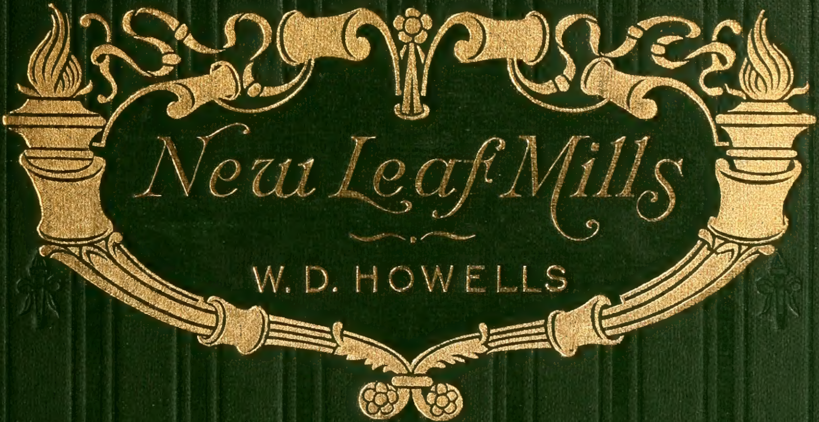

New Leaf Mills

W. D. HOWELLS

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NEW LEAF MILLS: A CHRONICLE

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NEW LEAF MILLS: A CHRONICLE

I

The opinions of Owen Powell marked a sharp difference between him and most of his fellow-townsmen in the town of the Middle West, where he lived sixty years ago. A man who condemned the recent war upon Mexico as a wicked crusade for the extension of slavery, and denounced the newly enacted Fugitive Slave Law as infernal, would have done well to have a confession of spiritual faith like that of his neighbors; but here Owen Powell was still more widely at variance with them. He rejected the notion of a personal devil, and many others did that; but his hell was wholly at odds with the hell popularly accepted; it was not a place of torment where the lost sinner was sent, but a state which the transgressor himself chose and where he abode everlastingly bereft of the sense of better things. Even so poor a hell saved Powell from the reproach of Universalism; but in a person so one-ideaed, as people then said, through his abhorrence of slavery, it was not enough. He was valued, but he was valued in spite of his opinions; they were distinctly a fact to his disadvantage in that day and place.

His younger brother Felix, after the wont of prosperous merchants, kept out of politics, and he carried his prayer-book every Sunday to the Episcopal service.

But he quietly voted with Owen, and those who counted on a want of sympathy between the brothers were apt to meet with a prompt rebuff from Felix. He once stopped his subscription and took away his advertising from the Whig editor who spoke of a certain political expression of Owen's (it was in a letter to the editor's paper) as having the unimportance of small potatoes, and he extorted a printed retractation of the insult before he renewed his patronage. He felt, more than any of his words or acts evinced, the beauty of the large benevolent intention which was the basis of Owen's character, and he was charmed, if he was not convinced, by his inextinguishable faith in mankind as a race merely needing good treatment to become everything that its friends could wish; by his simple courage, so entire that he never believed in danger; and by his sweet serenity of temperament. Felix was in delicate health, and he was given to some vague superstitions. He had lost several children, and he believed that he had in every case had some preternatural warning of their death; his young wife, who was less openly an invalid, shared his beliefs, as well as his half-melancholy fondness for his brother. She liked to have Owen Powell's children in her childless house; and she had some pretty affectations of manner and accent which took them with the sense of elegance in a world beyond them.

They came to her with their mother every Sunday night, and heard their father and uncle talk of their boyhood in the backwoods; of their life in a log cabin, and of the privations they had gladly suffered there. The passing years had endeared these hardships to the brothers, but their wives resented the early poverty which they held precious; and they hated the memory of that farm where the brothers had lived in a log cabin, and had run wild, as it appeared from the fond exaggeration of their reminiscences, in bare feet, tattered trousers, and hickory shirts. Sometimes the brothers reasoned of the questions of theology upon which the mind of the elder habitually dwelt; but Felix disliked argument, and Owen affectionately forebore to assail him as a representative of the Old Church. After the pioneer stories, the children fell asleep on the sofa and the carpet, and did not wake till they heard the piano, where their young aunt used to sing and their uncle accompany her with his flute; he remained associated in their memories with the pensive trebles of his instrument and the cadences of her gentle voice.

There came a time when the summer days were clouded in their home by an increasing care, which they felt at second hand from their father and mother; then there came a Sunday night when there were no rosy visions of the past; and, by the matter-of-fact light of the Monday following, Felix saw that the affairs of his brother were hopeless. Owen's book and drug store had never been a flourishing business, and now it had gone from bad to worse beyond retrieval. On the afternoon of the morning when the store was not opened he walked with his boys a long way into the country. It was very sultry, and he repeated a description of summer from Thompson's *Seasons.* As they returned along the river-shore he pointed out the lovely iridescence of the mussel-shells which he picked up, and geologized in passing on the stratification of the rocks in the bank.

An interval of suspense followed this stressful time, which their young memories took little note of. On the Sunday evenings at their uncle's the talk seemed to the children to be all of a plan for going to live in the country. Apparently there was to be a property which the brothers were to hold in common, and it was to be bought as soon as the younger could get his business into shape. Two brothers in other towns were to be invited to close up their affairs and join in the enterprise. Then, with something of the unsurprising inconsequence of dreams, the notion of a farm had changed in the children's apprehension to the notion of a mill, and more dimly a settlement of communal proportions about it. They heard their elders discussing the project one night when they woke from their nap, and crowded about their mother's chair for warmth, with the fire now burning low upon the hearth.

"The best plan," their uncle said, "will be to find a mill privilege with the buildings already on it. We could take out the burrs," which the boys understood later were millstones, "and put in paper machinery. When we were once settled there we could ask people that we found adapted to join us, but at first it would have to be a purely family concern."

"Yes," their father said. "One condition of our being able to do any good from the start would be our unquestionable hold of the management. That would be the only orderly method. I would give all hands a share in the profits, so as to interest and attach them, but till they were educated up to our ideas they oughtn't to be allowed any control."

Felix cleared his throat by a husky effort habitual with him before speaking again. "We could indirectly benefit them from the beginning enough to satisfy any reasonable expectation."

After that it might have been weeks before the enterprise took clearer shape. From time to time the children forgot it; they played through the long summer vacation; but when the first keen mornings of the autumn came, and the neighbors' children went by with their books, they did not return to school. The privilege, with a grist-mill and sawmill on it, had been found and bought, they did not know where, any more than how, but it was ten or twelve miles from the town in another county. Their father and mother had driven out with their aunt and uncle to look at it; their uncle had taken his gun, and he brought back some squirrels in the bottom of his carriage; he said that he had almost got a shot at a wild turkey. With such facts before them Owen's boys could not understand why their mother should be low-spirited about going to live at the mills. They heard their father talking with her after they went to bed, and she said: "But all that wildness makes my heart sink. I had enough of that when I was a girl, Owen. You know I never liked the country to live in."

"I know, I know. But we shall soon have quite a village about us. At any rate, we shall have a chance to begin life again."

"Oh yes. But it's beginning so far back."

In the morning she was cheerfuler, and their father told the children that they were to move out to the mills at once, and that he was to have charge of the property till the paper machinery could be put into the grist-mill. At the sawmill he was to get out the stuff for a new house that was to be built; but their hearts leaped when he told them that they were to live that winter in a log cabin.

It was Sunday, and the night was the last they spent at their uncle's in the old way. It was not quite the old way, though. The piano was not opened, and the flute lay shut in its case. The brothers went over their plans, and they spoke of whom they might invite to join them after their success became apparent. It seemed that they meant to be careful, and ask only those who could take up the enterprise in an enlightened spirit. Owen Powell believed that a responsive feeling would be awakened in the neighbors when they saw that the new-comers did not wish merely to make money for themselves, but to benefit all by improvements that would increase the price of their land and give employment to their children.

Felix listened with his melancholy smile, absently rolling his cigar between his thumb and finger. "What shall we call the place?" he asked.

"I don't know," Owen said. "Something that would imply our purpose of turning over quite a new leaf."

They talked further of the details of their undertaking, and the children went on with their play. They were dramatizing their arrival at the mills, and one of them was shouting to a supposed inhabitant, "Is this place New Leaf Mills?"

"Hey? Hey?" their uncle called to them. "What's that?"

"We're just playing," they explained.

"New Leaf—New Leaf Mills," he repeated, musingly. "That wouldn't be bad. What made you think of that name?" He bent a sidelong glance on the conscious group.

The eldest of the boys ventured, "Why, father said you would turn over a new leaf at the mills, and we just called them that."

"Yes, yes! Very good," he said. "Do you hear that, Owen? We've got a name for our place. We can stencil it on our flour-barrels now, and when we get in our paper machinery we can make it our watermark."

II

THE leaves were falling from the maples along the road, but they still hung brown and harsh on the sycamores that fringed the island between the tail-race and the river when Owen Powell and two of his boys passed the groaning and whistling mill and stopped with their wagon at the door of the old cabin. It was empty, but the door yielded to the hand that drew the leathern latch-string and lifted the rude wooden latch, and Powell made his boys note that this was a genuine log cabin, such as the pioneers of old dwelt in, and just such as he had himself lived in when a boy. He said that the string might have hung out of the cabin door of Daniel Boone; within, the ladder that climbed to the loft from a corner of the room could have led to the sleep that came from being chased by Indians; the hearth, that stretched half across the end of the cabin, was of the right backwoods dimensions; he excused the ax-hewn whitewashed walls as the sophistication of an age which had outgrown the round logs, chinked with moss and daubed with clay, of the true primitive architecture.

When he went back to the wagon to get their tools and provisions after the first moments of rejoicing, he dispersed the cows and pigs surrounding it as gently as if they had been a deputation from the neighbors who hung about the door of the mill and viewed with sardonic amusement the sole greeting offered the new-comers. They waited in silence till the Powells had gone into the cabin again, but they shouted together in laughter when the miller appeared at an upper door and launched a curse at the cabin walls. They tried to provoke him to greater bitterness as he rested his weight by one hand upon the rope that lowered the bags of flour to the backs of their horses; then one after another they mounted upon the balanced load and jogged away from the mill.

Powell was glad to find that his hand had not forgotten the cunning of one of the several crafts to which he had turned it in his early life when he came to glaze the broken panes in the small, weather-worn sashes of the four windows lighting the two rooms of the cabin; he had to replace the rotten flooring with smooth-sawn boards of poplar instead of the riven oak puncheons of pioneer times, but he was consoled to find that the floor of the garret could best be mended by throwing loose planks over its cracks and knot-holes. After their day's work was done he strolled out with his boys to explore the region in which he hoped to found a new home. From the road that crossed the tail-race below the grist-mill and crept eastward into the woods rose an isolated hill to a height notable in that country of broad bottom-lands. It was steep on the north, next to the mill; it sloped more gently away toward the south, but on the east and west it was steep again. It was thickly wooded with broad-girthed oaks, slim maples and ashes, and a host of shag-bark hickories hanging full of the nuts that now shone white through the gaping seams of their greenish-brown husks, and dropped about the feet of the Powells as they climbed upward through the fallen leaves. A company of pigs feeding on the mast under the trees lifted their heads at the approaching steps with looks of impudent defiance; then they hooted in alarm and ran down the sides of the hill, just as they did in the passage which Powell remembered from Bloomfield's poem of "The Farmer Boy." A covey of quails throbbed away from a pile of brush; a squirrel clattered up the shaggy side of one of the hickories. The simple incidents touched his heart as he climbed to the top of the hill and looked out upon the peaceful landscape. Below was the huge grist-mill, gray and weather-beaten, but strong as when first built; a wall of primeval forest lowered the eastern horizon, but north and south the woods retreated and left the interval yellow with a hundred acres of standing corn, and green with broad spaces of meadowland. The straight ribbon of the head-race stretched to the full dam of New Leaf Mills, whose smooth water spread up into the woods on the north. On the western hillsides were the openings of farms, where the blue smoke curled from the cabin chimneys. On the east a road stole out of the woods, down between the cornfields and the meadows, and lost itself in the woods upon the island framed between the mill-races and the river; another road wound round the hill and kept the course of the river southward out of sight.

The grist-mill fronted an acre of open space, with the hitching-rail for the farmers' horses in the middle, and a few rods beyond it crouched the sawmill among piles of lumber and saw-logs. The saw, which had been hissing sharply at its work, now stopped for so long a breath that Powell knew the water-gate had been closed for the night, and the soft treble of the grist-mill alone filled the nearer silence. From a distance the melancholy note of a farm boy calling his cows in the woods struck upon his ear; the miller appeared in the open space with a measure of bran under his arm, and, calling "Pig, pig, pig, poo-ee!" was answered from the fence corners and wayside nooks with greedy cries, and then with shrill laments and plaintive protests against the kicks which he distributed among them with savage fairness. He held the measure in his left hand like a tambourine, and danced a goblin figure with his floury face bobbing to and fro and up and down as he leaped and kicked.

"Come, boys," said Powell; "I see the other New-Leafers are having their supper. It's time for ours, too."

They descended to their cabin and broiled their rashers of pork on the hickory coals; the tea-kettle swung from the crane above, and sang to itself; almost with the last mouthful they stretched themselves on the floor, and, with the scanty bedding they had brought under and over them, they fell asleep.

In the night one of the boys woke, and saw his father sitting up, and heard him softly groaning.

"What are you doing, father?" he asked, sitting up himself and speaking for the companionship of his own voice in the weird play of the firelight dying on the hearth.

"I was wondering," Powell said, "whether we hadn't laid these boards with the hard side up."

They had a laugh together, and lay down to sleep again. Before he slept the boy fancied something at the window, a face looking in like the white-painted face of a clown with dark streaks running downward from the corners of the mouth; it vanished, and in the morning he thought he had dreamed it. He told his father, and his father said, "Very likely; one might dream anything on a bed like that."

III

The miller at New Leaf Mills had been there many years before that name was imagined; so many that he felt the mills a part of himself. He always meant to buy the privilege, with the farm on the shore above the dam and the island in the river. He was not afraid that the property would be sold away from him; he had been as good friends with the two old brothers who owned the mills as it was in his nature to be; and he somehow thought they shared his expectation that he should one day buy them.

He was not of the Virginian poor white stock which mostly peopled the region up and down the river; he had wandered into the place from somewhere farther north when he was a half-grown boy, and finished his growth in the family of the old miller to whom he had apprenticed himself and whom he succeeded in his house and home after marrying his daughter. He was now a man of forty, surly, solitary, and of a rude force of will and savage temper such as none of the farmers who stored their wheat with him in the deep bins of the mill would have cared to trifle with. Some of them called him Jacob and some Jake in the neighborhood familiarity, but with him they did not pass to the jokes or pranks they played among themselves. He was sometimes hospitable with his jug, but no one ventured to make free with it; and usually he was a sober man for the time and place. When he heard that the Larrabee brothers had sold the mills away from him without giving him warning, he thought first of his gun, and of going to the little town where they lived, and killing them each with a barrel of it; then he thought of his jug, perhaps because both the gun and the jug stood in the same corner. But after faltering a moment between them he only cleared the place of the farmers, who had come with their grists, and went over to the sawmill, where he presented himself in such violent pantomime that the saw-miller, Bellam, stopped his saw in the middle of a log and submissively joined him in the spree with which Overdale began to solemnize his wrong.

On the second story of the mill where the runs of stone were, with the bolting-cloths and the barreling-machine, a small space had been portioned off to serve as an office and a sleeping-room for Overdale when he ran the burrs at night. On dull days it was haunted by country loafers sodden with rain and drink; when he came in the loafers usually slunk out with the dogs that shared the buffalo robe forming his bed. He now pushed Bellam into his den and steeped his brain in whiskey raw from the still two miles away; and he drank so deep of the scathing liquor himself that Bellam drunkenly argued with him that no man ought to swill so much whiskey as that under any provocation. He pleaded tenderly with the miller, who had such longing for pity through his fury that when Bellam put out his hand with a maudlin wish to soothe him Overdale caught it and rushed him crazily through the mill, shouting out the details of the bad news with a flame of oaths. "Yes, they've sold the mills, and never give me a show. Sold 'em to a pack of lily-livered city folks that don't know an elevator from a cooling-floor, and couldn't dress a burr to save their souls from brimstone. Look at that run of stones! I've dressed 'em ever since they came into the mill, and there ain't flour anywhere on the river up to the flour they turn out; I can tell their tune as far as I can hear it! Who'll set the bolting-cloths when I'm gone? They'll be barreling shorts, I'll take my oath, in less than a month, and their flour won't be worth a curse in the market. Shorts? It 'll be bran!"

Bellam ventured in a doubt of getting so far away as the end of his sentence which gave stateliness to his speech, "I thought you said it was going to be turned into a paper-mill!"

"Hell, yes! So I did. The burrs has got to come out; and they'll be setting up a lot of milk-poultice tubs in their place, and you won't see clean wheat in the bins any more, but rags all over the place, and the air fit to kill you with the steam and stink."

He plunged about among the machinery with Bellam's rough hand in one of his and a smoky lamp held even with his forehead in the other, throwing gigantic formless shadows on the walls, and on the windows delicately laced with cobwebs and drifted with the floating flour. The two men stumbled to the basement, where the tall turbine wheels stood motionless in their tubs, with the water sullenly wasting under them, and then clambered back to the floor, where the elevator filled the cups of its long belt with wheat and followed it to the top of the mill where it discharged them into the machine which blew it clean of cockle and smut and left it ready for the hoppers. Everything was in order, and at every point Overdale poured out his boastful lamentation. He gathered, as he passed the different heaps where they lay, now a handful of wheat, now of bran, now of middlings; he stopped at the bins under the bolting-cloths and swept up a double handful of the flour, white, airy, clinging and light as April snow, and played with it, testing its smoothness with tipsy pathos; and so lapsed from his noisy grief in a dumb despair.

As the miller grew silent Bellam grew sleepy; he was dimly aware at last of being dragged back to Overdale's den and kicked forward onto the buffalo robe with a soft and muffled kick. When he woke the machinery of the mill was rattling and whistling round him; and he could hear the mad hum of the burrs, which sent out a gunpowdery odor from the flints triturated under the empty hoppers. He tumbled tremulously down to the gates to shut off the fearful head of water rushing on the wheels, and found Overdale stretched on the wet stones beside them. The miller's face was always white from the flour, but now it was of such a different white that Bellam thought he was dead. He dragged him within reach of the spray from the tubs, and the miller opened his eyes. He opened his mouth, too, and blasphemed so lucidly that there could be no doubt for Bellam that he was in his right mind; without bating a curse he jumped to his feet and shut off the water. Bellam took the path that led to the sawmill and started the saw where he had stopped it the evening before, and then waited in a drowse till breakfast-time. As he went home to his cabin on the island, past the grist-mill, he saw Overdale sitting in the doorway of the second story. The machinery had got back its mellow note of contented industry, and the miller was smoking a quiet pipe. He drew down his shaggy brows in his habitual frown of greeting as Bellam passed, but neither spoke, though Overdale quelled in himself a crazy impulse to ask the saw-miller about the dream which was hanging cloudily in his brain. It was as if Bellam must know about it if he had broken in upon it when he pulled Overdale from the stones beside the wheels. Overdale was not sure that he was dreaming it precisely then, but he seemed to have first become aware of it when he came to himself, and he was conscious of an instant effort to resist it and put it away. That would have been easier if the thing had been at once anything but a formless dread in which the sale of the mills away from him had begun to weigh like doom. As nearly as he could grasp the significance of it, with his rude mind, unused to any hold on mystery, it meant that the mills from being the daily wont of him had suddenly become a vital part, and that he could not be separated from them and live. He would not have put his vague foreboding in these words if he could have put it in any, as yet. It was there in his sense, destined to gather weight and point, and have power upon him from every superstitious vagary which he had heretofore supposed unheeded hearsay, but which he should hereafter find inexorably remembered.

He let Bellam go, but he was still smoking, irresolutely wishing he had kept him and put his shapeless trouble to the best of his knowledge, when a voice before the mill door under him called up in a high thin pipe:

"Hello, Overdale! Have you heard the news?"

The miller leaned forward and glowered down into the face of the man below. It was the young lawyer, Captain Bickler. As he sat his horse there he showed himself a spare, graceful figure in a black broadcloth coat and black cassimere pantaloons covered to the knees with green baize leggins. He wore a silk velvet waistcoat, with a gold watch-chain crossing it; the peak of a flat oilcloth cap came over his forehead to his shifty hazel eyes; his dark hair fell from the sides in locks carefully turned in at the ends. His clothes were of a cut that the neighbors understood to be fashionable; it was known that he got them at a clothing-store in the City, as the people of the region called the large town that formed its center.

The miller paused long enough before answering to spit to the leeward of the horseman. "What news?" he grunted, with his pipe between his teeth.

"About the mills. You're sold out of house and home," the horseman said.

"I know it," the miller answered, but so quietly that Captain Bickler must have felt at a loss how to go on. He said, with his eyes fixed in uneasy inquiry on the miller's white mask, "They're to put in paper machinery, I hear, in about a year from now."

The pipe fell from the miller's teeth and broke at the bay mare's feet.

"Well, what of that?" he demanded.

"Nothing. But I think it's a damn shame."

"Yes. Is it any of your damn business?"

The lawyer took the retort as a joke, and forced a laugh. "Well, I just wanted you to know how we feel about it around here."

"Well, now I know."

"The Larrabees ought to have let you have notice. Wasn't there some kind of promise?" The miller said nothing, and the lawyer added, "Well, you know where to come if you want any law; that's all. It won't cost you anything." He waited for whatever answer did not come, then he shook his rein and rode from under the glare of the miller's floury face, down into the road and across the tail-race.

Overdale looked after him with a pang such as holds one motionless and mute, while he felt the drunken dream which still hung in his brain shape itself as with an electric pulse into something definite, a prophecy of death, capriciously derived, but distinctly dated in event.

IV

In the month that passed between the sale of the mills and the coming of Owen Powell with his boys, Overdale had begun trying to look upon his dread as something he should be ashamed to own. His success was greatest when he woke in the morning, for that moment when disaster seems improbable and death is not in the world. Through the forenoon the shadow of his fear was in abeyance, and at noon it shrank, like the shadow that he cast in the sun, almost to nothing, and troubled him as little as at dawn. The familiar tasks, the traits of custom and habit, made him forget it; the murmur of the grist-mill working so smoothly and quietly, and the shrill hissing of the sawmill filled his sense and stilled the dread within. As he sat smoking his pipe and looking out on the road, where now and then a farmer jogged by and sent him a hello, it seemed impossible that he should be troubled by it again. All the things of every-day life denied it. The ducks and geese waded about the edges of the pool backed up from the head-race, and made a vulgar, friendly clamor; his hounds slouched by drowsily in the warm sunlight, with their air of weariness from coon-hunting the night before; his pigs rooted among the leaves on the hillside, or paraded to and fro under the mill door, greedy for their noonday feed; the turkeys and chickens strayed over the open space before the mill and among the saw-logs, or rustled through the dry stalks of the corn. At times from the heart of the field came the note of a quail; from the pastures the sad trill of a belated meadow-lark.

The inward stress which these sights and sounds combined to banish had not yet grown to be that second consciousness through which everything must pass from the world to him, taking color of its dread. But when the shadow of the mill began to lengthen before it in the afternoon, and at last to be lost in the shadow of the western upland beyond the island, the miller found his place at the door intolerable, and went to look for something to do in the mill. If there was nothing, he left it and walked up the path beside the race to the sawmill, where the loud noise put him in some heart again, and he shouted in talk with Bellam. When he went back after his supper the rush of the water on wheels beat dreadfully upon him, and he ran up-stairs to light his lamp. The light cheered him for a little time, and he was glad of the growing cool of the evenings, that he might have some excuse to kindle a fire in his stove and listen to its roar. But his feints and defenses were of brief effect, and in the night hours that he spent in solitude he had but one other resource.

