GRAYSON DAVID

HEMPFIELD

David Grayson
Hempfield

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Hempfield: A Novel:

Содержание

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CHAPTER I
I DISCOVER THE PRINTING-OFFICE

For years my sister Harriet and I confined our relationships with the neighbouring town of Hempfield to the Biblical "yea, yea" and "nay, nay," not knowing how much we missed, and used its friendly people as one might use an inanimate plough or an insensate rolling-pin, as mere implements or adjuncts in the provision of food or clothing for our needs.

It came only gradually alive for us. As the years passed the utilitarian stranger with whom we traded became an acquaintance, and the acquaintance a friend. Here and there a man or a woman stepped out of the background, as it were, of a dim picture, and became a living being. One of the first was the old gunsmith of whom I have already written. Another was Doctor North – though he really lived outside the town – whom we came to know late in his career. He was one of the great unknown men of this country; he lives yet in many lives, a sort of immortality which comes only to those who have learned the

greatest art of all arts, the art of life. The Scotch preacher, whom we have loved as we love few human beings, was also in reality a part of the town, though we always felt that he belonged to our own particular neighbourhood. He was ever a friend to all men, town or country.

It has always been something of a mystery to me, when I think of it, how I happened for so long to miss knowing more about old Captain Doane, and MacGregor, that roseate Scotchman. It is easier to understand why I never knew Anthy, for she was much away from Hempfield in the years just after I came here; and as for Norton Carr and Ed Smith, they did not come until some time afterward.

I shall later celebrate Nort's arrival in Hempfield – and may petition the selectmen to set up a monument upon the spot of this precious soil where he first set a shaky foot.

I lived before I knew Anthy and Nort and MacGregor and the old Captain, but sometimes I wonder how I lived. When we let new friends into our lives we become permanently enlarged, and marvel that we could ever have lived in a smaller world.

So I came to know Hempfield, and all those stories – humorous, tragic, exciting, bitter, sorrowful – which thrive so lustily in every small town. As we treasure finally those books which are not, after all, concerned with clapping finite conclusions to infinite events, but are content to be beautiful as they go (as truth is beautiful), so I love the living stories of Hempfield, nor care deeply whether they are at Chapter I, or in

the midst of the climax, or whether they are tapering toward a Gothic-lettered "Finis." Only I have never once come across any Hempfield story that can be said to have reached a final page. Every Hempfield story I know has been like a stone dropped in the puddle of life, with ripples that grow ever wider with the years. And I esteem it the best thing in my life that I have had a part in some of those stories: that a few people, perhaps, are different, as I am different, because I passed that way.

How well I remember the evening when my eye was first caught by the twinkle of that luminary, the Hempfield *Star*, with which afterward I was to become so intimately acquainted. It came to me like a fresh breeze on a sultry day, or a new man in the town road. It was a paragraph in the editorial page, headed with a single word printed in robust black type:

FUDGE

At that time I had been "taking in" the *Star* (as they say here) for only a few weeks, and had seen little in it that made it appear different from any other weekly newspaper. I am ashamed to say that I had entertained a good-humoured tolerance, mingled with contempt, for country newspapers. They seemed to me the apotheosis of the little, the palladium of the uninteresting. It did not occur to me that anything possessed of such tenacity of life as the country newspaper must have a real meaning and perform a genuine function in our civilization. In this roaring age

of efficiency we do not long support any institution that does not set its claws deep into our common life – and hang on.

I began to take the *Star* as a sort of concession, arguing with myself that it would at least give me the weekly price of eggs and potatoes; and, besides, Harriet always wants to know regularly where the Ladies' Literary Society is to hold its meetings.

You cannot imagine my surprise and interest then, when I came abruptly upon that explosive, black-typed "Fudge" in the middle of the *Star*. I have always had a fondness for the word. It is like a breath of fresh air in a stuffy library, and any man who can say "Fudge" in a big, round voice has something in him. He's got views and a personality, even though the views may be crooked and the personality prickly.

With what joy I read that paragraph – and cut it from the paper, and have it yet in my golden treasury. This is it:

FUDGE

> A fellow named Wright, who lives out in Ohio, says he can fly. Mr. Wright is wrong. If the Lord had intended human beings to fly He would have grown wings on us. He made birds for the air, and fish for the sea, and men to walk on two legs. It is a common characteristic of flying-machine inventors and Democrats that they are not satisfied with the doings of the Lord, but must be turning the world topsy-turvy. Mr. Wright of Ohio should peruse the historic

> story of Darius Green and his flying machine. If memory serves us right Darius bumped his head, and afterward lived a sensible life. The *Star* would commend the example of Mr. Green to Mr. Wright – and the Democrats.

Harriet heard me laughing, and called from the other room:

"David, what *are* you laughing at?"

"Why, a new judge in Israel" – and I read the paragraph aloud with the keenest delight.

"But I thought Mr. Wright *could* fly!" said my sister doubtfully.

"Well, he can," said I, "only this writer is a Republican."

She was silent for a moment, standing there in the doorway while I watched with interest the gathering question.

"But I don't see why a Republican – if he *can* fly – "

"Harriet," I began rather oratorically, "this is a very interesting and amusing world we live in, and it is fortunate that we do not all believe everything we see or hear – at any rate, I'd like to meet the man who wrote that paragraph. I feel certain that he is one of the everlasting rocks of New England."

It was this amusing little incident, rather than the really serious purpose that lay back of it, that sent me at last to Hempfield. I kept thinking about the man of the paragraph as I went about my work, chuckling in the cow stable or pausing when I was putting down the hay. I imagined him an old fellow with gray chin whiskers, a pair of spectacles set low on his nose, and a frown between his eyes.

"How he does despise Democrats!" I said to myself.

And yet – our instinct for the compensatory view being irresistible – a pretty good old chap! I thought I should like him, somehow.

One early morning in May, the spring having opened with rare splendour, I hitched up the mare and drove to town. Ostensibly I was going for a few ears of seed corn, a new tooth for my cultivator, and a ham for Harriet – so is the spirit bound down to the mundane – but in reality I was looking for the man who could say "Fudge" with such bluff assurance.

It was a wonderful spring morning, and I did not in the least know as I drove the old mare in the town road, with all the familiar hills and trees about me, that I was going into a new country, fairer by far than ours, where the clouds are higher than they are here, and the grass is greener, where all the men grow taller and the women more beautiful.

I asked Nort once, long afterward, if he could remember the first impression he had when he came to Hempfield and saw the printing-office. Nort frowned, as though thinking hard, and made a characteristic reply:

"I don't rightly remember," said he, "of having any first impression, until I saw Anthy."

But I will not be hurried even to my meeting with Anthy; for I have a very vivid first impression of the printing-office as it sat like a contemplative old gentleman in its ancient and shabby garden.

First we see things with our eyes, see them flat like pictures in a book, and that isn't really sight at all. Then some day we see them with the heart, or the soul, or the spirit – I'm not certain just what it is that really sees, but it is something warm and strong and light inside of us – and that is the true sight.

I had driven the streets of Hempfield for years, and gone in at the grocery stores, made a familiar resort of the gunsmith shop, and visited the post office, but had never really seen the printing-office at all.

Like most things or people really worth knowing, the printing-office is of a retiring disposition. It is an old building, once a dwelling-house, which stands somewhat back from the street, with a quaint old garden around it. An ancient picket fence, nicked and whittled by a generation or so of boys who should have known better, guards its privacy. At the tip of the low cornice is a weatherbeaten bird house, a miniature Greek Parthenon, where the wrens built their nests. Larger and more progressive business buildings had crowded up to the street lines on both sides of it, and yet it managed to preserve somehow an air of ancient gentility. The gate sagged on its hinges, the chimney had lost a brick or two, but it sat there in its garden and watched with mild interest the hasty world go by.

I wondered, that morning, why the peculiar air of the place had never before touched me. I paused a moment, looking in at it with such a feeling of expectancy as I cannot well describe. I did not know what adventure might there befall me. At any

moment I half expected to see my imagined old fellow appear on the doorstep and cry out, half ironically, half explosively:

"Fudge!" Upon which, undoubtedly, I should have disappeared into thin air.

