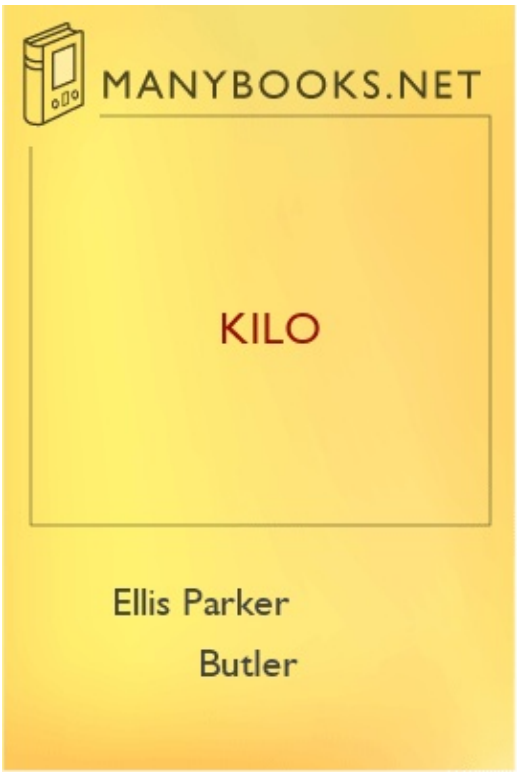

Kilo

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KILO Being the Love Story of Eliph' Hewlitt Book Agent

By Ellis Parker Butler

KILO

CHAPTER I

Eliph' Hewlitt

Eliph' Hewlitt, book agent, seated in his weather−beaten top buggy, drove his horse, Irontail, carefully along the rough Iowa hill road that leads from Jefferson to Clarence. The Horse, a rusty gray, tottered in a loose−jointed manner from side to side of the road, half asleep in the sun, and was indolent in every muscle of his body, except his tail, which thrashed violently at the flies. Eliph' Hewlitt drove with his hands held high, almost on a level with his sandy whiskers, for he was well acquainted with Irontail.

The road seemed to pass through a region of large farms, offering few opportunities for selling books, the houses being so far apart, but Eliph' knew the small settlement of Clarence was a few miles farther on, and he was carrying enlightenment to the benighted. He glowed with missionary zeal. In his eagerness he thoughtlessly slapped the reins on the back of Irontail.

Instantly the plump, gray tail of the horse flashed over the rein and clamped it fast. Eliph' Hewlitt leaned over the dashboard of his buggy and grasped the hair of the tail firmly. He pulled it upward with all his strength, but the tail did not yield. Instead, Irontail kicked vigorously. Eliph' Hewlitt, knowing his horse as well as he knew human nature, climbed out of the buggy, and taking the rein close by the bit led Irontail to the side of the road. Then he took from beneath the buggy seat a bulky, oil−cloth−wrapped parcel and seated himself near the horse's head. There was no safety for a timid driver when Irontail had thus assumed command of the rein. There was no way to get a rein from beneath that tail but to ignore it. In an hour or so Irontail would grow forgetful, carelessly begin flapping flies, and release the rein himself.

Eliph' Hewlitt unwrapped the oilcloth from the object in enfolded. It was a book. It was Jarby's 'Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science, Art, Comprising Useful Information on One Thousand and One Subjects, Including A History of the World, the Lives of all Famous Men, Quotations From the World's Great Authors, One Thousand and One Recipes, Et Cetera'. One Volume, five dollars bound in cloth; seven fifty in morocco. Eliph' Hewlitt passed his hand affectionately over the gilt−stamped cover, and then opened it at random and read.

For years he had been reading Jarby's Encyclopedia, and among its ten thousand and one subjects he always found something new. It opened now at "Courtship−How to Make Love−−How to Win the Affections−−How to Hold Them When Won," and although he had read the pages often before, he found in all parts of the book, whenever he read it, a new meaning. It occurred to him that even a book agent might have reason to use the helpful words set for in clear type in the chapter on "Courtship−−How to Make Love," and he realized that sometime he must reach the age when he would need a home of his own. For years he had thought of woman only as a possible customer for Jarby's Encyclopedia. Every woman, not already married, he now saw, might be a possible Mrs. Eliph' Hewlitt.

Suddenly he raised his head. On the breeze there was borne to him the sound of voices−−many voices. He closed the book with a bang. His small body became tense; his eyes glittered. He scented prey. He wrapped the book in its oilcloth, laid it upon the buggy seat, and taking Irontail by the bridle, started in the direction of the voices.

Half a mile down the road he came upon a scene of merriment. In a cleared grove men, women and children were gathered; it was a church picnic. Eliph' Hewlitt took his hitching strap from beneath the buggy seat and secured Irontail to a tree.

"Church picnic," he said to himself; "one, two, sixteen, twenty−four, AND the minister. Good for twelve copies of Jarby's Encyclopedia or I'm no good myself. I love church picnics. What so lovely as to see the pastor and his flock gathered together in a bunch, as I may say, like ten−pins, ready to be scooped in, all at one shot?"

He walked up to the rail fence and leaned against it so that he might be seen and invited in. It was better policy than pushing himself forward, and it gave him time to study the faces. He did not find them hopeful

subjects. They were not the faces of readers. They were not even the faces of buyers. Even in their holiday finery, the women were shabby and the men were careworn. The minister himself, white−bearded and gray−haired, showed more signs of spiritual grace than intellectual strength.

One woman, fresh and bright as a butterfly, appeared among them, and Eliph' Hewlitt knew her at once as a city dweller, who had somehow got into this dull and hard−working community. Almost at the same moment she noticed him, and approached him. She smiled kindly and extended her hand.

"Won't you come in?" she asked. "I don't seem to remember your face, but we would be glad to have you join us."

Eliph' Hewlitt shook his head.

"No'm," he said sadly. "I'd better not come in. Not that I don't want to, but I wouldn't be welcome. There ain't anything I like so much as church picnics, and when I was a boy I used to cry for them, but I wouldn't dare join you. I'm a"−− he looked around cautiously, and said in a whisper−−"I'm a book agent."

The lady laughed.

"Of course," she said, "that DOES make a difference; but you needn't be a book agent to−day. You can forget it for a while and join us."

Eliph' Hewlitt shook his head again.

"That's it," he said. "That's just the reason. I CAN'T forget it. I try to, but I can't. Just when I don't want to, I break out, and before I know it I've sold everybody a book, and then I feel like I'd imposed on good nature. They take me in as a friend and then I sell 'em a copy of Jarby's 'Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art,' ten thousand and one subjects, from A to Z, including recipes for every known use, quotations from famous authors, lives of famous men, and, in one word, all the world's wisdom condensed into one volume, five dollars, neatly bound in cloth, one dollar down and one dollar a month until paid."

He paused, and the lady looked at him with an amused smile.

"Of seven fifty, handsomely bound in morocco," he added. "So you see I don't feel like I ought to impose. I know how I am. You take my mother now. She hadn't seen me for eight years. I'd been traveling all over these United States, carrying knowledge and culture into the homes of the people at five dollars, easy payments, per home, and I got a telegram saying, 'Come home. Mother very ill.'" He nodded his head slowly. "Wonderful invention, the telegraph," he said. "It tells all about it on page 562 of Jarby's 'Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art,'−−who invented; when first used; name of every city, town, village and station in the U.S. that has a telegraph office; complete explanation of the telegraph system, telling how words are carried over a slender wire, et cetery, et cetery. This and ten thousand other useful facts in one volume, only five dollars, bound in cloth. So when I got that telegram I took the train for home. Look in the index under T. 'Train, Railway−−see Railway.' 'Railway; when first operated; inventor of the locomotive engine; railway accidents from 1892 to 1904, giving number of fatal accidents per year, per month, per week, per day, and per miles; et cetery, et cetery. Every subject known to man fully and interestingly treated, WITH illustrations."

"I don't believe I care for a copy to−day," said the lady.

"No," said Eliph' Hewlitt, meekly. "I know it. Nor I don't want to sell you one. I just mentioned it to show you that when you have a copy of Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge you have an entire library in one book,

arranged and indexed by the greatest minds of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. One dollar down and one dollar a month until paid. But−−when I got home I found mother low−−very low. When I went in she was just able to look up and whisper, 'Eliph'?' 'Yes, mother,' I says. 'Is it really you at last?' she says. 'Yes, mother,' I says, 'it's me at last, mother, and I couldn't get here sooner. I was out in Ohio, carrying joy to countless homes and introducing to them Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art. It is a book, mother,' I says, 'suited for rich or poor, young or old. No family is complete without it. Ten thousand and one subjects, all indexed from A to Z, including an appendix of the Spanish War brought down to the last moment, and maps of Europe, Asia, Africa, North and South America and Australia. This book, mother,' I says, 'is a gold mine of information for the young, and a solace for the old. Pages 201 to 263 filled with quotations from the world's great poets, making select and helpful reading for the fireside lamp. Pages 463 to 468, dying sayings of famous men and women. A book,' I says, 'that teaches us how to live and how to die. All the wisdom of the world in one volume, five dollars, neatly bound in cloth, one dollar down and one dollar a month until paid.' Mother looked up at me and says, 'Eliph', put me down for one copy.' So I did. I hope I may do the same for you."

The lady was about to speak, but Eliph' Hewlitt held up his hand warningly.

"No," he said. "I beg your pardon. I didn't MEAN to say that. I couldn't think of taking your order. I didn't mean to ask it any more than I meant to ask mother. It's habit, and that's what I'm afraid of. I'd better not intrude."

The lady evidently did not agree with him. He amused her because he was what she called a "type," and she was always on the lookout for "types." She urged him to join the picnic, and said he could try not to talk books, and reminded him that no one could do more than try. He climbed the fence with a reluctance that was the more noticeable because his climbing was retarded by the oilcloth−covered parcel he held beneath his arm. The lady smiled as she noticed that he had not feared his soliciting habits sufficiently to leave the book in the buggy, and she made a mental note of this to be used in the story she meant to write about this book−agent type.

"My name is Smith," she told him, as she tripped lightly toward the group about the lunch baskets.

Eliph' Hewlitt was a small man and his movements were short and jerky. He drew his hand over his red whiskers and coughed gently when she mentioned her name, and as she hurried on before him he looked at her tall, straight figure; noticed the stylish mode of her simple summer gown, and caught a glimpse of low, white shoes and neat ankles covered by delicately woven silk.

"Courtship−−How to Make Love−−How to Win the Affections−−How to Hold Them When Won," he meditated. "Lovely, but she will not suit. She is an encyclopedia of knowledge and compendium of literature, science and art, but she is not the edition I can afford. She is gilt−edged and morocco bound, and an ornament to any parlor, but I can't afford her. My style is cloth, good substantial cloth, one dollar down and one dollar a month until paid. As I might say."

CHAPTER II

Susan

Mrs. Tarbro−Smith had arranged the picnic herself, hoping to bring a little pleasure into the dullness of the summer, enliven the interest in the little church, and make a pleasant day for the people of Clarence, and she had succeeded in this as in everything she had undertaken during her summer in Iowa. As the leader of her own little circle of bright people in New York, she was accustomed to doing things successfully, and perhaps she was too sure of always having things her own way. As sister of the world−famous author, Marriott Nolan Tarbro, she was always received with consideration in New York, even by editors, but in seeking out a dead

eddy in middle Iowa she had been in search of the two things that the woman author most desires, and best handles: local color and types. The editor of MURRAY'S MAGAZINE had told her that his native ground−−middle Iowa−−offered fresh material for her pen, and, intent on opening this new mine of local color, she had stolen away without letting even her most intimate friends know where she was going. To have her coming heralded would have put her "types" on their guard, and for that reason she had assumed as an impenetrable incognito one−half her name. No rays of reflected fame glittered on plain Mrs. Smith.

While her literary side had found some pleasure in studying the people she had fallen among, she was not able to recognize the distinctness of type in them that the editor of MURRAY'S had led her to believe she should find. She had hoped to discover in Clarence a type as sharply defined as the New England Yankee or the York County Dutch of Pennsylvania, but she could not see that the middle Iowan was anything but the average country person such as is found anywhere in Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio, a type that is hard to portray with fidelity, except with rather more skill than she felt she had, since it is composed of innumerable ingredients drawn not only from New England, but from nearly every State, and from all the nations of Europe. However, her kindness of heart had been able to exert itself bountifully, and she had had enough experience in her sundry searches for local color to know that a lapse of time and of distance would emphasize the types she was now seeing, and that by the middle of the winter, when once more in her New York apartment, her present experiences and observations would have the right perspective, and their salient features would stand out more plainly. So she won the hearts of her hostess, and of the dozen or more children of the house, with small gifts, and overjoyed with this she set about making the whole community happier. Little presents, smiles, and kind words meant so much to the overworked, hopeless women, and her cheery manner was so pleasant to men and children, that all worshipped her−−clumsily and mutely, but whole−heartedly. She was a fairy lady to them.

The truth was that, in her eagerness to secure the most vivid kind of local color, she had gone a step too far. Clarence, with its decayed sidewalks and rotting buildings, was not typical of middle Iowa any more than a stagnant pool lift by a receded river after a flood is typical of the river itself. Before the days of railroads Clarence had been a lively little town, but it was on the top of a hill, and, when the engineer of the Jefferson Western Railroad had laid his ruler on the map and had drawn a straight line across Iowa to represent the course of the road, Clarence had been left ten or twelve miles to one side, and, as the town was not important enough to justify spoiling the beauty of the straight line by putting a curve in it, a station was marked on the road at the point nearest Clarence, and called Kilo. For a while the new station was merely a sidetrack on the level prairie, a convenience for the men of Clarence, but before Clarence knew how it had happened Kilo was a flourishing town, and the older town on the hill had begun to decay. Even while Clarence was still sneering at Kilo as a sidetrack village, Kilo had begun to sneer at Clarence as a played−out crossroads settlement. Clarence, when Mrs. Tarbro−Smith visited it, was no more typical of middle Iowa than a sunfish really resembles the sun.

In Clarence Mrs. Smith's best loved and best loving admirer was Susan, daughter of her hostess, and, to Mrs. Smith, Susan was the long sought and impossible−−a good maid. From the first Susan had attached herself to Mrs. Smith, and, for love and two dollars a week, she learned all that a lady's maid should know. When Mrs. Smith asked her if she would like to go to New York, Susan jumped up and down and clapped her hands. Susan was as sweet and lovable as she was useful, and under Mrs. Smith's care she had been transformed into such a thing of beauty that Clarence could hardly recognize her. Instead of tow−colored hair, crowded back by means of a black rubber comb, Susan had been taught a neat arrangement of her blonde locks−−so great is the magic of a few deft touches. Instead of being a gawky girl of seventeen, in a faded blue calico wrapper, Susan, as transformed by one of Mrs. Smith's simple white gowns, was a young lady. She so worshipped Mrs. Smith that she imitated her in everything, even to the lesser things, like motions of the hand, and tossings of the head.

When Mrs. Smith broached the matter of taking Susan to New York, she received a shock from Mr. and Mrs. Bell. She had not for one moment doubted that they would be delighted to find that Susan could have a good

home, good wages, and a city life, instead of the existence in such a town as Clarence.

"Well, now," Mr. Bell said, "we gotter sort o' talk it over, me an' ma, 'fore we decide that. Susan's a'most our baby, she is. T'hain't but four of 'em younger than what she is in our fambly. We'll let you know, hey?"

Ma and Pa Bell talked it over carefully and came to a decision. The decision was that they had better talk it over with some of the neighbors. The neighbors met at Bell's and talked it over openly in the presence of Mrs. Smith.

They agreed that it would be a great chance for Susan, and they said that no one could want a nicer, kinder lady for boss than what Mrs. Smith was−−"but 'tain't noways right to take no risks."

"You see, ma'am," said Ma Bell, "WE don't know who you are no more than nothin', do we? And we do know how as them big towns is ungodly to beat the band, don't we? I remember my grandma tellin' me when I was a little girl about the awful goin's on she heard tell of one time when she was down to Pittsburg, and I reckon New York must be twice the size of Pittsburg was them days, so it must be twice as wicked. So we tell you plain, without meanin' no harm, that WE don't know who you are, nor what you'd do with Susan, once you got her to New York."

"Oh, I now what you want," said Mrs. Smith; "you want references."

"Them's it," said Mrs. Bell, with great relief.

"Well," said Mrs. Smith, "that is easy. I know EVERYBODY in New York."

She thought a moment.

"There's Mr. Murray, of MURRAY'S MAGAZINE," she suggested, mentioning her friend of the great monthly magazine.

"Guess we never heard of that," said Mrs. Bell doubtfully.

"Then do you know the AEON MAGAZINE? I know the editor of AEON."

The neighbors and Mrs. Bell looked at each other blankly, and shook their heads.

Mrs. Smith named ALL the magazines. She had contributed stories to most of them, but not one was known, even by name, to her inquisitors. One shy old lady asked faintly if she had ever heard of Mr. Tweed. She thought she had heard of a Mister Tweed of New York, once.

Then, quite suddenly, Mrs. Smith remembered her own brother, the great Marriott Nolan Tarbro, whose romances sold in editions of hundreds of thousands, and who was, beyond all doubt, the greatest living novelist. Kings had been glad to meet him, and newsboys and gamins ran shouting at his heels when he walked the streets.

"How silly of me," she said. "You must have heard of my brother, Marriott Nolan Tarbro, you know, who wrote 'The Marquis of Glenmore' and 'The Train Wreckers'?"

Mrs. Bell coughed apologetically behind her hand.

"I'm not very littery, Mrs. Smith," she said kindly, "but mebby Mrs. Stein knows of him. Mrs. Stein reads a lot."

Mrs. Stein, whose sole reading was the Bible and such advertising booklets as came by mail, or as she could pick up on the counter of the drugstore, when she went to Kilo, moved uneasily. For years she had had the reputation of being a great reader, and brought face to face with the sister of an author she feared her reputation was about to fall.

"What say his name was?" she asked.

"Tarbro," said Mrs. Smith, as one would mention Shakespeare or Napoleon. "Tarbro. Marriott Nolan Tarbro."

"Well," said Mrs. Stein slowly, turning her head on one side and looking at the spot on the ceiling from which the plaster had fallen, "I won't say I haven't. And I won't say I have. When a person reads as much as what I do, she reads so many names they slip out of memory. Just this minute I don't quite call him to mind. Mighty near, though; I mind a feller once that peddled notions through here name of Tarbox. Might you know him?"

"No," said Mrs. Smith, "I haven't the honor."

"I thought mebby you might know him," said Mrs. Stein. "His business took him 'round considerable, and I thought mebby it might have took him to New York, and that mebby you might have met him."

Mrs. Bell sighed audibly.

"It's goin' to be an awful trial to Susan if she can't go," she said; "but I dunno WHAT to say. Seems like I oughtn't to say 'go,' an' yet I can't abear to say 'stay.'"

"I MUST have Susan," said Mrs. Smith, putting her arm about the girl. "I know you can trust her with me."

"Clementina," said Mr. Bell suddenly, "why don't you leave it to the minister? He'd settle it for the best. Why don't you leave it to him? Hey?"

"Well, bless my stars," said Mrs. Bell, brightening with relief, "I'd ought to have thought of that long ago. He WOULD know what was for the best. I'll ask him to−morrow."

To−morrow was the picnic day.

As Mrs. Smith led the way for Eliph' Hewlitt, the minister left the group of women who had clustered about him, and walked toward her.

"Sister Smith," he said, in his grave, kind way, "Sister Bell tells me you want to carry off our little Susan. You know we must be wise as serpents and gentle as doves I deciding, and"−−he laid his hand on her arm−−"though I doubt not all will be well, I must think over the matter a while. Welcome, brother," he added, offering his hand to Eliph' Hewlitt.

The little book agent shook it warmly.

"'I was a stranger and ye took me in,'" he said glibly. "Fine weather for a picnic."

His eyes glowed. To meet the minister first of all! This was good, indeed. Years of experience had taught him to seek the minister first. To start the round of a small community with the prestige of having sold the minister himself a copy of Jarby's Encyclopedia made success a certainty.

He took the oilcloth−covered parcel from beneath his arm, and handed it to the minister gently, lovingly.

"Keep it until the picnic is over," he said. "I'm a book agent. I sell books. THIS is the book I sell. Take it away and hide it, so I can forget it and be happy. Don't let me have it until the picnic is over. PLEASE don't!"

He stretched out his arms in freedom, and the minister smiled and led the way toward the place where a buggy cushion had been laid on the grass as his seat of honor.

"I will retain the book," said the minister, with a smile, "although I don't think you can sell the book here. My brethren in Clarence are not readers. I read little myself. We are poor; we have no time to read. Except the Bible, I know of but one book in this entire community. Sister Dawson has a copy of Bunyan's sublime work, 'Pilgrim's Progress.' It was an heirloom. Be seated," he said, and Eliph' Hewlitt seated himself Turk−fashion, on the sod.

The minister took the book carefully on his knees. Even to feel a new book was a pleasure he did not often have, and his fingers itched upon it.

In three minutes Eliph' Hewlitt knew the entire story of Mrs. Smith and Susan, so far as it was known to the minister, and he leaned over and tapped with his forefinger the book on the minister's knee.

"Open it," he said.

The minister removed the wrapper.

"Page 6, Index," said Eliph' Hewlitt, turning the pages. He ran his finger down the page, and up and down page 7, stopped at a line on page 8, and hastily turned over the pages of the book. At page 974 he laid the book open, and the minister adjusted his spectacles and read where the book agent pointed. Then he pushed his spectacles up on his forehead and looked carefully at the picnickers. He singled out Mrs. Tarbro−Smith, and waved her toward him with his hand. She came and stood before him.

The minister wiped his spectacles on his handkerchief, readjusted them on his nose, and bent over the book.

"What is your brother's name?" he asked kindly, but with solemnity.

"Marriott Nolan Tarbro," she answered.

He traced the lines carefully with his finger.

"Born?" he asked.

"June 4, 1864, at Tarrytown−on−the−Hudson."

"And he is married?"

"Married Amanda Rogers Long, at Newport, Rhode Island, June 14, 1895."

"Where is he living now?" he asked.

"Last year he was living in New York−−I am a widow, as you know−−but last fall he went to Algiers."

"The book says Algiers. What−er−clubs is he a member of?"

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Smith; "The Authors and The Century."

"I have no doubt," said the minister, "from what the book says, and what you say, that you are indeed the sister of this−−ah−−celebrated"−−he looked at the book−−"celebrated novelist, who is a man of such standing that he received−−ah−− several more lines in this work than the average, more, in fact, than Talmage, more than Beecher, and more than the present governor of the State of Iowa. I think I may safely advise Mrs. Bell to let Susan go with you."

"One!" said Eliph' Hewlitt quickly. "That's just ONE question that came up flaring, and was mashed flat by Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art, a book in which are ten thousand and one subjects, fully treated by the best minds of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. One subject for every day in the year for twenty−seven years, and some left over. Religion, politics, literature, every subject under the sun, gathered in one grand colossal encyclopedia with an index so simple that a child can understand it. See page 768, 'Texts, Biblical; Hints for Sermons; The Art of Pulpit Eloquence.' No minister should be without it. See page 1046, 'Pulpit Orators−−Golden Words of the Greatest, comprising selections from Spurgeon, Robertson, Talmage, Beecher, Parkhurst,' et cetery. A book that should be in every home. Look at 'P': Poets, Great. Poison, Antidotes for. Poker, Rules of. Poland, History and Geography of, with Map. Pomeroy, Brick. Pomatum, How to Make. Ponce de Leon, Voyages and Life of. Pop, Ginger,' et cetery, et cetery. The whole for the small sum of five dollars, bound in cloth, one dollar down and one dollar a month until paid."

The minister turned the pages slowly.

"It seems a worthy book," he said hesitatingly.

Eliph' Hewlitt looked at Mrs. Smith, with a question in his eyes.

She nodded.

"Ah!" he said. "Mrs. Smith, sister of the well−known novelist, Marriott Nolan Tarbro, takes two copies of Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art, bound in full morocco, one of which she begs to present to the worthy pastor of this happy flock, with her compliments and good wishes."

"I can't thank you," stammered the minister; "it is so kind. I have so few books, and so few opportunities of securing them."

Eliph' Hewlitt held out his hand for the sample volume.

"When you have this book," he declared, "you NEED no others. It makes a Carnegie library of the humblest home."

The entire picnic had gradually gathered around him.

"Ladies and gents," he said, "I have come to bring knowledge and power where ignorance and darkness have lurked. This volume−−−−"

He stopped and handed his sample to the minister.

"Introduce me to the lady in the blue dress," he said to Mrs. Smith, and she stepped forward and made them acquainted.

"Miss Briggs, this is Mr−−−−"

"Hewlitt," he said quickly, "Eliph' Hewlitt."

"Mr. Hewlitt," said Mrs. Smith. "Miss Sally Briggs of Kilo."

"I'm glad to know you, Miss Briggs," said Eliph' Hewlitt. "I hope we may become well acquainted. As I was sayin' to Mrs. Smith, I'm a book agent."

For the chapter on Jarby's Encyclopedia that dealt with "Courtship−−How to Win the Affections," said that the first step necessary was to become well acquainted with the one whose affections it was desired to win. It was not Eliph' Hewlitt way to waste time when making a sale of Jarby's, and he felt that no more delay was necessary in disposing of his heart.

CHAPTER III

"How to Win the Affections"

Miss Sally glanced hurriedly around, seeking some retreat to which she could fly. Mrs. Smith, having introduced Eliph' Hewlitt, had turned away, and the other picnickers were gathered around the minister, looking over his shoulders at the copy of Jarby's Encyclopedia. Although she could have no idea, as yet, that Eliph' Hewlitt had decided to marry her, Miss Sally was afraid of him. She was a dainty little woman, with just a few gray hairs tucked out of sight under the brown ones, but although she was ordinarily able to hold her own, each year that was added to her life made her more afraid of book agents.

Time after time she had succumbed to the wiles of book agents. It made no difference how she received them, nor how she steeled her heart against their plausible words, she always ended buying whatever they had to sell, and after that it was a fight to get the money from her father with which to pay the installments. Pap Briggs objected to paying out money for anything, but he considered that about the most useless thing he could spend money for was a book. Whenever he heard there was a book agent in Kilo he acted like a hen when she sees a hawk in the sky, ready to pounce down upon her brood, and he pottered around and scolded and complained and warned Miss Sally to beware, and then in the end the book agent always made the sale, and Miss Sally felt as if she had committed seven or eight deadly sins, and it made her life miserable. Only a few months before she had fallen prey to a man who had sold her a set of Sir Walter Scott's Complete Works, two dollars down, and one dollar a month, and she felt that the work of urging the monthly dollar out of her father's pocket was all she could stand.

Why and how she bought books always remained a mystery to her; it is a mystery to many book buyers how they happen to buy books. Book agents seemed to have a mesmerizing effect on Miss sally, as serpents daze birds before they devour them. The process applied between the time when she stated with the utmost positiveness that she did not want, and would not buy, a book, and the time, a few minutes later, when she signed her name to the agent's list of subscribers, was something she could not fathom.

And now she had been left face to face with a book agent, actually introduced to him, and her father still under monthly miseries on account of Sir Walter Scott's Complete Works.

"I don't want any books to−day," said Miss Sally nervously, when she saw that she could not run away.

"And I'm not going to sell you any," said Eliph' Hewlitt cheerfully. He had studied Miss Sally thoroughly, with the quick eye of the experienced book agent who has learned to read character at sight, and he had decided that no more suitable Mrs. Hewlitt was he apt to find. "And I'm not going to SELL you any," he repeated. "This is picnic day, and I'm not selling books, although I may say there is no day in the whole year when Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art is not needed. It is a book that contains a noble thought or useful hint for every hour of every day from the cradle to the grave,

comprising ten thousand and one subjects, neatly bound."

"I don't want one," said Miss Sally, backing away. "I don't live here, and you might do better selling it to someone who does."

Eliph' Hewlitt's eyes beamed kindly through his spectacles.

"It is just as useful to them that is traveling as to them that is home," he said, "if not more so. If you ever took a copy along with you on your travels you would never travel again without it. Take the chapter on 'Traveling,' for instance, page 46." He looked around, as if he would have liked to get his sample copy, but it was in such a number of eager hands that he turned back to Miss Sally. "Take the directions on Sleeping Cars," he said. "For that one thing alone the book is worth its price to anyone going to travel by rail. It gives full instructions how much to give the porter, how to choose a berth, how to undress in an upper berth without damage to the traveler or the car, et cetery. And, when you consider that that is but one of the ten thousand and one things mentioned in this volume, you can see that it is really giving it away when I sell it, neatly bound in cloth, for five dollars."

"I don't think I want one," said Miss Sally doubtfully, for she was beginning to fall under the spell.

"No!" said Eliph' firmly. "No! You don't. And I don't want to SELL you one. Nothing ain't farther from my mind than wanting to sell you a copy of that book. Just rest perfectly easy about THAT, Miss Briggs. We'll put 'Literature, Science, and Art' to one side and enjoy the delights of the open air, and, if I happen to say anything that sounds like book, just you excuse me, for I don't mean it. Mebby I DO get to talking about that book when I don't mean to, for it is a book that a man that knows it as well as I do just can't HELP talking about. It's a wonderful book. It is a book that has all the wisdom and knowledge of the world condensed into one volume, including five hundred ennobling thoughts form the world's great authors, inclusive of the prose and poetical gems of all ages, beginning on page 201, sixty−two solid pages of them, with vingetty portraits of the authors, this being but one of the many features that make the book helpful to all people of refinement and mind. Now, when you take a book like that and bind it in a neat cloth cover, making it an ornament to any center table in the country, and sell it for the small price of five dollars, it is not selling it; it is giving it away. Five dollars, neatly bound in cloth, one dollar down, and one dollar a month until paid."

Miss Sally looked hopelessly toward the sample copy, which the minister was still exhibiting to the picnickers with real pleasure. She was enthralled, but she was puzzled. Never had she bought a book that she had not first looked through. Invariably the agent had begun his dissertation on the book's merits by an explanation of the illuminated frontispiece−−if it had one−−and ended by turning the last page to show the sheet where she must sign her name, underneath those of "the other leading citizens of this town." There was something wrong, but she was not quite sure what it was. She glanced back at the eager face of Eliph' Hewlitt, and mistook the glow of "Affection, How to Hold it When Won," for the intense glance of the predatory book seller.

"I'll take a copy," she said recklessly.

Eliph' Hewlitt's face clouded, and he put out his hand as if to ward off a blow.

"No, you won't!" he said, with distress. "You don't want one, and I won't sell you one."

He cast his mind quickly over the chapter on "Courtship−−How to Win the Affections," and recalled its directions. He wished he had the book in his hands, so that he could turn to the chapter and freshen his memory, but the first direction was, certainly, to become well acquainted.

"I don't want to sell you one," he said more gently. "I want to sit down on this nice grass and get acquainted.

You and me are both strangers here, and I guess we ought to talk to each other."

He seated himself as he said the word, and crossed his legs, Turk−fashion, and looked up at Miss Sally, with an invitation in his eyes. For a minute she stood looking down at him doubtfully. She was unable to understand the actions of this new variety of book agent that refused to sell books after talking up to the selling point, and she suddenly remembered that she was away from home, and that the book was sold on installments. She flushed. Did his refusal to sell imply that she might not be able to pay the installments?

"I'll take a copy of that book, IF you please," she said haughtily. "I guess there ain't no question but that I'm able to PAY for it. I've bought books before, and paid for them; and I guess I'm just as able to pay as most folks you sell to. If you've any doubt about it, there's references I can give right here in Clarence that will satisfy you."

Eliph' Hewlitt coughed gently behind his hand, and stroked his whiskers, as he looked up at the indignant Miss Briggs. He did not want to sell her a book' it would place him in her mind once, and, probably, for all, as one of the tribe of book agents, and nothing more. Yet he could not offend her. He might compromise by giving her a copy, but the chapter on "Courtship−−How to Win the Affections," distinctly advised this as a later act. First it was necessary to become well acquainted; then it was advisable to proceed to give small presents, books or flowers or sweets being particularly mentioned, and Eliph' Hewlitt would never have thought of doing first the thing Jarby's Encyclopedia advised doing second. He had been selling Jarby's for many years. He had seen the "talking feature" of the colored plates of the Civil War pass, and had seen them succeeded by colored plates of the Franco−Prussian War, and had seen these make way for colored plates of one war after another until the present plates of the Spanish War appeared, and through all these changes in the last chapter he had studied the book until he knew its contents as well as he knew his "two−−times−−two." He could recite the book forward or backward, read it upside down−−as a book agent has to read a book when it is in a customer's lap−−or sideways, and could turn promptly to nearly any word in it without hesitation. The more he studied it the more he loved it and admired it and believed in it. It was his whole literature, and he found it to be sufficient. If he saw a thing in Jarby's he knew it was so, and if it was not in Jarby's it was not worth knowing. Under such circumstances he could not make Miss Sally a present of the book until he and she had first become well acquainted. Jarby's said so. He scrambled hurriedly to his feet.

"Miss Briggs," he said earnestly, "You ain't near guessing the reason why I don't want to sell you a copy of ;the world−famous volume. You ain't nowhere near it at all. If I was to tell you what the reason was I guess you'd be surprised. But I ain't going to tell you. It ain't because you can't pay for it, for if it was a library of one thousand volumes at ten dollars a volume, ten dollars down and ten dollars a month, I'd be glad to take your order. And it ain't because I ain't going to sell any more copies here, because I am, and I'm going to sell all I can, right here at this picnic, just to show you what I can do when I try. But I ain't going to sell you one. I've got a good reason.

Miss Sally was not fully pacified by this, for now she was sure she had guessed the reason Eliph' Hewlitt did no want to sell her a copy. She imagined now that some book agent had told him of her father's aversion to books−−when they had to be paid for−−and that Eliph' Hewlitt was willing to forego a sale rather than lead her into new trouble with her father. Possibly he had met the Walter Scott man. She turned away.

"I guess I'll go and help Mrs. Smith lay out the lunch," she said, as the easiest way to be rid of the annoyance.

"I guess I'll go, too," said Eliph' Hewlitt promptly and cheerfully. "I'm a good hand at that. It tells all about it in Jarby's Encyclopedia. Look under 'P':'Picnic Lunches. Picnic, How to Organize and Conduct. Picnic, Origin of,' et cetery, et cetery. A book that contains all the knowledge in the world condensed into one volume, with lives of all the world's great men, from Adam to Roosevelt, and the dying words of them that is dead."