The neighbors saw that he had begun to drink a great deal; he offered his jug to all who came, and tilted it up himself whether they joined him or not; but no one could say that he had seen him drunk. His fear was like a strong poison in his veins; the fiery liquor did not consume him, but was consumed in him; it only raised his heart to the level of other men's. The day when Powell came with his boys and began work upon their cabin the last of the farmers who rode away from the mill door left Overdale clinging to the rope that had lowered the grist to his horse's back, and listening to the blows of the hammer in the cabin. They fell like shocks upon the miller's heart; the invisible forces there seemed to embody his fear to him, and it passed crazily through him that he might wreak his anguish on them and annul his fear. The notion, diffuse as the floating dust that settled on the cobwebs in the mill, gathered shape in the will at least to look upon the impersonation of his fear; and with finally no clearer purpose than this he took his shotgun with him from the corner of his room when he yielded to his longing. If Powell, when he awoke that night and made his joke about his hard bed, could have looked through the window black before his eyes, he might have owned for once that there was danger in the world. But it would have been like him to contend afterward that Overdale was there through mere curiosity; and the miller himself, after he had looked upon his enemy's face and heard his friendly voice, might not have confessed any other motive.

He stumbled back to his den in the mill and roused the fire in his stove, and then he went out to the door again to look at the night. It could hardly be called the night any longer. The pallor of dawn was beginning to steal into the east; a planet shone sharp above the kindling sun, and the stars crisply twinkled about the sky; but there was that warning of day in the air which did not need the corroboration of a cock crow sounding faintly from one of the distant farms. Overdale drowsed where he stood; he flung himself upon the buffalo robe in the corner of the warm room and fell into a heavy sleep.

V

When Powell came back from town with his whole family to take possession of his new home, early in October, nothing about the place had kept quite the poetic aspect which rejoiced him when he first came with his boys. He was forced now to see it with the unsparing eyes of his wife, which robbed it of the glamour it had worn to his retrospective vision. The touches of construction and decoration which he had given the cabin showed bungling and ineffective; the floor wavered in spite of his relaying or on account of it; the repairs of the clapboarded roof did not keep out the rain, or, later, the snow when it came.

The pigs of the earlier tenants of the cabin had been sold to the miller, but they had not forgotten the comfort of their former home. When they had finished their midday feed before the mill they hurried to the cabin, and beaded the cleft between the door and the threshold with their pink snouts and appealed to the charity of the Powells with sharp menace and soft insinuation. After their evening feed they resorted to the warm chimney-back, at the base of the gable, as they had always done; the boys made forays into the dark to dislodge them, but the pigs returned before the boys were well indoors again. The mother could not share the younger children's pleasure in making believe they were wolves; she remembered the real wolves of the mystical region which they knew from her abhorrence as Out on Sandy, where she used to hear them howling through the dark when she was a little girl; and she told the children the comfortable grunting of the quiescent pigs was nothing like it.

There was an echo of it in the nightly baying of the coon-dogs that came hulking to the mill at the heels of the farmers' horses on grist-day and showed themselves large, lop-eared, liver-colored hounds. They were of no use by day, but by night when the moon was up, and they had treed a coon in some deadening where the girdled walnuts and hickories shone like bleached skeletons in the light, they called the boys and the loutish men of the farms from their beds to the supreme joy of the local year. There were other pleasures of the region which the women shared: the frolics where they met with the men for parching corn and candy-pulling; the huskings and apple-peelings, where neighborly help was given for neighborly hospitality; and the house-raisings and barn-raisings, where the women gathered and waited upon the men at the meals they had cooked for them. Separately the women had their quiltings, and the men at Christmas had their shooting-matches, where turkeys were the prizes of their rifles; they had their squirrel-hunts, in which the squirrel was the unit of every kind of game; and their wild frolics, where the jug went round and the stag-dance shook the beams and rafters. Quoits and foot-races and jumping-matches drew the men together, but the sexes united again in revivals and baptisms and spelling-matches. A fierce religiosity, choosing between salvation and perdition, was the spiritual life which an open atheist here and there sweepingly denied. Camp-meetings assembled old and young from far and near; the instinctive communism of the pioneer times prolonged itself in the social life by mutual help in the things which could not be done in severalty. But otherwise the farmers dwelt apart on their wide acreages in a solitude unbroken from Sunday to Sunday for their wives. When they came to the mill with their grists the men made it the center of neighborhood gossip or political debate, but, except for a visit with their women to one of the small towns of the region for buying or selling, they kept to their houses, or preferably their barns. The barns oftener than the houses were of frame and clapboarded; the dwellings were mostly reproductions of the log cabins of the first settlers; they repeated the primitive shapes of the past, but the logs were squared and plastered like those of the Powells' cabin. The few houses were of brick, and faced upon the road with two front doors, one for visits of ceremony from the neighboring wives, and the other never opened except for weddings or funerals.

The Powells had come from town without provision for the winter, and they had to trust for supplies to the farmers, who sometimes granted them surlily and sometimes cheerfully, but always as a favor. Owen went for them with his boys or sent the boys alone with the small one-horse wagon provisionally representing the dignity of the New Leaf enterprise to the lords of three or four hundred acres, who took the road with teams of tall Hambletonians, shining with fatness in their brass-mounted harness. The farmers viewed the one-horse wagon with silent scorn or kindly derision; but they opened for Powell's money the caves in their gardens where they kept their winter store of apples, potatoes, cabbages, and turnips, taking and giving odor and savor under a low roofing sodded over and banked in with earth against the frost.

Some of the kindlier farmers were German or Scotch-

Irish folk from western Pennsylvania, with here and there a French-Canadian family, but mostly the people were Virginians and Marylanders of a fierceness bred by contact with slavery and with a poor white revolt in their hearts against any one imaginably their betters. But their revolt did not include the superiority of the retired merchant who had come out from town and lived with his motherless daughter in a house having more than any the stateliness of a mansion. The gentleness of the Bladens was akin by blood to the fierceness of the rudest tribe of the neighborhood, and how the shy, pure girl could keep herself uncontaminate from that savage cousinhood was a riddle which remained unread for Ann Powell; she only saw that the tribe paid the Bladens, father and daughter alike, a deference which they rendered to no one else.

The women were better than the men, and they with the other farm wives of the little neighborhood which had formed itself within a mile of the mills came to offer Ann what welcome they knew how to give. With a few she found herself in neighborly kindness; but if she could have got away she would have been glad never to see any of them again. For her it was all a reversion to the barbarism of the new country where her childhood was passed, and which she had so gladly escaped from to the civility of the towns where she had lived ever since she left the farm with her young husband. Now, when they were both middle-aged people, she seemed to have been dragged back to conditions worse than those of the backwoods. Nothing at New Leaf Mills made her days endurable but the promise of the early coming of her sisters-in-law to form the heart of the communal body nebulously projected in the vision of their husbands. The change from town had been simple enough for Owen Powell, who had brought only the hope of a starry future from the ruin of his affairs; but his brothers had each to sell out or close up his business, and the delay was protracting itself to an end that seemed to his wife further off every day.

She could have borne the visits of the farmers' wives, but she could not bear the visits of the farmers, who came on wet days to sit with her husband before the cabin fire. Their coats dripped with the rain, and their stoga-boots, that reeked of the pig-pen and the barnyard, gave out their stench in the heat while they told their long stories and cracked their old jokes and spat in the hot ashes or the bristling coals where she must cook the family supper when they were gone. They had begun at once to call Powell by his first name, which she resented as a token of the general lapse from the town civilities she prized, and which she resented the more because she perceived that no friendliness went with the freedom. They could not help despising a man apparently so unfit to cope even tentatively and provisionally with the business he had undertaken. Felix Powell soon added a two-horse team and a blue-painted wagon of the proper pattern to the scanty equipment of Owen's first days at New Leaf, but even this did not convince the neighbors of that future of universal prosperity which they believed they had been promised.

Owen Powell was personally unimpressive in his circumstances; yet he was finally of a dignity which in spite of his wife's fears the neighbors did not growingly infringe. It was not their fault that they could not imagine him; he knew this; but it was not in him to feel unkindness toward them for it. He felt the sort of liking for them which tolerance breeds. If they laughed at his wit, he laughed at their rude drolling; he did not resent their conceit or their tedious advice; he knew as well as his wife that they were boors, and not pioneers; but it did not make him unhappy. It amused him that they cherished the largest landowners among them as a sort of social chiefs because of their more acres and their better horses, and valued their consequence above his own civilization. With his Quaker origin he could not mind their calling him by his given name or even trying for a nickname from it; but he could not help sharing his wife's relief whenever the last of his visitors shulked out of the cabin door, which they did not always remember to shut after them.

The family was safe from them after nightfall. Then, when Mrs. Powell and her little girls had cleared the supper away, she sat down with her family in the firelight, while Powell read to them by the candles which in his retrospective romance he had cast in some old-fashioned candle-molds of their earliest housekeeping. He read poetry sometimes, sometimes a book of travel, sometimes a novel; on Sunday nights he read a chapter from Swedenborg's *Heavenly Arcana* or a *Memorable Relation of Things Seen and Heard in the Spiritual World,* or a New Church sermon, which, by the virtue inherent in sermons, soon had the children scattered about him on the floor. When they were gathered up and got to bed, the boys in the cabin loft and the little girls in their mother's room, Powell and his wife lingered awhile before the fire to talk of that future which had lured them to New Leaf Mills, but which from time to time needed for her the constructive touches he was so willing to give it.

She lived in the memories which he promised it should renew in the things dear to her home-keeping heart. All her married days she had worked hard with head and hand to get together and keep together the few things which dignified her simple house in town. There were notably six cane-seated chairs which Felix had given her for the distinction of her parlor, and which she now hid in her own room rather than set them out in the place where those hulking farmers could spoil them; she would indulge some of the neighbors' wives with the use of them when these worthier women came alone; she would show them her pieces of old silver, and in moments of signal intimacy bring out her black silk and her best bonnet, which could not otherwise be seen; for the Powells did not go to the service of any sect of the Old Church in the village where the country women wore their finery. She had her air-tight parlor stove put up in her bedroom, with the bookcase which held her husband's library, and his portrait done in his young manhood, and the mahogany-framed engraving of Swedenborg which visibly attested Owen's religious persuasion and hers. She kept her flowered carpet there, sacred from the men's boots, for the parlor of the new house. Powell was to begin building it in the spring, as the first of that group of dwellings in which the brothers were to embody their community to the sense of the neighborhood, and she trusted in that house with a faith potently helped by the accumulation of black-walnut logs at the sawmill for the weather-boarding and shingles which were to cover the frame in and save the cost of paint by their natural coloring. She measurably believed in all the things of her husband's faith, even in the harp which he had made in his hours of leisure with his own hand, and which he expected some day to play upon when he had the opportunity of learning how; failing that hitherto, he already struck it with a hopeful if uncertain touch.

He was so wholly her spiritual life that she could give herself altogether to her house and her family; and if she was an earth-bound spirit it was because she realized in her home a heaven such as she could not imagine elsewhere. Of course she expected in due course that immortality which the Doctrines promised her with such scientific precision; but for the present she was content with the affection which came back to her here from those whom she loved and who made her paradise. If the log cabin and the conditions which it implied were not the setting for this paradise which her house in town had been, this could be fitly domiciled again when the new house was built after the plans which Owen's invention supplied, and which he had begun to draw out in the evening as soon as they were settled for the winter in the cabin.

That helped keep her from fearing herself permanent in it; but there were other evenings when Powell put the harp in order after one of its frequent seasons of disuse and complicated disability. In form it was not as other harps are; it was triangular, with a slantting bar at top instead of the traditional sinuous arch; but he held that this structural aberration did not affect its musical potentiality and was of antique authority. For the present he struck the strings somewhat at hazard, but if he accompanied them with his voice loudly enough, he could drown anything like dissonance in their response. His wife listened with tolerance, if not unfailing acceptance, to his performance, and his children, without closely examining the evidence of their senses, thought that he played as well as sang the piece which he liked best to give them:

"*When* in *death* I shall *calm recli-i-ne,*
Oh, *bear* my *heart* to my *mistress* dear;
Tell her it *lived* upon *smi-i-les* and *wi-i-ne*
Of the brightest *hue* while it lingered *here.*
Bid her not *shed* one *tear* of *sorrow,*
To sully a *heart* so *brilliant* and *light,*
Bu-u-t balmy *drops* of the *red* grape *borrow,*
To *bathe* the *relic* from *morn* till *night.*"

VI

His harp was one out of many proofs which Powell was always giving of his ingenious aptness with his hands and of his inventive skill. In the leisure from his failing business which had latterly grown so much too great he contrived himself a barometer, for which he long wanted a glass tube till once his eldest boy returned from a visit to his birthplace Up the River, bringing from the glass-works there a tube in the barrel of a gun which an uncle had given him. It exactly fitted the barrel and came endeared to Powell's humor by the novelty of its conveyance; he framed it in a cedar case which he carved for it, and it entered upon a long lease of usefulness in predicting fair and rainy weather. It was really a more practicable instrument than the harp, or even the flute which he got for the next younger boy, and then left him to nature in the art of playing on it. He believed that you could do what you wished to do if you wished it potently enough; and he left the boy likewise to nature in his struggles with the grammars of some foreign languages which he began attempting while he was failing with the flute. He did not struggle very hard with the grammars; he preferred his reveries of triumphs achieved without a struggle which he could indulge when to other eyes he seemed to be hoeing corn, or not hoeing, or wandering with the family gun on his shoulder through the woods. He amused his father, who called him the

Dreamer, and let him off from going to school. Powell was more this boy's companion than his eldest son's, though he respected the business faculty of the other so much and relied upon his help in all practical matters; he talked most with the younger, and tried to have him like the same authors, but the boy could not always share his father's tastes; he could not like Burns, though he liked Scott's poetry enough for his father's purposes and he liked Byron a little.

He could follow his father still less in the ingenious use of his hands, but there he could at least admire its effects with the rest. Before the family came to the mills, but when it was decided that the change from a grist-mill to a paper-mill was not to be made at once, Powell gratified his artistic instinct by cutting a stencil plate for the heads of the flour-barrels. He studied from nature a sycamore leaf, and crowned it with the legend of New Leaf Mills. When this, by the application of a shoe-brush, transferred its shape to a sheet of white pasteboard, it commanded the respect of the whole household. Ann herself could not deny it her praise, though she abhorred every mention of the mills; the children exulted in it as the anticipation of their brightest hopes; their young aunt was generously indignant in her admiration of it when Felix said, with his melancholy smile: "You can make so many other things, Owen, that it's no wonder you never made your fortune. If the mills fail you can support us all by stencil-cutting," and Powell had an affectionate laugh with him.

When he transferred his family to New Leaf, he lost no time in preparing for the navigation of the river. He shaped a skiff, very graceful and fit in its lines, from two elastic boards for the sides and a broad plank for the bottom, which was his pride and the joy of his boys, who stole in it on the wild ducks they never could shoot; he built a flatboat, commodious for the whole family, and on the still Sunday afternoons of the Indian Summer he made them all, mother and children, go with him up the stream, so wide and still above the dam. He punted against the slow current, walking down the gunwale with a pole pressed against his shoulder, as he told them the keel-boatmen used to do on the Ohio River; and then he let it drift back to the dam while they lay in the straw-strewn floor of the boat, and he talked and the rest listened, or he joked with them. When the mother did not wish to joke, for even in this safety from the intrusive neighborhood she could not forget her exile, Powell had to turn from his talking and laughing and hearten her with promises from his unfailing faith in the future. But the small pleasure she had in those flatboat voyages was spoiled one Sunday when they found the boat gone and had to wait till some of their bold young neighbors brought it back. Powell scolded them, saying, if it was worth having, it was worth asking for; and the fellow would not betray that one of Powell's boys, flattered into authority by their asking him for it, had said he did not believe his father would mind their taking it. It was the Dreamer who had done this, and now he longed with his whole soul to own that he had given those fellows leave to take the boat, but he could not own it for the shame it must bring him. He passed days of wistful inability trying for some form of avowal by which he should appear so noble to his father that his father would praise him rather than blame him, but he could not contrive anything so imperatively magnanimous; or anything which would not lead to his going with his father and apologizing to those neighbors for his want of candor. He could not imagine any outcome creditable to himself even with his mother, who was so tender with him, but would not spare him in such a wrong, and he let her remain in her fear of the revenge which the neighbors would take on his father, though it never came to more than an increase of intangible ill-will.

Her refuge from this fear, as from her father's troubles, was in the visits which Felix and Jessamy paid her in her exile. The Indian Summer lingered late into November, and on one of the dim afternoons Felix Powell drove from town to the mills with his wife. Ann kissed them, and got out for the early supper that best china which she could not have touched at any other time without a pang for the lost state which it symbolized. But for the dear young pair who seemed a part of the town life she had lost, she hurried forward one of the meals which her family thought matchless in cookery. Her husband sat the feast through with his innate gaiety of heart heightened by his brother's presence, and did not seem to note any vagueness in the talk of Felix about the enterprise which he reported his progress in pioneering. If Ann felt something unwonted in the tone of her brother-in-law, pride kept her from pressing any question of it; and during a visit which left Powell with his spirits as high as ever, she could not bear to dash them with her secret fears. The most tangible reason for her fears was nothing more tangible than her sister's letting fall in their women's talk together her belief that Felix would never be willing to live beyond the sound of church-bells; and Ann remembered, with a sinking heart, that there were no church-bells within three miles of New Leaf Mills. She bade them both a cheerful good-by when they drove away from the cabin in their buggy, looking back, one on each side, to prolong their farewells, with smiles and nods; then she turned and ran back into the cabin with her apron over her head.

"What is the matter, what is the matter, my poor girl?" Powell entreated her, and she said, Oh, nothing; she was not feeling very well. But after the children were abed and she was alone with him she told him what she was afraid of.

"They will never come here in the world, Owen. She let it out in that about the church-bells. I don't blame either of them. Who would want to live in such a God-forsaken hole?"

"Not quite a hole, my dear," he tried to comfort her, "though it may look like one from the inside." He became fascinated with his notion, and added: "But it isn't really such a bad hole, even from the inside; and we will soon better it. I don't wonder you're disheartened with a winter in the cabin before you, but we shall begin to build our new house as soon as the frost is out of the ground in the spring. I have got together most of the logs already; and I was thinking"—but Powell had, perhaps, just that moment thought—"that we would go in the morning and definitely choose the site of the house. I have an idea that the level at the foot of the hill, just opposite the mill, would be the proper place. But you shall decide yourself."

She probably knew that this decision of hers would be directed by his judgment, but she could not refuse the consolation his promise offered her, and with her reliance on his hopes she began to doubt her fears. A mild Sunday morning dawned in pale sunshine, and after the breakfast, which her little girls helped her redd up, she went for the walk with her husband and children which he considered so much better for them all than a religious service of the Old Church. No chime invited them to their worship, but when they had climbed the hill above the site fixed for their new house, he made her listen and almost made her hear the sound of a bell from the village three miles to the southward. The children were sure that they heard it, and Powell triumphed in their agreement. "There!" he said. "If Felix can't live beyond the sound of the church-going bell, he can come up here, any Sunday morning when the wind is right, and hear it."

He shared the shock which Ann felt at sight of the huddle of neglected graves on the hilltop, with their sunken barrows and their slanting stones, and the miller's pigs rooting for the mast among the dead leaves; but he said that she must not judge their neighbors too harshly for the neglect; the state of these graves did not express the callousness it would in a more enlightened community. At any rate, one of the first things he should set about doing, as soon as he could spare the time, would be sawing out a lot of palings to fence the graveyard. That would be a lesson in civilization which could offend no one; he had perceived that he must not begin to educate the neighborhood without due tenderness for its barbarity. While he talked with the mother and cajoled her from her gloom into the sunshine of his own spirit, till she yielded with the lamentation, "Oh, Owen, Owen!" the children foraged for the fallen hickory-nuts, and filled the little bags they had brought with them. They came to him to show their store, and he made the elder even up with the younger ones for a lesson in the unselfishness which he told them was not only one of the first attributes of the angels in Heaven, but was due always from the stronger to the weaker in this world. Then he gave his hand to their mother and lifted her from the little knoll, where they had been lying, and raced her down the hillside. The young children ran screaming joyously after, and the elder boys bore with what patience they might the incorrigible youthfulness of their father.

It was the last pleasant day of a long series of pleasant days. In the night the autumnal haze turned to mist, the clouds gathered, and the boys, sleeping in the cabin loft, woke in rapture at the sound of rain on the clapboards over their heads and the pelting of the finer drops in their faces. The rain lasted, off and on, for a week, and by grist-day the open space before the mill, which had been so pleasant to their bare feet with its velvety dust, was trodden into mire by the miller's pigs, and then patted smooth by the web feet of his geese, and again cut by the wheels and pitted by the hoofs of teams bringing in the farmers' wheat for storage.

It was at the sawmill that Powell spent most of his time, coming home to his meals with aches and pains unfelt during the years of his town life, but now ungrudgingly recognized as experiences of his rustic past. He had mastered such simple science of the sawmill work as Bellam was able to impart, and he had applied his universal genius to the invention of improvements in the double tramway which carried the sawn lumber down from the mill and brought the logs up into it. The iron dogs which held the sticks of timber in place, and the cogs that pushed them against the saw, received some creative touches, and he added to the other equipments a circular saw that bit diagonally half through Bellam's thumb the first time he pressed upon it the block of walnut which it was shredding into shingles for the new house. Owen stayed the sufferer in his burst of terror and put back the dangling fragment, which he secured so skilfully in place that, though it always stood a little awry afterward, it remained a monument to his surgery.

Ann refused to hear the particulars which the children would so willingly have furnished; they had enjoyed the most favorable places in the front row of the crowd which Bellam's lamentations had called to witness their father's skill; she told them she should be only too glad if they got away from the mills in pieces large enough to hold their lives. Overdale was left alone in the grist-mill during the affair, and he showed no more interest than Ann in the procession which took the saw-miller to his home on the island, mounted on a led horse, and supported in his seat by eager hands. When the doctor came he justified the popularity which Powell had won; he said that just the right thing had been done for Bellam's thumb, and that nothing was left for him but to dress it now and then.

VII

Powell had been careful not to add to the grudge in Overdale which he could not ignore, and he had left him in full control of the grist-mill until the paper machinery should be put in; the miller was told that the new owners would be glad to have him stay, and he signified a surly willingness to remain, more by staying than by saying that he would stay. His life did not vary under the new ownership; he came and went from his house beyond the sawmill so early before dawn and late after dark that he was seen to come and go only at noonday; he slept in the grist-mill, as he had always done. His sprees were wilder, but they were not so frequent, and they ended sooner in the drunken sleep in which the machinery was apt to run riot. The saw-miller had always taken leave to shut off the water at these times, and during Bellam's disability Powell put himself briefly in authority. He no more disliked Overdale than he disliked any other fellow-creature, and he accounted for the miller's rudeness toward himself as the impatience of a man who was somehow sick beyond self-command. What his sickness was, whether of soul or body, he could not make out. Sometimes he thought he must be the prey of a disease which he was trying to keep secret from himself; sometimes he conjectured that the miller had some misdeed of the past on his mind; he decided that more probably he was the victim of some form of hypochondria. He philosophized him to Ann, without effect other than to alarm her for his own safety.