There being no sign of life, for it was still very early in the morning, I opened the gate and went in. Over the front door stretched a weatherbeaten sign bearing these words in large letters:

THE HEMPFIELD STAR

Under this name there was a line of smaller lettering, so faded that one could not easily read it from the street. But as I stood now at the doorway and looked up I could make it out – and it came to me, I cannot tell with what charm, like the far-off echo of ancient laughter:

Hitch Your Wagon to the Star

Below this legend in fresher paint, bearing indeed the evidence of repainting, for many are the vicissitudes of a country newspaper, was the name of the firm:

Doane & Doane

I went up the steps to the little porch and looked in at the doorway. I shall never forget the odour of printer's ink which came warmly to my nostrils, the never-to-be-forgotten odour of printer's ink, sweeter than the spices of Araby, more alluring than attar of roses!.. It was a long, low room, with pasted pictures on the walls, a row of dingy cases at one side, the press at the farther end, the stones near it, and a cutting machine with its arm raised aloft as though to command attention. The editor's desk in the corner was heaped so high with books and papers and magazines and pamphlets that another single one added to the pile would certainly have produced an avalanche – and ended ignominiously in the capacious wastebasket.

For all its dinginess and its picturesque disorder there was something infinitely beguiling about the room. In the front window stood a row of potted geraniums, very thrifty, and there was a yellow canary in a cage, and the editor's ancient chair (one lame leg bandaged with string) was occupied by an old fat gray cat, curled up on a cushion and comfortably asleep. A light breeze came in at one of the windows, fingered a leaf of the calendar to make sure that it was really spring again, and went out blithely at the other window.

I liked it: I liked it all.

"There is a fine woman around this shop somewhere," I said

to myself, "or else a very fine man."

My vision of the daring paragrapher who could say "Fudge" with such virgin enthusiasm instantly shifted. I saw him now as something of a poet – still old, but with a pleasing beard (none of your common chin whiskers) and rarely fine eyes, a man who could care for flowers in the window and keep the cat from the canary.

At that instant my eyes were smitten with stark reality, my imagination wrecked upon the reef of fact. I saw Fergus MacGregor.

Fergus is one of those men who should always be seen for the first time: after you begin to know him, you can't rightly appreciate him.

He was sitting away back in the corner of the room, by his favourite window, tipped back in his chair, with one heel hooked over a rung, the other leg playing loose in space, sadly reading the "Adventures of Tom Sawyer" which he considers the greatest book in the world – next to Robert Burns's poems.

Fergus has always been good for me. He is all facts, like roast beef, or asparagus, or a wheel in a rut. It is almost impossible to idealize Fergus: he has freckles and red hair on his hands. When Fergus first came to Hempfield, one of our good old Yankee citizens, who had never seen much of foreigners and therefore considered them all immoral, said he never had liked Frenchmen.

Whenever I am soaring aloft, as I think I am too likely to do, I have to be very firm in the wings, else the sight of Fergus

MacGregor, with his red hair, his scorched face, and his angular wiry frame, will bring me straight down to earth. He brought me down the first morning I laid eyes on him. As I stood there in the printing-office, looking about me, Fergus glanced up from the "Adventures of Tom Sawyer" and said:

"Wull?"

I can't tell you what worlds of solid reality were packed into that single word. At once all my imaginings came tumbling about me. What, after all, had I come for? Why was I in this absurd printing-office? What wild-goose chase was I on? I should really be at home planting potatoes. Potatoes, cows, corn, cash – surely there were no other realities in life! For an instant the visions of the fields died within me, and I felt sick and weak. You will understand – if you understand.

I thought, as I stood there stupidly, that this was indeed the man who would say "Fudge!" to all the world.

I groped in a wandering mind for some adequate way of escape, and it occurred to me presently that I could order a thousand envelopes, with my name printed in the corner, and bring him to terms. No, I'd order *five* thousand – and utterly obliterate him!

"Wull?" said Fergus.

If it had not been for this second "Wull?" I might have gone back to my immemorial existence and never have brought my new vision to the hard test of life, never have known Anthy, never have felt the glory of a new earth.

But with that second "Wull?" which was even more devastating than the first, I felt something electric, warm, strong, stinging through me. I had a curious sense of high happiness, and before I knew it I was saying:

"After all, men *do* fly!"

I laugh still when I remember how Fergus MacGregor looked at me. For a long moment he said nothing as eloquently as ever I heard it said. I began to feel the humour of the situation (humour is the fellow that always waits just around the corner until the danger is past), but I said in all seriousness:

"I'm looking for the man who wrote an editorial last week headed 'Fudge.' He doesn't appear to approve of flying machines."

Fergus had not stirred by so much as the fraction of an inch. He looked at me for another instant and then paid me, if I had known it, a most surprising compliment. He smiled. His face slowly cracked open – I can express it no other way – and remained cracked for the space of two seconds, and returned to its usual condition. Fergus's smile is one of the wonders of nature.

"What ye going to do?" asked Fergus. "Thrash the editor?"

"No," said I, "convert him."

Fergus slowly shook his head.

"Ye can't," said he.

"I've already begun," said I.

Fergus looked me over for a moment, and smiled again, this time winding up with a snort or a cough, which started to be a

laugh, but stopped away down somewhere inside of him.

"Ye think I wrote it?"

"Well," said I, "you look perfectly capable of it."

I was just beginning to enjoy thoroughly this give and take of conversation, which of all sports in the world is certainly the most fascinating, when I heard steps behind me and, turning half around, saw Anthy for the first time.

"There's the editor," said Fergus. "Ask her yourself."

She came down the room toward me with a quick, businesslike step. She wore a little round straw hat with a plain band. She had a sprig of lilac on her coat, and looked at me directly – like a man. She had very clear blue eyes.

I have thought of this meeting a thousand times since – in the light of all that followed – and this is literally all I saw. I was not especially impressed in any way, except perhaps with a feeling of wonder that this was the person in authority, really the editor.

I have tried to recall every instant of that meeting, and cannot remember that I thought of her either as young or as a woman. Perhaps the excitement and amusement of my talk with Fergus served to prevent a more vivid first impression. I speak of this reaction because all my life, whenever I have met a woman – I have been much alone – I have had a curious sense of being with some one a little higher or better than I am, to whom I should bow, or to whom I should present something, or with whom I should joke. With whom I should not, after all, be quite natural! I wonder if this is at all an ordinary experience with men? I wonder

if any one will understand me when I say that there has always seemed to me something not quite proper in talking to a woman directly, seriously, without reservation, as to a man? But I record it here as a curious fact that I met Anthy that morning just as I would have met a man – as one human being facing another.

"I am the editor," she said crisply, but with good humour.

"Well," I said, "I'm afraid I'm on a rather unusual and unbusinesslike errand."

She did not help me.

"Last week I read an editorial in your paper which amused – interested – me very much. It was headed 'Fudge,' The writer plainly doesn't believe either in flying machines or in Democrats."

I heard Fergus bark behind me.

"He's going to thrash the writer," said Fergus.

Anthy glanced swiftly across at Fergus. It occurred to me in a flash:

"Why, *she* wrote it!"

The sudden thought of the chin whiskers I had fastened upon the imaginary writer was too much for me, and I laughed outright.

"Well," said I, "I shall not attempt any extreme measures until I try, at least, to convert her."

I saw now that I had said something really amusing, for Fergus barked twice behind me and Anthy broke into the liveliest laughter.

"You don't really think I wrote it?" she inquired in the roundest astonishment, with one hand on her breast.

"I should certainly be very well repaid for my visit," said I, "if I thought you did."

"Won't that amuse the Captain!" she exclaimed.

"So the Captain wrote it," I said, not knowing in the least who the Captain was. "Tell me, has he chin whiskers?"

"Why?" asked Anthy.

"Well, when I read that editorial," I said, beginning again to enjoy the give and take of the conversation, "I imagined the sort of man who must have written it: chin whiskers, spectacles low on his nose, very severe on all young things."