Miss Sally turned on him sharply.

"Goodness sakes!" she exclaimed, "I wish you would either sell me a copy of that book or keep still about it. Ain't I going to have no peace at all?"

"I didn't mention it, did I?" asked Eliph' Hewlitt innocently, and he did not know that he had. "I was speaking of this happy gathering. Ain't it pretty to see all kinds of folks gathered together this way to make each other happier? It's like a living Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art, a little of everything in one volume, and all of it good. All the good things from parson to pickles. I suppose you put up your own pickles, don't you?"

"Yes, I do," said Miss Sally, who was now walking toward where the ladies were unpacking the lunch. "Why do you ask it?"

"It called to my mind the recipe for making pickles that is in Jarby's Encyclopedia," said Eliph', unmindful of the look of anger that flushed Miss Sally's face at the mention of that book. "Them that has tried it says it is the best they have ever used. That and seven hundred and ninety−nine other tested recipes, all contained in the chapter called 'The Complete Kitchen Guide,' see page 100, including roasts, fries, pastry, cakes, bread, puddings, entrées, soups, how to make candy, how to clean brass, copper, silver, tin, et cetery, et cetery. Them that uses Jarby's tested recipes as given in this volume, uses no other."

There was a stiffening of Miss Sally's back as she walked ahead of him, and even Eliph' Hewlitt could not fail to observe it. It told plainly that if he could have seen her lips he would have seen them close firmly, and he made haste to reassure her.

"I ain't trying to sell you a book," he said, taking a quicker step to reach her side, but she hurried the more as he did so, and crowded in among the other women so that he could not follow. He stood a moment watching her, but she began talking rapidly to one of the women, ignoring him conspicuously, and he coughed gently behind his hand, as if to apologize for her affront, and then walked away.

He could not account for his poor success in getting well acquainted with Miss Sally, and he began to fear that he had not fully understood the directions given by Jarby's Encyclopedia in the chapter on "Courtship−−How to Win the Affections." He realized that he had used that chapter less often in talking up a sale than he had used any other, and that for that reason he had studied it less closely, and he saw now, more than ever, that there was no chapter in the whole book that a possessor could afford to neglect. He walked over to where the minister was still holding the book, but now holding it closed in his lap, and he asked politely if he might have it for a few minutes. The minister handed it to him, and Eliph', walking to where one of the smaller trees of the grove made a spot of shade, seated himself, and fixed his eyes on the chapter on "Courtship−−How to Win the Affections."

For the first time in his life he was unable to fix his attention firmly on the pages of Jarby's Encyclopedia. His eyes insisted on turning to where Miss Sally moved about the cloth spread on the grass; the tablecloth on which green bugs and black bugs and brown bugs were already parading, as bugs always do at a picnic. Occasionally he stroked his sandy−gray whiskers, and whenever she turned her face in his direction he cast his eyes upon his book, but he could not read.

He hoped he would have the good fortune to be seated next to Miss Sally when the lunch time came, and he had little doubt that he would be near her, for it was likely that he and she, being strangers, would be put near the minister. He closed the book, seeing at length that it was impossible for him to read it, and, as the men began to bring the cushions from the buggies and place them around the cloth, he arose and went to bring his own to add to the supply. As he reached the fence, a barefoot boy, mounted on a horse with no other saddle than a blanket, came galloping down the road, and stopped before him.

"Say," said the boy, wide−eyed with importance, "is Sally Briggs in there?"

Eliph' said she was.

"Well, say," said the boy, "she's got to go home to Kilo, right away. Her dad telephoned up, and he don't know whether he's dying or not, and she's got to go right home.

Eliph' turned and hurried to where Miss Sally was standing.

"I hope it ain't nothing serious, Miss Briggs," he said, "but that boy has come to give you a message that come by telephone. I think your father ain't well."

Miss Sally dropped the cake she was holding, and ran to the fence.

"What is it?" she gasped.

"Well," said the boy, "my dad was in the post office just now, and the telephone bell rang, and he looked around to see where Julius was, and Julius he had gone outside to see what Mr. Fogarty, from up to the Corners, wanted. I don't know what he wanted. Pa didn't tell me. I don't know as pa knew, anyway, but I guess he wanted something, or else he wouldn't have motioned Julius to go out, unless he just wanted to talk to Julium. Mebby he just wanted to ask Julius if there was any mail for him. So pa answered the telephone."

"Well, what did it say?" asked Miss Sally impatiently.

"You've got a pa, haven't you?" asked the boy.

"Yes," said Miss Sally.

"Well, has he got false teeth?" asked the boy.

"Yes," said Miss Sally more impatiently.

"Well, that's all right, then," said the boy. "Pa couldn't tell exactly whether it was false teeth or not, the telephone at the post office works so poor, and pa ain't no hand at it, anyhow. He said it sounded like false teeth. So you pa wants you to come right home to Kilo. Mebby he's dying."

"Dying!" cried Miss Sally, as white as a sheet.

"Yes, mebby he is," continued the boy. "He ain't right sure, but he says you'd better come right home, so if he IS dying you'll be on hand. And, if he ain't, you can help him hunt for them. He says he went to bed last night, same as always, but he don't recall whether he took out his false set of teeth or left them in, and he ain't sure whether he swallowed them last night, or put them down somewheres and lost them. He says he's got a pain like he swallowed them, but he ain't sure but what it's some of the cooking he's been doing that give him that, and anyway he wants you to come right home."

"Goodness sakes!" exclaimed Miss Sally, "why don't he go see Doc Weaver?"

The boy shook his head.

"I don't know," he said. "I guess pa didn't think to ask him that. I'll have to ask him when I git back."

The departure of Miss Sally made a break in the orderly progress of the picnic, for it not only terminated her part of the day's pleasures, but also cut short her visit in Clarence, and she had to say farewell to all the picnickers before she could go.

Eliph' Hewlitt offered to drive her to Clarence, but she refused him, and arranged to have one of the young boys, who had a faster horse, drive her to Kilo. The whole picnic leaned over the rail fence and watched until she was out of sight, and then went on with the lunch, which was just ready when her summons came.

It was a severe blow to Eliph' Hewlitt. He had hoped to have carried his courtship so far during the day that it would have been at least to the third paragraph of the first page of "Courtship−−How to Win the Affections," and now Miss Sally had left, and he had not progressed at all. It reminded him of the quotation in the Alphabet of Quotations, in Jarby's Encyclopedia, "The Course of True Love Never Did Run Smooth."

Miss Sally's departure, however, and the strange circumstance of it, allowed him to ask questions about her and about Kilo that he could not otherwise have asked. He learned how far she would have to travel to reach Kilo, who her father was, and all that he wished to know. He decided that the only course for him to follow was to omit his canvass of the interlying farms and of the town of Clarence for the present, and follow Miss Sally to Kilo.

When the picnic ended, Irontail had released the rein, and Eliph' Hewlitt drove off, well pleased with his day's work. He had not only secured a wife−−for he had no doubt that it only needed an application of the rules set forth in Jarby's Encyclopedia in order to "Win the Affections" of Miss Sally, and "Hold Them When Won," but he took with him subscriptions for sixteen volumes of Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art, bound in cloth, five dollars, and two bound in morocco, at seven fifty.

CHAPTER IV

Kilo

The next evening Jim Wilkins, landlord of the Kilo House and proprietor of the Kilo Livery, Feed and Sale Stable, was sitting in front of his hotel, with his chair tipped back against the wall, trading bits of indolent gossip with Pap Briggs, when Eliph' Hewlitt drove his horse Irontail down Main Street, and pulled up before the hotel. Pap Briggs had not swallowed his store teeth; he had not even worn them to bed, and Miss Sally found them on top of the pump in the back yard, where Pap had doubtless put them when he went to pump himself a drink. He often lost them, as he wore them more for ornament than for use, and commonly removed them when he wished to talk, eat, or laugh. It was Sally who made him buy them, and he wore them more for her sake than for any other reason, and he was always uncomfortable with them, for they were a plain, unmistakable misfit, and felt, as he said, "like I got my mouth full o' tenpenny nails." When out of Sally's sight he avoided this feeling by carrying them in his hand, hidden in his red bandana handkerchief. About town he used to show them with a great deal of pride, and openly boasted of their cost and beauty. On Sunday he wore them all day.

Whenever Eliph' Hewlitt drove into a town he looked about with a seeing eye, for he had learned to judge the capacity of a place for Jarby's Encyclopedia by the appearance of the town, but as he drove into Kilo he was more than usually interested. If this was the home of Miss Sally Briggs, it followed that when he had completed his courtship, and had won her affections and held them, it would be his home, also, and he was curious to see whether it was a town he would like or not like. He liked it. It was a real American town, and it looked like a good business town, because there could be no possible reason for people building a town on that particular situation unless it was for business.

The town was built on a flat space, and the country was flat on all sides of it. It was on no river, brook, or creek. It was as unbeautiful in location as it was in architecture. It was just a homely, common, busy little Iowa village, and even so late in the evening it was as hot as Sahara; but Eliph' Hewlitt knew it at once for a good town, for the street was knee deep in dust, which meant much trade, and the four buildings at the corners of Main and Cross Streets were of brick, which meant profitable business. There were a couple of other brick

buildings on Main Street, and one or two with "tin" fronts, and of the other business places only one or two were so ramshackle that they looked as if their firmer neighbors were holding them up, letting the weaker structures lean against them as a strong man might support an invalid.

Eliph' Hewlitt liked the town; it was just his idea of what a town should be, not much as to style, but business−like. There were two full blocks of Main Street devoted to business, and nearly half a block of Cross Street was given over to the same purpose, and the dwellings were well scattered over the surrounding level tract. Three or four of the dwellings "out Main Street" had conspicuous lawns that had felt the blades of a lawn mower, but most of the yards were merely grass, with flower beds filled with the more hardy kinds of flowers, such as would grow tall and show over the top of the surrounding grass. The plank walks, which on Main and Cross Streets were made of boards laid crossways, tapered down into narrow walks with the boards−−two of them−−laid lengthways very soon after the stores were passed, and a little farther out became dirt paths along the fences, and beyond that pedestrians were supposed to walk on the road. But most of the houses were painted, either freshly, or at least not anciently.

The corner of Main and Cross Streets, the business center of Kilo, was like the business centers of other small country towns. A long hitching rail extended at the side of the street before the buildings on each corner, and the dirt beneath was worn away by the scraping of the feet of the many horses that had been tied to the rails. Just below the corner, on Cross Street, were other holes worn by tossing horseshoes at pegs, which, if America was composed of small towns only, would be our national game.

It was a good little town, and Eliph' Hewlitt was pleased.

On one of the corners of Main Street stood the Kilo Hotel, and before it Eliph' checked the slow gait of Irontail.

Jim Wilkins, the landlord, tipped his chair forward, and got out of it with a grunt of laziness.

"Hotel running?" asked Eliph' Hewlitt briskly.

"You might call it runnin' if you wasn't dictionary−−particular what you called it," said the landlord. "If you had to keep it you'd more likely say it was tryin' to learn to walk. But it's open for business. Want your rig put up?"

"Yes," admitted Eliph'. "I've had my supper."

"That's all right," said the landlord cheerfully. "I'm sort of glad of it; save the old lady gittin' up a meal. I was just tellin' Pap Briggs here that I figgered Kilo had the hottest mean summer temperature, and the meanest hot summer temperature on earth, and it's hotter over a kitchen stove than anywheres else. We generally have cold suppers in this here hotel, unless some guest happens in. Hey, S. Potts! Come here and git this feller's horse!"

The livery stable was convenient, just around the corner on Cross Street, and S. Potts came lankly and lazily around the corner. He stood and looked at Irontail a minute critically, and then felt the horse's hocks and shook his head at the result of his investigation. Then he opened Irontail's mouth and looked at his teeth.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" he said, and he called around the corner, "Hey, Daniel!" and from the livery stable came a very old man.

"Look at this," said S. Potts, opening Irontail's mouth again, and Daniel looked and shook his head, as S. Potts had done.

"And feel this," said S. Potts, putting his hand on Irontail's hock again. Daniel felt as he was told, and again

shook his head.

"Now, what do you make of that?" asked S. Potts triumphantly.

"I dunno what to make of it, S. Potts," said the old man, shaking his head. "What do you make of it?"

The landlord broke in upon the conversation with sudden energy.

"Look here," he said, "you git that horse around to the stable, and shut up," and S. Potts and Daniel hastily clambered into the buggy and drove around the corner.

"I wonder if anything's the mater with my horse?" said Eliph'.

"Matter?" laughed Jim Wilkins. "That's just S. Potts tryin' to show off before strangers, like he always does. He don't mean no harm, but he can't be satisfied to just come around and git a horse and lead it to the stable. He's got to draw attention to hisself or he ain't happy. He's harmless, but he's just naturally one of the know−it−all−kind, and he's got to show off."

There is no man in a small town who can give such a satisfying and official welcome to a stranger as that given by the liveryman, and when the landlord of the hotel and the owner of the livery stable are combined in one man he is better than a reception committee composed of the mayor and the leading citizens. He is glad to see the stranger, and he lets him know it. He has a gruff, hearty, and not too servile manner, and a way of speaking of the men of the town and the farmers of the surrounding country as if he owned them. Having bought horses of many of the, he knows their bad traits, and he has an air of knowing much more than he would willingly tell regarding them. He is not inquisitive about the stranger's business, and is willing to give him information. Probably it is his trade of buying and selling and renting horses that gives him such a flavor of his own, for he knows that the horses he lets out on livery are often as intelligent as the men who hire them. He comes as near the chivalric model of the old Southern planter as a Northern business man can, but his slaves are horses, and his overseer the hostler. He is a man in authority, even though is authority is over horses.

Modern civilization has few finer sights and sounds than the liveryman when he is asked if he has a horse he can let out for a ten−mile drive into the country. He looks at the supplicant doubtfully; "Well, I dunno," he says, "where was it you wanted to drive to?" He receives the answer with a non−committal air. "That's nearer fourteen mile than ten," he says and then turns to the hostler. "Say, Potts, Billy's out, ain't he?" Potts growls out the answer, "Doc Weaver's got him out. Won't be back till seven." The liveryman pulls slowly at his cigar, and runs his hand over his hair. "How's the bay mare's hoof today?" he asks. Potts shakes his head. "That's right," says the liveryman, "it don't do to take no chances with a hoof like that. And we haven't got a thing else in the barn except that black horse, have we, Potts?" "Everything else out," says Potts. The liveryman walks away a few steps, and then turns suddenly. "Hitch up the black, Potts," he says, with an air of sudden recklessness. "Put him in that light, side−bar buggy of Doc Weaver's. Want a hitching strap? Put in a hitching strap, Potts. AND that new whip."

The result is that you get the horse and buggy the liveryman intended you to have from the minute he saw you coming toward him down the street, but you get it with a fine touch of style that is worth much in this dollar and cent world. Potts drives the rig around to where you are standing, and the liveryman sends Potts back to get a clean laprobe instead of the one that is in the buggy. He pats the horse on the neck as you climb in, and as you pick up the reins he says, as if conferring a parting favor that money could not repay, "Keep a fair tight rein on him; it's the first time he has been out of the stable to−day."

Eliph' Hewlitt, in his travels, had learned the value of the liveryman. He used him as friend and directory. None else could tell him so well where the prosperous farmers lived, nor who was most likely to fall a victim

to Jarby's Encyclopedia in the town itself. From the liveryman he could learn which minister, if there were more than one, would be the best to have head his list of subscribers, which lady was head of the Society, and what society she was head of. He took one of the chairs that were ranged along the side of the hotel, and laid his sample across his knees. He chose the chair that was next to Pap Briggs, for he was ready to become acquainted with the man he intended soon to have for a father−in−law.

"Nice town you got here," he said.

"She's purty good," agreed Pap, "except for taxes. Taxes is eternal high, and it's all us propputy owners can do to keep 'em from goin' clean out o' sight. City council don't seem to care a dumb how high they git. I wish't I'd stayed on my farm."

"Taxes ain't so high here as what they are in Jefferson, Pap," suggested the landlord. "If you lived down there they'd make you holler, all right."

"Well, Jim," said Pap, "they ain't much choice. If these here young fellers git their way taxes will go right up. What do they want to decorate this here town all up for, anyhow? What you think young Toole was sayin' to me to−day? He was sayin' it was a disgrace to Kilo to have the public square rented out an' a crop o' buckwheat growin' in it. He says we ought to plant it in grass an' stick a fountain in the middle. But that's the way she goes; anything to raise up the taxes. All I says to him was, 'All right, who'll pump water to make the fountain squirt? Suppose the taxpayers 'll take turns, hey?'"

"Well," said the landlord, "I ain't in favor of a fountain, myself. I reckon a nice piece of statuary would look better, so long as we ain't got water works to make the fountain fount out water. But it don't look right to have a public square rented out to grow buckwheat in. It ain't city−like."

"It brings in seven dollars a year to the town," said Pap, "an' that's better than payin' out good money for statuary. I'm agin high taxes every time. It costs too much to live, anyhow, especially when you've got a daughter to support, and no money comin' in, to speak of. And just when some does come in, along comes a pesky book agent or somethin' and fools the women out of the money. They ought to be a law agin book agent. City council ought to put a license on 'em, and keep 'em out of town."

"Some towns," he said softly, "do have licenses against book agents. One of the relics of the dark ages, but abolished wherever the light o' culture is loved and esteemed. What so helpful as the book? What so comforting? What so uplifting? And who but the book agent carries help and comfort and uplift, and leaves it scattered around, one dollar down and one dollar a month until paid; who but the humble but useful book agent? To mention but one book, Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art has carried wisdom into a million homes, making each better and brighter. It is a book that makes the toil of the day easy, by giving one thousand and one hints and helps, and that sweetens rest after toil, by quotations from all the world's great authors. In this one book−−−−"

Pap Briggs had put his hands on the arm of his chair, preparing to run away, but the landlord leaned forward and looked in Eliph' Hewlitt's face.

"Say," he said, "is your name Mills?"

"Hewlitt," said the book agent, "Eliph' Hewlitt."

He turned to the landlord and looked him fairly in the face, and as he looked the air of suspicion that had suddenly shone in his eyes vanished.

"Jim Wilkins!" he exclaimed. "Isn't it Jim Wilkins?"

"Ain't it!" cried the landlord. "Well, I should say it is! And to think, you little, sawed−off propagator of human knowledge didn't recognize your old side pardner in the field of sellin' improvin' and intellectooal works of genius! Don't say you don't remember the 'Wage of Sin," Sammy! Don't say you don't remember Kitty!"

"Kitty?" asked Eliph' doubtfully.

"Well, if the little red−head ain't forgot Kitty!" exclaimed Wilkins. "Why, I MARRIED Kitty, Sammy. For an actual, truthful fact I did. And to think I should run across Sammy Mills after all these years."

"Hewlitt," said Eliph'. "Eliph' Hewlitt is that name I'm known by."

"And to think you stuck by that name all these years!" said Wilkins. "And still sellin' works of literatoor, are you? Pap, this is my old boyhood's chum come meanderin' backwards out of the past. And still sellin' books! Well, I don't want to discourage your ambitiousness, but I guess you've struck Kilo about the worst time in the century. Ever hear of a literary writer called Sir Walter Scott? Well, sir, Kilo is chuck full of Sir Walter; full as a goat. She ain't begun to near git through with Sir Walter yet, and I don't figger she'll take in no more libraries just now. Sir Walter hit her pretty hard."

"Ten volumes, fifteen dollars cloth, twenty dollars half morocco?" inquired Eliph' Hewlitt.

"The identical same," said the landlord. "I purchased a group of Sir Walters in red leather myself. So did everybody in Kilo; at least I ain't found anybody that's been missed yet. Paper here got some."

"My daughter Sally−−−−" began the old man.

"Same thing," said Wilkins; "you pay just the same if you bought the books. Why, Sammy, there's enough Sir Walter right here in Kilo now to start up a book business. Kilo's light on literatoor generally, but when she goes in, she goes in heavy. There ain't many towns where you'll find every livin' soul ready to swaller down fifteen dollars worth of Sir Walter Scott, two dollars down and one dollar a month until paid; but I calculate them ten volumes will last Kilo quite a spell, and if worst comes to worst she won't buy no more literatoor till she gits paid up on Sir Walter. I figger from my own sense of feelin's that about the worst time to sell a feller books is when he is still payin' once a month on the old lot. About the second time the collector drops in to collect on a set of works of literatoor, a man feels like he had been foolish, but he grins cheerful, and pays up, but if another man drops in about then to sell another set of the world's great masterpieces it is pretty near an insult to human intelligence."

Eliph' Hewlitt drew his hand across his whiskers and coughed gently.

"They told me in Jefferson," he said softly, "that Kilo was the most intellectual town in central Iowa."

"Everybody says the same," said Wilkins with a touch of pride. "The Sir Walter Scott man said it, and I guess it's so. But there's other things besides books. Kilo may be strong and willin' on books, but she's strong other ways, too, and just now she is lookin' at another kind of horse, and that's why I say you've miscalculated your comin'. If I was you I'd go elsewhere and come back later. Kilo has got more books now than she can handle without straining something, and just now her mind's off on another tack. We struck a big missionary revival here last week, and you can bet a wager that every dollar that goes out of Kilo these days, except what goes for dues on Sir Walter, is goin' for the brethren. The women folks is havin' a sale this very evenin' to raise cash to help the heathen."

Eliph' Hewlitt arose from his chair and tucked the oilcloth−covered parcel that had been lying on his knees under his left arm. He was a small man, and his movements were apt to be short and jerky.

"Missionary sale?" he said briskly. "I guess I'll go around and look in on it. Strangers welcome, I suppose? I'm rather fond of missionary sales, and I think the world and all of the heathen. Think the ladies would like to see a stranger?"

Wilkins grinned.

"Pap," he said, "what you think? Think they'll fall on his neck if he has any money? From what I have experienced of them sales I figger to calculate that anybody that is anxious to buy gingham aprons an' sofa pillows is sure to be took by the hand and given a front seat. I'd go around with you, but I've got my taxes to pay, like Pap here, and I don't actually need any pink tidies. It ain't far; just up to Doc Weaver's; two blocks up, and you can't miss the house. It's the yeller mansion, this side the road, an' the gate's off the hinges and laid up alongside the fence. But I guess if them's your samples in that there package, you might as well leave them here."

But Eliph' Hewlitt did not leave them there; he tucked them under his arm, and hurried away with brisk little steps.

CHAPTER V

Sammy Mills

"There ought to be a license agin book agents," said Pap Briggs spitefully, when Eliph' Hewlitt had hurried away.

"It wouldn't harm that feller," said Wilkins. "He's a red hot one at book− agenting, he is, an' he'd find out some way to git round it. I hear lot of book agents that come round this way tell of him. He's got a record of sellin' more copies of that encyclopedia book of his than any one man ever sold of any one book, an' he's a sort of hero of the book−agenting business. It makes me proud to call to remembrance that him an' me was kids together down at Franklin, years ago. Him an' me took to the book−agentin' biz the same day, we did. I needed cash, like I always do, and he had literatoor in the family. So we went an' did it. We did it to Gallops Junction first, and after that Eliph' sowed literatoor pretty general all over Iowa, an' next I heard of him all over the United States. Iowa is now a grand State, an as full of culture as a Swiss cheese is full of holes, an' I don't take all the credit for it; I give Eliph' his share. Hotels help to scatter the seed, but literatoor scatters more.

"One day, down there at Franklin, Eliph' says to me, 'Jim, you know that book pa wrote?' That's what Eliph' remarked to me on the aforesaid day, but I wish to state his name wasn't Eliph' on that date, an' it wasn't Hewlitt, neither. It was plain Sammy; Sammy Mills. Eliph' Hewlitt was a sort of fancy name my pa had give to a horse he had that he thought was a racer, but wasn't. It was a good enough horse to enter in a race, but not good enough to win. It was the kind of race horse that kept pa poor, but hopeful.

"'Why, yes, Sammy,' I says, 'I've heard tell of that grand literary effort of your dad.'

"'Well,' he says−−we was sittin' on the porch of his pa's house−−'Pa he had a thousand of them printed.'

"'Dickens he did!' I remarked, supposin' it was us to me to do some remarkin'.

"'And,' says Sammy, 'he's got eight hundred an' sixty−four of them highly improvin' an' intellectooal volumes stored in the barn right now.'

"'Quite a lib'ry,' I says, off−hand like.

"'Numerous, but monotonous,' says Sam. 'As a lib'ry them books don't give the variety of topics they oughter. They all cling to the same subject too faithful. Eight hundred an' sixty−four volumes of the "Wage of Sin," all bound alike, don't make what I call a rightly differentiated lib'ry. When you've read one you've read all.'

"'Alas!' I says, or somthin' like that, sympathetic an' attentive.

"'Likewise,' says Sam, 'they clutter up the barn. They ought to be got out to make room for more hay.'

"'This was indeed true. I saw it was all good sense. Horses don't take to literatoor like they does to hay.

"'Well,' says Sammy, 'what's the matter with chuckin' them eight hundred an' sixty−four "Wages of Sin" into the rustic communities of this commonwealth of Iowa, U.S.A.? Here we've got a barnful of high−class, intellectooal poem, an' yon we have a State full of yearnin' minds, clamorous for mental improvement at one fifty per volume. It's our duty to chuck them poems into them minds, an' to intellectooally subside them clamors.'

"I shook my head quite strenuous.

"'Nix for me!' I remarked; 'no book−agenting for me.'

"'Who said book−agenting?" asked Sammy, deeply offended. 'Do you calculate that the son of a high−class author of a famous an' helpful book would turn book agent? Never!'

"'What then?' I asks him.

"'Just a little salubrious an' entertainin' canvassin' for a work of genius,' he says. 'A few heart−to−heart talks with the educated ladies of Gallops Junction an' Tomville on the beauties of the "Wage of Sin." That ain't no book−agenting,' says he, 'that's pickin' money off the trees. It's pie ready cut an' handed to us on a plate with a gilt edge. All we've got to do is to bite it.'

"No, let me tell you right here, Pap, that the 'Wage of Sin' was a thoroughbred treat to read. It was a moral book. Next to the Bible it was the morallest book I ever tackled, an' when W. P. Mills wrote that book he gave the literatoor of the U.S.A. a boost in the right direction that it hasn't recovered from yet. It was the champion long distance poem of the nineteenth century. That book showed what a chunky an' nervous mind old W. P Mills had. There was ten thousand verses to that book of poem, partitioned off into various an' sundry parts so the read thereof could sit up an' draw breath about every thousand verses, an' get his full wind ready for the run through the next slice.

"That 'Wage of Sin' book was surely for to admire, any way you looked at it. Take the subject; it wasn't any of your little, sawed−off, one−year sprints. No siree! W. P. Mills started away back in the front vestibule of time. He said, right in the preface−−an' that was all poetry, too−−

Now, reader, go along with me Away back to eternity, A hundred thousand years, and still Keep backing backwards if you will.

"An' when he got away back there he sort of expectorated on his hands an' started in at Genesis, Chapter One, Verse One, an' went right along down through the Bible like a cross−cut saw through a cottonwood log. He never missed a single event that was important, if true. He got all them old fellers rhymed right into that book−−Jereboam, Rehoboam, Meschach, Schadrach, an' Abednego, an' all the whole caboodle, from Adam with an A to Zaccheus with a Z.

"That certain was a moral tome, an' no prevarication. It was plumb drippin' with moral from start to finish.

You see Eve she set the ball a−rollin' when she swiped them apples. That was where she done dead wrong, and that was the 'Sin' as mentioned in the name of the book, an' old W. P. Mills he showed in that literary volume how everybody has had to pay the 'Wages' ever since. It was great. I never read anything else moral that I could say I really hankered for, but I sure did enjoy that book. Old W. P. Mills was a wonder at poetry.

"It beat all how vivid he made all them Old Testament people, an' the things they did. Why, I never cared two cents for Shadrach, Meshach, an' Abednego before I read that book, but after I read it I never could git them lines of W. P.'s out of my head−−

The King perhaps that moment saw A thing that filled his soul with awe− Shadrach and Meshach, to and fro, Walked and talked with Abednego.

"I tell you, you can't obliterate them three men out of your mind when you read that verse once. You see them walkin' in that fiery furnace, even when you're in your little bed; walkin' an' carryin' on a conversation, which, when you come to think of it, was the most natural thing for them to be doin'. You wouldn't look to see them sit down on a hot log, or to stand still sayin' nothin'. Walk an' talk, that's what they did, an' it's what anybody would do in similar circumstances. I guess fiery furnaces has that effect all the world over, but it took W. P. Mills to see it with his mind's eye, an' put it into verses.

"So, when Sammy gently intimated to me that it was his pa's book we was to canvass, the job looked different. I might shy at an encyclopedia, or at a life of Stephen A. Douglas, but to handle a moral volume like the 'Wage of Sin' sort of appealed to the financial morality of my conscience. So I asked Sammy what the gentlemanly canvassers would get out of it.

"'Pa had a lot of faith in that lyric poem,' says Sammy to me, 'an' no one had a better right to, for he wrote it himself, but the publishing game was dull an' depressed about the time he got ready to issue it forth, an' he was necessitated to compensate the cost of printing it himself. And,' he says, 'the rush an' hurry of the public to buy that book is such it reminds me of the eagerness of a kid to get spanked. So I figger we can get several wagon−loads of "Wage of Sin" at fifty cents per volume.'

"'That's a cheap price,' I says, 'That's two hundred verses for one cent, an' the cover free.'

"Sammy was one of the confidential kind that gets close up to your ear and whispers, even if he is only tellin' you that it looks like rain, so he looks all around and whispers to me:

"'We'll make our initiative beginnin' first off at Gallops Junction,' he says, 'where we ain't known, an' where pa ain't known, an' where the book ain't known. I've a premonition,' he says, 'that 'twould be better so. If we was to start in here we would get discouraged, for the folks ain't used to buyin' "Wage of Sin." They've been given it so bountiful an' free that pa can't give away another copy to the poorest man in town. They've got so that they run when they see pa comin'.'

"'You've got sense in that red head of your'n,' I says.

"'For me,' he says, 'it will be merely a voluptuous excursion. It will be pie to sell that book, because I am the son of its author. Filial relationship to genius,' he says, 'will make them overawed, an' grateful to be allowed to buy of me, but you will have it harder. You can't claim nearer kin to genius than that you helped the son of it chop wood at various and sundry times.'

"'And gave him a handsome black eye one time,' I says reminiscently. 'I'll make the most of that. The public likes anecdotes.'

"'No,' says Sammy, 'you can omit to mention that black−eye business. That kind of an anecdote would be

harrowing to the minds of literary inclined gentlefolks. You can reminisce about how you helped me carry wood while I recited passages of poem out of that book at you.'

"What I would have spoke next don't matter, because I omitted to speak it. I was gettin' a glimmer of an idea into my head, and I wanted to get it clear in and settled down to stay before I lost it. It got in, an' I had a realization that it was an O.K. idea, an' that it beat Sammy's son−of−his−father idea quite scandalous.

"When me an' Sammy got down to Gallops Junction we found that as a municipality of art an' beauty it was a red−hot fizzle, but as a red−hot, sizzling sandheap it was the leader of the world. As near as we could judge from a premature look at the depot platform the principal occupations of the grizzly inhabitants was pickin' sand burrs from the inside rim of their pants−leg. It was a dreary village, but Sammy restrained my unconscious impulse to get right aboard the train again. He had that joyful light of combat in them blue eyes of his, an' he looked at that bunch of paintless houses that was dumped around the Gallops Junction Hotel like Columbus must have looked at Plymouth Rock when he landed there.

"I had an immediate notion that the thing for me to do was to go over to the hotel, an' sit in the shade there, an' study the inhabitants a while, an' get the gauge of 'em, an' learn their manners an' customs, before harshly thrustin' myself into their bosoms, so I went an' did it; but Sammy proceeded immediate to visit their homes with the 'Wage of Sin' in one hand an' the torch of culture in the other.

"The more I set under the board awning of that hotel the less I felt like goin' for the to uplift the populace, so I went calmly an' respectfully to sleep, like everybody else in sight, an' the gentle hours sizzled past like rows of hot griddles.

"It was contiguous to five o'clock when I woke up, an' I had put three hours of blissful ignorance into the past, an' I seen it was too late to begin my labors of helpfulness that day. I crossed my legs the other way from what they had been crossed, an' I was about to extend my ruminations to other thoughts, when I noticed a young female exit out of a grocery store across the road. She had a basket of et ceterys on her arm, an' a face that was as beautiful as a ham sandwich looks to a man after a forty days' fast. I recognized her right away as the prettiest girl of my life's experience, an' as she stepped out I slid out of my chair an' made up my mind to make a disposal of one copy of that book as soon as she struck home.

"She went into her house at the back door, as most folks do, an' before she slid the basket off her plump but modest arm, she looked up in surprise to see what gentlemanly visitor was knockin' the paint off the screen door with his knuckles. The glad object that her eyes beheld was me, smilin' an' amiable, with one hand shyly feeling if my necktie was loose, while the other concealed behind my back the interesting volume entitled the 'Wage of Sin.'

"I won't circumlocute about how I got in and got set down on a chair alongside of the kitchen stove. Approaching the female species promptly and slick was my hard card always. So there I set, face to face with that beautiful specimen of female bric−a−brac, and about two inches from a ten−horse−power cook stove in full blossom. It was a warm day, and extry warm on the side of me next that stove. The night side of me felt like sudden fever aggravated by applications of breaths from the orthodox bit of brimstone, and even my off side was perspirating some.

"Thus situated before that young female lady, I was baked but joyous, and I set right in to sell her a 'Wage of Sin.'

"'Ma genully buys books when we buy any, but we never do,' she says.

"'Your ma in now?' I asks, respectful, but in a way to show that her eyes and hair wasn't being wasted on no desert hermit.

"'Yes, she's in,' she says. 'Looks like it's guna rain.'

"'Its some few warm,' I says, shifting my most cooked side a little. 'Can I converse with your ma?'

"'Only in spirit,' she says. 'Otherwise she's engaged.'

"'Dead?' I asks, her words seeming to imply her ma's having departed hence.

"'Oh, no,' she says, smiling. 'She's in the front room, talking. She has a very previous engagement with a gent, and can't break away.'

