EMERSON WILLIS GEORGE

BUELL HAMPTON

Willis Emerson

Buell Hampton

Emerson W.

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Содержание

Willis George Emerson
Buell Hampton

DEDICATED TO MY OLD SWEETHEART

My sweetheart of the long ago —
With rosy cheeks and raven hair —
Sang lullabies so soft and low,
All joyous was the rhythmic air.
Though other links with luckless fate
Have brought me bruises bathed in tears,
From childhood up to man's estate
Her love has held me all the years.
Our ties grow fonder, day by day,
While graces, all, in her combine.
Oh, love! make good and glad the way
Where walks this sweetheart – Mother mine.

THEME

Once an American mother, with the wealth of a Croesus and a lovely daughter, longed for titled distinction.

In her net she caught an adventurer, clothed in a frayed-out remnant of a former nobility – and an eyeglass.

They bartered and came to terms, – dollars, title, – while an innocent girl was thrown in as an incident.

"And what is writ is writ, —
Would it were worthier."

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage.

Every author who, early or late, finds it his delightful, yet dangerous, privilege to "get under cover" owes something to Pliny the Younger for recording the fact that Pliny the Elder used to say that "no book was so bad but that some good might be got out of it."

With this delightful assurance as an incentive, the author of "Buell Hampton" began, some twelve years ago, to construct the story herewith presented.

There is so much in the following tale of the great Southwest that is based upon facts and actual happenings that I hardly know where history ceases and fiction begins.

I know the grain-bags of promise were torn open and found to be filled with the tare seeds of disappointment, which were blown carelessly about by the wind-puffs of adversity.

The Osborns, the Hortons, queenly Ethel, and Marie, – the singing girl, – Lord Avondale, Jack Redfield, and Hugh Stanton are still in the land of the living, and will doubtless peruse these pages with varying degrees of approval. Judge Lynn died about one year ago, but will long be remembered in the Southwest for his oddities and grotesque sayings. I was present when a shadow fell between the old banker and his beautiful young wife, and, with the days, it deepened, until it was obliterated by the clods of Graceland Cemetery.

The prairie-fire, the foot-race, and the pitiless hot winds were actual occurrences, while the fields of sunflowers are, in season, still to be seen in all their gorgeous splendor.

Major Buell Hampton is a flesh and blood personality, with whom I spent many an enjoyable evening, and whom I learned to love for his wealth of wisdom and kindness of heart. His rise and fall, the tragedy on the red banks of the Cimarron River, and his strange disappearance, are a part of the tragic history of the cattle-range of the Great Southwest. The music of the old violin still lingers with me, and is inseparable from the strange character and complex destiny of this wonderful man.

W. G. E

CHAPTER I. – AT LAKE GENEVA

IT was only a game of tennis that brought on this affair of love's entanglement.

Ethel Horton, with rich, maidenly flushes on her soft cheeks, played as she had never played before – played and won.

Athletic suppleness and vivacious buoyancy were emphasized in every movement of this intense American girl.

With heightened color, she contested the game, point by point.

It was thrilling sport, and her clever opponent was Lenox Avondale, an Englishman.

And while this exciting neck and neck game was in progress, her mother, Mrs. J. Bruce-Horton, was idly conversing with Mrs. Lyman Osborn on a wide veranda of the hotel that overlooked the blue waters of the lake.

"Really," she observed, leaning back in her easy chair, "Lake Geneva is not such a bad place, after all. One can get on here very well for a few days."

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Lyman Osborn, as she seated herself languidly, and gazed across the blue waters, "yet I fancy that in time it would become quite dull for us, it is so thoroughly American. Let me push the cushions under your shoulder a little farther, dear."

"Thank you," replied Mrs. Horton, "that is more comfortable. What does Doctor Redfield say of my illness?"

"That in a week's time we can continue our journey to the Southwest."

"My dear husband," murmured Mrs. Horton, reflectively, "how glad he will be to see Ethel! It has been four years since the child was placed in that fashionable London school; she was then only fifteen. Her dear father will hardly know her."

"The thanks of all are due to you, my dear Mrs. Horton, for the educational advantages that Ethel has enjoyed."

"Yes, my husband is so determined in his ideas; but I manage to spend as little of my time on the frontier, you know, as possible, and I certainly shall see to it that Ethel does not deteriorate under the influence of our stupid American ways. She is certainly a girl of rare gifts, and I could never have forgiven myself had she been educated in the States."

"Quite right," assented Mrs. Osborn, "your husband may stay with his herds of cattle, and my husband may stand at his bank counter, year in and year out, if it pleases them to do so, but you and I will take our annual trip to merry England," and Mrs. Osborn laughed a ripple of indifference at the crude taste of their respective husbands.

Mrs. J. Bruce-Horton was a woman in her early forties. Her features were regular, and her complexion had a youthfulness not in keeping with her age. Her heavy brown hair was most becomingly arranged. Her neatly fitting suit of tweed, – a production of Redfern, – in keeping with the latest London style, admirably set off her rather stately figure. Her companion, Mrs. Lyman Osborn, was probably thirty-five, although in appearance she seemed much younger. A pink and white skin, fair hair, and blue eyes combined in giving her a bewitching appearance.

They were returning from a trip to England, whither they had gone to bring home with them Ethel Horton, who had recently finished her education in a London school. At Chicago Mrs. J. Bruce-Horton had been taken suddenly ill; and Doctor Redfield had been recommended and summoned. On his advice they had come to Lake Geneva until Mrs. Horton sufficiently recovered to continue their journey to southwestern Kansas.

Mr. John B. Horton was known in the West as a great cattle baron. Soon after the war he married in Baltimore, and moved West to engage in the cattle business. His lonely dugout of frontier days had given way to one of the most palatial residences in the West. This beautiful home had been erected on the site of the dugout, near the line between Kansas and No-Man's-Land, and not far

from the Cimarron River. Horton's Grove was known far and wide. Indeed, it was practically the only timber in that section of the country. In this grove two mammoth springs burst forth from the hillside, and formed a beautiful stream named Manaroya. Here, near the edge of the grove, and on the banks of the gurgling brook, less than three miles from Meade, Kansas, John Horton had erected his home.

With their accumulation of wealth had come an ambition on the part of Mrs. J. Bruce-Horton – as she inscribed her cards – to give her daughter Ethel all the advantages of a thorough education. Vassar had been thought of; but the banker's wife, Mrs. Lyman Osborn, had suggested that foreign travel was indispensable in reaching a correct decision.

Captain Lyman Osborn was a veteran of the Union army, and was many years his wife's senior. He was engaged in the banking business at Meade, and divided his time between his duties at the bank, and his son, Harry, who was not more than five years of age. The father fairly idolized the boy, and, while he was with him, was quite content that his young wife should travel abroad – if that were her pleasure.

Against her husband's wishes and advice, Mrs. J. Bruce-Horton had selected a London school for their daughter, and since Ethel had been placed therein, she had spent a portion of each year in England, accompanied by her bosom friend, Mrs. Lyman Osborn. In many ways these two women were dissimilar, but their very dissimilarity seemed to bind them more closely together. They had both become tinctured with the weakness of title-worship, and perhaps the most cherished wish of Mrs. J. Bruce-Horton was that Ethel should marry into some titled English family.

"I do wonder," she sighed, "if there are any people desirable for one to know stopping at the hotel."

"Very doubtful," lamented Mrs. Osborn. "The fewer Americans we know the better for us when among our friends on the other side."

"Quite true," assented the other, devoutly.

"It is so embarrassing, when one is among one's English friends, to have American acquaintances intruding themselves. Oh, here comes Ethel!" observed Mrs. Horton.

"Oh, mamma!" cried Ethel, as she came running toward them, all out of breath, "our side won."

"Why, Ethel, what have you been doing?" exclaimed her mother, as she held up her hands in amazement.

"I have just finished the jolliest game of tennis I ever played in my life; and my! did n't we do them up!"

"Such language, Ethel; do you know – "

"Why, mamma, if you could have seen how we Americans vanquished two rum Englishmen you would have shouted 'Hail Columbia' and 'The Star Spangled Banner' forever!"

"Ethel, Ethel, such language is so unbecoming!"

"I know, mamma, but I am in America once more, and I feel in a 'Hail Columbia' sort of mood. There," said she, "and there," as she stooped and kissed her mother affectionately. "Now don't scold me any more. My, but I am having lots of fun."

Mrs. J. Bruce-Horton adjusted her glasses, which had been displaced by Ethel's impetuous embrace, and inquired, "Did you say that there were some English families stopping at the hotel, Ethel?"

"Yes, mamma, the Countess Berwyn and Lady Somebody – I don't remember her name – and her son and an English friend of his."

"Not such an undesirable place to stop, after all," remarked Mrs. Lyman Osborn.

"No, indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. J. Bruce-Horton. "But really, Ethel, you must be more particular. You must not speak so disrespectfully of our English friends. You know we have so many across the water."

"Why, mamma, I am not disrespectful; I am only happy, and so glad that I am home again in my own country. Well, bye-bye, I must go and dress for dinner – Oh, yes, will Doctor Redfield be here this evening?"

"I presume so," answered her mother, inquiringly, "but why do you ask?"

"Oh, nothing," replied Ethel, and she hurried away – with her young face all aglow with happiness.

"Brimming over with animation!" said Mrs. Osborn, as she looked at the retreating form of the girl. "Together we must control spirited Ethel until she is safely anchored in the harbor of English nobility."

"Yes, indeed, we must," acquiesced Mrs. Horton; "and it is very kind of you to take so much interest in helping me."

Ethel Horton was a tall and stately girl. She had laughing eyes, pouting red lips, and teeth that resembled the delicate tints of the conch-shell. Her intellectual forehead, slightly aquiline nose, radiantly youthful complexion, and wealth of dark brown hair, made her a creature beautiful to look upon.

"I wonder why Ethel inquired about Doctor Redfield," mused Mrs. Horton, thoughtfully.

"Oh, it was nothing," rejoined Mrs. Osborn, "still we must beware of these broad-shouldered men with blond mustaches. He really is quite attractive; however, Ethel is not sentimental, is she?"

"Good gracious, no!" responded Mrs. Horton, emphatically, "not in the least."

"So much the better, then," affirmed her companion; "it will be a great deal easier to work out a destiny that will be for her own good. We should be able to make a great match for her, my dear. I will help you, and we shall not fail. Now we must find out about these English people."

CHAPTER II. – A CHANCE MEETING

WHEN Ethel returned to her mother after dressing for dinner, her tennis suit had been exchanged for an airy lace dress of soft material and such complete simplicity that it set off her youthful form to the very best advantage.

“By the way, mamma, Lady Avondale is the other Englishwoman stopping at the hotel. She and the Countess Berwyn are traveling together.”

“Lady Avondale!” exclaimed the mother, “did you say Lady Avondale? My dear friend, Lady Avondale!”

“How charmingly fortunate,” lisped Mrs. Lyman Osborn.

“Yes, indeed,” agreed Mrs. Horton, with unmistakable complacency, “how kind they were to us a year ago! You know, Ethel, we were entertained at Lady Avondale’s country-house a year ago, and oh, what a lovely estate they have, and how delightfully kind they were to us. We must send our cards at once.”

“Oh, here comes Doctor Redfield!” exclaimed Mrs. Osborn; and the three ladies turned toward a tall, broad-shouldered man of about thirty, who bowed politely as he approached them.

Dr. Jack Redfield, as he was familiarly called by his friends, although young in years, had nevertheless “won his spurs” in the medical profession. He had a lucrative practice in Chicago, and occupied a chair in one of the leading medical colleges. His head was of a Napoleonic cast. He had deep-set, expressive blue eyes, short brown hair, a rather heavy blond mustache, and a square chin indicative of great strength of character. In physical proportions he seemed an athlete. His neatly fitting attire proved that he kept abreast with the conventionalities.

“How are you feeling this evening?” he asked, addressing Mrs. J. Bruce-Horton.

“Oh, much better, thank you.”

“I fear it is almost too cool for you here on the veranda, and I suggest the wisdom of your retiring to the parlors.”

“Oh, do you really think so, doctor? It is so very pleasant here, and yet it is very thoughtful of you to mention it. Perhaps,” continued Mrs. Horton, turning to Mrs. Osborn, “we had better go in.”

“I will accompany you,” said Doctor Redfield. “I think it best to change the medicine.”

“Will you come, Ethel?” asked Mrs. Horton, as they arose.

“No, mamma, it is so very pleasant out here, and you know that I am not ill.”

As the invalid and her companion moved away, Doctor Redfield turned to Ethel and said, “I trust you are enjoying your temporary sojourn at Lake Geneva.”

“Oh, very much, indeed,” replied Ethel, with a smile, “I think the rowing is simply grand, and the shady walks and drives are superb.”

