service. The high pulpit, taken from the old meeting house, and the cricket on which he used to stand and the Bible from which he used to preach have remained objects of veneration in Coniston to this day. A fortnight later many tearful faces gazed after the Truro coach as it galloped out of Brampton in a cloud of dust, and one there was, watching unseen from the spruces on the hill, who saw within it a girl dressed in black, dry-eyed, staring from the window.

CHAPTER VII

"AND STILL THE AGES ROLL, UNMOVED"

Out of the stump of a blasted tree in the Coniston woods a flower will sometimes grow, and even so the story which I have now to tell springs from the love of Cynthia Ware and Jethro Bass. The flower, when it came to bloom, was fair in life, and I hope that in these pages it will not lose too much of its beauty and sweetness.

For a little while we are going to gallop through the years as before we have ambled through the days, although the reader's breath may be taken away in the process. How Cynthia Ware went over the Truro Pass to Boston, and how she became a teacher in a high school there, — largely through the kindness of that Miss Lucretia Penniman of whom we have spoken, who wrote in Cynthia's behalf to certain friends she had in that city; how she met one William Wetherell, no longer a clerk in Mr. Judson's jewellery shop, but a newspaper man with I know not what ambitions — and limitations in strength of body and will; how, many, many years afterward, she nursed him tenderly through a sickness and — married him, is all told in a paragraph. Marry him she did, to take care of him, and told him so. She made no secret of the maternal in this love.

One evening, the summer after their marriage, they were walking in the Mall under the great elms that border the Common on the Tremont Street side. They often used to wander there, talking of the books he was to write when strength should come and a little leisure, and sometimes their glances would linger longingly on

Colonnade Row that Bulfinch built across the way, where dwelt the rich and powerful of the city — and yet he would not have exchanged their lot for his. Could he have earned with his own hands such a house, and set Cynthia there in glory, what happiness! But, I stray.

They were walking in the twilight, for the sun had sunk all red in the marshes of the Charles, when there chanced along a certain Mr. Judson, a jeweller, taking the air likewise. So there came into Wetherell's mind that amusing adventure with the country lad and the locket. His name, by reason of some strange quality in it, he had never forgotten, and suddenly he recalled that the place the countryman had come from was Coniston.

"Cynthia," said her husband, when Mr. Judson was gone, "did you know any one in Coniston named Jethro Bass?"

She did not answer him. And, thinking she had not heard, he spoke again.

"Why do you ask?" she said, in a low tone, without looking at him.

He told her the story. Not until the end of it did the significance of the name engraved come to him — Cynthy. "Cynthy, from Jethro."

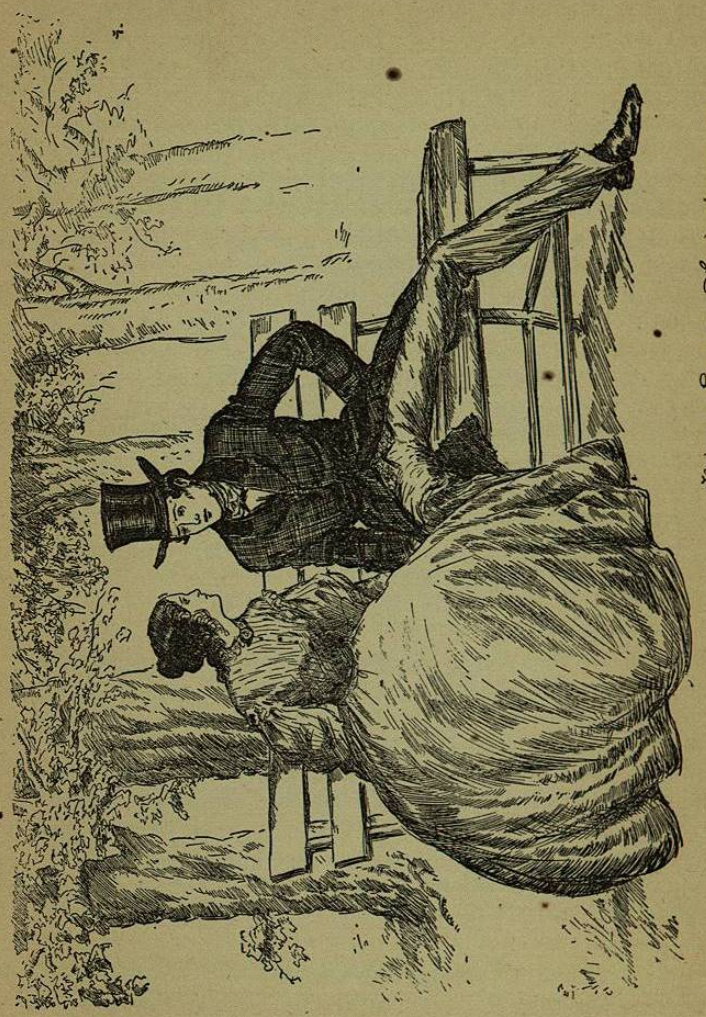
"Why, it might have been you!" he said jestingly. "Was he an admirer of yours, Cynthia, that strange, uncouth countryman? Did he give you the locket?"

"No," she answered, "he never did."

Wetherell glanced at her in surprise, and saw that her lip was quivering, that tears were on her lashes. She laid her hand on his arm.

"William," she said, drawing him to a bench, "come, let us sit down, and I will tell you the story of Jethro Bass. We have been happy together, you and I, for I have found peace with you. I have tried to be honest with you, William, and I will always be so. I told you before we were married that I loved another man. I have tried to forget him, but as God is my judge, I cannot. I believe I shall love him until I die."