"Well, Owen, be careful not to provoke him with you, if he's crazy in some way, or beginning to go crazy. Oh, I wish we had never seen the mills! Now, you keep out of his way all you can, Owen, or I won't have a minute's peace, day or night."

"You needn't be afraid of my taking any chances," Powell promised, in the cheerfulness he always had in disowning the possibility of danger; and then he began to laugh softly to himself as if he had not half taken her anxiety in.

"What is it?" she asked, hopelessly.

"Oh, nothing. But Elder Griswell says it's the religion that is working in Overdale; all you've got to do is to throw the religion out, and nothing will throw it out like immersion. That will bring the religion to the surface, just like measles, and then Overdale will be all right."

Ann laughed too at a phase of the Old Church theology which Powell could make so amusing. But her anxiety returned upon her when she went to pay that first visit to the miller's wife which the woman had failed to make her as the new-comer. She had talked the matter over with her husband and had decided to waive ceremony in a case of what she had decided to be uncouth shyness and not intentional offense in the gaunt, silent slattern, whom she characterized in a parlance of her own as a harmless sloom. Her magnanimity was rewarded by such politeness in Mrs. Overdale as standing with her door ajar and speechlessly regarding the visitor outside.

"May I come in, Mrs. Overdale?" Ann asked; and the sloom set her door a little farther open.

"Why, I reckon," she said; and when Ann entered, she so far realized her obligation to hospitality as to ask, "Won't you set?"

She pushed Ann one of the wooden chairs of the dining-room, which was also the living-room of the low-ceiled, close-shuttered room, and then took a rocking-chair herself and silently rocked in front of her while she studied her visitor's face in an abstraction scarcely broken by her brief assents to Ann's suggestions about the weather. But Ann soon came to the end of these, and then the miller's wife broke the silence that followed.

"Your man got anything ag'inst *him?*"

Ann recalled the backwoods use of pronouns by which wives and husbands shunned explicit mention of each other.

"Why, no, Mrs. Overdale. What should Mr. Powell have against your husband?"

After a season of dreamy reflections the sloom responded, "I don't know, but it 'pears like, from his tell, that your man wanted to do him a mischief."

"What in the world do you mean? What kind of mischief should my husband want to do yours?"

"Well, he don't come round much, exceptin' fur his meals. But from his tell one night after he'd been at the jug, when he wouldn't have any supper, 'pears like your man was goin' to kill him, or somepin. He kep' sayin' your folks buyin' the privilege would be the death of him."

A hot flush of anger followed the cold thrill of dismay which the woman's first words had sent through Ann Powell. "Well, I can tell you what, Mrs. Overdale, I won't have any such talk about Mr. Powell in the neighborhood."

"Oh," Mrs. Overdale listlessly interrupted, "I reckon he don't talk any. I reckon he don't talk much to *me* when he's sober. It's on'y when he's been at the jug."

"He had better keep away from the jug, then," Ann began again; but the miller's wife put in:

"That's what I always been tellin' him, but he don't seem to take any notice."

Ann refused to be stayed by this impression. "Mr. Powell and all his brothers are good men; they don't want to do anything but good here, and it's abominable for any one to say anything else even when they've been at the jug."

"Well, that's what I told him at the time," Mrs. Overdale agreed, as she rocked comfortably to and from her visitor. "I told him your man could have the law of him."

"We don't want the law," Ann retorted, "but I shall certainly have my husband find out what Mr. Overdale means." She said much more to the same purpose; she could not recur to the smooth generalities of a ceremonious call; and then she rose and made her way to the door.

She was fairly out of it before the miller's wife remembered to rise and follow her for leave-taking. "Well, call ag'in," she drawled.

Ann was still angry, but she answered, "I hope *you* will come to see *me,* Mrs. Overdale."

"Well, I will, the first chancet I git. But don't you wait."

VIII

After the children left the dinner-table that day, and Powell had taken his hat to go out, Ann asked him, "Are you going to the grist-mill?"

"I'm going to the sawmill to help Bellam. He's rather weak-handed still with that thumb of his."

"Well, don't saw *your* thumb off, Owen," she said; and Powell laughed at the wild notion. "And another thing, I don't want you to go near Overdale again till we've had a talk."

"I don't know that I follow you, exactly, Ann, but it's easy for me not to go near Overdale. What is it?"

She went to the cabin door and looked out. The children were playing Indians on the hillside well out of hearing across the road. She turned back to her husband. "I thought I could tell you to-night when they were all in bed, but I'd better do it now; I don't want you to run any risks. Owen, that worthless drunkard has been saying dreadful things. I don't feel as if your life was safe with him."

Owen put down his hat, and at this sign of concern for her, if not for himself, she hurried to tell him what the miller's wife had said.

He took her anxiety with seriousness instead of the teasing lightness which he so often tried her patience with. "Well, my dear, I don't wonder you're a little uncomfortable. But you mustn't be troubled. There isn't the least danger in the world, not the least," he said, and his spirits mounted with the courage of a man who had never believed himself in any sort of peril. "But I promise you I won't go to the grist-mill till I've seen you again. I will talk with Bellam about the matter."

"That poor lout?" Ann despaired. "Really, Owen, you are enough to provoke a saint."

"Yes, but we're neither of us saints, Ann," he answered, and she laughed helplessly. "Bellam has the making of a philosopher in him—that is, he believes I'm a much greater man than I am."

Ann's mind went off at a tangent. "Has that old wretch been after him lately?"

"If you mean Elder Griswell, no; I believe not since last week. The elder is as much afraid of Overdale as you are, my dear. I understand that now, as he can't get Bellam to go back to him and work out his debt, and can't collect the money of him, he's going to sue Overdale. He regards him as harboring his fugitive slave, but he doesn't like coming in reach of him. Bellam wasn't his slave exactly, either; only his *peon*."

Ann sighed. "If you get the right word for a thing, you feel almost as good as if you had righted it, Owen."

"But *peon* is so uncommonly right. It's about the only good thing we've ever got out of that rascally war."

Owen never spoke less violently of the Mexican War; but he valued the service which the volunteers had done in bringing back the name of a system of labor among the Mexicans so exactly fitting the case of Bellam and Elder Griswell.

The saw-miller had worked on the Elder's farm for years as his insolvent debtor, and at the end of each year was no nearer industrial freedom than at the beginning; the Elder's advances were always a little greater than Bellam's wages, as they might easily be. But one day when Bellam came to the mill with his grist, he opened his heart to Overdale, and asked him what he would do in his place.

"Hell!" the miller said. "Walk off."

The idea worked in Bellam's intelligence, and he walked off between two days, or on a Sunday when the Elder had gone to church. He reported to Overdale with his wife and children, and his poor belongings on the cart drawn by the rangy colt which he had somehow kept his own in spite of the Elder. Overdale could not be bothered at the time by the implications of the case; but he felt bound by the counsel he had given, and he told Bellam to drive over to the empty cabin on the island and put up there till he could think.

"But if the Elder comes after me," the escaped *peon* entreated.

"When he hears tell where you are I reckon he won't come," the miller said; and after he had time to hear from the Larrabees Bellam was put to work in the sawmill.

The picturesqueness of the incident had charmed Powell from his first knowledge of it. When he subjected it to examination in the light of the Doctrines, he had found it a singularly beautiful proof of those Remains of Good in a perverse soul like the miller's, by which his chances in another life might be hopefully regarded. His action might be merely an effect of Natural Good, and was to be esteemed only as such, or it might be an Influx from the Spiritual World moving him to a right course in contravention of temperament. Powell had often recurred to it in talk with his wife, and always with a softening toward the miller and a trust to the Remains in him which she could not share.

"You needn't be troubled, my dear," he ended one of their talks. "I won't take any chances with Overdale, or, for the matter of that, with Bellam, either—that is, I won't be ruled by anything he says; I'll only be ruled by what *you* say."

He laughed again, and his wife sadly with him, and she watched him anxiously from the back door of the cabin as he made his way among the logs lying round the sawmill, like a herd of saurians crept up from the waters and sleeping on the muddy shore. The tramway, which from time to time carried one of them up into the mill, passed over the gate, letting the water in on the wheel, and Powell now mounted the track and disappeared within. He came out with Bellam and stood talking with him in the wide low doorway, while the yellow heads of Overdale's children bobbed about in play along the banks of the head-race. Then a cry came from the children, and they ran toward the miller's house, where their mother stood idly watching them. At the same time Ann saw her husband break from Bellam's side and jump from the mill door to the bank and stoop over the race close to the head-gate. He rose with a child in his arms, and started with it toward the miller's house. She began running to him, but before she reached him, stumbling over the rough ground in her heedless dismay, Owen was coming back to her laughing and flapping the water from his clothes.

"I haven't been in the head-race myself," he called, gaily, "but it was almost as wet work getting that little scamp home after I got him out. A moment more and he would have been in on the sawmill wheel, and then—"

She would not let him stop more than to explain that one of the miller's boys had tumbled into the race;

but as she hurried him to change his clothes she understood how he had saved the child's life.

"And his mother—what did his mother say when you took him to her?" she required, after she gave Owen a dry coat and hung his wet one over a chair before the fire.

Owen laughed again. "She didn't say anything; she spanked him."

"But you—you; I meant *you*."

"Well, she didn't say anything to me, either."

Ann Powell made "Tchk!" and did not speak; but he knew that at the back of her mind she was disappointed; he knew she had hoped that somehow this event would have been the promise of bringing about a better feeling between him and the savage whom she feared for him. He would not make her own it: he only suggested, "Well, perhaps Overdale will say something."

IX

The winter was wearing away without change in the lives of the Powells toward immediate fulfilment of the hopes which had brought them to New Leaf Mills. Ann thought her husband lapsing, with his amiable acceptance of the order of Providence, more and more into a country drudge. He worked like a laborer at anything he could find to do about the mills, and she fancied that with his growing content in the actual situation the discontent of the neighbors was growing; she suspected irony in the tones of the women's greetings when she met them; she felt mocking in the slouch of the men's hats and shoulders as they bestrode their grists to and from the mill, and turned their glowering or sneering faces toward her cabin windows. Perhaps the tones were not sarcastic or the faces derisive; but if they seemed so it was enough, and Powell could not persuade her against it with all his cheerfulness. Once, in the darkest hours of January, a New Church minister came, and stayed over a Sunday; and the familiar talk of the Doctrines went on in the old way, with the wonted jokes and stories in kindly satire of the Old Church superstitions. For the time she could almost believe herself back in Tuskingum, but she could hardly share Owen's regret that there had not been time to notify the neighbors and have them gather in the mill for a New Church sermon; he had long given up his scheme of a Sunday-school there, which he once had.

The roads, with the changes of snow and rain and the freezing and thawing, were now so bad that Felix could not drive out to see his brother, as he had done every fortnight in better weather. He came only once during the month, and his wife did not come with him. Owen was as gay as at the other visits; and that night, after the older boys had gone to bed and the younger children had fallen asleep on the stone hearth, he tuned his harp and drowned the discords he extorted from it in his songs of "Roy's Wife" and "Flow gently, Sweet Afton" and "Banks and Braes of Bonny Doon." But as he was rolling out:

"Then *merrily* we'll sing
  As the *storm* rattles *o'er* us,
Till the *dear* shieling *ring*
  With the light, lilting *chorus*—"

his wife called to him:

"Owen, Owen, for goodness' sake stop!"

He stopped, with his hands on the harp-strings. "Why, I won't wake them."

"No, but you'll drive me crazy. I don't know how you can bear to sing. How can you bear to live on in this hovel, with no prospect of anything else?"

"No prospect?" he returned.

"No! We are doomed to live and die here, with that wicked wretch hating you over there in the mill that will never be anything but a grist-mill. Didn't you notice how Felix avoided the subject when you mentioned putting in the paper machinery?"

"I didn't notice it. But I'm sure you're mistaken if you think he isn't going forward with the enterprise; and as for our living on in the cabin, you know that I've got out all the shingles for the new house, with most of the weather-boarding. We are beginning on the oak flooring now, and I will have that kiln-dried if we're late with it. But we won't be. As soon as the frost is out of the ground we will put in the foundations, and the carpenters will have the timbers ready for the raising in June. You mustn't be downhearted about it; everything is going finely. But I know! You *are* run down. It's been a hard time for you. Ann, you must have a girl. I wonder if Felix or his wife couldn't get on the track of Rosy Hefmyer?"

"Oh, a girl!" Ann retorted. "Do you think a girl could take the real burden off of me?"

"Yes, the *real* burden; but you must bear the unreal burden yourself. I wish I could bear it for you." Ann began to cry softly. Owen said, "Oh, my poor girl, my poor girl!" and between her crying and his coaxing she comforted herself.

"Oh, I can get along, Owen. You needn't worry about me. But you must let me give way now and then. I only want to know that you haven't forgotten what we came for."

"Oh, my dear, don't you suppose I think of it all the time?"

"Besides, I don't believe they could find Rosy. With that old wretch of a mother of hers, there's no telling what's become of her by this time. She always said she would come back if I wanted her."

It would have been natural in Owen to allow the affair to go with that, but Ann's listless resignation remained after her rebellious outburst, and he saw that something must really be done for her. There came with February one of those interludes of soft weather which the midwinter knows in that region. The birds returned as if it were spring, bluebirds and robins; the frost came out of the ground, and the roads dried up.

"Now, Ann," Powell said one morning, "you had better take advantage of this open weather and go away for a while."

He could see that the thought had been in her mind, too, for all she said: "Where can I go? And leave you and the children here?"

"Not all of them. Take Dick and the buggy and go down to Middleville, and see father and Jim's family. You can hurry Jim up about coming here, and they will all be glad to see you."

Ann's despair lost its blackness in the notion of a family visit. "I might do that," she consented, "if I could only believe that Jim was ever going to come."

"Well, ask. It will do him good to be stirred up. He ought to have sold out by this time. Only don't put too bright a face on things here."

Ann laughed forlornly, but his teasing saved her further regret. "I believe in my heart I can really do something," she said, defiantly; and in the morning she started with her son on the forty-mile drive to Middleville.

She was aware only of the impossibility of staying any longer at New Leaf Mills without going mad. She did not forecast the future so far as to imagine how she should keep sane after she came back. She was at that point of homesickness when she was willing to forsake every one dear to her for a glimpse of the life from which she had been parted: simple as it was, in contrast with the social squalor she had fallen into, it was rich and fine and beautiful. She longed to escape from her household back to the town which seemed to her full of the things, the cane-seat-chair things, that made living worth while. Tuskingum had become her dream, her poetry, and the day that she now passed with Felix and his wife was the realization of all that she had imagined of it. She sat up late with them in the pretty parlor, with its Venetian blinds and lace curtains, and they played, Felix on the flute and Jessamy on the piano, and she listened in her corner of the rosewood sofa. In the morning she went to a store with Jessamy, and Jessamy bought her a shawl, so that she could keep warm if she and Dick were driving in the cool of the evening or the weather turned; and after the midday dinner, which the hired girl had cooked without the least help from Jessamy, Ann started gaily on her journey again.

Jessamy was so much younger that she could daughter Ann, and the boy beside her on the buggy seat was so old that Ann could almost sister him. She talked gravely and confidentially to Dick of the state of things at New Leaf Mills, and how little his father, with his hopefulness and his trusting goodness, was fitted to cope with the rude conditions, and with the brutal men who could not understand him or value him. She criticized Owen in her mind, but tenderly, being at a distance from him; and she said: "He is the best man in the world; I know that well enough; the willingest to help others. He hasn't a selfish thought or a mean one. But oh, if he would only be a little more *afraid!* I wish he could have some of *my* fear. But he is so *contented,* and so *sure* it will all come out right. If only he would lose heart a little I could have some."

Richard tried to comfort her, but her spirits sank when they got beyond the outskirts of Tuskingum among the high woods and the lonely fields again, and she had to recover herself through tears. Then she was cheerfuler, and as they drove along over the good turnpike road she began to wonder what Jim's wife would say when she saw them stopping at her door in Middleville.

"Well, she won't see us till to-morrow, mother," the boy said.

"Yes, we will have to pass the night at Shawnee," she assented. "I was at the tavern there with your father once, and it's a good piece from there to Middleville. I suppose we will go to your grandfather's, anyway."

It did not need the surprise they gave their kindred to win their welcome. The old people were not visibly moved, the grandfather from his gravity or the grandmother from her placidity; they were not only old, but they had the quiet of the Old World in their greeting; Jim's wife was noisily glad to see them, and romped around Ann in claiming half their visit. She wanted to hear all about the mills; she was just crazy, she said, to have Jim sell out and go there at once; she was sick of Middleville.

She almost made Ann believe that she was a fortunate woman in getting there so soon, and she talked as if the new house was almost finished. When Jim came from his store he grinned at her excitement. He said he didn't believe he could ever sell out. "Then you *give* your old business away," his wife said; "*I'm* going to New Leaf Mills. Ann 'll take me back with her, *I* know."

"How is it, Ann?" Jim asked. "Do they admit any but Bobolitionists yet? Let down the bars to the world's people?"

He was anti-slavery, like all the Powells, but he liked to say Bobolitionist for Abolitionist; the sound pleased him, and he enjoyed the shock it gave his father by its irreverence.

Ann and Richard stayed three days, and she enjoyed every moment of it. Sally made a company tea for her, and asked a dozen other ladies, old and young. She let Ann help get the tea: stewed chicken, cold ham, shortened biscuit, boiled potatoes, sweet tomato pickles, pound-cake, cold slaw, and coffee. Throughout the feast she stormed down the praises of her guests with apologies for everything.

Ann noticed that the dishes, which were nicer than hers, were some of them cracked; the spout of the coffee-pot was nicked, and Sally had no cane-seat chairs in her parlor; only yellow-painted Windsor chairs. When Ann started home Jim put a canvased ham in the back of the buggy. Grandmother Powell gave them a lunch of her nice bread and butter, with sugar-cakes for Dick and the children at home.

It was a happy time, and Dick thought they could drive the whole way back to Tuskingum in one day. But the heat increased, and the horse flagged. They had not got as far as Shawnee when the wind rose and blew the sky full of clouds. The thunder-heads mounted, and before sunset it began to lighten, and it grew so dark that they could scarcely see; but they followed the white turnpike. Ann was scared, and she was troubled about Owen and the children at the mills; but when in the blackness they came upon a man in the road, mixed up with three horses he was trying to lead and at the same time pick up his hat, which was blown off, she had to laugh with Dick.

The laugh seemed to carry away her care. She made Dick stop at the first house and ask if they might pass the night. The man of the house said they might, and when he had helped Dick put up his horse he led them in to his family, who were gathered round a wood-fire on the hearth; and while Ann dried herself at the blaze her thoughts went again to the family at New Leaf Mills in anxiety for its safety; it seemed to her she had been recreant to them all.

When the morning came, clear and cold after the storm, she decided that they would go straight on to the mills without stopping at Tuskingum; she did not wish to impose upon Jessamy, she said. Her heart did not go down, as she expected, at the sight of the mills. Powell was waiting at the door of the cabin, and the children ran out to welcome her and see what she had brought them. She felt a glow of happiness such as she had never known at New Leaf before, and she promised herself not to give way again.

" Well, I see it has done you good," Powell said, with a look at her.

After a few days' cold the weather turned warm again, and Felix came out sooner than Ann could have hoped, and Jessamy came with him. He went with Owen to the grist-mill, and looked it over with him; he said he had found a Fourdrinier machine which could be had cheap at second hand, and he would like to see if it could be put in without too much change. They came upon Overdale, who gave them no greeting before he could lurk into his den. Felix did not notice his rudeness, but it hurt Owen, who wished to be on gentle terms with the whole world and had not his brother's business preoccupations to defend him. On their way back to the cabin he spoke of his vain efforts to get into kindlier relations with the miller.

" I don't believe I'd worry about him, Owen," Felix said. " Of course, he thinks he will be out of a place when we make the change, but we can work him into our scheme somehow. I feel more hopeful about it since I've looked over the mill."

" Do tell Ann so!" his brother entreated.

" I will. It's been a hard experience for Ann. She ought to have some help in her work. She ought to have a girl."

"That's what I've been saying. I've been wondering if you could find out where Rosy Hefmyer is."

They had come to the cabin, where the sisters-in-law stood before the door in the sun. Ann was admiring the fashions of the younger woman with unenvious pleasure, asking where she got her bonnet and whether she had trimmed it herself.

Felix called to her: "Ann, you remember that girl of yours you liked so much—Rosy Hefmyer?"

"Did Owen ask you to hunt her up? It's too bad."

"No, he didn't; but she's hunted herself up. She came to me at the store. She wants to get somewhere that her mother won't find her; she's just left a place to get rid of her. I told her about you here; and she's crazy to come to you."

"Oh, Felix!" Ann could say no more; but penitence for all her impatience with Providence and her husband glowed in her heart.

"I could have brought her with us to-day, but Jessamy thought there wasn't room for three in the buggy."

"Indeed, Ann, that wasn't the reason. I thought you ought to have the chance of saying whether you wanted her first, and I promised Mr. Powell"—for so his wife always called Felix to himself as well as others—"that I wouldn't tell you about it. And have I?"

"Not a single word, Jessamy; but if you had known what a blessing it would be to me, you *could* have. How can she get here, Felix? When can she come?"

"To-morrow, if you want. She can come by the stage to Spring Grove, and you can send for her there, can't you?"

"Send? I would go and carry her here." Ann had got her breath now.

"Well, then, that's settled. Perhaps you'll like to know that we can put the Fourdrinier machine into the mill with very little change."

"You *can?* And when— But I *won't* ask."

Felix smiled, with a cast of his eye at his brother. "Owen's thought of some improvements he can make in it already."

"To be sure." Ann recognized the joke with a laugh. "Well, it does seem as if the heavens were opening."

"The Pit's been yawning a good while, Ann thinks. She thinks it's time the heavens took their turn," Owen said.

Jessamy watched her sister-in-law's face with shining eyes. She turned to her husband. "I didn't tell her about the Fourdrinier machine, either."

"That's more self-denial than you asked of yourself, Jessamy."

"I thought I'd better wait till you could see a place for it in the mill."

"Well, Ann, I've found a second-hand machine, very good and very cheap," Felix said.

She could only entreat him, "Oh, have you?" and then they all began to talk about it. They had talked about the Fourdrinier machine so much that the sisters-in-law believed they knew what it was like; the brothers really knew, and Owen knew best. He explained that his improvements were no joke, and specified them.

"Well, now, come in and have something to eat before you go, if you *must* go," Ann said; and she led the way indoors.

They had a joyful meal together. The little girls helped their mother get it, and then asked to go with their brothers and play Indians on the island. In the talk the elders were left to themselves. Felix seemed in no haste to leave; he and Owen recalled again the jokes and joys of their boyhood.

When Felix rose from the table his wife said: "Now, Ann, I'm going to ask you to let him lie down on your bed a minute before we start. It does him so much good to get a little nap after dinner."

"Oh, I don't need a nap," Felix protested.

But Ann said: "Take him right in, Jessamy. I'll be redding up the table; I won't make any noise."

In a little while Jessamy came out, leaving the door ajar. "He wants me to sing," she said, in a low voice. "I can't, very well, without the piano, but—"

Owen cleared his throat; his wife thought he was going to say he would accompany Jessamy on his harp, and she frowned at him; Jessamy was swallowing as if she were choking down a sob; then she sang "The Watcher":

"A watcher pale and weary
Looked forth with anxious eye."

It was a song that every one sang in those days, a wail of grief in which happy young people poured out their joy. Jessamy sang it several times. When she ended they none of them spoke for a while.

The sisters-in-law parted sadly; they said they did not know why they should cry: everything was so promising now. The brothers took leave with gay hopefulness.

Ann and Owen watched their guests across the tailrace and out of sight. Then she asked, "How did you think he looked, Owen?"