"'You'll do just as well,' I says, 'if not better. You have that intellectual look that I always spot on the genooine lover of reading matter.'

"'If you are gun to talk book, you better git right down to business and talk book' she says, 'because when I whoop up that stove to git supper, as I'm gun to soon, it's liable to git warm in this kitchen.'

"I took a look at the cooking apparatus, and decided that she knew what she was conversing about. I liked the way she jumped right into the fact that I had a few things to say about books, too. She was an up−and−coming sort, and that's my sort. It's up−and−comingness that has made the Kilo Hotel what it is.

"'All right, sister,' I says, 'this book is the famous "Wage of Sin."'

"'No?" she exlamates. 'Not the "Wage of Sin"? The celebrated volume by our fellow Iowan, Mr. What's−his−name?'

"'The same book!' I says, glad to know its knowledge had passed far down the State. 'Price one−dollar−fifty per each. A gem of purest razorene. A rhymed compendium of wit, information, and highly moral so−forths. Ten thousand verses, printed on a new style rotating duplex press, and bound up in pale−gray calico. Let me quote you that sweet couplet about the flood:

I hear the mother in her grief Imploring heaven for relief As up the mountain−side she drags Herself by mountain peaks and crags.

When I wrote that−−'

"'When you wrote that!' she cries joyous, stopping to gaze at me. 'What! Do I see before me a real, genooine author? Do I see in our humble but not chilly kitchen a reely trooly author?'

"'Yes'm,' I says, modest, like G. W. when is papa caught him executing the cherry tree. 'I wrote it. I am the author. Here, as you see me now, in tropical but dripping diffidence, I am the author of that tome. It's a warm day.'

"She stood in my proximity and explored me with her eyes.

"'An author!' she says, stunned but pleased. 'A real live author! My! But it is hard for me to grasp a realization of that fact. So you wrote it?'

"'Yes'm,' I says again. 'I done it.'

"'So young, too,' she says. 'Genius is cert'nly a wonderful phenomenus.'

"'It's easy when you know how,' I says off−hand like. 'Book−writing is born in us. When we get warmed up to it it's no trick at all. An author can't no more help authorizing than a stray pup can help scratching.'

"'But,' she says, 'it must be true what I've heard about authorizing being a poor paying job.'

"'Why?' I asks, being suspicious.

"'Because,' she says, 'if it wasn't you wouldn't be touring around to sell your own books after you've wrote them. That is hard work. Now, I have to stay in this kitchen and perspire because I have to, but if you was rich off your books you wouldn't sit on that chair and get all stewed up. I can see that.'

"'What you can't see,' I says, 'is that I came here just because I was the writer of this here composition. Money I don't desire to wish for. Being a rich man and a philanthropist, I give all I make off of this book to the poor. But it ain't everybody can experience the satisfiedness of seeing a reely genooine author. So I travel around exhibiting myself for the good of the public. And as a special and extraordinary thing−−a sort of guarantee to one and all that they have seen a genooine living author−−I write my autograph in each and every volume of this book that I sell at the small sum of one−fifty per. Think of it! Ten thousand verses; moral, intellectooal, and witty; cloth cover, and the author's own autograph written by himself, all for one−fifty. The autograph of the famous boy author.'

"'That's a big bargain,' she says, thoughtful.

"'Jigantic,' I says

"'Genius is cert'nly a wonderful phenomenus,' she repeats again, dreamy.

"'Ain't it!' I responds, sniffing to see if it was my pants that was scorching. 'Will you have one volume?'

"She hesitated, and then she says, 'No. No, I don't dast to. Not yet. Not till I see how ma comes out. Mebby she'll purchase one before she gits through being talked to.'

"I set straight upward on my hotly warmed chair. 'Being talked to!' I says, astonished.

"'Yes,' says the sweet sample of girl. 'Your son, you know, Mister Samuel Mills; he's in the front room interviewing ma.'

"'My son!' I ejaculates weakly, the thermometer in my spinal backbone going up ten thousand degrees hotter.

"'Such an oldish son, too,' she says, sinfully joyous, 'for such a youngish father. He must have been two years old the day you were born. Genius is cert'nly a wonderful phenomenus!'

"I set there a minute, wilted, but nervous. Then I got hot, and arose in anger.

"'My son!' I says, scornful. 'So that's what he says, it is? Disgracing his father in that way! All right for him! I disown him out of my family. And I furthermore remark that he ain't my son, nor never was.'

"'Well,' she says, 'you needn't get so hot about it. He's a hard worker. He's been here all day.'

"'I ain't hot,' I says, forgetting that my temperature was torrid plus glowing, 'but I'm mad to think that that boy which I hired to sell my book should pass himself off as my son, and then stay talking all day in one place, instead of selling books throughout the promiscuous neighborhood.'

"'Then,' she says, as if for the first time seeing light, 'that young man in their ain't no son of the author of this "Sin" book?'

"'Never; subsequent nor previous, nor wasn't, nor will be,' I solemnly made prevarication.

"'Well,' she says, 'he said he was when he come in; and me and ma didn't think it likely an author person would have his son out book−peddling, so we asservated back that he wasn't; and him and ma has been having a high−grade talking match all day in the front parlor to convince each other otherwise than what they are convinced of.'

"'Him,' continued the lovely girl, 'says he'll sell ma a book BECAUSE he's the son of the author thereof, and ma says she'll buy a book if he owns up truthful that he ain't the son of the author thereof. She says that if she buys a book off of him when he's making false witness of having a talented dad she'll be encouraging lying, which she can't do, being a full−blood Baptist. So they've got a deadlock, and the jury is hung, and the plurality is equal and unbiased on both sides, and up to date nobody wins.'

"'Then,' I says, 'I don't sell no "Wage of Sin" do I?'

"'Not as no author if it,' she says. 'If you want to tackle us as a common book agent, you'll find us right in the market.'

"'Katie,' I says, 'call your ma out here a minute. If I can sell a copy of this volume I am willing to sell my birthmark for a mess of potash any day of the week.'

"'That,' she says, cheerful, 'is spoke like a financier and a gentleman.'

"With that she started for the front room, but just then the door swung open, and out came her ma and Sammy, tired with fatigue, but satisfied.

"'What!' says the young daughter, 'is the tie untied? Is the jawfest concluded?'

"'It is,' says the maternal ancestor of that girl, weak but happy. 'We talked seven miles and six furloughs, but I won. He has renounced his sin. He ain't no son of no author. I've boughten his book.'

"I gazed at Sammy with a moist, reproachful eye.

"'Sammy! Sammy!' I says, shaking my head, 'to think−−−−'

"'Hush!' he says, 'don't say it. I ain't no Sammy. I ain't no Mills. Them is not my name.'

"'Alas!' I says, mournful, 'am I then deceived since childhood's happy hours?'

"I see the respectable old lady pricking up her ears and getting ready for another season of conversation. Sammy likewise made the same observation, and he fended off the deadly blow.

"'Yes,' he says, 'I have deceived you. My name is−−−−'

"He stopped and looked doubtful and perplexed, and scratched his ear with his forepaw.

"'My name is−−−−' he says, and stops, and then he turns to the elderly female, and asks desperate: 'What in tunket did I say my name was?'

"'Hewlitt,' she says, 'Eliph' Hewlitt.'

"'Oh, yes!' says Sammy, 'that's it. I guess I'll just write that down, so as to have it handy. You know,' he says, looking at me, 'my memory's awful bad since I had the scarlet fever. It's terrible. Why, when I come in here I knowed I had SOMETHING to say about this book, and I tried to remember, and I seemed to remember that I was the son of the author who authored it. I never come so near lying in my life. I'm all in a tremble over it to think how near to lying I was! An' I got the notion Eliph' Hewlitt was the name of a horse.'

"'Ma,' says Katie, giving me a wicked smile, 'this here other young man has got a bad scarlet fever memory, too. HE'S come near to lying, likewise. You'd ought to speak a few words of helpfulness with him, too!'

"'Now, here,' I says, 'you pass that by, Katie. All that that I said was a novel I was thinking of writing out when I got my full growth, which I told you to pass the time away whiles this What's−his−name was busy. I never wrote nothing!'

"'Well,' she says, 'you don't look as if you had the sense to, so I guess you ain't lying now.'

"But ma lit into me, and spent two hours, steady talk, convincing me I wasn't W. P. Mills, although every time she said I wasn't I said so, too. The more I agreed that I wasn't the more she would fire up and take a fresh hold, and try to bear it home to me that I wasn't. There was never in the world such a long fight, with both sides saying the same thing. Ordinary persons couldn't have done it, but hat lady mother could, an' did, an' every now an' then she would dig into Sammy again. An' all of it was right near to that enthusiastical stove. So at last she laid a couple of extra hard words against us an' we keeled over, as you might say, an' toppled out of the kitchen. We was dazed with language that was all words, an' when we come to the gate we was so stupefied that we climbed right over it, an' so weak that we fell down off the other side of it, an' Sammy all the time repeatin' 'Eliph' Hewlitt,' like a man in a dream. By next day he was able to leave the hotel, an' he took the train, an' I ain't seen him until this day, so I guess he stuck right to that name, for fear he might meet the talkin' lady again. I don't see how he could get the name out of his system when once Katie's ma had talked it in, anyway, for she was a great talker. I ought to know, for I went back an' chinned with Katie as soon as I got the daze out of my head, an' the long−come short−come of it was I married Katie.

"When Sammy comes back I want to ask him if he sold out all them 'Wage of Sin' books. I never sold but one, an' I didn't sell that−−I gave it to Katie for a wedding present."

"You done right when you gave up the book agent business, Jim," said Pap Briggs. "There ought to be a license agin all of 'em."

CHAPTER VI

The Castaway

Eliph' Hewlitt, when he reached the large, yellow house, found the door open. The sale was well over. The gingham aprons and the cat−stitched dusting cloths were all sold, and only a few crocheted slipper−bags and similar luxuries remained, and these were being offered at greatly reduced prices, much to the chagrin of the ladies who had contributed them. The cashiers were counting the results of the evening's business, and the other ladies were grouped about the minister, who stood in the middle of the parlor, laughingly explaining the merits of a plush−covered rolling−pin he had purchased in a moment of folly.

Eliph' Hewlitt tapped on the door to call attention to his presence, and walked into the parlor. Mrs. Doctor Weaver came forward, a shade of anxiety on her face.

"Mrs. Doctor Weaver, I suppose," said Eliph' Hewlitt. "Well, my name is Hewlitt, Eliph' Hewlitt, and I heard of this sale at the hotel. The landlord said strangers were welcome−−−−"

"Of course they are!" exclaimed Mrs. Doctor Weaver. "I'm afraid all the best things are gone, they went off so quickly to−night; but you're just as welcome, I'm sure, an' mebby you'll find something you'd like, though I suppose you're a travelin' man, an' I don't see what you'd do with a knit tidy, or a rickrack pin cushion, unless you've got a sister or a wife to send it to. But mebby you ain't a drummer after all?"

"Well, yes, I'm a sort of a drummer," said Eliph', tapping his parcel. "Book agent, you know. That the minister?"

Mrs. Weaver drew back when Eliph' mentioned his occupation. She did not consider a book agent any less worthy than another man, but she had been obliged to miss the last payment on Sir Walter Scott, and she had an ill−defined feeling of guilt. To miss a payment was almost as hideous in her eyes as to neglect to put a dime in the contribution plate each Sunday would have been. Her first thought was that Eliph' had come to rudely bear away the ten volumes of Sir Walter before the eyes of all the women of Kilo, and she gladly grasped at his last words.

"Yes," she said quickly, "that's him. Let me introduce you. He−−he likes books."

"I'm not selling books to−night," explained Eliph' Hewlitt, for her words seemed one form of the usual reception of a book agent, and to indicate a desire to be rid of him as quickly as possible; "but I don't mind meeting him."

As Mrs. Weaver led the way to the center of the group, Eliph' Hewlitt followed her, but his eyes quickly made a circle of the room, and rested a moment on Sally Briggs, who was one of the cashiers.

She saw him and caught her breath, as if the sight had frightened her, but when he nodded she could not refuse to return the salutation. She nodded as coldly as she knew how, and hurried to the most distant corner of the room. Eliph' was well enough pleased with this reception, for he would hardly have know what to do with a warmer one; in many years he had received only the book agent's usual greeting, which is far from cordial. She had nodded to him, at any rate, and he felt a glow of satisfaction.

When Mrs. Weaver introduced him to the minister she added that he was a book agent. She may have done this as an explanation, for Kilo, and even Kilo's minister, craved details, or she may have done it to give fair warning to all concerned. The effect was instantaneous, and the smiles of welcome faded. The minister shook hands gravely, and the ladies who had run forward with shoe bags and tidies turned and walked coldly away.

Eliph' Hewlitt smiled.

"Funny how that name makes a man unpopular, ain't it?" he said, addressing the minister. "But I ain't going to talk books in Kilo. The landlord down at the hotel told me it was a bad time, so I'm going to pass it by. Well, I guess we deserve all the blame we get. Some of us do pester the life out of people−−don't know when to stop. Now, when I see a man don't want my book, or when I see a town ain't ready for it, I drop books and go off, and leave them alone. I could have stayed down there at the hotel and bothered the landlord into taking my book. He'd have too it, because everybody that sees this book, and understands it, does take it; but I said, 'Why bullyrag the life out of the poor man when there's a missionary sale going on in town, and he don't want a book, and I do want to see the sale? I am interested in missions."

"It's a great field," said the minister, with a sigh of relief; for, as the literary head of Kilo, he was always the first and most strongly contested goal of the book agents. The subscription list that did not bear his name at the head bore few others, and he appreciated the self denial of Eliph' Hewlitt in passing such a good

opportunity to talk business.

"Are you deeply interested in the field?" he inquired graciously.

"Well, you se," said Eliph' Hewlitt, "I was cast away on one of those desert islands myself once, and I know what those poor heathen must suffer for lack of churches and civilization, and good books to read. I can feel for them."

Someone pushed a chair gently against Eliph's legs, in gentle invitation for him to be seated, and he took the chair, and laid his package across his knees. Those who had drawn away from him now gathered closer, and all gazed at him with interest. Miss Sally alone remained at the other end of the room.

"Well, I never expected to live to see a man that had been shipwrecked," said Mrs. Weaver, "let alone shipwrecked on a desert island−−an' a book agent at that!"

Eliph' smiled indulgently.

"I wasn't a book agent in them days," he said; "it was that made me a book agent. If I hadn't been shipwrecked on that island I wouldn't be here now with this book on my knees."

Mrs. Weaver's face flushed.

"I'm sure I ask you to excuse me," she exclaimed. "I don't know what I was thinkin' of not to ask to take your package. Let me put it aside for you. They ain't no use for you to be bothered with it."

"Thank you, ma'm," said Eliph', "but I'll just keep it. No offense, but I never let it go out of my hands, day or night. It saved my life, not once, but many times, this book did, and I keep it handy. But for this book that shipwreck would have been my last day."

"Land sakes, now!" cried Mrs. Weaver, "won't you tell us about it?"

"Well, as I said, but for this book I'd be bones at the bottom of the sea. Yes, ladies and gents, bones, of which there is one hundred and ninety−eight in the full grown human skeleton, composed of four−fifths inorganic and one−fifth organic matter."

"How dreadful!" exclaimed Mrs. Weaver, who, being a doctor's wife, had a particular dislike for bones, as for useless things that cluttered up the house, and were not ornamental. "But how come you to get wrecked?"

"Five years ago," said Eliph' Hewlitt, "I was a confidence man in New York. New York is the largest city in the Western Hemisphere; population estimated over three million; located on the island of Manhattan, at the mouth of the Hudson River. And, if I do say it myself, I was a good confidence man. I was a success; I got rich. And what then? The police got after me, and I had to run away. Yes, ladies and gents, I had to fly from my native land. I took passage on a ship for Ceylon. Ceylon," he added, "is an island southeast of India; population three millions; principal town, Colombo; English rule; products, tea, coffee, spices, and gems.

"We had a good trip until we almost got there, and then a big storm come up, and blew our ship about like it was a peanut shell, tossing it up and down on the mighty waves, and round and back; and the third day we bumped on a rock, and the ship began to sink. In the hurry I was left behind when the crew and passengers went off in the boats. Think of it, ladies and gents, not even a life preserver to save me, and the ship sinking a foot a minute."

"Goodness me!" said Mrs. Weaver, "you wasn't drowned, was you?"

"No," said Eliph' Hewlitt, "or I wouldn't be here to tell it. I rushed to the captain's cabin. I thought maybe I would find a life preserver there. Alas, no! But there, ladies and gents, I found something better. When I didn't find a life preserver I was stunned−−yes, clean knocked out. I dropped into a chair and laid my head on the captain's table. I sat there several minutes, the ship sinking one foot per minute, and when I come to my senses, and raised my head, my hand was lying on this."

Reverently he raised the volume from his knees and unwrapped it, and the Ladies' Foreign Mission Society leaned forward with one accord to catch a glimpse of the title. Eliph' Hewlitt opened the book and flipped over the pages rapidly with the moistened tip of his third finger.

"It was this book, ladies and gents, and it was open here, page 742. Without thinking, I read the first thing that hit my eye. 'How to Make a Life Preserver,' it said. 'Take the corks from a hundred champagne bottles; tie them tightly in a common shirt; then fasten the arms of the shirt about the body, with the corks resting on the chest. With this easily improvised life preserver drowning is impossible.' I done it. The captain of that ship was a high liver, and his room was chuck full of champagne bottles. I put in two extry corks for good measure, and when the ship went down, I floated off on the top of the ocean as easy as a duck takes to a pond."

"My sakes!" exclaimed Mrs. Weaver, "that captain must have been an awful hard drinker!"

"He was," said Eliph' Hewlitt−− "fearful. I was really shocked. But, there I was in the water, and not much better off for it, neither, for I couldn't swim a stroke, and as soon as I got through bobbing up and down like your cork when you've got a sunfish on your line, I stayed right still, just as if I'd been some bait−can a boy had thrown into an eddy, and I figgered like as not I'd stay there forever. Then I noticed I had this book in my hand, and I thought, 'While I'm staying here forever, I'll just take another peek at this book,' and I opened her. Page 781," said Eliph', turning quickly to that page, "was where she opened. 'Swimming; How to Float, Swim, Dive, and Tread Water−−Plain and Fancy Swimming, Shadow Swimming, High Diving,' et cetery. There she was, all as plain as pie, and when I read it I could swim as easy as an old hand. The direction al through this book is plain, practical, and easily followed.

"I at once swum off to the south, for there was no telling how long I'd have to swim, and as the water was sort of cool, I thought best to go south, because the further south you go the warmer the water gets. When I swum two days, and was plumb tuckered out, I come to an island. The waves was dashing on it fearful, and I knew if I tried to land I'd be dashed to flinders. It knocked all the hope out of me, and I made up my mind to take off my life preserver and dive to the bottom of the sea to knock my brains out on the rocks. But, ladies and gents, before I dived I had another look at my book, hoping to find something to comfort a dying man. I turned to page 201."

Eliph' Hewlitt found the page, and pointed to the heading with his finger.

"'Five Hundred Ennobling Thoughts from the World's Greatest Authors, including the Prose and Poetical Gems of All ages,'" he read. "There they were−sixty−two solid pages of them, with vingetty portraits of the authors. I read No. 285:

"As Thou has made Thy world without, Make Thou more fair my world within,' et cetery.'

'Whittier, J. G., commonly called the poet of liberty, born 1807, died 1892'−− with a complete sketch of his life, a list of his most popular pieces, and a history of his work on behalf of the slave.

"I was much comforted by this," said Eliph' Hewlitt, "and I run over the pages this way, thinking of what I had read, when I hit on page 927: 'Geography of Land and Sea.' I skipped ten pages telling in an interesting manner of the five great continents, their political division, mountains, lakes, and plains, their vegetable

inhabitants and animals, their ancient and modern history, et cetery, and I come to 'Islands, Common, Volcanic, and Coral'; and on page 940 I read that coral islands are often surrounded by a reef on which the waves dash, but that there is usually a quiet lagoon between the reef and the island, with somewhere an opening from the sea into the lagoon.

"When I read that," said Eliph', closing the book, "I shut up my book and swum round until I come to the opening, which was there, just like the book said it would be, and I swum across the lagoon, and fell exhausted on the beach. I was played out, and I had swallered too much water. I would have died right there, but I thought of my book, and I turned to the index, where every subject known to the vast realm of knowledge is set down alphabetically, from 'A' to 'Z', twenty thousand references in all, dealing with every subject from the time of Adam to the present day, including, in the new and revised edition just from the press, a history of the war with Spain, with pull page portraits of Dewey, Sampson, Cervera, and the boy king, and colored plates of the battles of Manila Bay and Santiago. I run my eye down the page till I came to 'Drowned, How to Revive the,' page 96; and what I read there saved my life."

The ladies sighed with relief.

"What shall I say about my four long years on that island?" said Eliph'. "I was the only man on it. Oh, the pangs of solitude! Oh, the terrors of being alone! But, ladies and gents, I suffered none of them. I was not alone. He is never alone who has a copy of Jarby's 'Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art,' published by Jarby & Goss, New York, and sold for the trifling sum of five dollars a volume, one dollar down and one dollar a month until paid, the book delivered when the first payment is made. And that, my friends, was the book I had, and the book you see before you."

The minister put out his hand.

"May I look at the volume?" he asked, and Eliph' passed it to him with a nod.

"From the first the book was my friend, philosopher, and guide. I had no matches. Page 416, 'Fire, Its Traditions−−How to Make a Fire Without Matches−− Fire−fighting, Fire−extinguishers,' et cetery, taught me to make a fire by rubbing two sticks, as the savages do. I had no weapons to kill the fowls of the air. Page 425, 'Weapons, Ancient and Modern−−Their History−−How to Make and Use Them,' et cetery, told me how to twist the cocoanut bark into a cord, and to shape the limb of the gum−gum tree into a bow and arrow. Page 396, 'Birds, Tropical, Temperate, and Arctic−−Song Birds, Edible Birds, and Birds of Plumage,' et cetery, with their Latin and common names, and over one thousand illustrations, told me which to kill, and which to eat. Page 100, 'The Complete Kitchen Guide,' being eight hundred tested recipes−−roasts, fries, pastry, cakes, bread, puddings, entrées, soups, how to make candy, how to clean brass, copper, silver, tin, et cetery−−told me how to prepare and cook them.

"Yes, my friends, I went to that island an ignorant, unbelieving man, and I came away educated and reformed. For my idle hours there was the 'Complete Mathematician,' showing how to figger the most difficult problems easily, how to measure corn in the drib, water in the well, figger interest, et cetery, by which I become posted on all kinds of arithmetic. There was the 'Complete Letter Writer, or a Guide to Polite and Correct Correspondence,' the 'Dictionary of Legal Terms, or Every Man His Own Lawyer,' the 'Modern Penman,' the 'Eureka Shorthand System'−−in fact, all the knowledge in the world, condensed into one thousand and four pages, for the small sum of five dollars. Who can afford to be without this book, which will pay for itself twice over every week of the year?

"I was picked up, ladies and gents," continued Eliph' Hewlitt, "by a passing ship, and I decided to devote my life to a great work−−to circulating this wonderful book in my native land. I wept when I thought of the millions that had not seen it−−millions that were living poor, starved lives because they didn't have a copy of Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art, and I gave myself to the

cause."

The minister handed the book back to Eliph' Hewlitt, and cleared his throat.

"It seems to be all you claim for it," he said; "but I fear the landlord of the Kilo House was right. We are not, many of us, ready for more books at present. If you return in a year or eight months−−−−"

Eliph' Hewlitt smiled, and put his hand gently no the glossy black knee of the minister's best trousers.

"True," he said, "true! Kilo has books. Kilo knows the civilizing and Christianizing influence of books. But," he exclaimed, " think of the poor heathen! Think of the poor missionaries fighting to bring civilization to those dark−hued brothers! Shall it be said that every home in Kilo has a set of Sir Walter Scott, ten volumes with gilt edges, while the minds of the heathen dry up and rot for want of the vast treasures contained in Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art? Here in this book is the wisdom of the whole world, and will you selfishly withhold it form those who need it so badly? If I know Kilo, I think not. If what is said in Jefferson regarding the unselfishness and liberality of Kilo is true, I think not. I know what you will say. You will say, 'Here, take this money we have collected this evening and give to the thirsting heathen as many volumes of Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art, as it will buy at five dollars a volume.'"

He glanced around the circle of faces.

"That is what you will say," he said; "But Eliph' Hewlitt will beg a chance to do his little for the noble work. He will, seeing the good cause, make the price four seventy−five per volume, and throw in one volume from for the Kilo Sunday School library, where one and all can have reference to its helpful and civilizing pages."

In Eliph' Hewlitt's eyes glowed the fire of conquest that always shone in them when he was "talking book," a glitter such as shines in the eyes of the enthusiast, and they fell upon Miss Sally Briggs, who had been drawn by his eloquence to the edge of the ring of ladies. As he paused, she recognized the moment as that when the victim is supposed to utter the words, "Well, I guess I'll take a copy," but she missed the direct appeal, and its absence confused her, and she was still wondering whether it was now time to say she would take a copy, or whether she had better wait for the formal appeal, when Mrs. Doc Weaver spoke for the Ladies' Mission Circle.

When Eliph' Hewlitt left the house, half an hour later with his order signed, Miss Sally had disappeared, and, although he peeked eagerly into both the side rooms as he passed through the hall, he could see nothing of her. He was disappointed.

When he returned to the hotel the landlord was asleep in the chair before the door. He arose with a yawn, rubbed his eyes, and led the way into the office where a dingy kerosene lamp was burning dimly. He stretched his arms as he looked at the clock that stood above the dusty pigeon holes back of the desk.

" 'Leven o'clock!" he yawned. "I must have been asleep two hours. Guess you'll want to get right up to bed, won't you? I reckon you found out Kilo don't want no books this trip, Sammy; an' if you want to git an early start from town you'll need all the sleep you can get."

Eliph' tossed his package on the desk carelessly.

"Why, yes, Jim, I wish you WOULD call me early," he said. "I'll be ready for bed in half an hour or so. I done a little business up yonder, and I want to mail my report to New York. But you needn't hitch up my horse in the morning."

"No?" asked the landlord sleepily.

"No," said Eliph', "and if any feller comes this way selling books in the next month or so, just tell him there ain't no use for a raw hand to waste time in this town. Tell him Eliph' Hewlitt has settled down to live here."

CHAPTER VII

The Colonel

When Eliph' Hewlitt stepped out of the hotel the next morning, after he had eaten his breakfast, and stood, with a wooden toothpick between his lips, looking up and down the street, he felt a sense of exultation. If he had been a victorious general, and Kilo a captured city of great importance, he would have had a similar feeling. Already he felt that, if he was not the captor of the town, he was one of its important citizens, and practically the husband of an attractive woman whose father owned sufficient property to be one of those who grumble about taxes.

To a man who had been a wanderer all his life it was pleasant to feel that he was soon to be kin to all the things he saw on Main Street, brother to the town− pump and cousin to the flag pole, and to consider that even the well−gnawed hitching rails were to be part of his future years. He nodded across the street to Billings, the grocer and general store man, as if he was an old acquaintance, and he watched Skinner, the butcher, sweeping the walk, with a pleasant smile, for he saw in him a future friend. He loved Kilo, and he was ready to like everything, from the post office to the creamery. His whole future seemed destined to be simple and pleasant, for he was resolved to do his best to make the town like him, and there seemed little opportunity for complications in a town that could all be seen at one glance.

Strangers think all small towns simple. The few stores are all plainly labeled, the streets run at right angles, and the houses are set well apart, like big letters in a primer. A small town looks like a story without a plot, like: "See the cat. Does the can see me? The cat sees the dog;" beside which a city is as unfathomable as a Henry James paragraph. To the stranger each man and woman he meets is a complete individual, each standing alone, like letters on an alphabet block, and not easily to be confused, one with the other. But these letters of the small town's alphabet are often tangled into as long and complex words as those of the greatest city; it takes but twenty−six letters to spell all the passions. The letter A, that looked so distinctly separate, is soon found to be connected with C and T in Cat, and with W and R in War, as well as cross− connected with the C and W in Caw, and with T and R in Tar; while the houses that stood so seemingly alone are all connected and criss−crossed by lines of love and hate, of petty policy and revenge and pride, quite as are nations or people who live in labyrinths, or in a metropolis.

It was still too early in the morning for Eliph' Hewlitt to call on Miss Sally, and there was no haste; the day was long. He even doubted whether it would be good policy to call on her in the morning; he might find her busy with household cares. Probably it would be best to wait for the afternoon, when she would be at leisure. This, he decided would be best. He would arrive in her presence at two o'clock, and four hours of conversation would carry them to the point of being well acquainted, as advised by Jarby's Encyclopedia. The next day he could enter the second stage of the directions, and call with a book, present it; call after dinner with a box of candy, present it; call after supper, and propose a walk, visit the ice cream parlor, and on the way home offer his hand, and be accepted. The chapter on "Courtship−−How to Win the Affections" advised against haste, and Eliph' did not wish to be hasty. To a man of his spirit two days seemed rather long to devote to so simple a matter−−a real waste of time−−but he was willing to take longer than necessary, in order to follow the directions in spirit, as well as in letter.

Eliph' settled himself into one of the chairs before the hotel and opened his copy of Jarby's Encyclopedia at the chapter on "Courtship−−How to Win the Affections." He was deep in it when the landlord strolled around from the livery stable and sank into a chair by his side.

"So you made up your mind to stay here, Sammy?" he asked. "I guess the town'll be glad enough to have you. All this town needs to be a big place is inhabitants. What you ought to do now it to settle down for good, an' get married. There's some purty fine women in this town that ain't picked up yet, but they won't last long, they way they're goin'. Somebody gets married every couple of months."

Eliph' looked up with a smile. Jim Wilkins did not know he had advised the very thing he meant to do.

"I've thought some about it," said Eliph', " 'most everybody's getting married now−a−days."

"It's the popular thing 'round here," said Jim. "Look across the street, yonder. See that feller just goin' up to the lawyer's office? He's one that's in the marry class, just now. That's Colonel Guthrie. He lives out on the first farm beyond Main Street, and he's goin' to marry Sally Briggs, daughter of old Pap Briggs, that we was talkin' to last night, here."

Eliph' Hewlitt stared at the Colonel, but he said nothing. He blamed himself; he had wasted his opportunity. This was what came of being slow! He should have completed his courtship at the picnic, or last night at the sale. Jim Wilkins interrupted the thought.

"Leastways," he said, "HE'LL get her if Skinner don't. It's a close run between him an' Skinner. Skinner ain't so good lookin' as the Colonel, but he's better fixed. It's Skinner owns our butcher−shop, an' it's Skinner is buildin' our Opery House Block. Some say Skinner'll get Pap Briggs' money, an' some says the Colonel will."

"Are there any others?" asked Eliph', looking down the street to where the raw brick of the opera house glowed in the sun.

"After Sally?" asked Jim Wilkins. "Well, there's sev'ral would like to get her, I dare say. Sally Briggs is a pretty fine sort of woman, an' Pap Briggs has quite considerable money, but the Colonel an' Skinner has the inside track. No one else has a chance."

Eliph' stroked his whiskers softly and coughed gently behind his hand.

"Briggs, did you say the name was?" he asked. "Seems to me I met a lady at a picnic up Clarence way that had that name. You said the name was Sally Briggs?"

"That's her," said Wilkins. "Sally Ann Briggs. She's been visitin' up there in Clarence."

Eliph' nodded his head slowly.

"I seem to recollect her, since you mention it," he said indifferently, and then he added, "She spoke as if she might buy a copy of Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art when I saw her at that picnic. I guess I'll drop 'round and see if she's ready to buy. If she' goin' to be married she ought to have a copy."

CHAPTER VIII

The Medium−Sized Box

As Eliph' walked briskly toward Miss Sally's house the Colonel was having an interesting conversation with Attorney Toole, in the attorney's office over the Kilo Savings Bank.

Attorney Toole had been a lawyer at Franklin, and he had come down to Kilo because he preferred a being a big toad in a small puddle, rather than a little toad in a middle−sized one. This was one of his reasons, but

another was that he had complete and full faith in Richard Toole, and intended to be a political power in the land. He could not be much of anything in Franklin, for that town was hard and fast Democratic, and Toole was a Republican. The first step to political preferment is to be elected to something or other, it does not make much difference what, and to rise from that to greater things, but a Republican had no chance in Franklin; couldn't even get an appointment as dog police or wharfmaster; couldn't get elected to any office at all.

So Toole packed up his law books and moved to Kilo, where he was in a Republican town, a Republican county, and a Republican congressional district, in a Republican State that formed part of a Republican nation. He selected Kilo, after considering other good little Republican towns, because the Republicans of Kilo needed aid and assistance; they were out of office; kicked out.

Every so often the small town of the West turns the regular party out of office and puts in a Citizens' ticket, just to show that the people still rule, and to let the greedy officeholders, some of whom get as much as one hundred dollars a year in salary, know that their offices are not life positions. When Attorney Toole descended on Kilo, the Citizens' Party was "in," and the Republicans were "out," and the attorney saw an opportunity of making himself valuable to his party by working to put the party "in" again.

Never before had the Colonel climbed his stairs, and Toole smiled like an Irish sphinx when the Colonel entered his office. He smiled most of the time, not because he thought a smile becoming to his freckled face, but because he found things so eternally amusing. In law a man is considered innocent until he has been proved guilty; in Kilo Attorney Toole considered everything amusing until it had been proved serious, and he considered the Colonel and Skinner, and the whole Citizens' Party they had been instrumental I organizing, as parts of the same joke. They would stand until he was ready to lazily push out his hand and topple them over. It was almost time to topple them, now, and he was glad to see the Colonel; he motioned him to a seat, and smiled.

The Colonel took his hat from his mat of coarse iron−gray hair, and laid it carefully on the floor. Out of his small sharp eyes ignorance and cunning peered, and the mass of beard that hid the greater part of his face could not hide the hard line of his mouth.

"I jest dropped up," he explained, after he had acknowledged the attorney's cheerful greeting with a gruff "mornin'," "I jest dropped up, sort of friendly− like, thinkin' you might have nothin' to do, an' might like to sit an' chin a while. You don't charge nothin' for sittin' an' chinnin' do ye?"

Toole said he did not.