Anthy looked at Fergus.

"And does he by any chance" – I inquired in as serious a manner as I could command, "I mean, of course, when he is angry – kick the cat?"

At this Fergus came down with a bang on all four legs of his chair, and we all laughed together.

"Say," said Fergus, "I don't know who ye are, but ye're all right!"

And that was the way I came first to the printing-office.

CHAPTER II
I STEP BOLDLY INTO THE STORY

It is one of the provoking, but interesting, things about life that it will never stop a moment for admiration. No sooner do you pause to enjoy it, or philosophize over it, or poetize about it, than it is up and away, and the next time you glance around it is vanishing over the hill – with the wind in its garments and the sun in its hair. If you do not go on with life, it will go on without you. The only safe way, then, to follow a story, I mean a story in real life, is to get right into it yourself. How breathless, then, it becomes, how you long for – and yet fear – the next chapter, how you love the heroine and hate the villain, and never for an instant can you tell how it is all coming out!

I should be tempted to say that I arrived at the printing-office at a psychological moment if it were not for the fact, as I soon learned, that most of the moments for several months past had been equally psychological. Indeed, before I had fairly got acquainted with the printing-office, and with Fergus and Anthy, and was expecting momentarily to hear the Captain coming in, crying "Fudge," the story moved on, as majestically as if I hadn't appeared at all.

In a story or a play you can set your stage for your crises, and lead up to the entrance of your villain with appropriate literary

flourishes. You can artfully let us know beforehand that it is really a villain who is about to intrude upon your paradise, and dim the voice of the canary and frighten the cat. But in real life, events and crises have a disconcerting way of backing into your narrative before ever you are ready for them, and at the most awkward and inconvenient times.

It was thus that Bucky Penrose came into the printing-office that spring morning. He was struggling with a small but weighty box filled with literature in metal. When he had got it well inside, he deposited it, not at all gently, on a stool, took off his cap, and wiped his forehead.

"Whew, it's hot this morning!" said Bucky.

Now, I dislike to speak of Bucky as a villain, for of all the people in Hempfield Bucky certainly least looks the part. He has towy hair and mild, light-blue eyes. He wears a visor cap and carries a long, flat book which he flaps open for you to sign. He is the expressman.

I could see, however, from the look in Anthy's face that Bucky was really a hardened villain. And Bucky himself seemed to know it and feel it, for it was in an apologetic voice that he said:

"The plates is a dollar this week, Miss Doane, and the insides is seven and a half, C. O. D."

Anthy's hand went to the little leather bag she carried.

"I – I didn't bring up the insides in this load. Mr. Peters said – the Captain – "

Anthy had taken a step forward, and there was a look of

sudden determination in her face.

"Never mind, Bucky, about the Captain – "

"Well, I thought – "

He was thinking just what the whole of Hempfield was thinking, and dared not say. The colour came up in Anthy's cheeks, but she only lifted her chin the higher.

"Tell Mr. Peters to send up the insides at once, Bucky, *at once*. The money will be ready for him."

"All right, Miss Doane, all right – but I thought – "

"Don't think," growled MacGregor, who had been standing aside and saying nothing; "it ain't your calling."

Bucky turned fiercely to reply, but Anthy suddenly laid a hand on his arm.

"In the future, Bucky, don't go to the Captain at all. Come straight to me."

"'Tain't my fault," grumbled Bucky; "I got to collect."

"Certainly you have," said Anthy; "I'll pay you for the box, and you can bring the insides later. Tell Mr. Peters."

It was magnificent the way she carried it off; and when at last the villain had departed, she turned to us with a face slightly flushed, but in perfect control. I had a sudden curious lift of the heart: for there is nothing that so stirs the soul of a man as the sight of courage in a woman. If I had been interested before, I was doubly interested now. It had been one of those lightning-flash incidents which let us more deeply into the real life of men than pages of history. I felt that this printing-office was sacred

ground, the scene of battle and trial and commotion.

At the same time the whole situation struck me with a sudden sense of amusement and surprise. Back somewhere in my consciousness I had always felt something of awe for the Power of the Press. A kind of institutional sanctity seemed to hedge it round about, so that it spoke with the thunder of authority – and here was the Press quite unable to pay the expressman seven dollars and a half! I think I must have entertained much the same view that Captain Doane so delights to express upon any favourable (or unfavourable) public occasion.

How often have I heard him since that memorable time! He does it very impressively, with his right thumb hooked into the buttons of his vest, his beautiful shaggy head thrown well back, and his somewhat shabby frock coat drawn up on the left side – for it is his left hand that he holds so tremulously and impressively aloft – that mighty director of public opinion, that repository of freedom, that palladium of democracy, that ruler of the nation. Whenever I hear the Captain, I can never think of the press without trembling a little at its incredible prescience, without being awed by the way in which it soaks up the life of the community and, having held it for a moment in solution, distributes it – I quote the Captain – "like dew" (sometimes manna) "upon the populace, iridescent with the glories of the printed word." Nor do I ever hear him these days, especially in his moments of biting irony, when he considers those "contemners of the Press" (mostly Democrats) who never tire of "nefarious

practices," without thinking of that first morning I spent in the printing-office – and the look in Anthy's eyes.

Events after the departure of the mild-eyed Bucky moved swiftly. Anthy walked down the room, and Fergus, after hesitating for a moment, followed her. I suppose I should have departed promptly, but I couldn't – I simply couldn't. After the solitude of my farm and my thoughts, I cannot tell how fascinating I found these stirring events.

The little drama which followed was all perfectly clear to me, though I heard not a word, except the last exclamation. As Fergus followed Anthy, he drew a lean tobacco bag slowly out of his hip pocket – and thrust it quickly back again, hesitated, then spoke to Anthy. She shook her head vigorously, and stood up very straight and still. Fergus's hand went back to his pocket again, hesitated, plunged in. He took a bill from the lean bag and fumbled it in his hand. Every line in Anthy's firm body said no. She looked out of the window expectantly. Fergus's looks followed hers. It was evident that they both expected and desired something very much.

"There he is now!" exclaimed Anthy, and that was the exclamation I heard.

He didn't come in crying "Fudge!" as I half expected, but it was none the less a dramatic moment for me. I heard the preliminary thump, thump, of his cane on the porch. I heard him clear his throat stentoriously, as was his custom, and then the Captain, stepping in, looked about him with a benignant eye.

"Anthy, Anthy," he called. "Where are you, Anthy?"

"Here, Uncle! Glad to see you. The insides are at the station, and we need – "

"Anthy," interrupted the Captain, impressively waving his hand, "I have determined upon one thing."

He took off his broad-brimmed hat, and, having with some determination forced the cat from the editorial chair, sat down. There was evidently something unusual on his mind. He sat up straight, resting one hand, which was seen to hold a paper-covered parcel, upon the edge of the desk. If he saw me at all, he gave no sign. I have never thought he saw me.

"Anthy – "

He paused a moment, very dignified. Anthy said nothing.

"I have determined," he continued, "that we must economize."

A swift flash swept over Anthy's expressive face, whether of sympathy or amusement I could not tell. I never knew a time in Anthy's life, even when the heavy world rested most heavily upon her (except once), when she wasn't as near to laughter as she was to tears. She had the God-given grace of seeing that every serious thing in life has a humorous side.

"You're right, Uncle – especially this very morning – "

"Yes, Anthy," he again interrupted, as though he couldn't afford to be diverted by immediate considerations. "Yes, we must economize sharply. Times are not what they were when your father was alive. 'Wealth accumulates and men decay.' The country press is being strangled, forced to the wall by the brute

wealth of the city. The march of events – "

"Yes, Uncle."

He stopped in the midst of his flight and repeated:

"We must economize —*and I've begun*!"

He said it with great dramatic force, but the effect on Anthy was not what an unprejudiced observer might have expected. I thought she looked a bit alarmed.

The Captain cleared his throat, and said with impressive deliberation:

"I've given up smoking cigars!"

Anthy's laugh was clear and strong.

"You have!" she exclaimed.

