still,
You will hear the wail of the bride in the vale
In tones of passionate thrill.

"But ere the day dawns, the wild wood moans
And a car from a star appears
To carry her ever, for ever and ever
Following his spirit in tears."

As Miss Finlayson finished the wild plaint of her song, sending its echoes far and wide through the forest, another and a different sound struck the ear. It came from the deep woods beyond. The horses had heard it, and, getting restless, commenced champing their bits and pulling on their halters.

"What's the matter with the critters?" someone cried out; "they are all on the rampage." And he bounded off to control his own, which were colts.

"It's a wolf," exclaimed Mr. Finlayson. "How he howls. He's down in the big swamp across the 14th. I guess you'd all better look after your horses, for they're getting scared."

The men scattered, while the women drew closer together round the camp fire.

"There's no danger," continued the host; "it's only a single wolf, and he won't come near; but I've seen the time when whole packs of the pesky things would come right through this sugar bush and up to the barn itself, and carry off my lambs. Hark! he's getting further off now. You hear his howls dying away in the distance."

"Come, girls," said Mrs. Finlayson, "you might help us with the supper. The men will be back soon. There's lots of cake and things and hot tea."

Miss Finlayson led the way, and the bright bevy of girls were soon busy enough. A moment later Robert was by her side.

"Thank you so much for that song," he said earnestly; "that rich voice of yours suited the legend perfectly. You put all your soul in it, too."

"I am glad you liked it." She gave him a quick glance, as her colour came and went again. "You know I tell a story or sing a song for the scholars every week, and I thought the song of the 'Elf' would fit in better after the legend."

"I wonder what other accomplishments you are going to unfold to us next?" he asked, with a laugh, while he almost devoured her with his eyes. "As teacher and regulator of boys you have an established reputation, while we all know what you are as a hostess and prima donna of the woods."

"The doctor says he's sure I'd make an excellent nurse," she answered mischievously, while she passed the cakes out to the other girls.

"I'm afraid, Miss Finlayson, that the wolf spoiled many well-deserved compliments," exclaimed that gentleman, who just then joined them, although he did not catch her words.

"I hope it's not the first time that a wolf has proved a friend," was her laughing answer.

"There's only one other case on record," said the doctor.

"And that a doubtful one," put in Robert, his mind wandering back to ancient lore.

"You gentlemen had better take some refreshments before the wolf howls again," said Miss Roberts, handing them some cake, while Miss Mathers served the tea.

"Or the storm breaks. See how quickly yonder clouds are coming. The stars in the east are all gone."

The wind was rising, and soon a sharp flash of lightning illumined the forest, followed by a peal of distant thunder.

"Perhaps that's what the wolf meant," said Mr. Finlayson. "They say he always howls before a storm. I'm sorry to break up so soon, but if you want to miss the rain, the sooner you all get away the better."

But his words were hardly needed, for, with hasty adieus, the guests were already climbing into their sleighs and waggons, and were soon rattling out of the wood.

Dr. Hartman and Robert left the sugar camp together. Half-an-hour's drive would take them to Linbrook, and if the coming storm would keep off until then, they and all the other visitors would have time to reach their homes in safety.

The sky was heavily overcast, and huge black clouds were chasing each other toward the zenith.

"A heavy rain now would be a serious matter for the mills," said Robert, as they turned into the main road out of the bush.

"Is there danger of the dam breaking?" the doctor asked.

"Yes, for the water is higher now than I ever knew it before the breaking up of the ice. The sun has been so warm that the river is full already."

"The ice is still covering the upper dams, too, I suppose?"

"That's where the difficulty lies. There's been no break yet anywhere. When one does occur, there's always a sudden rise. We have had none yet. A heavy rain now would break them all up at once, and the flood would be terrible. What makes the matter worse, too, is the unusual amount of timber that has been run in. All ours is above the dam."

Now and then a flash of lightning illumined the way, followed by deeper darkness and the approach of thunder. Before they arrived at Linbrook rain had commenced to fall. Very soon it was pouring heavily, and the young men parted with mutual misgivings of what another day might bring forth.

As Robert was opening the store door with his latch-key the boys' long sleigh dashed up, and, dropping James at the step, the two brothers went in together. They were soon in bed, ostensibly to sleep; but the wild tumult of the elements kept Robert awake during the greater part of the night, while an undefined dread of the morrow took possession of him.



CHAPTER IX.

AT FLOOD-TIME.

All night long until near daylight the wind howled and the rain poured down in torrents. It was one of those continuous and severe storms that so frequently break up the ice season on the Canadian rivers and lakes, and before daybreak many of the inhabitants were up and busy, preparing for the flood that they knew was coming.

Robert Thornton and his father were among the first to rise, but James was up before them, and he hurried over to the dam to get the earliest news. As has already been said, all Mr. Thornton's timber was either in the dam or on its banks, for every available skidway below the falls was occupied by the older firms.

This, however, under ordinary circumstances, would have caused little difficulty, as the overshoot of water was usually deep enough to carry the saw-logs over the dam, without the latter sustaining any injury.

The question that concerned all interested now was the possibility of the dam being carried away by the unusually high freshet, backed by the more than ordinary mass of timber which the pond contained.

As Robert and his father left the house, they were met by James who was running back, the bearer of important news. "There's an awful big jam," he cried out excitedly. "That pine tree just above the fall is uprooted. It fell clean across near the edge of the dam, and everything is blocked behind it."

"When did it fall?" his father asked, as they hurried along.

"A man there says it happened two hours ago, when the wind was at its height."

"He should have reported it at once," said Robert.

"I told him so," said James; "but he said it would have been no use, as it was pitch dark, and nothing could be done until it was light enough to see."

By the time they reached the dam a crowd had collected. The scene was exciting, and even grand. The river had risen many feet in height, and was rushing impetuously through the narrow gorge below the falls, carrying logs and planks and everything else that came in its way in its mad career. The arch of the fall itself, with its torrent of turbid water, was an impressive sight, as it poured into the seething tumult beneath.

Above the dam a very unusual scene lay before them. Not twenty feet from its margin, and lying directly across the stream, lay the uprooted pine. Its length extended from bank to bank, the lower roots on the one side still holding firmly in the ground, while the top had lodged above a pine stump on the other. The passage down the river was thus effectually blocked against the mass of logs and broken ice that lay in the upper current.

All over the dam were huge masses of ice, already piled irregularly from bank to bank; while away in the distance, they could see in the dawning light that the jam was increasing from the pressure from above, as the mass forced itself onwards.

The mill-owner was very excited, and raved round like a madman at the seemingly impending catastrophe; for beyond the obstructing pine tree, the timbers and ice were already piling up in tremendous force.

"Why in God's name wasn't that there tree cut down?" he called out. "Thornton, this is your business. If that stick stays there ten minutes longer the dam will be gone—and all through your infernal logs."

"It isn't my tree," replied Thornton; "but we'll cut it loose if possible. There's not a minute to lose."

"No, nor a second," cried Robert; and seizing an axe he bounded off to cross the bridge a little below the dam. In another minute he was standing on the lying tree near its root, and chopping the lower side with long, swinging strokes. Another man followed his example, doing duty at the smaller end to cut it clear of the stump, while one or two others busied themselves cutting away the branches.

Where Robert was chopping, the tree was perhaps a foot and a-half thick—considered a small size in those days of big

timber. Possibly this was the reason that it had been allowed to stand so long—too picayune in dimensions to be honoured at the gathering of the lumberman's harvest.

His idea was to chop half-way through the down stream side of the log, and follow this by a few cuts on the upper side. Then when the top end was freed, it would swing round and snap off by the force of pressure from above, while he could make his escape on to the severed stump.

In a very few minutes the top was cut through, the principal branches chopped off, and the men were jumping out of danger, when a wild cry of alarm filled the air. Mr. Thornton had ventured on the lower side of the tree to lift a branch out of the way, when it suddenly snapped loose at the butt, and swinging the top end down stream with tremendous force, hit him on the side, and swept him headlong into the flood and over the fall. In another moment his body disappeared from view, and the horror-stricken crowd rushed along the bank to see if they could catch a glimpse of him again, or offer any aid. With a wild scream his son James rushed to the water as he saw his father go under, and with difficulty was restrained from going in after him.

For a moment Robert was forgotten in the terrible disaster, but when with blanched faces they looked across the stream, he too was out of sight.

He had cut as he intended half-way through the lower side of the butt, and was in the act of chopping through the sapwood on the upper side, when the break came and he lost his balance. The log he was on turned partly while it slipped beneath him. He had not a moment for thought. He heard the wild shouts from the other side, but took them as friendly intimations of his own danger. He could see that he must either drop amidst rushing blocks of ice, or spring upward towards a floating stump that was coming toward him; and the latter he did, falling half-stunned against it, while he grasped one of its roots with the instinct of life.

The weight of his body half-turned the stump, and he was partially submerged. Then, by a desperate effort, his full sensibility returning, he scrambled on to the upper side, grasping the roots with legs as well as arms as it swiftly neared the vortex. Robert saw at once that there was no possible means of escape; but over the dam he must go. What intensity of thought was compressed into that moment of time!

It is well known from the evidences of many who have escaped from drowning, that, in the brief moments of submersion, a kaleidoscopic vision of the past peremptorily seizes the mind; but there is nothing in the act of drowning itself which should claim this distinction, save for the fact that the individual, plunged beneath the surface, is cut off entirely from the vision of the outside world. The immense potency of the thought that death is imminent, that escape is hopeless, that in an instant of time all of life may be over, makes the moment supreme, whatever the situation.

While swinging over the few feet to the edge of the fall and into the seething surf below, the whole energy of Robert's nature seemed concentrated in thoughts which focussed with lightning speed. The home life with his mother and sisters seemed gone for ever. His own existence, on the threshold of manhood, to be doomed, cut off in the morning of ambition when it filled the future with noble dreams. Then his love, daily growing stronger—at this moment idealised—out of reach for ever. And Winifred herself! How would she take his loss? Did she love him? Would she care? Better after all if she did not. Why should her life be saddened too? Had he not had a brief glimpse of joy already? Why not be satisfied and wait the future that the great God had eternally planned, and that was so swiftly coming? For Robert was almost a Calvinist, as he breathed an incoherent prayer for his life.

While thoughts such as these rushed through his mind, quicker than tongue could read them, the duality of existence forcefully presented itself in his actions. Realising that help was impossible, while he heard the shouts from the shore, he gave them no heed, but made every effort to steady his position and secure his hold. The base of the stump which carried him was very broad, and he felt that, in going over, there might yet be a chance for it to right itself, and bound out of the suction hollow, before the logs from behind could strike it.

Brief as the time was, and knowing that Mr. Thornton's life was lost, every eye from the banks was fixed on the son as he neared the fall. The long stick of timber swept at first with the top down stream, and was over the dam when the butt broke loose. Then it too lurched on and over. For a brief moment they saw Robert sitting erect, grasping with both hands a large root, while he looked straight ahead of him at the yawning chasm. Next, the curve was reached, and he disappeared over it like a shot.

With a wild rush they ran along the banks below the dam. Ropes and long pike-poles in willing hands were ready to give

any possible assistance, but for more than a minute after the descent, the wild tumult of the waters, the huge cauldron of foam, the clouds of spray, and the masses of timber and ice made an indistinguishable chaos.

"Isn't that the stump?" cried Dr. Hartman, who by this time had joined the number. "Yes, he's on it, sure enough. Thank God, if he's only alive."

"He doesn't move, though," said Cleve.

"Is he dead? Is he dead?" poor James sobbed out, as he wrung his hands in agony.

The stump had surged from below the fall, right side up, and with Robert still on it, but limp and motionless. It was near the centre of the river, surrounded by logs and chunks of ice, and in another moment was sweeping down the stream.

The current was rapid, and in the narrow gorge tumultuous. For some distance down the river it would be impossible to give him any assistance; so while some kept even with the progress made, others hastened on to where the river broadened out over the lower flats. Here the current would be less swift and aid more readily given. Those that kept pace with the floating body watched it intently.

By-and-by a cry of joy went up as Robert was seen to move.

"Thank heaven! he's not dead," was the fervent ejaculation.

Later on Robert raised his head, and for the first time looked shoreward.

"Hold fast and we'll help you," rang out over the water.

The young man nodded and slightly shifted his position. When they reached the flats, the flooded surface widened. The stump drifted out farther from the shore and suddenly became a fixture. It had been swept by the current, at a bend of the river, over the opposite bank and had lodged in shallower water. Beyond it, the open surface of an extensive field was flooded like a lake, but covered over with broken ice, while between the men on the shore and the occupied stump, logs and ice were sweeping down the stream. While these were passing, assistance would still be difficult, and, to make the matter worse, although the rain had ceased, the air was getting rapidly colder. How to liberate Robert immediately was the question that now occupied all minds. Unfortunately, the boat-house, that was swept away by the ice-jam the moment the fallen pine was set free, contained the only boats and canoes of the village. Hence they were not available, and two or three dug-outs lying about were none of them fit for use in such a torrent.

That something must be done was evident, the wind having veered to the north, and Robert was probably hurt as well as chilled through in his wet clothes. A raft was soon prepared, but for a considerable time the ice and logs occupied the whole stream, as they swirled irregularly past; and willing hands, while ready to seize the first opportunity of a break in the floating barrier, were compelled to wait.

The saddest sight of all was when Mrs. Thornton, with swollen face, stood with her sobbing children on the bank, straining her eyes to the utmost as she riveted them on her son in that first communication. He saw her and waved his hand; but though his eyes were fixed on the shore there was one form he could not see.

By-and-by the river was clearer of logs, and the raft, manned by the doctor and the miller, put out from the bank at a higher point up the stream. The idea was to put away from the shore, and with long poles to force the raft over to the stump. Then, after taking Robert on board, to drift down stream to the best landing-place on the near shore; but the long rope which was first attached to the raft, to make it controllable from the land, proved to be in the way, and was cut loose.

Then the two men pushed out with all their might. They soon got beyond the middle of the current; but, in spite of all their efforts, they drifted quickly downwards, and swept past unavailingly within a few feet of the prisoner. He spoke as the raft shot by; but was too weak to make any personal effort to reach them, and a couple of hundred yards further down the raftsmen ran into the shore again.

But the rest of the party were not idle. Cleveland, although still stiff in his left arm, was known as the best stone-thrower in the village; and it was at once decided to tie a long piece of strong twine to a knot of wood, and have him throw it if possible to the upper side of the stump. Fortunately, he succeeded on the first trial, and a murmur of approval greeted

Robert as he seized the cord when it drifted within his reach. To the shore end a new clothes-line was at once attached.

"Now pull," was sung out to him.

Hand over hand Robert drew it in. Then by direction he tied the rope firmly round his body below the arms, and calling out "I'm ready now," he plunged into the icy water.

His efforts at swimming did not keep his head above water, but in a few moments strong arms pulled him across and out on to the bank.

By the time the doctor and miller had rejoined the crowd, Robert was lying in a blanket, apparently more dead than alive, and was almost unconscious.

"Will he live?" his mother asked in an agony of suspense.

"Yes," said the doctor in a firm voice; and then in an aside, "Nothing must be said to him at present."

Every one understood what he meant, and the solemn faces tried to look cheerful, while they gave him stimulants, and wrapped warm clothes around his body.

The doctor's buggy was at hand, and he was helped in. Meanwhile Mrs. Thornton and her little daughters hastened home to prepare for his arrival.

Robert leaned against Hartman for support during the short drive. His face was pale; but he was fully conscious, and he knew it all. During the long hour that he had crouched shivering in his wet garments upon the stump, he saw every one on the shore very vividly, but one figure he missed. Why was not he there? Did they not go to the dam together? He could not have been hurt and carried home. If so, his mother and sisters and brother would not all have been standing there watching him, while they left his injured father uncared for. Then the actions and bearing of the people, the doctor and his own family included, proved his surmise to be true. But he could not speak of it.

Soon they were at the store, and Pettigrew came out to offer assistance.

"I am awfully sorry," he said in a voice of concern.

"Yes, it is unfortunate," muttered Robert, instinctively making light of it. "I suppose I've got a wetting."

He had to be helped out, and carried in, for he could not stand alone. A moment later he clasped his mother's hands in both of his. Their eyes met, each brimming with tears; but neither of them spoke. And the brave woman hurried up stairs to make things ready.

"We must take off his wet clothes at once," said the doctor, "and put him to bed. Which room, please?" He wisely wished to postpone explanation for the present.

On examination he found bodily bruises and a severely strained back; but, fortunately, no bones were broken. After lying still for some minutes, Robert opened his eyes. They were alone.

"Doctor," he said—there was wistfulness in his voice, "I can bear it all now. Tell me, won't you?"

The doctor saw at once that there was nothing to hide.

"It is all over," he said gently; "we could do nothing to save him."

"But where is he?"

"Where life's fitful fever can never touch him again. The cooling waters will keep his body safe till we find it."

"Oh, my God! to think it would end in this!" he broke out with a sob. Then with a strong effort he tried to control himself. "I can bear it better from you than I could from my mother."

It took longer than was expected for Robert to recuperate. The bruises were quick in healing; but the wrench in his back had been so severe that weeks elapsed before he could bear his weight on his feet again.

In many ways people vied with one another in expressions of sympathy, and made practical demonstration of genuine kindness of heart. The members of the toboggan club, the villagers generally, and even the farmers who brought in the saw-logs to other slides as well as Robert's, all voluntarily turned out day after day to drag the river in search of the body of his father.

Several times, too, before Robert could leave his room, Miss Finlayson came to the store to inquire, and more than once went in to see him.

"Your friends have not forgotten you," she said, as she took his hand. There was a tremor in her voice the first time she saw him after the accident. Robert thought she looked paler, and he tried to be composed.

"It was very good of you. I heard of you each time, and I am very grateful. But how did you come? Did Hugh drive you over?" he asked.

"Once he did, and he is coming for me now; but you know it is too busy a season for horses to be spared often."

"That is not answering my question," said Robert, looking wistfully into her eyes. "You surely did not walk all the way?"

"And what if I did? The roads are not bad, and a good walk is a change from the confinement of the school-room. Besides," she continued, "news travels slowly in the country. Hugh hunts along the river in the early morning, and I come in to hear if there is anything new at night."

She kept control of her face, and spoke as if this were the only object she had in view. Nevertheless, the young man's heart beat faster. "I shall never forget," he said. A tinge of colour suffused his pale face. "They have not found my father's body yet; and it is more than a week since he was drowned. The water is still muddy and the river high. They have dragged for miles; but I am afraid they will not find it until the water goes down."

"Your mother stands it nobly," said Winifred, her eyes filling with tears.

"Yes. She is a queen among women. I think she does it for my sake."

"You will soon be well again, Robert, and then you will help her to bear the burden."

"Yes. If I can I will."

CHAPTER X.

THE NIGHT VISION.

Winifred did not tell Robert from whom she first received the news, or what a terrible shock it had been to her. But she heard it at noon on the day of the accident. The air was cold and the sky overcast, and she was hurrying home for dinner. When opposite their own gate, on the 14th, Dr. Hartman drove rapidly up the road. He had stayed until after eleven o'clock in attendance upon Robert; then leaving him in as comfortable a condition as possible, he had hastened away to see his patients in the country, and, to make up for lost time, drove more rapidly than usual.

When Winifred saw him coming toward her at such unusual speed, she pulled her cloak about her closely, and waited his arrival, thinking that possibly from some cause he contemplated visiting their house.

As he neared her, however, he merely stopped to speak.

"Good morning, Miss Finlayson," he exclaimed with a grave face. She missed the usual smile.

"Good morning," she replied. "You are in a hurry to-day. Has anything serious happened, may I ask?"

"Yes," he said, the sad expression remaining. "There has been an accident at the dam, and a man was drowned."

"How terrible! And who was it?" she asked quickly.

"I am sorry to say it was my old friend, Mr. Thornton."

Winifred started violently, her face turning a pallid hue.

"This is awful!" she exclaimed. She felt as if her heart would stop beating. "Won't you come in for a moment—just for a moment—and tell us about it. It is so cold out here." She did not wish him to see her face, and the shock was so great, that she almost staggered, as she turned and walked up the pathway.

The doctor's face became even more sombre as he watched her. But he did as she desired, and followed her into the house. An undefined dread suddenly filled his mind, as he thought of the further news he had yet to impart. In his heart he wished he had not been the bearer of the evil-tidings; while at the same time he felt that he was unwittingly treading on forbidden ground, becoming the possessor of a secret which was not intended for him.

Miss Finlayson led the way into the parlour. There was a bright fire in the stove, but no one in the room.

"How did it happen? Was anyone else hurt? His son—Robert—did anything—— Oh! won't you sit down, please?"

"Yes, Robert was hurt too, but not very seriously. He is resting now at home, and I think will soon be well again."

"Are you telling me truly, doctor?" Winifred exclaimed excitedly, while unconsciously she wrung her hands. "We are such old friends. I have known them all my life. Robert has always been—like a—like a brother to me."

And the doctor told the story quickly, though gently, making as light as possible of Robert's injuries, and leaving out altogether the part that he had personally taken in the attempt at rescue. When he spoke of the grief of Mrs. Thornton and her little daughters, Winifred's tears flowed freely.

"Mrs. Thornton needs her son now more than ever she did," said Winifred fervently. "I am glad he is under your care, doctor; and you are sure he will get well?"

"We can be positive of nothing in the future, Miss Finlayson, though I feel sure he will," he said earnestly. Then he took her hand and held it for a moment between his two, as he took his departure. "But rest assured, there is nothing possible I would not do for Robert Thornton, for he is the truest and best man I have found in Linbrook."

He closed his teeth and frowned while he said it; possibly to hide some deeper feeling that he did not wish to reveal.

"I am glad you like him," was the trembling response.

"Every one does who is a man at all," said the doctor.

"And the body of Mr. Thornton," said Winifred with a shudder, as she thought of the terrible nature of his death, and the impossibility of the search being effectual while the flood lasted.

"Every effort will be made to recover it, but it will take time, probably days, before it can be accomplished," said the doctor.

"My brother will do what he can," said Winifred. "He is an early riser, and if I ask him I know he will gallop down to the river at sunrise every morning and do his best."

"We will be glad to have his assistance."

"Will Robert be confined to his bed?" she asked with an earnest look.

"For a time at least he will, though we hope not for long."

"And the business will have to be left in the hands of Mr. Pettigrew to manage."

"Yes," said the doctor, his brows contracting again.

"It is too bad." The pained expression that came into her face as she spoke was observed by the doctor, and seemed to be a reflection of a feeling that was in his own mind as well as hers.

"We will get Robert Thornton well as quickly as possible, anyway," he said more cheerily, and with a parting word he hurried away.

Dr. Hartman's countenance was gloomier than usual, as he continued his drive along the 14th Concession. He had met Miss Finlayson frequently since locating in Linbrook, and she had already found a warm spot in his heart. That she had a friendly feeling toward Robert Thornton he well knew; but that it had got any further, he had never had any suspicion until now.

What he had witnessed to-day was a revelation to him. In the deep central self of the coy maiden's heart he saw something more than mere friendship for the young lumberman. Somehow, although he knew them both so well, he had never suspected such a thing, and had been building little day-dreams of his own. Not very positive ones yet; but airy, beautiful things, floating in the air like summer sunbeams, giving a little greater zest to life, and promising better things in the days to come; while all the time he professed to himself that there was nothing in it.

Now all this was changed, and for the first time he felt that he himself was in love; but Carl Hartman never dreamed of rivalry. What was his friend's was not his. The priority of his own position, and the extra burden thrown upon Robert by the death of his father, though favouring his own cause, could only exercise a controlling influence upon his actions.

"They are a worthy pair, both man and maiden," he muttered to himself. "Pity their life cannot be smoother. But oh! if it had only been otherwise, how much I could have done for her, and how happy I could have made her life. He and I are built on somewhat similar lines. But he had the start for years, and it would be the fiend's work to try and uproot now what has been so well and truly laid. No, no, Robert Thornton, I will not supplant you. You are a worthy soul, if ever there was one in God's world, and Carl Hartman will not put a straw in your way. I know you like her, and now I come to think of it, I believe you love her too."

When he visited Robert again in the evening, he found him feverish and wandering, tossing his arms about, while his lower limbs were still. Soothing him gently, he gave him a sleeping potion, and, with comforting words for the sorrowing widow, he watched beside her son's bed far into the night, while she vainly tried to snatch a few hours' sleep.

As the doctor silently pondered and watched, Robert sometimes raved in delirium, talking now and then of Pettigrew in a tone of questioning alarm; but oftener of Winifred in a low and passionate appeal. Unwittingly from both sides he had learned the truth, and, apart from all sympathy, he was a sadder if not a wiser man.

But away from all this, the double catastrophe of the death of Mr. Thornton and the injury to Robert had an effect more real than apparent upon the prospects of the family. The store, as premised by Miss Finlayson, was consigned, by force of circumstances, to the complete control of Pettigrew; and although James filled his post as assistant faithfully, he was

too young and inexperienced to have any positive knowledge of the financial position, beyond what Pettigrew chose to tell him. The amount of business actually done was large. Many people came to the store specially to discuss the catastrophe and to hear about the progress of the patient, and with the desire to help the prospects of the firm, would not leave the premises without making a purchase. The regular customers too, notwithstanding the absence of the father and son, came in as before to buy. Still the amount of money received seemed to be little, and the reports sent upstairs daily to Mrs. Thornton and Robert were not of the brightest.

The honesty of Pettigrew so far had never been seriously impugned, and his accounts, meagre or otherwise, were supposed to be correct, notwithstanding the suspicions entertained by both Robert and his mother. Under the circumstances, however, there was no other course open but to accept the clerk's services, and the customers generally were under the impression that the Thorntons had reason to congratulate themselves on having in Pettigrew so faithful an ally and friend.

Another unfortunate thing for them in a business way was the fact that Robert was disabled at the very time when his services were required for the shipping and disposal of the timber. It was imperative that the logs should be floated down to the lake while the river was high enough to carry them, and also to have them picked out and rafted together before being sold to an American company and towed to the other side of the line.

Here the Cartright firm came to young Thornton's assistance, and had their own raftsmen float the saw-logs down the river, with the expectation that by the time they reached the lake Robert would be able to take charge of them himself. But in this they were mistaken, for when that time arrived he was still confined to the house and barely able to walk around with a stick. Consequently the Cartridges did both the rafting and the selling, and when the financial returns came in, the necessary charges had naturally lessened the expected profit.

Meanwhile the search for the body in the river continued, but latterly with less zeal than during the first few days. Many believed, when it was not found within a mile or two of the dam, that the strong current which prevailed at the time of the accident had carried it far down the stream, and advised delay until the high-water mark, still kept up by heavy rains, had passed away. This conclusion finally became general, and at a public meeting called for the purpose it was decided, as soon as the water was low enough, to form a strong body of searchers and drag the river, if necessary, down to its mouth. Even when considering this idea it seemed unaccountable that the river-men, who were ever on the alert, and had been rafting logs continually down the stream for two weeks or more, should have been unable to find the body.

After the first great shock, the widow, Mrs. Thornton, took her loss bravely. Still, she felt that it was not only the loss of her husband, and temporarily of Robert's control of the business, but that in the end it would be the loss of the business itself and of all the money her husband had put into it. Her suspicions of Pettigrew's honesty never wavered. If all had remained well, any nefarious schemes he had in view might have been checkmated; now she believed they could not. Her one hope was that Robert might recover and get strong again before the crash came. How glad she was, with all her sorrow, that she had retained possession of her little capital; it might help them to start again in some useful way, when all else failed.

Mrs. Thornton was not a visionary woman at all, but possessed a fair share of good practical sense. Still, there was a large store of sentiment in her nature; and, though she knew her husband's failings well, she had always cherished a deep affection for him, and, now that he was gone, suffered more intensely than most people who knew her believed possible. Up to this time she had always been a sound sleeper; but after the drowning of her husband her rest became disturbed, and she frequently saw him in her dreams—a silent intangibility—floating about in a mysterious way. Although he seemed real, yet whenever she attempted to touch him the phantom would dissolve or disappear, leaving a vacuum that was oppressive even in her sleep.

One night, however—and this was after the committee had decided to drag the river—her visions became more vivid. She dreamed that she was taking a ride in the country with her husband. The day was hot, and on returning home by the side line to the 14th, Mr. Thornton drove into the river to water and cool his horses. Instead of driving straight across, as was the rule, he made a long sweep downward, in order to cool the animals more effectually. Suddenly they were in deeper water, and the horses commenced to plunge, when, almost beneath their feet, with the bright sun shining directly upon his face through the clear water, she saw the double of her husband, lying on his back at the bottom of the pool, and only a few feet from the bank of the stream. With a start she woke up covered with cold perspiration.