"I didn't figger you did," said the Colonel. "If I'd thought you did I wouldn't have dropped up, for I ain't got no money to spend on lawyers. I'd sooner throw money away than spend it at law. But I figgered you was young at the law yet, and didn't have much to do at it, and I sort of run across a case I thought might amuse you, like, when you ain't got nothin' to do. Folks don't seem to have much faith in young lawyers, and you can't blame 'em; old ones don't know much. All any of 'em care for is to get people into trouble so they can charge 'em fees to get 'em out of it. So I thought mebby you'd like to hear of this case so you could kind of mull it over in your mind whilst you're loafin' up here."

"That was kind of you," said Toole.

"I always like to do a good turn when I can," said the Colonel, "when it don't cost nothin'. An' this case I was tellin' you about is a mighty good one for a young lawyer to study over. Soon as I heard of it I says to myself 'I'll tell this case to Attorney Toole, an' he'll be grateful to hear of it.'"

The country client usually begins in some such way as this, anxious to get all the advice he can without having to pay for it, and Toole merely smiled.

"Mebby you know," said the Colonel, "that there was a feller took board of Sally Briggs a while back; feller by the name of William Rossiter, that come through here peddlin' lightnin' rods and pain killer and land knows what all. Well, he was a rascal. He took board off of Sally Briggs four weeks, and then he cleared out, and she nor no one else has seen hide nor hair of him since, and he never paid her one cent. All he ever let on was to leave this letter stickin' on the pin cushion in his bedroom."

The Colonel dug the letter out of his vest pocket, and Toole read it. It was short:

Dear Miss Briggs: I'm off. Good−by. Business in Kilo is no good. Sorry I can't square up, but I leave you the box in my room in part payment. W. R.

"Prosecution's exhibit No. 1," said the attorney.

"Jest what I was tellin' Miss Sally," said the Colonel. "I says to her to keep that paper, and it might come handy. Mebby you heard that me and Miss Sally was what you might call keepin' company?"

"That's interesting," said Toole. "Been keeping it long?"

"Quite some consid'able time," said the Colonel. "Long enough, land knows, and we'd a−been done with it by this time and married, if that Skinner hadn't come crowdin' in where he wasn't wanted. What right has a man like him to come pushin' in like that? His wife ain't been dead twelve months yet. It ain't decent of him, is it?"

"Do you want a legal opinion?" asked Toole, reaching for a large law book that lay on the table.

"No, I don't!" cried the Colonel in alarm; "I don't want to run up no charges. I don't care whether it's legal or not, it ain't friendly, after him and me has worked together buildin' up this Citizens' Party, and all. What does he mean, sendin' Miss Sally porterhouses, when she only orders flank steak, like he was wrappin' up love and affection into every steak? He's got mighty proud since he set out to build that there Kilo Opery House of his. He's a fool to spend money on an opery house in this town. He's a beefy, puffy old money bag, he is. He needn't tell ME he expects to get even on what he spent on that Opery House Block out of what he'll make on it; he just built it to make a show, so some dumb idiot like Sally Briggs would think he amounted to more than others, and marry him."

The Colonel brought down his hand with a bang on the attorney's table.

"What kind of an idiot did you call Miss Briggs?" asked Toole pleasantly.

"I didn't call her no kind!" declared the Colonel. "All I say is, I've been married once already, and I know how women are. And I know Skinner. He's lookin' for to pay for that opery house with Pap Brigg's money that he'll git if he marries Sally. But he won't git it! I'm a−goin' to−−−−" He was going to say he was going to get it, but he caught himself in time, and substituted "I'm a− goin' to see to that."

"I see," said Toole, "and you want to retain me as your attorney in case you have to sue for breach of promise?"

The Colonel scowled.

"I don't want to retain, and I don't want to sue, and I don't want no fees to pay. You get that clear in your mind. If I did, I'd go to a lawyer that had some experience. I jest dropped up−−−−"

"Well, any time you wish, you can just drop down again, Colonel," said Toole, but not ill−naturedly.

"Now, don't git that way," said the Colonel. "I jest dropped up to do you a favor, and you git mad about it! I don't call that friendly. If you was to do me a favor I wouldn't git mad."

"Go ahead with the favor, then," said Toole, leaning back in his chair and putting his feet on his table.

"Miss Sally," said the Colonel, "she told me all about this feller Rossiter, an' what he said, an' what she said, an' how he come to go to her house for board, an' how he skipped off, an' she showed me the note he left on the pin cushion, an' then she come down to business. 'Colonel,' she says, 'have I a right to take an' keep that box? Have I a right to open it? Is it mine by law? If I open it can he come back an' sue me, or anything?'

"'Can he?' says I. 'That's the question. Can he?'

"'It's a large box,' says Miss Sally.

"'A large box, hey?' says I. 'Of course if it was a small box, Miss Sally−−but it is a large box! How large?'

"'Quite large,' she says. 'About medium large. Not too large. Besides anything very large it would be small, but beside anything very small it would be large.'

"I nodded my head to her, to let her see I knew what she was tryin' to say. 'Medium large,' I says, 'yes, I know just about how big you mean, but what I'd like to know is, is it heavy?'

"'Medium,' she says, 'just medium heavy.'

"Well, there she was! A medium heavy, medium−sized box. If it had been a little bit of a light−weight box I'd 'a' told her to open it and keep it, for there couldn't have been much in it; and if it had been a big heavy box I'd have told her she'd better leave it alone; for there wouldn't be any tellin' whether she had any right to open a box like that one might have turned out to be. I didn't know how the law stood on that kind of a box. But it was medium−sized, and I didn't know WHAT to say.

"'Miss Sally,' I says, 'I'd like to help you out on this. Any time I can give you any advice on anything, I'm glad to, but I don't know what to say about a box that is medium size and medium heavy. You'd ought to get the law on that subject before you touch that box. Don't you touch that box. Don't you open it unless there's a law officer standin' by to see you do it.'

"She seen that was good advice," continued the Colonel, "and I sat there right in her parlor and thought it over. 'Miss Sally,' I says, after I had thought all I could about it, 'I believe Attorney Toole would tell you what to do about that box. There ain't nothin' a lawyer needs more than to be popular, and there ain't no way to git popular quicker than by doin' little favors, an' he ought to be glad to do a favor for you, for you're almost an orphan. Your ma's dead, an' Pap Briggs ain't overly strong, an' you're liable to be an orphan almost any minute. I can tell by the looks of Attorney Toole,' I says, 'that he's got a good heart, and if you say the word I'll ask him what he says to do about that box.' She seemed sort of put out at what I'd said about orphans, but I seen she was willing to have me ask you about that box, and I seen it would be doin' you a favor, too, to tell you about it, so you could sort of exercise your mind on it, so I jest dropped up−−−−"

"Colonel," said Toole, "this is a very serious case." He put his hand over his mouth to hide the smile he could not prevent from coming to his lips.

"You don't mean to tell me!" exclaimed the Colonel. "I was afraid there might be somethin' wrong about it somewheres. But I ain't goin' to go to no expense about it. It ain't my box−−−−"

"I would not take a case like this for money," said the attorney, turning suddenly and facing the Colonel with a

seriousness that frightened that cautious soul. "I would not take a case involving a medium−sized, medium−heavy box; a box left for board by a man from parts unknown, now departed to parts unknown; a box that may contain stolen property; I would not take such a case for money, Colonel. But I'll undertake it for friendship. For friendship only. You ARE my friend, aren't you, Colonel?"

"Surely! Surely!" exclaimed the Colonel eagerly.

"A medium−sized box," said Toole, turning his head to hide his smile, "should be opened only in the presence of an attorney−at−law. That is legal advice and worth five dollars, but I charge you nothing for it, you being my friend. Consider it a gift from me to you."

"I'm much obliged," said the Colonel gruffly.

"And now," said the attorney briskly, "for the MODUS OPERANDI, as we lawyers say. Has the client, the lady in the case, a hatchet?"

The Colonel thought.

"I ain't right sure," he said at length, after he had searched his brain; "seems like she ought to have, but I've got one, an' I'll loan it to her."

"Good!" exclaimed Toole briskly. "That is better yet. A medium−sized box left by a transient in payment of default of a board bill should always be opened, if possible, with a hatchet not the property of the plaintiff. Chitty says that. It was so ruled in the case of MUGGINS vs. MUGGINS."

He took from his desk a bulky volume, and ran over the pages rapidly.

"Box," he said, "small box−medium box. Here it is. Humph!"

The Colonel leaned over the book, but the attorney closed it quickly.

"Bring an ax," he said. "A hatchet would do, but an ax is more legal. Hatchets for small boxes, axes for medium boxes. There is a later case than MUGGINS vs. MUGGINS."

"I'll fetch the ax," agreed the Colonel.

"Can you be at the house in half an hour?" asked the attorney.

The Colonel could.

"You're right sure there ain't goin' to be no charges to this?" he asked anxiously, and when the attorney had once more assured him there would be none, he picked his hat from the floor and shuffled into the hall and down the stairs.

CHAPTER IX

The Witness

When Eliph' Hewlitt reached the Briggs house, he did not hesitate, but walked right up to the front door and rang the bell. A minute later he saw the red silk that obstructed the pane of beveled glass in the upper part of the door drawn ever so slightly to one side and then quickly replaced. He caught the glisten of an eye, as the red silk was held aside, but the door did not open. Miss Sally, after the brief glance, tiptoed back through the

hall. She did not want to meet the book agent.

Eliph' waited a respectable minute and then rang the bell again, although he had little belief that this would bring Miss Sally to the door. It is good form to ring the bell of the front door several times, before going to the back door, for it may be that the lady of the house is dressing, or is hastily taking the folded paper "curlers" out of her front hair, or slipping on her "other skirt" before admitting the visitor. Few indeed are the front doors in Iowa that open promptly to a knock or a ring. Primping time must be allowed, ad if this, followed by a second ring or knock, does not open the door, nothing but business permits the visitor to go to the back door. Having waited, Eliph' went to the back door. It closed almost as he reached it, and it would not open to his most vigorous knocking.

To know a person is in a house, and not to be able to reach that person, is annoying, and Eliph' had often had this happen to him. The usual course was to go away and return again; returning a third or fourth time, or until the door at last opened; but Eliph' was not merely trying to sell a copy of Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art this time. He had no time to waste in the usual manner. If he could not get into one house to sell a book, he could enter another house and sell a book, but when a man is after a certain heart he does not care to go to another house and take another heart. Some men do it, but they are usually sorry afterwards. Eliph' walked to the front of the house again, and looked at the front door.

He felt there should be some way to get into the house and have five minutes' conversation with Miss Sally. If this Colonel and this Skinner had already had months or years of opportunity for pressing their suits, there was not time to be lost, and the sooner he began the sooner he would win. But none of his ordinary methods of entering unwilling houses would serve his purpose this time. It would not do to begin by making Miss Sally unfriendly. So Eliph' tucked his book more snugly under his left arm and looked at the house. He walked to the gate and looked up at the roof; walked across the street and viewed the house in perspective; but nothing useful came of it, so he crossed the street again and tried ringing the doorbell once more. He rang it sharply and waited. Then he knocked and waited. He was willing to wait until the door opened, and he leaned against the porch railing and waited, ringing the doorbell insinuatingly, or commandingly, or coaxingly, from time to time.

Meanwhile, the attorney waited until the half hour he had assigned was up, and then walked toward Miss Briggs' house with briskly business−like steps.

"Now, some folks," he said to himself, as he walked, "wouldn't get any fun at all out of a case like this, but I do. That's the way to keep young. It's why I don't grow stale in this town. It is a small puddle for a toad of my size, but I hop around and keep things stirred up."

As he neared the house, he saw the Colonel approaching from the opposite direction, and he waved his hand to him, and the Colonel hurried to meet him. They turned into the yard together, and saw Eliph' Hewlitt resting easily against the porch railing.

"Nobody's at home?" asked the attorney.

"Yes," said Eliph'. "Somebody's home, but they don't answer the bell.

"Book agent?" said the attorney. "Well, you can't blame them, much. Gems of literature aren't always wanted."

The Colonel scowled. He felt a personal interest in Pap Briggs' money, and he resented any attempt to part the old man from any of it. He suffered almost as deeply at tax time as Pap himself did, and he considered the money Sally had to pay in installments on Sir Walter Scott as practically thrown away, and that she might as well have taken it out of his own pocket. He knocked on the lower step of the porch, with the side of his ax,

angrily.

"You git out of this here yard!" he ordered. "I don't want no book agents a− hangin' around here, an' I won't have it. You clean out of here!"

Eliph' coughed lightly behind his hand, but the words of reproof that he intended to launch softly at the Colonel were never spoken.

"Well, this IS lucky!" cried the attorney, holding out his hand to Eliph'. "Colonel, this is the best luck we could have had. Here we need a witness, and here we have him right on the spot! I was going to stop and get Skinner on the way down, and then I thought maybe, from what you said, you and Skinner were not very friendly, so I didn't, and now I'm glad I didn't. We find a witness right here on the porch, just as if he had been ordered to be here. I call that a good omen."

The Colonel was not pleased, and he showed it, but he really had nothing that he could urge against this book agent, so he said nothing. The attorney rang the bell, and Miss Sally, having peeped out to see the meaning of so many men on her porch, recognized the Colonel and the attorney, and opened the door. The attorney stood back to let Eliph' enter, and then followed him in. The three men stood in the little hallway, hats in hand, while Toole explained why they had come, and Miss Sally led the way to the second−floor room where the box stood.

It was an impressive scene as the four gathered around the box.

"Knock off the lid!" said the attorney firmly. The Colonel raised his ax and struck. The board splintered but remained firm. "Legally," said the attorney, "you may strike three blows."

At the third blow a portion of the lid fell clattering to the floor, and the three men and Miss Sally peered anxiously into the box. From it the Colonel tenderly lifted a nickel−plated cylinder, as tall as a man's knee and as large around as a leg of mutton. It had a convex top, and on one side a dial. From near the base a long rubber tube extended.

The Colonel handled the thing gently. He held it in his hands as an old bachelor might handle his newborn nephew, and Miss Sally looked anxiously into his face, appealing for enlightenment. The Colonel studied the thing carefully, and then looked into the box again, and back at the glittering object in his hands. There were three more exactly like it in the box.

"What is it?" asked Miss Sally nervously. It looked explosive.

The gingerly manner in which the Colonel handled the dangerous−looking thing aroused her suspicions. She backed away from it. Eliph' Hewlitt opened his lips to speak, but the attorney motioned him to be still.

"Don't you know what it is?" Miss Sally asked, appealing to the Colonel.

"Yes," said the Colonel, but he still looked at the glistening affair with doubt. "Oh, yes! But I can't see what that there young feller was doin' with four of 'em. I can't see what he was doin' with 'em anyhow. Mebby," he said, "he was agent for 'em."

"He was agent for 'most everything I ever heard tell of a man bein' agent for," said Miss Sally, "but I wish you'd tell me what they are."

"Well, ma'm," said the Colonel, "this is fire−extinguishers; patent chemical fire−extinguishers. I know because I recall seein' some once when I was down to Jefferson. They had 'em in a theater there. They put out

fires with 'em."

"Well!" exclaimed Miss Sally. "How do you ever suppose anybody would put out a fire with a thing like that?"

The Colonel turned the affair over and over.

"I didn't study that up," he admitted, "but I guess if I take time I can find out how the thing works. They squirt out of this here tube somehow."

He turned up the end of the tube and squinted into it. Again Eliph' Hewlitt was about to speak, but the attorney caught his eye and winked, and the little book agent held his tongue.

"Well, land's sakes!" exclaimed Miss Sally, "What am I goin' to do with four fire−extinguishers, I'd like to know?" She asked the question as if the Colonel had got her into this thing of the ownership of the fire−extinguishers, and she looked to him to take the responsibility. He was quite willing to accept it.

"I've got to think that over," he said. "A feller can't decide right off hand what to do with four fire−extinguishers. It looks to me as if they was worth a lot more than the young feller owed you, Miss Sally. They ain't no doubt about Miss Sally havin' a right to 'em, is there, Mister Toole?"

"Not a bit of doubt!" exclaimed Toole cheerfully. "She has every right in the world. You've got a witness that they came out of that box, and she can sell, give, donate, assign, or bequeath them, for better or for worse."

"Then that's all right," said the Colonel, "an' I guess that's all we need you for."

"Except to settle the witness fees with this gentleman," said Toole, turning to Eliph', who was still eager to say a word or two. "But mebby, if I have a word or two with him, I can fix it up without making any expense for you."

He drew Eliph' to one side.

"What's the cost of that book you're selling?" he asked. "Well, I'll take one. I don't take one for a bribe, but because I can see you're not the sort of man that would sell a book that wasn't worth the money. I want that book. And just you keep still about those fire−extinguishers. Between you and me, those are first−class nickel−plated lung−testers, and not fire−extinguishers. But that doesn't matter. There's just about as heavy a call for fire−extinguishers in Kilo as there is for lung−testers. Can you keep still about it?"

"I can," said Eliph' Hewlitt, "and you'll never regret having bought a copy of Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art. It is a book that should be in every man's hand, and in every home. If you owned a copy now, you would know is value to man, woman, or child. I was going to try to sell one to Miss Briggs when you came, and if you could help me to−−−−"

The attorney smiled. This was the sort of game he enjoyed. "Don't tell about the lung−testers," he whispered, and turned to Miss Sally. "Miss Briggs," he said, "will you let this gentleman have a few minutes of your time? I want him to show you a book he has. It is a book that should be in every home. If you will give him a few minutes."

He did not wait for Miss Sally to answer, but turned to the scowling Colonel.

"Colonel," he said, "I want you to walk down to the office with me. I shouldn't wonder if you could sell those fire−extinguishers right here in Kilo."

The four descended the stairs together, and the Colonel would willingly have lingered, but the attorney took him by the arm and jovially steered him out of the door. Miss Sally, too, would gladly have had the Colonel remain, to protect her from the book agent, and to say "no" when the appeal to buy was reached, but Eliph' retreated into the darkness of the parlor, and took a seat in the corner of the room, and Miss Sally, unable now to escape him, seated herself as far from him as she could.

CHAPTER X

The Boss Grafter

Eliph' Hewlitt was resolved that into this interview no words regarding Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art should enter. With two such favored rivals in the field, and with such difficulty in getting into the house as he had experienced, he meant to get well acquainted in a hurry. Miss Sally sat stiffly in her chair, steeling herself to refuse the request to buy a copy of the book. Her usually attractive face was stern, as she looked at Eliph' Hewlitt, and she watched him suspiciously as he slowly combed his whiskers with his fingers, as if she feared this was some part of the operation by which he was charming her into a hypnotic state in which she would sign for a book without knowing why. She nerved herself to ward off whatever insinuating words he should first say, and Eliph', as he studied her face, sought words that would advance him at one bound deep into the state of being well acquainted. It was a trying moment for both.

Then, so suddenly that Miss Sally almost jumped from her chair, Eliph' coughed behind his hand, and spoke.

"It seems like it would be as hot to−day as it was yesterday, if it don't shower before night," he said, and smiled pleasantly as he said it.

Miss Sally was taken off her guard, and before she was aware she had answered, quite as politely as she would have answered the minister himself.

"It's awful hot," she said. "I guess Kilo's the hottest place on earth in summer."

"Not the hottest," answered Eliph', leaning forward eagerly. "You wouldn't say that if you had a copy of Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art, and studied it up the way I do. Page 442 gives all the hottest places on earth, with the record highest temperature of each, together with all the coldest places, where there is the greatest rainfall, and a chronological table of all the great famines, floods, storms, hot and cold spells the earth has ever known, from the time of Adam to the present day, with pictures of the Johnstown flood, and diagrams of Noah's Ark. This, with the chapter on the Physical Geography of Land and Sea, telling of tides, typhoons, trade winds, tornadoes, et cetery, explains why and how weather happens. All this and ten thousand other subjects, all indexed from A to Z in one book−−−−"

He paused suddenly, appalled to think that he was already far from his resolve not to mention Jarby's Encyclopedia, and, as his voice still hung on the last word he had spoken, the doorbell rang, and Miss Sally jumped up, happy for any interruption. She merely turned her head to say:

"I guess I don't want one to−day," and then Eliph' heard her open the door, and greet the newcomers as she welcomed them into the hall. They were Mrs. Tarbro− Smith and Susan, and, as Miss Sally hurried them up the stairs to remove their dusty hats, she leaned back and called to Eliph':

"You can get right out the door," she said, "it ain't shut. I guess I won't have no more time to spend listenin' to you to−day."

For half an hour Eliph' waited, listening to the chatter of voices, and then he quietly stole from the house and stepped gently out of the yard. There was no sense in waiting longer, and he knew it.

Mrs. Tarbro−Smith, receiving a letter from the editor of MURRAY'S MAGAZINE, had learned at length that Clarence was not typical Iowa, and she had transferred her field of study to Kilo on his recommendation. She meant to spend the rest of the season there, and hoped Miss Sally would take her to board. She found that Miss Sally would be glad, indeed, to have her company, and Mrs. Smith did not think it necessary to mention that she was looking for local color and types. She was pleased when she heard that Eliph' Hewlitt, who had so interested her, was "working" Kilo.

As Eliph' Hewlitt walked toward the hotel he felt that another opportunity had been lost−−thrown away−−by his inability to avoid Jarby's Encyclopedia as a topic, and for one moment he came as near giving up Miss Sally as he ever came to giving up anything. In that moment he saw the simplicity of his courtship, as he had imagined it would be, resolve itself into a tangled affair, as all these new individualities entered into it. Instead of being a mere matter between himself and Miss Sally, it was involving men and women, one after the other. It seemed to become a fight between himself, a singer stranger in Kilo, and an endless chain of interested citizens. Already there was Pap Briggs, who hated book agents; the Colonel and Skinner, who hoped to win Miss Sally; Mrs. Smith, who would serve as a defense against Eliph's attacks; and, as he walked down the street, he seemed to see in every man, woman, and child, a possible ally of either the Colonel or Skinner. But he tucked his sample copy of Jarby's under his arm more securely, and braced up his courage. He even whistled as he approached the hotel, but, when he glanced up at the attorney's office and saw Toole and the Colonel with their head together, he stopped whistling. If Toole was going to take either side, Eliph' would have liked to claim him. Toole was a smart man.

Toole and the Colonel left Miss Sally's with the attorney well pleased, and his enigmatic smile rested on his face as he led the Colonel to his office. He handed him a chair, and made him take a cigar, and then turned and faced him.

"Now," he said, "what are you going to do with those what−do−you−call−'ems?"

"Them fire−extinguishers?" said the Colonel, licking the cigar around and around before lighting it. "Well, I ain't had much time to think that over yet. A feller can't decide on a thing like that all at once. It ain't likely no one in Kilo would buy a fire−extinguisher like them, all nickel−plated, if they had their senses about 'em. 'Twouldn't be natural. I might raffle 'em off, only nobody'd be likely to buy chances on a fire−extinguisher. I might take 'em down to Jefferson, but I don't see as that would do much good, nobody'd be likely to buy fire−extinguishers off of me down there."

"No," said the attorney, turning to his table and looking over some papers, with an appearance of interest, "No, I guess not. I don't see that you can do much of anything with them, unless you use them for ornaments. It seems a pity that Miss Briggs didn't go to Skinner for advice about that box, instead of you, doesn't it?"

The Colonel stopped with a lighted match half way to his cigar.

"What do you mean?" he asked, red in the face. "Do you mean that puffy old beef− cutter's got more sense than what I have, young man?"

"Oh, no," said the attorney, carelessly. "Not at all. I was just thinking that if Skinner HAD opened that box, and HAD found fire−extinguishers in it, it would have been a fine chance for him to say to Miss Briggs, 'Madam, I am building in this town an opera house, known as Skinner's Opera House. The safety of the people of Kilo demands fire−extinguishers in Skinner's Opera House. I will take those four nickel−plated appliances and install them in my opera house, and allow you ten dollars apiece for them, cash or meat.' But, of course," continued the attorney innocently, "you can't do that; you haven't built an opera house."

The Colonel's little eyes peered at the attorney, and they were filled with cunning. Across his hard mouth a smile crept and broadened until he had to lay his hand across it, it was so indecently wide and exultant.

"Skinner is no fool," continued the attorney. "As soon as he hears that Miss Briggs has those four things he will probably rush right up to her house and offer to buy them. It would be a great feather in his cap with her, if he could get the credit of having thought of it. I shouldn't wonder if he had heard of what was in that box by this time. It seems a pity, doesn't it, that he should get all the credit after you have done all the work?"

The Colonel looked at the noncommittal face of the attorney, and smiled again. This was a sort of cunning he could appreciate, and he leaned over and gave Toole a sly poke in the ribs, to show him that he understood. Toole looked at him with a blank face, and at this the Colonel slapped his knee, and uttered a mirthful noise that was like the sound of a man choking. He clapped his greasy hat on his mat of hair and went out, pausing at the door to look back and grin at the attorney once more.

Mr. Skinner was trimming a roast. He had just cut off a piece of suet, which he held in his plump read hand as he listened to the Colonel's proposition to sell him four nickel−plated fire−extinguishers at ten dollars each. Perhaps the Colonel spoke to impetuously; to commandingly. Skinner held the lump of suet offensively near the Colonel's nose as he answered.

"Fire−extinguishers!" he laughed. "Me buy fire−extinguishers? I wouldn't give THAT for them."

He shook the suet before the Colonel's eyes.

"No, sir!" he sneered. "I wouldn't give THAT for them. And I throw that away!"

"Skinner," said the Colonel, growing dangerously red in the face, "don't you shake no meat in MY face like that! Don't you dare do it! I won't have no butcher shake meat in MY face. You low−down beef−killer. That's all you are, a beef−killer."

"Mebby," admitted the butcher indifferently. "Mebby I am, but I don't buy no fire−extinguishers. And I don't take much stock in agents for them, neither. No. Nor in gold bricks. Nor green good. No."

The Colonel raised his fist and brought it down on the butcher's counter so hard that the meat scales danced, and the indicator jerked nervously across the face of the dial, weighing a half pound of anger. The butcher leaned back against the shopping block, and gently caressed the handle of his cleaver. He pointed to the door with his other hand.

"Git out!" he said, and the Colonel scowled but went.

On his way home the Colonel bethought himself of a good excuse to stop at Miss Sally's. He had left his ax there, and he went to the back door, this not being a formal call. Miss Sally came to the door when he knocked, and brought him the ax, and he took the opportunity to say a bad word for Skinner, and he was astounded to find that she sympathized with Skinner on his refusal to buy the fire−extinguishers.

"I don't wonder at it," she said, "seeing he has put so much money on that opery house already. He's done a lot for this town that nobody else would ever have thought of doin'. Mr Skinner's a very public−spirited citizen, and to think he made it all out of sellin' meat! It must be a good business. I guess you'll have to excuse me now, Colonel Guthrie, I've got visitors down from Clarence."

The Colonel's steps dragged as he walked home. Never had Miss Sally said so many good words for his rival. She had almost rebuffed his good offices in the attempt to sell the fire−extinguishers, and had praised Skinner to his face.

Early the next morning he "dropped up" into the office of Attorney Toole, and as that young man lay back in his chair, with his feet on his desk, he told him the whole story. The attorney smiled. This was the kind of split in the ranks of the Citizens' Party that he had hoped to promote.

"After that, Colonel," he said, when the Colonel had told him that Skinner had ordered him out of the shop, "you ought to MAKE him buy them."

"I wisht I could, dog take him!" cried the Colonel. "I'd like to make him eat 'em."

"Colonel," said Toole, "I see you are, as always, guided by a spirit of conservative kindness. You hesitate to force that butcher to do what he does not want to do. The feeling does you honor, but is it business? You hesitate even when you see how easily your could force him to do what he is in duty bound to do to protect the lives of our trustful citizens. I admire your gentleness, but I deplore your unbusinesslike moderation. You lack public spirit."

The Colonel grinned savagely. He felt that the attorney was teasing him, but he could not quite tell how.

"You," said Toole easily, "knowing that our town council can, and should, pass an ordinance compelling all owners of opera houses to install nickel−plated fire−extinguishers−−to install four of them in each opera house in Kilo−−for the protection of our people, hesitate to ask them to pass such an ordinance. You hesitate because you do not wish to appear malevolent toward a rival. Now, don't you?"

"Me be kind to that fat, pig−stealing, sausage−grinding−−−−" snorted the Colonel, but the attorney stopped him with a lifted hand.

"Just what I said," exclaimed the attorney. "You are too kind; too considerate; too regardful of his feelings. But would he be so kind and considerate and regardful of your feelings, if he was in your place?"

He lowered his feet and his voice, and placed his hand on the Colonel's knee.

"No!" he whispered hoarsely. "No!" he cried loudly and defiantly. "No! He would not! He would use the influence you have with the city council and the mayor to have an ordinance passed making YOU put fire−extinguishers in YOUR opera house, and compel YOU to buy them of HIM. But you will not use your huge influence with Mayor Stitz and the city council. You hesitate."

Toole shook his head sadly; he almost wept out the last word, he seemed so heartbroken to see the Colonel hesitate.

"Why hesitate?" he asked. "If I were not a stranger in town, as I may say, I should beg you not to hesitate. I should beg you to act. I should beg you to think of the lives of poor, helpless women and children. I should beg you, for humanity's sake, to go to the honorable mayor and city council, and appeal to them to pass an ordinance compelling this Skinner to buy nickel−plated fire− extinguishers. To compel him, Colonel! But I have nothing to say."

He shuffled the legal−looking papers that littered his desk. The Colonel's eyes had narrowed to fine points of hate−instilled cunning as the attorney proceeded.

"What have we come to," asked the attorney sadly, "when the leading citizens of a town like Kilo neglect their duty? Are there no true citizens left to show the mayor and city council their plain duty?"

When the Colonel had the thing put to him in this light he did not hesitate. He knew Stitz, the mayor, and he knew that Stitz had full control of the city council. What Stitz told it to do the city council did, and the

Colonel believed he had a right to dictate what Stitz should tell it, for he had suggested the name of Stitz as candidate for mayor, and, with Skinner, had helped elect him. He went at once to the mayor, and laid the case before him.

Mayor Johann Stitz was an honest, upright shoemaker, and owned his own building. It had once been a street car in Franklin, and when the horse cars were superseded by electric cars, Stitz had bought this car at auction, and had paid ten dollars to have it hauled to Kilo. It had not been a very good car when it left the shops before it made its first trip, and the ten years of running off the track and being boosted on again had not improved it much. It was in pretty bad shape when Stitz picked it up for eighteen dollars, and it had deteriorated greatly since it had been doing duty as a cobbler's shop, but Stitz liked it. The tiny car stove that stood midway of one of the seats was all he needed in cold weather, and the seats along the sides were a continuous spread of cobblers' seats. He could cobble all the way up one side of the car and all the way back the other, and when he had customers waiting he always had a seat to give them. He and the whole city council could hold a caucus in the car, and all have seats, and in the evenings he could take a stool out on his front or back porch and smoke a pipe in peace. His car stood side by side with the round topped wagon of the traveling photographer, who had not traveled since his felloes gave out on that very lot six years before.

The city officers of the Citizens' Party, being of an independent part, were so independent that they were worried and chafed by their independence. No one but a man in office knows the real blessedness of having the set beliefs and an traditions of a regular party to fall back upon. The independence of the independents made their work more difficult; it compelled them to decide things for themselves, and then everybody complained of what they did. No independent is ever satisfied with what another independent does, and they lost even the satisfaction of knowing that they were pleasing their own part, which a properly service Democrat or Republican is rather apt to be sure of. In this state of things the six councilmen had thrown their burdens of decision to Stitz. They cast the whole burden on him, saying, "Ask Stitz. He's mayor. What he says, we'll do." And Stitz never would say.

As the Colonel entered the mayor's shoe shop Stitz was reading a magazine, which he laid beside him on the car seat while he listened to the Colonel. A pile of similar magazines lay beside him on the seat. They were the missionary offerings of Doc Weaver, who was interested in whatever was latest in religion, government or popular science. They were magazines telling of the municipal corruption of "New York, The Vile," "Philadelphia, Defiled but Happy," "Chicago, the Base," and "St. Louis, the Decayed." Doc Weaver had given them to Mayor Stitz to show him the evil of graft, and to keep his administration clean and pure.

When the Colonel had laid before the mayor his request for an ordinance compelling all opera house owners in Kilo to install and maintain four nickel− plated fire−extinguishers in each opera house, the mayor beamed on him through his iron−rimmed spectacles.

"Ho! Ho−o!" he exclaimed, "it is to make Mister Skinner buy some fire− extinguishers, yes? So shall my city council pass an ordinance, yes? Um!"

He smiled broadly at the Colonel, and then nodded.

"For how much you graft me?" he asked blandly.

"What?" asked the Colonel.

"Graft me," repeated Mayor Stitz. "I say for how much you will graft me when I shall pass one such ordinance my council through?"

"What's that?" asked the Colonel, puzzled.

"For how much you will make me one graft?" Mayor Stitz repeated slowly. "Graft! Graft! Understand him not?"

The Colonel shook his head.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Graft! Graft! Graft!" exclaimed the mayor with annoyance. "Don't you know him? When I make you one ordinance to pass, so, then you make me one graft, so! Like I read me in this book. Me to you, one ordinance; you to me one graft. So!"

A look of dismay came over the face of the Colonel, as he frowned at the smooth, honest face of the mayor, from which beamed eyes of childish honesty and frankness.

"Here in this book," said the mayor slowly and distinctly, like one explaining some simple thing to a child, "I read me of this graft business. It is to me this graft comes. So it is by all big cities. Man would have one ordinance. Goot! In every town is such one boss grafter. To the boss grafter gives the ordinance−wanting man a graft. So! Then for the ordinance−wanting man does the boss grafter get one ordinance made like is wanted. Yes! So, it is; no graft, no ordinance! Some graft, some ordinance! I read him in this book Doc Weaver gives me as a lesson to go by. It is a goot way. I like me that graft business."

A glimmer of the meaning entered the Colonel's mind, but he could hardly connect the idea of graft with the honest Johann Stitz. As a fact, to Mayor Stitz the idea of unlawful gain did not come. Graft was a way out of the difficulty of having to decide things. It was a system authorized by the lawmakers of great cities, and a system that could operate in Kilo. Whenever Stitz and his council passed an ordinance someone complained, and upbraided him; he saw now why this was; they had not used the approved system. But the Colonel still frowned.

"Well, what−−how much do you want?" he asked.