"And from now on," said the Captain, still very serious, "I shall smoke a pipe."

With that he took notice for the first time of the package in his hand. It contained a case, which he opened slowly.

"Isn't it a beauty?" he said, holding up a new briar pipe.

"Yes," she replied faintly; "but, Uncle, how did you get it?"

He cleared his throat.

"One must make a beginning," he said; "economy is positively necessary. I bought it."

"Uncle, you *didn't* spend Frank Toby's subscription for a pipe!"

The Captain looked a little offended.

"Anthy, it was a bargain. It was marked down from two dollars."

Anthy turned partly aside, quite unconscious of either Fergus or me, and such a look of discouragement and distress swept over her face as I cannot describe. But it was only for an instant. The Captain was still holding up the pipe for her admiration. She laid her hand again quickly on his shoulder.

"It *is* a beauty," she said.

"I knew you'd like it," exclaimed the Captain benevolently. "When I saw it in the window I said, 'Anthy'd like that pipe.' I knew it. So I bought it."

"But, Uncle – how we *did* need the money this morning of all mornings! The insides are here, we must have them – "

"So I say," said the Captain with great firmness, "we must economize sharply. And I've begun. Let's all get down now to work. Fergus, I've answered the fellow on the Sterling *Democrat*. I've left nothing of him at all – not a pinfeather."

With that he took a new pouch of tobacco from his pocket, and began to fill his new pipe. The cat rubbed familiarly against his leg.

Silence in the office, interrupted a moment later by the second appearance of that villain, Bucky Penrose, who thrust his head in the door and called out:

"Lend a hand, Fergus. I got the insides."

Fergus looked at Anthy. She had grown pale.

"Go on, Fergus."

It is this way with me, that often I think of the great thing to do after I get home and into bed. But it came to me suddenly –

an inspiration that made me a little dizzy for a moment – and I stepped into the story.

"I forgot a part of my errand," I said, "when we were – interrupted. I want to subscribe to your paper, right away."

Anthy looked at me keenly for a moment, her colour slowly rising.

"Whom shall we send it to?" she asked in the dryest, most businesslike voice, as though subscriptions were flowing in all the time.

For the life of me I couldn't think of anybody. I never was more at sea in my life. I don't know yet how it occurred to me, but I said, suddenly, with great relief:

"Why, send it to Doctor McAlway."

"He is already a subscriber, one of our oldest," she responded crisply.

We stood there, looking at each other desperately.

"Well," said I, "send it – send it to my uncle – in California."

At that Anthy laughed; we both laughed. But she was evidently very determined.

"I appreciate – I know," she began, "but I can't – "

"See here," I said severely. "You're in the newspaper business, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Then I propose to subscribe for your paper. I demand my rights. And besides" – it came to me with sudden inspiration – "I must have, immediately, a thousand envelopes with my name

printed in the corner."

With that I drew my pocketbook quickly from my pocket and handed her a bill. She took it doubtfully – but at that moment there was a tremendous bump on the porch, and the voice of Fergus shouting directions. When the two men came in with their burden I was studying a fire insurance advertisement on the wall, and Anthy was stepping confidently toward the door.

I wish I could picture the look on Fergus's face when Bucky presented his book and Anthy gave him a bill requiring change. Fergus stood rubbing one finger behind his ear – a sign that there were things in the universe that puzzled him.

While these thrilling events and hairbreadth escapes had been taking place, while the doomed *Star* was being saved to twinkle for another week, the all-unconscious Captain had been sitting at his desk rumbling and grumbling as he opened the exchanges. This was an occupation he affected greatly to despise, but which he would not have given over for the world. By the time he had read about a dozen of his esteemed contemporaries he was usually in a condition in which he could, as he himself put it, "wield a pungent pen." He had arrived at that nefarious sheet, the Sterling *Democrat*, and was leaning back in his chair reading the utterly preposterous lucubrations of Brother Kendrick, which he always saved to the last to give a final fillip to his spirits. Suddenly he dashed the paper aside, sat up straight, and cried out with tremendous vigour:

"Fudge!"

It was glorious; it came quite up to my highest expectations. But somehow, at that moment, it was enough for me to see and hear the Captain, without getting any better acquainted. I wasn't sure, indeed, that I cared to know him at all. I didn't like his new pipe – which shows how little I then understood the Captain!

As I was going out, for even the most interesting incidents must have an end, I stepped over and said to Anthy in a low voice:

"I'll see that you get the address of – my uncle in California."

CHAPTER III
ANTHY

It is one of the strange things in our lives – interesting, too – what tricks our early memories play us. What castles in fairyland they build for us, what never-never ships they send to sea! To a single flaming incident imprinted upon our consciousness by the swift shutter of the soul of youth they add a little of that-which-we-have-heard-told, spice it with a bit of that-which-would-be-beautiful-if-it-could-have-happened, and throw in a rosy dream or two – and the compound, well warmed in the fecund soil of the childish imagination, becomes far more real and attractive to us than the drab incidents of our grown-up yesterdays.

Long afterward, when we had become much better acquainted, Anthy told me one day, very quietly, of the greatest memory of her childhood. It was of something that never could have happened at all; and yet, to Anthy, it was one of the treasured realities of her life, a memory to live by.

She was standing at the bedside of her mother. She remembered, she said, exactly how her mother looked – her delicate, girlish face, the big clear eyes, the wavy hair all loose on the pillow. They had just placed the child in her arms, and she was drawing the small bundle close up to her, and looking down at it, and crying. It was the crying that Anthy remembered

the best of all.

And the child that Anthy saw so clearly was Anthy herself – and this was the only memory she ever had of her mother. That poor lady, perhaps a little tired of a world too big and harsh for her, and disappointed that her child was not a son whom she could name Anthony, after its father, tarried only a week after Anthy was born.

"You see," said Anthy, "I was intended to be a boy."

After that, Anthy remembered a little girl, a very lonely little girl, sitting at a certain place on the third step from the bottom of the stairs. There were curious urns filled with flowers on the wall paper, and her two friends, Richard and Rachel, came out of the wall near the dining-room door and looked through the stair spindles at her. Rachel had lovely curly hair and Richard wore shiny brass buttons on his jacket, and made faces. She used to whisper to them between the spindles, and whenever any one came they went back quickly through the wall. She liked Rachel better than Richard.

There was a time later when her hero was Ivanhoe – just the name, not the man in the book. She read a great deal there in the lonely house, and her taste in those years ran to the gloomy and mysterious. The early chapters of an old book called "Wuthering Heights" thrilled her with fascinated interest, and she delighted in "Peter Ibbetson." Sometimes she would take down the volume of Tennyson in her father's library and, if the light was low, read aloud:

I *hate* the *dreadful* hollow behind the little wood

As she read, she would thrill with delicious horror.

Then she went away to school, not knowing in the least how much her father missed her; and when she came back, the home of her girlhood seemed dreadfully shabby, small, old-fashioned, and she did not like the iron deer on the lawn nor the cabinet of specimens in the corner of the parlour.

Anthy did not tell me all these things at one time, and some she never told me at all. They were the slow gatherings of many rich friendships in Hempfield, and a few things afterward came to me, inadvertently, from Nort. I shall venture often in this narrative to assume the omniscience of foreknowledge: for it is one of the beautiful things to me, as I write, that I can look at those early hard days in the printing-office through the golden haze of later events.

It was in the vacations from college that Anthy began really to know her father, who was, in his way, a rather remarkable man. Although I never knew him well personally, I remember seeing him often in the town roads during the latter years of his life. He was always in a hurry, always looked a little tired, always wore his winter hat too late in the spring, and his straw hat too late in the fall.

Anthy remembered her father as forever writing on bits of yellow paper: "John Gorman lost a valuable pig last Wednesday";

or "Mrs. Bertha Hopkins is visiting her daughter in Arnoville."