"Why, uncommonly well."

"She's willing to have him come and live here now. She thinks it will be better here than in town." She scanned her husband's face. "Owen, Felix has had a hemorrhage."

"A hemorrhage!" Powell's face twitched pitifully; then the light of temperamental hope glowed over it. "Oh, well, it will be all right with him by spring. It isn't as if it had been in the fall. And isn't it fortunate he should have such a place as the mills to come to? We must hurry forward the new house now. We can easily take them in with us there."

"Yes," Ann said; "there'll be no trouble about that. But *do* hurry it, Owen! It does seem to me you have been such a long while about it. These delays, they almost kill me."

"Yes, poor girl, I know that," Powell said. "Depend upon it, I'll hurry things forward." Ann went into the other room and left him to cover the fire. His heart ached for Felix, but he could not refuse the comfort he found in the solid hickory chunk which he saw would make a glorious bed of coals. When he had bedded it deep in the ashes, he went to the cabin door for a look at the night. The sky bristled with stars, and he thought how the coals would bristle in the morning. He felt the sweet unity of creation, the little things and the great things, and he felt that life and death in the measureless scheme were the same. Ann, with her homesickness, was as important to the Maker of the world as the largest of these flaming planets; He would care for her as He cared for them. Powell looked across at the pretty place where the new house was to stand, and he could almost see it standing there. Already Felix had come to them practically well; and they were all living there together, and New Leaf Mills was fulfilling every promise of its imagined usefulness.

X

There was a typical delay next morning when Powell sent his eldest son to meet the stage at Spring Grove and fetch Rosy Hefmyer. But it was not his fault, exactly, that the only horse which consented to be caught in the pasture for the service should be found to have cast a shoe when she fell captive to a peck measure of bran. "You must drive fast, Richard," he instructed his son, "so as not to keep Rosy waiting at the Grove; she won't know what to do after the stage gets in, but you must drive very carefully. Remember, the mare has no shoe on her off hind foot. You'd better go the river road; it's longer, but it's soft dirt the whole way, and there are a good many stony spots on the hill road."

With whatever speed he made, Richard did not get back to the mills till Rosy had been there an hour. She had come with Captain Bickler in his open buggy; he had found out at Spring Grove, where he had his law-office, that she wanted to go to the mills, and, as he was going that way, he brought her. He explained the fact to Owen, who stood with his hand on the buggy wheel talking politics with Bickler after thanking him for his neighborly act. They did not disagree widely. In his zeal for his own nomination for the legislature Captain Bickler did not widely disagree with any voter of the Whig ticket; and though Owen would naturally have disliked a man who had got his title of captain in the Mexican War, it was in Bickler's favor that his company had been mustered in so late that he never went to the front. What Owen wished to make sure of was that Bickler favored a strong anti-slavery platform for the Whig party at the next State convention. There seemed no doubt of that, he reported to his wife, while confessing his impression that Bickler seemed rather a slippery character.

"Well, he's brought Rosy, at any rate," Ann said, looking off to the hill where the girl was playing with the children among the fallen leaves, which the sun of the warm, dry spell had crisped again. "She's just crazy about the place."

Ann's motherly heart had not ceased to glow with the welcome she had given the girl when Rosy jumped down from the buggy and ignored her obligation to Captain Bickler in her shy escape to Ann's arms. She began to romp with the children as soon as she put her little bundle of clothes into the house.

"I never expected to have you again, Rosy," the mother said. "How well you do look!" she said the next thing. She recognized the girl's beauty by this tribute to her health: her blue, sweet eyes, her cheeks like red peonies, and her smooth mass of yellow hair, her firm, straight features, and her strong, full young figure. She was rather short, but Mrs. Powell did not notice that.

"Well, now, you'll feel more at home," Powell said to his wife.

"Oh yes," she answered. "I have nothing to ask for now. But we mustn't stand here talking. I won't have a moment's peace till we get the frame of the new house up. Do hurry the stuff out, Owen." She was always saying something like that. "I declare, when I think of Felix and Jessamy coming I can't wait. It was like him to look Rosy up for me. He was thinking of me when he ought to have been thinking of himself, poor boy."

"There is a great deal of Natural Good in Felix," Owen allowed.

He started toward the sawmill; and after a moment of smiling silence Ann ran over to Rosy and the children at the foot of the hill. She pretended to catch up a stick from the ground as she came near, and she called out: "You good-for-nothing things! When do you suppose we'll have dinner? And Rosy the worst of you! Come straight along home with you."

The children shrieked joyfully and ran before her.

Rosy stopped for her, panting. "Oh, Mrs. Powell, it just sets me crazy; it's so nice here. It seems as if I couldn't bear to go into the house yet. But I reckon I got to. You don't want a hired girl to stay outdoors and help your children play." She laughed at her own joke, and brushed away the dead leaves which the children had heaped over her dress.

Mrs. Powell took some twigs from the girl's tumbled hair. "Indeed, indeed, I'd like to play with you all myself. But I suppose you'd better come and see where we're going to put you. I don't believe you'll think it's indoors much. It's a good thing we had anywhere for you, but I've been at Mr. Powell ever since we came to put up an outside kitchen for me, and that's where you're going to live; he only got it done last week, and there's no stove in it yet. When we get the stove I reckon you'll have to camp out in the cornfield."

"Well, I wouldn't like anything better. It seems like as if it was summer a'ready."

"Yes, it's been so for three or four days now. I heard a blackbird this morning. But he'll be sorry he came yet."

"Yes, the birds don't know everything about the seasons. They're just as apt as not to take a warm spell for summer. Why, it ain't Easter yet."

"Well, the children are beginning to talk about coloring eggs."

"I'll be bound they are. Mrs. Powell, I speak to cover the calico eggs. I've got some pieces my cousin Polly give me that 'll make the nicest pattern for eggs you ever saw."

"I won't interfere with you," Ann assented. "But now come and see where you are going to live."

She led Rosy through the cabin and out of the back door, where Powell had knocked together, as he said, a rude lean-to of slabs for a summer kitchen, and opening out of this at one side a small room where a cot-bed was placed under the window.

"Why, it's great, Mrs. Powell," the girl said, taking note of a washstand and looking-glass, and the pegs to hang her clothes on. "I just wisht Polly Nairns could see it. She hain't got anything half like it on the canal-boat; she has to sleep right in the very kitchen, almost on top of the stove."

Ann looked the joyous girl over with a new sense of her young beauty. "Well, I'll just tell you what, Rosy; I'll never let you sleep here in the world. It isn't the place for you. We'll put the boys in here, and you can have the loft."

"Oh, Mrs. Powell!" the girl lamented. "What did you get it ready for me for, if you didn't mean to let me have it?"

Ann faltered as to what she should say. Then she said: "You don't know what an awful pack some of them are around here. I always thought of you as you used to be. But you're — you're grown up, Rosy."

"Well, just as you say, Mrs. Powell," Rosy complied, demurely.

"Rosy," Mrs. Powell said, while she hesitated still, "have you seen your mother lately?"

"Not since the place before last. But I knowed she was on the track of me, and that's why I was so glad to get here. Why, I just broke down and cried when your sister-in-law ast if I would like to live with you. It was at market, and I couldn't hardly wait till I could get home and tell Mrs. Linsey I was goin' to leave. She knows about mother, and she was real nice when she understood."

"I hope Polly is keeping straight."

"Oh yes. It ain't very nice being on the boat with the men, do you think; but the captain he looks after her."

"Rosy, it seems dreadful for me to ask you to warn her against your mother."

"Oh, that's all right, Mrs. Powell. Polly 'd never tell her where I am."

"I didn't mean that exactly."

"Yes, I understand, Mrs. Powell. But Polly knows how to take care of herself a good sight better'n I do."

Ann drew a long breath. "Well, now, we must see about dinner."

She could not refuse the great relief that came into her heart; the clouds that had filled her home-bound heaven broke and drifted off to the far horizon of the outer world, and with the girl, who eagerly took up the household work, she could not refuse some share in Powell's enjoyment of a thing that happened a few days later, though it was a thing that had struck terror to her heart while it was happening.

Owen had gone to one of the outlying farms to make favor for some turnips, and she was standing at the cabin door waiting to see him come out of the woods on the rise of the eastward hill, when the team emerged at a speed which she had never known in either the horse or driver before. They came flying over the intervening distances, and as they seemed to flash by her she was aware of Powell rocking helpless on the seat and the reins, which had escaped his hands, dragging on the road under the horse's feet. The horse whirled round the corner of the cabin dooryard into the open space before the grist-mill, and there, as in a mystical vision, she was aware of Overdale at the head of the horse, as if he had leaped from his place at the door of the second story, while Powell appeared softly to bound from the wagon and light on his feet. The rest of the event was solely of Powell's experience, for as soon as Ann saw him safe on the ground she ran into the cabin and sank down sick.

When he came to reassure her, he was laughing, and he justified his amusement as the effect of Overdale's characteristic behavior. "When he decided that I wasn't killed, or even seriously scared, he said, 'Now, dern you, we're even,' and he gave me the reins and turned his back on me and went into the mill."

Powell laughed again, shaking his shoulders and nodding his head up and down as his fashion was, but Ann would not join him at once. "What did he mean by that?" she asked, conditionally.

"Why, you know," Powell explained, struggling with his delight, "you know he had never felt just right about my pulling his boy out of the water. I could see that it was worrying him all along. He felt that he ought to say something civil about it, but he didn't know how, and he didn't want to, besides. It would have been like giving up his grudge against us. Well, as luck would have it, he thought he had saved my neck, and so we were quits. It's deliciously like the fellow."

Powell laughed again, but his wife frowned before she smiled.

"Why do you say he *thought* he saved you? He *did* save you."

"Oh, there wasn't the least danger! I was intending to roll out at the first soft spot I came to."

"You were a long time coming to it, Owen."

"Yes; I hadn't made up my mind about the softness even at the last."

He laughed now at his own humorous notion of himself; he found that as characteristic as the miller's behavior; Ann made a despairing click of her tongue in her perplexity with the man who through their whole married life had puzzled her by the provisional levity tempering his final seriousness. At the moment, now, he turned serious, as much interested in another philosophy of the case which suggested itself as he had been in its grotesque phase.

"I shouldn't be at all surprised if it worked out favorably, on the whole. Whether there was any real danger or not, Overdale believes he's done me a good turn, and he's relieved of the gratitude toward me which has been embittering him. At the same time he has involved himself in the obligation which binds us in kindness toward those we have benefited. If he's saved my neck, as you think, he can't help feeling friendlier toward me from that fact alone."

"Well," Ann said, "let us hope so. You'll want your dinner now. But let me brush you. You're all dust."

"And I think I had better wash up a little," Powell said, going before her into the kitchen, where she followed him, plying the whisk-broom on his shoulders.

XI

At their next meeting Overdale did not pass Powell in surly avoidance so promptly as he usually did. He looked at him with a sort of novel interest, as if he might have seen something in him which had not caught his eye before. He said nothing, and Powell thought it best not to renew the offer of his gratitude for the miller's timely aid; that was what he now called it to himself. But he halted the man, who, after the first hesitation, would have slouched by him with the peck measure of corn under his arm on the way to feed his pigs. "Mr. Overdale," he said, "I suppose you know we are going to put in the paper machinery as soon as we can make the necessary changes. No, wait a moment," he hurried on at sight of the frown darkening the miller's white face. "I want to say now what I have wanted to say from the outset, that in any change we make we hope to keep you here with us. I'm not sure that we can't keep something of the flouring apparatus," the notion flashed into Owen's hopeful mind, "but, whether we can or not, we want you to stay on, somehow. This is my brother's wish as well—as well as my—"

"You tell your brother," the miller blazed out, "to go to hell."

"Oh, come, come," Powell reasoned. "Let us consider this matter in its true light. I've wanted to have an opportunity to talk it over with you ever since I came here, for I know—"

"For half a cent," the miller blazed out again, "I'd knock your head off." But in spite of his furious words his tone was helplessly provisional.

"After just saving my neck? You ought to ask more," Powell said; and he smiled so kindly that Overdale, who glowered still, might well have been moved by the joke. But he shifted the peck measure to his left side and pressed close, pushing his floury visage almost against Powell's face and lifting his fist. The man who had never been in any danger that he knew of did not believe that the miller was going to strike him. "I think," he argued, placidly, "that we can come to an understanding that will be of mutual advantage if we once reach it. I am not aware of ever harboring ill feeling toward you, and if I had I couldn't do so now. But apparently there is something on your mind against my brothers and me—me more especially, as I'm their representative here. Should you mind frankly saying what it is?"

"You keep away from me!" Overdale shouted. "I'll kill you some day."

"I don't believe you will. Perhaps you really meant to kill me the first night I was here, but you didn't; and after what happened yesterday I feel pretty safe with you; in fact, you've just thrown away a chance that would have relieved you of responsibility. When it came to the point, you wouldn't even let the pony kill me."

"Do you suppose—curse you!—I done it for *you?*"

"No, you did it for your little boy; I understood that perfectly, and I accepted it on those terms. But what I am trying to get at is the thing you have on your mind against us. If we could sit down somewhere—" Powell looked about him for the log or fence-rail which commonly offered itself for the convenience of talk at New Leaf Mills, but he found none near, and he was afraid Overdale would escape him if they moved from the spot where they were.

"I don't want to set down nowheres," the miller said, but he did not go. It was as if the gentle philosopher held him by a mesmeric spell.

"Oh, well, we can as easily talk standing," Powell lightly put the point aside. "I'm not aware of having offered you any personal offense. Have I?"

"Who said you had?"

"Well, I'm glad you don't think I have. Then the question is whether we've done you some sort of injury by buying the mills?"

"No, you hain't, unless the Larrabees told you I wanted 'em."

"They never did."

"If I had 'em by the scruff of the neck and could crack their heads together—"

"Mind, I don't say that we shouldn't have bought them in any case."

"Then, what the hell—"

"But we never meant to put you out of your place here. We have intended nothing but good by this whole neighborhood, and from the fact that we have gladly kept you on here—"

Overdale snorted disdainfully. "You knowed dern well you couldn't 'a' got along without me."

"Yes, we knew that. But now you see that when we could get on without you we still wish you to stay. We wish you to be one of us, to be in charge of the paper-mill, if possible, as you have been in charge of the grist-mill. Now, what is on your mind?"

The shame for his secret could not show its red through the flour of the miller's face; but he dropped his eyes, turning his head first this way and then that.

Whatever longing was in his heart to free itself, he quelled it.

"Mrs. Overdale," Powell continued, "asked my wife the other day what I had against you. If I can convince you that I have only the kindest feeling toward you—"

Overdale gave a formless bark. He showed his under teeth as a dog does; he squared his shoulders and pushed against Powell. "You git out o' my road."

Powell stood aside. "Well, some other time when you're more in the mood for it. I won't press the matter now."

He praised himself for his forbearance when he reported the incident to his wife, who could only give a gasp of relief at the conclusion.

"I watched you talking with him," Ann said. She was seldom of a satiric mood with the man whose philosophic mind held her respect even when it passed her patience, but now she added, "Did he seem to like you better because he had saved your life?"

"Oh, he didn't save my life." Powell was constant in his insistence on the point. "But apparently he doesn't like me any better for his having stopped the pony. At one moment I certainly thought he was going to strike me."

"I thought so too," Ann said. "My heart was in my mouth."

"There wasn't the least danger, however, as it turned out." Then Powell began to laugh in the way that tried her so.

"What is it now?" she required of him.

"Oh, I was thinking of the effect in myself of bearing with his violence. Whatever his feeling toward me was, I was aware of liking him better because I was still wishing to do him good in spite of himself. If he had really knocked me over"—Powell pursued his notion to its climax with joy in its absurdity—"I suppose I should have become his friend for life. There was no danger of his striking me," he assured Ann again, "but now I shall have to fall back upon general principles. I shall have to love Overdale along with the rest of our neighbors; and certainly a more detestable crew never appealed to a man's best feelings. I shall be glad when we get the paper machinery in and begin actively doing them good. If we don't do it soon, I shall feel like packing up and leaving them to their evils."

"That is the way I have felt all along, Owen," Ann said, grimly. "But we can't think of that now. If Felix is coming here to live we must surely stay, no matter what happens. We must hurry everything forward and have the new house ready for him before the summer begins. Oh, when I think how the thing has lagged along, it seems as if I must put it up with my own hands!"

"Well, I think the neighbors will help with the frame when they see you lifting those heavy sills, and Rosy and the children tugging the studs and scantling to you." He mocked her, but he ended, as always, with the earnest cheer, which she ended by accepting with the trust which his hopefulness compelled. "Now that you've got Rosy you won't even have to call on the neighbors' wives to cook the dinner for the raising."

XII

The Powells had forecast the raising in every detail months before the day came, and after the masons had put in the foundation their fancy was busy completing the structure. It was the custom for the builders of a new house to ask the whole neighborhood to the raising. The invitation went out by word, direct or indirect, as convenience served. Those who were spoken to carried the message to those unspoken, and in response the farmers came to put the skeleton of the house together and leave it for the carpenters to line with sheathing and clothe on with clapboards and shingles; and the farmers' wives came to help cook the feast which rewarded the labors of the day. Ann proudly felt herself equal to deal single-handed with the quality of the feast, but the quantity, she knew from the beginning, was beyond her, and there she was aware she must not fail, under pain of an indefinite increase of the unpopularity which she knew that she shared with Powell. With Rosy's help no one could cook a better meal, but three times their joint efficiency would not suffice for the meal which must be cooked. She must rely upon the favor of her neighbors, but she could ask it by implication only in asking them to the raising.

She and her husband agreed about this necessity, as they agreed about the necessity of asking the men. They got on confidently enough in the details till they came to a point where Powell sometimes seemed to waver and Ann always stood firm. The point was whether they should provide the whiskey, which was the free drink at raisings, or should offer unstinted coffee of a compensating strength, and of a brew which Ann was willing publicly to stake her housewifely reputation on.

"You know, Ann, I have never been a teetotaler," he teased.

"When have you ever drunk anything?"

"That is true; but I mean a teetotaler on principle."

"Well, you have never been an Abolitionist, but you have always been opposed to the extension of slavery, haven't you?"

"Yes, but I don't see—"

"Yes, Owen, you know you do. You want to restrict drunkenness, and though you may not be a teetotaler, you can't do that unless you stop the drinking."

Powell enjoyed her logic, but he could not forbear making her observe a break in it. "I am in favor of confining slavery to the present slave States, or against carrying it into Territories now free. On the same principle I ought to let the old topers get as drunk as they like, while I deny whiskey to those who have never been drunk. Suppose we let it be known that there is a jug for those who have the habit of it, and coffee for those who haven't."

"Now, Owen!" Ann cried, charmed with his joking, but vexed with him for it.

"Well, let us compromise, then; no whiskey for anybody; hard cider for everybody."

"Have you ever been in favor of compromising with slavery? They can get drunk on hard cider as well as on whiskey; you know they can."

"Well, not so fighting drunk. Unless we let some of them get peaceable drunk, we won't have a friend in the neighborhood when the day's over."

"Nonsense! Elder Griswell never lets them have anything but molasses water in the harvest field."

"And is the neighborhood full of his friends?" Powell saw that he had carried victory beyond its limits. "Oh, well," he gave way, "have your old coffee then. But I shall reserve the privilege of getting drunk in private before I begin the day. What else are you going to have for the feast?"

"Never you mind; I'll see to that. Just keep your jug to yourself; that's all I ask."

"I may offer Overdale a swig?"

"Overdale has a jug of his own."

"I've sometimes suspected as much," Powell said; and he went away lifting his shoulders and shaking with the fun.

He came back to say, seriously: "I think we had better make a special point of asking Bladen. He is the decentest man in the neighborhood, and his coming would give the occasion dignity in the eyes of the world here that nothing else would."

"I didn't know that you cared for the world anywhere, Owen."

"No, I don't. But this is a matter in which we ought to put our best foot forward, and he seems our best foot."

"Well, make your special point, then."

They had other hopeful talks of it before the day of the raising, and their children shared the talks with them. Rosy was like one of the children; she made no claim, as the others did, for special recognition in the arrangement of the rooms, but she freely gave her opinion. She was for conformity to the house-kite house, as she called the gambrel-roof pattern which had been the shape of the house where she first lived out and which all the best kites were modeled upon. While the father and mother sat with the plan of the house on the table before them in the lamplight, and the children hung upon the backs of their chairs looking over at it, Rosy went and came in and out of the shed kitchen humming to herself as she carried her dishes to the cupboard and stopping to glance down at the map. She interrupted the humming when she spoke, and began humming again when she had spoken. She gave the effect of perfect freedom while preserving an attitude of non-intervention, of being a friend of the family, but not a member of it.

Powell noticed how, with her shortness and straightness, she had yet a sort of stiff grace which expressed an inner rhythm and timed itself to the staccato tune she was humming. One night as he was winding his watch he said to his wife, "Rosy seems very happy."

"Yes," Ann consented, "she seems happy," and she sighed.

"What do you mean by that?"

"She is very headstrong. She's not a little girl any more. She has her own ideas; it's hard to move her; I have to manage very carefully with her."

"About her work?"

"About herself. There was never one like her to work; we are both agreed about the work; she knows my way, and all she wants is to do it."

"Well, then?"

"She's flattered."

"Well, she ought to be, with the way you pet her."

"Owen, have you seen that man lately to talk to? That Captain Bickler?"

"Why, no. Not since he came with the brooch he thought Rosy had lost in the buggy."

"He never thought she lost it there."

"Then why—"

"That's what I don't like. If he wanted to see the child, why didn't he come and ask without making up that excuse and bringing her a present?"

"Well, I suppose he's shamefaced if he fancies her. Do you think he does?" There was no reason in Powell's scheme of life why Captain Bickler should not fancy a girl like Rosy and be shamefaced about it; that was right and in the nature of things; but now with his wife's vision he pierced below the surface.

"I've got the brooch now."

"But you told me she gave it back to him."

"Yes, I know."

"Then he's been seeing her."

"Yes, more than I supposed. He's been coming by here in his electioneering, and he's talked with Rosy when she was out with the children on the other side of the hill. He stops to talk with her, and the children get tired and go off playing. She told me about it, and gave me the brooch. He made her take it the other evening when he was passing by and we were out with the children in the flatboat; we ought to have taken Rosy. I had to speak very plainly to her, and I'll give him his brooch the first time I see him."

"Oh, well, I don't know," Owen demurred.

"*Why* don't you know? Haven't you always mistrusted him?"

"Yes, but I've had no real grounds."

"Has he got round you by pretending to think as you do about the State platform? I heard him flattering you up that day while his eyes followed Rosy whenever she came into the room. And his pretending to be interested in the Doctrines!"

"We have no right to treat him as if he were guilty till he has done something wrong."

"Well, now he has done something wrong. He has made Rosy take that brooch in spite of us, Owen. Any man in the world but you would see that he was coming here just to amuse himself with Rosy, and to get you to use your political influence to send delegates to the county convention that will vote for him."

Now Powell thought he had reason to laugh. "My influence with Bellam?"

"Your influence with all the decent people in the neighborhood, and your influence with everybody except Overdale and his crew, as soon as it's certain that the paper machinery is going in. But I don't say that he's here on your account; it's on Rosy's. He's taken with her."

"Why, naturally he admires her."

"Oh!" Ann broke out at the end of her patience. "Certainly you are the most trying man!"

"What excuse did he make to her when he brought the brooch?"

"He didn't make any. He said he wanted her to have it whether she had lost it or not; he said he couldn't think of any one else to give it to."

"Did she tell you that?"

"Yes. And of course it flattered her, poor child."