After a while she went to sleep again. This time her dream was very troubled. She seemed to be alone in the world,

away back in the old city on the Mersey in which she was born. She was stitching wearily by the light of a candle far into the night for the shilling that was to buy her food for the morrow, when the shadow of her mother, who in her dreams she knew had been dead for years, appeared in the room.

"My daughter," she said, in the old familiar tone, "you must go to the river, and there you'll find him."

The floor beneath her disappeared, and she floated away, while for ever beside her was the shadow. Soon she saw below her the body of her husband with his face turned upwards, lying in the same little pool on the bed of the Powan river.

This time she did not wake up, but, feeling the oppression of the agonising and weird nightmare, turned over on the other side.

Again the scene changed. She was on a boundless prairie. Robert and James were with her; they had camped out all night, and, a breeze arising in the morning, a light had spread from the sticks of their camp-fire to the dry prairie grass. They shovelled earth upon it, and tried ineffectually to tramp it out. The fire fought them little by little, crowding them closer and closer to the river. Then, as she turned on the brink, the same pool was before her, and the same ghastly face was turned upward in the morning light.

By some occult power, the nature of which she or any of us know nothing, in the dead of night, sleeping upon her bed, she had in vision seen the truth; and the dead body of her husband lying miles away, in a dark pool in the river, had become a verity.

With a startled cry she leapt from her bed. It was hardly the commencement of dawn, but she would not lie down again. She felt convinced that in the thrice-told tale there was truth. Before the sun was much above the horizon, willing messengers were sent out to search the pool in which the fond woman had seen the phantom, and in that pool was found poor Thornton's body. During the three weeks it had drifted as many miles, and had at last found a resting-place in the quiet of a deep hollow, produced by the swirling waters in the bend of the stream.

Was there communion between the spirit of the woman and the spirit of the departed? Can the soul in supreme moments slip the coil of its earthly tenement and live elsewhere than here? Is there another sense, undiscovered, whose operations are unrestricted by the bounds of physical habitation? If so, where is it? What is it?

CHAPTER XI.

THE CORONER'S INQUEST.

These were the days when the coroner's duties were high and important in Upper Canada. An inquest was considered necessary in the case of almost every sudden death, and the coroner, as chief magistrate for the occasion, was in high feather while the trial lasted. His injunctions to the constable of the day were all-important, and nobody dared to countermand the orders of the officer of the law. One of the judicial mandates laid down by old Dr. Hincks, the coroner for Linbrook, was the imperative necessity of *super visum corporis*, or view of the body, by both coroner and jury, before it could be moved from the place where first found.

Although deaths had occasionally occurred—some from accident, some from apoplexy or heart failure, now and then a suicide, and once, in the long past, from suspected child murder—yet all these bodies had been found on land, and the imperative order of the coroner was not difficult to carry out. But the dead body to be found in water was a different matter, and Coroner Hincks, with knitted brows and an occasional stiff horn of hot Scotch to stimulate his reasoning faculties, devoted more than one spare half-hour to thinking out the problem.

Long before Mr. Thornton's remains had been found, however, Dr. Hincks had solved the impending difficulty, without, as he claimed, compromising the dignity of his position, honoured, as it had ever been, since the days of King Alfred, and the special charter of Athelstan, in Anno Domini 925.

He would compromise in this case of death by drowning, the first ever known to have occurred in Linbrook. So orders were given throughout the village that, on the body being discovered, information must be given at once to the coroner and constable—*virtute officii*. Then with all despatch the two important officials would visit the scene, view the body while still in the water, and thereafter order its removal, to be examined later by the newly empannelled jury on *terra firma*.

The consequence was that within an hour of the time that Mr. Thornton's white face was first seen lying at the bottom of the pool the whole village knew of it. All business was suspended; and the two officials of the law, with grave faces, drove rapidly toward the fated spot, followed by many others, either in buggies, on horseback, or on foot, all anxious to be in at the lifting.

"Shure, sorr, and where will ye be houlding the inquest?" said Patrick O'Grady, the constable, in solemn tones, as the two stood by the river bank, looking down upon the body but a few feet from the shore.

The coroner's face was equally solemn. He had taken an extra horn that morning, to prepare him for his onerous duty.

"I will have the body lifted at once," was the answer. "Deputy-Constables Jones and Pepper I see are here. They will act under your orders. Then I will empannel a jury from the crowd, and after viewing the body we will adjourn to hold the inquest."

"No place here to hould it—not a house nor a barn within half a mile," commented Patrick.

"Might hold it at the 'Queen's Arms,' Mr. Coroner," suggested a stout man, who had just driven up. "My parlour is large and warm, and I've everything ready. I might help to lift the body out too," and, bounding out, he went to the assistance of the deputy constables.

The coroner assented to the proposition, and ordered his chief to call out twelve men. Pettigrew, who felt his growing importance, and desired, above all things, to be to the front, had closed the store, and was talking earnestly to a number of the men over the sad event.

"As Mr. Pettigrew was associated with the dead man and his son, we must have him on the jury list," said the coroner aside to the constable. "He may have valuable suggestions to offer for the better protection of mill-dams."

"All right, sorr."

After the men were all selected, Dr. Hincks stepped briskly forward. He had not had too much that day; just sufficient to make him feel punctilious and wise and responsible for his high office. Raising his right hand, he exclaimed

emphatically and solemnly:

[D]"Oyez, oyez, oyez! You good men of this county, summoned to appear this day, to inquire for our Sovereign Lady the Queen, when, how, and by what means Theodore Thornton came to his death, answer to your names as you shall be called, every man at the first call, upon the pain and peril that shall fall thereon."

[D]Boys on Coroners.

Some of the men were so impressed with the dignity of the occasion that they uncovered their heads on their names being announced. On the last one being called, they quickly gathered together, and unanimously elected Pettigrew as foreman.

"Mr. Pettigrew, stand forth and take your oath," cried the coroner.

[E]"You shall diligently inquire and true presentment make of all such matters and things as shall be here given you in charge, on behalf of our Sovereign Lady the Queen, touching the death of Theodore Thornton, now lying dead, of whose body you shall have the view. You shall present no man for hatred, malice, or ill-will, nor spare any through fear, favour, or affection; but a true verdict give according to the evidence, and the best of your skill and knowledge. So help you, God."

[E]Boys on Coroners.

And Pettigrew kissed the book.

Then the jurors were sworn in trios. Unitedly they viewed the poor, bloated body, and, a *post-mortem* being considered unnecessary, the coroner formally handed it over to the undertaker for interment, in accordance with the family's intentions, while the jury and witnesses adjourned to the "Queen's Arms" to hold the inquest.

Mine host had made his hotel parlour very comfortable. A fire of maple logs in the box-stove was burning briskly, for the air was chilly. Hair-cloth chairs surrounded the room, and pens, ink, and paper were on the centre table ready for use; for was not the landlord a good Samaritan, a genial soul?

Next to the parlour was the bar-room—very comfortable to loaf in, and able to hold all the witnesses until they were successively called to give their evidence in the inner room. Some of them, too—and their number was large that day—were unaccustomed to public speaking, and required special priming to tune their nerves to the importance of the occasion.

Although Dr. Hincks was known to be partial to the cup that cheers, he was yet sensible to the dignity of his office, and, having taken all that he needed before calling his court together, was ready to wait until it was over before imbibing again.

"It is a cool day," he said briskly as he entered the cosy room, and took off his overcoat; "but, gentlemen, we must wait a bit, and patiently perform our duty." And they all knew what he meant.

It was astonishing the number of witnesses that the zealous Patrick summoned to testify concerning the sad event. Evidence about the tree, evidence about the dam, evidence about the death, evidence before and after, it was all welcome, for that body of jurymen had a great duty to perform, not only in proclaiming the absolute and true cause of death of the late lamented Theodore Thornton, but also in sending forth a message to the County Council, and through that body to the whole province, that would redound to the saving of human life and the protection of mill-dams through all future time! These truths were duly impressed upon that responsible body of men by the efficient coroner, who was magnanimously willing to devote the whole day to the inquest if necessary; for not only were the witnesses numerous, but the fees were sure.

So hours dragged along before the last deposition was made and the coroner's final charge given. Then he left the jury to consider the evidence and bring in the verdict.

Pettigrew's opportunity had come at last, and he determined to immortalise himself by a rider to the inevitable verdict.

"Gentlemen of the jury," said the coroner, when summoned to their room half an hour later, "what have you to say?"

Pettigrew rose to his feet.

"We find," he said, "that the late Theodore Thornton came to his death by drowning, and that no person was directly responsible for the fatal event."

"Is that all?" the coroner asked.

"We have also a memorial which we would like to append; said memorial to be forwarded to the County Council for their consideration. It reads—'Resolved, that in view of the fact that the late Mr. Theodore Thornton came to his death from the culpable conduct of some person or persons in allowing a tree to remain standing in close and dangerous proximity to the Linbrook mill-dam, said tree being blown down and across the mouth of the dam in a storm, and thereby producing disaster, in the endeavour to avert which the said Theodore Thornton lost his life—we, the jurymen now assembled to consider the cause of the said death, do urgently recommend that in no case should large trees be allowed to remain standing in near proximity to any mill-dams whatsoever. And we desire that a copy of this resolution be forwarded to our County Council, and that they be respectfully urged to give the subject their most careful consideration.'"

"We accept your verdict, gentlemen, and will forward the resolution as you desire," said the coroner, with becoming dignity. Then relaxing, with a broad smile, he continued: "The inquest is over. We've had a long session, and a hard one. Come along, boys, let's have something," and, with a guffaw and a grin, many trooped into the bar-room to whet their appetites for a belated dinner.

And so the judicial inquiry ended.

CHAPTER XII.

AND AFTER THAT THE BURIAL.

This had to be on the following day, for of necessity it must be done quickly. It was marvellous how the news spread that the body had been found, the inquest over, and the funeral to take place within thirty hours of the realisation of Mrs. Thornton's dream. Still, without telegrams, or quick messenger service, or telephones, everybody knew it, and people from the whole country round drove in to the funeral.

But the widow would not look on the face of her dead. She had seen it in a vision, when the thrice-told tale planted it, never to be forgotten, in her memory; and as she saw it, the white face was still covered with the running water. When brought to the air after that three weeks' submersion, the old look was quickly dissipated. This she knew must be, and being a wise woman, she preferred to remember her Theodore—the man whom she had loved for the long years of their chequered life—as she knew him, and as she saw him in her dream.

Dr. Hartman saw the body; but, contrary to the coroner's usual practice, he was not called in to give evidence at the inquest. The only other doctor in Linbrook was away for the day, and Dr. Hincks had too judicious a sense of the proprieties to consult in any way so young a man.

But Dr. Hartman was the better pleased. He knew of the inutility, and it gave him all the more time to do what he could for the family as their friend. It was upon his advice that the body was coffined and sealed before it was taken to the house. And a word from him was all that the widow needed to confirm her in her decision.

Still there was one point over which Mrs. Thornton was troubled. She believed herself to be a devout Calvinist; but she could not accept all the doctrines of original sin and "particular election and reprobation." In tracing back her own history, and she had often done so since this terrible affliction had come upon her, she had never been able to put her finger upon the time and place in her life when a change of heart had taken place; and yet, as a saved woman, she believed in the perseverance of the saints.

Then came the thought of her husband, who had never been a church member in his life; who never professed to be an orthodox believer; who did not know from personal experience what conversion meant; and yet who tried to do as he would be done by, and walk justly before all men; and nightly bowed his knee for a few moments by himself after he put out the light.

She could not believe he was "reprobated"; and if she could feel safe in her own heart, without ever having experienced any peculiar redemption, why should not he be safe also, home at last, without having subscribed to all the formulas of the church?

But her minister was a Presbyterian of the old school, a rigid believer in the full strength of original sin, in predestination from the Eternal, either to Salvation or Damnation, and that the one or the other is always manifested clear as daylight in the flesh.

As Dr. Hartman quietly entered the room, half an hour before the time announced for the funeral service, Mrs. Thornton was on her knees, with a daughter on either side. She was pouring out her soul in earnest prayer, not for the dead, but for the living. Her voice was low and passionate. He could not well retreat; bowing his head he stood still in the shadow and heard what remained of her petition.

"O Thou Father of the fatherless and the widow, Thou who lovest all men, Who hast taken him home to Thy keeping, free for ever from the snares of the wicked and of the devil, wilt Thou keep us Thy children? May our faith never waver. May Thy truth be our guide, and Thy peace our comfort; in the name of the Christ our Lord."

The voice ceased. For several moments the three remained silent but did not move. Then the doctor made a slight noise and entered the room as they rose to their feet.

Mrs. Thornton did not know that her last words had been heard, or how deeply they had entered into Dr. Hartman's soul.

"The minister is coming," he said. "I met him, and he told me he would like to be with the family for a few minutes before the people come in."

"He will be welcome," was her reply; but her lips tightened a little, and the tears dried in her eyes. "James is with Robert in his room; you might tell them."

The doctor opened Robert's door and entered. The young man rose, and greeted him with a shake of the hand. All lameness had passed away, but he required to move slowly.

"Feeling well to-day?" he asked cheerily.

"Better than I have been so far."

"I'm glad of that. Mr. McLeod is coming up the stairs, and your mother wants you both to come in," said the doctor.

"Mr. McLeod's a pessimist," said Robert moodily. "He means well, but he's too gloomy a man to comfort my mother in her sorrow."

"Your mother's comfort comes from the Divine, not from the mortal," said the doctor. "Mr. McLeod is a chronic dyspeptic, and can't harm anyone, least of all your mother."

"Do you think so?" Robert responded with brighter face. "Yes, we will go in. Come, James."

But Dr. Hartman did not mention what he had heard.

The Rev. Mr. McLeod's face was a combination of opposites. His mouth in repose was hard and close-lipped, while his eye was bright and genial; there was a sternness of expression about the lower half of his physiognomy which accorded ill with the smile that sometimes illumined his whole face. He was fully and deeply impressed with the doom vouchsafed to original sin, and that regeneration and justification must be clear and manifest in the eyes of God's servants, or the doom would be eternal. Hence, to satisfy his conscience, he must preach from the Word, of the Law and the Gospel, in season and out of season; and on any public occasion, which seemed to indicate God's special dealings, he must embrace the opportunity to reason and argue, and almost force his hearers into the truth.

But in the family circle, when in communion with the deepest sorrow, his finer sensibilities were sometimes aroused, and in subdued tones he would pour comfort and balm on the wounded spirit, as he spoke of the Saviour who gave himself for the life of the world.

In the brief interview which followed, Mrs. Thornton's face softened and she shed tears again. As she listened she began to think that her pastor's mission had changed, for the brief prayer that he offered up was simply a petition for Divine love and comfort and benediction.

Mr. McLeod, as he rose from his knees, pressed each member of the family by the hand, and then took his place at the head of the long room, for the people were coming in. Bowing his head over the Book he stood in deepest reverie. This, his conscience told him, was one of the occasions of his life. The room soon filled to its utmost capacity, while through the open door, on the stairs, and in the lower story stood crowds of people. He knew that his sonorous tones could reach every hearer within the building, and it was an occasion when the truth must be told. He had spoken to the family, now he must speak to the people. They knew it, and were just as desirous to hear him as he was to speak—for these rare occasions were memorable, and furnished food for future talk round many a country fireside.

Soon the minister cast his eyes around him, midst a solemn hush, and said: "We have met to perform a sad and solemn duty, while we yet have the joyful privilege of worshipping God. Let us read a part of the one hundred and third Psalm."

Commencing in a clear and modulated tone his expression varied with the meaning implied. Upon the words: "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy," he dwelt in loving fondness.

"As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us," came almost like an exultant shout.

But when he came to the fifteenth verse, and on to the eighteenth, the tone was raised and the words were poured forth in deep and solemn array for every one to hear.

"As for man, his days are as grass, as a flower of the field he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear

Him; and His righteousness unto children's children; to such as keep His covenant, and to those that remember His commandments to do them."

Deep and solemn and vibrating were the last words. His voice dropped almost to a whisper as he continued, "Also a few verses of the fifteenth chapter of John's Gospel:

"I am the true vine and My Father is the husbandman. Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit He purgeth it that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word I have spoken unto you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me. I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in Me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit, for without Me ye can do nothing. *If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them and cast them into the fire and they are burned. Herein is My Father glorified.*"

"Brethren," he continued, "these are words of solemn warning. Let us pray."

Almost a shiver passed through the assembled people as they listened. But soon they were intent upon the words of his prayer, as they ascended in deep adoration to the God of law and love and truth, riveting each listener to the spot on which he stood. It was evident that from the heart he believed the gospel of law and of grace; but law came first, with all its severity and magnitude. His first words were a supplication for Divine favour and blessing for the widow and the children, and a prayer that the present affliction would lead them to a higher consecration of heart. But he quickly passed on to the greater theme that was his mission. The absolute necessity of repentance for the life of sin and prayer that every hearer might prove his election by a full, open, and free acceptance of salvation through the influence of the Holy Spirit. For a few moments he dwelt with unction on the doctrine of surpassing guilt, the vital necessity of the remission of sins, acceptance, and justification. Then his last words surged forth in an impassioned peroration.

"O Thou just and Holy One," he almost shouted, "with our hands on our mouths and our faces in the dust we cry, 'Unclean, unclean.' For while Thou hast filled our barns and gathered in our stores, we have had none of Thee. When we get together our pelf, and give not Thee the glory, thou wilt spew us out of Thy mouth, give our heritage to the heathen, cut us off from the land of our fathers, and cast us into outer darkness. O our Father, be not angry with us for ever. May we turn while it is yet day and accept the offers of Thy mercy. And all that we ask is in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. Amen."

The prayer ceased. There was a low moan at the far end of the room, and the people commenced in a dazed way to move.

But suddenly another and unexpected voice was heard. It was that of an aged and venerable minister commonly known as Father Wortley. He had a crown of hoary hair, a long white beard, and a beautiful face, with a mouth sensitive and sweet as a woman's. His tall figure, unbent by years, stood erect above all others, as with upturned face he commenced:

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend.' O Heavenly Father, we thank Thee for Thy precious word; for the kindly light it gives us of Thy dealings with men. We see through a glass darkly; but Thou seest face to face. We do not presume to judge; it is Thou that judgest all things; but we believe that our brother, whose life was sacrificed while doing what he could for others, who was widely known for his upright life and pure living, who nightly entered into his closet, and shut the door, and put out the light, to commune with Thee—has entered into his reward and this day is with Thee in Paradise. May we also have clean lives, and pure hearts, and consciences void of offence when we come into Thy presence. And we ask all in the name of the Christ, who is our Passover."

There was a chorus of "Amen" from different parts of the room, as with brighter faces the people prepared to follow the coffin to the little cemetery at the verge of the wood.

"I was a little surprised at your prayer," said the younger minister with compressed lips as the two walked on together. "In fact, I scarcely thought it was necessary after I had pronounced the benediction."

"My brother," said the patriarch, while a broad smile illumined his face, "may the Lord be merciful to you, and may your heart grow mellow as the years go by."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE EXPECTED HAPPENS.

As the spring opened and Robert was able to be out, he grew strong again, and regularly devoted many hours each day to the details of the business; but he found the books in a complicated condition, and although Pettigrew made some effort to explain them, they were still incomprehensible. Entries had been made in an irregular way—sometimes they were duplicated; sometimes not carried forward; while items that Robert believed should have been entered had not been entered at all. The clerk stated that any errors existing arose from the fact that he had been too busy, during Robert's long confinement to his room, to keep a regular and exact statement of the business; but now that he had returned to work, he would soon be able to unravel the maze that things had got into, and make everything clear.

The importance of a thorough knowledge of their position soon became evident; for the season of delay was over, and bills were constantly coming in. What made the matter more threatening was the fact that while the Cartright firm had sent in their returns direct to Robert, they showed but a small margin of profit to be applied towards the payment of the large sums owing the creditors.

To act immediately seemed important, and the day after the funeral Robert spent wholly in the store.

"If James and I attend to business, and you devote all your time to the books," said Robert to Pettigrew, "how soon could you finish posting them?"

"Possibly by the week end," was the answer; "but there are some things I will have to attend to personally. Shipping goods to the wholesale men in Hamilton, like maple sugar and butter I promised to see to myself. It is imperative to keep in with these people."

"Well, we'll relieve you all we can; but you must have a statement of our position by Saturday."

"If I can," said Pettigrew turning to his desk.

But Pettigrew was slow in his posting. Over and over again he left his corner of the warerooms to attend to some matter, apparently trivial, and which either of the others could have done as well. More than once a deadlock seemed to face him at his desk, and he required personally to see some customer or send for him in order to make a correct entry.

The days dragged on, and Robert was very dissatisfied. Duns were coming in and claims being pressed. If he only knew their exact standing, he might have some idea how to act.

When Saturday night came Pettigrew declared that he was only half through the work, and it was into the following week before he announced that his task was nearing its completion.

"By to-morrow noon I will have a statement ready for you," he said, as Robert left the store with Dr. Hartman. Robert was taking electrical treatment, and by the new arrangement the evening was the only time he could spare.

The two young men from the arrival of the doctor at Linbrook had been much together, and since the accident, as physician and patient, more than ever. The fraternal spirit was strong between them; and having once learned to like Robert, Dr. Hartman did not allow his discovery with regard to Miss Finlayson to influence his friendship.

In many respects Robert had been reticent; but that night he unbosomed himself. Hartman had for some time heard direct rumours about the probable failure of the Thorntons, and his heart went out in sympathy to the family. He felt sure that Robert would try to make the most of it, and do his best. Perhaps it was this manifest altruism in the doctor's manner that induced Robert to speak.

"Things are going against us," he said moodily, as they neared the doctor's office.

"I suspected there was something wrong," said the doctor. "Is there no way of stopping it?"

"None that I know of. For nearly three weeks the business was entirely controlled by Pettigrew; and whether it was from lack of business ability, or because he had too much to do, affairs are in a worse condition now than ever they were."

"Do you know exactly how you stand with regard to assets and liabilities?"

"Unfortunately, I do not. It is several days since he was relieved of everything but the care of the books. He has not prepared a statement yet, but has promised one by to-morrow noon."

"Can you tell what it is likely to be?" the doctor asked. "Anything you say will be in confidence, and sometimes a friend's counsel helps one over a difficulty."

"You are right, doctor; you are the only friend I can go to, and I appreciate your kindness. The forecast is gloomy enough." And then he opened his heart, and told him of the occurrences of the winter, and the curious coincidence of Pettigrew's visit to Hamilton, and the threatened closure of the business by the wholesale men at the same time.

"But I thought your principal creditors were in Montreal."

"Some of them are, but the firm we owe the most to is in Hamilton."

"There may be some connection between the two; and now I think of it, the rumours I have heard about your business have come in a roundabout way from your clerk. Suspicion is an ugly thing, but it would be as well to keep your eye upon him."

"He may be a bad egg, I don't know. Mother never liked him. She says he is smooth and cunning and double-faced; but during all these years father had confidence in him, and it was only within the last two or three months of his life that it was shaken."

"Pity it had not been shaken ten years ago when he first came to you."

Then Robert told him in detail as far as he could of the occurrences from the date of the freshet disaster until now.

"You may as well prepare yourself for it; the outlook is black enough," said the doctor. "Have you any plan sketched out, if the worst should come?"

"No, except to leave Linbrook, and start life over again somewhere."

"Suppose your creditors would accept a compromise, take so much on the dollar, and let you try it on your own account," suggested Hartman.

"I couldn't do that," said Robert, shaking his head. "It would be commencing life handicapped with a failure. No, if I cannot hold the business together and pull it through, I must start as an honest man on the bottom rung somewhere. If God spares me, I intend to be a success sometime, wherever it may be."

"And so you will, you may depend upon that."

"Still, it will be hard to leave Linbrook in more ways than one," the young man continued.

"Yes," said the doctor, raising his eyes to Robert's; "you have lived here so long that you have formed many friendships."

"It is more than that," was the answer. His face was flushed, and he commenced to walk up and down the room.

Again the doctor looked up, and for a minute he watched him, but did not speak.

"I may as well make a clean breast of it, doctor. You are my father confessor, anyway."

Dr. Hartman gave a slight start. Then he settled himself down more deeply in his arm-chair, and prepared to listen.

"I am ready," he said. The tone was ordinary, but Robert was too intent upon his own feelings to notice the face.

"I suppose I'm a fool," commenced Robert. "A man has no right to be in love, when he has a mother and sisters depending on him, particularly when his business is gone, and he hasn't a dollar of his own to bless himself with."

"You put it hard," said the doctor.

"Hard but true. Still it didn't start when we had nothing. We thought we were prosperous then. I had a good position a

year ago, with good salary and prospect of better, and the whole future seemed bright before me."

"Does the girl know of your love?"

"She may suspect it. We have known each other always. We grew up like brother and sister till we got older. Then I suppose the feeling changed; but I never knew how I loved her until now. I never told her. She is like my heart's blood. I would give my life for her; and now, when I go away, I may have to give her up for ever."

"Perhaps not," said the doctor, turning his face still a little further away. He knew well to whom Robert referred, although no name had been mentioned. "If she loves as you do, there is time enough in the future, and you need not despair."

"Thank you for saying so—your words will spur me on. Still I would not bind her, even if she were willing. I will simply wait and prove myself worthy of her."

"No man could do more," said the doctor; but his face was grave and his features set. "Do not act rashly in anything, and when new developments arise in the business, let me hear of them."

Promising not to be despondent, and bearing a kindly message from the doctor to his mother, Robert took his leave.

"Strange destiny," said Hartman half-bitterly to himself, as he watched Robert go up the street. "The woman I adore tells me inadvertently of her love for another man; that man, who is my friend, makes me directly the confidant of his own passion for her; and I, as a man, must be true to both, while I crush the love and life out of my own heart."

The next morning Robert was down at the store earlier than usual; but Pettigrew was ahead of him, moving about in a restless fashion, with apparently little intention to trouble himself much about the books, notwithstanding his promise to have the statement out by noon of that day.

"This won't do," said Robert, when half the forenoon was gone. "A copy of that statement is promised for Grantham and Scott by the afternoon's mail, and you have only commenced to prepare the draft of it."

"Never fear," was the answer, "I can stick to it now. The post doesn't go out until three o'clock, and there's plenty of time. If I don't get through before the stage comes in, I can easily finish it after distributing the mail."

For some time he worked on in silence; but whenever the door opened and a customer entered, he glanced over in that direction. Pettigrew's mind was occupied by something unusual, and Robert noticed it. He never saw him so restless before.

"Is there anything the matter?" he said again. It was by this time nearly noon, and the first sheet was not half finished. "You seem to be nervous."

"Not much!" he snapped out sharply. "I'm no more nervous than you are. I'll get through all right. No doubt of that."

"I shall be well satisfied if you do," said Robert.

And the clerk scribbled again.

As the little clock in the office struck twelve, the stage rattled up to the door. The driver threw down the post-bags on the platform, and several passengers alighted. There was often a little crowd of loungers around the steps awaiting its arrival, and this day, the sun being bright and the air warm, there were more than usual.

Two of the strangers, from their attire and alertness of manner, were set down by the gaping crowd as from the city, and their movements noted with much interest. The shorter man of the two was quick, wiry, and energetic. His eyes were ever on the move, and glancing sharply over the building he nodded approvingly. The taller man was more reserved in manner, but seemed to be the guiding spirit.

"Let us go in," he said.

As they entered Pettigrew saw them. His pen ceased to move, but from his corner, with head bent over, he watched them through his eyebrows. With a quick glance they appeared to take in the situation. Only one customer was in at the time, and Robert was waiting upon her.

"Are you Mr. Thornton?" the shorter man asked.

Robert had noticed their arrival. He was at the window when the stage drove up, and instinctively divined something of the nature of their mission. Hence, during the two minutes that elapsed before they spoke to him, he had time to prepare himself.

"Yes," he replied, "and when I have waited upon this customer, I shall be at your service."

He sold her some thread, measured her off several yards of cotton, took the money, giving back the requisite change, and then accompanying her to the door, closed it after her.

"Now, gentlemen," he said with naïve courtesy, "is there anything I can do for you?"