Mayor Stitz turned up his innocent face and smiled blandly again.

"That makes not!" he exclaimed. "In the books it says much money, but is not yet Kilo so gross as New York. We go easy yet a while. It is what you want to graft me. One bushel apples−−one bushel potatoes−−that YOU must say."

The Colonel moved closer to the mayor. He thought of Miss Sally, and of Skinner.

"I will make you a present of a bushel of apples," he said.

The mayor laid down his magazine and arose. As the Colonel watched him with surprise, he removed his leathern apron. The Colonel folded his hand into a fist, but on the pleasant face of Mayor Stitz there was no sign of anger; no sign of righteous indignation; only a bland look of satisfaction.

"Well," inquired the Colonel impatiently, "will ye put the ordinance through, or won't ye?"

The mayor looked at him with surprise in every feature. Clearly this Colonel did not understand the first rudiments of graft.

"First I must go by Mr. Skinner," said Stitz simply. "Mebby he grafts me more NOT to pass such an ordinance."

"Look here, Stitz," said the Colonel in alarm. "You ain't goin' to do that, are ye?"

"Vell," said the mayor, "still must I do it! So always does the boss grafter. Which side grafts him the most, so he does. It is always so, never different. To the most grafter, so goes he. I read it in this books. When the boss grafter does not so, what use is the grafts? How then does he know which he shall do for, the ordinance−wanting man, or the ordinance−not−wanting man?"

The Colonel tried to argue with him, but the mayor was obdurate. He would not budge from the highest principles of graft, and, as the Colonel had gone too far now to recede with honor, he secured the best terms he could. The most he could obtain was a promise that the mayor would not mention any names, nor so much as hint that graft had been promised. He uneasily awaited the mayor's return.

Stitz returned radiant. He was rubbing his hands and beaming.

"Fine!" he exclaimed. "Fine! I make me one boss grafter yet! Mister Skinner grafts me one roast beef and six pigs' feet. He ain't much liking those fire− extinguishers to have. How much more will you graft me now?"

The Colonel looked the mayor squarely in the eye.

"Stitz," he said, "I ain't goin' to run no auction with that there Skinner. I come to you first, an' I was the first to say I'd make you a present, an' you ought to pass that ordinance anyhow. But to shut up this thing right here an' now, I'll do this: if you'll say you'll pas that ordinance like I want, so Skinner'll have to buy them four nickel−plated fire−extinguishers that Miss Briggs owns, at twenty−five dollars each, I'll give you four bushels of Benoni apples, two bushels of Early Rose potatoes, four bunches of celery, a peck of peas, and one spring chicken. And if you won't" he added, raising his hand threateningly, "I'll go to them six councilmen, an' I'll graft 'em one at a time, an' THEN where 'll your boss grafter be? You can't help yourself."

"Say!" he exclaimed, "ain't I a boss grafter? Apples, potatoes, celery, peas, and chickens! Five grafts for one ordinance! I do it!"

"An' don't you say nothing about it," warned the Colonel.

The Colonel thought there would be no harm in making a little commission for himself on the deal. It was not as if he had done nothing to earn it. He would have to furnish the produce for the mayor's "graft," and he had secured the services of Toole free of fees, and he was doing Miss Sally a good turn into the bargain. If Skinner was compelled to buy the four fire−extinguishers at twenty− five dollars each Miss Sally could afford a commission of ten dollars each, and forty dollars were always forty dollars to the Colonel.

The mayor kept his promise. At the next meeting of the council the ordinance was proposed, and hurried to a third reading by suspension of the by−laws, and the next day Stitz signed it. There was some opposition at the council meeting, for Skinner was present, and wanted to talk, but the marshal was present, too, and at a word from Stitz, he helped Skinner down the stairs, but gently, as a marshal owing a considerable butcher's bill should.

CHAPTER XI

The False Gods of Doc Weaver

When Eliph' Hewlitt reached the hotel after his unfortunate visit of courtship, he stood a minute irresolute, and then the sign of the KILO TIMES, across the street, caught his eye. Here was a power he must not neglect; the power of the press. He knew well enough that the next issue of the KILO TIMES would chronicle his arrival in town; something like "E. Hewlitt is registered at the Kilo Hotel," or "E. Hewlitt, representing a New York

publishing house, is sojourning in our midst," but he felt that his heart interest in Kilo demanded something more than this. He was willing to have all the friends he could muster for the fight he would have to make for Miss Sally's affection, and he knew that the press was powerful in creating first impressions. He crossed the street and climbed the stair to the office of the KILO TIMES.

Every Thursday, except once a year, when Thomas Jefferson Jones went to the State Fair at Des Moines, the KILO TIMES appeared, printed on an old Washington hand−power press in the TIMES office four small pages, backed by four other pages that came already printed from a Chicago supply house, with the usual assortment of serial story, "Hints to Farmers," column of jokes, sermon, and patent medicine advertisements. T. J.'s own side was made up of local advertisements, a column of editorial, a few bits of local news that he could scrape together, and several columns of "country correspondence." T. J. himself was the entire force of the TIMES, except for a boy who came in every Thursday morning to work the hand−power of the press, who then washed up and delivered the papers about town. T. J. had built up the paper from a state of decay until it was one of the most prosperous country weeklies in Iowa, and he had done this against a handicap that would have discouraged most men−−he was not married.

In Kilo subscriptions are frequently paid in turnips or cordwood, and the advertisers expect at least half of their bills to be taken out in trade, and the unmarried publisher is at a disadvantage. An unmarried publisher has little use for the trade half of the payment he received from the advertising milliner. No editor can appear in public wearing a gorgeously flowered hat of the type known as "buzzard," and retain the respect of his subscribers. Neither can he receive as currency, in a year when the turnip crop is unusually plentiful, more than sixty or seventy bushels of turnips in one day without having to get rid of them at a severe discount. But, in spite of all this, T. J., by his energy and good humor, had made a success of the TIME, and his editorials advising the people not to patronize the Chicago mail−order houses, but to patronize their home merchants, were copied by his contemporaries all over the State. One of his editorials on the prospects of the year's hog crop was quoted by the hog editor of a big Chicago daily, word for word. These are the real triumphs of country journalism, and all over the State his paper was referred to by his brother editors as "Our enterprising contemporary, the KILO TIMES," and T. J. as "The brilliant young editor of the same."

When Eliph' Hewlitt entered the printing office T. J. was standing by his case setting up an item of news. He never wrote anything but editorials on paper; other matter he composed in type as he went along. It saved time. Now he laid his "stick" on the case and turned to Eliph'.

"My name is Hewlitt, Eliph' Hewlitt," said the book agent, "agent for Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art,' published by Jarby & Goss, New York; price five dollars, neatly bound in cloth, one dollar down, and one dollar a month until paid."

As the editor was about to speak, Eliph' raised his hand.

"I don't want to sell you one!" he exclaimed. "We are members of the same craft, and I never canvass publishers, except to offer them a chance to buy this book at a very liberal discount offered by our firm to the fellow members of the great craft, a discount of forty percent, bringing the cost of the book, complete in every respect and exactly like those sold regularly for five dollars, down to the phenomenally low cost of three dollars. At this price no publisher can afford to be without a copy, containing, as it does, all the matter usually found in the most complete and expensive encyclopedias, and much more, all condensed into one volume for ready reference. It saves times and money."

T. J. shook his head, not unkindly, but positively, and was about to turn to his case again, but Eliph' held out his hand.

"I merely mentioned it," he said, with a smile. "I don't want to sell you one. I supposed you would have learned from the landlord that I was in town and I only wanted to be sure that you got the item right for the

next paper."

T. J. turned to his galleys and read from the type:

"'One of the visitors to our little burg this week is E. Hewlitt, of New York, who is stopping at the Kilo House.'"

Eliph' stroked his whiskers and smiled.

"Yes," he said. "Quite correct. H−e−w−l−i−t−t, I presume? A very good item, and well worded, but it might be more−−more extensive."

"We are rather crowded for space this week," said T. J. "Two of our country correspondents missed the mails last week, and we have a double dose of it this week."

"Certainly," said Eliph'. "But I was thinking that this book ought to be mentioned. The advent of a book like Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art, containing, as it does, selections from the world's best literature, hints and helps for each and every day in the year, recipes for the kitchen, the dying words of all the world's great men, with their lives, et cetery, ought to be noticed. I was wondering if you would have space to run in a little card about that book."

T. J. came forward and brushed a heap of exchanges from the only chair in the office, and motioned to it with his hand. Eliph' laid his book on the editor's desk, and picked up a copy of last week's TIMES. He ran his eye over the columns, and stopped at the advertisement of Skinner, the butcher.

"I was thinking of something about twice the size of this," he suggested.

T. J. smiled and mentioned his rate for the space. It was not much, and Eliph' nodded.

"Every week, until forbid," he said, "and I guess I'd better subscribe. I am going to live right her in Kilo right along now, and the man that don't take his home paper never knows what is going on."

T. J. was pleased. He was more pleased when Eliph' pulled a long purse from his pocket, and paid for one insertion of the advertisement and for the subscription. The editor pulled a pad of paper toward himself, and wrote hastily, while Eliph' briefly mentioned facts. When the next number of the TIMES appeared there was a well−displayed advertisement of Jarby's Encyclopedia, with Eliph' Hewlitt mentioned as agent, but more important to Eliph' was the "local item" that stood at the very top of the local column.

"We are glad to announce that Kilo has secured as a citizen Eliph' Hewlitt, a man whose work in behalf of good literature entitles him to the highest praise. Mr. Hewlitt, who intends to make his home with us permanently, is representative of the celebrated work, Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art, published by Jarby & Goss, Greater New York, and his travels in behalf of that work have taken him to all parts of the nation. To have a man of such extensive travel decide to make Kilo his home is an honor. Mr. Hewlitt says that in all his travels he never found a town more up−to−date and progressive for its size than our own little burg. We heartily welcome him to our midst.

"We have it on good authority that Mr. Hewlitt is a man of considerable means, amassed in carrying on his work as a disseminator of literature, and that he intends, in the near future, to purchase a home here. He will probably buy a lot, and erect a dwelling that will be a credit to him and to our little burg. At present he is stopping with Doctor Weaver, the leading physician of our little burg.

"We learn that our new citizen has followed a habit universally adopted by many authors, theatrical artists,

and others gifted in various ways, and early adopted a NOM DE PLUME, choosing the name of Eliph' Hewlitt because of its unassuming simplicity. His real name is Samuel Mills, and he is the son of the late W. P. Mills, of Franklin, gifted author of the deservedly famous poetical work, 'The wages of Sin.' Early in his career our new citizen found himself overshadowed by the fame of his father, and unwilling to succeed buy by and because of his own efforts, he chose a NOM DE PLUME, which he has ever since used. This truly American independence does him the greatest credit.

"Mr. Mills, or Eliph' Hewlitt, as he prefers to be known, is an old schoolmate of James Wilkins, the prominent livery and hotel man of our little burg. Again we welcome him to our midst."

This was headed, "Eliph' Hewlitt Now a Citizen of Kilo!" and it was all the introduction the little book agent needed−−except to Miss Sally. When se read it she turned pale. A book agent living in the very town was more than she could bear.

But there was another item of news that Eliph' left with T. J. that went into the same issue of the TIMES. This stated that Mrs. Smith, of New York, and Miss Susan Bell were visiting Miss Sally Briggs, and T. J. had completed the slight information given him by Eliph' by a call at Miss Sally's. It was after Eliph' had told T. J. that he meant to make his home in Kilo that the enterprising editor suggested Doc Weaver's as a good boarding place, and the little book agent was glad enough to settle himself in a real home, for the Kilo Hotel was hardly more than an annex to the liver, feed and sale stable part of Jim Wilkins' business, and any man with half an eye could see that it was not, as a home for men, to be compared to the comfort with the stable, as a home for horses. Jim would have been the last man in Kilo to expect a visitor to remain in the Kilo Hotel more than two days. Before the end of the day Eliph' had arranged with Mrs. Doc Weaver for board and lodging, and had moved his big valise to the little back room on the second floor, from the low six−paned windows of which he could look out over the cornfield that environed Kilo on that side.

At supper he met Doc Weaver himself, and found him, as Kilo pronounced him, "a ready talker." Eliph' and Doc Weaver were sitting at the supper table, earnestly engaged in conversation, while the doctor's wife cleared away the dishes, and Eliph' was pouring out the knowledge he had absorbed from Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art. The doctor was having a mental feast. Behind his spectacles his eyes glowed, and in exact ratio, as the doctor's spirits rose, the frown on his wife's forehead deepened.

The doctor had few opportunities for discussing any subjects but the most ordinary. Neighborhood gossip, the weather, the price of corn, were the usual sources of conversation in Kilo, except when an election gave a political tinge to discussions, or when a revival turned all attention to religious matters; but the doctor's mind scorned these limitation, and he found few persons from year's end to year's end to whom he could speak openly on his favorite themes.

To Kilo in general the doctor was something of a mystery. Ordinarily he was the most silent of men, but on occasion, as for instance when he could buttonhole an intelligent stranger, he dissolved into a torrent of words.

Doc Weaver held views. He believed there were other things besides the Republican party and the Methodist Church, and being liberal−minded, he believed all these other things in turn, and he had believed them enthusiastically. He could not help thinking that he was of a little finer clay than Skinner, or Wilkins, or Colonel Guthrie. Kilo considered the doctor one of her peculiar institutions; as Kilo took the ever−joking Toole seriously, so she took the ever serious doctor good−naturedly, but not too seriously. He was "jist Doc Weaver," and Kilo reserved the right to laugh at him in private, and to brag about him to strangers, and they were apt to "joke" him about his beliefs. As he was sensitive and dreaded the rough raillery of his neighbors, he kept his enthusiasms to himself. He was like an overcharged bottle of soda water.

Eliph' and the doctor were discussing Christian Science and faith cures generally, and when the doctor's wife

passed to and fro, catching a phrase now and then, a look of deep anxiety spread over her face, until, as she brushed the crumbs from the red tablecloth, her shoulders seemed to droop in dejection.

When she smoothed the cloth and set the lamp on the mat in the center the doctor glanced at his watch and arose. He buttoned his frock coat over his breast (it was the only frock coat in Kilo), and drew on his driving gloves, holding his hands on a level with his chin. It was a habit, an aristocratic touch, which, like his side−whiskers, detached him from the rest of Kilo. He had once worn a silk hat, but he soon abandoned it for gray felt; for even he saw that a silk hat emphasized his individuality too strongly for comfort. It was a tempting mark for snowballs in winter.

When the doctor had closed the door and stepped from the front porch, his wife sank into a chair.

"I do hope you won't git mad at what I'm goin' to say, Mister Hewlitt," she said, "'cause I ain't goin' to say it for no such thing; but I couldn't help hearin' what you was sayin' to Doc while I was reddin' off the table. I wisht you wouldn't let him git to talkin' about new−fangled religions and sich. It ain't for his good nor mine."

Eliph' nodded good−naturedly.

"Why, ma'm," he exclaimed, "we were only discussing faith cures, and neither of us believes in them−−wholly, that is. Of course everyone who has read the chapter on "India, It's Religions and Its History,' in Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art, must to some extend admit the power of mind over matter. But if you'd rather not have me, I'll not discuss it again. There are one thousand and one other interesting subjects treated of in this great book, any one of which will please the studious mind."

"I'd rather you wouldn't, if you don't mind," said the doctor's wife simply.

Eliph' Hewlitt pushed back his chair, and arose as he saw the lines of worry leave the face of his hostess. He turned to the side table and looked among the books that lay on it.

Mrs. Weaver sprang to her feet.

"Land's sakes!" she cried. "I know what you're lookin' for. You're lookin' for that book of yourn, ain't you? It's right there behind them wax flowers on that what−not. I seen it layin' around and I jist shoved it back there so Doc wouldn't git at it."

"Well, you sit down, ma'm," said the book agent. "I can get it. But there was no need to be so particular. The doctor knows how to hand a book as well as the next man."

The doctor's wife drew her darning basket from the side table and turned its contents into her lap.

"'Twasn't that," she said; "I'd never have thought of that, I guess. I hit it because I didn't know if 'twas a proper book for Doc. It's got a kind of a queer name."

Eliph' turned the book over in his hand. It was the first time anyone had suggested that the volume might be dangerous. He looked up and smiled.

"It would not harm the youngest child, ma'm," he said, "unless it fell on it. I wouldn't harm a baby."

"Well, I guess you'll think I'm awful foolish about Doc," said Mrs. Weaver, "but I wasn't goin' to take no chances, and the name kind of riled. Me. And them pictures of ladies bending."

"Physical Culture," said Eliph', "How to Develop the Body, How to Maintain Perfect Health, How to Keep Young and Beautiful. Page 542. Why, ma'm, that's just a system of training for the body. It makes one more graceful, just like running and jumping makes a boy strong."

The doctor's wife heaved a sigh of relief.

"Well, I guess that won't hurt Doc any if he does read it," she laughed. "I thought it was some new−fangled religion or other, and I allus keep sich things out of Doc's reach. Mebby you'll think I'm crazy, but when you know Doc as well as I do, you'll find out mortal quick he is to take up with new notions, and it would be jist like him to give up his sittin' in church and go and be a Physical Culture, if there was any sich belief. I don't mind much his bein' a Socialist, or any of them politercal things, if he wants to,−−and goodness knows he does,− −'cause they keep his mind busy; but since I got him to jine church I'm goin' to keep him jined, Physical Culture or no Physical Culture. I seen them pictures, and they riled me right up, to think of Doc's goin' round wrapped up in them sheets, or whatever it is on them folks in the pictures. Mebby it's all right for Physical Culturers, but I don't ever hope to see Doc so."

Eliph' Hewlitt laughed a thin little laugh, and Mrs. Weaver smiled.

"Now, you do think I'm foolish, don't you?" she inquired. "But I had sich a time with Doc 'fore I married him that I'm scared half to death every time I hear a long word I ain't right sure of. I was 'most worried out of my wits last Summer when Miss Crawford was lecturin' on Christian Science. It was jist about even whether Doc 'ud git in line or not. He had an awful struggle, poor feller, 'cause he can't bear to have nothin' new to believe in com round and him not believe in it. Religions is to Doc jist like teethin' is to babies; they got to teethe, and seem like Doc's got to catch new religions. He ain't never real happy when he ain't got no queer fandango to poke his nose into. But he didn't git Christian Scientisted.

"I says to him, 'Doc, ain't you an allopathy?' And he says, 'Yes, certainly.' 'Well,' I says, 'if you go and be a Christian Science you can't be no allopathy, Doc. Christian Science and allopathy don't mix,' I says, 'and you'd starve, that's what you'd do. I leave it to you, Doc, if you quit big pills, how'd you ever git a livin'? There ain't no big pills set down in the Christian Science book.'

"Well, he poked his eyes up at the ceiling, and says, 'I might write, Loreny.' 'Yes,' I says, 'so you might. And what 'd you write, Doc Weaver?' I says. 'Shakespeare?' And Doc shet right up, and never said another word. It was a mean thing for me to say, but I was awful worried."

"Shakespeare?" inquired Eliph'.

"Yes, that's the word−−Shakespeare," said Mrs. Weaver. "It come purty nigh keeping me from marrying Doc. You see, Doc ain't like common folks. Don's got sich broad ideas of things. Lib'ral, he calls it, but I name it jist common foolish. He's got to give every new−fangled scheme a show. I guess, off and on, Doc's believed most every queer name in the dictionary, and some that ain't been put in yet. I used to tell him they didn't git them up fast enough to keep up with him. He's got a wonderful mind, Doc has.

"I hain't no notion how ever Doc got started believin' things, but mebby he got in with a bad lot at the doctor school he went to. Doc told me hisself they cut up dead folks. Anyhow, he come back from Chicago a regular atheist; but that was before I knowed him. He lived up at Clarence, and he didn't come to Kilo 'til about ten years after that, and he'd got pretty well along by then, and had got right handy at believin' things.

"Well, when Doc come to Kilo pa had jist died an' ma an' me had to take in boarders to git along; so Doc come to our house to board. That's how Doc an' me got to know each other. I was about as old as Doc, and we wasn't either of us very chickenish, but I thought Doc was the finest man I'd ever saw, an' exceptin' what I'm tellin' you, I ain't ever had cause to change my mind.

"I'd never sa so many books as Doc brought−−more'n we've got now. I burned a lot when we got married−−Tom Paine and Bob Ingersoll, and all I wasn't sure was orthodoxy. Why, we had more books than we've got in the Kilo Sunday School Lib'ry. 'Specially Shakespeare books, some Shakespeare writ hisself, an' some that was writ about him. Doc was real took up with Shakespeare them days.

"'Most all his spare time Doc put in readin' them Shakespeare books, and sometime he'd git a new one. One day he come home mad. I ain't seen Doc real mad but twice, but he was mad that day and no mistake. He'd got a new book, an' he set down to read it as soon as he got in the house; but every couple of pages he'd slap it shut and walk up an' down, growlin' to hisself. Oh, but he was riled! That night I heard him stampin' up an' down his room, mad as a wet hen, and by and by I heard that book go rattlin' out of the window and plunk down in the radish bed. So next morning I went out and got it, 'cause I liked Doc purty well by then, and it made me sorry to see sich a nice, quiet man carry on so.

"I couldn't make head nor tail of the book, nor see why it riled Doc up so. It was jist another Shakespeare book, only this one said that it wasn't Shakespeare, but some one else, that wrote the Shakespeare books. I thought Doc was real foolish to git so mad about it, but I had no idea how much Doc had took it to heart.

"Well, I do run on terribul when I git started, don't I? An' them supper dishes waitin' to be washed! But I guess it won't hurt them to stand a bit. You see, when Doc begun to take a likin' for me, the poor feller started in to talk about what he believed in. Most fellers does. First he begun about greenbacks. He was the only Greenbacker in Kilo; but that was jist politercal stuff, and while I'm a good Republican, like pa was, I didn't see that it would hurt if my husband did think other than what I did on that, so long as he wasn't a saloon Democrat. That was when they was havin' the prohibition fight in Ioway, you know. But when Doc begun lettin' out hints that he didn't think much of goin' to church, I was real sorry.

"I was sorry because I couldn't see my way clear to marry an outsider, bein' a good Methodist myself; but I didn't dream but that he was jist one of these lazy Christians that don't attend church lest they're dragged. There is plenty sich. I thought mebby I could bring him round all right once he was married; so I jist asked him right out if he would jine church.

"Well, you'd have thought I'd asked him to take poison! He didn't flare up like some would, but jist sat down and explained how he couldn't. I guess he must have explained, off an' on, for three weeks before I got a good hang of his idea. Seems like he was believeing some Hindoo stuff jist then. I don't know as you ever heart tell of it. It's about souls. When a person dies his soul goes into another person, and so on, until kingdom come. R'inca'nation's what they call it."

"Yes," said Eliph' Hewlitt, "it is all given in "India, Its Religions and Its History,' in Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art."

"Jist so!" said Mrs. Weaver. "Well, I guess by the time Doc got done explainin' I knew more about r'inca'nation than what your Encyclopedia of Compendium does, because night after night Doc would sit up and explain till I'd drop off asleep.

"But it wasn't no use. So far as I could see, r'inca'nation was jist plain error and follerin' after false gods, and I told Doc so. Anyhow, I knowed there wan't nothin' like it in the Methodist Church, an' I jist up and let Doc know I wouldn't marry anybody that believed such stuff. Doc reckoned to change my mind, but my argument was jist plain 'I won't!' and that settled it. I believe a man and wife ought to belong to the same church,−−'thy God shall be my God'−−and I wasn't goin' to give up what I'd been taught for any crazy notions Doc had got into his head. I told him so, plain.

"Then Doc took a poetry−writing spell, but he wasn't no great hand at it. I told him in plain words he would be better off rollin' allopathy pills. I used to git right put out with Doc sometimes, foolin' away good time that

way, sittin' round by the hour spoilin' good paper. I reckon he started close onto a thousand poems, but he didn't git along very good. 'Bout the their line he'd stop and tear up what he'd wrote. When I wasn't mad I used to feel real sorry for Doc, he tried so hard; but feelin' sorry for him didn't help him none, and it was kind of ridiculous to see him.

"One day I asked Doc why he didn't tell ma and the rest of Kilo what he believed in, and he said that Kilo folks couldn't understand sich things, bein' mostly born and bred in the Methodist Church, and not lib'ral like he was. I seen he was payin' me a compliment, because he had told me, but I couldn't swaller r'inca'nation, for all that. And so we didn't seem to git no further.

"But one day Doc says, 'Well, Loreny, WHY can't you marry me? They ain't no one can love you like I do, and you know I'll make you a good husband, and I'll go to church with you reg'lar if you say so.'

"'Goin' to church ain't all, Doc Weaver,' I says. 'I jist won't marry a man that believes sich trash as you do.'

"'Well, tell me why not,' he says.

"'I'll tell you, Doc Weaver,' I says, 'since you drive me to it. I'm willing enough to marry YOU, but I ain't willing to marry some old heathen Chinee or goodness knows what!'

"'Doc was took all aback. 'Why, Loreny!' he says, 'Why, Loreny!'

"'I mean it,' I says, 'jist what I say. How can I tell who you are when you say yourself you ain't nothing but some old spirit in a new body? Like as not you're Herod, or an Indian, or a cannibal savage, and I'd like to see myself marryin' sich,' I says, 'I'd look purty, wouldn't I, settin' in church alongside of a made−over Chinee?'

"Doc ain't very pale, ever, but he got as red as a beet, and I see I'd hit him purty hard. Then he kind of stiffened up.

"'Loreny,' he says, 'I'd have thought you'd have believed my spirit to be a little better than a heathen Chinee's,' he says, 'though there's much worse folks than what they are.'

"I seen he was put out, an' I hadn't meant to hurt his feelings, so I says, more gentle, 'Well, Doc, if you ain't that, what are you?'

"I s'pose, Mr. Hewlitt, you've noticed how sometimes something you find out will make clear to you a lot of things you couldn't make head nor tail of before. That's the way what Doc said did for me. There was that poetry writin' of his, an' the way that Shakespeare book made him mad, an' how he read those Shakespeare books instead of his Mateery Medicky volumes.

"Well, I asked Doc, 'If you ain't a heathen Chinee or some sich, what are you?' an' when he answered you could have knocked me down with a wisp of hay. You'd never guess, no more than I did.

"'Loreny,' he says, solemn as a deacon, 'I didn't reckon never to tell nobody, an' you mustn't judge what I tell you too quick. I ain't made up my mind sudden− like,' he says, 'but have studied myself and what I like and don't like, for years, and I've jist been forced to it,' he says. 'There ain't no doubt in my mind, Loreny,' he says, an' he let his voice go way down low, like he was 'most afraid to say it hisself. 'Loreny, I believe that Shakespeare's spirit has transmigrated into me.'

"Well, sir, I was too taken aback to say a word. I thought Doc had gone crazy. But he hadn't.

"When I kind of got my senses back I riled up right away. 'Well,' I says snappy, 'I think when you was pickin'

out someone to be you might have picked out someone better. From all I've heard, Shakespeare wasn't no better than he'd ought to have been. He don't suit me no better than a Chinee would, and I hain't no fancy to marry Mister Shakespeare. Maybe you think it's fine doin's to be Shakespeare, Doc Weaver, but I don't, and I ain't going to marry a man that's like a two−headed cow, half one thing and half another, and not all of any. When you git your senses,' I says, ' you can talk about marryin' me' and off I went, perky as a peacock. But I cried 'most all night.

"Him an' me kind of stood off from each other after that, and I made up my mind I'd die before I'd marry Doc so long as he was Shakespeare, and Doc had got the notion that he was Shakespeare so set in his mind it seemed likely he would.

"I hadn't never took much stock in poetry readin' since I got out of 'Mother Goose,' but I begun to read Shakespeare a little jist to see what kind of poetry Doc thought he had writ when he was Shakespeare. Well, I wouldn't want to see sich books in the Sunday School Lib'ry, that's all I've got to say. Some I couldn't make sense out of, but there was one long poem about Venus and some young feller−−well, I shouldn't thing the gov'ment would allow sich things printed! I jist knowed Doc couldn't ever have writ such stuff. There ain't so much meanness in him. But I couldn't see clear how to make Doc see it that way.

"I'd about given up hopes of ever curing Doc, when one day a feller come to town and give a lecture in the dance room over the grocery. He was one of these spiritualism fellers, and as soon as it was noised around that he was comin', I knowed Doc would be the first man to go and the last to come away, and he was. Thinks I, 'Let him go. If Doc jines in with spiritualists, it will be better'n what he believes in now, and if he begins changin' religions, mebby I can keep him changin', and change him into a churchgoer." And so, jist to see what Doc was like to be, I coaxed ma to go, an' I went, too. It wasn't near so sinful as I expected.

"The feller's name was Gilson, an' he was as pale as a picked chicken, but real common lookin', otherwise. He was a right−down good talker and seemed real earnest. He wasn't the ghost−raisin' kind of spiritualist, and them that went to see a show, come away dissap'inted, for all he did was to talk and take up a collection. He said he was a new beginner and used to be a Presbyterian minister. Doc stayed after it was over and had a talk with Gilson, and of course he got converted, like he always did. He told ma so.

"I hadn't been havin' much talk with Doc one way or another, but when ma told me he had jined the spiritualists I eased up a litt, and one day I made bold to say, 'Well, Doc, I s'pose now you have give up that Shakespeare foolishness, ain't you?'

"'No, Loreny,' he says, 'I ain't.'

"'Land's sakes!' I says, 'do you mean to say you can be two things at once in religion, as well as bein' Shakespeare and Doc Weaver?'

"'Yes, Loreny,' he says. 'The spirit has got to be somewheres between the times it has got a body,' he says, 'That stands to reason. It's always puzzled me where I was between the time I died two or three hundred years ago and the time I entered this body,' he says, ' and spiritualism makes it all clear. I was floatin' in space.'

"That's jist how fool−crazy Doc was them days. There he was believin' with all his might that r'inca'nation business and that spirit business at the same time.

"I says, 'Well, Doc, some day you'll see how deep in error you are,' and I didn't say no more.

"Of course Doc wouldn't let well−enough alone. There was a big spiritualist over to Peory, Illinoy, a reg'lar ghost−raisin' feller, and what did Doc do but write over and git him to come to Kilo and give a séance. That is a meetin' where they raise up ghosts. Doc wanted the feller to stop at our house, but I wouldn't have it, so he

had to put up at the hotel. Doc said it was a shame, but as soon as I seen the man I said it served him right, and that he was a fraud, but Doc swallered him right down, hide an' hoof.

"They had the séance in the hotel parlor, and no charge, so me and ma went, thought we wasn't jist sure it was right; but I says it wasn't as if it was real−−we knowed it was all foolishness; so ma and me trotted along. I found out afterward that Doc paid to have the feller come to Kilo. His name was Moller, an' he was one of them long−haired greasy−lookin' men.

"I must say it was real scary when they turned the lights down an' Moller made tables jump around and fiddles play without anybody playin' on them. There wasn't many folks there, but ma held my hand, an' I held ma's, and Doc was right in front of us.

"Moller did a lot of tricks sich as I hear they always do, an' then he said he'd bring up any spirits anyone would like to have come up. That was what Doc was waitin' for, and he popped right up.

"'I should like to talk to Bacon,' he says.

"'Bacon?' says Moller. 'There's a good many Bacons in spirit−land. Which one do you want to speak to, brother?"

"'The one that lived when Shakespeare did,' says Doc. 'The one that wrote the essays and sich. Sir Francis Bacon.'

"'Ah, yes!' says Moller. 'I'll see if he's willin' to say anyting to−night.' And down he set into a chair. Well, you'd have died! In a bit his head and legs begun to jerk like he had St. Vitus dance, and then he straightened out, stiff as a broomstick. It was the silliest thing ever I seen. I felt real sorry for Doc, he was so dead earnest about it.

"In a minute Moller opened his jaw and begun to talk. It was all sort of jerky− like.

"'I'm sailin' through starry fields,' he says, 'explorin' the wonders of the universe. Why am I called back to earth this way? Doth somebody want to question me about something?'

"Doc was all worked up. He held onto a chairback, an' he was so shakin' I could hear the loose chair rungs rattle.

"'Is this Bacon?' he says.

"'It is,' says Moller, his voice jerkin' like a kitten taken with the fits.

"'Well,' says Doc, like his life was hangin' on what Moller would say, 'did you, or did you not, write Shakespeare's plays?'

"'I did not,' Moller jerked out; 'Shakespeare did.'

"You could hear Doc sigh all over the room, it was sich a relief to his mind. Doc was awful pleased. He was smilin' all over his face, he was so pleased to have Bacon own up, an' he turned to ma and me and says, 'Ain't it wonderful!'

"Then Moller come out of his fit an' set still a while, like he had jist woke up from a long nap. Then he says he's goin' into another trance, an' if any in the room wants to hold talk with any of their lost friends or kin, they should ask for them, an' he jerked again, and jerked out stiff.

"That old back−slider, Pap Briggs, popped up, but Doc was ahead of him, 'cause Pap always has to regulate his store teeth before he can git his tongue goin', and Doc says, 'I desire to speak with Richard Burbage.'

"I guess Moller didn't now any sich feller. Anyways he jist lay still an' so Doc says, 'Mebby there's several Richard Burbages. I mean the one that owned a theater with Shakespeare.' But Richard Burbage didn't feed like talkin' that evenin'. I reckon Moller didn't know nothin' about Richard Burbage, and was frightened that Doc would ask him something that he couldn't answer. There ain't nobody slicker than them fake fellers. It's their business.

"But Doc was so worked up he would have swallered anything, and I guess Moller thought he had to make up to Doc for payin' his expenses, so he says, smilin', 'I see, doctor, you are interested in literature, and I'll try to get somebody in that line that's willing to talk.' So he jerked into another trance.

"Purty soon Moller says: 'From the seventh circle I have come, drawn by the will of somebody that knows and loves me. It's a long way. Billions of miles off is ny new home, where I spend eternity writin' things that make what I writ on earth look like nothin','−−or some sich nonsense. Doc looked back at me once, proud as sin, an' then he swelled out his lungs, an' run his hand over his whiskers, like you've seen him do. He was gittin' wound up for a good talk.

"If I do say it myself, Doc's a good talker, an' I figgered he'd make Moller hustle. I see Doc was goin' to spread hisself to do credit to Shakespeare. He hadn't no doubt that one spirit would recognize another, so he says, like he was makin' a speech, 'You know who I am?'