"Have you got it here?" Ann took it out of her pocket. "You have dealt with Rosy," Powell said, reaching his hand for it. "I will deal with Captain Bickler."

"I can't trust you. *I* will do it."

"That wouldn't be dignified, Ann."

"Will you be plain with him?"

"I will use fairly clear dictionary English with him," Powell said, beginning to joke again, now that he had the brooch in his keeping. He looked down at it in his palm and turned it over. "It doesn't seem to be a great many carats fine. But I dare say Rosy isn't a judge of jewelry. Or Bickler either, for that matter." Powell hated the duty before him, but it was his duty, and not Ann's, as she now perceived too.

XIII

Powell was reluctant to think evil of any one, and his early want of perspective in the world made it hard for him to imagine a design of wrong from one social level to another. In the new country to which his family had first come, from the Old World in his own generation, he had not seen much of those differences; his father had left the Old World in abhorrence of the conditions which perpetuated social inequality there, and Powell had been taught by precept, if not practice, that such conditions were wicked and inhuman. His reading as a boy had been largely in the English poetry, where the life of simple villagers and rustics was celebrated as the ideal, and the cruelty of the Great was ascribed to the unjust structure of society. After his reading began to be so exclusively in the Doctrines, the questions of mundane difference sank more and more out of sight; they would settle themselves as man's conduct grew more in accord with the Interior Sense of the Word.

Powell left his wife at the cabin busy with some work which she undertook after calling: "Rosy! *Oh,* Rosy! I wonder where that girl *is!*" and then setting about it alone, with the comforting conclusion, "Off with the children somewhere, I suppose." She was inclined to be the less severe with Rosy because of the severity she had been obliged to use with her about the brooch, and she was glad to find her a child still with the other children; she did not want her to feel herself grown up.

"I will look for them on my way to Bladen's," Powell promised. "I want to see if he has any winter apples left."

"I wish we could get some dried peaches to make pies for the raising," his wife said, casually, at parting; the raising had taken the first place among her cares already.

He walked southward by the road that curved round the hill and continued on to Spring Grove after it left the hill behind. But it was at the bottom of the hill that by a sudden turn he chanced upon Captain Bickler sitting his horse at the roadside next the river and looking up the shore over a growth of tall pawpaw bushes which covered it there. He was handsomely dressed in his one fine broadcloth suit, and he had an effect of military gallantry, with his slender, graceful figure showing itself above his horse's neck as he stood up in his stirrups.

"Any pheasants over there?" Powell called to him for salutation.

"How do you do, Mr. Powell?" the young man called back, as he dropped into his saddle; and he rode forward and leaned over to give Powell his hand. "Why, no. I don't know what it was exactly," he added. "I was just going up to your place. I think I've got some news that will please you. *The Capital City Whig* says—I've got yesterday's paper—that there will be no doubt of that anti-fugitive slave law plank going into the platform at the State convention. I've thought so all along myself. I want you to remember that, Mr. Powell."

Powell smiled; he saw no reason why he should not give himself that pleasure and still do his duty in be-half of his wife. He took the paper from Bickler, who was holding his thumb at a certain place in it, and read it with satisfaction in its fact and in his own respite. "Yes, the *Whig* has always been on the right side. I didn't know *you* had," he said, giving the paper back with a sharper glance up at Bickler.

"Oh yes, I have," the young man answered. "It won't do to go too fast if you want to keep your influence in a community like this. It's all well enough for you, Mr. Powell; you've got a different sort of hold, but I have to feel my way. That's why I wouldn't like to say just where I stand at present to everybody; but you'll find me in the right place when the time comes. All well at home? It does me good every time I see Mrs. Powell. She's about the nicest lady I know."

"Thank you, we are all very well," Powell answered, provisionally.

Bickler continued, with increasing smoothness: "That's a great book you lent me. I want to keep it a while longer and go through it carefully. It's a wonder how he maps the other world out. Makes this world seem all at sixes and sevens."

Bickler laughed ingratiatingly; and Powell asked, "Do you mean that he makes too much of a map of the other world? That has been objected by some."

"I don't know if I should say that, exactly," Bickler answered. "But that idea of the spiritual world being all in the shape of a Grand Man, with the different spirits in the different parts according to their being good or bad—well, some might say *that* was funny."

"I see nothing funny in it," Powell began, resentfully; and Bickler made haste to save himself.

"Oh, I don't mean funny in the ridiculous sense. I mean strange and—and new; that's all."

"I think I can make it appear to you in its true light," Powell said, putting his hand on the neck of Bickler's horse and caressing it with a mounting kindness for Bickler himself. "We are so used to thinking of Heaven as in the sky over our heads and Hell as a pit under our feet that it is hard for us to conceive of them otherwise; but a very little reflection will convince you that the topography—if I may so express it—of the spiritual world is much more reasonably represented by our human figure, which was made in the likeness of the Divine."

From time to time the young man said, "Yes, yes," and, "To be sure," and, "I reckon you're right." The horse stamped in the soft road, and sent gentle shivers over its silken surface, and tossed its fine head up and down, jingling its bit.

Powell at last took his hand away, saying, "You cannot go amiss if you look at it in the light of the Science of Correspondences."

Bickler assented with a sigh: "I'll keep that in mind. It's a mighty new idea. But now about the two delegates from this township to the county convention. Can I count on your support if I arrange to have you sent as one of them?"

"Yes, certainly," Powell assented, with the cordiality due a man who had shown such an intelligent interest in the matters he had laid before Bickler. "But I ought to say that I don't think there is the least probability of my being sent. It may be different after we get the paper machinery in and the neighbors see that we mean to be as good as our word, but at present I realize that I am anything but popular in the neighborhood."

Bickler laughed the notion away. "Why, Mr. Powell, there's never been a man here more respected.

You'll see, when the people turn out to your raising. When is the raising to be?"

"Just as soon as we can bring matters to a head with the carpenters, and my brother Felix can arrange to be with us. He's winding up his business as fast as he can, and I am in hopes that my other brothers can join us soon. By the way, there's a point on which I should like to consult you; my wife and I have differed about it somewhat. But I have detained you long enough already."

"Well, I *am* in something of a hurry, that's a fact," the young man said. "But any time I can be of service to you—"

He indicated with a large flourish that he was at Powell's disposition. "For the time being, as between Mrs. Powell and you, we'll leave it that I'm on Mrs. Powell's side." He laughed at his joke, and it was something that Powell could not refuse to enjoy.

"Oh, I believe I'm on her side too," he said; and now the young man laughed again, and shook his rein, and his horse ambled away.

At Mrs. Powell's coming into the talk, something came into her husband's mind, but too warily for him to seize it. When Bickler was almost out of sight, and quite beyond earshot, he realized that he had not given him back the brooch.

He followed vaguely homeward in the same direction, wondering what he should say to his wife. When he came in sight of her standing at the cabin door, she called to him, "Did you ask the Bladens about the dried peaches?"

"I declare," he said, stopping short with the relief a man finds in balancing one trouble against another. "I forgot all about the Bladens. I'll go right back—"

"No, no," she said, coming out to him. "I've engaged some from Hurvey; he just went by. But where in the world have you been all this time?"

Then Powell had to confess what he felt to be the greater guilt of his other forgetfulness. When they had talked it over, Ann said, disappointedly, "Oh, well, you can do it the next time you meet him. I do hope that no harm will come from the delay."

"Oh, there isn't the least danger," Owen answered, light-hearted at escaping so easily.

"Better let me have the brooch. *I'll* remember to give it to Captain Bickler," his wife suggested.

"No, Ann. It's for me to do it. And I shall certainly not forget another time."

XIV

The children came home together, and directly afterward Rosy appeared alone.

"Why, Rosy," Mrs. Powell called out to her, "I thought you and the children went off together."

The eldest of the little girls answered for her. "So we did, mother, but Rosy wanted to go and see what was in the pawpaws by the river-bank, and we were afraid. We thought Rosy had got lost."

Rosy laughed. "I came up over the hill. I'll get you the water."

She went toward Mrs. Powell, who still had the teakettle in her hand on the way to the well. There was something evasive in her looks, which arrested Ann in a sort of distraction. "Well, you may, Rosy. I'm about beat out with this hot weather. I don't feel as if I could go near that stove. Now you set the table, children," she commanded her little ones.

"Oh, mother, we hate to go in yet," they pleaded, through the eldest girl. "Can't we have supper over by the new house?" The other children stood with their hands ready to clap and their feet to jump into the air at her consent.

The younger boys counted with the little girls in the family. Richard almost counted with his father and mother; he shared his mother's cares; his next brother, who somewhat darkled after him, had an ideal of devotion to her which he realized in many reveries. The eldest of the girls was like Richard; she had been a third hand for her mother about the house, but now that Rosy had come she became one of the little girls again. She played with them in the tall rows of rustling corn stretching far away in the eighty-acre field behind the cabin; she helped them build little cabins of twigs over the wild flowers; they all painted gloves on their hands with mulberry juice. Richard loved adventure; he wished to go to California and dig gold; his brother liked dreaming of himself in stately and splendid characters and situations, but he hated the trouble of any active undertaking; once when he went to visit his uncle in Tuskingum and see the boys he used to know he was deathly homesick. But the brothers were as good friends as elder and younger brothers usually are.

The island was the mystery and the desire of all the children; the boys had their Indian fights there, and they could go for a drink of well-water, when they were heated in battle, to Bellam's cabin; Mrs. Bellam drew the water with a bucket at the end of a long pole, and gave it to them in a gourd dipper. Richard was the friend and companion of Bellam in the sawmill; he helped him there; and Bellam helped the boys build the tent-shaped hut of boards their father planned for kiln-drying the flooring for the new house; sometimes he sat up with Richard at night, and when the boy fell asleep Bellam shifted the boards and kept the fire going good and hot in the big oblong stove which they used for seasoning the lumber.

He liked to talk about the raising, and was as eager for it as the Powells themselves. He told just what he should do, and bespoke certain duties and privileges. Among the men in the neighborhood he most truly valued Powell and honored him; he said, whenever he could get any one to look at his thumb, that he reckoned if it had not been for Mr. Powell he would not have had *any* thumb by that time. He was welcome to Mrs. Powell in the cabin; when it came once to her offering him her cane-seat rocking-chair he said, "If I had a cheer like this, I'd stay at home all Sunday and rock."

A few weeks before the time fixed for the raising in August, what people called the flux broke out, and many were sick. One of the Bellam children was taken, and then another, till all were taken. Lizzie Bladen and Richard helped their father and mother nurse them, sitting up through the night in the hot little single room of the cabin, and all but one of the children died in turn. Richard watched with the dead, a thing his brother could not have done to save himself alive; and Lizzie Bladen shared his watch, and walked home with him in the dim dawns across the island and through the sawmill.

It came Bellam's own turn, and he was very sick for a week; then he seemed to be getting well; but in the early morning when his wife and Richard were lifting him to make him more comfortable on his pillow he fell back and died. Mrs. Bellam said: "Now he'll be so disapp'inted about the raisin'. He 'lowed all along to do the most of it hisself, by his tell." That night Richard could not keep himself from telling his brother about it, and how solemn it seemed coming home with Lizzie Bladen. If it had not been for her not being afraid he said he could not have stood it. His brother listened with his tongue cleaving to the roof of his mouth, and silent in the horror of an experience which his fancy made tenfold his own. He knew that twenty Lizzie Bladens with twenty times her courage would not have helped him stand such a thing as seeing a man die. His brother slept, but the vision of what his brother had seen filled the dark of the cabin loft for the boy.

Bellam was buried beside the new graves of his children in the neglected place on the hill which Powell had not yet got the stuff out for fencing, in his preoccupation with the material for the new house. The minister at Spring Grove was sick, and could not come; Powell felt it would be a sacrilege to let Elder Griswell perform the service at the grave; he took the duty upon himself, and he had a peculiar joy in using the New Church Book of Worship. He always said that one ought not to proselyte, but in the remarks he made he contrived to bring in a good deal of the Doctrines, and apparently no one felt the worse for them, if they were none the wiser. The chance use of a passage from Revelation suggested the peculiar applicability of the Science of Correspondences to the mysteries of that book, and Powell branched off at some length on the interpretation of the words he had quoted. He recognized with humorous consciousness that his excursion had the more interest with his hearers because it involved an exposition of the spiritual sense of the word horse; but afterward he blamed himself for yielding to his opportunity, and he could not make Ann say she had liked it. At the close he announced that out of respect for the dead the raising, which would be a kind of frolic, was postponed for the present. He spoke of the great interest which Bellam had taken in the building of the new house, and how touching it had been for him to know this. Mrs. Bellam shed tears, and whispered to the neighbor at her elbow: "Just what I tole Richard. He'll be so disapp'inted, s'd I."

The whole countryside came to Bellam's funeral, which was the climax of the general affliction; with his death the epidemic began to abate, and with some cool days toward the end of August it disappeared. Overdale did not come to the funeral, but he showed his white mask at the mill door as the procession passed, and then went in and shut off the water, so that the mill was silent at the time of the burial. When the people came away, the mill was running again, and, some of them thought, furiously. They said in the low tones to which the recent solemnity had reduced their utterance that they reckoned Overdale had been at his jug again; they moralized the fact as a great pity for so smart a man as he was when sober.

Captain Bickler arrived too late for the funeral; he had been electioneering in another part of the county; and he told Powell he was truly sorry, for he would have liked to address the friends. It was an occasion which he might have hoped to improve politically, perhaps, but Powell was himself so moved by the whole affair that he could not make the ironical comment which tempted him. The sight of Bickler reminded him of the brooch which he had not yet returned to him; he felt in his waistcoat pocket for it, and he was rather glad to find that he had left it in his week-day clothes; it would have been no more the occasion for its return than for the irony which he forebore.

Though he had postponed the raising out of respect for Bellam, he had done so with a reluctance which Ann more than half shared with him. Felix and Jessamy had arranged to come out to the raising on the date fixed, and now Ann was afraid that they might not be able to come. But there was no help for it, and Powell held so strongly to their coming, if they possibly could, that he almost convinced Ann they would be sure to come.

XV

In her borrowed trust Ann gave herself so entirely to the cares and labors which now fell to her that the days went by without her duly noticing the absence of any further word from Jessamy. When the time came for the raising, on a bright Saturday of September, she was so much more distracted that she accepted without the bitter regret which it would have brought to her in a freer mind the fact that Jessamy and Felix were really not coming. They sent out with their letter a basket of baker's cakes, such as only the town could supply, with oranges up from New Orleans, and a bag of coffee to indemnify Ann for the coffee she must not stint for the raising. Jessamy wrote that Felix was not quite well enough to come, but she would write soon again; and in the excitement of applying their gifts to the feast, and the confusion of the time, Ann did not remember to grieve enough for him till the whole affair was over. She had made coffee by gallons; and there were crisp crusted chicken pies, wide and deep, which she baked in the brick out-oven in her milk-pans, and served smoking-hot with plates of cold ham and cold tongue, and platters of hot shortened biscuit, and bread and butter; it was the time for new apples, and dishes of apple-sauce alternated with the plates and platters.

The table was contrived of boards stretched on the carpenters' trestles, and the cold things were placed on it early in the day and covered with mosquito-netting against the flies, after due debate with Rosy and the little girls, indulged in minor details but overruled in the great essentials. Some of the farm wives had come to help, and Lizzie Bladen came with her father. He lent all the consequence to the affair that Powell had hoped, and here and there he helped a little. Lizzie helped a great deal, in spite of the flourishing politeness of Captain Bickler. He had come earlier than he had come to Bellam's funeral, and his courtly zeal in seconding the girl at every movement made her part of the joke which he became with the other men waiting to be served. The jokers spared her as much as they could, but they were not skilful; Bickler made believe to like it, and encouraged it for himself in defending her from it. Ann saw his neglect of Rosy, to whom he scarcely spoke, and her heart burned, though she could not have wanted him to notice Rosy; she saw with helpless compassion the pain of the young girl he was making conspicuous.

In all twenty six or seven farmers, counting their big boys, came to put up the frame which the carpenters had got ready. The smooth hewn sills, mortised for the studs, lay beside the stone foundation. When the sills had been placed and the studs and joists fitted into the mortises, the plates to bear the second story were raised with the heaviest lifting of the day, and a second row of joists and studs fitted into them. Then the timbers to support the roof were fitted on the studding, and the rafters raised in rows the whole length of the house on either side and pinned together at the comb of the roof.

The work went on in the rivalry of separate gangs, with captains for each. At raisings where whiskey was furnished, the work was delayed by fights over disputed points between the chosen or self-chosen champions. Even now without whiskey it was slow work getting the frame of the house together, and the hill on the southwest of it was casting long afternoon shadows over the grassy space in front of the frame before the last pin was driven into the posts. On this grassy space Ann had put her tables, and now in the pleasant shadow she invited her steaming guests to sit down. The jollity of the day mounted to a climax; jokes that went round for the second or third season were hailed with the same hospitality as the sarcasms and railleries that remembered the events of the work or greeted the feats of the workers at the feast. The men were in their shirt-sleeves and bare heads; the women who passed behind them and filled their cups and heaped their plates were demurely clad in their second best and hid their smiles in the depth of their sunbonnets.

The victuals were all praised, but Ann was praised most for her coffee and for holding out against whiskey. The men joked Powell for the weakening that some of them said he showed, when he asked them to the raising and acknowledged that there would be nothing stronger than coffee to drink. They roared at that, and then one of them called to him, "Owen, what did you say was the correspondence of a hoss?" and the rest waited for their pleasure in the gibe.

"Oh, you've got hold of the wrong word, Mr. Blakeley," Powell answered, with smooth formality. "What *you* want to know is the correspondence of a donkey."

The retort was on the local level; but it took time for it to reach home. Ann disliked it, and dreaded the effect. Then the man rose jovially in the shout that went up, and stumbled over to Powell's place, and put his arm round his shoulders and began to explain and apologize. The men all became better friends with Powell, and one after another they complimented him for his part in the raising, for his knowledge and his practical skill. Their praises brought him to his feet, and in a speech which made Ann ashamed and then proud as it went on he told how in his early backwoods days he had been captain at log-cabin raisings. He was beginning to own with modest pride, and Ann was beginning to fear for him again, that for notching a log to receive the next when it was in position, he had not his superior, if his equal, when he was stopped by one of his guests with a joyous shout.

"Hello, hello, hello!" Every one turned with him toward the frame of the new house. The upright supporting the peak of the nearest gable had broken from the pin that held it and now swung dangling.

Through the general laugh broke cries of "Why didn't *you* drive in that pin, Owen?" and "I thought you was a better hand than that," and "Oh, well, it ain't a log cabin, anyway," and "I reckon Owen was too excited to hit that last pin on the head."

Powell stood fixed and silent, smiling shamefacedly, till one of the men said: "Well, I'd like to go up and fix that pin, just to show Owen how he *used* to do it. But I couldn't do it on no coffee. Hain't you got a jug of corn juice around somewheres, Mrs. Powell?"

Powell called out: "Nobody must think of touching it. Keep on at what you're doing, friends, and I'll see to that piece of studding in good time."

He was going to enlarge upon the incident and draw a moral from it for himself and others, but another noisy outbreak stopped him.

"Well, here comes Jake, and I reckon he's going to take a hand; he's had some corn juice of his own."

"Why, he's got it with him!"

Powell saw Overdale reeling across the road from the side door of the mill and floundering toward the new house; he had a black jug in his hand; he shouted, "I'll show you how to fix that; I've got the thing to do it with."

His voice was not drunk, though his gait was, but he corrected that, holding himself strongly erect as some of the men started toward him. "Better nobody touch me if he don't want his head cracked," and then he staggered on again, but securely enough.

Powell came politely forward. "If Mr. Overdale wants to strike a blow on my new house, and mend my unworkman-like job, he'll want a tool."

He held out the mallet he had used in failing to drive the pin home, and the miller took it, glancing back and forth from Powell to the mallet.

Then he flung it from him with a roar: "Didn't I say I got the thing to do it with? What the hell—"

He got to the ladder which had been left standing against the house, and began to climb it. "Any one touch this ladder!" he threatened the half-dozen who rushed to stop him.

"Owen!" Ann appealed, in her terror.

"I'm going to, my dear," Powell said, as if there had been a full explanation. He put his neighbors aside with authority, and took hold of the ladder. "Get down, you tipsy fool! Do you think I'm going to have your blood on my house?" He shook the ladder and looked up at Overdale, lifting a hand to pull him down.

Instead of stooping over to strike him with the jug, as every one expected, in terror or amusement, Overdale gave a crazy laugh, and clambered out of reach. He swung himself upward with one hand, holding to his jug with the other, and when he reached the roof-plate he twisted himself in and out through the rafters till he reached the gable where the stud was dangling loose. He gathered it in and fixed it in its place, and then drew back to hammer the pin home with the jug. "I'll show you what whiskey can do."

The joking applause which would have hailed a safer feat failed on the open lips of the gazers below. Once, twice, three times the miller drove at the pin, shattering the jug and spilling the whiskey in the air. He drew back for a blow with what was left of the jagged neck and shoulders of the jug, but he missed his mark and lunged forward into the air. He turned and sprawled with a bat-like spread in his fall and struck in a heap at the base of the house on a loose mass of shingles lying there.

XVI

In the last hour which, close upon midnight, ended the day, Ann said to her husband, as she had said more than once before, "I certainly thought he would kill you, Owen, when you shook the ladder under him."

"Oh, there wasn't the least danger! But he may thank his stars that he didn't kill himself, in his fall. If it hadn't been for those shingles I had left there to season he wouldn't have got off with a few broken ribs and a dislocated shoulder." Powell was tempted to say "shoulder or two" for the joke, but Ann did not look as if she could bear even so good a joke, and he stopped short of it.

"I suppose we'll hear from Felix to-morrow. I'm glad, now, he and Jessamy didn't come. It would have tried Felix. But still I'm anxious. I hope he isn't worse."

"Oh, you may be sure of that," Powell answered.

"Dear, dear!" Ann said. "I don't see how he can live on that hot feather-bed in that choking little room, swarming with mosquitoes." She meant Overdale, now, in a natural reversion from Felix, and Powell understood.

"Oh, he's used to it, and it's an improvement on the buffalo robe in the mill. I'm sorry for Dick sitting up with him in that atmosphere. But he probably doesn't mind it."

"Yes, poor Richard! Everything comes on the child."

"Well, he's got that other child to help him bear it. Why her father chooses to live here, with such a girl as that! He is really a gentleman in his breeding. He wasn't much use at the hard work of raising, but his being there kept the others in check, and certainly lent all dignity to the occasion I could have wished. He quite conceived of that when I asked him."

"It was fortunate, after all, that Captain Bickler was there," Ann said, reluctantly. "If it hadn't been for him, I don't know how we could have got the doctor so soon."

"If it hadn't been for Bickler's horse we couldn't," Powell consented, "by at least fifteen minutes. However, it enabled Bickler to make a display of public spirit, and it was a good stroke of electioneering. Though, as for the matter of that, I had got Overdale into very fair shape before the doctor came."

"Yes," Ann assented, to his satisfaction. "Well, if it will only make them all like us a little better!"

"I'm afraid it won't make Overdale. But as for the others, they will like us better because they've done us a good turn, and because you gave them such a good supper."

Powell wound his watch for the night; but it was long before Ann slept, and she was up earlier than usual to have Dick's breakfast for him as soon as he came home. He came at sunrise, and reported the miller restless through the night; he testified to the faithfulness of his own vigil by falling asleep in his chair. His mother had to wake him for his coffee.

"Poor boy!" she said; and then she asked, "Why didn't you bring Lizzie with you?"

"I didn't like to ask her, mother," the boy explained. "Mrs. Overdale got her something. I'm going back, now, to let her off."