"Not much, I guess," exclaimed the smaller man with a guffaw, "except to give up the keys of the place. I am the county bailiff, and this is Mr. Grantham, of Grantham and Scott, of Hamilton. I am here to distrain and seize for unpaid interest and principal on the chattel mortgage."

"How can that be?" ejaculated Robert, turning pale, for he had no expectation that action could be taken so suddenly and without notice. "The money was sent down to pay the whole of the interest due, more than two weeks ago. It was a cheque from the Cartright firm, countersigned by myself, and for which I have your receipt."

"You forget, sir," said Mr. Grantham, "that your indebtedness to us is a very large one, over and above the amount of the mortgage, and that the notes are also overdue. The money you forwarded was applied to redeem one of these, and not to the payment of interest."

"The instructions I sent were very definite that it was to be used for that purpose," said Robert.

"The use of the money on being received by us was at our option," said Mr. Grantham, elevating his eyebrows. "My dear sir, we placed it to your credit; but, to suit ourselves, put it at the bottom of the largest note. Your receipt shows that it was only credited on account. I may say, too, we have only put off seizure to the present time out of respect for your lamented father."

"Still," said Robert, who could not understand the present action, "I was not aware that in case of default in payment of mortgage, and this is not default, seizure could be made without previous notice being given."

"That was provided for when the mortgage was drawn out," said Mr. Grantham. "A clause was inserted giving the mortgagee power to distrain on all goods and chattels if at any time the interest and the required amount of principal remained unpaid. This was purely a matter of business, and we did it for our own protection. Consequently, in accordance with the terms of the law, I now order the bailiff, Mr. Cutler, to take possession."

"If he does so, it will be at your risk," exclaimed Robert, hotly; and with blazing eyes he walked toward where Pettigrew was sitting. "Where is the copy of the letter I sent with the cheque, and the reply we received from Grantham and Scott?" he asked of the clerk.

"We haven't a copy of your letter. I did not think it necessary to keep one, but here is the note in reply. The receipt itself is on file."

The note ran:

"Mr. Robert Thornton—

"DEAR SIR,—Your cheque received. We have placed it to the credit of your account. Enclosed find receipt of same.

"Yours, etc.,

"GRANTHAM AND SCOTT."

Robert read it blankly. He saw for the first time how completely his instructions had been ignored, and not having a copy of his own letter, he had no redress.

"You must remember, Mr. Thornton, that our action in this matter was simply legitimate business," said Mr. Grantham,

who could not help wincing a little, when he saw how Robert took it. "We know your financial position very well, and although ours are the largest claims, there are others against you. A crash was sure to come. Our mortgage is worth its face value, but our account is not; and, as sensible men, we applied the money where it could do us most good."

"And is your present decision final?" Robert asked, feeling that he was at their mercy.

"Certainly," said Mr. Grantham. "The bailiff will take possession now. If you desire to have three days to obtain money to pay the claim, we will allow it. In any case, you shall have twenty-four hours to arrive at a decision; but Mr. Cutler will take the entire charge in the meantime."

"What about Mr. Pettigrew?" Robert asked.

"Not being a member of the firm, we can retain his services for the present, if he is willing. Is this the young man?" he concluded, again elevating his eyebrows.

Pettigrew advanced and bowed deferentially. The two met as though they had been strangers. They did not shake hands.

"A younger brother," suggested the bailiff to Robert, nodding towards James.

"Yes," was the answer.

"I do not think we'll need him. Mr. Pettigrew and I can get along."

"For your purposes he is not available," replied Robert. "Let us go upstairs, James. You shall hear from us to-morrow."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WALK THROUGH THE WOODS.

The warm rains and hot sun made spring earlier that year; so that, although it was only the middle of May, the little strip of woodland adjoining the Concession school-house was redolent with perfume. White clusters of trailing arbutus peeped through the dead leaves. Yellow buttercups were in abundance; white trilliums, here and there, were turning from white to pink. The showy orchis, too, rare though it is, had favoured this special spot with a few of its pretty flowers; and little patches of yellow and blue violets mingled among the bloodroots and the toothworts, all vying with each other in the development of their brief-lived glory. Overhead the maples stretched out their branches, already half-covered with leaves; balsams of Gilead rendered odorous the air; ashes and elms threw out their canopy heavenwards; while the gnarled oak, in its slower development, still held a tight grip upon its buds. The grove covered a couple of acres or more, and often echoed with shouts of laughter as the school-girls tripped lightly through it, gathering bouquets of flowers as they journeyed homewards.

Miss Finlayson had dismissed her scholars for the day, and was making necessary arrangements for the following morning, when a form darkened the school-house door.

"Oh, Robert, how you startled me!" she exclaimed; "but this is a surprise."

"Not an unwelcome one, I hope," he replied as he doffed his hat.

"I didn't say it was. But how did it happen that you should come this way to-day?"

"I wanted to have another walk home through the woods with you, as we did sometimes last year. Only that and nothing more."

"I see, and we are both to be silent as a mouse, and not say a word."

"That wasn't our habit," he said, shaking his head.

"But you said only the walk and nothing more."

"Well, if I did, I take it all back again; for I want you to say all the bright things you can. I am dumpish to-day."

"Is that the way a man goes to see a maiden, to give her the blues?" she asked, with a little laugh.

"No, indeed, Winifred. But I want to talk with you, I really do," he said with passionate earnestness.

"Forgive me, Robert," she replied more seriously; "but you were so grave that I thought it my duty to be gay. Now I am willing to do anything you want me. But are you not too tired to walk through the woods?"

"Not a bit! Walking is a relief to me. I had nothing else to do this afternoon, so I felt I must come out to see you. I couldn't help it."

"But what about your store? I thought you had full charge now, while Mr. Pettigrew finished up the books."

"That is one of the things I wanted to talk with you about," he answered. "Shall we go now?"

"In a minute," she replied.

She put away her books, locked her desk, and deftly arranging two or three things about the room, was ready. Then, as they passed out, she locked the door, and putting the key in her pocket, led the way to a winding road through the woods, which had only recently been opened.

"This way will be a quarter of a mile longer. Are you sure it will not be too much for you?" she asked with some concern.

"No," he replied in a lighter tone; "I am strong now, and the walk with you will be a pleasure, and not a pain at all."

"To me it will be a delight," she said gaily again, "for I love the woods. Now we will walk slowly and you must tell me everything."

Then he told her how it had all happened; that the bailiff had been in possession for three days, and that he himself was out of it now and for ever.

"What a shame!" she exclaimed indignantly. "I heard of it, but did not believe it could be true. Have they taken everything from you, and turned you out of your own store, without any compensation at all?"

"Scarcely that," he replied deprecatingly. "I am sorry to say our debts were very heavy, much heavier than I had any idea of, and the creditors have seized what was really their own."

"I cannot understand it at all," said Winifred, walking slowly and flicking the leaves with her parasol. "I always thought your father's business was a good one. He never seemed to be short of customers, and although the farmers are slow they always pay in the end."

"What you say is quite true," said Robert bitterly; "but for years we have been going back. I never knew it until last fall. It was when I found out how my dear father stood, that I left my situation with the Cartrights, and commenced lumbering for him."

"Did the lumbering do you any harm?" she asked.

"No, my illness was a drawback, but that was after all the logs were in; and they paid a profit above all expenses, though less than we anticipated."

"How can you account for it, then?" she asked, looking wistfully into his face. "Every one spoke of your father as a careful man, and I am sure your mother was not extravagant. Surely you were not the spendthrift?"

"Perhaps I was," he replied gloomily. "Father sent me away for three years to school and college. I didn't know anything about the business, only that it supplied me with money, and perhaps I didn't take as good care of it as I should. He never complained, however; but when I came home at last, he told me it would be necessary to work hard and make what I could. A position was offered me at once with the Cartrights, and father said it would be better to accept it than to go in with him. It is more than two years since I left college. If I had known then what I learned last Christmas, I might probably have prevented this from happening."

"Did you anticipate it coming when you were ill?" she asked.

"I dreaded it from the day of father's death, and felt sure of it when I was able to go down to the store and investigate things for myself. Ten days before that I sent a message to Pettigrew for the store books, but he returned word that he could manage them best, as I did not understand them. Besides, I had my own lumber books to attend to and they kept me busy, so I did not press for the others."

"I have often thought about Mr. Pettigrew," she said, looking directly ahead. "He's a peculiar man, and perhaps not the best that your father could have chosen to assist him."

Robert looked at her, and for a moment he paused. He had made no confidant but the doctor, and in his integrity of character he did not wish to accuse, even to Winifred, when positive proof was wanting.

"I don't know," he said at last. "He always seemed faithful. I never heard of him shirking his work; but for the last year or two father said it was always impossible to make the stock-in-trade accord with the books."

"And what will he do now if the store is closed?" she asked.

"Ah! that is where the peculiar part comes in. Pettigrew had nothing when father took him in, a raw clerk, many years ago. But now, it is said, he has money enough saved to buy the stock and pay cash for it."

"Buy the stock!" she exclaimed in surprise, "he must have other means, surely, for he has kept house and supported his mother almost as long as I can remember."

"He has never claimed to have any other money but the salary paid to him regularly by my father. The stock is valuable,

and with the fixtures worth thousands of dollars."

For some moments they walked on in silence. When he looked at Winifred again, her eyes were filled with tears.

"And what of yourself. What will *you* do?" she asked presently with averted face.

"That's what I came to see you about. I have a scheme, Winifred, and I want your approval."

"My opinion may not be worth much," she said.

"To me it is worth a great deal," was his answer. "I said I would tell you everything. There are my mother, my two little sisters, and James; and there is absolutely nothing for any of them but a thousand dollars that my mother inherited from her father. There was even a chattel mortgage on the household furniture, which I did not know of. James wants to be a farmer, and mother, tired of our present life, joins him in the desire to take up free land in Dakota. Even the girls like the idea."

"And you?"

"I would do anything for my mother's sake. I cannot help thinking that if the money spent on my education had been saved, this would never have happened."

"And would you be a farmer always?" she asked, steadying her voice.

"For a few years I might have to be," was his answer. "If we go we shall work very hard. But James will soon be a man and can take my place. Then I can start life over again."

There was much suppressed emotion in Robert's voice as he ceased speaking; and a nervous twitching about Winifred's lips too, but she mastered it. They were nearing the edge of the wood and walked more slowly.

"You are a noble fellow, Robert," she said at last, "and I honour you for it. Yes, I say go, and God be with you!"

"Thank you. I thought you would approve. But it will be hard to part from you for so long. You and the doctor are my best friends. It is like knocking four or five years out of my life," and he looked at her wistfully.

"No, it will be the richest part of your life. Years that can never be lost."

"I am glad you think so. I will do my best. And you," he continued, stopping to look full into her eyes, "will go on teaching in the Concession school-house?"

"Yes, teaching the new idea how to shoot; and warning the boys not to build too many castles in the air."

"And may I build no more castles?"

"Why, you are building castles already. I am afraid your improvement in that line is past redemption."

Then they both laughed and resumed their walk.

"How soon do you expect to go?" she asked at last.

"In a few days. To make anything at all this year in Dakota, we must go at once."

"May I go down and see your mother before she leaves?" Winifred asked.

"I wish you would. It will comfort her. She would like nothing better."

"Well, it will be after school to-morrow. I will walk in, and Hugh can drive down to bring me home again."

"I will tell her to-night. One more thing, Winifred; may I write to you from Dakota? A few words from you now and then would cheer a lonely fellow out on the prairie."

"Do you think you will really want them?" she said, looking up archly. "You may fall in love with some ranchman's daughter, and forget all about Linbrook."

"There's not the slightest danger," he said passionately.

"I will have to consent then. We will all want you to succeed, and to hear about it, too." She tried to laugh, but her eyes were moist.

"Your wishes can only help me, and your letters will make life brighter. How would it do to address mine to Catersville? Your home lies about half-way between the two places."

The look that passed between them was too comprehensive to need explanation.

"I think the idea a good one," she said, "and I will post mine there too."

They had reached the garden gate, and she asked him in; but he did not feel like meeting others then, and sent in his adieu. Lingered for a moment, they clasped hands, and looked into each other's eyes.... Then he turned and walked quickly in the direction of the home he was so soon to leave.



CHAPTER XV.

QUILTING BEE, NO. 2.

The collapse of the business of the late Theodore Thornton, the seizure of his estate, and the removal of his family from the village, formed a large theme for the people of Linbrook to discuss. Everybody was interested, and each individual knew more about it than his neighbour. Even the children at the school were full of knowledge upon the subject, and vied with each other with stories why and where the Thorntons were going, and what they were going to do when they got there.

Grief over the death of Thornton senior had subsided materially by this time, and the people were ready to take up any other topic of interest with equal zest; particularly when in lighter vein, and associated with the same family. Not that they were not sorry that the Thorntons were leaving, for they were. They had always found them honest in business, lenient, even too lenient, in collecting their bills, and invariably good neighbours; but there was novelty in the idea of so impressive a change—a breaking up of old associations—a lifting of a complete and important family from their midst—and their transplantation to far west Dakota: a new territory to the minds of the people, and supposed by some to be the coming El Dorado.

The consequence was that Mrs. Jemima Smith concluded to have her annual quilting bee this year in May, even if it was out of season; and to quiet any misgivings either she or her friends might have, she wadded one of the quilts thin enough to answer for summer use.

"My! but you be sensible!" exclaimed Mrs. Jones, as the guests seated themselves beside the double pair of long poles, and commenced to ply their needles through and through one or other of the quilts. "Nothing like starting airy, before the fall rush comes on."

"Fall rush," cackled Mrs. Juniper, "you mean June frosts! I guess Mrs. Jemima Smith was afraid she'd ketch cold after she'd put her blankets away, if she didn't have suthin' warm to kiver her with."

"Isn't that sensible?" said the hostess, who was always ready to hold her own. "One needs light quilts an' heavy quilts; and what's the use o' putting everything off to the last, anyway? When you wait till fall, you have quiltin' bees, an' huskin' bees, an' pairin' bees, an' fixin's for winter all in a heap. My motto is: 'Do the thing that comes handiest, an' don't wait for nuthin'.'"

"For a thin one, this is a mighty nice quilt for sure," said Mrs. Middlesize. "It's purty enough for a weddin' present. The only question is, who's the bride?"

"You go along," twitted Mrs. Juniper sharply, "You widders can't think of nuthin' but weddin's."

"They're all right sometimes," was the quick retort, "but I pity the man who ever made you a Juniper."

"It's as near like the one Mrs. Thornton made last winter, as one pea is like another," said Mrs. Jenkins, ignoring the altercation.

"It is a little like," said Mrs. Jemima Smith. "Only the centre of her squares was blue and these is pink."

"I suppose the Thorntons are well on their way by this time," said Mrs. Rounce, who was one of the guests.

"Yes," said Miss Trowther. "They started five days ago. They'll be in Chicago before now; but they have a long journey beyond that, and a good part of it will be by waggon."

"Land sakes! what did they go there for anyway?" cried Mrs. Juniper. "Them boys knows as much about farmin' as a two-year-old steer does about loggin'. Then there's the distance. It's out of all creation too."

"It is pretty far west," said Miss Trowther; "but as for the work, what they don't know they'll soon learn; and Robert Thornton is not a man to fail in anything he does himself, even if he is young."

"Right you are," said Mrs. Middlesize; "but it's a pity he didn't go on with the business instead of that man Pettigrew."

"Pettigrew's a pretty smart fellow," returned Mrs. Juniper sharply. "He knows what he's about; and he'll build up a bigger trade than ever Thornton could."

"The old man, perhaps, but not the young one."

"Well! he's got the money, and that's more than you can say of young Thornton."

"Robert has a heavy responsibility to carry," said Mrs. Rounce. "He'll have all the family to care for, and it'll be easier for him away from Linbrook than in it. Still it will be hard on the women-folk, I tell you."

"Yes, indeed! Was it Cleveland that threw out the line to him when he was in the river?" Miss Trowther asked.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Rounce, "and Robert hasn't forgotten it either."

"I heard there was a possibility of your son going out to them after a while?"

"It is possible. Robert came over to bid us good-bye the night before he started, and he said if he saw a good chance for Cleve out there, he'd let him know."

"He won't forget it either."

"I know he won't."

"What strong friends Dr. Hartman and Robert Thornton have grown to be," said Miss Trowther. "You would almost think they were brothers."

"Yes, but the funny part of it is, they both think the world of the one girl," said Mrs. Jenkins.

"Who's that?" questioned Mrs. Juniper, who, with all her sharpness, had not heard of this circumstance before.

"The doctor'll have it all his own way now," continued Mrs. Jenkins, again ignoring the question.

"I don't know about that," said Mrs. Smith. "She's just as cute as she's pretty; and if she really cared for a man, I don't think it would make much difference how far he happened to be away; she'd be true blue all the same."

"Do you think so?"

"Indeed I do."

"Perhaps she don't exactly know where she's at," suggested Mrs. Middlesize. "Then a bird in the hand's worth two in the bush."

"I don't think Dr. Hartman would take an unfair advantage of Robert or any other man in his absence," said Miss Trowther.

Although Mrs. Juniper had made several unsuccessful attempts to extract the young lady's name, the neighbours, out of pure mischief, declined to reveal it. Still she was bound to keep up her share of the discussion, and commenced sententiously as if she knew all the circumstance—

"But a young man's a young man and has his feelin's; an' tho' I don't put much stock on Dr. Hartman, if the young woman's not engaged, I don't see why he shouldn't have her if he wanted to."

"Provided she's willin'," said Mrs. Jemima Smith solemnly. "The doctor's a handsome man, he's making money, and he'll be able to support a wife in style, long before Thornton can have his mother and sisters provided for, say nothing about gettin' married. But I don't believe in him havin' her if Robert Thornton's her choice."

"Neither will she," said Miss Trowther. "A teacher who can bring those big boys to time as she did, has character enough to do anything she makes up her mind to."

"So that's the woman, is it?" exclaimed Mrs. Juniper, with a high-toned upward inflection. "Hoity toity, the pernicky, high-strung, top-lofty Winifred Fannelson; I don't care a button which has her for all me," she finished with a sneer.

"Your sister's son was one of the lads she straightened out, I believe," said Miss Trowther demurely; and the general laugh drowned Mrs. Juniper's answer.

And so the women chatted on until the hour for tea arrived; then they dispersed to the duties of their own homes, having helped Mrs. Jemima Smith in her quilting, while at the same time they had improved their minds and enlarged their understandings by their afternoon's gossip.

And the family they were discussing—where were they, as the shadows of evening lengthened? Pitching their tent on the prairie—on the Westward-Ho trail—miles away from any human habitation. They had carried in their waggon a keg of water from Butternut Creek; and, fireless from want of wood, were cheerily taking a cold supper before turning in for the night.

CHAPTER XVI.

MRS. FINLAYSON'S ILLNESS.

During the next year Dr. Hartman worked hard, his professional services being required both far and near. Still in his long rides he had plenty of time for thought, and plans for the present and future often filled his mind as he covered the weary miles on his journeys in and out from the village. During that year he often heard from Robert, who expatiated upon the trials and triumphs of the settler's life in the West, of the wearisome road over the prairie, of the drenching rains before the first shanty was up, of mosquitoes by the million in the wet prairie grass, of the frost in the fall before they were ready for it, and of the blizzards in winter. But the story was not all forlorn. They always had food to eat and clothes to wear, and the cattle grew fat on the green grass of the prairie. Their first crop, though small, was a good one; and their land, a rich loam many feet deep, might bear to be cropped almost for ever. Their house was up at last, and their mother through everything was brave, tender, and true-hearted.

That first winter in the West, Robert wrote, he had spent swinging his axe in the lumber woods to earn more money for the homestead, while James managed matters for his mother at the farm. It was a new life for Robert, but he said it made his muscles strong and his face ruddy; and after a month's experience he was able to swing his blade with any man, and earn as good money as any in the camp.

Robert in his letters wrote very little about Miss Finlayson, so little that Dr. Hartman believed he must be in correspondence with her. Consequently, every time he received a letter it set him thinking; and true to what he believed to be right during the whole of that first year, he almost avoided Winifred's company. He did not know how people had been talking about him, but he took discretion to be the better part of valour, and erred, if at all, on the safe side. His constant correspondence with Robert strengthened him in this resolution, for sometimes when on the point of relaxing his vigilance, another letter from the West would round him up again to what he considered to be the right place.

Still Winifred was ever in his thoughts, and the flutter of her skirt in the distance, or the sheen of her hair in the sunshine, would often for the moment rivet his attention, and make his heart beat faster, as he drove along the country road within sight of the school-house, where she reigned as queen.

But there came a time when the relationship became closer, when they daily associated with each other for weeks, when she watched his every movement and waited his arrival with much solicitude. It was the occasion of her mother's illness. This happened during the summer holidays, immediately after the closing of her school.

One morning, as Dr. Hartman was leaving his office, he was surprised to see Hugh ride up on horseback.

"My mother is ill, doctor," he exclaimed, "and would like you to come out to see her."

"Is it anything serious?" the doctor asked, while inwardly combating sensations never experienced before, when summoned to visit the sick.

"I am afraid it is," said the boy, with an alarmed face. "She has been ailing for more than a week; just dragging herself about and getting weaker all the time. To-day she didn't feel like rising, so stayed in bed. She says she doesn't need the doctor, only a little rest. Father don't know what to do, but Winifred insisted that I should come for you."

"I am glad you did," said the doctor emphatically, while he held himself together with a tight grip. "I have one other place I am obliged to go to, but will be at your house in about an hour."

"Thank you, doctor. We'll be glad to have you come soon." And Hugh started back on the lope.

Dr. Hartman drove rapidly to make the first call; but his mind was largely taken up with something other than either his present patient or his prospective one. It was his attitude towards Winifred that filled his thoughts. Out of loyalty to his friend in Dakota he had refrained from trespassing, and had scorned to take any advantage. He had, in fact, been so little directly with Winifred since the time of Robert's departure, that it was impossible for him to have any true conception of the present relationship of the two to each other. Of one thing, however, he felt sure, that neither she nor Robert had at any time suspected him of a tender feeling toward her. He was simply regarded by each as a cordial friend; and now that he would see more of her, he decided that the intimacy must be simply professional, and for this he schooled himself.

"I'm so glad you've come," was Winifred's greeting, as she pressed his hand, while she looked up appealingly. There was no change of colour, nor timidity in meeting his gaze. "I fear mother is very ill."

"Perhaps not so ill as you think," he said brightly. But on examination her fears were realised. She had typhoid fever, and though not delirious, the temperature for so early in the day was high.

"It is a rather serious matter," he said some minutes later, when discussing the case with the father and daughter in the next room. "She will be ill for some weeks, and will need care and constant attention. We must see what arrangements can be made."

"Is it typhoid?" asked Mr. Finlayson. "If so, the sooner we know it the better."

The doctor glanced at Winifred, but her face was calm.

"Do not refrain from telling us," she said in a low tone, echoing her father's words.

"Yes, it is," was his answer; "but it may be of a mild type. Much will depend on the nursing and care during the next ten days."

"Mother shall have whatever care you order," said Winifred. "My school has closed for midsummer holidays, and I can devote my whole time to her."

"That would be neither safe nor wise," said Dr. Hartman, shaking his head. "You may do a good deal, but we cannot have you do too much."

"Quite true," said Mr. Finlayson. "We leave it entirely in your hands, doctor; and whatever you order we will see is carried out."

"Let us commence at once then," said the doctor; and under his direction all unnecessary things were removed from the sick chamber. Shades were arranged to keep the hot sun from the window, and the room was made as comfortable and cool as possible. Then the diet scale was decided upon, and finally medicine was prepared and directions given.

"Now about nursing," he said to Miss Finlayson, who with skilful hands did whatever he desired. "You can look after your mother by day-time, but what about the night?"

"I can manage it very well for both for several days, with father's help," she said.

"Have you any neighbours who might assist?"

"They will be afraid when they know it is fever; but there is our old nurse, Mother Johnson. She might come part of the time, but I would rather do by ourselves for a day or two, until we see what is really needed."

"Very well, then; but you must rest this afternoon for awhile, to prepare for to-night, and I will drive over again before sundown."

As the doctor drove home his mind was disturbed with the whole problem. Why should typhoid develop in that region, so early in the season, and so far away from any known centres of infection? Why, too, should the temperature be so high at so early a period? And, what to his mind was also important, would he be able to fully control Miss Finlayson in her desire to be the chief, if not the only, nurse? The risk to herself was not an unimportant factor, when he considered that the long nervous strain of the past six months' teaching was only just over; and that by the time her mother could recover, even under the most favourable conditions, she would have to resume her duties, with a still larger contingent of scholars subject to her control. Those were the days when germ theories were scarcely beginning to be thought of, and sanitary conditions were only in their infancy. With all his investigations Dr. Hartman could prove nothing; but in order to prevent the spread of contagion in the family, he ordered all drinking water to be carried from the neighbouring spring, and the well to be thoroughly renovated.

That night he found Mrs. Finlayson's temperature higher, and the general symptoms aggravated.

"Mother has been restless all afternoon," said Winifred. "Her face has been hot, and I sponged her every three hours, as you directed."

"Did you get any rest yourself?" he asked.

"I could not. There were so many things I had to do. But I can do better to-morrow."

"Who will attend to her to-night?" the doctor asked.

"Father says he will, but I don't like to trust him. He's always tired after his day's work, and readily falls asleep."

"I will have Hugh wait by his mother the first half of to-night," said the doctor. "You must lie down at once, and rest till he calls you."

"But I don't need to to-night, I assure you."

"But Miss Finlayson I insist, and I will not leave until you do as I desire. To-morrow I will see that Mother Johnson is secured for night duty. I have had her before, and know she is reliable."

"How good of you, doctor," she said, while she flashed back a glance of acknowledgment that went straight to his heart. "You must forgive me, but mother is so ill, that I know I cannot do too much for her. Still I will do as you say." And she went off to her room without another word.

The next evening Mother Johnson was installed as night-nurse, with Winifred in charge of house and patient by day. Occasionally a neighbour who had hardihood enough to face the supposed infection, offered her assistance for a while, making things a little easier for Winifred.

As the fever advanced, Mrs. Finlayson became delirious and very restless, requiring each day more vigilant and continuous care. The case was a serious one; and when the doctor made his regular morning visit, he always found Winifred at her post. Little by little they seemed to grow closer to each other. She, with full dependence upon the man of skill, who, with patience and foresight, was guiding her mother through the mazes of a lingering and dangerous illness; he, with a heart full of tenderness for the maiden that he loved, who, with all unconsciousness, was laying bare to him the richest treasures of a refined and loving nature.

Sometimes when arranging the pillows for her mother, Winifred's hand would unwittingly touch the doctor's; and while forgotten next moment by herself, it would send a thrill through his being, to be remembered for hours afterwards.

"What a fool I am," he would say to himself, half-bitterly. "Skilful enough perhaps to heal the sick; but without wit enough to win the fair Penelope. Ye gods, I never try! and she never dreams that I love her."

One night near the end of the third week, Mrs. Finlayson was at her worst. A neighbour had taken care of her for an hour or two in the afternoon, while Winifred had snatched a little sleep in her hammock under the trees, for she wanted to sit up the first half of the night.

It was dark when the doctor made his evening call.

"Where is the nurse?" he asked in a low tone, as he watched the muttering delirium of the patient.

"She cannot come until one o'clock," said Winifred. "One of her children is sick, and I promised to wait upon mother for her until she returns."

"What time did you rise this morning?" he asked, with knit brows.

"At five o'clock; but then I am not tired, for I had a sleep in the hammock this afternoon, while Mrs. Robinson took my place."

"Humph," he said, "you are thoroughly tired out, and ought to be in bed this minute. The sponging was ordered every two hours, was it not?"

"Yes, doctor. It will be time again in ten minutes. I have everything ready and will do it then."

"My dear child," said the doctor, frowning in a fatherly way, "I have to change the medicine to-night. It will need to be given every hour for a while, and as it is necessary to be very particular, I am going to stay and give the first three or four doses myself. At the same time I can do the sponging. Now I want you to get me what I require. Prepare everything

for me, and then go immediately to bed. Remember," he finished with a smile, "these are the doctor's orders and must be obeyed."

"Oh, Dr. Hartman! how can you talk so? I could not think of letting you do it! Here you have been to see my poor mother every night now for two weeks past, with all your other work. It is you that are tired out."

Slowly the colour mantled the doctor's face, but it was partly shaded from view, and he soon controlled himself.