“Of course as a summer resort,” said Doctor Redfield, “it may not compare with Bath or Brighton, but I doubt if the Lakes of Killarney or the scenery surrounding them surpass, in point of beauty, Lake Geneva.”

“You are quite an American, are n’t you?” said Ethel, laughingly.

“Intensely so,” replied Doctor Redfield.

“Well, we can’t quarrel on that point, for I am more in love with my own country than before I went abroad.”

“I beg pardon,” interrupted Mrs. Osborn, who had returned from escorting her companion to the parlors, “but Mrs. Horton is waiting for you, doctor.”

“Very well, I shall come at once,” he answered, while a flush of embarrassment overspread his face; then, turning to Ethel, he said, “I trust that Lake Geneva may continue to be as interesting during the next few days as it has thus far proved.”

“Thank you,” replied Ethel, and the doctor was led away by Mrs. Osborn.

In the meantime, Mrs. J. Bruce-Horton had sent her own and Mrs. Osborn's card to Lady Avondale. Soon after Doctor Redfield concluded his professional call, Lady Avondale presented herself, and the titled Englishwoman and her American friends were profuse in their protestations of pleasure at the meeting.

After the dinner-hour, when Dr. Jack Redfield was leaving the hotel, he looked wistfully along the veranda in the hope of again seeing Ethel, but she had disappeared.

He was not only a skilful practitioner, but he knew the value of a patient like Mrs. J. Bruce-Horton, and when he had such an one on the road to recovery he was willing to humor her whims as much as the occasion permitted. As he walked toward the lake, down the graveled path so exquisitely bordered on either side with fragrant flowers, which were watered by frequent whirlabout fountains, each throwing its refreshing spray far over the lawn, a feeling of satisfaction at his professional success, and of complete contentment with the whole world, elated him. This feeling might have been continued indefinitely but for a single incident – a fate-like incident – that changed the story of his life.

As he came to a turn in the path he found Ethel reclining on a rustic seat and looking out over the blue waters of the lake.

"I am not a highwayman," said Ethel, jestingly, "but nevertheless I mean to waylay you."

"Indeed!" said Jack, inquiringly.

"Yes, I wanted to ask you about dear mamma. You do not think she is dangerously ill, do you?"

"By no means," replied Doctor Redfield, reassuringly, "her indisposition is rapidly giving way to my treatment, and I think that within a week she will have quite recovered."

"Oh, thank you, doctor, I have been so worried about her."

"With the assurance that I have given, you may cease worrying entirely," said Jack as he turned to leave her.

"Why are you in such haste to go?" asked Ethel, coquettishly.

"I am not particularly in haste," replied Jack, "but perhaps I interrupt your reverie."

"Yes, but I want to be interrupted," returned Ethel, laughingly.

"Very well," said Jack, seating himself near her.

Jack Redfield was anything but a Beau Brummel. The idea of yielding himself to maiden sovereignty had never occurred to him. Indeed, his lack of homage to woman might almost have been interpreted as a poverty of gallantry. Nevertheless, in the few days that he had been making professional calls on her mother, he had awakened to a knowledge of the feet that Miss Ethel interested him, to say the least. There was a wild dash of independence and of frankness about her that possessed a charm for him which he was unable to analyze.

As Jack looked out over the lake he was conscious that Ethel was studying him closely. Presently she said, "I cannot make myself believe that you are a physician."

"Indeed, why not?" interrogated Jack, much amused by her frankness. "You evidently expected me to perform a miracle in your mother's case, and, as I have failed to do so, you judge me harshly."

"Oh, no! not that," protested Ethel, "but then, I always fancied that doctors, who give bitter medicine, cut up people and saw bones, should be old and grim. Now, you don't look like a doctor at all to me."

"Well, as I have to make my living in the uncanny way that you have described, I must say that I am glad every one does not share your hasty judgment of me."

"Oh, thank you," said Ethel, "that's very well put. I know you think I am not very kind."

"No, I would hardly go as far as that," said Jack, "but I doubt my ability to hold my own in a conversation with you, much more than I would my skill in a surgical operation or a bad case of measles. I have faith that my treatment would be successful, but I have no faith that you would not vanquish me very quickly with your repartee and your direct way of putting things."

"Oh, what a refreshing compliment," laughed Ethel. "I thought because you were a doctor that you were stoical and grim, but you really seem quite the reverse."

"I am indeed surprised," said Jack, "not at you, but rather at your impression of me. I did n't know that I possessed the gift of being complimentary to ladies; in fact, the social side of my life has been very much neglected. My time has been so taken up with my studies and profession, that I have cultivated but little the ways and customs of the social world."

"Well, you are different from some people I know – Dr. Lenox Avondale for instance – but then he is English and you are an American."

"I am quite content to be an American, with all my stupidity in regard to social matters. He doubtless was reared among a titled aristocracy, and society is a second nature to him. I believe – pardon my frankness – that your life has been much the same, and that you will continue to dwell in a social atmosphere. From remarks made by your mother and her friend I doubt not that they have mapped out a great career for you."

"I trust I am too loyal an American," returned Ethel, proudly, "to take part in any career that is not entirely congenial to my own tastes, and your deductions as to yourself are quite incorrect. For my part, I think more of one who is noble and manly than I do of those English or American idlers, who think only of the latest fashions and who change their attire half a dozen times a day and are, even then, at a loss to know just what to do to kill time."

Jack looked at Ethel as she was speaking, and he was conscious of a budding admiration for her that was quite a new feeling to him.

"Bravo," said he, applaudingly, "those are grand sentiments. No one can say that they are un-American; but I fear that you are surrounded by conditions that may force you to change your views."

"Oh, I assure you," said Ethel, very earnestly, "I have the greatest admiration for workers, whether with the brain or with the hand. It is hardly fashionable, I suppose, to admit such views, but I can't help my convictions."

"I hope," said Jack, "that you may have the courage of your convictions, but I am not blind. I have already discovered that which is marked out for you. If your mother and Mrs. Osborn were not occupied with Lady Avondale, this accidental meeting of ours would not have taken place."

"A destiny marked out for me?" inquired Ethel, in surprise.

"Yes," said Jack, and his voice shook a little as he spoke, "a destiny that does not lie along the line of brain-workers. It is along a highway burnished with titles, on the one side, and with wrecked hopes, broken hearts, and much unhappiness on the other."

A silence followed. Presently he arose and quietly clasped her proffered hand. Over it he bowed in deepest respect. She was conscious that a strange, intense earnestness was moving this strong man. His every emotion said goodbye, but his lips spoke no word. He turned quickly from her and disappeared in the gathering twilight, and still, without knowing why, she remained where he had left her – watching, wondering, waiting.

CHAPTER III. – A DECLARATION

LADY AVONDALE was very gracious to the Americans, flattering their vanity by presenting them to the Countess of Berwyn. On the Following day, much to their gratification, she introduced them to her son, Dr. Lenox Avondale.

Doctor Avondale was, in fact, a rather distinguished personage. He was perhaps forty years of age, and while not an especially brilliant conversationalist, he talked quite fluently of the race-track, the chase, and kindred topics. Of the English army he knew much, having been appointed surgeon therein by Her Majesty. There he gained a wide reputation for skill in his profession. He was, however, decidedly blasi, and not even the usually alluring subject of out-door sports was sufficient to arouse in him more than a passing interest. He had a tendency to yawn at the dinner-table, and exhibited but little consideration for those occupying less exalted positions than himself. He cultivated a bored expression and complained a great deal about the "beastly American customs." He had obtained an indefinite leave of absence from the Army and was thoroughly "doing the States." His elder brother, Lord Avondale, had contracted an intermittent fever the year before, while in Australia. This fever had developed into serious complications, and his death was considered to be a question of only a short time, whereupon Dr. Lenox Avondale would succeed to the titles and estates, which are among the oldest in England. The estates, however, were so heavily encumbered with debts that it had been considered necessary to cast about for some American heiress, who, in consideration of sharing the titles, would bring with her enough American dollars to relieve the property of its indebtedness; indeed, Lady Avondale's mission to America was to assist her son in this undertaking.

Mrs. J. Bruce-Horton, in conversation with Lady Avondale, had assured her that if Ethel married a suitable person she should receive three million dollars on her wedding-day, and perhaps twice that much at the death of her parents.

Lady Avondale explained about the sickness of Lord Avondale, her eldest son, and that she was daily expecting to hear of his death, at which time her dear son, Lenox, would succeed to his brother's titles and estates. To all appearances she was very frank and confiding with Mrs. J. Bruce-Horton; but she failed to say anything about the multitude of debts.

Mrs. Lyman Osborn seemed particularly to fancy Dr. Lenox Avondale, and he paid much attention to her. She assured her bosom friend, Mrs. Horton, that she was very proud of his attentions – not for herself, but because of the opportunity it gave to pave the way for "a most desirable match for dear Ethel."

"You are a sweet, good creature; you are indeed," said Mrs. J. Bruce-Horton, when in the privacy of their room. "I could not manage. it, I certainly could not, without your assistance."

"I don't believe we had better be in too great a hurry about starting home," concluded Mrs. Osborn.

"Yes, I understand," agreed Mrs. Horton, nodding significantly, "I think that my health will not permit me to start for a couple of weeks. But, really, have n't you noticed, Lucy, what a deliciously wholesome foreign air there is about this place? With Lady Avondale and the charming countess here I could almost fancy that we were again in dear old England."

"On, it is perfectly lovely," rejoined Mrs. Osborn. "Dr. Lenox Avondale has invited me to go rowing this evening, and I certainly shall not miss the opportunity of pressing upon him the superiority of dear Ethel."

"It is so good of you," lisped Mrs. J. Bruce-Horton, "to take such a deep interest in the child. She is inclined to be rather wilful, and perhaps a little headstrong, but, by judicious management, I am sure that we can overcome her silly, girlish ideas."

That afternoon Doctor Redfield called and found that Mrs. J. Bruce-Horton was very desirous that he should advise their remaining longer at the lake. He was not slow in making the suggestion. He

wondered a little at the peculiar turn that affairs had taken, and the sudden attachment of his patient for Lake Geneva. However, he rightly attributed it to the presence of the English guests. When he left Ethel on the evening before, a strange feeling had come to him. He longed to see her, and he wondered if an hour of tender confidences would ever again be theirs. He remembered the pressure of the girl's warm hand. It had thrilled him. Leaving the hotel in the afternoon, he hesitated a moment on the veranda in an uncertain frame of mind. Then he walked briskly down a path leading through a dense wood that shaded the shore of the lake. An hour afterward he returned to the hotel, he having seen nothing of Ethel. On taking his leave, he saw Dr. Lenox Avondale, accompanied by Mrs. Lyman Osborn and Ethel, going toward the boat-house. Ethel recognized him, and he fancied that there was a warmth in her smile as she bowed.

Thus matters went on, day after day, for several weeks, until Mrs. Horton was pronounced entirely recovered. "We shall be leaving in a day or two," she observed to Doctor Redfield, "and, thanks to your skill, I am quite myself again."

When Jack had gone, Mrs. Osborn looked knowingly at Mrs. Horton, and said, "I think it is just as well that Doctor Redfield is not coming any more. Ethel has spoken several times of him, and has really exhibited more interest in him than I like."

"There is certainly no sentiment in Ethel," replied Mrs. J. Bruce-Horton, "and I feel sure, from what I have said to her, that she is favorably impressed with Dr. Lenox Avondale – still, one cannot be too careful."

While these two friends were thus plotting together, Dr. Jack Redfield was strolling along the beach with Ethel. His daily professional visits had been brightened with the anticipation of seeing her, and his heart had been gladdened by the belief that she, too, had looked forward, with more than passing interest, to his coming.

There are natures that blend and harmonize instantly. Friends are discovered – not manufactured or purchased, and congenial souls recognize one another by the restful influence that each imparts to the other. Ethel Horton and Dr. Jack Redfield each felt this kindred bond of sympathy and mutual discovery. When such souls meet, they defy all social customs.

"I don't know," Ethel was saying, naively, "why your visits give me so much pleasure. Am I too frank in saying this?"

"Oh, no," answered Jack, "I presume it is because you are so deeply interested in your mother's recovery, but I should like to believe that this is not the only reason. I should like to feel that you entertain an interest in me personally, although you must repent of it after we separate to-day, for doubtless I shall drift entirely out of your life. Perhaps that is your wish, and perhaps it is best that it be so."

A blush came to Ethel's face. She walked on silently at his side.

"Don't talk like that," she finally said, in girlish reprimand, "it makes me think that you are disagreeable. I shall always remember you." She laughed a little as she said this, and looked archly up at Jack.