Anthy was secretly ashamed of this unending writing of local events, just as she was ashamed of the round bald spot on her father's head, and of the goloshes which he wore in winter. And yet, in some curious deep way – for love struggles in youth to harmonize the real with the ideal – these things of which she was ashamed gave her a sort of fierce pride in him, a tenderness for him, a wish to defend him. While she admired her handsome uncle, the Captain, it was her father whom she loved with all the devotion of her young soul.

He knew everybody, or nearly everybody, in the town, and treated every one, even his best friends, with a kind of ironical regard. He knew life well – all of it – and was rarely deceived by pretence or surprised by evil. Sometimes, I think, he armoured himself unnecessarily against goodness, lest he be deceived; but once having accepted a man, his loyalty was unswerving. He believed, as he often said, that the big things in life are the little things, and it was his idea of a country newspaper that it should be crowded with all the little things possible.

"What's the protective tariff or the Philippine question to Nat Halstead compared with the price of potatoes?" he would ask.

He was not at all proud, for if he could not get his pay for his newspaper in cash he would take a ham, or a cord of wood, a champion squash, or a packet of circus tickets. One of Anthy's early memories was of an odd assortment of shoes which he had accepted in settlement of an advertising account. They never

quite fitted any one.

As he grew older he liked to talk with Anthy about his business, as though she were a partner; he liked especially to have her in the office helping him, and he was always ready with a whimsical or wise comment on the people of the town. He also enjoyed making sly jokes about his older brother, the Captain, and especially about the Captain's thundering editorials (which Anthy for a long time secretly admired, wishing her father had written them).

"Now, Anthy," he would say, "don't disturb your Uncle Newt; he's saving the nation," or "Pass this pamphlet along to your uncle; it will come in handy when he gets ready to regulate the railroads."

He was not an emotional man, at least to outward view; but once, on a Memorial Day, while the old soldiers were marching past the printing-office on their way to the cemetery, Anthy saw him standing by the window in his long apron, a composing stick in his hand, with the tears rolling unheeded down his face.

I think sometimes we do not yet appreciate the influence of that great burst of idealism, which was the Civil War, upon the lives of the men of that generation, nor the place which Lincoln played in moulding the characters of his time. Men who, even as boys, passed through the fire of that great time and learned to suffer with Lincoln, could never again be quite small. Although Anthy's father had not been a soldier – he was too young at the time – the most impressionable years of his boyhood were

saturated with stories from the front, with the sight of soldiers marching forth to war, his own older brother, the Captain, among them, the sound of martial drums and fifes, and the heroic figures of wan and wounded men who returned with empty sleeves or missing legs. He never forgot the thrill that came with the news of Lincoln's assassination.

There was a portrait of Lincoln over the cases at the office, and another over the mantel in the dining-room – the one that played so important a part, afterward, in Anthy's life.

Sometimes, on a rainy Sunday afternoon, Anthy's father would get down a certain volume from the cases, and read Tom Taylor's tribute to the dead Lincoln. She could recall vividly the intonation of his voice as he read the lines, and she knew just where he would falter and have to clear his throat:

> *You* lay a wreath on murdered Lincoln's bier;
> You, who with mocking pencil wont to trace,
> Broad for the self-complaisant British sneer,
> His length of shambling limb, his furrowed face,
>
> His gaunt, gnarled hands, his unkempt, bristling hair,
> His garb uncouth, his bearing ill at ease,
> His lack of all we prize as debonair,
> Of power or will to shine, or art to please…

When he had finished reading, he would take off his spectacles and wipe them, and say to Anthy:

"Lincoln was the greatest man this country has ever produced."

He was a curious combination of hardheadedness, of ironical wisdom, and of humour, and somewhere, hidden deep within, of molten sentiment. He was a regular Yankee.

One night he got more than ordinarily tired, and just stopped. They found him in bed the next morning, his legs drawn up under the coverlet, a volume of Don Quixote open on his knees, his empty pipe fallen from his lips, the lamp dying out on a table near him. At his elbow were two of the inevitable yellow slips:

Squire Baker of Arnoville was a visitor at Lawyer Perkins's on Monday

Apples stopped yesterday at Banks's store at 30 cents a peck – on their way up (adv)

He never knew what a hero he was: he had made a living for thirty years out of a country newspaper.

Anthy came home from college to the forlorn and empty and ugly house – and it seemed to her that the end of the world had come. This period of loneliness made a deep impression upon her later years. When at last she could bear to open the envelope labelled: "To Anthy – in case of my death," she found this letter:

> Dear Anthy: I am leaving the *Star* to you. There is nothing else except the homestead – and the debts. Do what you like with all of them – but look after your Uncle Newt.

Now, Anthy's earliest memories were bound up with the printing-office. There was never a time that she did not know the smell of printer's ink. As a child she had delighted to tip over the big basket and play with the paper ribbons from the cutting machine. Later, she had helped on press days to fold and label the papers. She was early a pastmaster in the art of making paste, and she knew better than any one else the temperamental eccentricities of the old-fashioned Dick labeller. She could set type (passably) and run the hand press. But as for taking upon herself the activities of her tireless father – who was at once editor, publisher, compositor, pressman, advertising solicitor, and father confessor for the community of Hempfield – she could not do it. There is only a genius here and there who can fill the high and difficult position of country editor.

The responsibility, therefore, fell upon the Captain, who for so many years had been the titular and ornamental editor of the *Star*. It was the Captain who wrote the editorials, the obituaries, and the "write-ups," who attended the political conventions, and was always much in demand for speeches at the Fourth of July celebrations.

But, strangely enough, although the *Star* editorials sparkled with undimmed lustre, although the obituaries were even longer and more wonderful than ever before – so long as to crowd

out some of the items about Johnny Gorman's pigs and Mrs. Hopkins's visits to her sister, although the fine old Captain worked harder than ever, the light of the luminary of Hempfield grew steadily dimmer. Fergus saw it early and it distressed his Scotch soul. Anthy felt it, and soon the whole town knew of the decay of the once thrifty institution in the little old printing-office back from the street. Brother Kendrick, of that nefarious rag, the Sterling *Democrat*, even dared to respond to one of the Captain's most powerful and pungent editorials with a witticism in which he referred to the *Weakly Star* of Hempfield, and printed "Weakly" in capital letters that no one might miss his joke.

It was at this low stage in the orbit of the *Star* that I came first to the printing-office, trying to discover the man who could shout "Fudge" with such fine enthusiasm – and found myself, quite irresistibly, hitching my wagon to the *Star*.

CHAPTER IV
ENTER MR. ED SMITH

It is only with difficulty thus far in my narrative that I have kept Norton Carr out of it. When you come to know him you will understand why. He is inseparably bound up with every memory I have of the printing-office. The other day, when I was describing my first visit to the establishment of Doane & Doane, I kept seeing the figure of Nort bending over the gasoline engine. I kept hearing him whistle in the infectious low monotone he had, and when I spoke of the printing press I all but called it "Old Harry" (Nort christened the ancient Hoe press, Old Harry, which every one adopted as being an appropriate name). I even half expected to have him break out in my pages with one of his absurd remarks, when I knew well enough that he had no business to be in the story at all. He hadn't come yet, and Anthy and Fergus and the old Captain were positively the only ones there.

But Nort, however impatient he may be getting, will have to wait even a little while yet, for notable events were to occur in the printing-office just before he arrived, without which, indeed, he never could have arrived at all. If it had not been for the ploughing and harrowing of Ed Smith, painful as it was to that ancient and sedate institution, the Hempfield *Star*, there never would have been any harvest for Norton Carr, nor for me, nor for Anthy. So

good may come even out of evil.

As I narrate these preliminary events, however, you will do well to keep in your thought a picture of Nort going about his pleasures – I fear, at that time, somewhat unsteadily – in the great city, not knowing in the least that chance, assisted by a troublesome organ within called a soul, was soon to deposit him in the open streets of a town he had never heard of in all his life, but which was our own familiar town of Hempfield.

The thought of Nort looking rather mistily down the common – he was standing just in front of the Congregational Church – and asking, "What town am I in, anyhow?" lingers in my memory as one of the amusing things I have known.