"My word is law," he said solemnly, shaking his head. "So get me the things quick."

Winifred did as she was told.

"How is mother?" she asked anxiously.

"Her condition is very critical," he answered, "and I intend to stay with her to-night until I see signs of improvement, and the nurse comes; but I do not want to have the daughter for a patient as well as the mother. Winifred, I want you to do as I desire." He had never called her by her christian name before.

The girl started, and putting her hands up to her face, something like a sob burst from her; and, to his amazement, she seized his hand and printed a kiss upon it.

"You are too good," she stammered. "I will do exactly what you want. But it will be too bad to leave you alone for three whole hours. Father and Hugh, tired from the harvest field, have both gone to bed."

"I can manage," said the doctor. "Get me the things, please, and go to bed at once. Remember, it is to sleep."

"God bless you, doctor." There were tears in the girl's eyes as she slipped away to her room. A flower dropped from her corsage, but it was pressed to a man's lips, and thrust out of sight.

"I cannot have that girl take in the fever odour to-night while sponging," he muttered to himself. "It would be as much as her life is worth. She is run down now. I must keep her for Thornton if I can't for Hartman. To-morrow we'll get the second new mattress under, then the air will be better. Poor woman! I wonder if you'll live that long."

Then he looked round, secured fresh sheets, and made a more complete change than there had been for days. He watched the patient very closely, opening wide the doors and windows, and noting the condition of the eye repeatedly; while he administered small doses of the medicine at regular intervals.

His eye never closed during his lonely vigil, but the expression of his face became more satisfied as midnight approached.

When the belated Mother Johnson arrived, he gave her explicit directions for the remainder of the night; and then, going out beneath the starry heavens, breathed a sigh of relief, as he got into his buggy and drove home.

CHAPTER XVII.

SUSPICIONS STRENGTHENED.

"Another lovely morning, Miss Finlayson, and I know your report is a good one. Your face tells the story," exclaimed the doctor, as he walked up the garden path to the house ten days later.

Winifred had a watering-can in her hand. She was returning with a smiling face from her flower-beds, and hastened when she saw who was coming.

"Yes, mother had a splendid night; slept right through, Mrs. Johnson tells me; and to our surprise was hungry for her breakfast this morning."

"You did not indulge her beyond my orders, I hope," said the doctor with a smile.

"No, indeed! we were tempted, but won't do that, I assure you."

"A few days more and we will have her up again; but we must hold our own ground and not lose an inch. Oh, before I go in, I want to ask you, have the trustees consented to the extension of your holidays yet?"

"They have conditionally, but will require a letter from you stating that the extension of time is necessary for my health's sake. Mr. Gregg said it was only a matter of form, to silence any grumblers at the next annual meeting."

"You shall have it, certainly. Suppose I make it three weeks instead of two. This will give time for a run away from home for a week, after your mother is able to be about."

"That is too long, doctor; two will be ample. Then I can return to duty a fortnight from to-day."

"As you like," he replied. "It seems to me you have been attending to duty pretty faithfully for the last four weeks, and deserve a real holiday before going back to school-work again."

"I will get my holiday all next week," she replied, with a ripple of laughter. "My aunt is coming then, and I can have the whole week to spend in the woods and among my friends to do as I like."

The doctor's visits now became less frequent, and Winifred missed them. She caught herself many times looking down the road for his carriage, the first day that it was not necessary for him to see her mother. She never thought of being disloyal to Robert by so doing. It was just the force of habit interfered with, and, when the habit was a pleasant one, the break became more noticeable.

Mrs. Finlayson now improved rapidly, and even during the first week Winifred often found time to wander in the woods among the beeches and maples. Sometimes she would throw herself down on the grass by the creek-side, and clasping her hands round her knee give herself up to thought—and perhaps, what was natural too, her thoughts were as much upon Dr. Hartman as upon Robert Thornton. Her correspondence with Robert had always been regular, and whenever it was possible his letters had been received weekly, entering as they did vividly into the details of his daily life. She had written several times to him during her mother's illness, to which replies had already come, full of sympathy and solicitude, and overflowing with praise for "the good physician, who, he was sure, would give every care and attention possible for her mother to receive."

"You never said a truer thing in your life," she whispered to herself one afternoon, as folding a letter after re-reading she put it away, and watched the little minnows playing in the water at her feet. "How much you two men resemble each other. Dr. Hartman is the most perfect gentleman I ever saw. Of course, a poor country school-teacher doesn't see much; but, for all that, I'll wager there are very few like him. Sometimes I think what a simple fool I might make of myself, if it wasn't for Robert. Dear old boy, out on the lonely prairie! How true you are to me. You'll be my sweetheart some day. You are now for that matter. But if it wasn't for you, my little heart might steal away after the big-souled doctor. He has soul enough for anyone; but, alas! he wouldn't have any heart for me. Poor insignificant me! With all his gentleness, and tenderness and goodness, he could no more think of falling in love with me, than I could with Mr. Pettigrew—not that we are alike in the least—he is the mountain, I am the mole-hill. He is one among many, full of high ideals and noble ambitions, who will aim at the top and reach it. I am a simple maiden in a country school-house, trying to do my duty, but

as far apart from him as are the poles. Don't I see it? He is all kindness and tenderness and consideration; but if I look at him even for a moment—and how can I help it sometimes—he immediately draws himself in, contracts his eyebrows, and looks almost as frigid as an iceberg; and the very next moment, with his face turned another way, his voice is as gentle and sweet as any woman's. He doesn't mean to, but it hurts sometimes.

"I wonder how it will be now? I used to meet him often before Robert went away, and I had many a long talk with him. It seemed to lift me up somehow, till I thought I was looking in the same direction that he was, and saw life from a different view-point. But after Robert went it was different. I don't see why his going away should have made any change. Possibly it may be the same again. At any rate, I shall try to keep in close touch with him. It will help myself and can't hurt him, even if I am a little prude."

The professional visits were soon over. Mrs. Finlayson gradually became her old self again, and things drifted back in some measure to their old order. Winifred's two weeks of extra holiday glided away too, and she was back at her school again.

So the daily associations of the man and the maid, which from many reasons had been so attractive to each of them, were practically at an end. Much as Dr. Hartman missed the bright words and captivating smiles of the girl he loved so hopelessly, he was too wise to continue the association any longer.

The break in regular attendance being made, he even paid his semi-professional visits at a time when Winifred was least likely to be present; feeling that, if he did otherwise, in some unguarded moment, either by look or word, he might betray himself, and undo the good which his resolve during the last year and a half had accomplished. What made his position still clearer to his own mind, was the style of Robert's recent letters; for in them he had spoken in stronger terms than ever of his undying attachment for Winifred; and hence he concluded that, for a while at least, the less he saw of her the better.

This new aloofness on Dr. Hartman's part was incomprehensible to the fair maiden. Why he should make occasional visits to her mother, when it was impossible for her to be present, she could not understand. Had she offended him in any way? or left any promise unfulfilled? or neglected to do what he had desired? She could think of nothing; and yet there must be something, for which she was responsible. This idea grew in her mind to such proportions, when three weeks elapsed without once having an opportunity to speak to the doctor, that to her sensitive nature the thought became unbearable; and she determined to see him and ask forgiveness for any mistake she may inadvertently have made.

The resolution was no sooner made than an opportunity to put it into execution presented itself. She met him the same day driving on the side line, on her way home from school.

"It seems to me I have not seen you for an age," he said with his old-time friendliness, but coupled with the same touch of reserve that he always had when speaking to her.

"It is three weeks to-day," said Winifred, "since I went back to school again."

She wanted to say more, but could not.

"I missed you both times when I called to see your mother," he said. "You were such a gentle and excellent nurse, that I might say she owes her life to you."

"Don't say that, please," she exclaimed, her face suddenly flushing. "It is not right to speak in that way of what little I did, when we owe everything so absolutely to *you*."

Hartman felt the blood tingling in his veins, but he forced it to stillness again.

"The doctor must do his duty," he responded lightly, "but without the nurse—and you were one of the best and gentlest I ever saw—does her part faithfully—his efforts will not have much avail. By the way," he continued, gently flicking his whip at a fly on his horse's back, "I had a letter from our old friend Robert Thornton since I saw you. He tells me that the crops on their homestead are fine this year, and everything promises well. He expects to go to the lumber camp again, to an advanced position, after the heavy work on the farm is over."

"Yes," she said, her face flushing again at the unexpected announcement, "he told me that, too."

"Robert's a splendid fellow," said the doctor, venturing to look this time directly but gravely into her eyes.

"I know he is, and what he does, for he tells me everything," she exclaimed candidly, while her face beamed unutterable things. Somehow she felt more than ever that Dr. Hartman could never be Robert's rival, while at the same time he could in a measure be her confidant.

"He's a happy man to have such a correspondent," he cried out with a laugh, that was not altogether natural. "And he's a capital man to have for a friend. I can only hope that in time your mutual friendship may grow into something stronger. But I must not forget to ask about your mother? I think I saw her in the garden as I drove by yesterday."

He had changed the subject to relieve his own as well as Winifred's embarrassment.

"She is her old self again," was her answer, grateful for a different theme, "and almost as well as ever."

"Next time I come I will try and arrange the hour when you will all be together," he said, and lifting his hat drove on.

But Winifred had not asked his forgiveness; and as she walked slowly toward home wondering why she had not done so, she concluded that perhaps after all there was nothing to forgive.

As Dr. Hartman drove rapidly toward the village, he ruminated a good deal over the recent happenings. Spite of his determination to the contrary, his close association with Winifred during the recent weeks had made his affection for her grow stronger, and he felt that if he yielded to the temptation he could easily find excuse for frequent drives along the side line of the 14th.

"Yes," he muttered beneath his breath, "and betray an honest man's confidence. That shall never be, come what will."

He drew up at Pettigrew's store and went in. The latter was still at the old Thornton stand. Two or three clerks were busily moving about while Pettigrew himself was sorting the mail.

"Anything for me?" the doctor asked.

"Yes, there's another letter from Yankton, Dakota," he answered. "It looks as if your correspondence from that quarter was booming again."

"I don't know about that," said the doctor, looking sharply at Pettigrew. "I never had very many letters from there, and it must be a couple of weeks since I received the last one."

"My mistake then," said Pettigrew. "So few letters come to Linbrook from Dakota, that those which do arrive are more likely to be noticed."

"Still, the Thorntons will have a number of correspondents yet," said the doctor.

"Not many," was the answer. "There were some for a time, but they've dwindled down, till you seem to be the only one left."

"I thought Robert was popular, and had lots of friends."

"So he was; but time and distance deaden the interest, you know; and you'll give it up yourself after a while."

Pettigrew finished with a laugh, that was intended to be merry, as he turned to stamp the out-going letters.

"Robert is too genuine and true-hearted a fellow to be given up so easily; and I've no intention of dropping him, I assure you," was the warm reply, as picking up his own mail matter the doctor went out.

When he entered his office he fell into a brown study. The information he had received surprised him. He had always supposed that the correspondence between Robert and Winifred was carried on through the Linbrook post-office; and the discovery that this was not the case strengthened his suspicions of Pettigrew's probity and honour more than ever. The impression that Robert Thornton had of his character must have been black enough, if he could not trust his personal correspondence to his official care.

The name or location of the post-office used by them was of no interest to Hartman. The interest lay in the fact that

Pettigrew could never have had their confidence; and the thought struck him, that sometime, when Robert Thornton's position in the world became assured again, he might yet probe Pettigrew's honesty and integrity to the bottom.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BROKEN AXLE.

Another year rolled by, and though the general condition of things indicated little change, Dr. Hartman was a busier man than ever; for his reputation, both as physician and surgeon, had spread throughout the county. His professional work occupied him so fully that he had little time to think seriously of other matters, and was glad. Professionally, he had set before himself a high ideal; and, thwarted in his first love, he aimed above all things to reach that ideal.

What his future would be he did not vex himself by attempting to solve. For the present he would simply work and wait. The airy castle that during his first year he had busied himself in building, with Winifred as its queen, had long ago tumbled to pieces, and in its place for the present he would build no other. That he would be contented to spend his life in Linbrook he did not think at all possible, but while Winifred stayed he would stay too.

To Winifred herself, Dr. Hartman was a perpetual enigma. Always kind, always cordial, she never met him but with the hope that the intimacy of friendship might at last be established between them. Perhaps it was, but weeks would invariably elapse before she would meet him again—the old experience to be once more repeated.

Her friends Miss Mathers and Miss Roberta declared to her that they "had no use for Dr. Hartman."

"He's so stuck on his profession that you can hardly get a word from him," said Miss Roberts.

"And when you ask him out," said Miss Mathers, "if he hasn't anything on hand, you may depend on it he'll have to read up a case."

"That's the reason why he is so excellent a physician," said Winifred warmly. "I am sure he saved my mother's life, and I don't think he could have done it if he had not been a close student."

"That's all very well," said Miss Mathers emphatically; "but why can't he be like other people? We don't doubt his ability; but he doesn't come out of his shell enough. He acts as though he were so desperately in love with someone, goodness knows where, that he can't see another girl, even if she's only six feet away."

"That depends on who the girl is," put in Miss Roberts, with a grimace toward Winifred.

"I don't believe he's in love with any one but his profession," said the latter. "He looks to me like a man who will devote himself to his work for years and years before he will ever think of getting married. I never knew a girl who was good enough for him, anyway."

"Not even Winifred Finlayson?" said Miss Roberts, drawing down the corners of her mouth.

"Not even Winifred Finlayson," was the scornful rejoinder. "We are all talking foolish nonsense, when we might be doing something better."

"Well, I'm going to make another attempt," cried Miss Mathers. "I am commissioned to ask him to join our Croquet Club."

"That's a sensible idea," said Winifred, "and I think, if you choose a convenient time for playing, he will join you. I once heard him say he was fond of the game." And the girls parted.

During the three years of Winifred's acquaintance with Dr. Hartman, she had rarely ridden in his buggy, and latterly, never. One afternoon, however, a few days later, she had another opportunity. As she dismissed her school, the sky became suddenly overcast; peals of distant thunder followed each other in quick succession, and both teacher and scholars hurried along the road as rapidly as possible towards home. Soon the clatter of hoofs and rumble of wheels far in the rear attracted their attention, and, as the sound drew nearer, Winifred discerned that it was the doctor who was coming.

"Oh, Dr. Hartman!" she exclaimed, "I'm so glad you are passing. These two little girls live a mile and a half from here on your way. They are sisters, and if you will take them, I will be so much obliged."

"I would do anything in the world for you, Miss Finlayson," he said, while an amused expression passed over his face. "But what about yourself?"

"I have both rubbers and waterproof, and a little rain won't hurt me," she replied with a laugh; "besides, you haven't any more room to spare."

So he made way in his seat for the children.

"I am sorry I have not," he said. "If you walk rapidly you may reach home before the storm breaks. Good-bye, I'll be even with you yet," he finished, with a laugh. Winifred had voluntarily missed her chance.

The doctor's little maids, aged respectively five and seven, cuddled closely beside him. His large umbrella protected them from the rain which soon commenced to fall, while their sharp little eyes, glancing quickly around, took everything in. When he drew up the rubber apron to tuck about them they discovered the good-sized instrument-box which lay at their feet, and it set them thinking.

"And what are your names?" asked the doctor.

"Sophy and Tiny Clark," replied the elder one.

"So you are Tiny and this is Sophy?"

"No, it isn't; I'm Sophy and she's Tiny," was the indignant reply.

"Oh!" said the doctor.

For some minutes they drove on in silence as the rain pattered down; but the little girls soon commenced to talk in whispers.

"You ask him," said Tiny.

"Ask him yourself," said Sophy.

But a minute or two elapsed before they could muster up courage, the doctor meanwhile listening as he drove gravely on.

"Please, doctor," ventured Tiny at last, "what you got in your box?"

"Lots of things. Couldn't tell how many things I've got there."

Another pause. By-and-by—

"Are you Mrs. Jenkins's doctor?"

"Yes."

Another pause.

"Didn't you bring her a boy baby in a box?" "Hs—sh—sh—sh!" said Sophy, nudging her sister.

"I won't!"

"Yes," said the doctor. He remembered now that the Clarks had a large family of girls, and that Tiny was the youngest.

"You ask him now," Tiny whispered in Sophy's ear. But Sophy shook her wise little head and frowned upon her sister.

At last Tiny mustered up her courage again.

"Haven't you got another boy in your box?"

"I'm afraid not, Tiny," said the doctor sorrowfully, shaking his head. "I haven't got anything but girls."

"We don't want no more girls," spoke up Sophy this time.

"When you ketch another boy, will you bring him to our house?" pleaded Tiny, with a little quiver upon her lips.

"I'll think of it," said the doctor good-naturedly. Both children took the words in the light of a promise, and were happy again.

By this time they were opposite Mr. Clark's gateway, and, the rain being over, the doctor dropped the little chatterboxes by the roadside and drove on.

But if Winifred had not ridden with the doctor for the whole of the previous year, it was not from conscientious reasons on her part, but because he had not asked her. This little incident about the children made him view the matter in a different light; and, after thinking it over, he decided to invite her again, and that in the near future. It so happened that her summer holidays were again approaching, and he knew that she purposed taking a trip up the lakes about the date of his prospective visit to Toronto. Why not take the twenty-mile drive to the railway station together? So he proposed it when they next met.

"I shall be very glad," was her laughing response; "and we can have a good long talk—something we haven't had for a year."

"Yes, and you can christen my new top-buggy by honouring it in the first ride. I only took it out of the shop yesterday."

"Won't that be delightful!" she exclaimed. "I shall be quite proud of the compliment. Hugh will be glad too, for he is very busy with the horses just now, and it is difficult to spare them."

"I shall call for you at the house on my way, and if your grip is not a large one, I can easily stow it under the seat."

"Thank you so much. And what time do we require to start?"

"At eight o'clock sharp in the morning."

"Very well, doctor, I shall be ready."

The morning sun was bright, but the air cool, owing to a breeze from the east.

"I think we might have the top down," said the doctor, as they were about to start.

"It will be pleasanter for a while," said Miss Finlayson; "the air just now is cool and bracing."

The buggy was a handsome one, with elaborate gearing and glossy finish, shining like a mirror in the sunlight. The top was adjustable, just then coming into use, and capable of being drawn over the occupants like a hood, or placed at different angles backward until it assumed a horizontal position.

The horse was a high-stepping bay, and stood proudly in his newly-polished harness and resplendent rig.

"Quite a respectable turn-out, doctor," said Miss Finlayson as she took her seat.

"Yes, it will do," replied the doctor with unassumed gratification, for above all things he delighted in a good trap.

For several miles the country was very picturesque—part of the way along the bank of the river, then a gradual slope took them to the upland, and through the clearings, with fields of waving corn on either side ready for the cradles of the harvesters.

The two soon became absorbed in conversation as Charlie trotted briskly along the level, in and out between the pine stumps which here and there decorated the road.

"Are you fond of driving?" the doctor asked as they struck an unusually favourable stretch.

"Do you mean to hold the ribbons?" she questioned.

"Well, both that and riding."

"Either and both," was the laughing answer.

"Take them, then, if you like. We've a straight, level road for a mile at least."

"Thank you," and she handled the lines with skill and without fear.

"When you are such a good horsewoman, how is it that you and I have driven so little together?" he asked, watching her with admiration, and forgetting for the moment that he was treading on dangerous ground.

"Some questions are not easily answered," she replied, remembering whose was the fault. "But I am not the only girl who can drive. Miss Mathers is just as good, and so is Miss Roberts."

"But that is foreign to the point," said the doctor, with a laugh; "and, if one must judge by appearances, Mr. Pettigrew is likely to monopolise at least one of the young ladies' accomplishments in that line."

"On the same score of appearances," she said with an arch smile, "it would never do for the lady teacher of the Concession school to be monopolised."

"But you do not intend to teach for ever?"

"Perhaps not; but three years is not for ever."

"Pretty nearly, though, I must confess. Will you give me the lines, please? We are going down the long incline, and yonder is the creek."

"Thank you; my hands are getting a little tired. Your horse pulls so."

Charlie was swinging along at the same rapid pace, but Dr. Hartman, who had driven him for years, did not consider it necessary to hold him in.

The excitement of driving, together with the tenor of conversation, had heightened the glow on Winifred's cheeks. Her eye sparkled, her red lips were slightly open, and as the doctor glanced toward her he felt his heart give a quicker beat.

But his attention soon turned to the still steeper incline and the little pitch of the road downwards, as with slower speed they neared the bridge.

Suddenly snap went the axle of the off front wheel, the arm breaking sharply off inside the hub. With a bound Miss Finlayson sprang out over the wheel at her side as the other collapsed. Fortunately she sustained but little injury; but the doctor, having hold of the lines, was thrown violently out, and momentarily stunned as his head came in contact with the hard-packed gravel of the road. At the same moment the horse dashed madly with the dismembered buggy over the bridge.

Somewhat dazed, Winifred rose from the spot on which she fell and went over to the doctor's assistance. One side of his head was bleeding, and his face bruised. There was no one else in sight, so she ran down to the creek, and, wetting a couple of handkerchiefs, hastened back to wipe the blood from his face.

He immediately commenced to revive.

"Where am I?" he asked, but at once saw what had occurred.

"Thank heaven, you are not killed!" ejaculated Winifred, who found it difficult to steady her voice.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the doctor, "what a pretty cavalier I am to bring you out and spill you like this! Are you not hurt yourself, Miss Finlayson?"

"No," she said, notwithstanding her sore side—"a mere shake. You had better go down to the creek, if you can, and bathe your head. The horse did not run far; he is standing by the fence yonder among the bushes."

Hartman did as suggested, while she sat down on a log by the roadside to nurse her own pains. In a few minutes another buggy came rattling down the hill, driven by Dr. Betson, of Catersville.

"This is a pretty how-do-ye-do! What in thunder's happened?" he cried as he jumped out.

"My young lady friend and I are camping by the roadside," replied Dr. Hartman, between the successive mops he was giving to his head. "We are taking our ablutions one at a time."

"This is terrible," said the new-comer in genuine concern as he hastened down to him. "Let me see your head. There's a gash above the temple, but the rest won't amount to much. Sit down here while I put a couple of stitches in. You were fortunate to escape, miss," he said to Winifred, who was now washing her hands in the brook. "Are you not hurt?"

"My side pains a little, that is all."

While he was sewing his fellow-medico's head Winifred told of their intended drive to the station, ending in this disastrous result.

"Fortunately," said Dr. Betson, "my wife is going on that lake trip too. If not too much hurt by the fall, you could still go on with her."

"Thank you very much. But what about Dr. Hartman?" said Winifred.

"He can rest at my place for a day, and then go on to the city if he wants to. But I must first catch that horse."

This was an easy matter, for Charlie was already caught in the bushes. He was soon released and tied to a tree. Then Dr. Betson investigated the cause of the accident.

"That axle was rotten!" he exclaimed indignantly. "Where it snapped off the shoulder the metal is flawed, by George! all the way round. The wonder is that it went ten rods instead of ten miles. Pardon me if I express myself freely, but that new firm is a d——d fraud. This is the second buggy axle of theirs I have known to snap in the same place."

Miss Finlayson did not believe in swearing, but somehow she thought that Dr. Betson was justified, and felt relieved upon hearing his mild expletive.

Dr. Hartman by this time had his wounds dressed, and was beginning to ponder seriously over the best way of getting out of the present dilemma. The offer of Dr. Betson with regard to Miss Finlayson was a great relief.

"I cannot be too grateful to you, doctor," he said. "You just came in the nick of time to help us."

"Gratitude be d——d," exclaimed Betson, who was noted for his strong language when he felt in a particularly friendly mood. "I was just wanting a chance to punch somebody's head, when yours came in the way. Now I tell you what we can do. We'll leave your horse tied where he is. Then the three of us can drive over to Catersville, and I'll send over my blacksmith for the horse and rig. He can easily fix the thing up while you rest."

"We'll have to accept the offer of our good Samaritan," said Hartman to Winifred cheerily. "I hope I shall never require to pay him in kind."

"You might get a chance some day who knows?" said Betson, laconically. As he had a span of horses and a capacious buggy there was ample room for the three, and they were not long in driving to Catersville.

"Is this what they call being even?" Winifred asked with a smile, when she saw that Dr. Hartman was inclined to laugh at their disaster.

"No, indeed," he replied grimly. "Your name implies a lover of peace, and here I have been trying to lead you to slaughter."

"Neither of you has much to brag about," put in Dr. Betson, who thought they were referring to their comparative injuries; "perhaps the one who missed the bruises got the biggest shake. But I tell you, doctor, you ought to prosecute that Timberton firm for damages. It's a scandal to turn out axles like that of yours."

"I don't know about prosecuting," said Hartman, "but I shall write them a pretty sharp letter when I return, I assure you."

An hour later Miss Finlayson, who declared that she was entirely uninjured, started again in company with Mrs. Betson for the railway station. She would not go, however, until assured, both by Dr. Betson and his patient, that the latter would be able to resume his journey to Toronto by the evening train.

After she had gone, and while resting on the couch in Dr. Betson's office, Hartman pondered much over this unfortunate ride; and, while appreciating the fine lines of character which the incident had brought out in Winifred, he shuddered when he thought of what the result would have been, if the top of the buggy had been up instead of down, effectually

preventing the leap which insured her safety.

He felt, too, for his own peace of mind, that he was unwise to be with her at all. She was so unsuspecting of anything serious on his part that it lured him on, leading him, with every interview, deeper and deeper into the toils. Sometimes he felt tempted to wish that he had never known Robert Thornton. Then he would have had a free hand, fearless of any rival, and, without dread of the future, would joyfully have declared his love. But the next moment he would scorn the idea, his better nature asserting itself.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE GRASSHOPPER STORM.

Not many weeks later, at a point within a hundred miles of Yankton, in Southern Dakota, a very different scene was being enacted. It was ten o'clock in the forenoon, and the hot August sun was pouring down his rays from a clear sky, as a man, with dark moustache and sunburnt face, led a mustang to a tie-post at the settler's door. He wore a broad-brimmed straw hat, and his handsome beast was equipped with a Mexican saddle.

The house was a one-story frame, almost new, and situated on the top of a little knoll, from which the land sloped down in every direction, giving a wide prospect over the prairie whichever way one looked.

Near by was the barn, neat and tolerably large, and built of cotton-wood saplings. A good garden, containing an assortment of vegetables, surrounded the house; while the trim flower-bed in front, by its fragrance and beauty, gave a fair idea of the taste, as well as the thrift, of the inmates.

Further distant were waving cornfields, while away in the far south and east could be observed two or three other homesteads dotting the prairie. No woodland whatever could be seen, except along the course of a creek that meandered away toward the western horizon.

"Are you going before dinner?" Mrs. Thornton asked. Her strong face was still bright and cheerful, although her hair had grown whiter.

"Yes," said Robert. "I have finished cutting the barley. James and Cleve will get it tied and shocked all right, and I want to see Mr. Nathan particularly to-day."

"Wait a minute, and Ethel will get you a glass of milk and a roll. I'm afraid you are working too hard. You have been at it since before sunrise this morning."

"And what were you doing at that time, I would like to know?" queried Robert, with a laugh. "Did I not see you come out of the house with a milk-pail as I passed the barn with the cradle?"

"Oh! but woman's work is never done."

"And the early bird catches the worm."

"I suppose we are a pair, Robert, but we've need to be thankful. Things are much better than they might have been."

"I should think so. Here we are with two hundred acres, a house and a barn, such as they are, and everything paid for; at least, they will be as soon as the wheat is thrashed. It was your money that did it, mother. If it had not been for that thousand dollars, where would we have been?"

"The money helped, of course; but it was your industry and good judgment, Robert, that put us where we are. Look at your long winters in the lumber woods, too, every dollar you could spare going into stock. I shall never forget it," and the mother looked proudly at her son.

"Thank you, mother, but we all did our best. Even Cleve has been a help."

"Yes, it's astonishing how that harum-scarum lad has settled down to work. He's saved quite a bit out of his wages in the two years he has been here, and most of it, he tells me, he has sent home to his mother."

By this time Ethel, a tall, bright-eyed girl, had spread the lunch for her brother.

"Did Cleve tell you that he thinks of taking up the hundred-acre lot close by the bluff, two miles west of here?" said Robert.

"No, he has not mentioned it."