"Remember me!" said Jack, as he turned toward her under the shading branches of an elm that stood near the shore of the lake. "Yes, I should like to believe that you would remember me, but you cannot. Not only is your destiny marked out for you, but even your friends have been chosen for you, and I am not on the list. No difference what your personal wishes may be at this time, you will soon forget me."

There was an earnestness approaching sternness in his voice.

"You are very cross to-day," said Ethel, sadly, "very cross, indeed. I could not forget you, even if I were to try, and I do not think it kind of you to say so."

"Are you quite sure?" inquired Jack, half rapturously.

She raised her eyes to his, and after a moment said, "I am sure. But what difference can it make to you? I shall never see you again."

Jack could not reply at once. He turned partly away and looked out across the waters. As Ethel glanced at him she saw that his face was ashen. She feared that he was vexed and would again say something cross to her. She remembered the feeling that had come over her once before when she was with him. At the sight of his sad face her thoughts became those of pity; and she fell to wondering why friends have to part. She came close to his side, and, laying a hand on his arm, said, pleadingly, "You must not be angry with me to-day; indeed you must not. Why, your arm is shaking as if you were cold."

"Yes," replied Jack, in a low, trembling voice. "Oh, Ethel, Ethel, can you not see – can you not understand that I love you? My heart is beating for you with fierce hammer strokes through every fibre of my being. I have no words to express myself, but I know, yes, before God, I know that I love you better than my own life."

Tears stood in Ethel's eyes, and in their startled surprise Jack read that his impassioned declaration had been too sudden.

"Oh," sobbed Ethel, as she bowed her head to hide her tears, "if daddy were only here."

"Forgive me – forgive me for speaking, if I have offended you, but the thought of your going away from me, perhaps forever, quite unmanned me." Lifting one of her trembling hands, he kissed it passionately. "Forget me, Ethel, forget me to-morrow, if you will, but only tell me before we part that I am forgiven."

"No, no," said Ethel, between her sobs, "I am sure there is nothing to forgive. Oh, I cannot understand this strange feeling that has taken possession of me. If daddy were only here so I could talk to him. I am afraid to speak to mamma."

"Well, do not speak to her," said Jack, soothingly, "but when you reach your home tell your father, if you will, and, if you can give me your love, write me and I will come to you at once."

"It is good of you to say that," said Ethel, still sobbing, "I really believe I love you now."

Jack was about to throw to the winds all his good resolution of giving her time to decide, and he would have taken her in his arms then and there, and claimed her for his own forever, had not a colored boy from the hotel interrupted them.

"Beg your pardon, miss," said he, "but Mrs. J. Bruce-Horton wished me to say would you please come to her."

Jack dropped a piece of silver in the boy's hand, and said, "Please say to Mrs. Horton that Miss Ethel will come very soon."

They turned and walked slowly, side by side, along the path, in the now uncertain light, toward the hotel, enjoying love's first awakening. Presently Jack spoke.

"You will not forget me, Ethel, but you will write for me to come, will you not?" The soft pressure of the girl's small hand, which was resting contentedly in his, and her sweet, low words of assurance made Jack happy, and yet he was conscious of the sadness of parting. As they neared the hotel he lifted her hand to his lips again and murmured, "Good-bye, Ethel, God bless you."

"Good-bye," she whispered; and her eyes were brimming with tears. "I shall not forget my promise, and I am sure daddy will be on our side."

Jack hurried down the walk, and Ethel stood on the veranda, looking after his retreating figure. A soft mist of awakened love overflowed her young heart and enveloped her.

She turned and went into the hotel – a woman; her girlhood had vanished with the awakening.

CHAPTER IV. – THE DEPARTURE

WHEN Mrs. Horton and Mrs. Osborn learned from the messenger boy that Ethel was with Doctor Redfield their agitation became apparent. They agreed that the best thing to be done was to hasten their departure from Lake Geneva. They wisely decided not to mention the affair to Ethel; but they determined to be more careful and observant of her in the future. Before retiring, they determined to start for the Southwest on the following day.

Lady Avondale was blandly polite, and she assured Mrs. Horton that already she had learned to love Ethel, the dear child, as if she were her own daughter. “Lenox,” she said, assuringly, “is taken with her, really he is quite attentive; have n’t you noticed it, Mrs. Osborn?”

“I must admit,” replied the intriguing Mrs. Osborn, “that he has expressed his admiration for her quite freely, while the dear boy’s eyes betray an eloquence of feeling that cannot be doubted.”

Had Mrs. Horton tried to give an explanation why she desired such an alliance, she would perhaps have floundered hopelessly in a sea of interrogation-points. Until she met Mrs. Osborn this Anglomania idea had never even been thought of by this otherwise sensible American mother. There are natures that influence us, unconsciously to ourselves, in strange and mysterious ways. We meet a person, and instinctively we are impressed with some peculiarity that he or she possesses. We hardly know just what it is, nor do we even stop to analyze our feelings. This one peculiarity might outweigh, in our minds, a hundred glaring defects – defects which in others would be not only quickly noticed by us, but severely condemned. Hence, in our newly formed fondness, friendship, or whatever it may be, we practically become blind to faults.

Mrs. Horton had formed a strong attachment for this very clever woman. This power was not an unconscious one to Lucy Osborn. She had quickly discovered it, and she meant to profit by it, – not in a mercenary way, no, she would have scorned even the thought of such a thing, but in a social way; through an alliance for Ethel she would in some way build an altar for herself.

She experienced little love or sentiment for either Mrs. Horton or her daughter, but she determined to use them as a means to an end. In most things Mrs. Osborn would have been considered an average woman – no better, no worse. Her desire, her ambition, her mania, however, to enter into English social circles was paramount to all other considerations. It was the gaunt tigress of her nature, famishing with desire, ready with hidden tooth and claw to pounce upon every opposition.

“I can assure you, Lady Avondale,” said Mrs. J. Bruce-Horton, and she flushed deeply as she spoke, “that a marriage between my daughter and your son, when he shall have succeeded to his family title, will be most agreeable to me.”

“So nice of you to say that, I am sure,” lisped her Ladyship, while in her heart she was saying, “Why, this silly American woman is extremely amusing.”

“I trust,” continued she aloud, “that your worthy husband will also approve of the contemplated alliance of our families.”

Mrs. J. Bruce-Horton shrugged her stately shoulders in an affected manner and looked bored. Mrs. Lyman Osborn came to her rescue.

“I promise you, Lady Avondale,” she observed, “that when Mrs. J. Bruce-Horton speaks, she does so for her entire family. Mr. John B. Horton is, perhaps – well, a little stupid, as American men of business so often are, you know. He is perfectly at home with his vast herds of cattle, mavericks, brands, and all that sort of thing, but when it comes to social questions, or to a family alliance like this, my dear friend, Mrs. J. Bruce-Horton, is in full authority.”

“Ah, just so,” replied Lady Avondale, as she adjusted her eye-glass and nodded her head wisely, “I understand.”

In the meantime Ethel had retired to her room; but not to sleep. She had a good cry all to herself, after which she bathed her flushed face and, after the manner of women, felt much relieved.

She sat down and gave herself up to thoughtful reverie. She remained thus far into the night; but, finally, arousing herself, she said aloud, "Yes, he is a brain-worker, and oh! how I love brain-workers! Bah, I hate idlers!"

In the morning she awoke from the refreshing sleep of youth. She had scarcely finished her toilet when there came a knock at her door. It proved to be the colored bell-boy who had interrupted them on the evening before.

"Please, miss," said he, with great obeisance, as she opened the door, "the gemman said I was to give you this letter in pusson."

"Thank you," said Ethel as she took the missive. Hastily tearing away the envelope she read:

> "My darling Ethel: – It is now after midnight. I have walked along the path and stood under the old elm in the mad belief that I might see you again, although I must have known that it was impossible. I am sustained by the abiding hope of seeing you after you have spoken to your father. I trust it will not be long. I believe in you. The honesty of the soul that shines out through your eyes cannot be doubted. I am thrilled with deepest reverence, when I think of you, – a reverence such as one might feel when standing before a snow-white sacred shrine of peace, purity, and innocence. Know that my love is immortal – it cannot die.
> *"Affectionately,*
> *"Jack."*

It was no shame to the noble heart of Ethel Horton that she kissed Jack's hurriedly written note over and over, and bathed it with her tears. On the impulse of the moment she rang for pen and paper, and wrote:

> "Dear Jack: – Your note has made me very happy. We leave to-day for the Southwest. I have thought it all over, and I know that I like you awfully well. I am conscious of a strange sensation that may be – well, I don't know what it is. Do not give up hope, but share my faith in daddy. Yours,
> *"Ethel."*

Before leaving Lake Geneva, it was understood between Mrs. Horton and Lady Avondale that her son was to visit them at their ranch in southwestern Kansas. He intended spending about two months, later in the fall, hunting in the mountains of Colorado. Dr. Lenox Avondale looked upon an alliance with the American heiress as necessary for the preservation of the estates in England, and he accepted his mother's arrangements as a matter of course. The flirtation which he had secretly begun with Mrs. Osborn promised a recreation within itself when he should visit the Hortons.

As for Dr. Jack Redfield, he was impatient to see Ethel once more, and in the hope that she had not yet gone from Lake Geneva he boarded a train, and at noon was at the lake, only to find that the Hortons and Mrs. Osborn had taken their departure an hour before. He had not yet received Ethel's letter. He returned to the city, determined to bury himself in the multiplicity of his professional duties and study until his summons should come from Ethel Horton.

That evening on returning to his apartments on Dearborn Avenue he found among his letters the note from Ethel. His other mail he left unopened, while he read and re-read this message of hope. It was so sacred to him – it meant so much. This great, strong fellow who, heretofore, had been proof against love's tender passion, had awakened to find himself thoroughly ensnared in its silken meshes. No, he did not wish to be' free. As he walked to and fro in his room, he idealized Ethel with an ardent chivalry that might have become a knight of old.

The door-bell rang and Hugh Stanton was announced.

"Admit him," said Jack. "I wonder what he wants. No, I will not tell him of my happiness."

A moment later Hugh Stanton was ushered into Jack Redfield's presence. They greeted as the warmest of friends. Between these two it was always "Jack" on the one side and "Hugh" on the

other. They had been classmates at Princeton. After graduation Hugh had turned his attention to commercial pursuits, and had gradually worked his way up to the cashiership of one of Chicago's most conservative banking institutions.

Hugh Stanton presented a striking contrast to his friend, Doctor Redfield. He was slightly below medium height, and rather stout. He had a handsome, good-natured face, black eyes, fair skin, and a silky, dark mustache. His thick, dark hair was inclined to be wavy, while his rather small hands and feet suggested a patrician ancestry.

After their greeting Jack produced a box of Havanas, and settling themselves in comfortable chairs, he observed, "Well, old boy, what's the news?"

"I am about to leave Chicago," replied Hugh, with an interrogative smile as much as to say, "What do you think of that?"

"Leave Chicago!" exclaimed Jack, in amazement. "Why, man, you have one of the best positions in the city."

"Yes, but you know that my father's estate, which has been tied up so long in the courts, is at last settled; and I find myself with fifty thousand dollars in ready money at my command. That amount does not mean much in a city like this, but on the frontier, where rates of interest are high, I can soon double it several times; and then, too, I am tired of city life. One is too much of an atom in a great throbbing centre like Chicago."

"Well, you astonish me," said Jack, "you almost take my breath away. I thought you were permanently settled and thoroughly in love with your surroundings."

"Well, you know there is an old saying," said Hugh, smiling, "that it is better to be a big fish in a small pond than a small fish in an ocean. I have been in correspondence with the captain of my father's old company, who is now on the frontier, and am offered the cashiership and an opportunity to purchase half the stock in the national bank of which he is the president."

"It is rather strange that your father's estate was so long in being settled," said Jack, reflectively.

"Yes," said Hugh, "more than twenty years from the time of his supposed death. He fought in the battle of Bethel Church and was numbered among the missing, but we were unable to establish the fact of his death. My mother died when I was a mere child, and then I lived with an uncle, who has had charge of my affairs; but at last everything is settled, and the money is now to my credit in the bank."

"And so you are going to the frontier. I fear you will soon grow tired of it," said Jack, "the contrast will be so great. What sort of man is he with whom you are going to associate yourself?"

"I cannot say," replied Hugh, as he knocked the ashes from his cigar, "I have never met him. He was captain of the company in which my father was first lieutenant, and I have had considerable correspondence with him in trying to obtain information in regard to my father's death. This correspondence has, strangely enough, led to the present contemplated business arrangement."

"Well, we must see much of each other between now and the time you start."

"My dear Jack," replied Hugh, "I have already resigned my position and I shall leave to-morrow for my new home. I have called to-night to have an old-time chat, and to say farewell."