It appeared that Richard was to relieve yet another watcher, in the miller's wife herself. It seemed as if he had scarcely gone out of the front door when she came through the corn-field to the back, with the sun at her shoulders, throwing her long shadow on the floor.

Ann looked up from the table where she was pouring herself a cup of coffee.

"He in?" the woman asked; and Ann understood that she was asking if Mr. Powell was at home.

"Why, he's still sleeping," Ann said. "Won't you come in and sit down—and have a cup of coffee?"

The woman made no answer, but remained in the doorway. "'Pears like as if *he* wanted to see *him*."

"Well, I will send him as soon as he's had his breakfast. How did Mr. Overdale get through the night?"

The miller's wife remained irresponsive. "And you say he hain't got nawthin' ag'in' him?"

"Why, certainly not. What do you mean by asking that again, Mrs. Overdale? What could my husband have against yours?"

"'Pears like as if he thought he had."

"Very well, then; he had better tell Mr. Powell what it is when he comes."

"He won't have to tell I been here?" the woman asked.

"Not unless you want him to."

The miller's wife made no more answer to this than to the other questions. After a moment of hesitation she went away as silently as she came.

Ann let Owen sleep on like a child from his fatigue, and she kept the other children from waking him by sending them to play in the new house.

By the time he had breakfasted and was looking for his hat to go over to the miller's a friendly voice called to him from the front of the cabin. It was the doctor, who had his joke in saluting him as Dr. Powell, and said he had just come from the miller's.

"And how did you find him?" Powell asked.

The doctor twisted himself between his saddle-bags and looked round. "It seems queer not to have either of your mills going."

"Yes, we're left in pretty bad shape, and the silence sounds rather solemn. By the way, it *does* sound?"

"So it does, so it does!"

"But that wasn't what you wanted to talk about?"

"Well, not before company," the doctor said, with a laugh. He lowered his voice. "There's something I don't understand about Overdale. He's in no danger from his broken bones. But there's something on his mind, and it seems to have been there a good while, and it seems to be about you—"

"Would you mind my wife's hearing?" Powell asked.

"Why, if it won't worry Mrs. Powell."

"The things that worry my wife are the things she *doesn't* hear," Powell said, and the two men had their laugh; and then he called into the cabin, "Ann!" She came to the door. "The doctor wants to talk to us about Overdale."

"Will he die?" Ann gasped.

"No, I don't think he will," the doctor said, "unless Owen here"—Ann did not mind the doctor's calling her husband by his first name—"wants to do his worst by him."

"What do you mean, doctor?" But Ann partly knew, though not clearly.

"I can't say, exactly. But there's something on his mind, about the sale of the mills to your family. It isn't anything reasonable; it's something he's ashamed of while he's afraid of it. He seems to think Owen knows, but he won't tell it himself. It's some sort of hallucination. I can't get it out of him; but unless somebody does—and I believe Owen can—at any rate, it seems to be connected with him and his brothers—"

"I just knew it!" Ann broke in. That's what that poor thing's been groping after." She told the doctor of the question the miller's wife had only just now been with her to repeat from their first meeting. "She said he seemed to want to see Owen, and if you think—"

"I think Owen had better see him, then."

Ann hesitated. "I don't want him to take any risks with the crazy wretch."

"Oh, there isn't the least danger," Powell put in, eagerly. "Where is my hat? I'll go at once."

"I've got half a mind to go with you," she said. "If that wretch should have his shotgun—"

The doctor laughed. "He hasn't got his shotgun in bed with him, Mrs. Powell."

"Well, then go at once, Owen. But don't be a minute longer than you can help."

"I'll be back directly, my dear," and with the doctor's riding off Powell was half-way to the miller's house.

It was sultry with the heat which in the Middle West comes with September when the summer ought to be gone. A swarm of flies buzzed up from the bed and out of the room where the miller lay when Owen entered from the kitchen, where Mrs. Overdale met him. He sat down where he could look the bruised and broken man in the face.

"Now, what is it you've got on your mind, Overdale?" he demanded, severely. The fact, whatever it was, would interest him the more if it were something of mystical portent, but if it were merely resentment it would still interest him. "You have something on your mind concerning me, and for your own sake"—Powell was not indifferent for himself, but he repeated—"for your *own* sake, I want to know what it is."

The miller seemed clear enough to this appeal. "You reckon I'm a-goin' to tell you?" he returned, sulkily.

"Not necessarily. But I'm going to find out. When did you begin to harbor this grudge against my brothers and me? Was it because we bought the mills away from you?"

"What if it was?"

"Then that's when it began. But we kept you on, and I have assured you that we wished to keep you, somehow, after we had put in the paper machinery. Then it wasn't on business grounds that you hated us?"

"Who ever said I hated you?" the miller demanded.

"I didn't know what other name to give your behavior. You must have had some strong objection, at any rate. Did you think we meant you some sort of harm?"

"I don't know what you meant, or what you done, or whether you done it. But there it was."

"*What* was?"

"You think I'll tell? It can kill me, but I'll keep it to myself."

Powell glimpsed a darkling something which fascinated him. He took a longer turn about. "I know," he said, almost tenderly, "that we often attach consequences to things which happen far beyond their reasonable effect. I remember when I was a boy that I would be throwing a stone at a tree or a post, and I would say to myself, 'Now if I hit it I shall live out the year, and if I don't—'"

The miller lifted himself on his elbow; then he dropped back with a curse of pain; he would not let it be a groan. “What do you mean by living out the year?”

“Simply what I say. What could I mean?”

The miller lay silent. Then he turned his bandaged head on the pillow and said, as if he had been tacitly working to that conclusion, “I'll be derned if I'll tell you.”

Powell sat patiently confident of some other conclusion, and after a minute Overdale turned his face toward him again. “There's always got to be two to a bargain. If it was a spell that you devils laid on me, to git me out of the way, you must 'a' knowed what it was before you agreed to pay the price, and all your pretendin' to want me to stay couldn't fool me. Your sayin' that about a year's time, just now, shows you always had it on your mind. But I'll fool you yit. I'll live the year out, in spite of you.”

It seemed to Powell that another and clearer glimpse of the miller's trouble was offering itself; he thought he could best promote the revelation by postponing it, and he rose to go, but more than half feigning to go. “Very well, Overdale, when you feel ready to tell me what you mean I'll try to help you; but as it is you won't let me. I must leave you now; this excitement is bad for you—”

“No, you don't! No, you don't!” The miller shook his fist and tried to writhe up from his bed. “You know as well as I do that when you took the mills you'd fixed it so I wouldn't live more'n a year after you bought 'em.”

Now it was all plain before Powell. He was in the presence of the anguish of a foreboding; he had once known the terror and the stress of it in his hypochondriacal youth; he had seen his own brother again and again in its shadow; and his heart was glad that he could lift the incubus from the wretched soul which he seemed to see writhing before him. But he must treat the pseudo-foreknowledge reverently, though he could have laughed it away.

" Why, Overdale, you've lived the time out already. We bought the mills in August last year—two months before you knew about it."

" *What!*" the miller shouted. In spite of his bruises and bandages, he raised himself on his sound arm and stared at Powell, as if to take in with his eyes what his ears had known. Then he dropped back and lay still.

XVII

"I CERTAINLY thought he was dead," Powell said, telling it all in detail to his wife when he came home and found her on the point of following him to the miller's house. "It was not so long, though, before we brought him to. Or, rather, *I* did." He corrected himself, not to refuse the credit justly his due. "The woman was not much help, though she knew that tea would have more effect with him than whiskey; be more of a contrast," and Powell did not deny himself the comfort of a laugh. Then he mused the case in a silence which Ann interrupted.

"And what did he say when he came to?"

"Why, practically nothing. He wanted to get up and go over to the mill. The whole affair was as simple as having a tooth pulled. You nurse your terror of the pain to come in infinitely greater pain, and when the dentist jerks the tooth out and the whole thing is over you're simply ashamed of yourself, and you don't want to say anything about it. Not but what there are real presentiments; but for the most part they are lying intimations from the devils who delight in tormenting people in this world when they escape from the hells."

Ann was not satisfied with the Doctrinal philosophy of the case. She could not help thinking of the miller's misery during the year past, but she put it out of her mind with a personal consideration. "Well, I hope he will behave himself now and treat you decently."

"I don't count on it," Powell said. "His behavior is from the character that he's been building up all his life. To change now would be like saving his soul by a death-bed repentance. He will be more likely to show that he doesn't owe me anything by behaving worse than ever." The notion moved Powell to his usual laughter, but he checked himself at the continued gravity of his wife's face. "Well, what is it now, Ann?"

"Nothing. I thought if I once had Overdale off my mind I shouldn't care for anything. But I do. There's some trouble with Rosy. She's been crying."

Powell was guiltily sensible of the brooch in his waistcoat pocket; the crazy question whether it could be that which was making Rosy cry went through him, and he thought his wife might be going to speak of it; but she said:

"You noticed that fellow scarcely looked at her yesterday, and didn't speak to her at all. He's trying to break off."

"Well, isn't that what you wanted him to do?"

"Yes, but when it comes to it, and I see her taking on so! Oh, I wish the child had never set eyes on him! Of course he never did care for her, and now that he thinks he's going to be elected he doesn't want even to speak to her. And I know she's got her heart set on him."

"But *do* you know that, Ann?"

"What else would she be crying about?"

"You might ask her. But seriously, I don't think there's the least danger of trouble for her."

"Oh, you never think there's the least danger of anything, Owen!"

"Well, but how often has she met him? It couldn't go on without our knowing. He's been all over the county drumming up delegates. I haven't seen him here once in a week, and then he hasn't been near us."

"No, not *us;* but Rosy has met him. I know she has. She goes out with the children, but they get separated, and she comes home alone. Not always, but often enough to make me anxious. Time and again I've been on the point of asking her, but I didn't like to; Rosy is proud. She does her work, and she might say that was enough without answering questions. She's queer; sometimes I think she's sly."

"Oh no, Ann! She may be secret, but she isn't sly."

"No, I *mean* secret; she's keeping something to herself, and it troubles me. Well, I'm going to watch her. Here comes poor Bellam's boy. He said he was going to Spring Grove, and I told him to ask if there were any letters for us."

A barefooted boy on a barebacked horse, the last left of Bellam's children and possessions, rode up to the cabin door, where the Powells were talking. "Here's y'ur letter fur yuh," he said to Ann, taking it out of his open shirt-front and holding it toward her.

"Oh, thank you, Jimmy. Wait and I'll get you a slice of cake." Jimmy waited; then he thumped his heels into the horse's ribs, and rode away with his mouth instantly full. "It's from Jessamy," Ann said, opening her letter. "I expected she would write after not coming. I wish they could see how well the new house looks." She delayed herself with a glance at the frame of her future home before she began to read. After the first look she said, "Why it's dated from the City and—" She crushed the sheet together and gave it to Powell. "Felix has had another hemorrhage, and they're on the way to New Orleans! You read it, dear!" she said, with the hem of her apron to her eyes.

"Well, well," Powell complied. "There's nothing to be alarmed about. We'll see what Jessamy says. If they're going South it's the best thing, and we'll be all the better prepared for them in the spring." Then he read on to himself, as people begin doing when they are asked to read for others.

"Owen!" his wife sharply recalled him.

"Oh! Oh yes! Why, she just says that he's had a little attack, and they're very properly going South for the winter; and—there isn't the least danger—"

"*Read* what she says *out loud,*" Ann bade him, severely, and then he did so. But it came to no more in substance than the facts they both knew already. Jessamy sent her love and her husband's to all. She said the doctor thought he ought to get away before the first chilly weather, and she was going to bring him back strong and well; and they were coming straight to the mills. If there was not room enough for them in the new house, Felix and she would live in the cabin till they could build for themselves; he was crazy for the place now, and Owen must hurry and get out the stuff. She wrote bravely, even gaily, and "You see," Powell ended for her, "there isn't any cause for anxiety."

Ann took the letter he held illustratively toward her, and, the sadder for his cheer, folded it carefully for another reading and went into the cabin.

Rosy was coming in at the back door from the shed outside, panting as if she had been running, and Ann thought she looked pale. "Where have you been, Rosy? Where are the children?"

"I do' know where the childern are," the girl answered, sullenly. "I been up over the hill, if you want to know."

"You mustn't be saucy, Rosy," Ann said; and she added, as if it were the reason why, "We've had bad news about Mr. Powell's brother."

"Oh, have you, Mrs. Powell?" the girl broke in, with instant contrition. "I'd just lay down my life for him. Has he had another bleeding?"

"Yes. And they're on their way South for the winter."

"Oh, Mrs. Powell! But that 'll do him good, won't it?"

"The doctor thinks so; I hope so. And, Rosy, child, I'm troubled for you, too. I'm sorry for you. I saw what happened yesterday, but you won't believe I'm sorry for you when I say I was glad of it."

"Yes, I will, Mrs. Powell! But I'm all right now, and you don't need to worry a bit about me. I reckon he's got as good as he give."

XVIII

That morning, while the doctor was talking with the Powells at the cabin door about Overdale, Rosy had gone with the children to look the new house over and help rejoice at moving into it, which they thought could not be more than a week or two now. She left them there and kept on up over the hill. "I'll be back directly," she called down to them.

At the bottom of the hill on the other side a horse was grazing among the pawpaw bushes, with his bridle-rein hanging loosely behind his ears and dropping round his mouth. She pretended not to see the horse, so that she need not turn back; but a fire of consciousness blazed over her face.

Bickler spoke from the grass, where he was sitting near the horse's head. "Hello, Rosy!"

She did not answer.

"You don't seem to hear very well this morning, Rosy."

Now she answered, "You didn't seem to *see* very well yesterday, Captain Bickler."

"Well, no, that's a fact," he said, easily. "That's what I thought I'd explain if you happened to be coming over the hill this morning."

"I reckon I don't want any explaining from you," she returned. "I reckon a hired girl knows when she's a hired girl. And if I'd knowed you was here I wouldn't 'a' happened to be comin' over the hill, as you say."

"Well, maybe you would, maybe you wouldn't." He laughed teasingly up into her face. "But I'm glad you have come. I didn't see any one that looked like a hired girl yesterday; I saw a lady helping Mrs. Powell that I thought was too far above me to speak to."

"Did you?" Rosy retorted, scornfully. "You spoke to her good and plenty all the same."

"Oh, you mean that pale, little washed-out snip of a child? *I* mean the lady with the yellow hair, and the big blue eyes, and the cheeks as red as the roses she's named after. You ain't mad, are you, Rosy?"

"Yes, I *am* mad; and you mustn't think you can come it over me any longer, Captain Bickler. I reckon I can see through you well enough." Rosy ended ineffectually, and she knew it as well as the man, who laughed again.

"I didn't know you were going anywhere, Rosy. If I had a chin like that—I wish you could just see it from here!"

"You quit your foolin', Captain Bickler, and let me past or I'll—"

"I didn't know you were going anywhere, Rosy. But don't hurry. I want to argue it out with you. What did you want me to do yesterday? Get up before 'em all and say, 'Ladies and gentlemen, I wish to announce the engagement of Miss Rose Hefmyer and Captain Harrison Bickler'? The fellows wouldn't have done another stroke of work on Mrs. Powell's chicken pie, and old Overdale wouldn't have had a chance to fall off the top of the new house. I met Doc Jenner, here, just now; he thinks Overdale didn't fracture enough ribs to hurt. But what I mean to say is this, Rosy. It won't do for me to be courting you till I'm in a position to marry you."

"Who as't you to marry me?" she demanded, fiercely.

"Well, not you. And I'm not going to let you. When it comes to marrying I want to do the asking myself. But now I'm all tied up with this electioneering. If it was known I was running after a girl when I ought to be running for an office I wouldn't get the office, I'm afraid."

"You wouldn't get the girl, neither, if I had any say!"

"Well, all right, Rosy, all right. We'll see about that afterwards. You mustn't think I don't care for you if I don't show it everywhere. It's the whole world to me to meet you this way, every once in a while, and have a little friendly chat. I'll tell you what, Rosy. If I'm elected, and I don't see but what I *will* be the way things are going now, I'll want some old friend to call on evenings after the legislature adjourns. I'll want somebody to take to the theater, and then go round and have an oyster stew."

Rosy stood looking at him where he sat with his face lifted toward her, but she said nothing, while he chewed on a blade of grass which he plucked up from between his feet.

"I know a lady up there who wants a girl. *You* don't lay out to pass the winter here in the new house," and Bickler laughed at the phrase which had become mockingly current in the neighborhood from the Powells' use of it. "You would suit my friend first rate; kind of a parlor girl, with nothing to do but dust and keep the place in order, and all her evenings out. I'll write and tell her I've found just the girl for her—"

"Mrs. Powell," Rosy broke off at this point in telling Ann, "you'll think I done a poorty awful thing."

"Why, what did you do, Rosy?" Ann asked, fearfully.

"I just run right up to him and slapped him in the face good and hard so't he most keeled over, and then I run home as fast as I could foot it." Ann did not ask why she had done this; she did not need Rosy's explanation: "A poor girl finds out a good many things, especially if she's got worse than no mother; she ain't like a girl that's been raised in a decent family; and when she ain't much more than a child she understands—understands—what the oldest woman in the world ortn't to—"

Rosy's hardness had given way now, and she was fetching her breath in dry sobs.

"Oh, poor thing!" Ann tried to comfort her, but she would not hear further.

"I wouldn't 'a' minded his not noticin' me yesterday; and I wouldn't 'a' cared for his not likin' me the way he'd like some one that wasn't a hired girl; but for him to sejjest or even to hint— Oh, do you think I done right, Mrs. Powell?"

"'Deed and 'deed I think you did just exactly right, Rosy," Ann could not help saying, though she felt that she ought to add: "I suppose Mr. Powell would say that you ought to bear anything rather than give a blow. But a good smack in the face is the only way with such a man if he meant what you think he did—"

"Oh, do you reckon he *couldn't* 'a' meant it, Mrs. Powell? Say it if you do! I'd give the world to believe he didn't! I'd just lay down and let him walk over me. I can't help it, Mrs. Powell—I think he's splendid and the handsomest and smartest man in the world, and I'd give my life if he *didn't* mean it."

She was crying her heart out in tears now, and Ann was puzzled between her pity for the girl and her hope that she had not been mistaken. That would be the quickest and easiest way out. "I will speak to Mr. Powell and—"

"If you do I'll kill myself!" Rosy jumped up from where she sat bowed over, with her apron at her eyes.

Ann took her in her arms. "Well, well, I won't, then. But now you go up to your bed and lie down awhile. I'll get the dinner; and don't you come till I call you. I want to think about it."

When the dinner was out of the way Ann followed her husband over to the new house, where he stopped to speak with the carpenters, and they climbed part way up the hill to see how the frame looked from there. Then she told him what Rosy had told her; she knew that Rosy would expect her to break her promise.

Instead of blaming Rosy for her violence Powell said, "He ought to be cowhided!" and instantly Ann, terror-stricken to silence, saw him cowhiding Bickler. But after the silence Powell began to retreat from his impetuous outburst. "Of course, he could say he didn't mean anything of the kind."

"I was almost wishing he did mean it. It would put an end to the thing with Rosy. It's the plague of my life."

"Well, well," Powell resumed. "We mustn't misjudge him." With that brooch in his pocket, which he had never yet found the chance of making Bickler take back, he was aware of wishing to give him more than the benefit of the doubt. "Very likely he does know a woman there who wants a girl; it may be nothing more than that, and I see no reason why he shouldn't wish to marry Rosy."

"Yes, you do, my dear," Ann said. "She's more than his equal in character and heart and good sense, but she hasn't any education, and she never could get any; she doesn't see the use of it. She's a wild thing in all that, and she always will be. He'll want somebody that will do him credit with her manners if he gets on; and he will get on; he's the kind; and poor Rosy has no more manners than I don't know what."

"Very well. Then I must keep an eye on him. I'm glad it's come to this. Perhaps he'll be so angry that he won't come near her again."

"Trust him for that! And I'm afraid Rosy knew that when she struck him that way she lost the battle."

"Do you think so, Ann? Now I see it in quite another light. I believe she's finished with him, and he understands it. You must keep her up to that idea, Ann; and I will keep a sharp lookout for him." This was the translation of Powell's purpose to take the first opportunity for returning the brooch, and for speaking his mind freely to Bickler and appealing to his better nature. He did not see why he should not deal frankly with the fellow, and pending the cowhiding which Bickler possibly deserved put the case before him and shame him into letting the child alone or into marrying her. Upon reflection he did not see why marrying her should not be the more probable outcome. "As for his ultimately giving any trouble," he said aloud, "I don't believe there's any danger of it."

XIX

The habit of drink, which had fouled the blood in Overdale, retarded his recovery. He had naturally what his neighbors called powerful healing flesh, such as would have responded with prompt self-cure to any hurt, but, as it was, his bruises and broken bones healed so slowly that it was well into October before he was out-of-doors. Even then he did not get back to his work in the mill. A temporary miller, as Powell carefully explained to him, supplied his place; an amiable and voluble Pennsylvania German, whom Ann had to give his meals, though he slept on the buffalo robes in Overdale's den. He was acceptable to the younger boys because he let them play in the wheat-bins, where they buried each other in the grain and stuffed their garments out with it to unseemly corpulence. He allowed Richard to run the mill and dress the burrs; but at table he was dreadful to them all from his habit of helping himself to the butter with his knife after first sucking it clean. He was gentle with their father, and even respectful, so that Ann almost liked him.

Powell hurried the work forward on the new house with a constancy which the carpenters scarcely expected of him, and which he could himself scarcely have counted on. In the weeks that had passed the roof was shingled and the walls were weather-boarded, so that the black walnut gave its mellow color convincingly to the eye, and almost persuaded the neighborhood that its natural surface was as handsome as the white paint or the red brick of other houses. The sash was glazed and put in and the doors hung, and then the rooms were divided off and lathed for the plastering; but at this point Ann's patience gave out, and she decided to leave the cabin and move into the house without further waiting. It seemed to her that if she were once in it the work could be pushed forward much more rapidly; even if it were not plastered till the spring came with its drying winds, they would suffer less discomfort from the cold than if they weathered the winter through in the old cabin.

When they were settled in it Powell found a beauty in the conditions which almost tempted him to delay. The rooms up stairs and down, with their neat lathing, were like a succession of latticed bowers which, he said, might be covered with vines; he made believe for the children that plants could be set in the ground beside the chimney and trained over the partitions and ceilings. There was an open hearth in each room; in the first cool evenings fires were kindled on them, and the soft play of the flames through the lathing was so much prettier than any foliage he could think of that he said there was no hurry to cover it even with vines. The children fell in with his humor, and if Ann held aloof it was without reproach, but not without anxiety. She was anxious about Felix, and the more so because she could not make Powell share her troubled mind. Letters came from Jessamy, not very often, but regularly enough, reporting at first that the warm climate was doing Felix all the good that they had expected; then she did not write so confidently, but only said that he was getting on and was waiting eagerly for the spring, so that he could go North and could come to them at the mills. As the weeks went by she merely told what they were doing; and Owen insisted that this no news was good news. He read hopeful auguries into Jessamy's omissions, and Ann felt herself almost culpable in failing to share his confidence.

"The dear knows," she said, after one of these letters came, "I'd *like* to believe it, Owen. And I *will* believe it if you say so. You ought to know best. But if Jessamy feels the way you say— Well, it *is* a good thing, her sending those messages from him, about hurrying up the work on the house; and I hope you'll mind them, Owen. Don't wait till spring before you plaster. We could get on very well ourselves, but an unplastered house will be no place for a sick person."

"Felix won't be sick when he gets here in April; and the more fresh air he can get the better."