Late in June I began to feel distinctly the premonitory rumblings and grumblings of the storm which was now rapidly gathering around the *Star*. It was a very clever Frenchman, I believe – though not clever enough to make me remember his name – who, upon observing certain disturbances in the farther reaches of the solar system, calculated by sheer mathematical genius that there was an enormous planet, infinitely distant from the sun, which nobody had yet discovered.

It was thus by certain signs of commotion in one of its issues that I recognized a portentous but undiscovered Neptune, which was plainly disturbing the course of the *Star*. A big new advertisement stared at me from the middle of the first page, and there was a certain crisp quality in some of the reading notices – from which the letters "adv" had been suspiciously omitted –

the origin of which I could not recognize. The second week the change was even more marked. There were several smart new headings: "Jots and Tittles from Littleton," I remember, was one of them, and even the sanctity of the editorial column had been invaded with an extraordinary production quite foreign to the Captain's pen. It was entitled:

"All Together Now! Boost Hempfield!"

I can scarcely describe how I was affected by these changes; but I should have realized that any man bold enough to hitch his wagon to a star must prepare himself for a swift course through the skies, and not take it amiss if he collides occasionally with the heavenly bodies.

I think it was secretly amusing to Harriet during the weeks that followed my first great visit to the printing-office to watch the eagerness with which I awaited the postman on the publication days of the *Star*. I even went out sometimes to meet him, and took the paper from his hand. I have been a devoted reader of books these many years, but I think I have never read anything with sharper interest than I now began to read the *Star*. I picked out the various items, editorials, reading notices, and the like, and said to myself: "That's the old Captain's pungent pen," or "Anthy must have written that," or "I warrant the Scotchman, Fergus, had a finger in *that* pie." As I read the editorials I could fairly see the old Captain at his littered desk, the cat rubbing against

his leg, the canary singing in the cage above him, and his head bent low as he wrote. And I was disturbed beyond measure by the signs of an unknown hand at work upon the *Star*.

"I thought, David, you did not care for country newspapers," said my sister.

She wore that comfortably superior smile which becomes her so well. The fact is, she *is* superior.

"Well," said I, "you may talk all you like about Browning and Carlyle – "

"I have not," said my sister, "referred to Browning or Carlyle."

"You may talk all you like" – I disdained her pointed interruption – "but for downright human nature here in the country, give me the Hempfield *Star*."

Once during these weeks I paid a short obligatory visit to the printing-office, and gave Anthy the name of my uncle in California and got the envelopes that had been printed for me. I also took in a number of paragraphs relating to affairs in our neighbourhood, and told Anthy (only I did not call her Anthy then) that if agreeable I would contribute occasionally to the *Star*. She seemed exceedingly grateful, and I liked her better than ever.

I also had a characteristic exchange with Fergus, in which, as usual, I came off worsted. In those troublous days Fergus was the toiling Atlas upon whose wiry shoulders rested the full weight of that heavenly body. He set most of the type, distributed it again, made up the forms, inked the rollers, printed the paper (for the most part), did all the job work which Hempfield afforded, and

smoked the worst pipe in America.

When I told him that I was going to write regularly for the *Star* and showed him the paragraphs I had brought in (I suspect they *were* rather long) this was his remark:

"Oh, Lord, more writers!"

It was on this occasion, too, that I really made the acquaintance of the Captain. He was in the best of spirits. He told me how he had beaten the rebels at Antietam. I enjoyed it all very much, and decided that for the time being I would suspend judgment on the pipe incident.

One day I reached the point where I could stand it no longer. So I hitched up the mare and drove to town. All the way along the road I tried to imagine what had taken place in the printing-office.

I thought with a sinking heart that the paper might have been sold, and that my new friends would go away. I thought that Anthy might be carrying out some new and vigorous plan of reconstruction, only somehow I could not feel Anthy's hand in the changes I had seen.

It was all very vivid to me; I had, indeed, a feeling, that afterward became familiar enough, that the *Star* was a living being, struggling, hoping, suffering, like one of us. In truth, it was just that.

No sooner had I turned in at the gate than I perceived that some mysterious and revolutionary force had really been at work. The gate itself had acquired two hinges where one had been quite

sufficient before, and inside the office – what a change was there! It was not so much in actual rearrangement, though the editorial desk looked barren and windswept; it was rather in the general atmosphere of the place. Even Tom, the cat, showed it: when I came in at the door he went out through the window. He was scared! No more would he curl himself contentedly to sleep in editorial chairs; no more make his bed in the office wastebasket. Though it was still early in the morning, Fergus was not reading "Tom Sawyer." No, Fergus was hard at work, and didn't even look around when I came in.

Anthy was there, too, in her long crisp gingham apron, which I always thought so well became her. She had just put down her composing stick, and was standing quite silent, with a curious air of absorption (which I did not then understand), before the dingy portrait of Lincoln on the wall just over the cases. On her desk, not far away, a book lay open. I saw it later: it was Rand's "Modern Classical Philosophers." It represented Anthy's last struggling effort to keep on with her college work. In spite of all the difficulties and distractions of the printing-office, she had never quite given up the hope that some day she might be able to go back and graduate. It had been her fondest desire, the deepest purpose of her heart.

As she glanced quickly around at me I surprised on her face a curious look. How shall I describe it? – a look of exaltation, and of anxiety, too, I thought. But it passed like a flash, and she gave me a smile of friendly recognition, and stepped toward me with

the frank and outright way she had. It gave me a curious deep thrill, not, I think, because she was a woman, a girl, and so very good to look upon, but because I suddenly saw her, the very spirit of her, as a fine, brave human being, fighting one of the hard and bitter fights of our common life. I do not pretend to know very much about women in general, and I think perhaps there is some truth in one of Nort's remarks, made long afterward:

"David's idea of generalizing about women," said that young upstart, "is to talk about Anthy without mentioning her name."

Is yours any different, Nort? – or *yours*?

Yes, I think it is true; and this I know because I know Anthy, that, however beautiful and charming a woman may be, as a woman, that which finally rings all the bells in the chambers of the souls of men are those qualities which are above and beyond womanly charm, which are universal and human: as that she is brave, or simple, or noble in spirit.

That Anthy was deeply troubled on that summer morning I saw plainly when the Captain came, in the keen glance she gave him. He, too, seemed somehow changed, so unlike himself as to be almost gloomy. He gave me a sepulchral, "Good morning, sir," and sat down at his desk without even lighting his pipe.

Something tremendous, I could feel, was taking place there in the printing-office, and I said to Anthy – we had been talking about the paragraphs I brought in:

"What's been happening to the *Star* since I was here before?"

"You've discovered it, too!" she said with a whimsical smile.

"Well, we're just now in process of being modernized." At this I heard Fergus snort behind me.

"Bein' busted, you mean," said he.

Fergus, besides being temperamentally unable to contain his opinions, had been so long the prop of the mechanical fortunes of the *Star* that he was a privileged character.

"I knew something was the matter," I said. "As I was coming in I felt like saying, 'Fee, fie, fo, fum, I smell the blood of an Englishmun.'"

"Plain Yankee this time," said Fergus.

"Now, Fergus!" exclaimed Anthy severely. "You see," she continued, "we positively had to do something. The paper has been going downhill ever since my father's death. Father knew how to make it pay, even with half the families in town taking the cheap city dailies. But times are changing, and we've got to modernize or perish."

While she spoke with conviction, her words lacked enthusiasm, and they had, moreover, a certain cut-and-dried sound. "Times are changing. Modernize or perish!"

Anthy did not know it, of course, but she was living at the psychological moment in our history when the whole country was turning for salvation to that finished product, that perfect flower, of our institutions, the Practical Business Man. Was a city sick, or a church declining in its membership, or a college suffering from slow starvation, or a newspaper down with neurasthenia, why, call in a Practical Business Man. Let him administer up-to-

date remedies; let him hustle, push, advertise.

It was thus, as an example of what the historian loves to call "remote causes," that Mr. Ed Smith came to Hempfield and the *Star*. He was a graduate of small-town journalism in its most progressive guises, and if any one was ever entitled to the degree of P. B. M. *cum laude*, it was Ed Smith.