Jack looked at his friend incredulously, and said, half indignantly, "Well, why have n't you called before?"

"I have called nearly every evening for the past two weeks," replied Hugh, "but you were never at home."

"Oh, yes," said Jack, looking up at the tiers of books on the shelves, and plucking his mustache, reflectively. "Yes, that's so, I have been away – professional calls, you know."

Soon Hugh Stanton took leave of his friend and the following day found him en route for Meade, Kansas.

After crossing the "Big Muddy" at Kansas City, Hugh began to realize, for the first time, that he was entering the "Great Plains" – that he was, indeed, in the West. He gazed meditatively from the car windows and beheld, in rapturous anticipation, the vast, rolling, monotonous prairies. He was

coming to a land of promise, a land of hopes and of disappointments, a land of vast herds and of writhing winds, a land of struggling farmers and of princely cattle barons, a land of wild flowers and of sunshine. Here, Hugh Stanton was soon to become an actor on the realistic stage of the Southwest. He was to become, first, an actor in melodrama, then tragedy, and finally he was to play a part in a mighty orchestral avalanche of mystery.

CHAPTER V. – A FRONTIER BANKER

MEADE, Kansas, was at that time almost a typical western frontier town, situated some forty miles southwest of Dodge City – the nearest railroad station – and on the western bank of a small stream known as Crooked Creek. It had then a population of three or four thousand people, and was an important commercial centre for ranchmen and cattlemen. When Hugh Stanton arrived on the old four-horse stage-coach from Dodge City, late one afternoon, he found himself covered with dust and almost exhausted from the tiresome ride. The leading hotel was the Osborn House, where he found convenient and pleasant quarters. The hotel property belonged to Captain Lyman Osborn, who also owned several brick business blocks at Meade.

That evening he met Captain Osborn, who gave him a hearty welcome to Meade and expressed sincere pleasure at his decision to join him in the banking business.

On the following day, after carefully looking over the books of the Meade National Bank, Hugh made arrangements to purchase one-half of the capital stock of the institution and was duly elected and installed cashier.

Those were halcyon days in southwestern Kansas. Hugh, to his amazement, found that deposits in the bank amounted to over half a million dollars and that a semi-annual dividend of fifteen per cent, was regularly declared.

Captain Osborn was a man of perhaps sixty years, military in bearing and possessing a flowing iron gray mustache and an imperial mien that gave him a distinguished appearance.

“Sir, you remind me very much of your father, Lieutenant Stanton,” observed the captain one day after Hugh had become his partner in the banking business. “There was not a braver man in the company. We were bosom friends for many years before the war with the South, and we enlisted at the same time. I feel very proud, Stanton, my boy, that we have become associated in business. I know that I can trust you implicitly, and I have need of some friend to lean upon.”

The rich, deep voice of the old captain quivered a little as he spoke, and a shadow of melancholy flitted across his face.

“You will not be disappointed with the profits,” he continued, – “they are certainly enormous compared with returns on money in the middle or eastern States.”

“I am quite sure,” replied Hugh, “that I shall like the change to the frontier, although it differs vastly from the busy metropolis that I have just left.”

“Doubtless,” said the captain, “the contrast is very marked. There are many reasons why I like southwestern Kansas. The climate is superb; then there are so many old soldiers here, and you know between the veterans there is a sort of unspoken friendship. Scattered throughout our valleys and across our prairies you will find the boys who wore the blue and those who wore the gray dwelling on adjoining farms, and the best of neighbors. There are many old soldiers of the late war living among us; one of the most prominent of whom is Major Buell Hampton, editor of the *Patriot*. While he and I differ materially in politics, yet, withal, he is a most cultured and entertaining gentleman. I have understood in a vague way that he won his title fighting for the Southern cause. Then, there’s Mr. John Horton, – perhaps the most extensive cattle owner in the Southwest. His herds cover not only his own vast range, but also the plains of No-Man’s-Land and northern Texas. Before the recent rush of settlers into this part of Kansas it was a great range for his cattle.”

“Has the settlement of the country inconvenienced the cattlemen?” inquired Hugh.

“Considerably,” replied the captain. “You see the cattlemen have a theory that this is not a farming country. The settlers know better. Now last year and the year before there were no finer crops anywhere in the world than were grown on the farms in this part of the State. The old earth was recklessly improvident in her generosity; every farm was an overflowing granary of plenty. However, we have no quarrel with John Horton. He is one of our largest depositors, and a very manly fellow.

His millions have not turned his head, although I cannot say as much for all members of his family. Ah, here comes a young scapegrace that I want you to know."

As the captain spoke, a little boy came bounding toward him through the open door of his private office, and nestled on his knee. The captain caressed him tenderly. The boy slipped one arm coaxingly about his father's neck, and received the introduction to Hugh very bashfully.

"This is my boy Harry," said the captain.

The little fellow was perhaps not more than five years old, but his face beamed with an older intelligence.

"We are great companions," said the captain, "and he takes more liberties with me than he has any right to – that's what you do, you little rascal," said he, addressing the boy and giving him an affectionate hug.

"Won't you come to me, Harry?" said Hugh, in a coaxing voice.

"No, sir, 'cause we're not 'kainted yet – when we is 'kainted I will."

"This gentleman is my friend, Harry," said the father, "and therefore he is your friend, too."

"All 'ite, then," said the boy, "I's your fwend, too," and he held out his hand, which Hugh clasped as a bond of good-fellowship between them.

Hugh Stanton very early discovered that Captain Osborn's life was centred in his young son. That evening, by invitation of the captain, Hugh dined at the Osborn home. He was very much surprised at the youthful appearance of the captain's lovely wife. She made no efforts to conceal her feelings of superiority and indifference toward the captain, but she was very gracious toward Hugh, and chatted away incessantly about her travels and her English friends. It seemed that the iron will of the captain, which he was noted for exercising in the business world, was changed to all forbearance and courtly respect toward his wife; although one could readily discover a sad lack of sympathy between them. Indeed, there was but little in common between Captain Osborn and his wife. During dinner the captain made some remark relative to the superiority of American institutions, when his wife quickly interposed:

"Captain, you know nothing about it. You will do far better to discuss matters of business, bank stocks, and that sort of thing. They seem to suit your particular style of intellect; but of society and what constitutes the best taste, why, really, you are not an authority."

The captain reddened a little, and replied, quietly, "Very well, Lucy, I freely acknowledge your superior judgment in such matters – perhaps I ought not to have spoken; but I know one thing," said he, chucking little Harry under the chin, "this boy and I are in love with each other, is n't that so, Harry?"

"Yes, we's made a barg'in, mamma," cried the little fellow, "papa and I is lovers, and when I dets big I's doin' to be his par'ner."

"Indeed!" said his mother, as she elevated her eyebrows. "You and your papa have delightful times together. Well, I am glad of the attachment," said she, turning toward Hugh with a wearied expression, as much as to say, "Let them go their way, and I will go mine."

"I hope to see much of you, Mr. Stanton," she said, with her most bewitching smile. "Are you fond of society?"

Hugh confessed that he knew but little of the social world, having led a rather busy and secluded life.

"Well, you will not see much society in southwestern Kansas," observed Mrs. Osborn.

"My dear, you must introduce him to the Hortons," ventured the captain.

"With pleasure," replied his wife. "Mrs. J. Bruce-Horton and I are very close friends. We but recently returned from England, where her daughter, Ethel, was graduated last June. We have many friends across the water."

The old captain looked deep into his cup of tea, while an ironical smile played across his face. "Our English cousins," he remarked, "are very partial to American dollars."

"Oh, Captain," exclaimed his wife, while her smiles disappeared and a look of displeasure replaced them, "I have before observed on numerous occasions that you know nothing of England, her customs or her people, and light remarks about my English friends are not relished, I assure you."

The captain laughed good-naturedly, as he winked at Hugh, and said, "I beg your pardon, Lucy, my dear, I was only quoting a view I saw expressed recently in the *Financial Gazetteer*."

"Yes, in the *Financial Gazetteer*," repeated his wife, contemptuously, "you are competent to judge things only from a strictly commercial standpoint, and it would be much better for you not to speak than to make such stupid remarks."

She again relaxed and turned toward Hugh with a charming graciousness. "Yes, I shall be pleased, Mr. Stanton, to introduce you to the Hortons. Miss Ethel is a delightful young lady; but mind," said she, coquettishly shaking her finger at him, "you must not lose your heart, as she is already spoken for."

"Oh, indeed!" replied Hugh, "how unfortunate for me!"

"What," said the captain, "is Miss Ethel to be married?"

"Now, Captain," and the tiger's claw protruded just a little as she spoke, "you must not ask direct questions. At present it is quite a secret; but as a friend I was only warning Mr. Stanton, and 'forewarned is forearmed,' you know."

"Very well," said Hugh, "I know I shall be delighted to meet them, as they are such friends of yours."

"Oh, thank you," replied Mrs. Osborn, bowing at the compliment.

"Friends of ours, too," remarked the captain. "Think of John Horton's fat bank account."

"Oh, Captain," cried his wife, with an exasperated expression of countenance, "won't you – can't you divorce, for one short evening, the coarseness of business from the refinements of social intercourse? It seems impossible for the captain to rise above his bank counter," said she, apologetically, to Hugh.

"Not a bad level to maintain," replied the husband, "and a good many people would feel quite content if they were on a level with the Meade National Bank counter."

"I do not say anything against your business, Captain, but please do not try to step outside the beaten path with which you are familiar. It is unbecoming in you, and makes you appear quite ridiculous, I assure you." The captain winced, in silence.

Shortly after they had arisen from the table, Mrs. Osborn went driving, and the captain and Hugh sat on the broad veranda and smoked their cigars, while the veteran told reminiscences of the war. The infinite tenderness with which the captain held his boy was touching to Hugh. The little fellow nestled contentedly on his father's knee, where he soon fell asleep. When the captain finally arose to carry him within, the child murmured in his dreams, "Papa an' I is lovers – is lovers."

"Did you hear that?" exclaimed the old captain to Hugh, and a tear fell from the bronzed face of the father, and rested like a benediction on the soft cheek of the sleeping boy.

CHAPTER VI. – MAJOR BUELL HAMPTON

MAJ. BUELL HAMPTON, editor and proprietor of the *Patriot*, called at the bank one morning and was introduced to Hugh by Captain Osborn.

"I am indeed delighted," said the major, as he extended his hand, "to meet any one who is Captain Osborn's friend. The captain and I were both for humanity during the late unpleasantness, acting our parts, however, in different ways; and now we are neighbors and friends, both believing in the same government and respecting the same flag, although I must say we offer up our devotions at different political shrines."

The major laughed good-naturedly, when Captain Osborn said, "Yes, we believe in the same government, but we have different professions of faith."

The major was an exceptional specimen of manhood. He was six feet two inches tall, straight as an Indian, splendidly proportioned, and weighed, perhaps, two hundred and forty pounds. His broad-brimmed slouch hat was suggestive at once of the South.

On the silk lapel of his Prince Albert coat was a dainty carnation *boutonnihre*. This little flower was in keeping with the tenderness of the man's heart. A heavy gold chain, with many a link, encircled his neck as a watch-guard. To those who knew him best, this chain was symbolic of his endless donations to the poor. Like the chain, his charities seemed linked together – without a beginning, without an end. His carefully polished shoes and neatly arranged necktie denoted refinement and good taste. These outward evidences of genteel breeding were not offensive to the poor, but, rather, inspired them with confidence and courage to accept alms from this man. His long, dark hair and flowing mustache were streaked with gray, his nose was large, his forehead knotted, and the wrinkled lines of his face were noticeable, – strong, deep-cut. There was a thoughtfulness, a gentleness, a kindness beaming from his gray eyes and from every lineament of his rugged face, and, indeed, from every motion of his powerful frame, that forced a conviction into the heart that here was one upon whom God had set his seal of greatness – of goodness.

There were times, however, when in deep meditation, that his eyes seemed resting afar off on some unraveled future. An observer might fancy that a cloud had obscured the radiance of his soul, leaving in its stead only dissolving shadows of sadness. Then the lines of his face would deepen and his soul would seem far away on some errand of mercy. It was in such moods that he became patriarchal in appearance, and the observer might well have exclaimed, "Here is one over whom an hundred winters have blown their fierce north winds," but, when he turned again, with his inspiring smile of benevolence, to answer perhaps the simplest question of the simplest questioner, few would have judged him to have seen more than half a century. At such times the soul-light seemed illuminating his classic yet gentle race with kindly interest for the little things of earth, and his years would then have been reckoned by summers and south winds – not by hoary winters.

"By the way," said the major, turning to Hugh, "what is your political belief?"