"Well, he was talking of it the other day. He says his mother doesn't need his help so much now, and he can go on working for us, while at the same time he can break up a fallow on his own lot each year to enable him to claim his

settler's rights."

"And finally settle down there?"

"I suppose that's his idea."

"Does that lot run down to the creek?" Ethel asked.

"Yes, I believe it does," said Robert, and he watched her retreating figure as she went to join her sister Alice at the churning.

"You've set your heart upon this new business," said his mother more seriously, as he was about to leave, "and I hope and pray it will be for the best. Still, it will be hard to have you away, and know that it is for good."

"That will not be for a couple of months yet, mother, and, when I do go, my purse shall be yours while you need it."

With good-bye to his mother, and a merry word for his sisters as he passed the milk-house, he hastened to his horse, and vaulting into the saddle was soon speeding with an easy lope along the prairie road.

The first two summers would have gone hard with the Thorntons but for the widow's available cash. Long before the end of that time it had all been consumed, spent in travel, implements, stock, building their first shanty, and providing for themselves and their beasts. It was by Robert's work in the lumber woods during the winter, however, that their stock had been increased and their new house built.

The present season, too, was a splendid one. Robert had broken up a large acreage, and the grain crops upon it were abundant, while prices promised to be good. He believed that with wise management the future could not fail to be prosperous. He had strained every nerve from their first arrival until now, in order to place the family in a position of assured prosperity, believing that for the future the farm could be managed successfully by James, when aided by his mother's counsel.

Now he was preparing to launch out for himself, in connection with a business that would engage his whole time, as well as take him away from home.

He felt that a new era was dawning upon his life as he leapt into the saddle that morning. The future was opening before him, and the bright dreams that for years he had cherished seemed possible of realisation. Winifred Finlayson had been his guiding star through the years of labour. Although he had asked for no promise, and no troth had been plighted, he always felt sure she would be true to him, and this belief nerved him to greater effort.

Somehow, whenever he thought of Winifred, he thought of Dr. Hartman too. What a noble fellow he was! How true to the best ideal of friendship! That the doctor was insensible to the charms of Winifred's personality he could not believe. Still, he knew from the tone of the letters from each, although the subject was never alluded to, that he was not the man to take advantage of the lover's absence. How far Winifred might have been influenced, if the doctor had pressed his attentions as a suitor, he would not allow himself to consider; but that Hartman had refrained, whatever his inclinations might be, filled him with joy, and made him love him all the more. How glad he was that he had made the doctor his confidant before leaving Linbrook. If he had not, possibly the result might have been different; for although he always believed Winifred cared for him, and he loved her with his whole heart, they had never accepted each other as lovers, nor been formally betrothed.

The sun was at the zenith when Robert reached the huge log-house of Thomas Nathan. It was at least a dozen miles from his own home. Mr. Nathan, a tall Kentuckian, was not only a cattle king, but a successful lumberman as well, and on his ranch were more than a thousand head of cattle roaming almost at will. While true to his vocation of ranching, he had built his house of logs, in deference to his larger business among the pineries.

His wife, a pretty and trim little lady from New England, was sitting in the porch, awaiting, with her two children, the arrival of her husband to his mid-day meal when Robert rode up.

"How do you do, Mr. Thornton?" she cried, as he leapt from the saddle. "The men are away to-day driving cattle to the station, but Mr. Nathan will be in immediately, and you are just in time for dinner."

"Thank you," was his response, as he threw the lasso over the tie-post. "I had lunch before starting, and am not at all

hungry. What a lovely garden! These melons are the finest I have seen, and the tomatoes are ripe. How do you manage to keep them so well during the hot weather?"

"We are close to the creek, you see, and the men water them every day, else we could not manage it. You must take dinner with us. May," she called to the maid in the summer kitchen, which stood apart from the house, "set a plate for Mr. Thornton."

The next minute Mr. Nathan came in from the barn, and greeted the young man cordially.

"Glad to see ye," he exclaimed. "I've been kalkilatin' on your comin' this mornin', for I wanted a free-hand for a talk before ye started east. Catherine, how about dinner? Is it near ready? We can talk while we're eatin'."

"Of course it is, Thomas. We are waiting for you."

"Just another minute while I run Thornton's horse in."

Returning almost within the time they all sat down.

"Tell ye what it is," said Mr. Nathan, as he served Robert with a huge piece of beef, "now's the best and only time to visit them timber limits. There are two of 'em near Midland and Penetang. I have the plan of the lots drawn out by the surveyor, and what I want you to do is to go over the ground right now. Everything is dry and the woods clean. You've had experience, and can form a fair estimate of the actual measurement of the timber. Find out how much clear stuff there is in each, and how much rough."

"How long will it take?" Robert asked.

"There's not more'n an hour's drive between the two lots," said Mr. Nathan, "and they might take three days apiece."

"Do you want me to go immediately?"

"Yes, within a day or two anyway, for I have to hand in my tender by September 1st at latest."

"Will day after to-morrow do?"

"That will be all right. Then, if I buy 'em, I'll want ye to start in by October 1st, to get everything ready for the winter's logging. I'm goin' to give ye full charge over the hull consarn. For I tell ye, lad, I've watched ye like a cat watchin' a mouse for two winters now; and what's more, I've larned to trust ye." And the big Kentuckian's face broadened out, and his eyes opened wide, as he beamed on the fast reddening face beside him.

"I'm proud of your confidence," said Robert with a shaky voice, for this was more than he expected. "I thank you from my heart, and will do my best."

"I know ye will," cried the Kentuckian, slapping Robert on the knee. "And ye'll need to. This is a new speculation; and, what's more, my own time will be fully occupied in the woods at Saginaw, and I'll have to leave it almost entirely in your hands. Of course," continued Mr. Nathan in a reassuring tone, "if I shouldn't buy these new timber limits after all—this is the first time that the Government of Upper Canada has offered 'em for sale—I'll have a post for ye anyhow. There's lots o' room in Michigan for a chap like you."

"It won't do to spoil Mr. Thornton by too much flattery," said Mrs. Nathan with a smile.

"Not much danger, I reckon," said the Kentuckian, with a broad laugh.

"I hope not," commented Robert, every nerve in his body quivering with suppressed excitement. "But where do you think would be the best centre of operation, if you do purchase?"

"It would likely be Penetang. It's a good shipping-port and a little the nearest; but most of your time, of course, durin' winter would be in the woods."

"See, pa! there's a storm coming!" cried out Mr. Nathan's youngest son; and looking out through the open door to the south, they saw a dark brown, heavy-looking cloud, low down in the heavens, sweeping toward them.

"By the heavens! that's grasshoppers, or my name's not Thomas Nathan!" screamed the Kentuckian, springing from the table, and hurrying to the door. "Shet all the doors and windows, and kiver the garden stuff if you can."

At the same moment he rushed off to close up the doors of the barn and stables. Mrs. Nathan and the rest of the family, aided by Robert, although none of them had seen a similar catastrophe before, did as directed. They got pans and dishes, as well as old clothes and sacks, anything that was available, to cover up the growing vegetables, but almost in vain. Their efforts proved utterly useless, save for the few large metallic and pottery utensils with which they covered smaller plants, and which the omnivorous insects could not devour.

Already the grasshoppers were coming down in millions. The air was full of them; and almost in a moment, even before Mr. Nathan could return from the barn, the ground and every green thing was covered with them. They were piled up, one or two inches thick, actually beneath their feet; and the sun, a couple of minutes before in a clear sky, was now darkened until they could scarcely see it. The leaves and small twigs of Mr. Nathan's young orchard were fiercely mown down, while every green thing was riddled and shrivelled up before the onslaught.

Words could hardly picture the wholesale devastation. Even the bags and sheets which had been thrown over the cabbages and tomatoes to protect them were riddled in a few minutes like a sieve; while the clothes on the backs of the astounded spectators did not escape perforation. The very stalks of corn, standing seven feet high in their luxuriant growth, were eaten down till scarcely the root fibres were left in the little indentation, where, a quarter of an hour before, the crop was standing. It was, to all intents and purposes, a veritable plague, like that of the "locusts of Egypt."

In an hour's time all was over. The earth had been literally garnished and then swept. The grasshoppers had done their work, and were again winging their way in a northerly direction. The children and Mrs. Nathan had early gone inside, but Robert and Mr. Nathan had remained without, brandishing off the insects, but watching the progress of the devastation.

"This beats creation!" exclaimed Mr. Nathan, as he gazed in amazement at the appalling ravages which stretched out in every direction. "In all my born days, I never seen as bad a locust storm as this, and I've seen two or three. Don't know but I'll sell my place for a mortgage, and take it out in trade. Everything's clean gone except what's already in the barn, and that's only enough for the horses. Reckon we'll dig holes to put the cattle in, and let 'em hybernate for the winter."

"It's something terrible," said Robert, thinking of their own place twelve miles away. "If it's all over like this, it means utter ruin to the people."

"Of course it does, but it isn't," said Mr. Nathan paradoxically. "These pestiferous critters most generally run in streaks, always lighting thickest where the spots is greenest. Mrs. Nathan's garden was the purtiest in the hull section. Goodness gracious! it's all turned into vanity and vexation of spirit. Wall! there's nothing like a change sometimes. It helps to keep peoples' heads level."

"I wonder if our farm escaped?" queried Robert, looking anxiously westward. "I hope they haven't stretched out that far."

"Reckon you're all right. When there's a wind they go pretty nearly straight with it. This time they've gone about due north. Wish they'd wind up with the pole and stay there. But there's lots of poor fellows round here will be mighty sufferers. I can stand it, but I know some who can't. If the good Lord 'ud only promise never to let the durned things come back again, I wouldn't mind divi-ing up a little."

"You'll do that anyway, Mr. Nathan," exclaimed Robert, who could not help smiling at the Cattle King's way of putting things. And then coming directly to his own interest in the catastrophe, "Do you often have trouble with the grasshoppers? I never saw them thick enough to do damage before."

"Not like this," was the answer. "They may bother a little for a year or two, then they are clean gone for a while. You might live twenty years in Dakota, and never have a show like this again. Wall! there's no use grumblin'. Come in, and we'll finish dinner if there's anything fit to eat."

"Thanks, I have had all I want; and after this I would like to go straight home. Is there anything more about the business that I ought to know?"

There was some further conversation as to detail, and then Robert jumped into his saddle again and rapidly rode away. For several miles along the prairie road the vegetation was completely destroyed. Yet, strange to say, the grasshoppers,

which two hours before were nowhere visible, had during that period arrived, done all the mischief that was possible, and winging their way were again out of sight.

Soon he came to the dividing line, not very abrupt, but sufficiently marked to be easily noted. A long and slightly-elevated ridge stretched away to the north, and upon it the ravages were less. The wind, too, blowing from the south-east, had protected the region beyond. Here Robert breathed with relief.

"Thank heaven!" he exclaimed aloud, "we are safe."

And slackening his speed, he finished the home journey more leisurely, his thoughts being full of the escape of to-day and his own immediate plans for the future.

CHAPTER XX.

THE RETURN JOURNEY.

A couple of days later Robert started for Yankton, *en route* for Chicago. James drove him over, and they left the house before daylight for the sixty-mile drive. The mother and sisters bade the young men good-bye and watched them step into the buggy. Cleve, too, was standing near.

Mrs. Thornton's eyes were full of tears—not because Robert's absence was going to be long; he expected to be back in two weeks—but it was the commencement of the first great break, and her woman's heart was filled with passion for her first-born, as he entered the great divide.

Robert knew it, and in strong sympathy he felt a responsive thrill.

"This time I will soon be home again," he said, as he pressed his lips to hers. "And remember, mother, the cars fly quickly, and I shall never be long away."

"It's all right, Robert. I knew it was coming," she said, mastering her emotion. "But it's one of the things one can never be ready for. Still I'll get used to it. Women all do."

"They are not all like you, mother. The bravest are the tenderest."

"We'll look after mother," said Ethel, as she kissed his cheek.

"Of course we will," echoed Alice.

"And I'll work harder than ever," said Cleve. "Jim and me'll see things is done just as they ought to be."

"That's good encouragement all round," cried Robert, forcing a smile. "James will be back to-morrow. Good-bye!" And away they drove.

"I am glad you will have Cleve with you," said Robert later on to his brother. "He is a steady fellow now, and a good worker. The only trouble is you may find him a little inclined to be bossy."

"I don't think there's much fear on that score," replied James, who was now a strong, strapping fellow in his nineteenth year. "I could lick him, for that matter, if it came to a pinch."

"I hope there'll never be any need for such strong measures," observed Robert questioningly, as he glanced over muscular proportions already as big as his own.

"Nor there won't," was the emphatic answer. "I just referred to what possibly might happen. I had a talk with him yesterday, and he's all right. He's bound to work hard, for he wants that lot the worst way; and what's more, to my surprise he's getting concerned about his education. He proposed that if we did everything up plumb by New Year's, he'd like to go to school for a couple of months, working nights and mornings. The new school will be opened by then, and it's only three miles away."

"What's got into the lad's head anyway?" said Robert reflectively.

"Why, don't you see?" echoed James, "that he's getting a little bit sweet on Ethel, and she won't give him any encouragement. Cleve thinks it's because he hasn't any education."

"But she's only a child."

"Only a child, eh!—she's seventeen."

"'Pon my word she is. But the thing's absurd."

"I don't know about that," said James. "Cleve says his mother is an educated woman, and the only matter with him when he went to school was that he was lazy. He's got over that, and I tell you he's smart."

"Well, I'm very glad you mentioned it, James," said Robert soberly. "You will be the man of the household now. You must keep your eyes open, and always be master of the situation."

"That I will," replied the youth emphatically.

"And always remember to tell me everything. While mother needs money, too, she shall have it."

"You may depend upon me," was James's response; and they drove on for a while in silence.

Their road lay in a south-eastern direction—a sixty-mile drive—past the Swan Lake and along a little tributary of the Missouri River. The day was hot, and they rested for a couple of hours at noon at a wayside tavern. Then they pushed on, arriving at Yankton before the sun was down.

"We'll have time to put up the horse, and get supper before my train leaves," said Robert.

"Yes, and have a little more talk while we wait at the station," responded James, who had been consulting the St. Paul Railroad Guide.

"Will you go to Penetang straight?" he asked later, as they walked up and down the little platform at the station.

"Certainly," said Robert. "Mr. Nathan pays my expenses; and my first duty will be to obtain all the information that I can about the timber limits, and forward it to him. Then, if I have time, I will visit old Linbrook again."

"If?" said James, with a questioning smile.

"Well, without the 'if' if you like."

"I thought so. You two have not been corresponding for more than two years for nothing," said James.

"But there is nothing positive."

"Do you mean to say that you and Winifred Finlayson are not engaged?"

"I do, most emphatically."

"Well, I'd bet my bottom dollar if you are not now, you never will be," said James, who like most youths felt well-informed on such subjects.

Robert smiled as he asked:

"What makes you think so?"

"I don't know, but it seems to me that a girl wouldn't correspond with a fellow for so long without getting engaged to him, unless she was in love with some other fellow at the same time."

"You have had such a large personal experience that your judgment must be infallible," exclaimed Robert with a laugh.

"Infallible or not, I think it reasonable—don't you?"

"That's a point I'm not prepared to answer."

"I thought not," said James. "But how do you know that Hartman is not getting in his innings, while you are away out west?"

"What made you think of him?" Robert was astonished at the insight manifested by James on a subject they had never mutually discussed before, although occasionally he had been chaffed a little upon it.

"Oh, the boys have their eyes open, and two or three of us used to talk about Hartman before we left Linbrook."

"Well, there's nothing in that at all events," said Robert.

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure."

Just then the train arrived at the station. Bidding each other good-bye, Robert stepped on board the car, and James watched the fading light from the platform, as it gradually disappeared in the distance.

It was almost noon next day when Robert reached Chicago. Here he had to change cars, and wait for several hours for the delayed express. Even in those days, years before the great fire, Chicago was known as the rising metropolis of the west, and Robert felt gratified at the opportunity which the brief interval gave him of obtaining another glimpse of the city.

His curiosity almost lost him his expected seat; for on boarding the east-bound train, which had arrived and was ready to start when he returned, every one was occupied, and many passengers were standing. On passing through one of the cars, however, he noticed a stout, red-faced gentleman occupying a seat by himself.

"Pon my word," he mentally ejaculated. "That's Mr. Scott, of the Hamilton firm; I wonder if he'll know me? Hardly likely, though; I never saw him but twice, and then I was a boy. Excuse me, please," he continued aloud, as he lifted down Mr. Scott's valise, "this is the only vacant seat I can find."

"You're welcome to it," was the answer, but the look of interrogation was somewhat bleared. He had been drinking a little and failed to recognise the young man. After a while, however, he seemed inclined to be talkative, and Robert decided to obtain what information he could regarding Pettigrew and his business, without revealing his own identity.

"No, I'm not a Yankee. I'm from Canada," came in answer to a general question about travel. "My home's in Hamilton. Just returning from a trip out west."

"And a pretty city Hamilton is," said Robert. "I remember being there once. It lies at the foot of the mountain, does it not?"

"Yes. It's one of the best towns in Canada; but the mountain's no mountain at all. Just a ridge back from the lake, and the city's built at its foot."

"Is it a good business place?" Robert asked. "I have heard that it has nearly as many wholesale houses as Toronto."

"It has pretty nearly. My partner and I have one. We are in the grocery trade."

"You will know nearly all the retail men in the Province then?"

"I guess so. Are you from Canada?"

"Not recently. I live in the western states. I'm going as far as Detroit now, and expect to return in a week or two."

"A lot of our young men cross the line, expecting to better their fortunes; but they don't always do it," observed Mr. Scott, turning his red eyes upon Robert.

"I know that. Still, the majority who go west succeed, while a good many who stay at home don't," replied Robert returning the gaze.

"Still there are big chances in Canada when a man knows how to take 'em," said Mr. Scott, nodding his head confidentially. "I know a young man who started as a clerk in a country store fifteen years ago. He is now carrying on a first-class business in his own name in the same place. He's piling up money already, and owns the whole shooting match."

"Possibly he had other money beside his own to help him," suggested Robert.

"Not a cent. He worked on a salary for ten or twelve years. Then something happened to the man he worked for. I think he was drowned or something; but, anyhow, the business had all gone to pot, and had to be wound up. Fortunately, the clerk was a saving fellow. He'd put away a lot of money, and bought over the business."

Robert assented by a nod, and then looked out of the window. This unwitting allusion to the death of his father put a damper for the moment upon his desire to continue the subject. The newsboy appeared, and, securing a daily paper, conversation for a time ceased.

Later in the day Mr. Scott must have refreshed himself with further libations, for his face became even redder, while his tongue wagged more freely. Robert, however, did not forsake his seat, and by-and-by he returned to the old subject of discussion.

"The career of the young man you spoke of a while ago," he said at last, "reminds me of an acquaintance of mine whom I used to know somewhat, but I have not seen him for years. His name was Pettigrew."

"Singular!" said Mr. Scott, turning round and looking Robert in the face, while he again nodded his head. "That's the very man I was speaking of. How the deuce did you come to know him?"

"That's not very remarkable," Robert exclaimed, laughing. "Men knocking up and down the world are constantly making acquaintances, and rubbing against someone or other."

"That's true enough," was the rejoinder. "I never travel anywhere but what I meet someone I know, or somebody that knows somebody else that I know. It's a little world we're living in, after all," and, tossing his head back, he laughed heartily.

"But this man Pettigrew," said Robert, following up the scent, after throwing Mr. Scott off the track. "Where is he living now?"

"Just where he made his money—in a little village called Linbrook."

"And doing a big business too, you say."

"I judge so from his orders—knows what he's about—bound to make money. So he's a friend of yours, eh?"

"I used to know him, but that's long ago, and of course I feel interested in knowing how he is doing."

"Natural! A fellow feeling, I suppose! And what's your name. You haven't mentioned it since we got on at Chicago. My name is Scott."

"Roberts, from the other side of the Dubuque," was the answer. His mother's name was Roberts, and he had been named after her.

"Well, Mr. Roberts," he said, looking fixedly with his bleared eyes over his red nose, "your friend Pettigrew understands pretty sharp practice. In ten years he saved five thousand dollars—money enough to buy the business and fill up his stock—but how in thunder he did it out of his salary beats me. If Thornton had known what I know—— Well, as a friend give him a wink, or, by the Lord, he'll be cornered yet some day."

Further efforts at gathering information proved useless. The effects of the liquor were passing off, and Mr. Scott seemed to realise that possibly he had said too much. When they reached Detroit the two men parted.

Robert made what arrangements were necessary before continuing his journey, and then, with all the speed possible, proceeded on his timber mission. On arriving at Penetang everything was favourable to the pursuit of his object, and, as long as necessary, he devoted his undivided attention to the work entrusted to him by Mr. Nathan.

Ten days later, having accomplished all he could, he hastened on, *viâ* Catersville, for Linbrook.

"What! is this Robert Thornton?" exclaimed Mr. Dibsedale, the Catersville barrister, as he grasped him by the hand in surprise. "How well you look, but so changed! If I had met you on the street I'm sure I shouldn't have known you."

"Still the same," said Robert, warmly returning the grasp.

"I guess the western prairie-life agrees with you—more muscle, lots of bronze, moustache, too, all since you left. Come right in. Welcome back to the old county!"

"Thank you. I'm glad to get back, even if it is for a short time."

"When did you come?"

"Just now, by stage from the railroad."

"You've not been to Linbrook, then?"

"No; I am on the way, but there's something I want to talk to you about, so I came here first."

"Well, if it's anything important, you struck me at the right time. Office hours are over, the clerk has gone home, and we can talk without interruption." Perhaps he had a suspicion.

Mr. Dibsdale had been an old friend of his father, having frequently done legal work for him; and, believing the lawyer to be both trustworthy and confidential, Robert, after much thought, had decided to refer the matter of his conversation with Mr. Scott to his judgment.

He did not intend to throw good money after bad, but if there was a probability of being able to force Pettigrew to make restitution of fraudulently obtained funds to his mother, he certainly felt justified in making the effort.

Robert then entered somewhat minutely into his old misgivings about Pettigrew, relating the incident of his visit to Hamilton at the time the creditors from that city were pressing for settlement, and the special effort that his father and he had made on the same night to lengthen the day of grace. This subject, he said, had long been a closed book, and he would not have opened it again but for the conversation he so recently had with the garrulous Mr. Scott. This, too, he related minutely, as he watched the expression upon the lawyer's face.

"I always suspected there was something crooked about that man," said Mr. Dibsdale, as he gravely returned his look, while he gently stroked his shaved chin. "These plausible, slippery people are rarely genuine. But about that trip to Hamilton; did you at any time have reason to suspect that he came to a definite understanding with your creditors there?"

"Not till after father's death. On account of my own illness, Pettigrew had full charge of the business then; and, inside of a week, he handed a letter to my mother from Grantham and Scott, requesting that, for the time being, Pettigrew should have the entire control."

"Still, you have nothing positive."

"No. I never in my life had much to do with the store. Father was reticent about business matters, and rarely made a confidant of me until towards the last. Then he sometimes spoke of a discrepancy between stock-in-trade and cash receipts that he could not understand."

"What salary did Pettigrew receive?"

"For the first two or three years, three hundred dollars, then four hundred for a while, and for the last three years it was raised to five hundred dollars per annum."

"Very good for a country village; but if he never had anything except his salary, I don't see how he could realise as much cash as Mr. Scott said he had when he took over the business. Was he a speculator in any way?"

"Not to my knowledge. He may have lent money on notes at a high rate of interest; but I always understood that he put his spare cash into the banks. The Bank of Montreal was his favourite."

"Had he any accomplice or particular friend that you know of?"

"Now you mention it, although he never seemed to have any special male friend in the village, there was a man in your own town here who visited him sometimes. He was a real estate agent, named Peter Jenkins. I have several times on a Sunday seen them drive out together."

"Peter Jenkins! That's peculiar. He's here now, a regular note-shaver. He'll fleece the last dollar out of any man if he has the chance."

"This is news to me. Birds of a feather! Still, all I have said about Pettigrew is in the way of suspicion."

"The whole thing looks suspicious. But if Pettigrew screwed his personal expenses down to a minimum from the first, and then let out his money at extortionate rates, he could possibly have saved the five thousand without direct peculation."

"Of course, if you consider that probable, it settles the case, and I will think no more about it," said Robert.

"Well," said the lawyer, again sedulously stroking his chin, "without you have something more definite than you have been able to adduce, I must say you have no case for an action for fraud, although you certainly have ground for strong suspicions."

"It was to obtain your opinion that I came to you," said Robert. "I have neither the time nor the money to contest the case. My main thought was, that if positive evidence could be obtained and presented to him, he might be forced, in his own interest, to pay back to my mother some of the money that he fraudulently obtained from my father. It is for her sake alone that I would act in the matter."

For a few minutes Mr. Dibsedale sat in silent thought.

"How long are you going to remain here?" he asked at last.

"Not more than three or four days at the outside. I am due at Yankton this day week."

"Were you recognised by any one while coming to my office?"

"No. I was surprised to see no one whom I knew."

"Did you introduce yourself to any one?"

"No."

"That's fortunate. An idea has occurred to me by which we may perhaps gain something. I know Peter Jenkins very well; and if you can get out of town to-night without being recognised, I may possibly twist some definite information from him. Once rouse his suspicions, however, and he will be as silent as a clam."

"I can manage that by keeping out of sight until dark. I intended to drive over to Linbrook, but can walk instead. Then there'll be no danger."

"A good idea," exclaimed Mr. Dibsedale. "A twelve-mile walk will do a young fellow like you no harm. You can stay in my office here until it is safe to leave. But you must be hungry. Don't know but I'll bring you a bite myself. It's a good while since I had the honour of being head waiter and jailor combined."

"I'm giving you no end of trouble," said Robert with a smile.

"Not at all. Anything to break the monotony of a quiet life. But you must lock yourself in. I'll be back in an hour, and by that time will have thought out my plan."

At the specified time he returned, loaded down with an abundant lunch thrust into his capacious pockets. After thanking him for his kindness, Robert asked about the development of his scheme.

"It has crystallised down to this," was the answer. "I will make what investigation I find possible between now and to-morrow noon, and if I find it worth the candle, I'll drive down to Linbrook in the afternoon and meet you at the 'Maple-Leaf' Hotel at, say, three o'clock. How will that suit?"

"Admirably," was Robert's response.

"Another thing," said the lawyer, "if anything substantial comes out of this I shall expect to be remunerated, for, like other men, I live upon what I earn; but if nothing accrues, the fee will be nothing, and the little trouble it gives me will be for the sake of auld lang syne. One thing more, if I secure tangible evidence that your views are correct, I will act, not otherwise."

Half an hour later the short twilight of the summer day was over, and Robert, watching his opportunity, slipped out of the lawyer's office and walked leisurely along the quiet street. Although he met several people, it was too dark for them to observe him closely, and he was soon on the outskirts of the little town. Then he hastened his speed as he struck the Concession line. For a while it was a solitary walk through the long stretch of woods, but he liked it. The sky was clear, and the young moon visible through the tree-tops. Now and then a whip-poor-will would sweep across the road, and lighting in obscurity fill the air with his mournful triologue. Birds were still catching insects on the wing, and owls hooting in the distance among the trees.

Although he walked rapidly in the direction of Linbrook, Robert was too well accustomed to life in the settlements to expect to go the whole way on foot. Someone he felt sure would overtake him and offer him a ride, which, as one of the customs of the country, it was as honourable to accept as to offer.

For a long time, however, there was no sound of approaching wheels, and he was beginning to think that his old luck in walking had forsaken him, when he heard the rapid tramp of horses' feet and the rattle of a light waggon coming up in the rear. By this time he was miles away from Catersville. There could be little danger now of identification from that quarter, so he was prepared to accept any reasonable offer for a lift on the way that might present itself.

As he emerged from the long wood into an open clearing the waggon overtook him; he stepped aside from the beaten path in order to clear the way, and at once the man pulled up his horses and offered him a ride.



CHAPTER XXI.

THE HOME CIRCLE.

"Hello, Bob! Have a ride?" called out the driver, with a turn of his head and a glance at the pedestrian.

"Don't mind if I do," was Robert's reply, while the question flashed through his mind. Was he recognised and nicknamed, or was the man merely applying a term commonly bestowed on young strangers?

"Lots of room here," was the next greeting from the high-perched seat. The two men looked at each other keenly, as Robert mounted and sat down by the driver.

"What!" exclaimed Robert, extending his hand, "is this Hugh Finlayson?"