"'I do,' says Moller.

"'Then,' says Doc, 'since my spirit eyes are blinded by this mortal body, may I ask who you are?' He didn't hardly breathe. Then Moller jerked. 'I am Shakespeare,' he says, sudden−like.

"'What's that?' says Doc, short and quick.

"'Shakespeare,' says Moller−−'William Shakespeare.'

"Poor Doc jist dropped into his chair, and run his hand over his forehead and his eyes, like he had bumped into the edge of a door in the dark. I ain't never seen Doc real pale but once, and that was then. Then he turned round to ma an' me, weak as a sick baby, an' says, 'Come, Loreny; this lyin' place ain't nowhere for you and me to be,' and we went out.

"'Well, Doc,' I says, when we was outside, 'seems to me like there is two of you,' and that was all I says to him about it, then; but I guess he see what a fool he'd been, 'cause the next night he says, 'Loreny, I wisht you'd git me a set of the articles of belief of our church. I'd like to look them over.'

"'Well,' I says, 'who'll I say wants them, Shakespeare or Doc Weaver?'

"'You can say an old fool wants them,' says Doc, 'and you'll hit it about right.'

"So Doc jined church, an' he's leadin' the singin' now; but you can see why I keep sich a lookout lest he gits started off on some new religion."

Mrs. Weaver glanced at the clock.

"Mercy me!" she exclaimed. "Doc'll be home before I git them supper dishes washed up. Now, you won't feel hurt because I don't want you to talk new religions to Doc, will you? You can see jist how I feel, and you

wouldn't want no husband yourself that was a philopeny, as you might say. I don't believe I could git on real well with Doc if he had kept on bein' Shakespeare. I'd always have felt like he was 'bout three hundred years older than me. But there's jist one thing I dread more than anything else. If Doc should take up with the Mormon religion and start a harem, I believe I'd coax him to be Shakespeare again. It's bad enough to have a double husband, but, land's sakes, I'd rather that than be part of a wife."

CHAPTER XII

Getting Acquainted

Althought Eliph' Hewlitt was not making much progress in his courtship he was far from idle in the succeeding weeks. He had taken many orders for Jarby's great book in the county, before he arrived in Kilo, and as a shipment of the books arrived from New York he spent much of his time behind old Irontail making his deliveries and collecting the first payments, and some time in the immediate neighborhood making new sales. One of the copies he had to deliver was the one purchased by Mrs. Tarbro−Smith, but although he delivered it to her at Miss Sally's, he did not have an opportunity to speak to Miss Sally, for she hid herself when he approached the door, and did not come down stairs again until he had left the house.

Mrs. Tarbro−Smith received the book with a lady−like enthusiasm, and immediately placed it upon Miss Sally's center table, where its bright red cover added a touch of cheerfulness to the room, suggestive of the knowledge, literature, science and art the book was guaranteed to irradiate in any family. But Miss Sally never so much as looked inside its covers. She avoided it as if the thought the book itself might seize her and sell to her, against her will, one of its fellows. Mrs. Smith said openly that she wished she might see more of Eliph' Hewlitt, and that she thought him a most remarkable book agent, particularly after she had heard of his selling the Missionary Society a wholesale lot of Jarby's Encyclopedia, and after glancing through the book she admitted that it was really an excellent thing of its kind, but Miss Sally merely remarked that she didn't like book agents, and that she hated this one more than most, he was so slick.

The energetic spirit of Mrs. Smith was sure to carry her into anything that partook of a social nature, and she had arrived in Kilo in the midst of the festival season, when out−door festivals of all varieties were following one after another almost weekly for the benefit of the church, which had a properly clinging and insatiable debt. In these festivals she took a prominent part, for the brought her in contact with the people of Kilo as nothing else could, and if she enjoyed the affairs, so did Susan. Susan bloomed wonderfully. She sprang at once from childhood to young womanhood, and Mrs. Smith was pleased to have her protégée appear so well and receive so much attention, for she felt that she had had the revision of her. She already saw in her the heroine of the novel she meant to write, with the plot beginning in Kilo and Clarence, and carried to New York and, perhaps, Europe.

The attorney and the editor were particularly nice to Susan, and attentive to Mrs. Smith at all the festivals, and it amused the New Yorker to find herself and her maid on and equal social plane. It is quite different in New York. But lady's maids in New York are not all like Susan. Maids in New York do not spend their spare time studying Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art, and Susan did. Even Eliph' Hewlitt could not have read the book more faithfully than Susan did, nor have believed in it more trustfully. Often when the editor or the attorney sought her at one of the festivals they would find her talking with Eliph' Hewlitt, exchanging facts out of Jarby's Encyclopedia.

For Eliph' never missed a festival. He haunted them, standing in one spot until his eyes fell upon Miss Sally, when he would make straight for her with his dainty little steps, and she, catching sight of him−−for she was always on the lookout−−would move away, weaving around and between people until he lost sight of her, when he would stand still until he caught sight of her again. It was like a game. Sometimes he caught her, but before he could have a word with her she would make an excuse and hurry away, or turn him over to another. Usually she shielded herself by keeping either the Colonel or Skinner beside her, if they were present, and

they usually were.

"Land's sake!" she exclaimed to Mrs. Smith, one evening, as they were walking home after an ice−cream festival at Doc Weaver's, "I wish somebody would tell that Mr. Hewlitt that I don't want to buy no books. He pesters the life out of me. I can't show myself nowhere but he comes up, all loaded to begin, and if I'd give him half a chance he'd have me buyin' a book in no time. It don't seem to make no difference where I am. I believe he'd try to sell books at a funeral." Mrs. Smith laughed.

"I know he would!" she said. "He is delightful! Why don't you do as I did, and buy a book, and then he will be satisfied, and leave you alone."

"Well, I won't!" declared Miss Sally. "I ain't done nothin' all my life but buy books an' then fight pa to get money to pay installments on 'em, an' I won't buy no more! I declared to goodness when I bought them Sir Walter Scott books that I wouldn't buy no more, an' I won't. If I buy this one off of this man, there'll be another, an' another, an' so on 'til kingdom come, an' one everlasting fight with pa for money."

"Couldn't you pay for it with the money you got for those fire−extinguishers?" asked Mrs. Smith.

"Pa borryed that to pay taxes with, long ago, an' that's the last I'll ever see of the money," said Miss Sally. "Pa ain't the kind that pays back. He's a good getter, an' a good keeper, but he's about the poorest giver I ever did see, if he is my own father. There ain't nothin' in the world else that would drive me to get married but just the trouble I have to get money out of pa for anything. I ain't even got a black silk dress to my name, and there ain't another lady in Kilo but's got one. I guessed when we moved to town I would have the egg money same as on the farm, but since pa had his teeth out an' got new ones he won't eat nothin' but eggs, an' I don't get any egg money. Pa eats so many eggs I'm ashamed to tell it. I wonder he don't sprout feathers. I don't believe so many eggs is good for a man. It don't seem natural. That encyclopedia book don't say anywhere that eatin' too many eggs makes a man close fisted, does it?"

Mrs. Smith said she could remember nothing to that effect in the book, and for a minute they walked in silence. Suddenly she looked up and spoke.

"Miss Sally," she exclaimed, " I know what to do! I will make you a present of y encyclopedia. I will give it to you, and the next time you see Mr. Hewlitt you can tell him you have a copy, and then he will leave you alone!"

That was how it happened that at the next festival Miss Sally did not run when she saw Eliph' Hewlitt approaching, but stood waiting for him. He stepped up to her with a smile that was half pleasure and half excuse.

"I don't want to buy a book," she said quickly. "I've got one. Mrs. Smith gave me the one she had. So you needn't pester me any more."

"I didn't want to sell you a book," said Eliph' gently, "although I am glad to learn you have one. No person, whether man, woman or child, should be without a copy of this work, including, as it does, all the knowledge of the ages and all the world's wisdom, from A to Z, condensed into one volume, for ready reference. It is a book that should be on every parlor table and−−−−"

"Well, I've got one," said Miss Sally, "so it's no use wasting talk on it. One's all I want. Another one wouldn't be no good but to clutter up the house."

"Just so," said Eliph'. "I don't want to sell you another. To sell this book is the smallest part of my trouble. It is a book that sells itself. I only need to show it, to sell it. Wherever it falls open it attracts the attention with a

gem of thought or a flower of knowledge, perhaps the language of gems, or the language of flowers, how to cure boils, how to preserve fruit, each page offers something of value to the mind. A copy of this book in the house is a friend in sickness or in health, a help in business and a companion in pleasure; to the agent it is a source of steady and continuous income. One copy sells another."

"I said before that I don't want another," said Miss Sally shortly.

"Let us talk about something else," said Eliph' Hewlitt, coughing politely behind his hand. "I'll be glad to, but I do not blame you for bringing up the subject of the work I am selling. I make it a rule never to talk book out of business hours, but I am not sensitive, as some book agents are. When Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art is mentioned I am not offended; I am not ashamed of my business−−I enjoy it. I could talk of the merits of this unequaled work day and night without stopping and yet not do it full justice, but I don't. When my work is done I stop talking book. I might, to enliven conversation, quote from the 'Five Hundred Ennobling Thoughts from the World's Greatest Authors, Including the Prose and Poetical Gems of All Ages,' containing, as it does, the best thoughts of the greatest minds, suitable for polite and refined conversation, sixty−two solid pages of the, with vingetty portraits of the authors, and a short biographical sketch of each, including date and place of birth, date and place of death, if dead, et cetery. Or I might, to brighten a passing moment, propound one or more of the 'Six Hundred Perplexing Puzzles,' page 987, including charades, conundrums, quaint mathematical catches, et cetery, compiled to brighten the mind and puzzle the wits, suitable for young or old, for grave or gay. It is a book that meets every want of every day, is neatly and durably bound, and the price is only five dollars."

Miss Sally turned as if to run away, but Eliph' put out his hand and touched her arm lightly.

"But I don't," he said. "I don't quote, and I don't propound. I put the book aside and I forget. When my work is done I relax my mind. I enter into the pleasures I find most congenial, such as festivals, sociables, fairs, kermesses, picnics, parties, receptions, et cetery, rules and suggestions for conducting all of which are to be found in this book, which is recommended and esteemed by the leaders of society, both in the Four Hundred and out. Or I read a good book, a list of five hundred of which may be found on page 336, 'The Reader's Guide,' giving advice in selecting fiction, history, philosophy, religious works, poetry, et cetery, the whole selected by eight of the most eminent professors of literature in our colleges and universities, both at home and abroad. Or I indulge in conversation, in which what better guide than is to be found on page 662, 'The Polite Conversationalist,' including gems of wit, apt quotations, how to gain and hold the attention, how to amuse, instruct and argue, et cetery? When it is remember that all this, and much more, can be had for only five dollars, neatly bound in cloth, one dollar down and one dollar a month until paid, what wonder is it that−−that−−−−"

Suddenly one of the paper lanterns that hung from the wire above them burst into flame, and Eliph' saw on Miss Sally's face the look of fear with which she was regarding him, fear and fascination mingled. The smile faded from his lips, and his gentle blue eyes became troubled. He dropped the hand that had been lightly resting on her arm, and his dapper air of self−confidence wilted in abashment.

"Was I−−was I talking book?" he asked weakly. "I was! Pardon me, Miss Briggs, pardon me, I didn't know it. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to."

For a moment Miss Sally studied his face, and she saw only a genuine contrition there, and a regret so deep that she was sorry for him. There could be no doubt of his sincerity.

"Well!" she exclaimed, with a breath of relief; "I do believe you didn't know you was! I believe that book's got so ground into you that you can't help but talk it, like Benny Tenneker, who got so used to climbin' trees an' fallin' out of 'em that he used to climb the bedposts an' fall of of 'em in his sleep without wakin' up. Mrs. Doc Weaver's his aunt, an' when he visited her he nearly got killed fallin' out of bed when he was tryin' to climb a

bed post when there wasn't not on the bed. He'd got so he could fall out of any high place an' light safe, but he wasn't used to fallin' off of low ones. He was such a nice boy. All Martha Willing's children were nice. Mebby you've met her. She lives out Clarence way."

"Willin?" said Eliph'. "Yes, I sold her a−−I mean to say, I met her."

"Well, her husband's dead, and her and her boys is runnin' the farm," said Miss Sally, "an' doin' right well, so I guess she ain't afraid of book agents. She can afford to buy. I don't know as I'm afraid of 'em either, or hate 'em as such, but I can't afford. Pa don't approve of books much, an' he can't see why he should pay out money for what he don't approve of. Books an' taxes he don't care much for. That's why I was so scared of you."

"I didn't want to sell you a−−to sell you anything," said Eliph' meekly. "All I wanted was to get acquainted, to get well acquainted."

"I guess that's all right then," said Miss Sally. "There ain't anything more natural than that you should wish that, bein' intendin' to make your home here. I hope you like the place an' make lot of acquaintances, but if I was you I'd try not to talk book any more than you have to. I don't think it'll help to make you popular, as I may say. That Sir Walter man sort of gave everybody an overdose of book, an' folks feel kind of mad at book agents ever since. Like father Emmons, when he had one of his sick spells, an' nothin' would do but he was goin' to die, so he got up before sun−up an' drove to town to see Doc Weaver. He let Doc know he felt he was dyin' an' told him the symptoms, an' all Doc says was, 'All you want is salts. You stop at the drug store an' get a pound of salts, an' I'll warrant you'll be as well as ever.' So when his daughter−− she's Mary Ann Klepper−−went into the house after carryin' lunch to the men in the field, there was her poor old father settin' at the table with the big yeller bake−bowl in front of him, an' him eatin' away at what was in it with a big spoon. 'Eatin' bread an' milk, father?' she asks, an' her pa looks up with tears in his eyes, an' swallers down another spoonful. 'No,' he says, as cross as a bear, 'I'm eatin' a pound o' salts Doc Weaver told me to git, but hang if I can eat another spoonful, an' I ain't above half done.' So I guess Kilo folks kind of gag when they think of books."

"If I so much as mention books," said Eliph' pleadingly, "I wish you'd stop me. Don't let me. Mebby I do sort of get in the habit of it, thinking it and talking it so much. But I never meant to sell you one. I only wanted to get acquainted."

Miss Sally laughed.

"Well," she said cheerfully, "there's different ways to do it, but I guess you an' me have got well acquainted different from what most folks does. Ain't you been over to the ice−cream table yet? Or was you waitin' to be primed; that's what us ladies is here for, to start folks spendin' money, like Mrs. Foster's little nephew that come up from the city to visit her last summer. He wanted to know what everything was for that was on the farm or in the house, that he wasn't used to, an' when they told him they always had to leave a dipper of water in the pail to prime the pump with so it would give water, he wanted to know if the reason they had the pans of milk in the spring−house was so they could prime the cows so they would give milk."

Eliph' laughed heartily, for his heart was light. He was making progress; Miss Sally admitted that they were well acquainted, and now he could proceed to the second step advised in "Courtship; How to Win the Affections; How to Hold Them When Won."

CHAPTER XIII

"Second: A Small Present"

The next morning Eliph' Hewlitt purchased the two−pound box of candy in the pictured box that had long been considered by the druggist a foolish investment. For months it had reposed in the end of the toilet soap case awaiting a purchaser, and had acquired a sweet odor of scented soap mingled with the plainer odor of cut castile, and no one had been so extravagant as to buy it. Once the druggist had tried to persuade the candy salesman to take it back in exchange for more salable goods, but after taking it from the show−case and smelling it the drummer refused. At the opposite end of the case the druggist kept his plush manicure and brush−and−comb sets, with a few lumps of camphor scattered among them to discourage moths, but the odor of camphor did not hurt the candy. The scented soap protected it from the camphor. When Kilo buys scented soap she likes to have it really scented.

Miss Sally, when the small boy Eliph' secured as a messenger had delivered the box of candy, knew well enough what it meant. The neatly written card, "From Yours very truly, E. Hewlitt," did not suggest much, perhaps, but in Kilo friends do not scatter two−pound boxes of candy recklessly about. To receive a two−pound box on Christmas would have been a suspicious circumstance, for a smaller box would have done quite as well between friends, but to send a two− pound box on a day that was no holiday at all, but just a plain day of the week, could stand for but one of two things−−the giver was insane, or he had "intentions," and Miss Sally knew very well that Eliph' Hewlitt was not insane. Unless on the subject of Jarby's Encyclopedia.

She carried the box of candy to Mrs. Smith, and showed her the card.

"How lovely!" cried Mrs. Smith, an exclamation which might have meant either the box of candy or the sentiment that inspired the sender, and then added, "How odd! It smells like soap!"

"That's a sign it's good candy," said Miss Sally. "The candy Rudge sells always smells of soap, an' he handles only the best, so when you see candy that smells that way you know it's good. This is Rudge's candy, sure enough, for I know this box by heart. Rudge has had it in his show case ever since the firm was Crimmins & Rudge. It must be some stale by this time, but the box is pretty."

"I don't suppose Mr. Hewlitt knew it was stale," said Mrs. Smith, "He evidently tried to get the best he could."

"Yes," admitted Miss Sally. "He wouldn't know this box of candy so well as we town folks do, him bein' a newcomer here. I suppose Rudge gave him a discount off the price on account of the box bein' soiled a little. I hope to goodness that man wasn't so foolish as to go an' pay straight sixty cents a pound for it. He got cheated if he did, an' I'll tell him so when I see him next." She slowly untied the red ribbon that bound the box, and rolled it neatly around the fingers of her left hand, to lay away for future use. "Now, what do you suppose that man sent it to me for?" she asked.

Mrs. Smith smiled, for she knew Miss Sally was asking the question merely that she might have her own belief made sure by the words of another.

"Because he's in love, of course," said Mrs. Smith. "Because he is desperately in love. It is a romance, my dear."

Miss Sally looked doubtfully toward Susan, who was curled up on the old sofa in the corner of the room. She was not sure that such matters should be discussed before one so young, but Susan would have refused to leave the room, even if asked, and she resented the questioning glance that Miss Sally had thrown at Mrs. Smith.

"'Courtship−−How to Make Love−−How to Win the Affections−−How To Hold Them When Won,'" she said gaily. "'First, get acquainted; second, make small presents, such as flowers, books or candy; third, ask for the lady's hand.' You needn't look at me that way, Miss Sally; I know all about it. I read it in Jarby's

Encyclopedia."

"Lands sakes!" exclaimed Miss Sally. "And me and him only got well acquainted last night at the festival. I never heard of such a thing!"

"It's love at first sight," teased Mrs. Smith. "He will probably be around this afternoon to propose, and we can have the wedding this evening."

"Well, he needn't come this afternoon, if he's got it in his mind to come," said Miss Sally shortly, "for I won't be at home. I ain't goin' to be rushed that way, not by no man. I don't say but Mr. Hewlitt is a clever spoken man, Mrs. Smith, when he ain't talkin' books, but I ain't in the habit of bein' courted like I was a Seidlitz powder, and had to be drunk down before I stopped fizzin'. That may be some folks way of doin' it, but it ain't mine."

"Nor Colonel Guthrie's," suggested Mrs. Smith.

"If the Colonel's slow it ain't his fault," said Miss Sally. "He'd be quick enough if I'd let him, but I can't see no hurry, one way or another. I don't say but that a husband is a good thing to have, mind you! I guess I'm like all other women and want to have one some time, but so long as I've got pa I'm in no hurry. He's as much trouble as a husband would be, and as grumpy when things don't go to suit him. Sometimes I feel like in the end I'd choose to marry the Colonel, since it wouldn't be so much of a change, the Colonel bein' like pa in some ways, such as bein' economical; and then again I feel like I'd prefer Skinner, just because he'd BE a change. I'd be always sure of gettin' good meat, for one thing, and I'd insist upon it. I can't a−bear tough meat.

"Shoemakers' children go without shoes," suggested Mrs. Smith.

"They wouldn't if I was their mother, an' I'll tell Skinner so, if I choose to marry him an' he tries to send home any but the best meat he's got in the shop," said Miss Sally firmly. "That's one man, if I marry him, I won't take no foolishness from. When a man is castin' his eyes my way, an' then has to have a city ordinance made to compel him to do me the favor of buyin' four fire− extinguishers off of me, that ain't no earthly use to me, I'll let him know I'm going to have my way about some things when we're married. I know well enough I ain't such a beauty that Skinner an' the Colonel is what you might call infatuated with me, and I don't expect 'em to be. Pa's got money, and if he didn't have I guess the Colonel an' Skinner wouldn't bother their heads about me much; but if they like me for pa's money now I guess they'll like me for it just as well after they marry me, for I'll have it well known that money don't go out of my name. And I'll let this book agent man know it too. If it's pa's money he's in such a hurry to get, he'll find out his mistake."

"I rather like the book agent," said Mrs. Smith. "He doesn't seem to me at all the adventurer type."

"His whiskers do make him look like a preacher," said Miss Sally, "if that's what you mean; but if he means business he ought to know I ain't the kind of bird to be caught with boxes of candy. Neither Skinner nor the Colonel is so silly as to think that."

She smoothed her apron across her knees, and looked at its checked pattern.

"Seems to me," she said, with a touch of regret, "this ain't no time or age for such foolishness. It ain't as if I was a girl like Susan there. Boxes of candy an' Susan would match up like pale blue an' white. I guess the safe thing is to make choice of one that ain't a stranger. I've done business with Skinner years an' years, sellin' him calves an' buyin' meat off of him; an' as for the Colonel, I guess I know all his bad points as well as his good ones. The Colonel has been a friend of pa's a long time."

So it happened that when Eliph' Hewlitt called at Miss Sally's that afternoon he did not find her at home. Mrs.

Smith received him and tried to make up by her kindness for the disappointment Eliph' evidently felt. She thanked him in Miss Sally's name for the beautiful box of candy−−although Miss Sally had left no such word−−and drew him on to talk of Jarby & Goss, the publishers of the Encyclopedia, and of his own adventures. The longer she talked with the little man the better her opinion of him became, and she saw that he was gentle, shrewd, capable and sincere−−sincere evening his wildest enthusiasm for Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art. When he arose to go he stood a moment hesitatingly with his hat in his hand. He coughed apologetically.

"I hope Miss Sally like the little token of esteem; the box of candy;" he said, looking up into Mrs. Smith's face anxiously. "it isn't as if I was used to such matters. My preference would have been a book; a good book; a book that I could recommend to man, woman or child, containing in a condensed form all the world's knowledge, from the time of Adam to the present day, with an index for ready reference, and useful information for every day of the year. It was my intention to have given her such a book, which would have been a proper vehicle to convey to her my−−my regard, but I learned only last night that she already had a copy of that work, without which no home is complete, and which is published by Jarby & Goss, New York, five dollars, bound in cloth; seven fifty, morocco. I learned that she already had one."

"She told you I had given her my copy?" asked Mrs. Smith.

"Yes," said Eliph' simply. "So I could not present her with a copy of that work. My preference was to give a work of literature; I am a worker in the field of literature, and it would have been more appropriate. But I could give her nothing but the best of its kinds, and where find another such book as Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art? Nowhere! There is no other. This book combining in one volume selections from the world's best literature, recipes for the home, advice for every period of existence, together with one thousand and one other subjects, forms in itself a volume unequaled in the history of literature. No person should be without it."

"I know, Mr. Hewlitt," pleaded Mrs. Smith, smiling, "but I have already bought two copies. Don't you thing you ought to let me off with that?"

"I was not trying to sell you one," said Eliph' with embarrassment. "I hoped−− −−" He paused and coughed behind his hand again. "You know my intention in sending a present to Miss Briggs," he said bravely. "I admire her greatly. I−−to me she is, in fact, a Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art among women."

"Dear Mr. Hewlitt," said Mrs. Smith, taking his hand,"I understand. And I wish you all the good fortune in the world. I shall do all I can to help you."

"Thank you," said Eliph', shaking her hand as if she was an old acquaintance he ad met after long years of separation. "So you understand that I can feel the same to no other woman. Not even to−−to anyone." He wiped his forehead with his disengaged hand. "So I feel that you will not misunderstand me if I ask you to accept a copy of Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art, bound in morocoo, seven fifty. I mean gratis. No home should be without one."

"Why, it is very kind of you to suggest such a thing," said Mrs. Smith, "and I'm sure I'll be glad to own a copy."

"I'm glad to have you," said Eliph'. "I wanted to give you one, but I didn't want you to think I meant it in the way I meant what I sent to Miss Sally. I was afraid you might, or that Miss Sally might. But I don't mean it that way."

"I know you don't," said Mrs. Smith heartily. "And if Miss Sally is jealous I will tell her she is quite mistaken.

But if you will let a woman that has had a little experience advise you, do not be too hasty. Do not try to hurry matters too much. It would spoil everything if you pressed for an answer too soon and received an unfavorable one. And I'm afraid it would be an unfavorable one if you put it to the test now."

Eliph's countenance fell. It said plainly enough that he understood her to mean that the Colonel and Skinner were more apt to be favorably received.

"I'm afraid so," said Mrs. Smith regretfully. "You know they are older acquaintances, and Miss Sally is not one of those who think new friends are best."

"I was coming again to−night," said Eliph'. "Perhaps I'd better not say anything to−night. Perhaps I had better wait until to−morrow."

"Wait until next month, or next year," advised Mrs. Smith. "There is no hurry. Something may turn up."

CHAPTER XIV

Something Turns Up

Something turned up the very next day. It turned all Kilo upside down as nothing had for years, and created such a demand for the TIMES that J. T. Jones had to print an extra edition of sixty copies, and he would have printed ten more if his press had not broken down.

Across two columns−−the TIMES never used over one column headlines except for the elections−−blazed the work "GRAFT," and beneath, in but a size or two smaller, stared the "sub−head" "OFFICIAL OF KILO CORRUPTED. CITIZENS' PARTY ROTTEN TO THE CORE. PROMINENT CITIZEN IMPLICATED." Beneath this followed the moral of it, "The City, as Predicted in These Columns, Suffers for Departing from The Beneficent Rule of the Republican Party."

Attorney Toole was sitting in his office when the boy from the TIMES delivered the paper to him. He smiled as he opened the damp sheet, for he extracted more amusement than news from the little paper, but as he turned it the headlines caught his eye, and instantly he was deep in the columns. Someone had sprung his mine before he had intended−−it had exploded prematurely and with, what seemed to him, as he read on, a futile insipidity.

There were full two columns of it. There were hints and innuendoes, too well veiled, but no names mentioned. The specific act of graft was not brought to the surface. It was as if the writer had a "spread" of some vaguely uncertain rumor, and yet there was not doubt that Colonel Guthrie and Mayor Stitz and the fire− extinguishers were meant. The attorney could see that, and he had an idea that the writer had meant to tell more than he really did tell. The veiled allusions were so thoroughly veiled in words that they were buried as if under mountains of veils. Each slight hint was swamped in morasses of quotations and fine flourishes, overgrown and hidden by tropical verbiage, and covered up by philosophical and political phrases until nothing of the hint could be seen. As he read on the attorney could see Doc Weaver talking, as plainly as if he stood before him; he could see him at his desk in a frenzy of composition, and he recognized the apt quotations from Shakespeare that were Doc's specialty. Doc Weaver had written it.

The attorney laid the paper down and studied the matter. How could Doc have learned of the affair? Skinner, angry as he had been at having to buy the four fire−extinguishers, would never have dared to wreck the party he had helped to create. The Colonel would have been no such fool. Stitz? He would hardly accuse himself. Who then?

One passage set the attorney thinking again as he re−read the article. "'Thinks are seldom what they seem,' as the poet says, which is as true as that 'Honesty is the best policy.' And as Shakespeare says, 'To what base ends,' for all this disreputable graft centers around certain brilliant objects that are not what the guilty bribers and bribees suppose them to be. While we shudder with horror at the temerity of the sinners we shake with laughter as we think of their faces as they will be when they realize that they are mortals to whom the immortal bard refers when he enunciates the truth, 'What fools these mortals be!'"

"Certain brilliant objects" could mean nothing but the lung−testers. Eliph' Hewlitt had that secret, and Eliph' Hewlitt boarded with Doc Weaver. The attorney felt a sudden rush of anger. It was to this intermeddling book agent, then, that he owed the premature explosion of the mine that was to have blown the Citizens' Party to fragments, and to have landed the fragments in the basket held ready by Attorney Toole?

The distribution of that week's TIMES acted like a tonic on the town streets. New life followed in the wake of the boy as he carried the paper from door to door. It began at the corner of Main and Cross Streets, and as the boy proceeded, the merchants, the loafers, and the customers came from the stores and gathered in knots that formed quickly and dissolved again as the parts passed from one group to another, questioning, arguing, and guessing. The attorney looked out of his window. Across the street he could see the office of the TIMES, and T. J. already besieged by questioners, to whom he was evidently giving a kind but decided refusal of further information. The editor was waving them away with his hands. Some of the editor's visitors handed T. J. money, and carried away copies of the TIMES, but all went, gently urged by the editor, and joined one or another of the groups below. The attorney drew on his coat. He would postpone his interview with Eliph' Hewlitt; Thomas Jefferson Jones was the man he wanted to see at that moment.

It was difficult for the attorney to retain his enigmatical smiles as he climbed the stairs to the TIMES office. He was angry, but he knew the value of that irritating smile that hinted superiority and a knowledge of hidden details. He needed it in his talk with the editor.

It is odd how common interests will bring men together. And sometimes how common interests will not. The attorney and the editor had been as one man in polite attentions to Susan Bell, Mrs. Smith's protégéee, at first, but as their acquaintance with her grew they seemed to like each other less. They no longer consulted each other on the best methods of bringing Republican rule back to Kilo. They did not consult together at all. The attorney coldly ignored the editor, and his irritation, beginning in this rivalry, was increased by the growing suspicion that the editor dared look toward the leadership of the Republican party in Kilo.

It all angered the attorney. What right had a country editor to compete with a man of talent, with a member of the bar, with Attorney Toole? Was this the thanks a rising lawyer should receive for leaving the superior culture of Franklin and bringing his talents to add luster to the bleak unimportance of Kilo? The very impertinence of it angered him. Toole, a man whose name would one day ring in the hall of Congress and perhaps stand at the head of the nation's officers as chief executive, to be bothered by the interference of a Jones! By the interference of a man who spent his time collecting news of measles and hog cholera! It was about time T. J. Jones was told a few things.

As Toole entered the printing office T. J. was handing a copy of the TIMES to a customer, and the editor turned, and, seeing who his visitor was, held up his hand playfully.

"No use!" he exclaimed. "I can't say anything about it, except what's in the paper. Contributed article, and the editor sworn to silence, you know."

The attorney seated himself on the editor's desk, pushing a pile of papers out of his way.

"That's all right, Jones," he said. "That's for the"−−he waved his hand toward the window−−"for the fellow citizens; for the populace. This is between ourselves."

"I'd like to," said Jones, "but really, I can't say anything about it. I promised faithfully I would not betray my contributor's confidence."

"Now, do I look so green as that?" asked Toole. "Nonsense! Doc Weaver wrote that rot." He smiled. "He spread himself, didn't he?"

The editor remained motionless.

"I have nothing whatever to say," he remarked, noncommittally.

"Well, I have!" cried the attorney. "I'll tell you that it is poor work for you to steal my thunder and attempt to use it without consulting me! It is poor work, and mean work. You want to be boss of this party in Kilo county, that's what you want. And you haven't the capacity. You have proved it right here, right here in this silly sheet of yours. You hit on a big thing, and you spoil it. You are so anxious that Toole shall get no credit that you rush it into print and make a fizzle of it. I know who the traitors to the party are−−you are one. Doc Weaver with his elegant style and his Shakespeare is another. And that miserable intermeddling little book agent is another. You make me sick."

The editor stood like a statue, and his face was as white. The attorney dropped his words slowly from lips that still wore the tantalizing smile.

"The childishness amuses me," said the attorney. "It makes me smile. Why didn't you give names, since you had them? Why didn't you tell it all, and do the party some good, as well as doing me some harm, if that was what you were after−−and I don't know what you were after if it wasn't that? Why don't you get a schoolboy to edit your paper for you?"

T. J. ground his nails into the palms of his hands. He meant to retain possession of his temper, but it was boiling within. He said nothing as the attorney indolently arose from his seat on the desk; he was resolved to do nothing, but when the attorney brushed against him in passing, turning his superior smile full in his face, he raised his arm. The next moment the two men were lying beside the press, struggling and gasping, locked fast and fighting for advantage, legs intertwined and each grasping the other by a wrist. The editor was on top, but the heavier attorney was working with the energy of hate, and as they panted and struggled the door opened and Eliph' Hewlitt entered.

There was strength in his wiry arms, and he threw himself upon the upper man and dragged him backward. The attorney loosened his hold and the two men stood up, panting and gulping, and soon began to brush their clothes and look at the floor for dropped articles, as men do who have fought inconclusively and are not sorry to have been parted. The only real damage seemed to have been done to Eliph's spectacles, which he had shaken off in his efforts, and which had been crushed beneath a heel. The attorney presently smiled, but it was a silly smile, and then he went out of the door and down the street.

Eliph' coughed gently behind his hand, as if to excuse his intrusion.

"Quarreling?" he suggested. "I used to wrestle some when I was a boy. But not much. I hadn't then the rules, given on page 554 of Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art, including "How to Wrestle, How to Defend Oneself Against Sudden Attack, Jui Jitsu," et cetery, with wood cuts showing the best holds and how to get them. All this being but one of one thousand and one subjects treated of in this work, the price of which is but five dollars, neatly bound in cloth."

The editor had turned his back and was staring angrily out of the window−− sulkily tremulous would be a better description, perhaps−−when he suddenly cried out. Eliph' searched hurriedly in his pockets for another pair of spectacles, found them and put them on, and looked where the editor pointed. Across the street the

attorney, backed up against the wall of the bank, was defending his face with one arm, and with his right hand seeking to grasp a ship that was raining blows upon his face and head. Someone grasped the whip from behind and wrenched it from the hand of the attorney's assailant, and as the man turned angrily, the two in the window saw that it was Colonel Guthrie.

They heard him cursing those who had taken the ship from him, ending by loudly justifying himself for what he had done to the attorney, and saw the attorney step forward to quell the Colonel's hot words. The Colonel put up both his hands and shouted, and some from the crowd, grasping the attorney about the waist and arms, as if the feared he was about to attack the older man, hurried him away, speaking soothing words to him.