"I am a Republican," replied Hugh, "but I trust, though differing politically, that our social relations may be most pleasant."

"Thank you," replied the major, with urbane courtliness, "I share your wishes, but I may as well tell you now, as later, that the Republican party is bound to be snowed under, root and branch, in our local election this fall."

"That remains to be seen," interposed Captain Osborn, smiling. "The game of politics is never out until the returns are all in."

"That's all true, Captain," replied the major, "but if your Republican soul does not languish in utter despair when the returns are all in, then I shall have labored in vain. The *Patriot* goes to every nook and corner of the county, and I fancy it is like 'bread cast upon the waters,' or 'sowing seeds of wisdom' – results of a satisfactory nature are sure to follow."

"I presume," said Hugh, "that Captain Osborn is a Republican because he believes that the better class of Northerners adhere to that party, and on the other hand, Major, you are a Democrat because no respectable Southerner could live in the South and not be a Democrat."

"That's well put, young man," said the major, looking kindly at Hugh, "the only fallacy in your deduction is that I am not a Democrat, although I voted that ticket for many years in Kentucky. Politically, I am supposed to be a Populist; in truth I am a Reformist. However, Mr. Stanton, I will not intrude my political faith upon you at our first meeting. I am sincerely delighted to have met you; and in some way I have an impression that we shall become great frends. Do you love music?"

"Passionately fond of it," replied Hugh, "but, unfortunately, I cannot play even a Jew's-harp."

"A soul without a language," said the major, as he looked benignly at Hugh. "Internal rhythm and melody that move us with their invisible touch, and then die away like a song on the night wind – into silence – when one is unable to express the emotions that stir the inmost soul. Yes, I believe I understand you."

Hugh looked at the major in amazed surprise. "Yes," said he, "I believe you do. I believe you understand my feelings even better than I do myself."

"Now I am sure we are to be friends," said the major, laughing. "Come and see me often. The latch-string hangs on the outside of my house, while my den at the *Patriot* office has an easy chair awaiting you at all times."

When Major Hampton had taken his departure Captain Osborn observed, "Well, Hugh, did I not tell you that he was a cultured gentleman? How do you like him?"

"Why, Captain," replied Hugh, "he is a revelation to me. I am drawn to him as steel to a magnet. What a physique! What a noble, face, so full of rare intelligence, sympathy, and tenderness! Really, Captain, the major is one of the most perfect specimens of physical and intellectual manhood that it has ever been my pleasure to meet."

"Very true," replied Captain Osborn. "Yet, in one way, he is quite an enigma. Formerly a Kentucky Democrat – now a Populist of the most ultra type, an organizer of the Farmers' Alliance, and the founder of a secret society among them known as the 'Barley Hullers.' It seems incongruous to me that he should entertain and champion such political heresies."

"You may be unduly prejudiced, Captain," said Hugh.

"Well, possibly I am," replied the captain, "one thing is certain, however, I am not a politician, and I manage, on account of our banking interests, to keep my views pretty close at home. At the same time, Stanton, an old, grizzled veteran like myself, who fought for four years for the preservation of the Union, is liable to be rather set in his political opinions."

"While I do not agree with Major Hampton, politically," observed Hugh, "yet otherwise I am very favorably impressed with him."

"That's right," said Captain Osborn, "so am I. He is an amiable gentleman, always dresses immaculately, as you saw him this morning, and is noted far and wide for his deeds of charity and his kindness among the poor. If any are sick within twenty miles of Meade, Major Hampton knows all about it. He visits them, and takes care that they are properly provided with medical aid. He is a warm supporter of the Ladies' Aid Society, and contributes most liberally to the different churches, although he evinces no preference for any particular creed. Indeed, he is quite popular, and, between ourselves, Hugh, I should not be a bit surprised if he told the truth about snowing us under at the polls this fall. You see the 'Barley Hullers' is a secret organization, and, therefore, an unknown quantity, and I have no doubt that the major will control it at the coming election, to a man."

After banking hours that evening, Hugh called at the *Patriot* office. "Come in, Mr. Stanton," cried the major, in most hospitable tones, as he ushered him into his own private "den." Its moquette carpet, easy chairs, Turkish divan, beautiful pictures, and shelves well filled with books – all combined to make this little editorial "den" one of surprising elegance. The major had laid aside his Prince Albert coat for a smoking jacket.

"These are Congressional Records and works on political economy," said he, waving his hand toward the book shelves, as he noticed Hugh looking at them. He lounged negligently on the divan, and threw one arm back carelessly over his head.

"You have quite an extensive library, Major," observed Hugh, as he seated himself.

"My library is at my home," replied the major, "these are but a few statistical volumes which I find necessary in writing editorials for the Patriot. There is hardly a recent work of a political nature published that is not represented on these shelves. By the way, Stanton, there are some pretty fair cigars in that box – help yourself."

"Thank you," said Hugh, as he lighted one.

Presendy the major arose from the divan, and, after lighting a cigar, observed, "By the way, Mr. Stanton, are you fond of books?"

"I certainly am," replied Hugh, "they have been my best friends. Many hours of solitude have been beguiled by their pleasant and profitable companionship."

"Of course you read novels?" said the major, inquiringly.

"I presume you regard it as a weakness," replied Hugh, "but I must admit that a good novel has a great charm for me."

"On the contrary," replied the major, "I regard a good novel as healthful reading. The works of Scott, Thackeray, Dickens, Lytton, Victor Hugo, Hawthorne, J. Fenimore Cooper, and of many other novelists, may be read with profit. Some of our greatest historians have been novel readers, and some of our greatest novelists have clothed history with romance and made it immortal, thus diffusing historical facts far more widely than could have been done in any other manner."

"I agree with you," replied Hugh, "though I must admit that fiction has a general tendency to cultivate a dislike for more solid reading."

They were interrupted by a knock at the door, and the major called out, "Come in!" The door opened and a tall, gaunt, rough-looking fellow came stalking in. The major, nastily rising from the divan, said:

"Why, hello, Dan, how do you do! Come right in. Mr. Stanton, allow me to introduce to you my friend Dan Spencer. Dan, this is Mr. Stanton, the new cashier of Captain Osborn's bank. My friend, Spencer," continued the major, "is one of our 'horny handed sons of toil.' He belongs to the big frontier army that is noted for having seen better days.'.rdquo;

The newcomer was, indeed, a study. He had exceedingly large feet and hands. Huge Mexican spurs were buckled to the heels of his high-topped boots. His small, restless, gray eyes and sandy hair were in keeping with his stubby red beard, large mouth, and sunburnt nose. It required no second introduction to discover that Dan Spencer regarded the major with reverential homage. Whenever he spoke, Dan had a habit of wambling and grinning, thereby disclosing his tobacco-colored teeth, and quivering like a creature in convulsions. The one noticeable feature about Dan Spencer was an abnormally long fanglike tooth, almost directly in front. This tooth protruded from the lower jaw, and when Dan spoke it wobbled about like a drunken man. Hugh fell to watching this tooth, and he fancied that every heavy breath on the part of its owner caused it to sway about like a willow buffeted by the wind.

After the introduction he said, addressing Hugh, "Waal, how do you like this 'ere country?"

"Quite well, what I have seen of it," replied Hugh.

"Don't reckon you've seed much yit. You'll find lots uv pore corn-juice, canned goods, ig'nance, and side-meat. I 'spect the ig'nance, though, will nachally give way afore better brands of red liquor."

Before Hugh could reply, Dan turned his wobbling tooth toward the major, and said:

"Hell is poppin' agin, Major. I jist came in from No-Man's-Land and I heerd that two hundred head uv old Horton's fat beeves hed been stampeded, cut outer his herd an' run off."

"Great God!" exclaimed the major. "Stealing Horton's cattle again? You don't mean it!"

"You bet I surely do. The beeves are sure 'nuff gone," replied Dan. The major walked back and forth in an agitated way for several minutes, as if he were in deep thought. Presently, turning to Spencer, he said:

"Go down to the pasture and cut out the roan pony; also select a fresh one for yourself and be ready to start with me in a couple of hours." Turning to Hugh he said, "My dear Mr. Stanton, you will have to excuse me. We go to press early to-morrow morning and I must write up this cattle robbery for the *Patriot*. You may not be acquainted with the conditions that exist on the frontier, but there are a lot of cattle thieves in this locality that must and shall, by the Eternal, be torn out root and branch. I must also ride over and see Mr. Horton this evening. Well, good-bye, Stanton, come to see me often."

Hugh was profoundly impressed by the troubled look of the major, and, as he walked along the street toward the hotel, he shuddered as he thought of the vengeance that would be meted out to the cattle thieves if Major Buell Hampton should have the passing of judgment upon them.

He soon, however, dismissed all thought of the cattlemen and of their troubles, and, while softly humming an air from "Robin Hood," began writing a letter.

CHAPTER VII. – THE CATTLE KING

HUGH STANTON had now been in Meade about a month, and was well pleased with his new position. Money poured in from the East for investment, and seemed as free as water among the people. Deposits continually increased in the bank, while the ruling rates of interest were very high. Investments were quickly turned and immense dividends declared and sent on to the Eastern capitalists, who in turn became intoxicated with the desire for more of these large profits, and consequently sent back their money for reinvestment. Not content with this, they borrowed to the full extent of their credit, at a low rate of interest, and sent on the funds for Western investment and speculation. Barley, wheat, and other cereals yielded enormously, and lands that had been purchased from the government at a dollar and a quarter per acre changed hands – within a year – at from thirty to forty dollars per acre in favored localities. Real estate in Meade that had cost original purchasers from fifty to one hundred dollars per lot sold readily at from one thousand to five thousand dollars each.

During all the progress and prosperity there was one class – the cattlemen – who were firm disbelievers in the agricultural permanency of the Southwest. Prominent among these disbelievers was John B. Horton, the cattle king. Major Hampton said, in the columns of the that the cattle barons wanted these rich, nutritious buffalo grass lands for their vast herds of cattle, and that in their selfishness they were willing to prevent their settlement by the actual tillers of the soil.

One afternoon Hugh went horseback riding down the Crooked Creek valley. He was exploring territory new to him, and presently he came to the banks of the Manaroya, a beautiful stream that had its rise in Horton's Grove. The cool, refreshing waters of this rapid, pebble-bottomed brook were, indeed, a welcome sight. It presented a striking contrast to the dreary stretch of gray and brown prairie lands that lay monotonously level for miles in every direction; save a large elm-tree and Horton's Grove, perhaps a mile away to the westward, which were like coral islands in a vast inland sea. Hugh had dismounted and was standing idly at its brink watching the restless, rippling waters in their flight from the gushing springs in the lichened woods above, on and on, even to the boundless ocean. Here the waters sparkled in all their purity – filtered dewdrops.

"How restful," mused Hugh, "what a fairyland for dreams – for day-dreams."

There, before him, the tiny bubbles in the eddies seemed to dance and laugh and chase each other round and round in romping play. Now they paused as if to rest – or to whisper great secrets – or, perhaps, it was to warn each other of the dread future in the mighty ocean beyond. Just below, the channel widened, and the noisy waters of the riffles changed into a miniature lake – calm, peaceful. The lone elm-tree, with its spreading branches, grew upon the brink; its gnarled and twisted roots reached far out into the bed that held the placid waters. This cool retreat was the summer home of the lazy turtle, of sunfish and of "mud-cat." Out from coverlets of rock and root peeped many an unseen, blinking eye in wonderment at Hugh.

Here, in this tranquil pool, nature had fashioned, with her magic brush, a picture framed about with countless wild flowers. In this realistic dream every fluttering leaf on every limb and branch trembled in rhythm. Here the shadows sifted, the sunbeams danced, the birds flew. Here the butterflies floated lazily in holiday attire, as if on wings of pleasure. Here the gaudy-winged "snake feeder" skipped from side to side, across the waters, as if he were abroad in search of trade and barter.

Again, this embryonic lake was a mirror for sky and cloud – for each nodding flower and grass blade that craned its little neck, in vanity, over the margin, that it, too, might see itself reflected in this looking-glass of nature. Higher than Jacob's Ladder appeared the bending sky and floating clouds, and yet, inverted, they seemed deeper than lie buried the broken images of a life.

Suddenly Hugh's reverie was broken in upon by the calling of a brusque "Hello, there, pardner! Are you looking for mavericks?"

Hugh found himself face to face with a rather heavy-set man, with a full gray beard and soft dark eyes. The stranger had dismounted from his mustang, and stood eyeing Hugh critically from the opposite bank.

"I have lost no mavericks, that I know of," replied Hugh, stiffly. "May I ask what you are doing and what you are looking for?"

"I am attending to my own affairs," replied the man. "I am on my own land, which, perhaps, is more than you can say for yourself."