"And Robert Thornton, too! Excuse my impudence! Well, I'm glad to see you! But who would expect to find you trudging along the road at this time of night, and from Catersville? We were looking for you, but thought it would be by Brantford."

Robert's explanation was non-committal and not very definite. Hugh had been delayed at the mill waiting for his grist.

"One thing certain," he continued, "you must come straight home with me and stay for the night."

To this Robert readily assented. In fact, the prospect of remaining for the night under the roof which habitually sheltered Winifred filled him with a feeling of intense pleasure. It was true that she knew he was coming, and had invited him to their house. But she did not know of the time. Robert's stay at the timber limits had been longer than he expected, and the postal system in those days was so imperfect in the rural sections that it was impossible for him to inform her of the exact period of his arrival.

Even after reaching Catersville, the conversation with Mr. Dibsdale had upset his immediate plans. His first idea had been to get quickly through his dealings with the lawyer, and then drive over to the Finlaysons, arriving there before dark. But when he found he must remain until night in the village and then walk, he had concluded to push through to Linbrook, and postpone his visit to Winifred until the next day.

This happy encounter with Hugh, however, reversed his decision.

"You saved me from a long walk," said Robert; "there are not many driving to-night."

"But why did you not hire a livery and drive over?" asked the younger man.

"To tell the truth, Hugh, I wanted to remain unknown and if I had gone to a livery stable there was the possibility of recognition."

"That's a funny reason. You've nothing to be ashamed of that I ever heard of," said Hugh quickly.

"I know I haven't, nor that anyone else ever heard of either. Still I had a special reason for it. I am pressing an investigation of a certain matter, which recognition in Catersville might seriously retard or even prevent. Now I am four miles away, and feel quite safe."

"It was a lucky thing that my grist wasn't ready after all," said Hugh.

"It saved me a twelve-mile tramp."

"Our place is only six," was the comment.

"Yes, I call it the half-way house between the two places, but I intended to walk through to Linbrook and visit you all to-morrow. How is Winifred? It seems ages since I saw any of you."

"She's all right. Her school's bigger than ever this year, but she takes lots of exercise and stands it well."

"One would think teaching and walking to and from school would be enough exercise for any one," said Robert.

"You'd think so; but after mother had typhoid fever last year, Dr. Hartman advised Winifred to use Indian clubs for a quarter of an hour every morning to strengthen her, and she has used them ever since."

"And no doubt derived benefit from the exercise?"

"She says she has. The weak spells that used to bother her before then are all gone now."

"That's good news," said Robert. She had not mentioned it to him in her letters. "Have things changed much in the village?" he asked.

"Not a great deal, but there are some new houses. Mr. Cartright has built a very handsome one on the hill, and Dr. Hartman has a new one of his own now."

Robert started a little, though it was too dark for Hugh to observe it. The doctor in writing had said that he was thinking of building, but had not entered into particulars, and it was a week now since he had heard from him.

Why did Robert feel that commotion at his heart? Should not the prosperity of his friend be a matter of rejoicing? Why should the simple fact that the doctor had built himself a house affect him? Would not any sane man do the same thing, if he was able, and intended living permanently in the one place?

But somehow Robert had never looked upon Dr. Hartman as a permanent resident of Linbrook. This was but a stepping-stone to greater things. He was not a pebble on the beach; but a boulder to fill up a larger gap, a distinctive place, a niche in the wider temple of the outer world.

In some way he had always looked upon Hartman as a bigger man than the ordinary, and when it was announced by Hugh that he had built a house for himself to dwell in, it came in the way of a shock—as one of the incompatibles.

And what could it mean? Was he going to keep bachelor's hall there? or had he picked out a maiden to be his wife? How was it that it had never come to his ears? Why had not even Winifred in her letters said a word to him about the doctor or his plans? The whole thing seemed to be an enigma that needed explanation; and yet, while he had the opportunity, he almost shrank from asking for it. But he could lead the way. What maiden could it possibly be?

"And where has Dr. Hartman built his house?" he asked after a pause.

"On the square beneath the elms. They say it's the best site in the village for a doctor."

"I suppose he is a busy man."

"I should say so. They come for him from all over, and he has very long drives—sometimes even into the next county."

"Is he in the house yet?"

"Just moving in now; and they say Miss Trowther is going to keep house for him."

"That is until he gets a wife, I suppose," ventured Robert.

"I guess he's not of the marrying kind. They say he doesn't pay attention to anybody. You never see him with a girl. Perhaps he's too busy, and hasn't time."

"And what about Pettigrew? Does he still hold forth on the old stand?"

"The same old place; but he's fixed it up a lot. He does a rattling business too."

"He still lives with his mother, I suppose."

"No. She died six months ago, and he's dressed in black and has worn heavy crape ever since."

"Is not that appropriate?" Robert asked.

"Perhaps it is. But he puts on too long a face. People don't think it's genuine. Still, he's a good business man and does a big trade."

"Did he not pay a good deal of attention to Miss Mathers in the old days?"

"Yes, I suppose so," returned Hugh with a laugh. "Folks say she's a kind of reserve for him, if he can't do any better."

"Does he try very hard?" Robert asked with a glance at Hugh's face, but it was too dark to see it distinctly.

"Perhaps he does, in spells," replied Hugh, giving his off horse a touch with the whip. "We are pretty near home now. There'll be a big surprise, I tell you, when they see you drive up with me."

And while that drive was progressing, the home picture at the Finlayson residence was worthy of notice—Miss Finlayson reading aloud by a bright light in their pretty sitting-room—her mother assiduously knitting socks, as was her wont when the day's work was done—and her father resting comfortably in his easy chair. Suddenly a knock at the door attracted their attention. Mr. Finlayson rose and opened it.

"I have been out to Catersville on business," said Mr. Pettigrew, for it was he, "and thought I would run in for a few minutes on the way home. I often think of Mrs. Finlayson. It's just a year since she was so ill, I believe. Is she quite well now? That's good! So glad to hear it. But we all have to go some time. My poor mother—it's only six months since she died."

And the man heaved a sigh as he hung up his heavily-craped hat on the wall.

"Come in, glad to see you," said Mr. Finlayson, as he showed him into the lighted room. "Is your horse all right?"

"Yes, thank you. I tied him at the gate."

Coming forward he shook hands with Mrs. Finlayson and her daughter. But Pettigrew, though sharp at a bargain, was conceitedly blind to the ways of women. Although under one pretext or another he had for years made periodical visits to Winifred, he still failed to see what slow progress he was making. He attributed her reserve to diffidence, and each time, on leaving, blamed himself for not being more out-spoken. Still in another sense his little keen grey eyes had all along been observant. So far as he could see, she was practically without suitors. The little talk he had heard about Dr. Hartman had vanished away in thin air, for he never saw them together; and the doctor had not been a near neighbour of his for so long a time without Pettigrew feeling pretty certain of his movements. Then the old idea that Robert Thornton was the favoured man was likewise a myth—distance did not lend enchantment to the view in this case—for not a single letter had passed through the post-office between them since Robert had gone to Yankton. And of course his was the only post-office! He never dreamed that from the first they had chosen another one!

Pettigrew was a man who put a monetary value upon everything; and, like most men who pursue a narrow, sordid groove, he judged the rest of mankind to be guided by similar motives as himself. Although plausible in manner and possessed of a certain amount of *savoir faire*, he yet believed that the end justified the means, and with a craving desire for popularity made a constant effort to impress others with the fact of his success in life. Then the judicious sadness of countenance, which he often assumed in memory of the dear departed, was another card worth playing—and poor Mr. Pettigrew had many sympathisers.

No doubt more than one of the young lady visitors at the village store would willingly have given tangible evidence of her appreciation of his worth, and of her sympathy in his distress, if he had desired it. But Pettigrew was too astute to be captured, and accepted the little scraps of comfort, as they were tendered over the counter from all and sundry, with a thankful heart.

On this occasion, however, he had arrived at the conclusion that more decisive action must be taken, and that, without further delay, he would make the most of his visit.

Winifred laid her book on the table as Pettigrew seated himself.

"Do not let me stop your reading," he said; "I heard your voice as I came to the door. Let me be one of your listeners, please?"

"That will never do," said Winifred. "It is rather a dry subject anyway—the story of the Jesuits in the Georgian Bay region in the early days."

"You are a diligent student, Miss Finlayson, to teach all day long—and then study all night as well," he said in an

approving tone.

"Don't imagine that I study much out of school, Mr. Pettigrew," she replied with a smile. "It is never more than may be required for the lessons of the next day."

"Why such a recluse then?" he pleaded. "You should pity your friends and go out more. I am sorry to say I scarcely ever see you."

"You surprise me," she replied. "I go down to the store as often as usual. Then I see you at church. Something new for you. I am glad you attend so regularly. It's a good sign, Mr. Pettigrew."

"Ah yes! since my mother died, perhaps I do. Things with me have been so different since then. I fear I was getting too worldly-minded—too much engrossed in business. It doesn't do for a man to let secular things occupy all his thoughts."

"I suppose you are getting rich fast," said Mr. Finlayson.

"Not that, sir, exactly; but doing fairly well. I have a large transaction in wheat on just now, which will net me a couple of thousand. But this is the exception, of course. It is only occasionally a business man can strike a legitimate deal like that. You must be ready when the chance comes; and it isn't every man has the nerve to tackle it when it does."

"But what of the risk?" said Mr. Finlayson.

"There isn't much, if a man knows anything. The horse jockey's motto, 'Keep your eye skinned and your hand ready,' is a good one for the merchant to remember."

"Speaking of your business, Mr. Pettigrew," said Winifred, turning her face towards him, "reminds me of the case of poor Mrs. Halsted. The children were talking of it at school to-day. Her best cow died last week, and they say you are pressing her for her bill. I thought perhaps you did not know of her misfortune."

"Ahem!" said Pettigrew, moving uneasily. "Did she lose a cow? That's too bad! How did it happen, Miss Finlayson? Do you know?" he asked to gain time.

"They say the cow was lost in the Big Swamp after the heavy rain. They hunted for her for days. Then the neighbours turned out and at last found her almost buried in the mire."

"I'm sorry for Mrs. Halsted," said Pettigrew; "but about her bill—she belongs to that class of people who always require pressure to make them settle. I've arrived at the conclusion that they almost like it; for, no matter how you press them, the moment they get the old bill off their hands, they at once start to pile up another one."

"But is not that from actual necessity?" Winifred asked.

"Perhaps; but they usually buy more than they need."

"I suppose they lack the right kind of thrift," observed Winifred in a low, quiet tone. "But this is an unusual case. From all I hear, the woman is honest and industrious, and has a large family of children to keep. So I hope you won't press her. A subscription is being taken up to buy her another cow, and in time I believe she will be able to pay."

"She is fortunate in having so valiant a champion," said Pettigrew with a shrug, "and I suppose I shall have to promise, though it's against the rule. I confess I find it a good policy to threaten sometimes, though I rarely sue."

"Thank you for the promise," said Winifred, rewarding him with a grateful smile. "I am sure the poor woman will rejoice."

Perhaps Pettigrew's heart beat more vigorously for a few moments against the spare ribs of his chest, as he caught the look on the wing. But it was not for long. Voices were heard outside, and the door opened, admitting Hugh, who had grown into a tall and vigorous youth, together with the stranger whom he had picked up on the road home.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE DECLARATION.

"Oh, Robert Thornton!" exclaimed Winifred, who recognised him at once; and, startled out of her accustomed reserve, she rushed forward to grasp him by the hand, her face glowing with colour.

"And Winifred." He uttered the words as they looked into each other's eyes. Years had passed since the last opportunity, and that look told unutterable things.

Mr. and Mrs. Finlayson were on their feet at once to greet him.

"Most welcome," exclaimed the former, shaking him heartily by the hand.

"It is like old times to see you again," said Mrs. Finlayson. "And what a man you've grown in three years. Your mother and sisters, are they well?"

"Thank you, they are. Mother specially sent kindest messages to you."

"How did Hugh succeed in finding you?" Winifred asked.

"By overtaking me on the road. I had concluded to walk instead of obtaining a livery rig," said Robert.

"Mr. Pettigrew has just driven from Catersville too," said Mr. Finlayson.

"Is it possible?" rejoined Robert, slightly startled by the announcement. He had not noticed until this moment that he was seated at the other side of the room. "He must have left before I did, for I saw no one on the Street whom I knew."

Pettigrew rose and advanced, evidently with the intention of shaking hands. But Thornton, with a simple "How do you do?" avoided the cordiality.

"I've had no tea," said Hugh, "and I doubt if Robert has either."

"But I had a hearty lunch," returned Robert.

"You can take something else," cried Winifred gaily. "I will have it ready immediately," and she glided about the room in quick preparation.

While taking part in the general conversation, Robert's mind was active and his eye observant. For years back while following the plough on the prairie, or chopping saw-logs in the lumber woods, a picture like this had often thrown itself across his mental vision; and he watched Winifred in her movements now with a thrill of pleasure more vital than he ever felt before. To see her in the charm of home-life had not often been his privilege, and in the pretty grey dress, with dainty collar, spotless white apron, and a rose on her bosom, to his eye she appeared more beautiful than ever.

There was only one feature of the home picture that jarred upon his nerves, and that was the presence of Pettigrew. Why was he there? The man of all others whom he disliked, and whose real character he despised! Was his presence merely a coincidence? That there was anything akin to love between Pettigrew and Winifred he could not for a moment believe; but intimacy or friendship there must be, or he would not be there so late in the evening, miles away from his own home. He felt as if his mere existence in such sacred atmosphere was almost a pollution, and the quicker he left and freed the air from his presence, the easier he would breathe.

And what was Pettigrew thinking?—as with fawning smile he played the agreeable to the old folks at the other side of the room. He was nonplussed. With all his astuteness he failed to grasp the situation. He always believed Miss Finlayson possessed an unusual amount of reserve, which he attributed in part to her occupation; while her present cordiality with Thornton, whom he hated, was due entirely to old friendship and surprise at his unexpected arrival. He knew well that through his post-office no correspondence whatever had taken place between them; and that there was none by any other channel was proved by the accidental nature of his meeting with Hugh. Whatever the cause, the visit could only be of brief duration; and he plumed himself that his own suit, backed by his financial success and prospect of accumulating a fortune, would eventually come out to his entire satisfaction.

In a few minutes the supper for the two was ready, and Winifred sat down with Robert and her brother, Pettigrew declining to join them. But he was soon forgotten, as the three talked of old times, and the new home in Dakota.

"Is your mother contented?" Winifred asked.

"Yes, contented and happy; and the girls like it too."

"I knew James would," said Hugh. "He used to glory in the idea of going west, long before the rest of you thought of it."

"His one ambition is to be a ranchman," said Robert. "We have a cattle king living near us, who is his *beau-ideal* of what a westerner ought to be."

"You encourage him in his aspirations, I suppose?" said Winifred.

"Yes, I do. James is made of good stuff. He is a steady, pushing fellow, and in the end will accomplish what he aims at, I feel sure."

"Never say die!" exclaimed Hugh.

"And make everything bend to your purpose, so long as the purpose is right."

"And James thinks as you do."

"In principle he does. But we look on life from different view-points, that is all."

"You will stay with us to-night?" said Winifred, as they rose from the table.

"Of course he will," answered Hugh. "I made that all right while we were driving."

"I must thank you for the double invitation," said Robert. "It is a fine night, and I could easily walk to the village; but it will be pleasanter to stay," and as he looked at her his hand touched Winifred's lightly. They turned and approached the others in the room.

Pettigrew had overheard part of the conversation, and, availing himself of the first opportunity, tried to make what capital he could.

"The Dakota people must have had a pretty hard time of it this year," he observed. "The newspapers say that the grasshoppers swept the country."

"Some parts have suffered while others have escaped," was the answer.

The shot missed, but Pettigrew continued:

"An old friend of mine, who was all through Dakota last year, told me that what with grasshoppers and tornadoes in summer and blizzards in winter, the settlers there soon get tired; and would leave almost to a man if they could sell their farms. I hope your people struck one of the best parts."

"My people are satisfied, thank you. What pretty roses you have," he continued, turning to Winifred. "They remind me of my mother's garden. Do you know, I think she has the choicest I have seen north of Yankton."

"I know how fond she was of them," rejoined Winifred. "I have a new variety that Hugh potted and put in the parlour for me the other day. Will you come in and see it? The buds are just bursting into flower."

So they went into the other room. The roses were pretty, the bush was unusually fine, and covered with the budding blossoms; but their hearts were not all centred on roses.

"I know a sweeter flower than any rose-bush ever produced," said Robert.

"How strange!" said Winifred in delightful unconsciousness. "Is it lily or heliotrope, chrysanthemum or hyacinth, violet or carnation? To me the rose is the sweetest of all, and then the varieties are endless."

"But my choice is a single flower that I would transplant from a dell in the woods to a little grove by the lake. Do you

think the change would be too great, Winifred?"

"That depends upon many things," she answered with heightened colour, as she picked two or three dead leaves from the spreading branches, "if the flower is not too tender, and you choose the right season of the year. But are there no blizzards and tornadoes there, that Mr. Pettigrew talks about?"

"No, but I was not speaking of Dakota. That is my mother's home. Mine will be in our own country. But about Mr. Pettigrew. Why is he here?"

"I do not know," she replied, looking frankly into his face. "He has not been here before for months, and I did not know he was coming."

Robert breathed with relief.

"I will tell you what I came for," he said. "My tongue was never free before, but it is to-night. I have come to declare to you my love, to tell you of my heart's desire, of the one long passion of my life, and to ask you to promise to be my wife." He spoke with low passionate utterance, and would not give her time to speak. "I have worked very hard in Dakota," he went on, "but you were always my guiding-star. It was your words that helped me to succeed. Soon I shall have done all that my mother needs of me, and for myself I have already a position in Mr. Nathan's lumber woods that will insure me a good income. Will you promise me, Winifred?"

He clasped her unresisting hand and retained it.

"I always cared for you," she said. Her full eyes were uplifted to his, and she was going to speak again, but her lips quivered. There was a tender look in her face as they stood close together, and before they knew his arms drew her to himself in a long passionate embrace.

"I know I ask a great deal," he said at last, "but I give a great deal. Heaven knows I would give my life for you, Winifred. You do not doubt me, dearest?"

"I never doubted you, Robert; and though I have held myself with a tight rein during these years of struggle, your love has not been unreturned."

For a moment more they were silent. The lamp flickered. It almost went out. Then it brightened up again: things pursued once more the even tenor of their way.

"Do not think," Winifred continued, "that the help has always been on one side. Your life has been an inspiration to me. Somehow when I knew you were working early and late on the prairie, I felt like working all the harder in my school."

"Do you mean that you kept on teaching on my account?"

"I do. After the first year they all wanted me to give it up. For a little while I was not very strong, and they said I needed rest. But I soon recruited, and went on teaching to earn money of my own to help in our future life, if ever it came to anything. No one knew the reason, and you would never have known if you had not come."

"My darling, I never dreamed of such an unselfish motive."

"There's a good deal passes through a woman's mind that man never dreams of. During the last three years I have saved quite a bit of money, I can tell you," she exclaimed with a low silvery laugh.

"What a splendid girl you are, Winifred. I wish I were more worthy of you."

"You were always worthy," she replied, looking fondly up into his bronzed face.

Then he told her more about his plans—of his visit to Penetang, of his examination of the timber, and the satisfactory report he had been able to send in to his principal; and, what was best of all, the prompt acceptance by the Government official of Mr. Nathan's offer, and the consequent arrangement he must immediately make to take charge of the work.

But it was getting late. Thoughts had chased each other so swiftly that they did not know how the hours were flying. When they opened the door to return to the other room, Pettigrew had long since gone, the lights were turned low, and every one had retired.

So Winifred showed him to the guest-chamber, and, with their first parting kiss, they bade each other good-night.

CHAPTER XXIII.

REMINISCENCES.

The next morning the Finlaysons were up early, as usual; and when Robert went out to greet them, robins, thrushes, and cat-birds were filling the outer air with song. His heart was full of music too, and he felt like one of them as he listened to the glad refrain.

"But you have not seen our cardinal," said Winifred, leading the way from the porch. "We are of the favoured few. They rarely come so far north, but a beautiful one lights in the top of the big maple every morning in August, and trills his rapturous song. See, there he is!"

"Yes, and listen to him. How he sings!"

"He does it with his whole heart."

"And what a big one he has."

They went in to breakfast, but there was no opportunity to tell the old people the good news and ask their consent that morning. Winifred carolled like one of the free wild birds in the woods, as she hastened through her duties, making ready for school, for the short summer holidays were over.

Then as she was about to start, she pinned a crimson rose to the lapel of Robert's coat.

"And you shall be my cardinal," she exclaimed, shaking her fair ringlets, and tossing her head joyously, "and fill my life with song."

"From the heart, yes, Winifred; but the songs must come from you."

"Hence we will start with a division of labour," she answered, with a laugh.

"You mean a division of love."

"Yes, both; but I must go."

"May I walk with you as far as the school, and then on to Linbrook?" he asked.

"Certainly, my liege," she replied, with a stately bow. "But for the drive to the village, father can let you have a horse."

"I would rather walk, thank you," he replied. "It will give me a better chance to think."

"Do you feel moody?" she asked, in a doleful tone.

"On the contrary; my ecstasy is so great that it will need sober thought and weary plodding on terra firma to keep it under control."

"Are you going?" Mrs. Finlayson asked, as she returned from the paddock with brimming milk-pails.

"Yes, for the present, but I will be back again."

"You will be welcome at any time, and we want you to make our house your home until you go west again."

With renewed expression of thanks, he accompanied Winifred on her way.

"You will surely not teach much longer?" he asked, as they walked on over the brown turf.

"But, indeed, I will," she replied, with sparkling eye. "Just as long as I can. When you have everything ready, give me a month or two to prepare, and that will do for my resignation and everything else."

"What a matter-of-fact little woman you are."

"So would you be if you had taught the young idea how to shoot for three straight years," she replied with a laugh.

"Well, my lady, you shall have notice to quit before the springtime comes again, if the gentle fates will only permit."

"And I shall be glad and sorry too," was her comment; "perhaps gladness will be greatest."

Their roads diverged within sight of the school-house door; and after arranging to see her again that evening, Robert struck out for the village. Half an hour's brisk walk, with the help of a ride on the way, brought him to the bridge at Linbrook. For a minute or two he stood still, looking over the railing, his mind full of the past. It was not so long ago, and yet how distant it seemed, filled as the interval had been with incident and change. How vividly the old logging days came back!—the ringing shouts!—the loud halloa!—the whoops of the men as with hurrying teams they hauled the huge logs to the skidway! Then the booms of the bounding timbers, the crashing of the ice, and the peals of laughter! To him it was song as well as story. And that memorable night, too, of the meeting of the toboggan club; the incidents before, the joy of the glorious ride, the accident, and the consultation after! How full was each of reminiscence!

Then this village was his old home. How well he knew every foot of it! Every house, every lane, almost every tree, was like an old friend to him, rivetted upon boyhood's memory. And the aftermath—making the wife the widow and himself the mainstay of the fugitive household! How often in life's journey, we turn the broad, full leaf down, never to be lifted again, save for a transient thought, a moment of thinking, as we pause on the threshold of another chapter!

Soon Robert moved on. It was after nine o'clock, and he knew that the doctor would be visiting his patients by this time. So, in accordance with his promise to Cleveland, he made his first call upon Mrs. Rounce. Boy-like, the lad had not communicated with her at all on the subject, and her surprise and pleasure were complete.

"My! what a change has come over Cleve since he went to you," she cried. "Before that, he didn't care a cent for anything. Now he writes like a sensible old man. He says he's awful sorry he missed his schooling, but it was all his own fault. He's good to his old mother though, I tell you. Ever since you took him he's sent home half his wages. But Ted and Harry are both working now, and I told him in my last letter that we could get along and in future he must save for himself."

"Yes," said Robert, "he told me; and I can tell you, Mrs. Rounce, that with all his old faults to fight, Cleveland is a son to be proud of, for he's going to make a man after all."

"I'm right glad to hear you say that, sir," exclaimed the mother. There was a smile of joy on her face as she wiped away a tear with the corner of her apron; for there are moments when gladness and weeping go hand in hand. "For many's the time I prayed that the good Lord would stop him in his foolishness, and put him right at last. And it's come true. He's far away from me, and I never see him now; but what does it matter? It will be all the same by-and-by. I'm so glad that you and your mother trained him well, and that he's learned to suit you."

"We could not have a man suit us better," said Robert; "for he has the virtues of a good workman. He is trustworthy, industrious, and thorough; and when a boy has these qualities, there's not much fear about his prospect for the future."

"He tells me that the whole family are kind to him, and make it just like home," said Mrs. Rounce, and there was a wistful sound in her voice.

"That's only natural," was Robert's smiling reply.

"He never talks of coming back though."

"I think the boy has some idea of taking up land."

"And settling down for himself?"

"Some day, when he has saved enough."

"And then, perhaps, he'll get married?"

"Possibly; but what put that into your head, Mrs. Rounce?" said Robert, turning his eyes involuntarily upon her.

"I don't know," she replied, flushing slightly. "Perhaps it was the thought he'd need to, if he was starting on a place for himself."

"Don't encourage that idea for a while, whatever you do," said Robert. "It will not be necessary for a long time to come anyway. But I must go. I will tell Cleve how well and comfortable you all are. Good-bye."

And away he went. For a few minutes he walked on in a brown study. Cleveland to get married! Strange that Mrs. Rounce should suggest the very thought already referred to by James! It might be all right in time, after careful watching, preparation, and guidance. His mother must know—not to nip the blossom and prevent its fruitage—but to guide and counsel and fondly control, as only a true and wise mother can.

Very soon he was at Dr. Hartman's new office. His rig was not at the door, so possibly he had not returned. He would go in and see. Everything was still rough about the place; piles of lumber and mortar and loose stones were scattered over the yard, awaiting removal. Yet, notwithstanding the *débris* that surrounded it, the picturesque little villa, standing back among the tall elms, was very noticeable. Its Gothic gables, broad verandah, glistening white walls, and brown shutters, made it differ from every other house in the village, for there was not another one like it.

"How do you do, Miss Trowther," said Robert, for he remembered her face well. "You did not expect to see me this morning, I am sure."

"We've been looking for you, though. The doctor spoke of your coming yesterday. How well you are, Mr. Thornton. I'm very glad to see you. Come right in."

"And how is Dr. Hartman?"

"He's pretty well, I think, but very busy. I'm sorry he's not in now. He can't be back until afternoon sometime; but he told me, if you came, I must be sure and make you comfortable until he returns."

"I'll come in for a minute now, and run in again when I'm sure to find him, before I leave the village. But how does he look?"

"He's quieter than he used to be, and graver, too. I suppose when a man sees so much sickness he can't help it, and he's such a student. Look at that pile of new books there. They only came in this week. There seems to be hardly anything for him but practice and read, practice and read."

"These are handsome offices," said Robert.

"Yes, but they are the only rooms finished in the front part of the house except his bedroom."

"And you are keeping house for him, Miss Trowther?"

"Yes, he asked me if I would before he commenced to build. He's a man who needs a home of his own."

Then she asked about his mother and sisters and James.

"The girls must be getting big now," she said. "Why Ethel will be grown up nearly. Is she going to be tall?"

"Yes, tall like our mother, with brown eyes and flaxen hair—a prairie bird—a beauty of the west is my sweet sister," he said with a laugh.

"And does she like prairie life?"

"She does, indeed. It is a freer and larger life in many ways than amongst the woods, and Ethel thinks it too ideal ever to leave it."

"Well, I suppose she'll get married to some big ranchman and settle there for good," said Miss Trowther, heaving a sigh; but whether for lost opportunities or consideration of the possible, it was hard to tell.

"Perhaps she will some day," said Robert shortly. "The doctor will not be home before three o'clock, you say?"

"Possibly a little earlier; but won't you come to dinner? We have it at one when he is here, and it will be just the same for you."

"No, thank you. I would rather have tea with him, and a talk as well, if that will suit."

"Very well. He will be sure to be here—say at six o'clock."

And so it was arranged; and Robert went out to make one or two more calls before taking dinner at the "Maple-Leaf," and awaiting the arrival of Mr. Dibsedale.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE TRUTH BROUGHT HOME.