"We can let in enough air through the windows. I want the whole house finished before he sets foot in it, and I'm afraid if you feel that way about it you'll let the plastering lag along and it won't be done before summer."

"Oh, you needn't be afraid of that," Powell said; and then, "Ann," he continued, "do you know whether Rosy has seen anything of Bickler lately?"

"Why, no. What makes you think she has?"

Owen had not much reason, if any, to think she had, and he had brought the matter in partly to divert Ann from her anxieties about Felix; but he made the most of a fact in the matter.

"I met him yesterday when I was in Spring Grove, and I took occasion to speak plainly to him about Rosy." Owen did not say that the occasion which he took was the long-delayed return of the brooch. He had so often forgotten to give it back that he acquired the greater merit with himself for remembering it in passing Bickler's office and going in expressly to restore the gift. Bickler made no pretense of not knowing why; he said very seriously he was glad Owen had brought it, for he was afraid there was some misunderstanding on Rosy's part. He looked on her as a child, but he saw how his giving her such a present might appear to Mrs. Powell, and he wanted Owen to tell Mrs. Powell so. Without telling her so now Owen said, with the assumed shrewdness of not crediting Bickler with too much goodness, "I think he wishes particularly to stand well with us at present, for the election is going to be very close, and he has an exaggerated notion of my influence in this neighborhood."

"If he has any notion of it at all, Owen, it's exaggerated. Now that poor Bellam is gone, I don't believe you could influence a single vote," Ann said.

Owen laughed. "Why, I don't know but Overdale is working round to my way of thinking in some things."

"Well, if Bickler will only let that poor child alone, I don't care why he does it. Did you get any letters?"

"I declare, I quite forgot. There's a letter for you from Jessamy. I just glanced into it; she seems to be writing in high spirits for some reason."

"It's because there's such a decided turn for the better with Felix," Ann said, running her eye down the page. "He's better than he's been yet, and they're both so full of hope." She kept on reading. "Yes, there isn't one unfavorable symptom, and she's just as confident now as he has always been. What a load it takes off my heart! Now we must begin really to get ready for them. If only you won't let the plastering lag along!"

"Oh, you may rest assured I won't do that." Powell felt so sure of himself that for some days he allowed his interest in the political situation to occupy him, and did not agree with the plasterers to come until the day before the first Tuesday in October. "Well, to-morrow will tell the tale for Master Bickler," he said, as if that could possibly interest Ann.

That night he got his harp out, for the first time in the new house, and tuned it. He believed that he really played "Rosin the Bow" on it, and the children recognized the song when he sang it. Ann went cheerfully to bed after sitting up rather late, in talk of Felix and Jessamy coming early in the spring. The children's spirits had been damped a little by hearing that the mill would not make ruled writing-paper at first, but only yellow wrapping-paper; their father assured them that the wrapping-paper would be such as could be used for kites. He pretended to chase them upstairs to bed, and they had fun calling down through the latticework of the walls to Rosy, where she was washing the belated supper dishes in the kitchen.

Rosy slept in a little room lathed off from the kitchen on an entry leading to the back door; and the room of the Powells was on the same floor beside the front hall. Sometime after midnight Ann woke from a dream of Felix, and he seemed to be dying. Jessamy was crying over him, and a strange voice sounded through the room which in her breaking dream Ann thought was the voice of death. She started fully awake, and sat up in her bed to listen, while Powell slept on.

The crying continued: now Ann knew that it was Rosy crying in the kitchen, and the voice continued, low, coarse, and wheedling. It coaxed Rosy, and answered what seemed her bursts of protest.

The girl stopped her sobbing and wailed out: "Oh, mother, mother, mother! He'd never marry me in the world!"

The voice did not reply at once, then it said low, coarse, and wheedling, but clear, "Well, honey?"

A cry of grief came from the girl, and there was a rush as of steps and a sound as of a door flung open.

Ann jumped from her bed and ran to the kitchen. Beside the table, dim in the light of the dying fire of the stove-front, the shapeless bulk of a woman rose at Ann's coming and stood holding a bundle as of clothes. Ann understood.

"You worthless, good-for-nothing, drunken old thing!" she shuddered at the apparition. "Go out of my house this minute!"

The woman did not speak, but stumbled through the door that Rosy had left open into the night. The dark gave no answer back to Ann as she called, at first softly and then loudly and imploringly, "Rosy, Rosy! Rosy, child!"

XX

The candle which Ann lighted showed Rosy's sunbonnet hanging on its nail beside the door, and she went again and again to the outer steps and held the candle at her forehead and peered into the warm, windless dark. The rays which streamed to the border of the woods on the hill slope showed nothing, and Ann waited more and more hopelessly for the girl's return. Neither her figure stealing back barefooted nor her mother's bulk lurking in the shadows defined itself in the vague shapes which Ann conjured out of the trees and bushes. At last she went and wakened Powell, and they watched together till the daylight dimmed the candle-light.

Then she set about getting breakfast at the fire which they had kept going in the stove; the children woke, and the miller crossed from the mill, and the life of the household, broken in its course, began to make its way again over the interruption. It seemed every moment as if the girl must come back; all things were still so perfectly part of her presence that her absence was more and more incredible. Powell went away to vote at Spring Grove, and that was a relief to Ann, as if while he was gone Rosy would have more courage to return; she could not explain to the younger children; to Richard she could be clearer, and that was a comfort; and she could make him tell the others that Rosy had gone off in the night, but she expected her any time; the Dreamer knew of something tragical without the telling. Now and then Ann drowsed and had swift, long dreams which she woke from to the fancied sound of Rosy's singing and her steps on the kitchen floor, or her calling to the chickens at the back porch.

Powell came home in the late afternoon, and she had to bear his disappointment that Rosy should be still away. He reported a very light vote at the polls; what really interested Ann at all was the fact that Bickler was running behind the ticket. The next morning news came by the first passer at the mill that the rest of the Whig ticket had been elected, but Bickler had been defeated. The rumor of Rosy's absence had gone through the neighborhood the day before, though Ann had tried to keep it quiet. The miller must have told it, for she saw some of the farmers who had stopped at the mill on their way from the polls looking harder at the house than usual as they drove by. She did not care to blame the miller for it, and when some of the farm wives came the next morning to verify the rumor she confirmed it. She did not try to explain the fact, but her heart stood still when the first of her visitors offered to bet that Captain Bickler could tell where Rosy was.

The fear which she thought had been kept to Powell and herself she found was the common suspicion; the women who now talked of it to her were bitter against Bickler; they said he ought to be cowhided, that Mr. Powell ought to cowhide the truth out of him; there was blame for Rosy too on their tongues, but nothing like their blame for Bickler. His defeat at the polls was a judgment on him, but they did not believe that was the end of it. Ann alone seemed to know of the mother's presence, with its sinister implications, and she could at least keep that to herself.

The neighborhood talk grew as each day went by;

it spread to the children, and at the log schoolhouse two miles away the little Powells were asked if Rosy had come back or if they had heard from her. Ann silenced her own belief, but she could not silence the belief of others. It began to be said that Rosy had drowned herself, and it began to be said that Owen Powell ought to have the dam and the head-race dragged. The general gossip knit Rosy's name closer and closer with Bickler's, and from the depths of Ann's remembrance of the girl's cry and the mother's answer by night there was proof which even the optimism of Powell could not always resist. She urged no duty in the matter upon him; she could trust him for his duty as he saw it; but they were both in doubt of what his duty would be.

If it was to summon Bickler and demand the truth of him, Powell was saved that extreme of action, so alien to his temperament, by Bickler's coming to him unsummoned after the third day had gone by. He seemed to have timed his coming to the hour when the children were away playing on the other side of the hill, and he rode up to the back door of the new house and called softly to Ann in the kitchen. "Mrs. Powell, Mrs. Powell!"

Ann looked out, dumb with abhorrence and then with pity of the man. His face was as if drenched from tears, and as she stared at him they began to stream afresh. He choked down the sobs to say, "I want to speak to you and Mr. Powell."

"I'll tell my husband," Ann said, with more severity than she felt; and she called Owen from the front room, where he was arranging the volumes of the *Heavenly Arcana* and some Collateral Works on a shelf with some other books; he had not thought Pope's *Homer* and Byron's poems unfit for their company.

"Well, well!" he answered so dreamily that she doubted if he realized who it was wanted to speak to him. He came to the back door in his shirt-sleeves and stood in the soft October air, silent and waiting for Bickler to speak.

Bickler had dismounted and dropped the bridle on his horse's neck; it was cropping the grass at his feet.

"You know why I've come, Mr. Powell. Have you found out where she's gone yet?"

"I didn't know but you might tell us, Captain Bickler."

"Mr. Powell. you're a good man, about the best man I ever saw, and I want you to believe me just as if I was saying it before the Judgment Seat. I don't know any more than you do where Rosy Hefmyer is. I fooled with her, and I can't say I didn't mean her any harm, but for all the harm I ever did her she was like the babe unborn. I knew her mother was hunting for her, and I told her where Rosy was."

At the confession of this atrocity Powell's heart, which had begun to soften in pity of the wretched man, hardened again. "Bickler," he said, dropping any formal address, "it isn't merely the wrong we do that we're guilty of—"

"I know it, I know it!" the miserable man wailed out. "Don't I know it, don't I think it, don't I feel it night and day, every minute, every second?"

The Doctrinal truth was precious to Powell, and he felt bound to retract what he had just said. He recognized that it was a Puritanic contravention of the New Church precept teaching that there are degrees in sin, that all sinning is not of one quantity of wickedness. "I don't mean," he said, "that you are as guiltless of what you meant as if you had not meant it; in the nature of things you must now suffer the same as if you had done it, and I couldn't lessen your suffering if I wished."

"I don't want you to, Mr. Powell; and if you don't believe what I tell you I want you to take this and lay it onto me for all you're worth."

He held out the cowhide which he carried for his whip. Powell remembered how for far less he had said that Bickler ought to be cowhided; with the culprit before him it was a different thing. "Throw it away!" he said with loathing, as if the cowhide were a snake. "You won't have your punishment at my hands, if you've counted on that. We think Rosy may be dead. She ran away, we don't know where, in the dark; she probably didn't know, either; the poor wild thing may have fallen into the river, or the head-race, and been drowned. We are going to drag them, and if you choose to come and help—"

Ann had been listening within, and now she came to the door. "What are you thinking of, Owen? He shall *not* come! I wouldn't let him help find that dead child to save his own life."

She went further than she meant, and she was not proof against the man's prayer. "Oh, do let me come, Mrs. Powell! I won't make any trouble. I don't believe she's drowned, but if she is it's for me more than anybody else to find her. I wouldn't ask it to save my own life. What do I care for my life now? I'm done for. I can't hold up my head in this neighborhood again. All I want now is to show people how I feel about it."

"Yes, *to show people,* that's what you want," she said, with a cruelty which caused the relenting Owen to murmur, "Ann!" "Well, you won't come with *my* leave," she ended, lamely.

"No, I don't ask any one's leave," Bickler said, with fallen head. "All I want is just to come." He pleaded with pitiful repetition; Ann went indoors again; and at last Owen, worn out by his reasons and entreaties, said:

"If we hear nothing of her, we are going to drag the dam to-morrow morning." Then he turned away too, without other forms of parting, and Bickler thanked him haggardly and mounted his horse and rode off.

The neighbors came early with a seine. It was a long net with wide meshes, which they used for the larger fish whenever Powell invited them to the frolic of dragging the dam. "I reckon that 'll hold her," one of them said, as he tested the strength of the twine with a pull.

They had shut the head-gates of the race, which they were to drain later if necessary, and now they set about dragging the waters of the dam in two parties, one in the flatboat which Powell kept there and one in the skiff which they had carried up from the river below. Bickler had promised to be there among the first, but Powell thought it quite like the man that he was not to be seen. He himself directed the course of the flatboat, close to the shore, and at a point where some bushes overhung it Bickler parted them and jumped aboard. No one spoke to him, but at his appearance there was a sensation in the men poling the heavy boat, as Powell bade them, in the low tones to which they dropped their voices with his. Bickler took his place at the bow and stooped over the still water with eyes that seemed to pierce its depths.

There was no wind, and the slow ripple of the flatboat as it advanced scarcely broke the oily surface. From time to time a red or yellow leaf dropped from an overhanging tree and made a faint circle in it. At the seine's length away to the larboard the skiff kept even with the flatboat. When something caught the net below the waters, which had been lowered by opening the sluice in the dam, one of the men would say, "What's that?" Then the course of the boats would be arrested till the net was carefully lifted and a decaying branch or sodden log released from it and thrown ashore. At such times Bickler would shrink back from where he knelt, or hold himself unmoved, with hands clenching the gunwale. When fish were brought up they were thrown back, not without mute appeals from the men which Powell denied, or protests from the boys on either shore who followed the course of the boats and saw the bass and mudcats and pickerel wastefully returned to their haunts among the roots holding the projecting banks together, or in the mats of withered iris along the shore.

The search went on for hours until the whole of the dam was dragged; then there had begun to be murmurs of impatience among the crews which Powell could not check. In fact, the event had been losing reality for him, and he was glad to be able to say at last: "Well, we might as well stop. There's no use. Now we will try the head-race." With the authority which would not have been conceded to him at other times he led the crowd of men, with its border of dogs and boys, down the banks of the race to the flood-gates below the sluice of the sawmill. In his progress he was aware of Bickler keeping close at his side, as if in terror of himself, and as the waters began their sheeted spurt from the opening valves of the gates he felt the man at his elbow.

Powell himself believed that the girl's body, if she were drowned, might more probably be found in the race, which could, at any rate, be effectually searched; he seemed to draw breath in the wretch beside him and to watch with his vision for what the waters should reveal. He wanted to say to Bickler, whose gasping peculiarly molested him, to go away, but in pity he could not, and he was sensible of their calming their respiration together as the spurt from the gates grew weaker and lower without discovering what they mutually dreaded. With a sort of nether sense he perceived that Overdale had added himself to the crowd, and with bandaged head and one arm still in a sling was now appearing for the first time out-of-doors. No one noticed him, as if in the greater interest no one felt any strangeness in his presence.

At last the race was drained and the gates set wide. There was nothing but a heap of fish flapping and floundering in the scattered puddles left by the waste.

"Oh, blessed be God Almighty!" Powell heard Bickler groan out at his shoulder and then give a screech of terror and make a choking sound.

"Don't you be too sure o' God Almighty!" Overdale was shouting, and Powell saw him with his sound arm outstretched, as if he had leaped the pool that parted them; his hand was at Bickler's throat, pushing him backward and making his head shake from side to side. "If Owen Powell, here, 'll say the word I'll shake the life out of you!"

"What do you mean?" Powell shouted. "Let the man alone! Don't any one touch him!" He turned to the others, for they seemed to be preparing for a rush upon Bickler. "He's coming with *me!* Till there's something proved against him he's as innocent as any of you."

Some such disappointment as dumbly shows in a dog's eyes when he is made to release his prey, and something of a man's amaze at an unimaginable difference of opinion, was visible in Overdale; but he did as he was bid, and stood a little off so that Powell could put himself before Bickler and take, much against the grain, the wretch's elbow in his hand and lead him away toward the new house. He turned and called back to the crowd: "There's no reason why you shouldn't have the fish now"; and this, if anything of the kind were needed, operated a diversion, and Bickler continued safe in his keeping.

XXI

“Yes, Ann,” Powell said that night, after the children had gone to sleep, “you gave him shelter, I don’t deny, but can you say you gave him welcome?”

“I had no welcome to give him, and I don’t pretend that I had. All that I wanted after he got into the house was to get him safely out of it. I hate the sight of him, and I shouldn’t have been sorry if the crowd had seen him going.”

“Oh yes, you would, Ann. But the fish looked after that. If it hadn’t been for the fish, I doubt if your vigilance would have been enough to smuggle him through the back door and start him off to Spring Grove. But seriously, my dear, I think Bickler has behaved very well, considering the mischief he has made without meaning the whole of it. He certainly seems truly repentant.”

“I don’t care for his repentance. All the repenting in the world won’t bring poor Rosy back,” Ann said, with passionate pity for the girl.

“Well, perhaps she will come back of herself,” Powell hopefully suggested.

“No, she never will come back. I just know her dreadful old mother has got her somewhere, and that’s the end of Rosy.”

In the morning it seemed as if Rosy might have stolen back. Her sunbonnet hung on its nail behind the kitchen door, and her shabby little shoes, side-worn at the heels, stood on the floor beneath it; but the day went by, and the days after that, and no Rosy returned to wear the bonnet and the shoes. Her poor best dress clung to the wall beside her bed in that mocking facsimile of the wearer which clothes have the trick of, and in her bureau drawer, among her ribbons and collars, Ann found the brooch which Bickler had given her.

"He must have made her take it again," Ann said to her husband. "There is no telling how often the miserable scamp saw her or how he kept her from letting us know. We shall never have the truth from him."

It was Powell's belief, as the days and weeks went by, that they not only had the truth, but more than the truth from Bickler. He came almost daily, or, rather, nightly, to confess the wrong he had done and to repeat his repentance with some increasing form of self-accusal. He owned that he had made the girl take back the brooch and keep it a secret from Mrs. Powell, and he exaggerated his guilt in the matter in order to extract the comfort from Powell which Powell more and more unwillingly ministered. He began escaping Bickler and leaving him to Ann, who healed his wounds by unsparing cautery rather than such medicament as Powell's philosophic compassion supplied. The two, as they sat together in the kitchen, still haunted by the vanished presence of the girl, heard Powell tuning his harp, or striking it untuned, in the remotest front of the house, and singing to it some of the Scotch songs so alien to its Welsh nature. It tired Ann, too, having the man dwell upon his vain despair, his vain hope of finding Rosy; yet if he left these a moment with some hapless remark upon the minstrelsy she brought him pitilessly back and suffered on with him.

He still wore the fashionable clothes in which she had first seen him, for he had no others; but he seemed to have shrunk in them, and they hung about him in the neglect which they shared with his unshaven beard and unoiled hair. The splendor of his electioneering days was far from him; he remained visibly in the shame of his defeat at the polls. He rode up to the back of the house, and entered at the kitchen door with boots spattered from the mud of the country road. "I always think," he would say, "that I'm going to find her here when you open the door. I reckon you haven't heard anything yet?"

"Not yet, Bickler," Powell would answer, kindly, "but I don't give up the hope of doing so," and then the wretched man would begin with the tale of his suffering and with his self-accusal mixed with self-pity.

"I don't seem to care for eating any more, and I wake half a dozen times in the night. I always dream that she has come back, and as I get along nearer to your house I bet myself she won't be here. God's my judge, how glad I'd be to lose once."

Powell could not forbear a smile. "Well, perhaps you will yet."

"Mighty little chance, I reckon. Now, Mr. Powell, I'd like to go the case all over; go through it like as if it was in court."

"Well, Bickler, you've done that already, you know."

"But some points have come up in my mind. Still, I won't to-night. There's one thing, though, I wanted to speak about. Do you think it would do any good if I was to go into church, some church, and own up before everybody just how it was?"

"I doubt it, Bickler. Doesn't everybody know the worst already?"

"Ah, they know *more* than the worst! They don't know the best, bad as it is. I believe if it could be understood once— But what do I care what they think? It's what *I* think myself that I care for. Do you suppose that if I made public confession it would help me to get the Lord's forgiveness? I shouldn't care whether it made *them* take after me, and tar and feather me, and ride me out of the county on a rail, if it would only help me to get a little peace of mind. But nothing will do it, and that's a sign that the Lord isn't going to forgive me. Oh my, oh my, oh my!"

They had talked again and again to this point, and again and again Powell had assured the sinner that if he owned his sin to himself he had disowned it, and that this renunciation made before himself and his wife was morally as effective as if made before the whole community.

"But what I want is *punishment,* something to take it out of me," and it was at this point that the notion of relaxing him to the secular arm in the person of Mrs. Powell first occurred to her husband. He did not at once act upon it, but it finally formed his justification in summoning Ann to the conference, and when once the appeal had been made to her as a point for adjudication, retiring himself from the case and leaving it wholly to her.

She found at first a certain satisfaction in bringing his potential guilt before the wretched man, though in his collapse she could not always recognize him for the miscreant she theorized him, but at times felt as if he were some miserable boy, whose fault had found him out in worse guilt than it necessarily implied. From the pathos of this she had to recall herself to the abhorrence of his betrayal of Rosy to her mother; that was his greater guilt.

"There is one thing you can do, Mr. Bickler," she said at last, "and that is to look up that wicked old mother of hers."

"What good would that do?" Bickler gasped, in the reluctance which he had for putting his remorse to a practical proof; it was much easier to suffer shame at the hands of the Powells than take some action that would entail the public consequences which he had professed himself so eager to meet.

"It would do the good that nothing else would. It would be the way of finding Rosy, if she is still alive. Her mother knows, if anybody. If you can't find her mother, you can find that cousin of hers that cooks on the canal-boat. She could tell you where Rosy's mother is, at any rate. But why do you make me tell you all this? You are a lawyer and you know how to act."

Bickler answered, vaguely: "It's like as if I couldn't move. I can come here and talk with you, because you know about it, but it doesn't seem as if I could speak to anybody else."

"Well, then, I can tell you that's very cowardly, and if you are as sorry as you pretend to be you'll overcome it and do the only thing that's left for you to do."

"I'm afraid, I'm afraid; I don't deny it. I can't bear to speak her name anywhere, or to ask anybody, for fear I'll find out that she's dead, or worse than dead."

"Then don't come here any more, Mr. Bickler, for I won't stand it. You pretend to be sorry and to want punishment, and you shirk it in the only shape you can get it." Ann rose. "Now I want you to go and not come back unless you come to tell me that you've been to look for Rosy's mother and cousin."

Bickler got up perforce from the chair he was sunk in, and turned his cap on one hand with the other; he now always wore it pulled over his eyes and no longer jauntily slouched on one ear when he made his appearance at the back door. "Don't you think we had better talk it over with Mr. Powell?"

"No, I don't. And if you want to know, Mr. Powell is sick and tired of your coming here, and he'll never want to see you again unless you've really got something to tell."

"That was rather severe, Ann," Powell said when she repeated the fact to him. He looked down thoughtfully while she stared indignantly at him. "I *am* sick and tired of him. I realize that his repentance has worn out my patience. But it's dreadful, isn't it, that the remorse of a man should bore his fellow-creature?"

Ann was unable to enter into the psychological inquiry. "I don't know anything about that, Owen, and I don't care. It's nearly enough, your taking it that way, to make me feel that there's a pair of you—that you're as bad as he is."

Powell laughed now with a humorous sense of her excess. "Well, I hadn't any part in driving poor Rosy away, exactly."

"Perhaps you had. If you'd made him take his brooch back at once, or let *me* make him, it might never have come to his driving her away."

This brought Powell's guilt home to him. "Ann," he said, solemnly, "you are right. I am to blame almost as much as Bickler himself. But it was mere forgetfulness—"

"Forgetfulness may be a sin, too."

Powell waived the point at least for the time being. "And what did he say when you told him I didn't want to see him or wouldn't?"

"He didn't say anything. Just went. What else could he do?"

"Nothing, I suppose. But it seems rather hard."

The tears of vexation came into Ann's eyes. "Owen," she said, "if I didn't know how good you were, I should say you were the cruelest man in the world. And as it is, I *will* say you are the most trying."

"Oh, my dear girl, I know I am trying, and I am sorry for it. You have done just exactly right with the fellow, and from this out I will take him in hand myself. I realize that I have been shirking him, and I assure you that I have been ashamed of myself for doing so. I ought to have borne with him to the bitter end, and the least reparation I can make him is to stand his remorse from now on."