"I may not be on my own land," answered Hugh, half angrily, "but I am attending to my own business. Am I breaking any law by taking a gallop across the valley, or resting by this stream of water?"

The stranger laughed good-naturedly at Hugh's irritation. "Hot blood of youth," said he; "come, don't be so touchy. There's only a small thing between us – a narrow stream of spring water. You look like a manly fellow, and I suppose you are all right, although you are a stranger to me."

"I am a resident of Meade," said Hugh, "and the cashier of one of its banks."

"Is that so?" asked the man, in surprise. "You are Mr. Stanton, I reckon, Captain Osborn's friend from Chicago."

"Exactly," replied Hugh. "May I inquire your name?"

The stranger threw himself again into his saddle, touched spurs to his horse, and, at a single leap, cleared the brook. Dismounting at Hugh's side, he said, "My name is Horton. My home is about a mile from here, in Horton's Grove."

Hugh's breath was almost taken away. Here before him stood the great cattle king, John B. Horton, whose estimated wealth was ten million dollars; and yet a man as free from affectation as a cowboy.

"Give us your hand, young man," said he. "It is well that we should be acquainted. I have been intending to come in and see you, but am kept so exceedingly busy, looking after my cattle, that I have but little time for social matters. Through the machinations of a band of cattle thieves, during the last year I have lost over a thousand head of beeves that were ready for the market."

"Why, that is a terrible loss, Mr. Horton," observed Hugh. "Is it not possible to catch the thieves?"

"Easier said than done, young man," replied the cattle baron. "I would n't care much for the thirty or forty thousand dollars' worth of cattle they have already taken, if I could only break up the gang. However, I do not wish to bore you with a ranchman's troubles. How do you like our country?"

"Oh, very much," replied Hugh. "I am well pleased with it so far. It seems to be settled with a thrifty class of farmers, and their crops are certainly looking well."

John Horton laughed derisively. "Farmers!" he ejaculated. "Why, young man, in five years there will not be a so-called farmer within one hundred miles of where you are now standing. The influx of self-styled settlers and farmers is a spasmodic farce, transitory in the extreme. You doubtless regard Meade as a growing, healthy town; yet, within five years from to-day, I shall pasture my cattle on the grass that will be growing in her streets."

"You astonish me," said Hugh. "With such a calamity confronting us there can be left but little hope."

"I am aware," said John Horton, "that Captain Osborn has a different belief. My old friend, Major Buell Hampton, also takes occasion to brand me as a 'cattle baron' in the columns of his paper. Nevertheless, Mr. Stanton, they are both my friends, and I esteem them both as royal good fellows. I assure you, however, that they are sadly mistaken in regard to this being a farmer's paradise. Wait until the hot winds come. Now hot winds don't hurt the buffalo grass a particle, for it is indigenous to this soil and climate; but there's nothing grown by the farmer that can stand before the hot winds."

"Major Hampton was telling me the other day," said Hugh, "that the cattle thieves had just stolen two hundred head of your fattest cattle."

"Yes, that is the latest outrage; but they have been stealing my cattle for the last year. Before the settlers came here we had no cattle thieves to speak of in this country. Major Hampton is a true Southerner, and is doing nis utmost to run down the thieves. I contend that the thieves are none other than the so-called farmers. The major, however, insists that the gang is made up of lawless cowboys."

"The major seemed very much provoked when he heard of the theft," said Hugh, "and from the article that appeared in the *Patriot* the following morning, I imagine that he would be a very severe judge."

"The major's personal assistance and the influence of his paper are both on the side of law and order," replied Mr. Horton. "I have no doubt that sooner or later we shall be successful in running down the thieves."

The cattle king removed his sombrero, and, leaning against his horse, fanned himself with its broad brim, as he continued:

"The major is a little weak up here," tapping his forehead, "or else I am when it comes to the matter of politics. I served in a Georgia regiment through the last years of the war, and fought for the cause that was lost. When the war was over, I accepted the conditions of our surrender by respecting the stars and stripes, and have voted a straight Democratic ticket without a scratch ever since. I cannot understand how the major could give up his democracy for populistic doctrines. However, he is withal a noble fellow."

As the cattle king bared his head, Hugh noticed that it was quite bald, and that it had a great red scar near the crown.

"It is very gratifying," said Hugh, with his eyes on the scar, "to see those who fought for the lost cause and those who fought to subdue the rebellion living here, side by side, in peace."

"Yes," replied Horton, "the wounds are all healed, but the scars are left. Hello! there comes Bill Kinneman, one of my most trustworthy cowboys. Hello, Bill, what's the news?" Bill Kinneman was short and stoop-shouldered. He had a low forehead, thick black hair, cut square around, a small nose, a protruding chin, and a scraggy beard. A pair of squinting, bloodshot eyes combined with his other facial make-up to give him the appearance of a brute.

"Oh, nothin' much to tell," replied Bill. "I foller'd 'em five days, an' they clean got away from me."

"Could n't you pick up their trail?"

"Yass, we found whure they crossed the Cimarron down in the Strip."

"Well, why did n't you follow them?" asked Horton, impatiently.

"We foller'd 'em as fur as we could, but somehow we wuz jist strugglin' round in the coils uv error, fur we dun lost the trail – we did fur sure."

"Well, Bill, I am disgusted with you," said Mr. Horton. "I used to think you were a nervy fellow and sleuth-hound to track down a thief, but of late you always disappoint me."

"I know I'm a pore cuss, but don't unbosom yourself too malignant agin me. Don't be too hard on me, Mr. Horton. I would n't wonder a mite if he'd overtake 'em," said Kinneman.

"Who the devil do you mean?" asked Horton, angrily.

"Major Hampton; he's quite a stayer. He's at least a mighty sight thet ere way. He'll whup the hull danged outfit if he comes up with 'em, thet's what he'll do. A shootin' is likely to ensoo if he finds the thieves. Anyway, suthin' mighty thrillin' will occur on the landscape thereabouts, for the major will sure 'nuff use his artillery."

"Where did you see the major?"

"Way down on the Cimarron, below the red bluffs, jist whure I turned back. I was assoomin' you'd want me to come an' make a report. The major sent word to ye thet he was purposin' to foller 'em, an' he'd go clar to the Missoury if he had to."

"All right, Bill. You may go on to the ranch, put up your pony, and get something to eat."

The cowboy touched his spurs to the jaded bronco and galloped away up the valley.

"Major Hampton," said Horton, turning to Hugh, "has good blood in him. I have an impression that he will overtake the thieves."

Soon after this Hugh took leave of Mr. Horton, who gave him a pressing invitation to call at his ranch. Hugh accepted this invitation by promising to visit Mr. Horton at no distant day.

CHAPTER VIII. – A COMMITTEE OF FIVE

THE Barley Hullers' Association was a secret society made up principally of tried and true members of the Farmers' Alliance. It had been founded by Maj. Buell Hampton, who was district organizer of the Farmers' Alliance in southwestern Kansas. It was said that the primary incentive of the farmers thus associating themselves together was to prevent the excessive prices which they were compelled to pay for articles purchased, and to raise the ruling prices which they had been forced to accept for the products of their farms.

About a mile northeast of Meade, in an old deserted building that had formerly been used as a sugar mill, were the secret lodge-rooms of the organization. This dilapidated building was provided with a spacious reception-room, an anteroom, and a hall of deliberation, and was indifferently illuminated throughout with green and red lights.

The written work of the order was said to be very literary in tone and was based upon the great principle that in union there is strength. Its professed object was to exact justice from the contending forces of the commercial world. Indeed, it was an organization founded on the principles of the brotherhood of man and of fair dealing toward all classes.

Maj. Buell Hampton enjoyed, perhaps, a pardonable pride in this organization, which was strictly a child of his own making. The members had passwords, grips, and everything of that sort, whereby one brother Barley Huller might know another, whether in the dark or in the light. It was a custom, among the members of the organization, to turn out in force on the Fourth of July and other holidays. On such occasions they paraded the streets to the tat-tat-too music of a snare drum and the shrill whistle of a fife. Their badge was a cluster of barley heads, worn as a *boutonnihre*.

When crops were good the Farmers' Alliance organization usually languished, but when they were poor a marked revival invariably sprang up. It was the highest ambition of the young farmer who was a member of the local Farmers' Alliance to show, by his zealous work and adherence to the principles of that organization, that he was worthy and eligible to membership in the Barley Hullers.

There was a system of procedure in these secret meetings which gave a better idea of the aims and accomplishments of the order than anything disclosed in its written by-laws or professions of faith. At these secret meetings one might find two or three dozen stalwart farmers seated on broken chairs and benches, while their chief presided. The exercises consisted of a general exchange of confidences, which were usually made in speeches intended for the general good of the order.

A few evenings after Hugh had made the acquaintance of John Horton, the Barley Hullers had a meeting, at which Bill Kinneman, a prominent yet rather inflammable member, was present. Several members made spirited speeches and finally Kinneman got the floor.

"Mr. President," said he, "I'm no corn-field sailor ner exhortin' evangelist, but I'm 'lowin' if anybody crosses my trail, why, we'll jist try a tussle an' see who's locoed fust. Fur the las' ten years I've bin ridin' the range, workin' like a nigger fur other people, an' durin' all this time I hev never hed a single ray uv hope 'til I jined the Barley Hullers."

The twenty-five or thirty members sitting around cheered him lustily at this convincing confession.

Bill continued: "There's a lot uv us laborin' fellers thet hasn't hed no privileges up to the present time, an' now we air proposin' to hev a little fairer divide. Fur my part, I'm tired uv bankers, cattle kings, middlemen, an' all the other blood-suckers who air feastin' in luxury on our hard labor."

"Hear! hear!" shouted the crowd. Thus encouraged, Kinneman continued:

"Speakin' wide open and onrestrained like, I want to say it's mighty nigh time we wuz provin' a man's better 'n money. It's time our brotherhood wuz banded together tighter 'n ever an' thet we stop bein' slaves fur these 'ere money kings who hev got their iron heels on our necks an' air grindin' us down in the dust like as we wuz a pack of Russian serfs. We ask fur bread an' they giv' us a stun; we

ask fur meat an' they give us a serpent, an' by an' by we'll hev to ask permission to breathe the pure air uv heaven, as we take a gallop acrosst the range."

Wild huzzas and more hand-clapping greeted this, and the speaker continued:

"I'm liable to git hostile in the extreem an' somebody's goin' to git hurt on this 'ere range afore long onless a change sets in. The question is, hev n't us workin' fellers got to thet pint uv life whure money is more respected than the genuine pure artickle uv manhood? Thet's the question, feller citizens, fur us to settle. Pussonally I'm feelin' a heap careless."

Cries of "Good!"

"That's right!"

"Come again!" were heard on every side.

"Lets us," continued Kinneman, "take our cue from these 'ere money fellers. Ev'ry cussed one uv 'em is in a pool or a trust uv some kind an' hang together jist like so many cockle-burrs, an' we, my br'thers, mus' do the same. We're the fellers thet's workin' like dogs an' they're the fellers thet's hevin' all the big dinners. Now, I say, is the time to stop. It's no longer a question uv capital an' labor, it's a question uv life, an' jestice on one side an' death an' injestice on t'other. There's liable to be a select assortment uv guns doin' onusual permiscus work in these 'ere diggins if some people don't quit assoomin' sooperior airs over us laborin' men. My doctrine is to hustle an' git what b'longs to us, peace'ble if we can; if not, git it anyway.'.rsquo;

"That's right!"

"Now you're talking!" was heard from the open-mouthed auditors.

"Now, gen'lemen," concluded Kinneman, "I don't b'lieve in a feller screechin' round too much. Talk's mighty cheap. I b'lieve in bein' plenty p'lite; same time I want to be doin' suthin'. An election is clus to hand, an' the fellers thet git the support uv the Barley Hullers in this 'ere county air dead sure to be elected, and I onbosom myself enuff to say that they've got to pay fur it an' pay fur it han'some, an' no misunderstandin', an' don't yer furgit it, an' – "

"Hold on!"

"Hold on!" cried several voices. "We must not go into politics."

"Major Buell Hampton," said one member, "has expressly provided that politics shall not be mixed up in this organization. Now, while I am with Brother Kinneman in much that he has said, yet I draw the line on violating any of the rules of the order."

Bill Kinneman was about to reply, when a greasy-looking member stealthily took him by the coat sleeve and whispered a few words to him.

"All right, Mr. President," said Bill, "p'rhaps I wuz actooally a leetle too fast, an' I 'poligize fur whoopin' it up in so ondefensible an' hostile fashion." Other members spoke, but in a less fiery manner. Most of them were moderate in their expressions, and urged that in union there was sufficient strength to accomplish all the aims in a peaceful and friendly manner.