Robert intended visiting the old store whether Mr. Dibsdales came or not, but decided to postpone going there until after the hour of the proposed appointment. Having taken dinner at the hotel, he chatted with old friends who were glad to see him, and almost before he knew it three o'clock arrived, and with it the lawyer from Catersville.

"You were all right, Thornton," said the lawyer, after they had retired to a private room to consult together. "The information you had received was quite correct. I find on investigation that I could make your case much stronger, but it might involve an innocent party, and is not necessary."

"That's good news, Mr. Dibsdales."

"Good for you, but not for Mr. Pettigrew."

"'Tis his own fault though. Any action we may have against him, he alone is responsible for."

"True, and if we put the case clearly we should carry our point. If Pettigrew yields on the first presentation, all right. If not, I have another card up my sleeve which will bring him to time. This is the case of another man, in whom you have no interest. Of course we would rather not carry it that far."

Mr. Dibsdales then partly revealed what he himself had learned since his former interview with Robert; and by a few minutes' further conversation a mutual understanding was arrived at.

"You had better go over to the store first," said the lawyer. "We want the thing done as quietly as possible. Get into general conversation, and I will join you a few minutes later."

Robert was soon within the old familiar walls, where so many of his boyhood's years had been spent. Pettigrew, however, received him with scant courtesy, wondering what special object he could have in view. The occurrences of the previous evening were too fresh in his memory to afford any pleasure, and he merely nodded when he saw him enter. Still there were one or two of Robert's old customers present, and he talked with them until Mr. Dibsdales came in.

As the latter entered the store, Pettigrew contracted his eyebrows and glanced quickly at Robert. The lawyer advanced and, extending his hand, blandly inquired after Mr. Pettigrew's health.

"Quite well, sir," was the answer. "It is not often that we have the pleasure of seeing you in Linbrook."

"Not very often. How do you do, Mr. Thornton?" aside to Robert. "But I do come occasionally. Can I have a word with you a moment, please?"

"Certainly," leading the way to the office.

As he followed, Mr. Dibsdales dropped his voice to remark:

"I have not much time to spare; so I may say at once that Mr. Thornton and I have an important subject we want to discuss with you."

"Discuss with me?" exclaimed Pettigrew, in seeming amazement. "What does all this mean?" he asked defiantly, as Robert joined them.

"Mr. Dibsdales can explain," said Robert. "A private room would be better; but if you prefer, he can tell you here."

"John!" Pettigrew called to a young man at the other end of the store, "take charge till I come down again."

Going upstairs, he led the way to the old parlour, full of associations which Robert remembered so well. Pettigrew closed the door and motioned the others to be seated at a table in the centre of the room.

"Mr. Pettigrew," said Mr. Dibsdales, who sat opposite to him, "Mr. Thornton is my client, and he is here to prefer serious charges against you."

"What are they? A pack of infernal lies, I suppose!" exclaimed Pettigrew, changing colour, and looking alternately from the one to the other.

"Wait till you hear them; then you will know whether they are infernal lies or devilish truths. He has discovered that, by misrepresentation and fraud, you got possession of the business of the late Mr. Thornton, and is here in the name of the family to claim restitution."

Pettigrew rose to his feet and turned white, evidently struggling with conflicting emotions.

"These are strong charges!" he exclaimed passionately; "a pack of lies, without a shadow of truth. He shall suffer for this vile slander."

"There is no use getting angry," said Mr. Dibsdale pleasantly. "Mr. Thornton has a strong case. I can tell you a few of the points we can prove. First, on an average salary of 400 dollars per annum, you kept yourself and mother for ten years and cleared 5,000 dollars in cash, besides collateral property as well, and this without any money whatever to start with. Second, you had a personal interview with one of the wholesale houses, and by misrepresentation induced them to close the business of the estate and place you in charge. Third, you made false entries in the books. Fourth, you sold goods without accounting for the money received."

"And how are you going to prove these charges?"

"By direct evidence in the Courts, if necessary."

"And what do you expect to gain by such a rascally effort?"

"Leaving out the unnecessary adjective," said Mr. Dibsdale, with a smile, "we expect restitution to the Thornton family of what by right should be theirs," rejoined the lawyer.

"And exposure to the people of Linbrook of the true character of their principal merchant," said Robert.

"It's all d——d lies," cried Pettigrew, in a suppressed scream. "Show me your evidence. You haven't a scrap. Thornton can put his case in Court if he likes, and sink what little money he has made in it; but he is a bigger fool than I take him for if he does, for he'll lose every cent he's got."

"Take it coolly, Mr. Pettigrew. Don't get excited. Both Mr. Thornton and I knew very well what we were about when we came here. We have a strong case, which will probably ruin you if taken to the Courts. Not only that, but it will destroy the confidence of the people, so that your reputation in Linbrook will be gone. Through you Mr. Theodore Thornton lost several thousand dollars. His son is bound to press the case; and as you have a reputation and have made money besides, your best policy is to restore a part at least of what in common justice belongs to the Thorntons."

"I deny the allegations, and positively refuse to give up one cent to such atrocious blackmail," muttered Pettigrew between his clenched teeth.

"Very well then, the law must take its course," said Mr. Dibsdale, he and Robert rising to their feet and moving toward the door.

"Stop a minute," cried out Pettigrew. "What do you want? I can't allow my business to be injured. It may pay me to give a little rather than run the risk of circulating this tissue of abominable lies."

"Tut, tut! what nonsense!" exclaimed Mr. Dibsdale. "Give Mr. Thornton a cheque or draft for a thousand dollars, and he will give you a written guarantee, witnessed by myself, against any action being taken, legal or otherwise."

"Phew! Do you take me for an idiot?"

"We will give you one hour to decide, and will be at the parlour of the 'Maple-Leaf' Hotel to await your decision."

"Good afternoon," said Mr. Thornton.

"Good afternoon," said Mr. Dibsdale.

Pettigrew merely nodded as they went downstairs.

"That's a good stroke of business," said the lawyer, smiling all over his face and rubbing his hands together, as they walked along the street.

"Do you think he'll surrender?" Robert asked.

"Yes. He'll kick hard to reduce the figure. Still, if we hold out, he'll pay all right."

"His willingness to consider proves his guilt."

"He's guilty enough. More so a good deal than you imagine. That man could do almost anything that would benefit his pocket. His face tells it."

At four o'clock they entered the sitting-room of the hotel. Very soon they were joined by Pettigrew, at whose suggestion the landlord showed them to a private room. Again they arranged themselves round a table.

"What is your decision?" the lawyer asked.

"Decision? That it is a gross libel—a hideous attempt to make me pay for another man's losses. But as I don't want my business injured, and the Thornton family have the sympathies of some of the people here, I consent to give five hundred dollars on the conditions you stipulated, but not one cent more."

"Repeat that again, please," said Mr. Dibsedale, busily taking the words down. "This is equivalent to an admission of guilt. What have you to say, Mr. Thornton?"

"Simply that he must make it a thousand or nothing."

Pettigrew quibbled and squirmed and blasphemed and refused, but in less than an hour he signed the required draft, upon which he received the promised guarantee against future prosecution, as well as public announcement of what had occurred between them. Mr. Dibsedale witnessed the document, and then offered to shake hands; but the enterprising merchant scorned the cordiality, and, pressing his hat tightly over his temples, hurried out of the room and back to the store.



CHAPTER XXV.

ROBERT'S RIDE WITH CARL.

"Come in," cried Dr. Hartman cheerily, in answer to a ring at his office door. "And it's Robert Thornton, sure enough! 'Pon my word, it seems like an age since you left us. And how well you look! Nothing like the prairie to put colour into a man's face."

"Thank you, doctor. Still, I'm glad to get back to the village in the woods, even if it is only for a day. You have changed, too; and the world must be using you well, or you could not afford to build a handsome villa like this."

"Oh, I suppose," replied Hartman, "we've got to keep moving, you know. It would never do to be at a standstill. When did you arrive? Miss Trowther told me that you called when I was out. You should have come here for dinner."

"I came to the village this morning and have been pretty busy ever since, so I thought I would not infringe upon your hospitality until now."

"So you've been busy, have you? Visiting all the old friends, I suppose. Pettigrew among the number, no doubt?"

"Yes," said Robert with a smile. "I had to take a look at the old store, of course."

"And were you two men very cordial?"

"Not exactly," said Robert. "Still we managed to talk a little. We seem to understand each other better than we used to do."

"Perhaps long absence gives you keener penetration. Somehow, Pettigrew's a man I cannot understand yet. He is a sort of psychological study, that has bothered my brain ever since I came to Linbrook."

"I would not let him trouble you any longer," said Robert with a laugh, "for it isn't worth your while."

"Your own opinion has not improved, then?"

"Distance has not lent enchantment to the view."

"Well, my dear boy, what is the news? Take this easy chair, and tell me all about it."

"All about what?" queried Robert. "Where shall I begin?"

"Commence anywhere and end everywhere, if you like. It is so long since I saw you that I feel like sitting still just to hear you talk."

"Well, then," said Robert, "you are such a critical personality, and possess such excellent judgment, that I will tell the big news first, in order to secure your opinion."

"Very well, I am listening." And the doctor settled down as he did once before in the long past, with his face slightly averted and looking out of the window.

"My dream is coming true," said Robert, "and although I have waited long, I have at last won the dearest girl in all Canada. You may laugh at me, doctor, and take me for a wild enthusiast; but then you are Platonic, you know, and perhaps do not altogether understand."

"But I think I do," said the doctor slowly. "I did not know how near you were coming to the end though. Being Platonic, as you say, you must not expect me to be very enthusiastic. Still, I extend to you both my sincerest congratulations. You are winning a rare treasure. She is winning a manly man—one who is destined to come to the front, and take a good position in this Canada of ours yet."

"I don't know about that, doctor. I can only do my best."

"That is all any of us can do," said Hartman gravely.

"But what does all this mean?" said Robert, as he looked admiringly round the pretty office and through the open door to handsome rooms as yet unfinished. "This was never intended purely for bachelor's quarters."

"And why not?" returned the doctor, compressing his lips and forcing a smile, as he looked Robert squarely in the eyes. "Wouldn't you let an old fellow be comfortable, simply because he hadn't a wife to bother him?"

"Old fellow!" replied Robert in an amused tone. "Why, you're not much older than I am."

"Well! I wanted room," said Hartman, rising and walking back and forth. "I suppose I like a pretty place; yet I can hardly say why I did it. I don't know that I ever had very definite plans in view, but somehow I bought the lot because it was pretty and unoccupied; and the building followed the buying, like the cart follows the horse."

"Do you think you will always stay in Linbrook?" Robert asked. He did not know why, but somehow he felt sorry for his friend. Perhaps it was because he was so intensely happy himself.

Hartman started. The question was unexpected.

"It is not likely," he said after a pause. "I have not thought very much about it; but I am studying hard, and it is possible I may drift into a larger field after a while. In the meantime," he went on more brightly, "I purpose making this little place as comfortable as I can; and if I ever leave, may possibly dispose of it to some other doctor to take my place."

There was another ring at the door, and Robert's old employer, Mr. Cartright, entered. After greeting him cordially, he went on:

"I hear good things of you. That staunch old Kentuckian, Mr. Nathan, tells me that he has got you in line."

"Yes, I have worked for him for two winters now."

"You've got a capital post for this winter, too. Those limits X and Y are among the best in the market, and to entrust the management to so young a man is a high compliment."

"You did not tell me that," said Hartman.

"My dear fellow, I have not had time," replied Robert with a laugh. "That was item number two, that I was going to tell you about next."

"If Nathan had not already secured you," said Mr. Cartright, "we were ready to give you a good position ourselves."

"Thank you," replied Robert, "but I am irretrievably booked. I like Mr. Nathan, too. He tries a man, and if he finds him true he trusts him."

"That's the right plan every time," said Mr. Cartright. "I am glad I met you again, and you have my best wishes for success in life."

After tea was over it was getting dark, and Robert said that he would hire a livery and drive out to the Finlaysons.

"You will do nothing of the kind," exclaimed Hartman. "I am not very busy to-night, and will drive you out myself."

How little Robert knew what was in the doctor's mind as they swung along the road that fair evening. Fireflies were flashing in the darkness before they reached the house. Stars studded the sky, and a gentle breeze rustled among the leaves, as their road wound through one piece of woods after another.

"I like the old forest life," mused Robert, "and shall be glad to be in it again."

"It is when driving through the woods that I think the most," said the doctor.

"With me it is not the thought; but the life, the bustle, the stir. It is working among the trees with masses of men that I exult in," was Robert's comment.

"My work is among the individuals who make the masses," returned Hartman, "and when driving through the wide stretching woods, filled with the weird music of the pines, the problems of life fill the soul with a deeper meaning than at any other time."

"What you need, doctor, is to be out of the woods for a while. They work you too hard. You should get what you professional men call a *locum tenens*, and then go abroad for a season. It would do you a world of good."

"So you think I'm getting moody, do you?"

"Perhaps a little."

"There may be something in it," said the doctor, "but I can't take a holiday just yet. My hands are tied with building, and it will take all winter to get everything straightened out and put into shape."

"Why not make arrangements to go abroad next summer, then?" suggested Robert.

"That might do; but when is your wedding to take place? or is it decided upon yet?"

"I'm not that far ahead," returned Robert with a laugh. "It might occur before very long, though; for my mother is now practically independent, and the decision will be with Winifred. Whenever it happens, however, I want you to do me the honour of being my best man."

"That is a contingency I never contemplated," ejaculated Hartman.

"But I have ever since I knew you. You must remember I have known Winifred all her life."

The mention of her name made the doctor's nerves tingle. He had never called her Winifred but once. She did not know how dear the name was to him; and yet she was to be his friend's, his rival's, for all the years to come. It was well that the mantle of night hid the doctor's face as they neared the Finlayson homestead.

"Won't you promise me?" continued Robert, in a rather surprised tone.

"Certainly, I will," replied the doctor with sudden energy. "I am willing to do anything to help to make you both happy."

"Thank you," was the earnest response. "I knew you would. Here we are—won't you come in? Why, do by all means. I'm sure they won't like it, for you to drive me all the way over and then not enter the house."

"My dear Robert, you must give my excuses. A doctor's time is not his own, remember. I have other work to do to-night. But I have enjoyed the ride with you, and would not have missed it for a good deal."

"Well, that's too bad. I'm awfully sorry. Couldn't you come in just for a minute?"

A light foot was speeding down the pathway, and a laughing voice cried out:

"Oh, is that you, Dr. Hartman? How good of you to come with Robert, too. You must come in, you really must. Mother would like to see you so much."

"This makes it all the harder for me to refuse," was the answer, but the voice had a far-away sound. "I am sorry, but I cannot spare the time to-night. I have given so much to Robert that I haven't a moment left for anybody else, not even you, Miss Finlayson. I will have to drive like the wind now, and must say good-bye, old man. May the gods take care of you! Write me soon again. Miss Finlayson, will you tell your mother that I shall call upon her soon?"

With a shake of the hand, a lift of the hat, and a quick turn, he started back, and for a few minutes he did drive like the wind. But once in the woods again, his speed slackened.

"No," he said to himself. "I cannot spare the time to-night—not there. To sit by and watch the meeting of fond hearts and sweet looks and loving glances would never do—Carl Hartman, you'd have to throw up the sponge, for you couldn't stand it. Let them have their loves to themselves. You've been a fool to let your heart run away with your judgment for three whole years, and now you must bear the consequences."

As he had said it was in the woods that he did his thinking, so when he came to the next stretch he again slowed his speed to a walk.

Why had he built that house anyway? Why had he devoted time, energy and money in the construction of a home that could only be a temporary one at the longest? What infatuation was it that urged him onward, when in his heart of hearts

he knew that Winifred was already wooed and won, and that he himself would be the last man to attempt to sever the unwritten bond?

And yet he had done it. If there had been no Winifred Finlayson, there would have been no villa beneath the elms. For Linbrook, from the first, had only been considered as a stepping-stone to higher things. With all that, now it was built, he felt a certain pride in this first home that he had ever owned, and whatever came of it would push it to completion.

Then he thought of the coming marriage of Winifred. It was evident from the conversation between Mr. Cartright and Robert that the new position of the latter with Mr. Nathan would be a lucrative one; and the fates favouring, there seemed to be no reason why the wedding might not take place in the spring.

He would have his house and grounds in order by that time anyhow, so that when Robert came he would at least have a comfortable room to put him in. As for the future, let it take care of itself. By-and-by he reached home again. When he entered his office this time there was no one waiting for him. So he went to bed. Whether he slept or not, however, during the early hours of the long morning was a different thing.



CHAPTER XXVI.

MUTUAL CONFIDENCES.

"I am sorry Dr. Hartman would not come in," said Winifred regretfully. "His professional work seems to occupy his every thought; but how fortunate that he could bring you over."

"He said he could spare the time," returned Robert, "and I assure you I was glad; for it gave me the opportunity for a longer talk."

"Is he not delightful?"

"Yes, a splendid fellow. One you can have a heart-to-heart talk with—a man you can completely trust."

"So you were telling secrets, were you?" she asked, with a low, silvery laugh.

"My dear Winifred, if I didn't do it when I had the opportunity, when could I? I may not see him again for goodness knows how long."

"Perhaps that was the reason he would not come in," said Winifred gravely. "And what did he say?"

"He praised you up to the heavens; and congratulated me, of course."

"And why did he not come in to congratulate me?" she asked, looking up quickly into Robert's face, with a questioning smile.

"Probably he thought I would tell you that he congratulated us both," was the laughing answer.

"I would rather have his congratulations at first hand, though," said Winifred. "But do you know, I think it would be an excellent thing for Dr. Hartman to get married. He has such a lonely life of it. There is no one here that would suit him, I know, but he could find one somewhere. I often think of him. He works very hard, and does a lot of good; and then when his day's work is done, he goes back to his lonely room in his new house to be all by himself. Of course, he has a good housekeeper. He could not have a better one than Miss Trowther; but a man like Dr. Hartman needs something more than a housekeeper."

They were walking up and down the lawn beneath the trees before going in, and Robert looked at Winifred long and earnestly while she was speaking. How often had he thought the same thing too! And how frequently during the years of his absence had the vision of Hartman and Winifred come up before him; and now the question, if he himself had not been there, would the villa remain unoccupied? Would the solitary man continue to live alone? But to know that now, as always, possession was his, filled him with a frenzy of joy. To feel that Winifred's heart had always been true, was simply beatitude; and, involuntarily, a rapturous regard for the sterling worth of the man, who had just driven to the village, filled his being.

He slipped his arm round Winifred's waist and drew her towards him.

"My darling," he said, "I am glad you like Dr. Hartman. He is made for the love of a noble woman; and some day, though it may not be for years, he will surely find one. Linbrook is not the place for him. His present bride is his profession, and he will climb the rungs of the ladder long before he turns for solace to a woman."

"What, Robert, you a lover and a pessimist!"

"No, Winifred. I'm an optimist; but I think I know the doctor better than you do, and in his own way he seeks the highest."

"But you haven't seen as much of him as I have. His devotion to duty when my mother was ill was simply marvellous. Sometimes I thought he was very stern, but it was only his masterful gentleness. You would walk through fire to do as he wanted you."

"It is that masterful gentleness that will make him carve his way; while he makes love, and everything else, bend and submit to what he looks upon as the highest destiny."

"About love, I don't know. The poor man has never had a chance. There was nobody here for him, but let him move away and you don't know what might happen. Let the occasion come, and he might get into just as big a hurry as you have done Robert, notwithstanding the rungs of the ladder."

"All of which is possible," echoed Robert, and they both laughed. "There is one thing more I have not told you yet," he exclaimed. "The doctor has promised to stand up with me at our wedding."

An electric shock seemed to pass through Winifred as she heard the announcement. As it affected the doctor when he was asked, so it affected her when she heard. It was new, unexpected. It seemed to take a moment to realise such a thing possible.

"And yet he did not come in to congratulate me," she repeated in a low and serious tone.

"But he will."

"Are you not progressing very rapidly?" she asked, in sudden excitement. "To propose last night, and then to arrange things to-day without even asking my consent?"

"Forgive me, dearest. I have not had time to explain everything yet. But I have still more news to tell you."

"From the village? What is it?"

"Good news—a secret! But you and I are one."

"I can keep it."

Then he told of Pettigrew's surrender, and draft for a thousand dollars.

"A direct proof of his guilt," said Winifred. "I am so glad you got it."

"If innocent, he would contest the case in the Courts rather than forfeit the money," commented Robert.

"Did you bind yourself to secrecy?" Winifred asked.

"I gave a written promise not to make it public, so I did not even tell Dr. Hartman."

"I am glad you told me."

"It is one of the instances where good comes out of evil," said Robert; "for it will free my mother from financial trouble, and return to her part of what was rightfully her own."

"I can't tell you how joyful I am over it," whispered Winifred. "It is one of those things that a woman would want to publish far and near, just to expose the knavery of the man. Still, if you say so, I won't say a word to any one, not even to Hugh."

"I have promised," said Robert, "and have given my bond."

"You are right, and here is the seal of mine." She turned up her face to his, and he pressed her closely to him.

"That contract will have another excellent effect," added Robert. "It will speed our wedding-day; for henceforth I can work for ourselves, for you and me; for our own little home on Georgian Bay, near the big pine woods."

"Again you are rushing things," exclaimed Winifred, laughingly pressing her hands over her ears. "You have not obtained my father's consent yet, nor even my mother's."

"Forgive me, I forgot that. Let us go inside."

CHAPTER XXVII.

WHAT MRS. FINLAYSON HAD TO SAY.

The next day was Wednesday, and in Winifred's school section, as in many others at that period, the afternoon was a holiday. This was matter for rejoicing with the lovers—they could spend it together—being their last opportunity, for on the morrow Robert required to leave. That day was a very full one for him. He was up with the lark in the morning, picking berries with Winifred in the garden, while they listened to the cardinal sing in the tall maple.

"I never knew this place was so lovely," he exclaimed. "Look at the dew on the grass, sparkling in the sun by the creek, and the slanting rays through those old oaks. They fairly glitter with glory. What a queen of trees is that linden, too! Then there's the slope and the crest of the hill in the orchard—and see yonder ground-hog by the big stone. Yes, there are three of them, just look."

But some one else was looking too; for at that moment they saw Hugh creeping along the edge of the field with his rifle. He gradually drew nearer, and before the old wood-chuck knew of his danger, there was a sharp crack, a little wreath of smoke, and the grey old hibernator keeled over. Quick as a flash the other two disappeared down their hole, and did not show themselves again for days.

"Hugh has been watching for that old ground-hog for some time," explained Winifred. "It's in the early morning he likes to do his shooting."

"Has he tried deer-hunting yet?" Robert asked.

"Yes, he was out a number of times last year. He and Lavin and Thompson shot several deer among them, and we had venison nearly all the winter."

"I saw some fine herds in the lumber woods on Georgian Bay," Robert remarked. "They were magnificent fellows. It made me wish I had my rifle, and that the hunting season was on again."

"Oh, do tell me about it," said Winifred, as she rose up from a large raspberry bush that she had stripped of ripe fruit. "I suppose the country is very wild, and there are lots of Indians there."

"Yes, the timber limits are wild enough, and there are both Indians and French half-breeds; but they are all semi-civilised and quite harmless. Some of them are good workmen, as well as splendid canoeists."

"Shall we have to live among them?" she asked.

"Oh, no," replied Robert with a laugh, "our home will be in one of the towns on the bay, probably at Penetanguishene or Midland."

"I have heard of both places," said Winifred. "They should be very pleasant in spring and summer, whatever they are in winter."

"It is in the spring I expect to take you there, dearie," said Robert.

"So soon as that?"

"Yes, as soon as the winter's lumbering is over, if all goes well. Shall you be ready?" he asked triumphantly.

"Don't ask me just now," she replied with a ringing laugh. "If we don't go in at once, I shall be late at school; and you will get all the blame, for the whole school section knows that you are here."

"I would not damage your reputation for punctuality for a farm."

"Nor even a timber limit," she retorted, as, picking up their pails, they returned to the house. Breakfast was over long before this, and the men had all gone to their day's duties.

"You had better come back and talk to me," said Mrs. Finlayson, as Robert and Winifred started on their walk toward the school-house. "I have scarcely had a word with you yet." And there was a wistful tone in her voice.

"Yes, as soon as I leave Winifred," was the answer; and in buoyant spirits the two hastened onwards.

"How I shall miss these walks," he exclaimed. "Every morning at half-past eight I shall know that you are on your way."

"And where will you be at that time?"

"In the fields at the homestead until October; then every day in the woods."

"Scoring trees and bossing the hands and building castles again, I suppose," she exclaimed in a bantering tone.

"Perhaps—planning our castle. We will build it overlooking the lake this time. I will send you the plans, and you must tell me exactly what you want."

"That would be splendid, if you only had the money to do it."

"Oh, I know; but you must not be too practical, dearie. We will just do as best we can at the start, and everything else will come in time. For I'm willing to work with hand and brain and heart, too, for the dearest girl in all the world."

"Mother says the men all talk that way," she added slyly with a gay laugh; but she was thrilled with delight, for she knew that he meant what he said.

"Perhaps they are not all as much in earnest as I am."

"If I had not believed you, I would not have promised to be your wife," she almost whispered.

They stopped for a moment at the cross-roads near the school-house before he turned back.

"And do you know all I shall be doing when half-past eight comes?" she asked, as she took his hand. (Lovers always have to shake hands oftener than other people.)

"Tell me, and then I will."

"Following the old path to the school-house; thinking of you in the woods; of what we are talking about to-day; and wafting my love for some one on the wing."

Robert whistled gaily as he returned to the home to talk with Mrs. Finlayson. She had hurried through her domestic duties that morning, for she wanted to have a long talk with her prospective son-in-law. She had never had one before; and, although she liked him, she desired to know more of the man who was to be the keeper of her daughter's happiness for all time to come. Although she had no misgivings about Robert himself, she dreaded the loneliness of separation that was coming; and would have given anything to have had her daughter cast her lot in Linbrook instead of so far from home.

Perhaps if she talked to him straight, as intended mothers-in-law sometimes can, he would appreciate his future bride all the more, and do all he could to lighten the prospective lot of herself and the daughter who was so dear to her.

Her eyes were dry, but there were traces of tears when Robert joined her.

"There is no joy without a sorrow," she said, as he placed a chair for her near the honeysuckle by the open window.

"But there is no sorrow that has not its joy," he returned. "I shall do my best to make Winifred happy, Mrs. Finlayson."

"Yes, I know: but she is my only daughter, and I never thought I could bear her going so far away. Perhaps I am foolish, but home will not be like home when she is gone."

"Still, marriage would take her from you under any circumstances, Mrs. Finlayson. With us it will only be a matter of distance—and I intend that you shall see her often."

"You will do what you can, no doubt, Robert; and it would have been all right if you had stayed in Linbrook."

"Oh, yes, if I only could. But that is not my fault."

"Neither was it hers. When you were there and likely to go in with your father, it was all right; but when your prospect

was gone, and everything broken up, it might have been best to let the intimacy drop. Many men have wanted Winifred—good men, too—and she would not have had to forsake her mother in her old age."

"My dear Mrs. Finlayson," said Robert earnestly, "Winifred will never forsake you."

"I know that; but the fates will divide us, when they might have let us be. I feel sure Winifred might have mated and been happy with some one, who would let us bide near each other, as long as I lived. And now that is all undone."

Robert began to feel troubled. He did not expect that Mrs. Finlayson would have taken it in this way. It was a new revelation to him.

"Is there any special one you refer to?" he asked.

"Winifred never spoke of it, mind that," she commenced; "but there's Mr. Manson, the teacher in the next section; and Mr. Starr, Mr. Cartright's manager, would either of them have done anything for Winifred. Of course, she did not care for them; but there's another one still." And as she stopped speaking, she looked dreamily out through the open window.

"And who was that, pray?" queried Robert, his heart suddenly beating.

"One of the kindest and noblest men that ever lived." And again she stopped. A tear was glistening in her eye.

"Go on, please." His voice was low; it had lost its timbre.

"Winifred did not know about it, and doesn't know now."

"I would never tell her," he muttered.