He had come at Anthy's call – after having made certain eminently sound and satisfying financial arrangements. When it came finally to the issue, Anthy had seen that the only alternative to the extinction of the *Star* was some desperate and drastic remedy. And Ed Smith was that desperate and drastic remedy.

"I felt," she said to me, "that I must do everything I could to keep the *Star* alive. My father devoted all his life to it, and then, there was Uncle Newt – how could Uncle Newt live without a newspaper?"

I did not know until long afterward what the sacrifice had meant to Anthy. It meant not only a surrender of all her immediate hopes of completing her college work, but she was compelled to risk everything she had. First, she had borrowed all the money she could raise on the old home, and with this she paid off the accumulated debts of the *Star*. With the remainder, which Ed Smith spoke of as Working Capital, she plunged into the unknown and venturesome seas of modernized journalism.

She had not gone to these lengths, however, without the advice of old Judge Fendall of Hempfield, one of her father's close friends, and a man I have long admired at a distance, a fine, sound

old gentleman, with a vast respect for business and business men. Besides this, Anthy had known Ed for several years; he had called on her father, had, indeed, called on *her*.

It was bitter business for the old Captain to find himself, after so many glorious years, fallen upon such evil days. I have always been amused by the thought of the first meeting between Ed Smith and the Captain, as reported afterward by Fergus (with grim joy).

"Do you know," Ed asked the Captain, "the motto that I'd print on that door?"

The Captain didn't.

"*Push*," said he dramatically; "that's my motto."

I can see the old Captain drawing himself up to his full stature (he was about once and a half Ed's size).

"Well, sir," said he, "we need no such sign on *our* door. Our door has stood wide open to our friends, sir, for thirty years."

When the old Captain began to be excessively polite, and to address a man as "sir," he who was wise sought shelter. It was the old Antietam spirit boiling within him. But Ed Smith blithely pursued his way, full of confidence in himself and in the god he worshipped, and it was one of Anthy's real triumphs, in those days of excursions and alarms, that she was able both to pacify the Captain and keep Fergus down.

Ed came in that morning while I was in the printing-office, a cheerful, quick-stepping, bold-eyed young fellow with a small neat moustache, his hat slightly tilted back, and a toothbrush in

his vest pocket.

"You are the man," he said to me briskly, "that writes the stuff about the Corwin neighbourhood."

I acknowledged that I was.

"Good stuff," said he, "good stuff! Give us more of it. And can't you drum up a few new subs out there for us? Those farmers around you ought to be able to come up with the ready cash."

To save my life I couldn't help being interested in him. It is one of the absurd contrarieties of human nature that no sooner do we decide that a man is not to be tolerated, that he is a villain, than we begin to grow tremendously interested in him. We want to see how he works. And the more deeply we get interested, the more we begin to see how human he is, in what a lot of ways he is exactly like us, or like some of the friends we love best – and usually we wind up by liking him, too.

It was so with Ed Smith. He let into my life a breath of fresh air, and of new and curious points of view. I think he felt my interest, too, and as I now look back upon it, I count his friendship as one of the things that helped to bind me more closely and intimately to the *Star*. While he was not at all sensitive, still he had already begun to feel that the glorious progress he had planned for the *Star* (and for himself) might not be as easy to secure as he had anticipated. He wanted friends in the office, friends of those he desired to be friendly with, especially Anthy. Besides, I was helping fill his columns without expense!

I had a good lively talk with him that morning. Before I had

known him fifteen minutes he had expressed his opinion that the old Captain was a "back number" and a "dodo," and that Fergus was a good fellow, but a "grouch." He confided in me that it was his principle, "when in Rome to do what the Romans do," but I wasn't certain whether this consisted, in his case, of being a dodo or a grouch. He was full of wise saws and modern instances, a regular Ben Franklin for wisdom in the art of getting ahead.

"When the cash is going around," said he, "I don't see why I shouldn't have a piece of it. Do you?"

He told me circumstantially all the reasons why he had come to Hempfield.

"I could have made a lot more money at Atterbury or Harlan Centre; they were both after me; but, confidentially, I couldn't resist the lady."

Well, Ed *was* wonderfully full of business. "Rustling" was a favourite word of his, and he exemplified it. He rustled. He got in several new advertisements, he published paid reading notices in the local column, a thing never before done on the *Star*. He persuaded the railroad company to print its time tables (at "our regular rates"), with the insinuation that if they didn't he'd … and he formed a daring plan for organizing a Board of Trade in Hempfield to boost the town and thus secure both news and advertising for the *Star*. Oh, he made things lively!

Some men, looking out upon life, get its poetic implications, others see its moral significance, and here and there a man will see beauty in everything; but to Ed all views of life dissolved,

like a moving picture, into dollars.

At first Fergus, that thrifty Scotch soul, was inclined to look with favour upon these new activities, for they promised well for the future prosperity of the *Star*; but this friendly tolerance was blasted as the result of a curious incident. Fergus had lived for several years in the back part of the printing-office. It was a small but comfortable room which had once been the kitchen of the house. In the course of his ravening excursions, seeking what he might devour, Ed Smith presently fell upon Fergus's room. Ed never could understand the enduring solidity of ancient institutions. Now Fergus's room, I am prone to admit, was not all that might have been desired, Fergus being a bachelor; but he was proud of it, and swept it out once a month, as he said, whether it needed it or not. Ed's innocent suggestion, therefore, of a house-cleaning was taken by Fergus as a deadly affront. He did not complain to Anthy, though he told *me*, and from that moment he began a silent, obstinate opposition to everything that Ed was, or thought, or did.

If it had not been for Anthy, Ed would indeed have had a hard time of it. But Anthy managed it, and in those days, hard as they were, she was finding herself, becoming a woman.

"Fergus," she said, "we're going to stand behind Ed Smith. We've *got* to work it out. It's our last chance, Fergus."

So Fergus stuck grimly to the cases, actually doing more work than he had done before in years; Tom, the cat, sat warily on the window sill, ready at a moment's notice to dive to safety;

the old Captain was gloomy, and wrote fierce editorials on the Democratic party and on all "new-fangled notions" (especially flying machines and woman suffrage). His ironies about the "initiative, referendum, and recall" were particularly vitriolic during this period of his career. Anthy was the only cheerful person in the office.

It was some time in August, in the midst of these stirring events, when the *Star* was deporting itself in such an unprecedented manner, that the Captain one day brought in what was destined to be one of the most famous news items, if not *the* most famous, ever published in the *Star*.

I was there at the time, and I can testify that he came in quite unconcernedly, though there was an evident look of disapproval upon his countenance. It was thus with the Captain, that nothing was news unless it stirred him to an opinion. An earthquake might have shaken down the Hempfield townhall or tipped over the Congregational Church, but the Captain might not have thought of putting the news in the paper unless it had occurred to him that the selectmen should have been on hand to prevent the earthquake, upon which he would have had a glorious article, not on the earthquake, but on the failure of a free American commonwealth, in this enlightened twentieth century, to secure efficiency in the conduct of the simplest of its public affairs.

But truly historic events get themselves reported even through the densest mediums. I saw the Captain with my own eyes as he wrote:

> What has become of the officer of the law in Hempfield? A strange young man was seen coming down Main Street yesterday afternoon in a condition which made him a sad example for the lads of Hempfield, many of whom were following him. Is this an orderly and law-abiding town or is it not?

I may say in passing that the Captain's inquiry: "What has become of the officer of the law in Hempfield?" was purely rhetorical. The Captain knew perfectly well where Steve Lewis was at that critical moment, for he had looked over the fence of Steve's yard as he passed, and saw that officer of the law, in a large blue apron, helping his wife hang out the week's washing. But how could one put that in the *Star*?

Such was the exact wording of that historic item. By some chance it did not meet the eagle eye of Ed Smith until the completely printed paper, still moist from the press, was placed in his hands. Then his eye fell upon it.

"Who wrote this item about a strange young man?" he asked.

"I think the Captain got it," said Anthy.