Soon after the meeting broke up, the lodge-room became a lobby, thick with smoke from numerous pipes. Kinneman was praised on every hand for his fiery speech. A little later the farmers wended their way in different directions toward their respective homes, while Kinneman and his four associates skulked back into the old mill building, and sought the privacy of the room of deliberations, taking special care that the window curtains were well drawn.

"You mighty nigh upset our game, Brother Bill," said Dan Spencer.

"Well, I 'poligize. I clar furgot myself, sure," replied Kinneman, good-naturedly. "Now, if it's agreed, I'll act as chairman, an' we'll state briefly the objec' of this 'ere conference. You fellers nachally know thet most uv the Barley Hullers in the county air opposed to mixin' up in pol'tics'cause Major Hampton has said they mus' n't. Now, boys, I reckon us five fellers know er thing or two thet beats a bob-tail flush all holler. There's five offices to be filled in this 'ere county this fall. The Democrats hev nominated a man fur each office, an' the Republicans hev dun the same, an' so hev the Populists. Now, I ain't pluckin' brands from the burnin' fur nuthin', an' I move thet we be a committee – a

committee uv five – to see each uv these candidates an' collect as much as we kin fur influencin' the Barley Hullers in this 'ere county. We're a secret society an' they don't know we ain't 'lowed to mix up in pol'tics. I hev a theery we can harvest each uv 'em fur a couple uv hundred, an' thet would make a mighty neat 'jack-pot' to divide 'tween us five, an' make things kind er gay an' genial like."

"That's right," cried his associates. "I second the motion," said another, and soon it was agreed and carried that these five stalwart "lights" of the Barley Hullers, who for self-aggrandizement were thus willing to bring reproach upon their society, should sally forth and secretly pounce upon the various political candidates, and, under the promise of giving to each the support of the Barley Hullers – of the county, – intimidate them into paying certain sums of money.

It should not be imagined that these five members constituting the committee were fair representatives of the organization. Indeed, most of the Barley Hullers were honorable, well-meaning, hard-working men, who had joined the society in the hope that it might better their condition both socially and financially. There was an air of mysticism surrounding the order, as there is surrounding all secret societies; and while nothing was positively known of its inside workings, except by its own members, yet the Barley Hullers was at this time held in high regard by the Farmers' Alliance societies throughout the country. As usual, however, the rank and file became only tools in the hands of a few demagogues who managed to gain and hold control for the sole purpose of pelf and plunder.

CHAPTER IX. – AN AFTERNOON DRIVE

HUGH STANTON was not only a successful, hard-working young man of affairs, but he possessed innate refinement and gentleness. Scrupulously honorable himself, he frequently gave others credit for higher and more manly attributes than they really possessed. His unusually dark hair and fair skin would cause the most casual observer to turn and look at him a second time. His small feet and hands and tapering fingers suggested effeminacy; but Hugh Stanton was not effeminate, for his heart was strong and manly. In appearance he was an ideal society man – a veritable Beau Brummel. As a matter of fact, however, he had scarcely any knowledge of society or of its ways.

His father had fought in the battle of Bull Run, and later at Bethel Church. Hugh was then an infant in his mother's arms. The young mother was heartbroken when she learned that her husband was numbered among the missing. She died a year later. The son was christened with his father's name and was given a home with his uncle and guardian. He possessed a studious turn of mind, and, even as a boy, had been noted for his success at school. Later, he led his classes with distinction at Princeton. Dr. Jack Redfield was Hugh's ideal of true manliness, and, to the credit of Jack, his measure of sterling manhood was Hugh Stanton.

After their college days they had kept up, in an intermittent way, their social relations, but, as year after year went by, each became more and more absorbed in his own special pursuits, and gradually they drifted away from their old chum-day relations. Although Hugh had lived at Meade for a month, he had never thought of writing to Jack Redfield, and if Jack had been asked Hugh's address, he could not have given it, for the very good reason that Hugh had neglected naming his objective point in the West.

One morning when Captain Osborn came to the bank he handed Hugh a daintily perfumed, monogrammed note. Opening it, Hugh found an invitation from Mrs. Osborn to drive with her that afternoon to the Hortons, where they were expected to dine.

Hugh offered the note to the captain, who asked, "Well, what is it?" looking at Hugh over his glasses.

"A letter from Mrs. Osborn," replied Hugh.

"Well, is it not for you?" inquired the old captain.

"Certainly," said Hugh, "but then – "

"If it is for you, it is not for me," said the captain, "and, Hugh, my boy, understand for now and for all time that I have no curiosity as to any arrangements my wife may make or any letters she may choose to write. I trust her without question."

"I hardly know why," said Hugh, "but some way your words chill me." He waited a moment in silence, and then went on, "I wish I were nearer to you, Captain, for ever since I saw that tear fall on little Harry's sleeping face I have longed to be as close to you as a son." The captain noticeably softened, and said, huskily, "There, there, Hugh, my boy, sit down and let me tell you something. You know I am much older than Mrs. Osborn. We have been married twelve years. She was about to enter a convent when I met her pretty girlish face and fell desperately in love with it; and, notwithstanding my almost fifty years of life, it was my first and only love-affair. She finds pleasure in society, and I despise it most cordially – regard it as a hollow mockery. It is not right to object to that in which she finds innocent pleasure. I am a sort of turned-down back number, while she is in the zenith of life. I have thought it all over, and here are my deductions: Mrs. Osborn must have an opportunity of pursuing those innocent paths of amusement in which she finds her greatest pleasure. She has given to me our little Harry, God bless the boy! She is Harry's mother, and therefore she can do no wrong. When you are older you will learn that love is a looking-glass sort of an affair, framed about with a gossamer network of illusions, easily broken and impossible to mend."

There was a pathetic tenderness in the old captain's words as he uttered the last sentences, and it struck Hugh, at the time, as being odd.

"Now, my boy," continued the captain, as he looked kindly at Hugh, "I have spoken to you as to no other person on earth. If you were my own son I could not have spoken more freely."

"Thank you," said Hugh, as he took the captain's outstretched hand, "I shall strive earnestly to prove myself worthy of your confidence."

"Not only on account of your father, whose memory I certainly revere, but also on account of yourself, I shall try to be all that a father should be to such a son; and, Hugh, if anything should ever happen to me, do as much for little Harry, and the account will be more than balanced."

Hugh gave his promise, and soon after he turned to his desk, but the captain's words kept ringing in his ears. The promise that he had made impressed him strangely, and he was conscious of a disturbed, rather than an uncomfortable, feeling. He sent a reply to Mrs. Osborn, accepting her invitation, but was not at all sure that he had acted wisely. During the afternoon, Mrs. Osborn called at the bank, and Hugh was driven away in her elegant carriage. It was a lovely Indian summer afternoon, with scarcely a breath of air stirring. As they turned from the street into the country road, Mrs. Osborn, who had kept up an animated yet light conversation, said:

"For one afternoon, Mr. Stanton, you are my captive."

"A most willing one, I assure you," replied Hugh, laughingly. She threw herself gracefully back among the soft upholsterings of the carriage seat, and jestingly replied:

"Indeed, is that so? Had I known your willingness, I certainly would have called you away from the bank counter long before this."

"We have been very busy of late," replied Hugh. "It is not often we can get away."

"You must not serve the god of business too faithfully," said Mrs. Osborn, "but rather make him serve you."

"Very well expressed," replied Hugh, as he looked at Mrs. Osborn, and realized more than ever before that she was, indeed, a most beautiful woman. Her azure eyes were bewitching in their languid softness. Her shapely mouth and full red lips might have suggested danger, yet, withal, there seemed something sincere in her fascinating ways and in the sweetness of her smiles.

"For my part," said she, "I think travel affords a recreation that is doubly enjoyable, because there is no such thing as business to disturb one. Have you ever been in England, Mr. Stanton?" she asked, sweetly.

"Never," replied Hugh, "but I have promised myself a thorough European tour when some convenient opportunity presents itself."

"Oh, how lovely that will be, and how laudable the ambition. It would be so pleasant if you could get away next year and go with us – I mean Mrs. Horton and myself. Our practical husbands stay at home, you know," said she, laughingly, "and we do the traveling for our families."

"Still, it would be more pleasant," replied Hugh, "if your husbands could arrange their business affairs and accompany you."

"I am not so sure about that," said Mrs. Osborn, and she gave her pretty shoulders a shrug and looked at Hugh so intently that, in sheer embarrassment, he looked away. It began to dawn upon him that she loved adoration and adorers alike. Presently Mrs. Osborn laughed softly, and said:

"Why, what a silly one! You are either the most ingeniously clever man or else the most intensely innocent one I ever met."

"I fear," said Hugh, confusedly, "that I am not very clever, and I am quite sure that I am not worthy to be called innocent."

"You are a contradiction," went on Mrs. Osborn, as if Hugh had not spoken, "and yet – well, really you interest me. We must see more of each other – but here we are at the Grove, and there is my dear friend, Mrs. Horton, on the veranda."

Hugh was soon presented to Mrs. J. Bruce-Horton, who received him with unfeigned cordiality. “My husband,” said she, “has spoken so much of you since your chance meeting the other day, that I have been quite impatient to meet you.”

“Well, I like that,” said Mrs. Osborn, with a haughty air and elevated eyebrows, addressing her hostess. “Indeed, have you only heard of Mr. Stanton through your husband? Does all I have said go for nothing?”

“Oh, I beg your pardon, my dear Lucy,” replied Mrs. Horton. “Of course you were the first to tell us about him.” Then, addressing Hugh, she continued, “My friend Mrs. Osborn, I assure you, has been most profuse in complimentary remarks.”

“I am powerless to express my gratitude,” said Hugh, gallantly.

“Mr. Stanton,” said stately Mrs. Horton, bowing, “my daughter, Miss Ethel.” With true frontier hospitality Ethel advanced and, extending both her hands to Hugh, said:

“You are, indeed, most welcome, Mr. Stanton. It was daddy’s wish that we make you feel at home when you called, and it will not be my fault if we fail in doing so.”

Hugh stammered out his thanks, as he accepted a chair. Ethel was a revelation to him. She was the same girl on her father’s ranch that she had been at Lake Geneva, when she completely captivated Jack Redfield. To Hugh she seemed a budding rose just opening into a greater beauty; and yet, what could add to her loveliness! She seemed a queen just stepping from a canvas. Her eyes, her mouth, her nose, her hair, her smile, her voice – these were among the entrancing glories of Ethel Horton.

Hugh Stanton did not believe that he loved her – no, not that – he simply longed to know her better, to give her his confidence and to receive hers in return – a generous, platonic regard, actuated by, well – only respect, he told himself.

The day marked an epoch in Hugh Stanton’s life. The seeds of a mysterious ambition had been planted – what of the harvest?

CHAPTER X. – HOME OF THE HORTONS

JOHN HORTON had erected his home upon a little hill overlooking a lake that had been made by damming the Manaroya. More than twenty acres of placid water were within its shores. Rising back of the house – which, of itself, was palatial – was a picturesque hill, much higher than the one upon which had been built the residence. This hill was covered with heavy forest trees that stretched away to the north. The grounds about the Horton country home were laid out as artistically as a city park. A wide, terraced green sward stretched away from the house to the very edge of the lake. Ornamental shrubbery and fruit-trees were growing here and there, and numerous fountains played their vapory waters over fragrant flower-beds. A veranda, southern in its appearance, extended along the front and one side of the house.

The interior of the Horton house was richly elegant. There was one room in which Mrs. J. Bruce-Horton had assembled the art treasures which she had picked up in her travels. Rare old china and Dresden ware, bowls from Corea, mounted buffalo-horns and deer-antlers – were all arranged together in complete harmony as if they had been lifelong friends instead of strangers gathered from the antipodes. Indeed, this palace home of the Occident had been enriched by some of the choicest treasures of the Orient. Paintings from masters and rich tapestries and hangings suggested, at once, refinement and a lavish expenditure of money. And still there was a warmth of welcome pervading the Horton home that robbed it of stiffness and formality.

While the hostess and her daughter were entertaining Mrs. Osborn and Hugh on the veranda, Mr. Horton joined them and assured Hugh that he felt honored by his presence. He hoped that his visit was but the beginning of an acquaintance that would ripen into lasting friendship.

“I cannot understand it,” John Horton had said to his wife, when telling her of his meeting with Hugh, “but I feel interested in that young man in an inexplicable manner. I like the spirit he displayed when I was chaffing him about being on other people’s land.”

The dinner-hour passed pleasantly. Hugh quite forgot all thought of embarrassment and joined heartily in the informal conversation. During the dinner, Mrs. Horton mentioned, incidentally, that Dr. Lenox Avondale would probably visit them during the fall.