The Colonel rioted on. Nothing could have stopped him. He pulled a copy of the TIMES from his pocket and slapped it with his hand as he abused the attorney for having given T. J. Jones the facts of the article.

He lit it be plainly known, in his anger, that the article called him a giver of graft. The crowd stood silent, as crowds stand about some drunken man, for the Colonel was drunk with wrath, and wordy with it, talking to himself as drunken men do. He finished, and the crowd opened a passage through itself to let him pass, and Skinner, who, in apron and bare arms, had viewed his rival's wrath from a safe place on the edge of the group, backed away. The Colonel, mumbling, caught sight of him, and with one swift motion of the arm grasped him by the shirt band.

"You!" he shouted, pulling the shirt band until Skinner grew purple in the face. "You! You done it! Why couldn't you buy them fire−extinguishers like a man? You made me buy up that Dutchman. I wouldn't 'a' had to do it but for you."

He gave the choking butcher an extra shake, and raised his hand to strike him, but again the crowd interfered, and seized the Colonel, and hurried him away.

The butcher stood stupidly and rubbed his neck, waiting for the wits that had been choked out of him to return, and far down the street Mayor Stitz, hearing a noise, came out on his front platform and looked up the street. It appeared to him that something was going on, and sticking his awl in the door of his car, he walked blandly up the street to where the remnant of the crowd formed a half circle around the butcher. He crowded through, saying, "Look out, the mayor is coming. Stand one side yet for the mayor!"

The butcher looked and saw before him the round, innocent face of the mayor, topped by the mayor's round bald head. He raised his large, fat hand, and in vent for all his injured feelings brought it down, smack! On the smooth bald spot.

"Ouw−etch!" said the mayor.

He was surprised. He backed away and rubbed the top of his head, and what he said next was a rapid string of real, genuine German; exclamations, compound tenses, and irregular verbs and all that makes German a useful, forceful language. As long as he rubbed his head−−with a rotary motion−−he spoke German; then he stopped rubbing and spoke English.

"So is it you treat your mayor!" he exclaimed indignantly. "Such a town is Kilo, to give mayors a klop on the head! Donnerblitzenvetter! Not so is it in Germany." He turned to the crowd. "A klop on the head! It is not for klops on the head that I am mayor. No. I resign out of this mayor business. Go get another mayor, such as likes klops on the head. I am no mayor. I am resigned."

He turned and walked slowly back to his car, pulled the awl out of the door, and went inside.

The editor moved away from the window. He seated himself at his desk and leaned his head on his arms and

thought.

"Headache?" asked Eliph'.

"No," said the editor, lifting his head. "I'm trying to think this thing out. Guthrie is in it, and Skinner must be in it, and Stitz. And that fellow across the way said you knew something about it, and he said Doc Weaver wrote the article. No," he added hastily, as Eliph' offered to speak, "let me think it out myself."

He leaned his head on his hand, and gazed at the attorney's office. He drew the week's copy of the TIMES toward him and read over the article that had caused all the trouble.

"It might be that fire−extinguishers ordinance," he said slowly. "Stitz pushed that through. And Skinner had to buy them. And−−they were owned by Miss Briggs and the Colonel negotiated the sale." He jumped up and turned over the file of back numbers of the TIMES. He found the announcement he had made of the arrival of Eliph', and the report of the meeting of the city council that had passed the fire−extinguishers ordinance. Eliph' had been in town before the ordinance had passed. Eliph' boarded now with Doc Weaver. Again he read the article in the TIMES, seeking for the meanings that Doc knew so well how to hide. He paused at the "Things are seldom what they seem" lines, and considered it. Suddenly he arose and put on his hat.

"Wait here," he said, "I'll be back."

When he returned he was smiling. He had visited Skinner's Opera House and had examined the fire−extinguishers where they sat, each on its bracket.

"Hewlitt," he said, "when you told Doc about the fire−extinguishers did you tell him they were lung−testers?"

The little book agent stared at the editor.

"I never told," he exclaimed. "I have never said a word to Doc Weaver, nor to anyone about them. Not a word. I have kept it as sacred as the secret of the Man in the Iron Mask, a full account of whom, together with a wood cut, is given on page 231, together with 'All the World's Famous Mysteries,' this being but one feature of Jarby's−−−−"

"All right," said the editor. "And you never told him about the graft?"

The blank amazement on the book agent's face was sufficient answer.

"I've got to go out," said the editor. "I've got some reporting to do. You'll excuse me. I want to see Stitz. And Skinner. And Guthrie. I wish Doc hadn't gone to his State Medical Society meeting to−day."

Eliph' went out with the editor, who locked the door behind him.

"Don't say anything," said the editor, "but I think there will be an extra edition of the TIMES out to−morrow."

CHAPTER XV

Difficulties

Eliph' had said nothing to Doc Weaver about the affair of the fire− extinguishers, he had known nothing of the graft matter, and yet it could not be supposed that Doc Weaver could be a confidant of the attorney's. The editor was puzzled, but he was sure he was right in the main, and he was nearer learning the truth than he supposed, as he hurried down the street to the mayor's car− cobbler shop.

He opened the door and stepped inside, but the mayor did not look up with his usual smile; he was sulking, and from time to time he rubbed his head where the butcher had struck him.

"How do, Stitz," said the editor. "How's the mayor?"

The cobbler pulled his waxed threads angrily through a tough bit of leather, and did not look up.

"I am no more a mayor," he said crossly. "I am out of that mayor job. I give him up. I haf been insulted."

"I saw it," the editor assured him. "He gave you a good whack. Sounded like a wet plank falling on a marble slab. Mad about the fire−extinguishers business, wasn't he?"

"And why?" asked the mayor, looking up for the first time. "he has a right to obey those ordinances and not get mad."

"Oh, but he don't like the way folks will laugh at him when they learn the joke you have played on him. That was a good one."

"Joke?" queried the mayor, growing brighter. "Did I play him one joke?"

"You know," said T. J. "Making him buy those lung−testers of Miss Briggs' when he thought they were fire−extinguishers. I should say it WAS a joke!"

"Sit down," said the mayor; "don't hang on those straps when seats is enough and plenty. Sit down. So I joked him, yes?"

"Rather," said the editor, "and Guthrie, too, making him pay that graft."

"Sure!" grinned the cobbler. "I got goot grafts. Apples, and potatoes, and celery, and peas, and chickens! Five grafts for one such little ordinances. Grafts is a good business, but now is all over. I quit me that boss−grafter job. I like me not such kloppings on the head. Next comes such riots, and revolutionings. I quit first." He sewed steadily for a while then prepared another thread, waxing it, and twisting the bristle on either end.

"That fire−extinguishers joke," he said, as he ran the ball of wax up and down the thread; "that was a good one, yes? On Skinner. That makes me a revenge on Skinner for such a klop on the head, yes?:

He adjusted the shoe on his knee, and began to sew again.

"Yes," he said, "I am glad I make that joke on Skinner. What was it?"

"Come now!" said T. J. "Don't pretend such innocence, Stitz. Don't try to fool ME. You knew all the time that those fire−extinguishers were nothing but lung− testers." The mayor looked puzzled, and properly, for he had never heard of lung−testers. "To test lungs," explained the editor. "To show how many pounds a man can blow; how much wind his lungs will hold; a sort of game, like pitching horseshoes. They are not worth anything to Skinner. He paid his money for them for nothing. He will have to buy four genuine fire−extinguishers now. That was what made him mad at you."

When the editor left Stitz's car he had learned all the mayor could tell him, including the undoubted fact that the mayor considered graft a quite legitimate operation, and this particular case a good joke on Skinner and Colonel Guthrie, and that the mayor himself, thinking the joke too good to keep, had told Doc Weaver. The editor easily guessed that Doc had investigated the rest of the affair, and had seen the fire−extinguishers and known them to be not what they seemed. He hurried back to his office to set in type what he had learned.

But others were abroad, too. Attorney Toole, watching the editor, had seen him enter the cobbler−car and leave it again, and he easily guessed the object of the editor's visit. He, too, went to see Stitz, and had a long and confidential talk with him, first frightening him until he was in a collapse, and then offering him immunity and safety, and at length leaving him in a perspiration of gratitude. He held up to him a vision of the penitentiary as the reward of grafting, and when the mayor was sufficiently wilted, rebraced him by promising to defend him, whatever happened, and finally restored him to complacency by showing him that the transaction was not graft at all. When he parted from the mayor, that official was, as opposition papers put it, "a creature of the attorney's."

The attorney found Skinner in his butcher−shop surrounded by a group of friends, to whom he was relating a story of how he had been attacked by the Colonel, and what would have happened to the Colonel if intervention had not come just when it did. Toole entered briskly and pushed his way through the group to where the butcher stood.

"Skinner," he said, "I want half a dozen words with you, at once," and his manner was enough to silence the butcher. Skinner led the way to the back room where the sausage machine made its home, and Toole carefully closed the door.

"Now," he said, taking the butcher by the shirtsleeve," you have had a taste of what comes of taking the political lead away from the party to which it rightly belongs. You have had an experience of what happens when people who know nothing about politics meddle with thing that the natural political leaders should be left to handle. You have been choked, and you have been cheated, and you deserve to be kicked. You pay money to this editor her in town, for an advertisement that you know does you no good, and in return he prints an article to make you laughed at. You form a combination with Guthrie to put in outsiders instead of good party men, and Guthrie uses his pull to have an ordinance passed to make you spend money for fire−extinguishers. You elect a mayor, by your influence as a leading citizen, and he takes a bribe from Guthrie, and passes an ordinance to rob you. And you, like a fool, let him do it. And you let Guthrie, that he may stand in solidly with the very woman you have your eye on, sell you−−what? Fire− extinguishers? Not much! Not fire−extinguishers at all, but useless, no−account lung−testers! Lung−testers, that he makes you pay one hundred dollars for, and that you will have to throw away. That is what they are, lung−testers, and you can pocket a loss of one hundred dollars, and buy four real fire−extinguishers now, as the ordinance tells you, and makes you!"

The butcher's mouth opened and his eyes stared. He felt weakly behind him for the edge of the table, pawing uncertainly in the air.

"That's all I have to say to YOU," said the attorney. "If you like that kind of thing, you are welcome. If you are willing to be cheated it is nothing to me. I don't say T. J. Jones set them up to doing all this, just to throw down your Citizen's Party, but you can see in the TIMES who printed the whole thing. If you like to have that kind of man run your only public journal it is no business of mine, but look out for the next TIMES!"

The butcher had found the edge of the table and was leaning back against it. The attorney paused with his hand on the door.

"You ought to be able to make the Colonel pay you back that hundred dollars," he said. "It looks as if he had obtained money under false pretenses and given a bribe. But if you don't care, I don't," and he went out.

Outside of the butcher shop the attorney stopped and looked up and down the street, smiling. He felt that he had done well, so far, setting both the mayor and Skinner against the editor, making a tool of the mayor, and inflaming the butcher against the Colonel. He would have liked to go to the Colonel and set him against the editor and Skinner, but he neither dared nor felt it really necessary. If Skinner attempted to make the Colonel take back the lung−testers the ill feeling between the two would be sufficiently emphasized, and no doubt the

Colonel had sufficient reason, in the publication of the article, to hate the editor.

Horsewhipped! His face reddened as he thought of it, but he was too polite to consider a revenge of fists, which would not lessen the insult of the whipping he had received, but would only add the stigma of attacking an older man. That he had led the Colonel into the affair, putting him up to it, did not strike him as being any excuse for the Colonel. He felt that he had done only what he was entitled to do in the pursuit of political leadership. He would revenge himself on the Colonel later. A suit for damages for assault, timed to precede the next election, would be both revenge and politics. He could, at the moment, think of nothing else to do to undermine his opponents, and he had turned toward his office when a fresh idea occurred to him. Should Miss Sally take back the lung− testers, where then would his case stand? Guthrie would return the hundred dollars to Skinner. Skinner was fool enough to be satisfied with that, and Kilo, like many other towns, not wishing to besmirch herself, would hush up the whole affair. Miss Sally must not take back the lung−testers.

The attorney swung around and walked briskly toward Miss Sally's home, tossing tumultuously in his mind the events of the day, his plans and what he would say to Miss Sally. As he turned in at the gate he saw Mrs. Smith and Susan sitting on the porch, and he took off his hat, and walked smilingly up to them.

"Miss Sally in?" he asked, after the customary greetings. "I would like to speak to her if she is."

"She's in" said Mrs. Smith, "but she is engaged at present. Won't you have a seat and wait?"

Toole passed rapidly through his mind all those who might have business with Miss Sally this morning−−the Colonel, Skinner, the editor. It could not be Skinner, for he had just left him, nor the editor, for he knew he was still in his office where he had seen him last. Probably it was the Colonel. He took the proffered seat.

"I suppose you saw the TIMES," he said, "and that tremendous article. It amused me considerably. Splendid specimen of local journalism. Our friend T. J. is to be congratulated, isn't he? He has made quite a stir."

"The Colonel was here with a paper," said Mrs. Smith. "He was furiously angry. I couldn't understand what it was all about, except that it was connected with those fire−extinguishers Miss Sally had."

"It was about the meanest piece of business I have ever run across," said the attorney, speaking more to Susan than to Mrs. Smith. "It was the most vindictive thing I ever heard of. Do you know any reason why that editor should want to annoy Miss Briggs?"

"Mr. Jones annoy Miss Sally?" said Susan, with surprise. "I can't imagine why he should."

"That's what puzzles me," said Toole. "There doesn't seem to be any reason whatever, except that he is showing his ill−will. It looks like a conspiracy to throw those fire−extinguishers back on Miss Sally's hands. Probably he has taken an agency for fire−extinguishers, or had made a deal to take some in payment for advertising space in his paper, and wants to sell them to Skinner. I understand there is some cock−and−bull story he has got up about these fire−extinguishers being out−of−date, or useless, or something of that kind, and that he means to make a big stir about the council having been bribed to force them on Skinner. I suppose Jones will get something out of it, someway. I understand he means to keep the thing alive in his paper, and throw ridicule on all concerned, until he forces things his way. Probably he has some political object, too. But I think it is bad that he should drag Miss Sally into it. I don't mind his trying to throw mud on me. I can see his reason for that."

He looked at Susan and smiled.

"I don't understand," said Mrs. Smith, "I couldn't see that he said anything about you this morning."

"Not this morning," said the attorney. "There will be more to follow. Wait until you see the next issue of the representative of a free and untrammeled press. He will serve up all his friends there. I saw him darting around like a hawk−eyed reporter this morning. I went up to plead with him to drop the whole thing, this morning, but he as much as told me to mind my own business. The poor old Colonel was so angry he came at me with a whip−−I don't know why−−but I did not take the advantage my strength gave me. I can forgive a man who is anger blinded. All I want to do now is to prevent that editor fellow making any more trouble for my friends, if I can. I don't want Miss Sally to TAKE back those fire− extinguishers, and I don't want her to be blackmailed into BUYING them back. I want to put her on her guard against T. J. Jones."

"This is very kind of you," said Mrs. Smith.

"She is a friend of yours, and of Miss Susan's," said the attorney. "That would be reason enough for my doing it."

The door opened and Eliph' Hewlitt came out of the house, and Toole, who had jumped up, in order to be on the defensive had it been the Colonel, assumed an air of indifference. The book agent hesitated uncertainly, glanced toward Mrs. Smith, felt under his left arm where his sample copy usually reposed, and, not finding it, put on his hat and walked toward the gate. Mrs. Smith sprang from her chair and ran after him. She caught him at the gate and laid her hand on his arm. He turned to face her, and she saw that there were tears in his usually clear eyes. He had put the question to Miss Sally, and the answer had been unfavorable.

The interview had been short and conducted with the utmost propriety, as advised by "Courtship−−How to Win the Affections," and Miss Sally had been kind but firm. The article in the TIMES had, far from turning her against the Colonel, shown her what the Colonel has risked for her sake, and she had decided in his favor, although he had not yet appeared to claim an answer to the question he had never asked, but had been hinting for years.

CHAPTER XVI

Two Lovers, and a Third

The attorney, when Eliph' walked down the path to the gate, entered the house, and found Miss Sally still sitting in the dark parlor where she had had the painful interview with Eliph' Hewlitt. She still held her handkerchief to her eyes, for she had been weeping, and the attorney was not sorry to see this evidence of the stress of her interview with the book agent. Certain that Eliph' had told Doc Weaver of the lung−testers, he was no less certain that the book agent had been telling Miss Sally that the nickel−plated affairs would be thrown back on her hands, and he hastened to urge resistance.

"Miss Briggs," he said, "I came right in, because I knew what that book agent was here to say to you, and I wanted to warn you against him. I know what he asked, and I hope you refuse him."

Miss Sally gasped.

"I believe," continued the attorney, taking a seat, "that you refused, because you know which side your bread is buttered on. I believe that before the day is over Colonel Guthrie will come with the same question, and I want you to give him the same answer. And if Skinner should come on his knees, I want you to send him away with the same answer, too. They will all have arguments enough, but don't be fooled. They money is all they want."

Miss Sally gasped again. She was astounded.

"I could see," said the attorney, confidentially, "that you have the book agent a pretty sharp answer, and that was right. He had no business to put himself forward at all, and I don't suppose you can guess why he did."

"He said he liked me," said Miss Sally weakly, ashamed to mention the word openly. The attorney laughed.

"My opinion is that it is an conspiracy," he said. "That is just the word, a conspiracy, and T. J. Jones is at the head of it. The book agent has come first; now the Colonel will come; and then Skinner, all asking the same thing, but my idea is that they are all in partnership, and that Jones is engineering the whole thing. They want your money, and that is all they want, and once they get it they will be happy and you will be left with four lung−testers on your hands."

Even in Kilo slang comes and goes as in the rest of the world and Miss Sally was not sure about the word "lung−tester." It had a slangy sound, and it must be a term of reproach applied to the future value of the four men Toole had mentioned. She accepted it as such.

"All I have to say," continued the attorney, "is to refuse the Colonel, and to refuse Skinner if he comes, just as you have refused this book agent. Stick up for your rights. If they want to sue you, let them sue. You have the money now, and it is better to have that than a lot of good−for−nothing lung−testers. Once you get them on your hands you'll never get rid of them."

He arose and took up his hat.

"That is all I have to say," he said, "but I wanted to let you know what you ought to do. Don't mind if there is a lot of stuff published in the TIMES. You have to expect that, and Jones will probably drag your name into it, in connection with the Colonel and Skinner, but you are perfectly innocent and they can do nothing to you."

He went out, and Miss Sally remained in a daze, looking at the door by which he had gone. She was still looking at it helplessly when Mrs. Tarbro−Smith came in with a swish of skirts and put her arm gently about her.

"DO you think you did what your heart told you to do, dear?" asked the lady from New York, kissing Miss Sally on the brow. "He was SO downcast. I really pitied him, poor man."

Miss Sally threw her arms around Mrs. Smith's waist and hit her face in the lacy softness of her gown, and wept. The authoress smoothed the brown hair and waited patiently for the tears to cease.

"Did you see Mr. Toole?" she asked brightly, to ease Miss Sally's weeping and to turn her thought to other things. "He wanted to see you about those fire− extinguishers. But I don't trust him. I think he has some plan or other that is selfish. I think he had been drinking."

Miss Sally's tears ceased, and she sat up, straight and severe.

"Fire−extinguishers?" she asked quickly.

"Yes," said Mrs. Smith; "he seemed to think Skinner or the Colonel or someone would want you to take them back. And return the money, I suppose."

"The money?" echoed Miss Sally slowly. She blushed as she saw that she had misunderstood the attorney, thinking he had dared to advise in her love matters, and then she frowned. "The money?" she repeated. "But I gave that money to pa. Pa won't ever give that money back, never! I don't know where on earth I'd ever get sixty dollars."

As she spoke she heard someone on the walk, and then the heavy feet of the Colonel climbing the porch steps. She heard him ask Susan if Miss Sally was inside, and heard the girl answer that she was, and she held Mrs. Smith's hand tighter.

"Come in," she called, to the knock on the door, and the Colonel stumped into the room. He was hot and angry, so angry that he did not stop to offer his usual curt greetings.

"Look here," he said, by way of introduction, "you an' your fire−extinguishers has got me into a purty fix, Sally Briggs−−a blame purty fix−an' I want to know do you intend to git me out or not? I don't want no foolishness. Skinner is after me an' I've got to pay him back them sixty dollars, or somebody'll go to jail for it. You ought to have knowed them wasn't nothin' but lung−testers, afore you set me up to sellin' 'em to Skinner, an' not let me go an' make a 'tarnal fool out of myself. But that ain't the thing now; the thing is, will you pay back them sixty dollars? I guess you'd better do it, an' do it quick. Skinner'll have the law on ye if ye don't."

Miss Sally drew back toward Mrs. Smith as he scowled at her.

"Now, you git them sixty dollars an' hand 'em over to me, that's what you'd better do," said the Colonel. "I want to git shut of this business. I was a fool fer meddlin' in a woman's affairs in the fust place. I don't want to have no more hand in it. You git me that money, an' let me fix it up with Skinner. He's mad, an' he won't stand no foolin'. It was all I could do to keep him from comin' in an' makin' a row right here in the house. He's waitin' at the gate till he sees if I git the money, an' if I don't−−−−"

"But I haven't got sixty dollars," Miss Sally gasped. "I gave that money to pa. I don't know whether I can GET sixty dollars out of pa."

She was so helpless that Mrs. Smith's blood boiled at the rude brutality of the Colonel, and she stepped forward and faced him.

"What is all this about?" she asked. "What is the matter with those fire− extinguishers? Why do you come bothering Miss Sally this way? Why don't you settle it with Mr. Skinner yourself?"

"The matter is, them ain't fire−extinguishers at all," said the Colonel rudely, "an' wasn't, an' never was. Them things is lung−testers, an' Sally was cheatin' Skinner when she sold 'em to him. An' the reason I'm botherin' her is that she got the money fer 'em, an' she's got to find it somehow an' pay it back. An' as for me settlin' with Skinner, I ain't got nothin' to do with it. I wasn't nothin' but Sally's agent. I done her a favor, an' that's all, an' I'm sorry I ever meddled in it."

"But there certainly can't be such haste needed," said Mrs. Smith. "Miss Sally is not going to run away. Mr. Skinner is not going to fail for want of sixty dollars, is he? You can wait until to−morrow, or to−night, when Miss Sally can see her father."

"No, I can't," said the Colonel doggedly. "I can't wait at all. By to−morrow mornin' that newspaper feller will have another paper printed up, an' I hear tell he's goin' to give us all plain names, an' I ain't goin' to wait. I want to git this thing fixed up right now. If Sally ain't got sixty dollars, let her go borry it. I got to pay Skinner right now, an' I want Sally to pay me. I want to git shut of this."

"I don't believe Mr. Skinner is in any such hurry as you pretend!" exclaimed Mrs. Smith. "I don't believe he is so ungenerous. I believe he is more chivalrous, I believe HE will have some manliness, if you have not."

She started for the door, but the Colonel grasped her by the arm.

"Hold on, here!" he said, but Mrs. Tarbro−Smith merely raised her eyebrows and looked, first at his hand on

her arm, and then at his face, and his hand fell. He stood irresolute and uncomfortable as she went to the door and called to Mr. Skinner. The butcher walked up to the door, clearing his throat as he came. Mrs. Smith held the screen door wide for him to enter, and he walked into the parlor, holding his hat in his hands, and stood uneasily.

"The Colonel," said Mrs. Smith pleasantly, "has told us you wish Miss Sally to return the money you paid for what she supposed were fire−extinguishers."

"They was nothin' but lung−testers," said the butcher.

"So it seems," said Mrs. Smith, "and it is odd that a man of business like yourself should not know it in the first place. But of course Miss Sally did not know what they were. Who told you they were fire−extinguishers, Sally?"

"The Colonel," said Miss Sally, and the Colonel moved his feet uneasily.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Smith, giving the Colonel another of her paralyzing glances. "But Miss Sally will do whatever is right. She hasn't the money at this moment. You can wait until to−morrow for the sixty dollars, can you not, until she can see her father?"

The butcher grew red in the face, redder than his naturally high coloring, but he shook his head.

"I want it now," he said. "Business is business." And after a moment he added, "It wasn't sixty, it was one hundred. Four at twenty−five, that's one hundred. One hundred dollars, that was what I handed Guthrie. I paid one hundred and I want one hundred back."

Miss Sally and Mrs. Smith looked at the Colonel.

"I had a right to make a commission," he blustered. "I ain't no sich fool as to do business fer other folks an' lose time by it. I took out a commission, an' I had a right to, an' I don't want to hear no more about it. A commission's fair."

"You didn't say anything about it," said poor Miss Sally. "Mrs. Smith was just surprised to learn of it."

"Surprised, my dear?" said Mrs. Smith, "No, indeed. Nothing that man would do could quite surprise me. But forty percent commission! Miss Sally hasn't sixty dollars in the house," she added, turning to the butcher. "You know very well people here don't have so much in the house at one time. If I had it I would gladly lend it to her, but I don't happen to have so much with me to−day. You can wait until Mr. Briggs gets back from Clarence, or you can do what you please."

"I want the money," said Skinner doggedly.

"Very well," said Mrs. Smith. "Collect forty from the Colonel. That will keep you from starving until to−morrow. And now will you both kindly leave the house?"

"Now, look here, Mrs. Smith, ma'm," said the butcher. "You ain't got any right to talk that way to me. Money matters is money matters, and a man has a right to look after his own the best way he can. I was cheated out of one hundred dollars by this man and Miss Sally, as easy as you please, and there's bribery in it, and land knows what. But I ain't mean. All I want is my money back, and I want it now. I hear T. J. Jones is going to get out an extry to−morrow morning all about this, and all I want is to do what is right. Hand me back my hundred dollars, and I'll go to T. J. and explain that Miss Sally did what was right, and tell him to leave her out of what he writes, but if I don't get the money I won't say a word to him. He can guess all he wants about

Miss Sally and the Colonel being in cahoots with this bribe business. All I want is my money."

"But I say you shall have it in the morning."

"Well, I don't count much on what you'll get out of Pap Briggs. You might get ten cents, if he was feeling liberal, but he don't usually feel that way. What I want is one hundred dollars right now. I don't need no lung−testers, and I've been cheated, and I won't wait. If Miss Sally ain't going to pay me, I'll see what the law says about it."

"Mr. Skinner," said Mrs. Smith, "in consideration that Miss Sally is a lady and that you are a gentleman, will you not wait till to−morrow?"

"Business is business," he said flatly. "When I'm sellin' meat I ain't a gentleman, I'm a butcher; and when Miss Briggs was sellin' lung−testers she wasn't a lady, she was in business. Business is one thing an' bein' pleasant is another. I've got to look after my money or I soon won't have any."

When the two men went out Mrs. Smith could hear them begin to wrangle even before they quitted the yard, but she was more interested in what might happen to Miss Sally through the vindictiveness of the butcher. She was surprised to hear that T. J. Jones had even thought of such a thing as bringing Miss Sally's name into the matter as a conspirator, and she did not know enough about Iowa laws to know whether the butcher could take any summary action or not. The most satisfactory way to straighten things out would be to pay the butcher, but it must be done at once. She pleaded with Miss Sally to remember someone of whom she could borrow sixty dollars, but Miss Sally confessed that she knew no one who would be apt to lend so much. She even expressed her doubt that her father would ever release the money she had given him. The two women sat in the darkened parlor, Miss Sally weeping softly and Mrs. Smith thinking hard. The authoress was ashamed that she could devise no way to aid her friend, and there they sat, exchanging a brief word from time to time, and the gloom deepening every minute. Presently, when the atmosphere was so charged with sadness that it was almost too thick to breathe, Mrs. Smith called to Susan, and the girl came in.

"Sue," said Mrs. Smith, "will you run down to the TIMES office and see Mr. Jones? And−−let me see−−and tell him I very much want to see him before he begins to print his extra. You won't mind, will you?"

"Oh, no," said Susan cheerfully, and she went, a fairy in filmy white, while the two women relapsed into gloom again.

So softly did the next comer mount the porch stairs that the two women did not hear him until a gentle tap on the door frame, followed by an apologetic cough, announced the return of Eliph' Hewlitt.

CHAPTER XVII

According to Jarby's

When Eliph' Hewlitt, sad at heart, departed from his disastrous interview with Miss Sally, he felt, for the first time in his life, a doubt as to the infallibility of Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art. Here was a book he had praised, sold and believed, and it had failed him. Here was a book that was proclaimed, in the "Advice to Agents," to be so simply written and so easy of understanding that a child could follow its directions as well as a man, and it had only led him to defeat. He had courted according to "Courtship"; he had tried to win the affections according to "How to Win" them, and instead of the "Yes" that Jarby's book led him to believe he would receive, he had been given a "No." This, then, was the book whose success he had made his life work! Caesar, when he saw Brutus draw his dagger, was wounded no more in spirit than Eliph' Hewlitt was now.

The world seemed to slip from beneath his feet; his firmest foundation seemed to have crumbled away; his best friend seemed to have turned false. As he walked toward Doc Weaver's house he decided what he would do: he would go to his room and tear his sample copy of Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art to scraps and throw them out upon the wind; he would write to Jarby & Goss and resign his commission; he would have Irontail hitched to his buggy and leave Kilo at once and forever, and from some other town he would write to G. P. Hicks & Co., and solicit the agency for Hicks' Facts for the Million, a book he had heretofore hated and despised. All this he resolved to do, and yet here he was again at Miss Sally's door, and the sample copy of Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art was under his arm!

Mrs. Tarbro−Smith, when she saw Eliph' Hewlitt at the door, uttered a little cry of joy and darted toward him. She put her finger to her lips and slipped out of the door and drew him to the seat that had once been a church pew, but was now doing duty as a garden−seat under an apple tree in the side yard. On Eliph's face was no longer the care−worn expression of the rejected lover, but the full glow of confidence, radiating from between his side−whiskers.

Mrs. Smith bent confidentially toward him, and laid one hand on the copy of Jarby's, which he had placed across his knees. In quick, crowding words she bade him hope−−which wasn't necessary−−and told him of the coming of Guthrie and Skinner, and of their demands. She laid before him all she knew of the affair of the fire−extinguishers, of the horror of the threatened legal attack on Miss Sally, and the disgrace that would overwhelm her should T. J. Jones publish an article mentioning her name. Eliph' Hewlitt must prevent the publication of the article; he must save Miss Sally.

The book agent was willing. As the appeal was spoken his eyes brightened and the book agent instinct−−the instinct that knows no defeat, but will talk a book into any man's library, or die in the attempt−−flowed full and free through his soul. Mrs. Smith saw him take fire, and she ventured the question she had been leading up to.

"Now, Mr. Hewlitt," she said, "I have sent for Mr. Jones, and I will do what I can to persuade him not to publish the article. I depend on you to do what you can in that, too, but I am going to trespass on your good nature in another thing also. It is something I know Miss Sally would never allow me to ask, and I myself would not ask it but that I happen to be waiting for a check from my publisher, and am quite out of funds at the moment. I am going to ask you to lend me sixty dollars! Not for myself, but to me. I believe Miss Sally would be willing to borrow it of me, and I know, dear Mr. Hewlitt, you will be willing to lend it to me."

Eliph' coughed softly behind his hand.

"Gladly!" he said. "Gladly any amount. I have quite a little money laid away, quite a little; some thousands, in fact; I might be called a wealthy man−−in Kilo. And it would be a pleasure, a real pleasure, to spend all for Miss Sally. She is a fine woman, Mrs. Smith. I admire her."

"I knew I could depend on YOU," said Mrs. Smith, putting her white hand on his scarcely less white one.

"But I can appreciate Miss Sally's−ah−maidenly dislike, in fact, her quite proper dislike of a loan from−ah−one who aspires−−−− In fact," he said, boldly breaking away from all attempt to speak bookishly, "from me. She don't want to borrow from me, and it would be the same thing if you borrowed for her from me. The same thing. I am courting Miss Sally, and such a loan would be irregular. There is nothing, Mrs. Smith, in the chapter on 'Courtship−−How to Win the Affections,' et cetery, about loaning money to the lady. It would derange the directions given in this book, which is−−−−"

"I don't want to hear about the book," said Mrs. Smith with annoyance. "I know all about the book. So you refuse to lend me sixty dollars? You, like these other men, are willing to desert Miss Sally at a time like this?"

"No," said the book agent. "Not desert. Rescue. Rescue her from the hands of these−−these men. Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art should be in every home, in every store, in every office. To be without it is to be like a rudderless air ship tossed by the waves of the relentless ocean. It contains a fact for every day in the year, for every moment of life, any one of which is worth the price of the book many times over. This book," he said−−and then his eyes, which had been gazing far into the sky over Miss Sally's house, returned to the eyes of Mrs. Smith−−"I am going to sell Mr. Skinner a copy of this book."

In spite of her disappointment in him, Mrs. Smith, the authoress, felt a thrill of pleasure in the discovery of such an admirable type−−a book agent who could see in the midst of love, courtship, conspiracy and trouble only his book and a chance to sell it. But she was deeply disappointed.

"Then you desert Miss Sally," she repeated sadly.

"Mrs. Smith." Said Eliph', reaching into his pocket and laying a handful of thick greasy manila envelopes in her lap, "these are my bank books. Six, containing the sum of seventeen thousand four hundred and eighty−two dollars and forty−six cents, and all this I lay at Miss Sally's feet if I do not succeed in selling a copy of Jarby's Encyclopedia this afternoon. If sold, the matter is settled."

When Eliph' reached the business part of Main Street he turned into Skinner's butcher shop and halted at the counter. The butcher was at work in the back room, and he put his head out and, seeing who had called, shook it.

"No books," he said shortly. "I never buy books. I didn't buy them Sir Walter Scotts even. No books."

Eliph' coughed his deprecatory little cough and walked behind the counter and to the door of the back room.

"So I understood," he said. "I heard at Franklin that you didn't buy books; it was mentioned to me that I would be wasting my time in calling on you. They said you was known all over the State as not buying books, and many admired your self−restraint in not buying. They said it was wonderful. That's why I never called on you to buy. But I didn't come to sell you a book. I wanted to ask if you knew William Rossiter?"

"William Rossiter?" asked Skinner, perplexed, coming out of the back room. "Who's William Rossiter?"

Eliph' laid his book on the chopping block.