"Well!" exclaimed Ed, "that must be the very chap I have just hired to help Fergus."

He paused a moment, reflectively.

"I got him dirt cheap, too," said he.

And this was the way in which Norton Carr was plunged into the whirl of life at Hempfield.

CHAPTER V
NORT

I love Norton Carr very much, as he well knows, but if I am to tell a truthful story I may as well admit, first as last, that Nort was never quite sure how it was that he got off, or was put off, at Hempfield. In making this admission, however, I do not for a moment accept all the absurd stories which are afloat regarding Nort's arrival in Hempfield.

He says the first thing he remembers clearly was of standing in the street at the top of our common, looking down into Hempfield – one of the finest views in our town. The exact historic spot where he stood was nearly in front of a small shoe shop, the one now kept by Tony, the Italian. If ever the Georgia Johnson Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution runs out of places upon which to plant stones, tablets, trees, flowers, cannon balls, or drinking fountains, I would respectfully suggest raising a monument in front of Tony's shop with some such inscription as this:

Here Stood

NORTON CARR

On the Morning of His

INVOLUNTARY

Arrival in Hempfield

Nort walked down the street with a number of boys behind him —*three*, to be exact, *not* a "rabble." He was seen by old Mrs. Parker, one of our most prominent journalists, who was, as usual, beating her doormat on the front porch. He was seen by Jared Sparks, who keeps the woodyard, and by Johnny McGonigal, who drives the hack; and finally he was caught by the eagle eye of the Press, in the person of Captain Doane, as I have already related, and his shame was published abroad to the world through the columns of the *Star*. As nearly as I can make out, for the facts regarding any given event in Hempfield often vary in adverse

proportion to the square of the number of persons doing the reporting, the main indictment against Nort upon this occasion was that he appeared in town, a stranger without a hat. *Without a hat!*

I admit that he *did* stop in front of the Congregational Church; but I maintain that it is well worth any man's while to stop on a fine morning and look at our old church, with its mantle of ivy and the sparrows building their nests in the eaves. I admit also that he *did* make a bow, a low bow, to the spire, but I deny categorically Johnny McGonigal's absurd yarn that he said: "Good mornin', church. Shorry sheem disrespechtful." Any one who knows Nort as well as I do would not consider his making a bow to a perfectly respectable old church as anything remarkable, or accusing him of having been intoxicated, save with the wine of spring and of youth. Why, I myself have often bowed to fine old oak trees and to hilltops. I wonder why it is that when small communities jump at conclusions, they so often jump the wrong way?

And yet I don't want to blame Hempfield. You can see for yourself what it would mean – a stranger, without a hat, bowing to the spire of the Congregational Church – what it would mean in a town which has religiously voted "dry" every spring since the local-option law went into effect, which abhors saloons, which resounds with the thunders of pulpit and press against the iniquity of drink, and where, if there are three or four places where the monster may be quietly devoured, no one is supposed to know

anything about them.

I do not enlarge upon this picture of Nort with any delight, and yet I have always thought that it was a great help to Nort that he should have appeared in Hempfield in the guise of a vagabond.

If we had known then that he had the right kind of a father, had come from the right kind of a college, and had already spent a good deal of money that he had not earned, I fear he would have been seriously handicapped. We should probably have looked the other way while he was bowing to the church – and considered that he was going without a hat for his health. As for putting him in the *Star*, we should never have dreamed of it!

I love to think of Nort, coming down our street for the first time – the green common with its wonderful tall elms on one side and the row of neat stores and offices on the other. It must be a real adventure to see Hempfield on a sunny morning with a new eye, to pass Henderson's drygoods store and catch the ginghamy whiff from the open doorway, or go by Mr. Tole's drug store and breathe in the aromatic odour of strange things that should be stoppered in glass bottles and aren't. And then the cool smell of newly watered sidewalks, and the good look of the tomatoes in their baskets, and the moist onions, and spinach, and radishes, and rhubarb in front of the shady market, and the sparrows fighting in the street – and everything quiet, and still, and home-like!

And think of coming unexpectedly (how I wish I could do it myself some day and wake up afterward to enjoy it) upon

the wide doorway of John Bass's blacksmith shop, and see John himself standing there at his anvil with a hot horseshoe in his tongs. John never sings when his iron is in the fire, but the moment he gets his hand on his hammer and the iron on the horn of the anvil, then all the Baptist in him seems suddenly to effervesce, and he lifts his high and squeaky voice:

"Jeru (whack) salem (whack) the gold (whack) en (whack, whack),

"With milk (whack) and hon (whack) ey blest (whack, whack, whack)."

And what wouldn't I give to clap my eyes newly on old Mr. Kenton, standing there in front of his office, his florid face shaded by the porch roof, but the rotundity of his white waistcoat gleaming in the sunshine, his cane hooked over his arm, and himself looking benignly out upon the world of Hempfield as it flows by, ready to discuss with any one either the origin or the destiny of his neighbours.

At the corner above the post office Nort stopped and leaned against the fence, and looked up the street and down the street. His spirits were extremely low. He felt wholly miserable. He had not a notion in the world what he was going to do, did not at that time even know the name of the town he was in. It was indeed pure chance that had led him to Hempfield. If he had had a few cents more in his pocket it might have been Acton, or if a few cents less it might have been Roseburg. His only instinct, blurred at the moment, I am sorry to say, had been to get as far away

from New York as possible – and Hempfield happened to be just about the limit of his means.

He was already of two minds as to whether he should give it all up and get back to New York as quickly as possible. He thought of dropping in on the most important man in town, say the banker, or the Congregational minister, and introducing himself in the rôle of contrite spendthrift or of remorseful prodigal, as the case might be – trust Nort for knowing how to do it – and by hook or crook raise enough money to take him back. He pictured himself sitting in the quiet study of the minister, looking sad, sad, and his mind lighted up with the wonderful things he could say to prove that of all the sheep that had bleated and gone astray since ever the world began, he was, without any doubt, the darkest of hue. He sketched in the details with a sure touch. He could almost *see* the good old man's face, the look of commiseration gradually melting to one of pitying helpfulness. It would require only a very few dollars to get him back to New York.

He was on the point of carrying this interesting scheme into operation when the scenes and incidents of his recent life in New York swept over him, a mighty and inundating wave of black discouragement. Everything had been wrong with him from the beginning, it seemed to him that morning. He had not had the right parents, nor the right education, nor enough will power, nor any true friends, nor the proper kind of ambition.

When Satan first led Nort up on a high hill and offered him all the kingdoms of the earth, Nort had responded eagerly:

"Why, sure! I'll take em. Got any more where those come from?"

Nort's was an eager, curious, ardent, insatiable nature, which should have been held back rather than stimulated. No sooner had he stepped out into life than he wanted it all – everything that he could see, or hear, or smell, or taste, or touch – and all at once. I do not mean by this that Nort was a vicious or abandoned character beyond the pale of his humankind. He had, indeed, done things that were wrong, that he knew were wrong, but thus far they had been tentative, experimental, springing not from any deeply vicious instincts but expressing, rather, his ardent curiosity about life.

I think sometimes that our common definition of dissipation is far too narrow. We confine it to crude excesses in the use of intoxicating liquor or the crude gratification of the passions; but often these are only the outward symbols of a more subtle inward disorder. The things of the world – a thousand clamouring interests, desires, possessions – have got the better of us. Men become drunken with the inordinate desire for owning things, and dissolute with ambition for political office. I knew a man once, a farmer, esteemed an upright man in our community, who debauched himself upon land; fed his appetite upon the happiness of his home, cheated his children of education, and himself went shabby, bookless, joyless, comfortless, that he might buy more land. I call that dissipation, too!

And in youth, when all the earth is very beautiful, when our

powers seem as limitless as our desires (I know, I know!), we stand like Samson, and for the sheer joy of testing our strength pull down the pillars of the temple of the world.

In Nort's case a supply of unearned money had enormously increased his power of seeing, hearing, feeling, doing; everything opened wide to the magic touch of the wand of youth, enthusiasm, money. He could neither live fast enough nor enjoy too much.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.