“We shall give him a hearty welcome,” observed Mr. Horton, “and even though we live on the frontier, we are nevertheless whole-souled fellows, Mr. Stanton.”

Hugh could not understand it, but he was conscious of displeasure and resentment at the mere mention of the Englishman’s name. An invisible thorn pierced a half-formed ambition. Ethel sat at his right, and until now he had quite forgotten Mrs. Osborn’s warning in regard to Ethel’s betrothal.

“I am just wild to show him how we American girls can ride,” said Ethel, enthusiastically. “Would n’t it be great sport, daddy, if Doctor Lenox Avondale, by mistake, should try to ride one of our bucking broncos? Oh, it would be glorious!” she laughed.

“I believe it would test his horsemanship most thoroughly,” replied Mr. Horton, much amused.

“Ethel,” said her mother, chidingly, “you must not think of playing any jokes on Doctor Lenox Avondale.” Then, addressing Hugh, she continued, “He is quite a distinguished surgeon, late of the English army. He has been traveling in America for over a year. All last winter he was in the Southern States. He belongs to one of the oldest families in England.”

“He is so intellectual,” observed Mrs. Osborn, “and just blasi enough to be interesting. He does not pretend to possess great goodness or innocence, but I daresay he is quite as good as many who do.”

As Mrs. Osborn made this remark she cast a furtive glance at Hugh; and he, remembering their conversation during the drive, colored perceptibly. After dinner they returned to the veranda, where Hugh found himself near Ethel.

“Are you a good horseman, Mr. Stanton?” she asked.

"I can't say that I am a good horseman," said Hugh, emphasizing the word "good," "though I am very fond of riding."

"It seems so strange that one like yourself should come away out here on the frontier to live," said the girl, as her eyes rested inquiringly on his face.

"My coming here," replied Hugh, "happened in a most natural way. I do not see anything strange about it. Thousands of people are immigrating to the West."

"Yes, but you had to leave your home and your people," said she.

"Almost every one does that when he comes to a new country," replied Hugh, "but, unfortunately, I had no people to leave."

"No people!" exclaimed Ethel. "Why, how odd! You must have an interesting history."

"On the contrary," replied Hugh, "it is a very uninteresting one. I am an only child. My father lost his life in the war, and my mother died while I was yet very young – so there you have my genealogy in a nutshell."

"And have you traveled abroad?"

"No, I have not as yet treated myself to that pleasure. I have been somewhat of a student. My earlier years were spent with books. After leaving college I engaged in business, and have really had no time for travel."

"Oh, then you are a brain-worker," said Ethel, smiling. "I like brain-workers," and her eyes wandered afar down the valley. She was thinking of Jack Redfield.

Hugh interpreted her words as a compliment, and he marveled at the mysteries of women. He was sure that Dr. Lenox Avondale was unworthy of this beautiful girl. He mentally determined to question Mrs. Osborn in regard to Ethel's betrothal on their way home that evening.

"Come often and without formality," was the pressing invitation extended to Hugh as he prepared to go.

"Just drop in at any time," said John Horton, "and you will always find a welcome."

Hugh assured them that he would take advantage of their kind invitation, and when he and Mrs. Osborn started away down the country road he told her that he had never spent a more pleasant evening in his life.

"You must not forget what I told you," said she, looking volumes at him with her expressive eyes.

"Oh, you mean in regard to Miss Ethel," said Hugh, innocently.

"That is exactly what I mean," replied Mrs. Osborn, laughing. "I told you that she was spoken for, and, now mind, you must behave or I shall not take you to the Hortons again."

Hugh laughed good-naturedly, and presently said: "Mrs. Osborn, is there no way to break that Englishman's head? I hardly think it's fair to lose such a jewel as Miss Ethel from the Southwest."

"I knew it," said Mrs. Osborn, looking archly at Hugh. "I knew you were a silly fellow who would fall in love at the slightest provocation. I know of no way you could break Doctor Lenox Avondale's head, but I have an idea that he is a sufficiently determined Englishman to play sad havoc with yours, should you interfere with Miss Ethel."

"Do you call Miss Ethel a 'slight provocation'." inquired Hugh.

"Well, perhaps not so slight as some others might be," replied Mrs. Osborn, condescendingly.

"Put your mind at rest," Hugh continued, "for I did not lose my heart irretrievably, as you seem to suppose. The young lady appeals to my chivalry and respect, and I am sure I would be quite satisfied if she were my friend and I had the right to ward off a danger if I saw it approaching her."

Mrs. Osborn laughed softly to herself, and looked incredulously at Hugh.

"I presume you think that I am modest in my wishes," said Hugh, "or, possibly, you quite disbelieve me, but I assure you I state truthfully my position."

"That may be your position to-night," said Mrs. Osborn, "but what will it be to-morrow or next week or next month? Ah, I know you men too well to believe in your platonic friendships. A woman may successfully maintain such a feeling, – a man, never."

Hugh made no reply, and for awhile they drove on in silence. As they alighted from the carriage at the Osborn door, she laid a hand on Hugh's arm, and, bending toward him, she asked, in a soft, pleading voice:

"What would you give – what would you do for a friend who would tell you how to supplant Doctor Lenox Avondale?"

Hugh drew himself away in surprise and answered, "Nothing, Mrs. Osborn, absolutely, nothing. If the Englishman is Miss Ethel's choice, then he is my choice."

The intense and passionate expression on her face gave way to an assumed one of listless drollery, and she smiled. "How charming – what a valiant knight you are. I admire such men, I do indeed. Of course you know I was only jesting, for I assure you no one could supplant Doctor Lenox Avondale. He is quite secure – quite secure indeed."

CHAPTER XI. – DADDY'. CONSENT

ETHEL HORTON remained on the veranda watching Mrs. Osborn's carriage as it disappeared in the gathering darkness. Her mother complained of fatigue and retired to her room. In reply to an inquiry from her father, Ethel said:

"Oh, yes, daddy, I like Mr. Stanton very much. He is quite interesting. I think your tastes and mine are much alike anyway, don't you?"

"I think they are," replied the cattle king, gallantly, "although it is a compliment to me, rather than to you, my little girl."

Ethel laughed. "I say, daddy, you can make as fine speeches as any of them. I don't think you are a bit stupid," and the girl crossed over to her father and, nestling up close to him, was soon seated on his knee.

"This is something like old times," said her father, as he clasped her closer to him. The moon was climbing over the eastern horizon, causing the waters of the little lake below to appear like a sheet of silver, while the rough edges of the rippling waves were as golden as the sunflowers that grew at the margin. It was an hour for girlish confidences, and one that Ethel determined to improve.

"Did you ever think," inquired her father, teasingly, "that I was especially stupid?"

"No, daddy, I really never did; but, do you know, in England they boast a great deal, in quiet ways, about Englishmen, and all that sort of thing, and if you are an American they make you feel fidgety, as if having been born in America were a calamity."

"That's all nonsense," replied her father, "don't let your little head be turned by that sort of rubbish. To be an American, Ethel, in my mind, is a greater good fortune than to have been born a member of the most distinguished of England's titled aristocracy. Understand me, daughter," he continued, "the English are a great nation, but titles, of which some boast so much, had a beginning, and the conditions that surrounded their forefathers, and gave them an opportunity to do deeds of valor, are also here in America, developing the sterling qualities of manhood in their highest perfection."

"Bravo!" cried Ethel. "That's good, daddy; it makes my American blood just tingle. It's better than a feast to hear you talk. I wish," she continued, half petulantly, "I had never gone away to that London school."

"No, Ethel," replied her father, as he gently stroked her heavy, dark tresses, "no, you must not say that. It was your mother's best judgement that you should go; and her ideas and tastes are of a very high order. I have been lonely during the four years of your absence. But life again seems complete now that you are at home."

"Do you believe, daddy, that the best class of Americans care for titles, royalty, or anything of that sort?"

"My dear child, many wearers of English titles nowadays are but twaddling idlers – frayed remnants of a former illustrious ancestry. Whatever other views you may entertain, never believe that there is anything in a mere title. True manliness tells; and titled or not, a man is a man if he possess the sterling qualities of manhood. I would not disparage any man simply because he bore a title, neither would I give him a hair's-breadth of preference. This, my little girl, is a plain statement of your old father's views."

Ethel nestled still closer to him, and with her head resting against his breast remained silent for awhile. He fancied she shivered a little, as if a sob were struggling for mastery. Presently she said, with a slight tremor, "I want to talk to you, daddy; I want to tell you something no one else knows. Do you think, daddy, if some great English lord should come over here for me that you would give me up to him, and let me be carried back to England and, perhaps, never see you again?"

"Why, Ethel, my darling child," replied her father, hesitatingly, "I presume that if your heart were set upon it, I would give my consent. Your mother has intimated what we might expect, but it will be a great trial to me, Ethel."

"Oh, mamma has intimated, has she?" mused Ethel, half to herself. "Listen, daddy – what if a brain-worker, a real American brain-worker, should want – want me – you know, and I should care for him – for this poor brain-worker – care more for him than for all the money in the Bank of England and the titles of all the nobility thrown in – what then, daddy? What then would you do? Would you be on my side, or against me? Tell me, daddy, dear, how would it be?"

The girl's breath came short and quick, and the last part of her question was uttered in a rapid, jerky fashion. John Horton felt her tremble with suppressed excitement, and a light began to dawn upon him. He imagined, and rightly, that the girl was half-afraid of her mother.

"In such a case as that, Ethel, can you doubt the stand I would take?"

"No, but let me hear you say it, daddy; let me hear you say it – just what you would do."

"On your side, my daughter, on your side forever, and we would fight to a finish on that line, if it took all the beeves and mavericks on the range."

"Oh, daddy, daddy," cried the girl, as she threw her other arm around his neck and gave way to a flood of tears, "I – I love you so – so much!"

Tears sprang to the cattle king's eyes. Ethel's soft sobs stole out along the veranda into the calm moonlight and away on the shadows into the woods where they lost themselves among the tall trees and on the wandering night winds. When she reached her own room that night, she wrote a letter to Jack Redfield, which read as follows:

> "Dearest Jack: – Daddy is on our side. I am almost too happy to write. I know now what that feeling was, – love, Jack, love for you. Come and see me as soon as you can, and meet the grandest daddy in the whole world. Yes, I love you, love you, love you.
> *"All your own,*
> *"Ethel."*

Mrs. Lyman Osborn called the next day, and in her neighborly kindness she consented to carry this letter, with others, from the Horton ranch to the post-office.

On the following day Mrs. J. Bruce-Horton called at the Osborn home.

"My dear Lucy," said she, sinking into a chair in Mrs. Osborn's exquisite boudoir, "I felt that I must see you. You attended to the letter properly, I suppose?"

"Trust me for that, my dear Mrs. Horton," replied Mrs. Osborn, meaningly.

"How good of you," murmured Mrs. Horton. "I really could not hope to get on at all in this matter if it were not for you."

"You see my fears in regard to Doctor Redfield were well founded," replied Mrs. Osborn.

"Indeed, I realize it," said Mrs. Horton, emphatically, "and now we are confronted by this Mr. Stanton. My husband is really quite charmed with him. I don't see why Doctor Avondale is so dilatory about coming. I certainly wish he would hasten."

"My dear Mrs. Horton," replied her friend, "trust me to guard off this Mr. Stanton. I have already assured him that Miss Ethel is spoken for, and I feel sure that he is too honorable to intrude himself when he regards Ethel as already engaged."

"But she is not engaged yet – that is the trouble," exclaimed Mrs. Horton, who at heart was really an estimable woman, although worldly and ambitious to gain a foothold in English aristocracy. Perhaps if she had never met Mrs. Osborn, Ethel might not have been sent to London. In her intercourse with English acquaintances, however, Mrs. Horton herself had become a devotee of the nobility.

"How delightfully innocent you are," laughed Mrs. Osborn. "Why, my dear Mrs. Horton, of course she is not engaged, but that does not prevent our saying she is, when it will protect the girl."

"Perhaps you are right," replied Mrs. Horton, with a sigh, "but I do dislike duplicity, and really, Lucy, I feel worried about that letter. I fear we are hardly doing right, and yet it seems to me that one is forced to questionable measures in a case like this. Why Ethel can't see the advantage to be derived from a marriage into such an old family as the Avondales is quite past my comprehension."

"It takes time to cultivate the taste," replied Mrs. Osborn. "Americans, as a rule, are naturally very stupid, and we American women are especially headstrong; but we, my dear Mrs. Horton, have mixed with the purple, and our eyes have been opened. I doubt not," she continued, "that either Doctor Redfield or Mr. Stanton would be quite eligible, but then they would develop into men of affairs and, like your husband and mine, would be wedded to their money-making schemes rather than to their wives."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.