Bickler did not come the next night or the next, and then the third night Powell was true to his word and received him, though in illustration of her own regret for forcing the distasteful office upon him Ann presently joined them both. Perhaps a certain impatience for his report mixed with her compassion.

He showed a haggard face at the door, and asked, dry-tongued, to be allowed to sit down a moment first. He sat without offering to speak, and then had to be prompted by Powell with a "Well?" as sharp as he could make it.

"Well"—he took the word huskily on his own lips—"I didn't see her mother. I found the canal-boat, and I saw her cousin. Rosy—Rosy has gone off somewhere with her mother. I've been in Tuskingum the last three days, and I've searched the place all over—everywhere that I was afraid she would be."

He began to cry piteously, to sob and to moan, and to rock himself backward and forward in his chair.

Ann stared at him silently, but the sight wrought upon Powell so that he made several beginnings of consolation. "Oh, well, we mustn't give up all— Certainly they can be found somewhere or other— There isn't the least danger but what—"

Ann stopped him with a distracted cry of *"Owen!"*

XXII

No man lives well into the forties, as Owen Powell had lived, if he is of Owen Powell's philosophic mind, without realizing that it is not a misfortune misfortunes come not single spies. He perceives that he borrows from one misfortune strength to support another, and power somehow from their successive help to turn the day against them all. The trouble lingers near, but the man is left in possession of the field.

It had often seemed to Powell that his life at New Leaf Mills had been a series of large and little tragedies which were none the less tragic because they were also rather squalidly comic. He had grieved most truly for the fate of the unhappy girl who was like a child in his family, and he had fully shared his wife's anger with the means by which the offense came. His anger passed as Bickler's remorse persisted, and, though the remorse bored him more and more, he could not refuse him the sympathy the man did not merit; the stress of its reason remained. The girl was gone in mysterious silence to a destiny that his wife and he, though it harrowed them with its dreadful possibility, did not explicitly forecast, but left in the silence into which Rosy herself had vanished. Now when a letter came from his brother James at Middleville definitely renouncing his hope of joining the family community at the mills, Powell found a sort of relief in thinking of Rosy and her intangible disaster; and again when the new miller said one morning that he had made up his mind not to stay any longer, and the running of the mills must fall into the unskilled hands of himself and Richard, he took comfort from his brother's defection, and could at least join Ann in refusing to blame Jim and Sally for not wanting to come to such a hapless place.

But Ann's real stay in the matter was her faith in the coming of Felix in the spring. That was to be atonement for all injuries, compensation for all losses, and it seemed to her that it was by the direct favor of Heaven that the day after Jim's letter came there should be one from Jessamy reporting a great increasing improvement in Felix, so great that she was now fully sharing his never-failing hopefulness. The letter had been a week making its slow steamboat journey up the Mississippi and the Ohio, but Ann was not impatient with that. She began reading it aloud, and then she stopped her reading aloud and partly reported its tenor to Powell.

" Yes, there isn't one unfavorable thing. He's made such a wonderful gain in strength. Cough better; he sleeps better than he ever has. His appetite has increased. He takes walks and doesn't get so tired. They will be here in April if he keeps on gaining. And I had such a bad dream again last night about Felix! I suppose it was that miserable Bickler's talking about Rosy and thinking she was dead. I hated to tell you what my dream was this morning, and now I needn't tell you. Let's go and look at their room. We ought to get it plastered right away, if we don't the others, so that it will be good and dry for them."

The Powells were standing on the sawn-off piece of sill which formed their provisional doorstep, and Ann had opened and read her letter there. As they turned to go in she caught sight over her shoulder of a boy on a horse splashing through the tail-race and waving what seemed a letter in his hand toward them.

"Oh, what can it be, Owen?" she implored.

Powell went down to the road to meet the boy. "It's a telegraphic despatch," he called to her; it was too early in the history of telegraphing to call the thing a telegram. He fumbled in his pocket for money to pay the boy, and Ann suffered at the door.

"Oh, open it, open it!" she lamented.

Powell opened it slowly as he came toward her. Then, standing beside her, with his encouraging smile still on his face, he read mechanically: "Felix died last night. Coming north with him. Have written. Jessamy."

"My dream!" Ann said. "Oh, poor Jessamy!" And then she looked at her husband's face, and she said, "Oh, poor Owen!" She knew that he loved Felix, as in large families the eldest is apt to love the youngest, with fatherly affection.

She cried. Owen did not cry with tears, but he whimpered like a child controlling itself.

"He didn't think," Ann said, finding help in the detail, "when he sent me that bag of coffee that he was going to die before I used half of it. Where will she have the funeral? They will bring him to Tuskingum. We must be there to meet Jessamy."

The circumstances of their sorrow softened their sorrow, and their sorrow softened others toward them a little. The new miller promised he would stay until they could get somebody, and Owen left Richard to look after the younger children while he went with their mother to the funeral.

Ann told Richard about it when she came back. All the brothers of Felix had been at the funeral, but only one of them had talked as if he would come to the mills. He was the next to Owen in age, and was most in sympathy with him religiously. But he had not been able to wind up his business, as he said, and he was uncertain whether he could sell out.

"If he comes here," Richard's mother said to him, "I suppose we must go, and if he doesn't I don't know how we are to stay. I don't believe your father could make enough out of the mills to keep them going; he's only got along with your poor uncle's help. I'm sorry for your poor father every way; I know he likes this dreadful place, and that it will be a struggle for him to go out into the world again and find something. You must help him all you can, Richard."

She took the boy's hand and smoothed it with her own. "Oh, surely we can get something, mother," he said, and his adventurous spirit fired at the notion of getting it by some miraculous chance. "I don't believe it's too late yet for us to go to California. I could go ahead."

"You mustn't think of that, Dick, dear. But you might go down to the City and look round. You have such good business faculty. I have been thinking about it already, for we must settle somewhere or have the prospect of it before the winter. Your father has friends among the New Church people there, and you could see them for him."

The two talked the chances over, and took more and more courage from their talk. Powell was out looking after the pigs and hens; he had almost a personal understanding with the pigs in their wildness among the fallen leaves on the hillside, and with the chickens in their home-loving tameness about the back yard; his familiarity always made it difficult to part with them for the ends that pork and poultry seem appointed to in the order of Providence; at such moments he owned that he was inclined to a vegetable diet. Now he came in flushed with interest in certain characters among them, and already so cheered from his contact with nature that Ann tried to hide her gloom from him; she knew he had not really forgotten his brother, and that he had comforted himself from supernature as well as nature.

"You'll be wanting supper, Owen," she said, putting on an apron over her dress, "and I reckon the children will, too."

"Why, yes, I suppose I will, though I didn't realize that I was hungry. I declare, I never saw such a sunset. It blazed through the trees on the western side of the hill like a fire. Do you know," he added, fallenly, "that I wanted to tell Felix about it. Isn't it strange? But perhaps he was seeing it too where he is."

Ann could not say; she left him sitting before the hearth in the latticed bower which was to have been their parlor; and presently the cheerful hiss of frying made itself heard from the kitchen, where she was busy over the stove, while the children were setting the supper-table in the other latticed bower which was to have been the dining-room.

Richard had gone to get some apples from the Bladen orchard, where the Powells were always welcome without special leave. Lizzie Bladen was there picking mushrooms, and he helped her fill her apron with them before he filled his own hat and pockets with apples. They did not talk much; only a few shy words. She asked him if his father and mother had got back from the funeral, and she said she would like to see Tuskingum again. Dick was cautious even with her, and he said he believed if they ever left the mills they would go to the City to live.

She said, “ I would like to see the City once, but I would rather live in Tuskingum.”

“ That’s because we are more used to it, I suppose,” Richard said. When he remembered on the way home that he had said we, it seemed as if he had been rather bold. After supper he told his mother what Lizzie Bladen had said about Tuskingum, and she answered, Indeed she would rather live in Tuskingum, too, but she knew there was no chance for his father there; and they spent the evening planning for him in the City, while Powell was busy looking over his accounts by the parlor fire. He ended with more courage in the possibilities of the mills than he had when talking it over with Ann on their way back from the funeral. He had then taken the burden of her mood, but now he rose from his dejection. There was no longer any question of turning them into paper-mills or carrying out the scheme of a semi-communal settlement at New Leaf. That must be all given up, and Powell gave it up not without a pang then and there, though he must often recur to it regretfully afterward. What seemed practicable was some arrangement with Overdale, who could contribute his experience and look to the joint profits of the concern for his compensation, while Powell would supply the capital for carrying it on. He did not at once determine where the capital was to come from, but on reflection it appeared to him that his brother David, whether he did or did not decide to take hold actively himself, might arrange to let him have something to keep on with.

The scheme still wore so hopeful an aspect in the morning that he approached Overdale confidently with it. He could not help believing that somehow the man’s nature should have been changed by his experiences, and, though this was quite as unreasonable, in his philosophy, as the saving effect of a death-bed repentance, he could not persuade himself that Overdale was not cherishing a secret amity toward him and would not be glad to show himself a friend if occasion offered, especially if the occasion embraced an obvious advantage. But when he opened the matter Overdale bluntly refused, not quite with his old savagery, but still gruffly and finally. He said that he was going away from New Leaf as soon as he could get away. He was going to sell his stock and furniture at vendue, and stay with his wife's family near Spring Grove for the winter and then move West in the spring.

He did not vouchsafe an explanation or offer an acknowledgment of Powell's good-will; and Powell, in philosophizing the fact to Ann, who had tried to dissuade him from approaching Overdale with his suggestion, interested himself without rancor in the study of human nature which the incident afforded. He decided that Overdale kept his moroseness on as a cloak to hide the shame he felt before him because Powell knew the cause of his baseless terror in the past. The fight against this terror had drawn out the man's strength, and he could have died valiantly fighting, but his rescue had left him cowed. While the foreboding remained his secret he could keep his self-respect, but when it became known he could not continue without humiliation in the presence of the man who shared it. In a sort of way he was perhaps grateful to Powell, and his attack on Bickler might be taken as an expression of gratitude which otherwise he could not own. He was like a man who had been dignified by the vision of a specter and then cast down by finding it a shadow or a dead tree. Or perhaps it was only the man's nature to be surly and to find a supreme satisfaction in thwarting an expectation of friendliness; he was merely fulfilling the design of the Power which makes ugliness and makes beauty by the same creative impulse.

Powell allowed this possibility, which Ann, in language less psychological, suggested when she said she was glad that he was to have nothing to do with the sulky wretch, and hoped that now he would not try to make anything of him again. She did not otherwise betray her satisfaction in an event which took from Powell his last hope of remaining at New Leaf Mills. She realized too keenly the disappointment which she could not share, and she tried to make her gradual preparations for leaving the place as tacit as possible. Yet of course they could not be carried on, or even fairly begun, without his knowledge and connivance, and when she found him going about the wonted routine as if he were always to go about it she felt the necessity of coming to open terms. For a while she watched him dreamily denying by his actions the situation which his thoughts must have owned, and then she spoke.

"I know you hate to go, Owen," she said one evening, when he came in from a walk with the children and was building a fire on the parlor hearth.

He looked round, with his face still hidden from her by the blaze behind his head. "To go?"

"Surely you don't think we can keep on staying here?"

He sank back upon his heels where he knelt. "No, certainly not. But I see no occasion for hurry. If David should decide to come, perhaps we could arrange—"

"No, we couldn't, Owen, and you know it well enough. This house wouldn't be big enough for both families—let alone the living from the mills. Oh, don't you see, my dear, that we have *got* to go whether David comes here or not?"

"Yes," he said, so dispiritedly that she had hardly the heart to press on, as she knew she must. "I suppose so."

"Don't you *know* so?"

"I know it, but I don't realize it. I will try to realize it, my dear," he said.

"You must at once," she persisted. "Richard and I, here, have been talking it over, and I want you to let him go down to the City and look round for something you can get hold of. He has such good business faculty I know he can find something. We don't see why you shouldn't get hold of the New Church bookstore—"

"Ann," he said, and he got to his feet as he spoke, "I thought of that the instant you spoke of the City. It is strange that the same thing should have been in both of our minds at once," he said, tasting the mystical quality of the fact.

"Yes, it is," she owned, glad of his interest, even though it was so far from a practical interest.

"Perhaps," he said, "it was an influx from the spiritual world in both our minds. We must act upon it," he continued, with increasing energy; and that night he took the matter up with Richard and Ann. "Yes," he concluded, as he rose to wind the clock, "the outlook is very hopeful. You could get something to do, Dick, until I could work you into the business, or perhaps I should need you from the start; certainly I should want your help for a while. I have an idea that a New Church periodical of some sort could be made to pay." Ann looked a little troubled at this conjecture, but she would not discourage it.

"As yet we have nothing west of the Alleghanies in the way of a periodical. And in that event I should certainly require your help, Dick. You could solicit subscriptions and advertising." He planned it vividly out. Then as he paused, with the shovel in his hand before covering the fire for the night, he asked, "When do you think he had better start, Ann?"

"Why, the sooner the better," she said. "I could get him ready by to-morrow afternoon, poor boy; he hasn't so much to take with him. He could walk to Spring Grove and take the railroad cars for the City there."

"I don't know about the sinews of war," Powell mused, feeling in his pocket and finding a silver dollar there. "I declare, I hadn't realized since I left Tuskingum that we were poor! We shall realize it more and more, Ann, in the City. We have been rich here, for we haven't wanted anything; we shall have many wants there. I suppose a dollar wouldn't go far there even with Dick; the hotels are a dollar a day."

"Oh, if you are going to look at it in that light!" Ann lamented.

"I'm not. Walters has been talking about buying our pigs. I could send word in the morning, and if he pays cash in part we can start Dick off like a prince with five dollars in his pocket."

"And I'm not afraid but what I can get something to do while I'm looking up the business for you, father," Dick said. "If Uncle Ben's boat happens to be in, I can stay on that till she goes out."

"That is true," Powell admitted. "Well, we will see what a night brings forth," and now he covered the fire.

XXIII

The farmer who wanted the pigs had not changed his mind about them, but he had changed his mind about the price and about the amount of cash which he would pay when he came to look them over in the morning, so that in the afternoon Dick started for the City with three dollars and seventy-five cents in his pocket; it seemed to him a good deal, and he regarded it as capital which would readily multiply. His heart was full of the hope of adventure, and he walked along with his brother, the Dreamer, toward Spring Grove. His brother thought it would be fine to tell about the adventures which Dick thought it would be fine to have; and that was the great difference between them. They were sorry to part, but the younger would not have gone with Dick if he could. When they came to the point where they had agreed that he was to turn back neither of them had any thought of his going farther. They kissed each other in the fashion of their childhood, and then Dick kept on, and his brother stood a moment watching him in the pale afternoon light of the early November day and wondering how it would feel to be going off in the night to a place where he knew no one. He dreamed instantly an awful dream of himself in the supposed case, but he did not notice that Dick had no overcoat and no precaution against a change of weather except the comforter he wore stringing from his shoulders. He, no more than his father, knew that they were poor, and Dick did not mean to be poor for more than a day or two, if there was any faith in adventure. He carried a little linen bag which his mother had made and put in it a shirt and two pairs of home-knit socks for his sole baggage. After he rounded the southern slope of the hill, which hid the new house from sight, he came to the Bladens' house, with the orchard next the road. Dick thought he would get over the fence and pick up an apple or two. When he put his hands on the top rail to spring over, he saw Lizzie Bladen under the best tree. She came toward the fence with one of the apples in her hand; and he thought her coloring was like the apple she held out to him—the ivory, almost sallow, white of the bellflower, brightened by her gentle dark eyes. "Don't you want it?"

He took it absently. "I'm going to the City," he explained, as if his equipment needed explanation first of all.

"I heard so," the girl answered, looking down at the foot she was pushing against a tuft of grass.

Then neither of them spoke until Dick said at last, "Thank you for the apple, Lizzie."

"You're entirely welcome. Would you like more?"

"No, this will be plenty." Somehow it seemed now as if more apples would spoil her gift. "Well, I must be going, Lizzie."

"Good-by, Dick."

"Good-by."

Neither could say more; and it was the last time they saw each other.

For the rest of the family the days began to go with a sort of eager swiftness. The children were on fire with wild notions of the City; but the father went about the usual work of the place, overseeing the sawmill chiefly and keeping a slighter supervision of the grist-miller, who would have resented more and was, as he sometimes reminded Powell, just staying on to accommodate.

That week Overdale had his vendue, and auctioned off his pigs and poultry, and the larger household stuff which he did not care to take away. It was a stirring event for the neighborhood, and culminated in the departure of the miller and his family the next day for Spring Grove on the new wagon which he had bought to move West in. The children were scattered in different vantages of the bedding, and on the top, in a sort of triumph, rode the sloom deeply hidden in her sunbonnet. The miller drove, and Powell thought that as he passed the new house to cross the tail-race he might stop to say good-by. But he did not stop, and Powell did not attempt to stay him. Ann watched his passing with regret for Powell's letting him. "Don't you think you'd better go out and speak, Owen?"

"I've decided not. It's better as it is—it might afflict him to have me. It's more in his nature so, and he can manage better."

"You as good as saved his life."

"Oh, there wasn't the least danger of his dying."

In those days Ann relented more and more to the man whom she saw still so little able to realize their situation. One morning she found him, after seeking everywhere else for him, in the empty log cabin, coming down from the loft as if he had been looking the forlorn place over. "Owen," she accused him, "I do believe you've been seeing if this hovel would do for us if David comes to live in the new house."

He laughed in a guilty way. "I've been seeing that it would not do," he ended, with a sigh.

"Oh," she said, "if you could only see that the whole place won't do, and never would!"

"I dare say I shall come to that," he consented, sadly.

He moped, she felt, as the time went by, and he was cheerfuler only when some letter, full of hope without expectation, came from Dick. The boy had got a temporary place in the New Church book-store; but the business was not for sale, and he was looking for something else. The most discouraging of the letters seemed to cheer Powell most: he was like a condemned man to whom respite brings the hope of reprieve. That vexed Ann with him; but she knew he could not help it, and her heart ached for him. She had always had to fortify him for his encounters with the world, and she understood how in this retreat from it he had felt a safety and peace that he had never felt in its presence. With her practical mind she had not been able to enter into his poetic joy in a return to the simple things dear to him from his boyhood, but with her heart she could divine the anticipative homesickness that now possessed him.

Late one afternoon the Dreamer, who had been sent to Spring Grove for the mail, came back with a letter from Dick, which the mother tore open and read through with a flushing face, and then looked about her for the father. He was not in the house, and she ran to the back door and saw him stretched upon the hill slope above; there, propped on one elbow, he seemed to be gazing out over the landscape. She started eagerly toward him, but her steps grew slower, and she hid the letter in the pocket of her dress and kept her hand on it there as if it might escape.

As she came near and nearer the gentle child-hearted man, whom she knew so brave and wise for all high occasions, her breast filled with worship and pity of him, and it seemed to her as if she were going to deal him some cruel hurt with the news she had. She remembered how good and patient he had been through the trials of their life in the squalor of that place, which he could have liked no more than she; how hard he had worked; how he helped her keep her courage through their common trials from the rude conditions among the rude neighbors, in the hope of bettering both. She remembered the unselfish purpose which he had infused into the necessity of their coming, and how he had not chosen to come, but, being chosen, had sought for beauty in their squalid lot; how he had never repined at the worst of it, but with his sweet humor had tried to laugh the ugliness away. She knew the gifts of heart and mind which needed only the push of ambition to make him valued in the world, and she blamed herself for blaming him that he had taken so modestly the ignorant ill-will of the clowns and savages about him. She considered, swiftly, as she slowed her swift pace, that his solace and reparation were in her and in their children, and that he had not cared for anything outside of his home except for the aspect of those fields and woods which she abhorred. She perceived as never before that he loved the countenance of the seasons and the skies, unvexed by the noise and turmoil of the town where he had somehow found himself so unfitted for the struggle in which she believed he might have succeeded. She was going now to take him from the simple things of nature so dear to him, and hurry him back into the town, and plunge him again into the cares and troubles which might harass him into another failure. She could not bear it, and she ran toward him with the renunciation in her will that took her breath and made her heart beat so that she shook with it as she stood beside him.

"I was just thinking, Ann," he said, smiling without waiting for her to speak, "how beautiful this prospect is. I suppose that in the spiritual world there will be scenery that will far surpass it; in fact, according as our mood is there, we shall create scenes of heavenly beauty. But—but—this is dear because it is familiar, because it is like a beloved face, because I *know* it— Why, Ann!"

She had sunk down beside him, and she began to cry, with her face in her hands. He took them down and wiped away her tears with his handkerchief, as if they were young people together. "What is the matter, my poor girl?"

She turned bravely upon him. "Owen," she demanded, "would you like to stay here? Because if you would I am ready to stay, and I will never say another word against the place. I know we could make the log cabin do."

"Have you had a letter from David? Have they decided to come?"

"No, it isn't from him. But whether they come or not I'm ready to stay. Don't you believe me, Owen?"

He took the hand she had put on his knee and held it there in his hand. "I believe you would try, and that is all that is expected of us. But we can't stay, Ann. The cabin is hardly fit for cattle, and, besides, how could I carry on the mills? I have no means, and I realize that I am unfit to deal with the people about here. I think they are friendlier than they were, but they don't understand me, and I don't believe I've ever understood them."

"They are savages!" Ann passionately broke out.

"Oh no, oh no; not quite so bad as that, though they are not very polished. I fancy I can get on better with people of a somewhat more advanced civilization. At any rate, I am willing to make the experiment."

“ Do you say that because you know I want it?”

“ I know you want it, but I don’t say it for that reason. I rather want it myself at times. This has been a beautiful dream—”

“ Owen, if ever I said a true word to you in my life I am saying it now! I want to stay here; I want to stay *here,* and not go to the City.”

“ But you can’t stay, Ann; that dream is passed, and we can’t dream it over again.”

“ Then, there!” she said, and she pulled Richard’s letter out of her pocket and threw it into his lap. “ Dick has got the business for you. The Wilsons are willing to give up the store, and they will take your notes for the stock and good-will; they’ve just heard of a chance in Chicago; they say that’s quite a growing place, and there are more New Church people there. They have been very good to Dick, and they’ve asked him to stay with them till we can come down and take hold; and now we needn’t even hurry.”

“ I think,” Powell said, formally, “that it will be better not to lose any time,” and now he lost none in confirming himself in the things she had said from Richard’s letter. “It seems a good opportunity, and we must not let it slip through our fingers by any sort of delay.”

He spent the evening in making a box to hold his books; but he decided to leave the harp, trusting it to the fraternal tenderness of David, in the possibility that some of David’s children might learn to play on it; his own had not, but Powell was inwardly aware that he himself had not. Ann and he sat up late talking the whole affair over, and it appeared to him more and more probable that something in the nature of a New Church periodical might succeed in connection with the book-store.

When they were settled in the City he was patient with the reasons which his New Church friends urged against the scheme. He had known some of them before, and he found them very agreeable and cultivated men. They were rather conservative in some things, but Powell himself, while holding fast to the fundamental principles of justice in politics, now confined his assertion of them to aiding the escape of fugitive slaves from Kentucky, whom he enjoyed hiding in the basement of his store, till he could forward them to some other underground station. He did not relinquish the ideal of a true state of things which he and his brothers had hoped to realize at New Leaf Mills, but he was inclined to regard the communistic form as defective. The communities of Robert Owen had everywhere failed as signally as that of New Leaf Mills, which indeed could scarcely be said to have passed the embryonic stage. But he argued, not so strenuously as he used to argue things, but as formally, that if some such conception of society could possess the entire State, a higher type of civilization would undoubtedly eventuate.

THE END

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Howells, William Dean
New Leaf Mills

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