"She need not know for that matter. It is too late; but I should have spoken then." A spasm came over her face, but it passed away, and she went on: "It was when I was ill, just hovering between life and death. Sometimes my mind wandered, but I wasn't always deranged, though Winifred and the doctor thought I was. I lay there with my eyes half closed and too ill at times to speak. It didn't affect me at the time. I hardly noticed it; but I remembered things afterwards. Many a time have I seen the doctor almost devour her with his eyes when she was turned away; but his face was grave, almost stern, when she turned back again. I am telling you another man's secret. Perhaps I shouldn't. Still, it is because you have won what he has lost; and, when you know, it will make you all the more tender and true to the wife that others would have given their lives for. One night I was awfully low. It was at the crisis. The nurse wouldn't be back until after midnight; and Winifred, although she had been up and working since dawn, was going to take her place. When the doctor came, I couldn't move, my mouth was open, and lying partly on my side, I could just see between my eyelids and gasp for breath. I couldn't move a muscle, and looked, I suppose, as if consciousness was all gone. The doctor examined my eyes, changed the medicine, and told Winifred to go and get him something. As she went out a rose fell from her neck at his feet. She did not notice it, but he did; and when the door was shut he picked it up and, kissing it, thrust it into his pocket. It would not surprise me if he kept it to his dying day. When she came back, it was so strange, he was stern as ever, and sent her at once to bed. Like a lamb she obeyed him. She always did what he told her.

"After she had gone he examined me closer than ever. As he bent over he bit his lips and frowned.

"'My God,' he exclaimed 'she may die before morning, and that child does not know it. But for your sake, Winifred, I will save her if I can.'

"Then he worked like mad. He got clean blankets and sheets and everything, and made me new; and bathed me and gave the medicine every few minutes, and never rested himself for a moment. When one o'clock struck, the nurse came back. He smiled for the first time, told her what to do, and went out into the night. That's the man that Winifred should have married. But it's too late. She loves you, and you'll be a good husband, won't you?" she finished pleadingly.

"By God's help, I will," said Robert with passionate earnestness. "I will love her as truly as any man ever could; and I shall never tell the secret. Still, I am glad you told me; it makes many things plain that were dark. And let me tell you, while I love Winifred with my whole soul, if ever there was a man in the whole world that I loved—it is Dr. Hartman."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LETTERS.

"PENETANGUISHENE,

"October—, 186—.

"MY DEAR WINIFRED,

"I have been on the rush ever since I came here. As I told you in my last letter, there is such a host of things to attend to, that they have kept me constantly busy. We are having two big shanties built, one on each Limit; each of them will board and house a hundred men. Of course, we are having them built by the men themselves, those who first came into camp; and it is astonishing what a lot of handy fellows there are amongst them. As a rule, a man who can swing a broad-axe and hew square timber in the woods, can do almost anything in a rough way in the building line. And our shanties are going to be big, commodious things, I can tell you. I expect to have you honour them by visiting and dining in each sometime in the future. But next summer looks to me a long way off. How fortunate it is that I am busy! If it wasn't for that, I feel as if I could never put the time in during the long period that will lapse between now and our marriage day.

"You have been a great deal in my mind, dearest, ever since we went out to Dakota; but more than ever during the last two months. From Monday till Saturday, every week, there is never a morning that I don't think of you. I can see you in every step of the way to the school-house: how you look; what you wear; and every turn you take. From what we said to each other on that last morning, I can almost read your thoughts, as you can mine. What a splendid idea that was of yours—our actual communing time. For fifteen minutes of every day of the week our spirits touch each other, and our thoughts in unison blend together in wireless telegraphy.

"That last afternoon in the woods, how we did enjoy it! The two of us picknicking together down by the creek was such fun—and the trout-catching. You had better luck than I had. Perhaps it was because I was thinking more of the angler than I was of the fish! You know when a man falls in love he gets it badly; it influences his every action. But when a woman does, she knows that her lover has it too. So she remains cool and collected, and can catch the trout every time; while he is nervous and irresponsible, and the cold-blooded fish know it. Is it not so, dearie? I await correction.

"I had a letter from the doctor last week. He said he was busy, and his house was getting along beautifully. He said also that, although he had seen very little of my fair enamorata, he had seen enough to be able to tell me that she was enjoying excellent health, and looking exceedingly well. All of which filled me with pleasure. Still I await your corroboration of his joyous message; and with a full heart and ever-growing affection for the dearest girl in the world,

"I am, ever your own,

"ROBERT."

"THE LITTLE SCHOOL-HOUSE

DOWN IN THE WOODS,

"October—, 186—.

"MY OWN DEAR ROBERT,

"The scholars are all gone. I waited until they were out of sight and I had put everything in order, making things neat and tidy in my little domain, before answering your last welcome letter. The windows are open yet, and the perfume of balsam and honeysuckle is wafted in. I hear the hum of insects and the buzz of bees; and beyond, in the elms, the

orioles are singing. The air is full of gentle, restful melody; and now the children are away, it seems so still that it puts me in the mood for writing a long letter, this Indian summer eve.

"How interesting to hear of your lumbermen and their shanty building! Of course, I would want to visit them, particularly when you work there, and see how they do things, and what kind of fare you shanty-men live upon. It would be funny, too, to take a meal among them and be the only woman in the whole camp.

"You did not say whether our home was to be at Penetanguishene or not? I suppose it is too soon yet to know. In your next you might tell me more about it; and what the place is like?

"No, I haven't forgotten our compact; and, every morning when I go to school, my mind is fixed upon you, and what we were talking about. How a habit grows upon one. I commenced it the day you left. For some days it required a little effort to withdraw my thoughts from other things and concentrate them properly. But that soon passed off; and then, the minute I left the house, I realised that you were thinking of me and I of you, until we almost seemed to be in actual contact with each other. The idea is a pleasant one; but I believe it was you, and not I, who originated it. At any rate, we can keep it up, for it is delightful to believe that we are sufficiently one already to be able to concentrate our thoughts upon each other daily at the same moment of time. Yes, I am quite well, thank you.

"But about your fish story, sir! You did well to await correction. The audacity of a man not giving a woman due credit for being a better angler than himself, when she landed the trout while he couldn't get a bite—then his amazing assurance, that it was because she was cool and collected, and hadn't any nerve at all! Really, sir! What will you say next?

"But to change the subject; I had a darling little letter from your mother only yesterday, full of best wishes and love. She thinks the world of her boy; there is nobody like him; and, between ourselves, she says there isn't anyone in the wide world she would give you up to but me! I felt proud, I tell you, when your dear mother spoke to me like that! Then she says that they are all so comfortable. The dear girls are studying hard, and are as good as they can be—James is going to be her right-hand man—and even Cleve seems to have become one of the household, and a sort of pillar for your mother to rest upon. Is it not fortunate to have that boy turn out so well?

"There are lots of enquiries about you. Somehow people have got our names coupled together; and since their tongues commenced to wag, I have learned how really popular you were. Everybody says you should have stayed in Linbrook, and that, if you ever settled here again, the whole country-side would support you. This is pleasant for me to hear, for I like to have you appreciated; but I don't know that I should want such a thing to take place. Somehow I am getting very ambitious for you, and I want you to fill a larger life than ever Linbrook could offer.

"I have seen very little of Dr. Hartman since you left. It seems strange. Although he is always kind when we meet, I almost think he tries to avoid me. I cannot understand it. We never had the slightest difference upon anything, and except yourself, of course, I like him better than any other man I ever knew. I always get so much from him. His very presence seems to stimulate me to higher things; and as you say I may not live here very many months longer, it would be a pleasure for me to be with him much oftener than I am. Oh! I must say his house is nearly finished, and he has invited mother and me to go over it before very long. Probably we shall visit it together. Still, I am not sure. Possibly when I am down sometime soon, I may run in and see Miss Trowther before mother can make it convenient to do so.

"Well, my dear boy! the shadows are lengthening, the air is getting cooler, and the swallows are catching gnats on the wing. It is time for me to close my school-house door and wend my steps homeward. If I don't do it soon I'll be late for tea. So with fondest love for the dearest one in the world, I must say good-bye until to-morrow morning.

"WINIFRED."

And the letters came and went through the short fall and the long months of the winter, and the lovers had their daily commune in thought, as Winifred wended her way, through storm or sunshine, through rain or snow, to the little school-house on the 14th Concession. During all this time Robert was building up a reputation. He was the moving spirit, the guiding force, the leader of his men—noted for his level-headed coolness, his keen foresight, his discrimination under difficulty; and winning, what he wanted most of all, the emphatic approval of Mr. Nathan.

Still the winter was almost gone, and the first indications of spring made themselves visible, before anything definite

was decided upon. Then he wrote in joyful exultation to Winifred—

"Yes, dearest, it is all settled. What I have been working for so assiduously all winter has been accomplished. I wanted to prove myself invaluable to the tall Kentuckian, and in a manly, generous way he has acknowledged the point at last. My salary on the first of April is to be increased one-half, with the prospect of a percentage interest by-and-by. You often wanted me to speak more definitely about where our home was to be. The reason I did not, was because I could not. Now I can tell you it will be at Penetang. Rather a wild place in winter, but a picturesque and lovely spot in summer. There was only one available house in it that I cared for, and without this increase in salary I could not have taken it. I wanted to take my sweetheart to a home she would like. Without that increase we would have had to go to Midland, to a smaller house, and one that you would not like so well.

"Now, about our marriage, darling. I shall be ready in May; somewhere about the 24th, the birthday of our beloved Queen. The house will be vacant about the 1st, and during the interval I purpose having it painted and decorated, and the little garden put in order. You will be ready, won't you?

"Speaking about our Queen reminds me of another thing. You know we are on the eve of a general election, and the main issue is the great one of Confederation of the Provinces in Canada, and the formation of the new Dominion. One fortunate thing is, that the best men on both sides of party politics, I am glad to say, favour the scheme. It will be a grand thing to unite all Canada from the Atlantic to the Pacific in a great commonwealth, under the supreme control of Great Britain, but governed by representative men elected by the people throughout the Dominion from ocean to ocean. The scheme is a big one, and meetings are being held all over to discuss it. Somehow they have pressed me into the work, too. I tried to keep out of it, but I could not. The meetings only take place in the evenings, so they do not interfere with my regular business; and I am careful not to allow them to engross too much of my time. Although I often used to argue, I never did any public speaking until I came here; and I suppose it was because some of the leaders heard me talk a little that they thought of it and urged me. I don't know why it is, but there are some short-sighted people who are positively opposed to the scheme, and in this riding are doing their utmost to defeat the present member, who is an ardent supporter. The consequence is, that they are pressing everyone who can talk at all to stand by him, and I have promised to speak at two more of his meetings this week; that, I am thankful to say, will be the last for me at any rate. Don't think, dearest, that I am turning politician, for I am not, only in a very small way. Business success will be the first object, whatever comes afterwards.

"I intend to write to the doctor and tell him the good news this week. I hinted about it in my last letter; now I can speak more positively. I am glad to hear he is such a busy man. He says he is studying hard, too; and, between ourselves, for he would not like to have it known until he personally announces it, he has been promised a position in the college already, if he will spend the intervening summer in attendance at the European hospitals. I am very glad of his success, and proud that he should have the honour; but it seems a pity that he should have spent so much time and money on his beautiful villa, and then, as soon as it is finished, have to leave it.

"And now, my sweet Winifred, I shall almost count the hours as they wing us on toward our nuptial day. Do resign your school at once. Do not teach one more day than you actually need. I think you said that one month's notice of resignation would be required. Perhaps, after serving so faithfully, they will take less. I trust they will.

"Ever, with the utmost devotion,

"YOUR OWN ROBERT."

And then came Winifred's answer, full of rapture and gladness, but with a tinge of melancholy at leaving her scholars and the work she loved so well. And most of all at the thought of parting with the loved ones at her own dear home.

"I fear that joy and sorrow will have to go hand in hand on my wedding day," she wrote; "but think the joy will swallow up all the sorrow, and my mother will be contented, even though I am absent, when she knows how happy you have made me. I met the doctor yesterday and I told him the good news. He congratulated me again, and said how glad he was to hear it; but he did not look very well. I hear he has had any amount of night work lately, and needs a rest. I was almost speaking to him about what you told me, when I suddenly thought of your warning and stopped myself in time. But I am just as glad as you are. He has not the opportunity that he is capable of here, and when he goes to the city he will get what his merit deserves.

"And so my liege lord is becoming a politician. How can he be anything else, when he attends political caucuses, and with thrilling eloquence addresses the free and independent electors? Forsooth, my dear man, you'll be aiming at statesmanship yet, if I don't look after you!

"Oh, did I tell you, I have been all over Dr. Hartman's house, almost from cellar to garret. It is beautifully finished and exquisitely planned. You would think the interior arrangements were laid out by a cultured woman. They are in such perfect taste and so systematically arranged. I was so struck with it that I could not help teasing the doctor a little.

"You need not tell me,' I said, 'that all this was done without any thought of marriage. These are the very things that a wife would want, but where is the wife?'

"My dear Miss Finlayson,' he said gravely, while he looked at me very hard, 'I once dreamed of marriage, but now I believe I shall never dream again.' Then he turned away and went on, 'They will make pleasant bachelor's quarters anyway, and I feel sure that my good housekeeper, Miss Trowther, will do her best to make me comfortable while I am here.'

"You have no idea how sad his words made me feel. What could he mean? Has he ever been crossed in love, I wonder?

"Yes, dearest, I shall be ready for you at the time you mention. The bride, you know, has the privilege of setting the day, so we will make it the morning of the 24th, and celebrate Her Majesty's birthday by our marriage, and thus make the day additionally memorable to us as long as we live. How will that suit you, dearie?

"Your loving and promised bride,

"W^{INIFRED}."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE DOCTOR'S SOLILOQUY.

"It's awfully good of you, doctor, to take me in and be best man as well."

"Pshaw! I don't see it in that way at all. Pity if a man cannot accommodate an old friend over night, particularly when he is going to stand up with him in the morning. I would not have you go anywhere else, that's certain."

"Neither would I want to. What an ideal place you've made of this, doctor; and the grounds—sodded—and flower-beds and shrubs and all—with the whole under the shade of the elms."

The doctor smiled. They were standing on the balcony, and away to the front they could see the river, backed by the hillside covered with pines.

"It will do," he said. "And after all I shall be sorry to leave it."

"After all," echoed Robert questioningly. "And will the leaving be imperative?"

"Not exactly. Every man is his own master. I can go or stay. But I have thought it out, and I believe this spring will be my last in Linbrook. Still, there's an element of sadness in parting with a place when you've fixed it up exactly to suit you. But I must not talk of gloomy things, when I have such an excellent offer before me, and when my own guest is the happiest man alive."

"Thank you, I believe I am."

"And you ought to be. Remember there is only one Winifred Finlayson; and you are running away with the flower of the whole country-side. Half the fellows for miles around are in love with her, although they have known all along that it was no use."

"I believe that, and from the bottom of my heart I am sorry for them," Robert returned with a sober face. He had not forgotten Mrs. Finlayson's words.

"She is genuine through and through. Although this has been about the coldest winter on record, they tell me she taught every day; even when she had to wade or drive through a blinding snow-storm with a temperature below zero."

"I know it," said Robert. "Thank heaven, she'll never need to do that again."

"She did not need to do it this time," said the doctor. "Her father is well off; but why should I mention it? You no doubt are familiar with all the circumstances." He finished with a forced laugh, as he arranged the plants by the porch.

"I wanted her to resign at Christmas," said Robert, "but she firmly declined; and, to tell the truth, I believe she continued to teach purely on my account, to lighten in some degree our immediate future."

"I guessed as much," returned the doctor. "So you are going to locate in Penetang, are you?"

"Yes; our house is on the road to the old fort overlooking the long, narrow bay. You must come and spend your summer holiday with us. I can promise you the most cordial welcome from both of us, I assure you," said Robert earnestly.

"Thank you very much. Perhaps I may another year; but this year I am booked for the continent, to prepare for my first course of lectures at the college next winter."

"Oh, yes, I forgot. How stupid of me. Will you get a *locum tenens* to take your place while you're absent?" Robert asked. He was so enraptured with the thought of his own prospective happiness, that he could hardly talk straight.

"*Locum tenens* be blowed!" exclaimed Hartman, with a touch of impatience, about the first that Robert had ever seen on his face. "My dear boy, if I once leave Linbrook, I leave for good. I have a good practice here. It is well established, and it will not be difficult to find a competent man who will be glad to step into it and take over the house as well."

"I know it. The people will miss you terribly, though."

"They will have to miss me then, I fear. Let us have a smoke before you drive over to see the prospective bride again. We can sit in the inner office. The windows are open, and there's a comfortable chair or two."

"You have a larger library than when I was here last," was Robert's comment as his eye rested on well-packed shelves filled with recent publications; and then on the new pictures upon the walls.

"Yes; I have a number of new books, thoroughly up to date. I find them very useful, and I'm glad to have them. I like the staunch old men, though. These pictures are all from among the fathers in my profession, commencing with the bust of Esculapius and ending with that etching of gallant old Dr. Widmer of Toronto. That is Sir Astley Cooper, one of the finest men that ever lived, and this the renowned Jenner. Every one knows Harvey, the discoverer of circulation, and the heroic John Hunter. You won't care about them, though; but, you know, since I am destined to be a bachelor, these are my household gods."

"You are destined to nothing of the kind," ejaculated Robert. "I'll warrant you'll be married to one of the finest ladies of the land some day."

"Shall I?" asked the doctor, elevating his eyebrows. "Are you a prophet, or the son of a prophet?"

"Neither, but a staunch friend who expects to dance at your wedding," was the smiling rejoinder.

"Well, if ever I get married, I shall certainly invite both you and your wife to be among my guests," added the doctor with a sweep of his hand. "But what is the programme for to-morrow? You have not favoured me with any of the particulars yet, except that it is to take place at the hour of nine in the morning."

"We chose that hour in order to take the long drive to B—— Station and catch the afternoon train," replied Robert.

"If your time is not too limited, perhaps I might throw in a suggestion," observed Hartman. "There is going to be a unique celebration of the Queen's birthday to-morrow at Klincoe. There will be a street parade, marches, music by the Hamilton band, races, games, and fireworks in the evening; to conclude with a grand concert by Madame Anna Bishop. It is said to be the first time that the county has ever been favoured with a singer of so high an order. Why not take it all in, remain over at Klincoe for the night, and then drive to B—— Station in the morning. Of course, I don't want to interfere with your plans. This is merely a suggestion. I know Miss Finlayson is fond of good music, and I thought that both of you would enjoy the slight change in your programme."

"Are you going to take it in yourself, doctor?"

"I am sorry I can't, for after the wedding I shall be too busy with professional work to attend to anything else."

"Thank you very much for the thought; but it is a pity you can't go too," said Robert regretfully; "it is well worth considering, and I will speak to Winifred of it to-night. She said something about it in her last letter; but nothing seemed to be very definitely settled then."

"Oh, the definite part of the arrangement has been made within the last few days, and is the outcome of the intense loyal feeling that now prevails. It is a sort of praiseworthy effort to boom Confederation."

"I believe in Confederation," said Robert, "and every Canadian should do what he can to further it."

"That's right," exclaimed the doctor, "I am glad you are true blue."

At that moment a buggy was driven up from the livery stable.

"Shall you be very late?" the doctor inquired.

"No," replied Robert, "I expect to be back in good time."

"If you are likely to be later than twelve you are welcome to a latch-key," said the doctor; "but up to then the house will still be open. You will find a light turned down in your room, and everything arranged."

"Thank you very much," were Robert's parting words, and away he went.

"So it's all up at last," said the doctor to himself as he leaned back in his chair in his inner office. The moon was at the

full and cast soft shadows into the room through the open window; for he had turned down the light. "I knew it from the first; and yet, fool as I was, I allowed the infatuation to continue. How I have kept it hidden is a mystery to me! Not a soul knows it. Still, over and over again I have almost given myself away, both to Winifred and to Robert. I wonder if they ever suspected. Did I do right after all? God knows I could have won her if I had tried. But how could I? The price of honour is above rubies. Can a man prove a traitor to his friend, and when he is down, act the dastard, and shove him down deeper? A Hartman could not, anyway; and if he did, he is not worthy of the name. Yet I love you, Winifred, with all my heart and soul. I have tried to crush the feeling and stamp it out, but it's no use. They say in time every wound heals. Will it take years or decades, I wonder, to heal mine? Still, ignorant as they are, they shall neither of them ever know. Oh! but how can I face to-morrow?—to stand by and with a smiling face see them give her away!—to feel the cords wringing my heart, separating us for ever, doomed to bachelorhood for ages—and with a smiling face extend loyal congratulations and groomsman's best wishes. Still, by heaven, you shall do it, old man! You shall go to the wedding and be the gayest of the gay! No smile shall be brighter than your smile; no laugh lighter than your laugh!—and, by the God above us, no greeting shall be more heartfelt than your greeting! An hour or two, and it will all be over; and then, luckily, you will have a long day's work afterwards. There's that case of pneumonia out on the 14th, and the old man's broken leg on the 12th, and I'll have to see that case of erysipelas out beyond the Tamarack swamp, no matter how late it is. It will be a good tonic, too, to get back again from sentiment to actual prose—the solid and dreary facts of life."

The doctor rose, went outside for a few moments, walked up and down beneath the elms, and examined the peonies, which were coming into bloom. Then he went in again and marched up and down the balcony. Finally, he re-entered the office and resumed his musing; but another messenger came, and he was hurried away.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE WEDDING.

It was one of the brightest days in May. The woods were full of flowers, the trees covered with blossom, and the air redolent with a thousand perfumes. The women in their best frocks, and the men in their Sunday clothes, all came to the home wedding. The birds and squirrels too seemed to be invited, for they sang and chattered round the Finlayson homestead the livelong day.

Miss Roberts as bridesmaid came early, to help to robe the blushing maiden in her white silk gown and orange blossoms. And Robert, arrayed in frock coat and grays, drove up in good time with the doctor. Mr. Finlayson was at the door to meet them. He looked very sedate in his suit of broadcloth and black stock. It was his duty to do all honour to the occasion, and his deportment was genuinely grave.

"This is a solemn and serious contract you young people are entering into," he said to Robert as they shook hands. "To me, marriage is the great sacrament of life."

"It is to me, also," assented Robert, "and should be to every man."

Mrs. Finlayson, arrayed in a black silk, which was said to stand alone, and was the cynosure of many eyes, stood in the room waiting to receive them. Furtively she glanced at the doctor, as the two men entered together, but it escaped his observation.

"This is a grand day for you all, Mrs. Finlayson," he exclaimed with a gay laugh. "Thornton here's a happy man; but I expect you are almost as happy as he is to gain such a son. I congratulate you all."

"Thank you," she replied, looking from one to the other in a peculiar way, which Robert alone either saw or understood. "But if I do gain a son, I lose my daughter; and both will be so far off, that they'll be little use to me, I fear."

"My dear Mrs. Finlayson," said the doctor lightly, "if you want to be always together, you must make it a succession of holidays. Either go and see her, or have her come and see you, all the way from January to December."

"That would be foolishness," said Mrs. Finlayson gravely; "but come over here for a moment, please, I want to say a word to you."

The doctor followed her to the side verandah, while Hugh and his father and Robert talked to the guests.

"Do you really think, doctor, that it is the very best thing for Winifred to marry Robert Thornton?" she asked, looking him intently in the face. "It won't alter things now, but I do want to have your opinion straight. No one else need know."

The doctor looked gravely at her while she was speaking. This was unexpected; but he had himself well in hand. Slowly a humorous twinkle gathered in his eye, and his grave face broadened into a smile.

"Yes, Mrs. Finlayson, I do. When a man and a maid love each other as Robert and Winifred do, it is always the best thing for them to marry, if they can; and what is more, it is a sin if they don't. And to prove to you and to them how glad I am that they have selected each other, and are going to be man and wife, I have brought a little present for the bride; and here it is. Give it to her, please. I am just impatient to see how well she looks to-day!"

"This is too much, doctor. How could you?"

But the only answer was a ringing laugh, as he turned to join the other guests.

Father Wortley was there too. He had been selected by Winifred to perform the ceremony; and his genial smile shed a warm glow over the whole company.

"Do you know that Mr. Pettigrew has got ahead of you?" said the doctor to Robert as he mingled with them again. "You are not half sharp enough, sir," he concluded, with a sly shake of the head.

"Why, what has he done?" was the query.

"Stolen a march on you by a whole week. He has married Miss Mathers and taken her down east on their wedding journey."

"Bright man!" exclaimed Robert. "*He* is to be congratulated; and I hope *her* life will be a happy one."

In another minute Mrs. Finlayson entered the room again and came over to speak to Robert. A look of pleased surprise came into his face as he glanced toward the doctor; but the latter was causing ripples of laughter all round him by a story he was telling.

"Doctor!" he exclaimed.

"Just wait till I finish, please," was the laughing answer, and the mother and Robert heard him to the end.

"What is it, pray?" were his next words, as he turned toward them.

"Mrs. Finlayson tells me you have sent a beautiful bracelet of diamonds and rubies to Winifred. She and all of us are overwhelmed."

"It isn't gorgeous," said the doctor, drawing up his eyebrows and smiling serenely, "but it's a chaste little thing, and will suit her wrist to perfection. She's the belle of the whole county, you know; and it's only fitting that the man who is making a good thing out of you all, should give her a trifle before she leaves. This is the Queen's birthday, too. Let her wear it."

"I don't see why she should not," said Robert, slightly contracting his eyebrows. "It's awfully good of you, doctor."

"Nonsense, man. Don't know but I'll give it in the name of the whole country-side. And she'll honour us all by wearing it to-day."

Another despatch was sent to the robing-room, and in a few minutes Winifred came out—a dream of loveliness—leaning upon the arm of her father. The eyes of the bride and groom met for the first time that day in a passionate look of love and trust. Then she saw the doctor. Upon her left arm flashed in rare brilliancy his bracelet, and her face beamed with a smile of recognition and gratitude.

Quickly the bride and groom, supported by Miss Roberts and the doctor, took their places. Then the hoary-headed minister, his face beaming with kindness and love, made them one, and pronounced over their bowed heads the benediction.

"Now you are my own sweet wife," said Robert, as he kissed her tenderly.

"Yes, yours for ever," was her low refrain; but another heard it.

"That is just as it should be," murmured the doctor, while he raised her fingers to his lips and bade them God-speed. He dared not trust himself to kiss her lips.

Congratulations, and after that the breakfast. Then the toast, and it was Dr. Hartman who proposed it. With beaming face and flashing eye and cordial words, he bade them drink to the health of bride and groom: "May they have long life abounding in peace, overflowing with love, and strewed with many mercies. May God's blessing go with them, and kind friends ever be near them."

A ripple of approval went round the board as the toast was drunk. While the guests sat down again, Father Wortley retained the floor.

"I have only one thing to add to the toast of the good doctor," he said, "and that is—I hope and pray that the boys and girls who are here to-day will all follow the example set them by the young couple we have just married. Let me tell you—I have no doubt you know it already, but it will bear repeating—that this is a genuine love-match from start to finish. Winifred Finlayson and Robert Thornton have known each other from childhood. Their attachment grew with their youth and strengthened with their years—until it developed into what it is to-day, love of heart for heart and soul for soul; something that will stand by them through joy and sorrow—through rain and sunshine—through life, and I believe through death as well. Of course," continued the old man, shaking the hoary locks which almost swept his shoulders, and smiling upon the upturned faces round the table, "you can't all have known each other for twelve or fifteen years, or even five; but you all have known each other long enough to be able to distinguish the true love from the false. When you are

once sure that you have got hold of the right article, all I say is—go in and win!"

In another hour they were gone; but they did not go to Klincoe. Winifred thought it best, in embarking upon her new life, to leave all the old behind. She could come back to it again, and her friends could come to her; but, for the present, she must be alone with the husband she loved; and the whole outer world, with all its strange faces and strange scenes, must simply be the setting of the inner life, which was their own.

Dr. Hartman was the last to wave them adieu. His face was the gayest, and his laugh the loudest; and as the carriage started he dropped a huge cluster of roses at Winifred's feet.

"Good-bye, old man," cried Robert. "I shall never forget."

Then, as they disappeared over the hill, the doctor's own buggy drove up to the door.

"After the poetry comes the prose," he said, and, taking up the reins, he bowed to the guests and drove away.

THE END.

BRADBURY, AGNEW, & CO. LD., PRINTERS,
LONDON AND TUNBRIDGE.

Transcriber's Note

Punctuation errors have been corrected.

The following apparent printer's errors have been addressed.

Page 20 'seervics' to 'services' 'to secure his services'

Page 165 'sucedive' to 'successive' 'between the successive mops'

Page 187 'some one' to 'someone' 'against someone or other'

[End of *How Hartman Won* by Eric Bohn]