"William Rossiter, agent," he said. "He was here once. He was the man that stopped with Miss Sally Briggs a while. I thought maybe you knew him. He's dead. I thought maybe you'd be interested to know it."

A light dawned on the butcher. William Rossiter must have been the man that left the lung−testers at Miss Sally's.

"I'm glad he's dead," he said. "I don't know anybody I'd sooner have it happen to."

"Don't say that!" exclaimed Eliph'. "If you only knew how he died, poor young man, you wouldn't say it. He burned to death."

"Well," said the butcher, "I don't know as I care how he died. I can't say I'm sorry. I guess he cost me a hundred dollars. I've got to go to law for it if I ever want to see it again. I guess he deserved to die, for the trouble he has made in this town."

Eliph' placed his hand on the sample copy of Jarby's.

"I will tell you how he died," he said briskly.

"No, you won't," said Skinner angrily, waving his hand toward the door; "you won't tell me nothin'. I've heard of these stories of yours, I have. You want to sell me one of them books, and you'll talk away at me about this Rossiter feller, and the first thing I know you'll have me down for a book. But you won't, for if you don't get right out of that door I'm goin' to put you out."

"All right," said Eliph' cheerfully, picking up his book, "if that's the way you feel about it I won't take up your time telling you about it I won't take up your time telling you about Bill Rossiter. Only I thought you'd like to know how it happened he was burned up in a theater when there was two dozen as good fire− extinguishers, right at hand, as there is in the world. But I won't intrude. I know myself too well, and I know I might happen to get to talking books before I thought. You see," he said, as if apologizing for himself, "I can't forget how this book saved my life, and might have saved the life of Bill Rossiter, too, if he had had a copy, the price being only five dollars, bound in cloth, one dollar down and one dollar a month until paid."

"There," said Skinner, as if Eliph' had offended him, "you are talkin' books right now, like I said you would."

"Was I?" asked Eliph'. "And all I started out to say was that I met Bill Rossiter in St. Louis just after he had run away from here. He told me all about it, and wept on my shoulder as he told me how it pained him to have to skip that way. He said it wasn't as if he could have left Miss Briggs anything that she could use, but−lung−testers! He asked me what a town like Kilo could do with lung−testers, and he felt awful about it. Said he couldn't bear to look at a lung−tester any more, they made him feel so ashamed, and what made it all the worse was that he had to look at them all day."

"I should think they would," said the butcher heartily. "It makes me sick to see them. But why did he do it if he didn't like it?"

"I was just going to tell you that," said Eliph', putting down his book again. "You see, when he left here he went right to St. Louis, that being where his home was, and that was how he happened to have lung−testers with him when he was here. His father made them. That was his father's business. He was in the lung− tester manufacturing business. So when Bill Rossiter left here he went right home to his father, which was the wise thing to do."

"Went home to sponge on the old man, I suppose," said Skinner.

"Just so," agreed Eliph', "and that was how I happened to meet him. There was a man there in St. Louis by the name of Hopper−Darius Hopper−and he owned the Imperial Theater and Museum. He was an old friend of mine, and I had sold him a copy of Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art away back in 1874, and as soon as he heard I was stopping in St. Louis he sent around to the hotel and begged me to come around to the museum and give readings out of Jarby's to the people that come into the museum. He said that it would draw bigger crowds in a cultured city like St. Louis than would come to see a two−headed calf or a fat women's race, being a course of readings that would instruct, entertain and please, and he asked me to name my own price."

"I should call him a fool," said Skinner scornfully.

"He wasn't," said Eliph'. "It took splendid. But I wouldn't let him pay me a cent. I said I considered it my sacred duty to make as many people as I could love and know Jarby's, and that I was doing my best to better the world that way, and was glad to do it free gratis, because in a big place like St. Louis there were many that could not afford even the small price of one dollar down and one dollar a month, which is all that is asked for this splendid volume, containing all the wisdom of the world, from the earliest days to the present time, neatly bound in cloth, and I felt I was helping the cause of progress by reading them a few chapters. I began at page

one," continued Eliph', opening the book in his hands, "skipping the allegorical frontispiece in three colors, and the index in which ten thousand−−−−−"

"I thought you was goin' to tell me about William Rossiter," said the butcher suspiciously.

"So I am," said Eliph'. "William Rossiter was on the third floor of the Theater and Museum building, for that was the job his father hunted up for him. William was in charge of the penny−in−the−slot machines of all kinds, a full description of which will be found in this book under the head of 'Machines, Automatic,' including a description of how made, how to use and how to repair. In fact, there is nothing in the way of information, from how to tell the weight of a baby by measuring its waist, to the age, size and history of the immortal pyramids of Egypt, one of the seven wonders of the world, that this book does not contain. It interests alike the student and the business man. And," he continued quickly as Skinner was about to interrupt him, "among the slot machines of which William Rossiter had charge were twenty−four lung−testers."

"Twenty−four!" exclaimed Skinner. "Them St. Louis folks must like to test their lungs!"

"No," said Eliph', "they don't, and that is what makes me feel so bad about William Rossiter. The St Louis people didn't care for lung−testers at all. They crowded pennies into all the other machines, but they would just go up to the lung−testers and sort of sniff at them, and walk away without trying them. So there those twenty−four lung−testers stood, useless to man and beast, all in a row, doing nobody any good, and there I was on the floor below reading out of a book that would have told Bill Rossiter how to make those lung−testers worth their weight in gold, and would have saved his life. And to think he could have bought this book for the small nominal sum of−−−−"

"You said that once," said Skinner. "Five dollars; one dollar down, and one dollar a month until paid."

"Bound in cloth," said Eliph'. "Seven fifty if in morocco leather. So at the very minute that the fire broke out−−−−"

"Fire!" said Skinner; "what fire? You didn't say anything about a fire."

"The fire in the theater and museum," said Eliph'. "It started right on the stairs between the second and third floors, and the old building flared up like dry paper. Two or three men that was trying the slot machines saw the smoke and run for the lung−testers, thinking by the look they were fire−extinguishers, which was the most natural mistake in the world. The looks of them would fool anybody, but they were lung−testers, and there that old building was, with twenty−four lung−testers in it, and not one fire−extinguisher. After that fire they passed an ordinance compelling every theater to have four fire− extinguishers."

"And do they have them?" asked Skinner.

"Every first−class theater and opera house does, all over the United States," said Eliph'. "But the odd thing was that at the very moment the fire broke out I had this book open at page 416, 'Fire−−Its Traditions−−How to Make a Fire Without Matches−−Fire Fighting−−Fire Extinguishers, How Made.' I was reading to those people how to make fire−extinguishers at home out of common chemicals and any suitable nickel−plated can, that would be as good as the best sold in any store, and right as I read it I thought how easy it would be for any man or child to turn those twenty−four useless lung−testers on the third floor into first−class fire−extinguishers, by following the simple directions set down on page 418, at a cost of only about twenty−six cents each−−−−"

Skinner held out his hand for the book.

"Let me have a look at that book," he said.

Eliph' picked up the book and tucked it under his arm.

"And at that minute came the cry of 'Fire!'" he said. "And I thought of poor Bill Rossiter up there on the third floor, shut off from all hope of rescue−−− −−"

Skinner reached down to his cash drawer and pulled it open. He took out a dollar bill and held it toward Eliph'. The book agent ignored it.

"Think of it," he said. "Bill Rossiter on the third floor, burning up, and me on the floor below with this book in my hand reading off of page 418 the names of the simple ingredients that would−−−−"

"Mebby I might as well pay the whole five right now," said Skinner, taking four more dollars out of his drawer. "Could you leave that book with me?"

"I will, as a special favor," said Eliph'.

"Well, say," said Skinner, "I'll be mortally obliged to you if you will. It will take a mighty load off of my mind."

And when Eliph' left the butcher shop he had, for the first time in his life, sold his sample copy.

CHAPTER XVIII

Another Trial

When Eliph' stepped out of the butcher shop he saw T. J. Jones across the street, returning from his interview with Mrs. Smith, and the book agent hailed him and crossed the street. The editor wore a harassed look as Eliph' stepped up to him, and it deepened when Eliph' asked him if he had acceded to Mrs. Smith's request.

"Hewlitt," he said, "I couldn't do it. I wanted to, but I couldn't. The man was willing but the editor had to refuse. The press cannot sink the public welfare to favor individuals; once the freedom of the press is lost the nation relapses into sodden corruption. I told Mrs. Smith so. And besides, I have the whole article in type, too. I like Mrs. Smith, and I like Miss Sally, but the hissing cobra of corruption must be crunched beneath the heel of a free and independent press. The TIMES must do its duty, let the chips fall where they may."

"'The pen is mightier than the sword,' page 233, Apt Quotations for All Occasions," said Eliph', "this being one of three thousand quotations, arranged alphabetically according to subject, as 'Bird−−in the hand, Bird−−of a feather, Bird−−killing two with one stone,' et cetery, including 'Leap−−look before you,' and 'Sure−−be sure you're right, then go ahead.' What do you mean to print?"

The editor told him all he had been able to gather regarding the matte of the fire−extinguishers, and as he talked Eliph' saw the butcher leave his shop and enter the drug store−−he was after chemicals. He turned to the editor with fresh assurance.

"See page 88, 'Every Man his Own Lawyer,'" he said, "giving all that it is necessary for any man to know regarding the laws of his native land, including laws of business, how to draw up legal papers, what constitutes libel, et cetery. This one division alone being worth the whole cost of the book, showing among other things what a paper should print and what it should not. Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art is a marvelous work, including as it does the chapter on 'Fire−−Its Traditions−−How to Make a Fire Without Matches−−Fire Fighting−−Fire Extinguishers, How Made,' et cetery, containing directions by which man, woman or butcher can convert lung− testers into approved fire−extinguishers at a cost of only twenty−six cents. It is a good book. I just sold Mr. Skinner one."

He watched the editor's face as the meaning of his words dawned on it, and added:

"Miss Briggs has a copy, morocco binding, including among ten thousand and one subjects 'What Constitutes Libel.'"

"Then those fire−extinguishers will be all right, after all?" said the editor. "You want to look out how you trifle with the press. The press never forgives nor forgets."

"Those lung−testers, prepared according to Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art, would put out the flames of the fiery furnace prepared for Shadrach, Meschach and Abednego, mentioned in 'Bible Tales,' Condensed and Put into Words of One Syllable for Children,' page 569, Jarby's Encyclopedia," said Eliph' airily. "They would satisfy an investigation committee of imps, or other experts."

The editor thought for a minute and Eliph' looked at him and smiled, gently combing his whiskers with his fingers.

"That's all right," said the editor. "That lets Miss Sally out, and it may satisfy Skinner, but it don't do away with the bribery. Mayor Stitz was bribed and he admits it. He says he was, and he brags about it. Guthrie bribed him, and I've got enough left to give Stitz and Guthrie a good shot. I'll leave Skinner and Miss Briggs out, but I'll go for Stitz and Guthrie. I'll show them that in Kilo the press is alert, wide awake, and not to be trifled with. I'll teach them a lesson."

"So do!" said Eliph'. "And make Miss Sally mad. And make Mrs. Smith mad. And make Miss Susan mad. And me. So do, and have Tolle tell them that he did not want you to print it, and that he went up and fought you to get you not to print it. So do, and instead of having Miss Sally and Mrs. Smith and me your friends, have us run you down to Susan. Instead of having hit Toole by printing the thing sooner than he wanted, as you did, print more, and do him a favor. Make him a favorite of Miss Sally's. So do, if you want to. Or−−have me go to Miss Susan and say you will not relent but that there is one chance−−that she shall plead with you herself."

He stepped back and looked at the hesitating Jones.

"Jones," he said, "the way you are acting, the way you hesitate, would tell anybody that you have not a copy of Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art, in your office. No man who has read that book would lack wisdom, that work containing under one cover all the wisdom I the world, price five dollars, two dollars off to the press. Buy a copy and be sensible."

Jones looked far down the street toward his office as if the matter he had there standing in the galley was begging him not to desert it.

"Courtship−−How to Make Love−−How to Win the Affections−−How to Hold them When Won," said Eliph'. "See Jarby's giving advice to those in love, those wishing to win the affections, et cetery. 'If the object of the affections can be placed in a position where she will be compelled to ask a favor, the granting of it, however slight, will advance the cause of the eager suitor."

"I don't care!" said T. J. Jones suddenly. "I'd lose Skinner's ad if I printed that article, and he pays cash."

"Mine too," said Eliph', "and I was just thinking of doubling it. Jarby's deserves−−−−"

"That's all right," said the editor, with a sigh of relief. "You needn't have Miss Susan come begging me. Just tell her I gave up printing the article because you said she wouldn't like it."

"Don't throw away a chance," urged Eliph' putting a hand on the young man's arm. "Be wise. Do as Jarby's says. Be urged. I followed Jarby's advice."

"Why are you−−are you, too?" asked T. J., beaming upon him.

Eliph' coughed behind his hand.

"Yes," he said, "Miss Briggs. I followed Jarby's advice−−and won."

"Congratulations!" said the editor. "Have it your own way then. I'll be at Miss Sally's after supper, if Sue wants to coax."

They parted, and as Eliph' walked happily toward his boarding house he did not realize that he had not won, nor that his appeal had been rejected by Miss Sally, for he had regained his faith in Jarby's and if he had not yet won, he felt that he would, and that was the same thing.

After his supper Eliph' felt that the time had come to arrange things with Miss Sally. There was no longer any cause for delay. He had arranged the matter of the fire−extinguishers; he had settled the matter of the TIMES, and he felt that Skinner and the Colonel must have hurt by their actions their causes with Miss Sally. They had, indeed, far more than Eliph' guessed. He repaired to his room and brushed his whiskers carefully. Never had he appeared smarter than when he went out of the gateless opening in Doc Weaver's fence, and turned his face toward Miss Sally's home.

His way led him pas the mayor's little car, where Stitz was on his platform smoking and evening pipe. The mayor halted him with a motion of his pipe stem.

"Mister Hewlitt," he said, "you know too that joke, yes? About those lung− testers was not fire−extinguishers?"

"That's all right," said Eliph', seeking to pass on, "It is all fixed up now. They ARE fire−extinguishers."

"Such a fool business on Skinner," said the mayor with enjoyment. "And on Stitz, too. I thinks me I am the boss grafter, and I ain't!"

He chuckled.

"No−o!" he said cheerfully. "But next times I makes no more such fool mistakes; I make me a real boss grafter. I am now only a boss−fool, but boss grafter. So says Attorney Toole. Money is grafts, and houses and lots is grafts, and horses is grafts, and buggies, but," and he paused impressively, "apples isn't, and potatoes isn't, and peas isn't, and chickens isn't. Nothing to eat is grafts. If it is to eat it is not grafts. So says Attorney Toole. Things to eat is no more grafts as lung−tester is fire−extingables. So says Toole. So nobody won't prosecute me. I stick me to the mayor business yet a while. Klops on the head is nothings much; all big men gets them. So says Attorney Toole."

Skinner was locking his shop when Eliph' passed, and the stopped Eliph' too.

"Works fine," he said. "I tried a tomato canful on a bonfire in the back yard, and it put it out like a wink. That's a great book; I'm glad you spoke about it. I wish you'd told me about it sooner."

Miss Sally was not on the porch when Eliph' arrived, for she was still in the kitchen at the supper dishes, but Mrs. Smith and Susan were there, and they greeted him eagerly. The little man smiled as he walked up to them, and waved his hand in the air.

"You fixed it?" cried Mrs. Smith. "It is all right now?"

"Fixed from A to Z," said Eliph', as he took a seat on the porch step. "All right from the allegorical frontispiece in three colors to the back page. Jarby's wins, and error don't. Miss Sally in?"

He heard the click of the dishes as Miss Sally laid them one by one on the kitchen table, so he knew well she was in.

"It might relieve her mind if I told her," he suggested, and Mrs. Smith smiled and said it might.

"Go right in," she said, and Eliph' did.

He went into the hall and coughed gently behind his hand, and Miss Sally looked up. She wiped her hands hastily on her blue gingham apron, and came into the hall.

"Jarby's fixed it," he said, and rapidly related what he had done, with illustrations in the way of quotations from the titles and sub−titles of Jarby's. "When you have a moment to spare," he added, "I would like to speak to you. I want to tell you something about Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art, a copy of which I see lying on your parlor table, forming an adornment to the home both useful and helpful."

"Well, I don't want no books," said Miss Sally, "I've got one copy, and that ought to be enough to adorn any home. And I've got to get these dishes washed sometime. I've let the fire go out, and the water will be cold. If there's anything important you want to say about that book, you can go out and wait till I get the dishes done."

"It's about how to get the best use out of it," said Eliph'. "I'll go out and wait. It's something everybody that has a copy ought to know."

He went out as she said, and found Susan alone on the porch. Mrs. Smith was at the gate, and he could see her white dress in the evening darkness. Susan sat with a knitted shawl about her shoulders, for the evening were already growing chill, so long had Eliph's courtship lengthened out. He could not have had a better opportunity to speak to Susan alone, and he warned her of the "piece" T. J. had threatened to publish in the morning, and of the disgrace and sorrow it would bring to Miss Sally. The girl listened eagerly and her indignation grew as he went on, so that he had to veer, and expatiate on the virtues of T. J. and the right of the modern press to meddle in private affairs when it wants to.

"And can't anything be done?" asked Susan. "Why don't somebody do something? I didn't think Thomas was like that."

"He isn't," admitted Eliph' heartily. "But he needs coaxing. If you were to coax him he might see how wrong he is. I shouldn't wonder if he would come up here to−night, looking for me, being interested in Jarby's Encyclopedia and anxious to get a copy at the reduced price of two dollars off, offered to the press only. If he does, try to move him."

"I will," said Susan. "And if he publishes that piece, I'll never speak to him again."

Eliph' was still sitting there when T. J. came, and when Susan proposed a walk down to the corner he knew that it would be all right with T. J. Jones. A light coming suddenly over his shoulder from the parlor behind him told him that Miss Sally was ready to receive him, and he took his hat and went into the house.

Miss Sally was sitting in the rocker with the cross−stitch cover, and Eliph' took a seat at the opposite side of the center−table and lifted the morocco bound copy of Jarby's from its place beside the shell box. The

kerosene lamp glowed between them, and he drew closer to the table and laid the book gently on his knees. Miss Sally sat straight upright in her chair and looked at the little book agent.

"This book," he said, looking up at her with eyes in which kindness and business mingled, "although sold, in this handsome binding, for seven fifty, is worth, to one who understands it, its weight in gold. It holds a help for every hour and a hint for every minute of the day. It furnishes wisdom for a lifetime. I read it and study it; for every difficulty of my life it furnishes a solution. Corns? It tells how to cure them. Food? It tells how to cook it. Love? It tells how to make it. But," he said, laying his hand affectionately on the morocco cover, "to be understood it must be read. To read it well is to admire and cherish it, and yet, only this morning I was about to tear my copy of this priceless volume to pieces and scatter it to the four winds of heaven."

He paused to let this awful fact sink into Miss Sally's mind.

"Yes," he continued, "I was about to turn away from the best friend I have in the world and declare to one and all that Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art was a fraud! When I left your home yesterday, I was full of anger. I was mad at Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art. I had trusted to its words and directions, as set forth in, Courtship−−How to Make Love−−How to Win the Affections−−How to Hold Them When Won, and you sent me away. I went away a different man than I had come, and resolved to go away from Kilo, and never to sell another copy of this book. I resolved to take the sale of 'Hicks' Facts for the Million,' a book, although greater in cost, containing by actual count sixteen thousand less words than this.

"I went to my room at Doc Weaver's," he continued, "and seized my copy of this work from where it lay on my bureau. I called it names. I told it it was a cheat and a liar. Yes, Miss Sally, I let my angry passions rise against this poor, innocent book. I believed it had advised me falsely. I had trusted to its words and had done as it said to do, and you had sent me away, not in anger, but in sorrow, but just as much away. I picked up the book and opened it, grasping it in two hands to tear it asunder."

He opened the book and showed her how he had grasped it.

"I pulled it to tear it in two," he said, raising the book and pulling it in the direction of asunder, "but it would not rip. It was bound too well, the copies bound in cloth at five dollars, one dollar down and one dollar a month until paid, being bound as firmly as the more expensive copies at seven fifty. I pulled harder and the book came level with my nose. I saw it had opened at 'Courtship−−How to Make Love,' and I said, 'While I am getting my breath to give this book another pull, why not read the lie that is written here once more? It will give me strength to rend it asunder.' So I read it."

He looked at Miss Sally and saw that she was showing no signs of being bored.

"I held the book like this," he said, showing how he held it, " and read. All that it said to do I had done and my anger grew stronger. But I turned the page! I saw the words I had not seen before; words that told me I had tried to tear my best friend to pieces. I sand into a chair trembling like a leaf. I felt like a man jerked back from the edges of Niagara Falls, a full description and picture of that wonder of nature being given in this book among other natural masterpieces. I weakly lifted the book back again and read those golden words."

"What was it?" asked Miss Sally, leaning forward.

"'Courtship−−How to Make Love−−How to Win the Affections−−How to Hold Them When Won.'" said Eliph', turning to the proper page. "And the words I read were these: 'The lover should not be utterly cast down if he be refused upon first appealing for the dear one's hand. A first refusal often means little or nothing. A lady frequently uses this means to test the reality of the passion the lover has professed, and in such a case a refusal is often a most hopeful sign. Unless the refusal has been accompanied by very evident signs of dislike,

the lover should try again. If at the third trial the fair one still denies his suit, he had better seek elsewhere for happiness, but until the third test he should not be discouraged. The first refusal may be but the proof of a finer mind than common in the lady.'"

Eliph' removed his spectacles and laid them carefully in the pages of the book which he closed and placed gently on the center−table.

"Having read that," he said, "I saw that I had done this work a wrong. I had read it hastily and had missed the most important words. I felt the joy of life returning to me. I remembered that you were a lady of finer mind than common, and I understood why you had refused me. I resolved to stay in Kilo and justify Jarby's Encyclopedia of Knowledge and Compendium of Literature, Science and Art by giving it another trial. And now," he said, placing his hand on the book where it lay on the table and leaning forward to gaze more closely into Miss Sally's face, while she faced him with a quickened pulse, and a blush, "now, I want to ask you again, WILL you put your name down for a copy of this work−−−−" He stopped appalled at what he had said, and stared at Miss Sally for one moment foolishly, while over her face spread not a frown of anger or contempt, but a pleasant smile of friendly amusement.

"Not the book," he said, "but me."

Miss Sally looked at the eager eyes that were not only serious, but sincere and kind.

"Well, Mister Hewlitt," she said, "I guess I'll have to marry someone some time so I might as well marry you as anybody. But I don't think pa will ever give consent to havin' a book agent in the family. He hates book agents worse than I used to."

"You don't any more," said Eliph', putting his hand very far across the table.

"Well, no, I don't," said Miss Sally graciously, "not all of 'em."

CHAPTER XIX

Pap Briggs' Hen Food

The doubt that Miss Sally had expressed regarding Pap Briggs' acceptance of Eliph' Hewlitt as a son−in−law was mild compared with the fact. When the old man returned the next day from his farm at Clarence and learned from Miss Sally that she had promised to marry the book agent he was furiously angry. For two whole days he refused to wear his store teeth at all, and when he recovered from his first height of anger it was to settle down into a hard and fast negative. He went about town telling anyone that would listen to him that there ought to be licenses against book agents, and once having made up his mind that Miss Sally should not marry Eliph' as long as he remained alive to prevent it, not even the friendly approaches of the book agent could move him from his stubborn resolution. Miss Sally would not think of marrying while her father was in such a state of opposition, and indeed, Eliph' did not urge it. He had no desire to defy his father−in−law, and he unwillingly but kindly agreed to wait.

In this way the autumn faded into winter. Mrs. Tarbro−Smith returned to New York with a note−book full of dialect and a head full of local color and types, and if she took Susan with her it was only because she agreed to bring her back in June, when T. J. Jones was to marry her. Miss Sally lived on with her father, attending to his wants, which were few and simple. An egg for breakfast, and enough tobacco to burn all day were his chief earthly desires, eggs because he could eat them in comfort, and tobacco because he liked it.

When Miss Sally had moved to town there was one thing she had said her father SHOULDN'T do, after living all his life on a farm, and that was, have store eggs for his breakfast.

"Hens is trouble enough, Lord knows," said Miss Sally, "an' dirty, if they can't be kep' in their place; but there's some comfort in their cluckin' round, and I guess I'll have plenty of time, and to spare to tend to 'em; so, Pap, you won't have to eat no stale eggs for breakfast, if I kin help it. They ain't nothing' I hate to think on like boughten eggs. Nobody knows how old they are, nor who's been a−handlin' them; and eat boughten eggs you shan't do, sure's my name's Briggs!"

So Sally brought half a dozen hens and a gallant rooster to town with her, and supervised the erection of a cozy coop and hen−yard, and Pap had the comfort of knowing his eggs were fresh. But fresh or not, it made no difference to him so long as he had one each morning, and it was fairly edible.

"These teeth o' mine," he told Billings, the grocer, "cost twelve dollars down to Franklin, by the best dentist there; but, law sakes! A feller can't eat hard stuff with any comfort with 'em for fear of breakin' 'em every minute. They ain' nothin' but chiney, an' you know how chiney's the breakiest thing man ever made. That's why I say, 'Give me eggs for breakfast, Sally,'−−and eggs I will have."

The six hens did their duty nobly during the summer and autumn and a part of the winter, and Pap had his egg unfailingly; but in December the long cold spell came, and the six hens struck. It was the longest and coldest spell ever known in Kilo, and it hung on and hung on until the entire hen population of Eastern Iowa became disgusted and went on a strike. Eggs went up in price until even packed eggs of the previous summer sold for twenty−seven and thirty cents a dozen, and angel−cake became an impossible dainty.

The second morning that Pap Briggs ate this eggless breakfast he suggested that perhaps Sally might buy a few eggs at the grocery.

"Pap Briggs," she exclaimed reproachfully, "the idee of you sayin' sich a thin! As if I would cook packed eggs! No; we'll wait, and mebby the hens will begin layin' again in a day or two."

But they did not, and the days became a week, and two weeks, and still no eggs rewarded her daily search. Pap knew better than to repeat his suggestion of buying eggs, for Sally Briggs said a thing only when she meant it, and to mention it again would only exasperate her.

"Our hens don't lay a blame egg," Pap told Billings complainingly, "and Sally won't buy eggs, and I can't eat nothin' but eggs for breakfast, so I reckon I'll jist have to naturally starve to death."

"Why don't you try some of our hen−food?" asked Billings, taking up a package and reading from the label. "'Guaranteed to make hens lay in all kinds of weather, the coldest as well as the warmest' That's just what you want, Pap."

"Well," said Pap, "I been keepin' hens off and on for nigh forty year, and I ain't ever seen any o' that stuff that was ary good; but I got to have eggs or bust, so I'll take a can o' that stuff. But I ain't no hopes of it, Billings, I ain't no hopes."

His pessimism was well founded. The cold spell was too much even for the best hen−food to conquer. No eggs rewarded him.

One evening he was sitting in Billings', smoking his pipe and thinking. He had been thinking for some time, and at length a sparkle came into his eyes, and he knocked the ashes from his pipe and arose.

"Billings," he said, "mix me up about a nickel's wuth o' corn−meal, and a nickel's wuth o' flour, and"−−he hesitated a moment and then chuckled−−"and a nickel's wuth o' wash−blue."

"For heaven's sake, Pap," said Billings, "have ye gone plumb crazy?"

"No, I ain't," said Pap. "I ain't lost all my brains yit, nor I ain't gone plumb crazy yit, neither. That's a hen food I invented."

"Hen−food!" exclaimed Billings. "You don't 'low that will make hens lay, do you, Pap?"

"I ain't advisin' no one to use it that don't want to," said Pap, "but I bet you I'm a−goin' to feed that to my hens"; and he chuckled again.

"Pap," said Billings, "you're up to some be−devilment, sure! What is it?"

"You jist keep your hand on your watch till you find out," answered Pap, and he took his package and went home.

"Sally," he said when he entered the house, "I got some hen−food now that's bound to make them hens lay, sure."

She took the package and opened it.

"For law's sake, Pap," she said, "what kind o' hen−food is that? It's blue!"

"Yes," said Pap, looking at it closely, "it IS blue, ain't it? It's a mixture of my own. I ain't been raisin' hens off an' on fer forty year for nothin'. You got to study the hen, Sally, and think about her. Why don't a hen lay in cold weather? 'Cause the weather makes the hen cold. This will make her warm. You jist try it. Give 'em a spoonful apiece an' I reckon they'll lay. It don't look like much, but I bet you anything it'll make them hens lay."

"I don't believe it," she snapped, "and I'll hold you to that bet, sure's my names Briggs." But the next day she gave them the allotted portion.

That evening when Pap Briggs knocked the ashes from his pipe and rose from his seat in Billings' store, he said, "Billings, have you got some mainly fresh eggs−−eggs you kin recommend?"

"Yes, I have," said Billings, with a grin. "So your hen−food don't work, Pap?"

Pap chuckled.

"It's a−workin," he said, "and you can give me a dozen o' them eggs. And, say, you need't tell Sally."

Billings laughed. "I'm on," he said.

Pap put the bag of eggs back of the cracker−box, and put three of them in his pocket.

When he reached home he quietly slipped around the house and deposited the three eggs in three nests, and went it.

The next morning Sally greeted him with a smile. "Eggs this mornin', Pap," she said. "That hen−food did work like a charm. I got three eggs."

Pap ate without comment until he had finished the second egg. He felt that he could eat a dozen, after his long fast.

"It do seem good to have eggs agin," he said.

That evening, and the next evening he deposited three eggs as before. On the third morning Sally said: It's queer about them hens, Pap; they lay, but they don't cluck like a hen generally does when she lays an egg."

Pap hesitated for a moment.

"It's sich cold weather," he said, "I reckon that's why."

About a week later Sally said: "I do declare to gracious, Pap, them hens do puzzle me."

Pap moved uneasily in his seat.

"The do puzzle me!" repeated Sally. "Here the are layin' right along as reg'lar as summer−time, and never cluckin' or lettin' on a bit, and the queerest thing is they jist lay three eggs every day. It don't seem natural!"

That night Pap put four eggs in the nests. The next night he put in five, and the next night three, and the danger into which his wiles had fallen was averted.

One morning Sally startled him by saying: "Pap, I can't make them hens out. Here they are a−layin' right along, and all at once they quit layin' decent sized eggs like they ought, and begin layin' little mean things no better than banty eggs."

Pap scratched his head.

"You must allow, Sally," he said, "that it's quite a strain on a hen to keep a− layin' right along through such weather as this, and I'm only thankful they lay any. Mebby if you give them a leetle more o' that hen−food they'll do better."

"I believe it," said Sally. "Why, it's wonderful, Pap. I shouldn't be a bit surprised to find 'em layin' duck eggs if I jist give 'em enough o' that stuff."

Pap looked closely at her face, but it was innocent of guile. She suspected nothing.

The next day the eggs were of the proper size.

"It's a real blessin' to have hens a−layin'," she said one day. "I took half a dozen over to the minister's wife this mornin', and she was so pleased! She said it was sich a blessin' to have fresh eggs again. She was gittin' sick o' them she's been buyin' at Billings'. She was downright thankful."

About a week later she said:

"Them hens of ourn do beat all creation. I run out o' that hen−food a week ago, and I hain't give them a mite since, and they keep a−layin' jist the same. I can't make head nor tail of them, Pap."

Pap squirmed in his chair.

"Pshaw, now, Sally," he said, "you'd ought to have let me know you was out. You oughtn't to do that. Feed 'em plenty of it. They deserve it. If you stop feedin' them they'll stop layin' pretty soon. The effect of that hen−food don't last more'n two weeks. No," he said thoughtfully, "ten days is the longest I ever knowed it to last 'em."

If Pap Briggs enjoyed his eggs for breakfast he enjoyed as fully the many laughs he had with Billings over the scheme, and Billing found it hard to keep his promised secrecy. It would be such a good story to tell. But Pap

exhorted him daily, and he did not let the secret out.

One Sunday morning Pap came down to his breakfast and took his seat. Sally brought his coffee and bacon. Then she brought him a plate of moistened toast.

"You've forgot the eggs, Sally," said Pap admonishingly.

"They ain't none this morning," said Sally briefly.

Pap looked up and saw that her mouth was set very firmly.

"No eggs?" he asked tremulously.

"No," she said decidedly, "no eggs! I kin believe that hens lay eggs and don't cluck, and I kin believe that hens lay eggs all winter, and I kin believe that Plymouth Rock hens lay Leghorn eggs and Shanghai eggs and Banty eggs, Pap, but when hens begin layin' spoiled eggs I ain't no more faith in hens."

Pap laid down his knife and fork.

"Spoiled eggs!" he ejaculated.

"Yes, spoiled eggs," she declared. "You and Billings ought to be more careful."

Pap turned his bacon over and eyed it critically. Then he frowned at it. Then he chuckled.

"You needn't laugh," said Miss Sally severely. "You don't get no more eggs until the hens begin laying regular. You can eat moistened toast. You ain't fair to me, pa. You set up to say who I shall marry, when I'm old enough to know for myself, and then you go and cheat me about eggs. Mebby I ain't old enough to know who to marry, but I'm old enough to run this house for you, and you don't get no more eggs. No more eggs until spring, or until I can marry who I want to.

Pap looked at the mushy piece of toast and grinned sheepishly.

"You'd be worse of 'n ever, Sally," he said meekly, "if so be you married a man that felt he had to hev eggs every morning. They'd be two of us then."

"Well, Id just have to buy eggs then," she said, "if that come to pass. I couldn't expect these few hens to lay enough eggs in winter for two men. If I had to buy eggs for a husband, I'd buy them."

The old man ate his toast slowly and without relish.

"Sally," he said that afternoon, "I guess mebby you'd better git married. I'm gittin' old. You'd better marry that book agent whilst you got a chance."

It was Pap Briggs who urged an early date, after that, and who was most joyous at the wedding.

"Pap," asked Sally one morning soon after she and Eliph' were married, while the three were sitting at breakfast, "what ever made you swing round so sudden and want me to marry Eliph', after objectin' so long?"

Her father looked at Eliph' slyly and chuckled.

"Eggs," he said. "I fooled you that time, Sally. I knowed when I said to go ahead that Eliph' has to have eggs

for breakfast. Doc Weaver told me so."