They sat in the summer twilight, until darkness



"'I will tell you the story of Jethro Bass.'"

fell, and the lights gleamed through the leaves, and a deep, cool breath coming up from the sea stirred the leaves above their heads. That she should have loved Jethro seemed as strange to her as to him, and yet Wetherell was to feel the irresistible force of him. Hers was not a love that she chose, or would have chosen, but something elemental that cried out from the man to her, and drew her. Something that had in it now, as of yore, much of pain and even terror, but drew her. Strangest of all was that William Wetherell understood and was not jealous of this thing: which leads us to believe that some essence of virility was lacking in him, some substance that makes the fighters and conquerors in this world. In such mood he listened to the story of Jethro Bass.

"My dear husband," said Cynthia, when she had finished, her hand tightening over his, "I have never told you this for fear that it might trouble you as it has troubled me. I have found in your love sanctuary, and all that remains of myself I have given to you."

"You have found a weakling to protect, and an invalid to nurse," he answered. "To have your compassion, Cynthia, is all I crave."

* * * * * * *

So they lived through the happiest and swiftest years of his life, working side by side, sharing this strange secret between them. And after that night Cynthia talked to him often of Coniston, until he came to know the mountain that lay along the western sky, and the sweet hillsides by Coniston Water under the blue haze of autumn, aye, and clothed in the colors of spring, the bright blossoms of thorn and apple against the tender green of the woods and fields. So he grew to love the simple people there, but little did he foresee that he was to end his life among them!

But so it came to pass. She was taken from him, who had been the one joy and inspiration of his weary days, and he was driven, wandering, into unfrequented streets that he might not recall the places where she had once

trod, and through the wakeful nights her voice haunted him, — its laughter, its sweet notes of seriousness; little ways and manners of her look came to twist his heart, and he prayed God to take him, too, until it seemed that Cynthia frowned upon him for his weakness. One mild Sunday afternoon, he took little Cynthia by the hand and led her, toddling, out into the sunny Common, where he used to walk with her mother, and the infant prattle seemed to bring at last a strange peace to his storm-tossed soul.

For many years these Sunday walks in the Common were Wetherell's greatest pleasure and solace, and it seemed as though little Cynthia had come into the world with an instinct, as it were, of her mission that lent to her infant words a sweet gravity and weight. Many people used to stop and speak to the child, among them a great physician whom they grew to know. He was there every Sunday, and at length it came to be a habit with him to sit down on the bench and take Cynthia on his knee, and his stern face would soften as he talked to her.

One Sunday when Cynthia was eight years old he missed them, and the next, and at dusk he strode into their little lodging behind the hill and up to the bedside. He glanced at Wetherell, patting Cynthia on the head the while, and bade her cheerily to go out of the room. But she held tight hold of her father's hand and looked up at the doctor bravely.

"I am taking care of my father," she said.

"So you shall, little woman," he answered. "I would that we had such nurses as you at the hospital. Why didn't you send for me at once?"

"I wanted to," said Cynthia.

"Bless her good sense," said the doctor; "she has more than you, Wetherell. Why didn't you take her advice? If your father does not do as I tell him, he will be a very sick man indeed. He must go into the country and stay there."

"But I must live, Doctor," said William Wetherell.

The doctor looked at Cynthia.

"Led her, toddling, out into the sunny Common."

"You will not live if you stay here," he replied.

"Then he will go," said Cynthia, so quietly that he gave her another look, strange and tender and comprehending. He sat and talked of many things: of the great war that was agonizing the nation; of the strong man who, harassed and suffering himself, was striving to guide it, likening Lincoln unto a physician. So the doctor was wont to take the minds of patients from themselves. And before he left he gave poor Wetherell a fortnight to decide.

As he lay on his back in that room among the chimney tops trying vainly to solve the problem of how he was to earn his salt in the country, a visitor was climbing the last steep flight of stairs. That visitor was none other than Sergeant Ephraim Prescott, son of Isaiah of the pitch-pipe, and own cousin of Cynthia Ware's. Sergeant Ephraim was just home from the war and still clad in blue, and he walked with a slight limp by reason of a bullet he had got in the Wilderness, and he had such an honest, genial face that little Cynthia was on his knee in a moment.

"How be you, Will? Kind of poorly, I callate. So Cynthy's b'en took," he said sadly. "Always thought a sight of Cynthy. Little Cynthy favors her some. Yes, thought I'd drop in and see how you be on my way home."

Sergeant Ephraim had much to say about the great war, and about Coniston. True to the instincts of the blood of the Stark hero, he had left the plough and the furrow at the first call, forty years of age though he was. But it had been otherwise with many in Coniston and Brampton and Harwich. Some of these, when the drafting came, had fled in bands to the mountain and defied capture. Mr. Dudley Worthington, now a mill owner, had found a substitute; Heth Sutton of Clovelly had been drafted and had driven over the mountain to implore Jethro Bass abjectly to get him out of it. In short, many funny things had happened — funny things to Sergeant Ephraim, but not at all to William Wetherell, who sympathized with Heth in his panic.

"So Jethro Bass has become a great man," said Wetherell.

"Great!" Ephraim ejaculated. "Guess he's the biggest man in the state to-day. Queer how he got his power — began twenty-four years ago when I wahn't but twenty. I call that town meetin' to mind as if 'twas yesterday — never was such an upset. Jethro's be'n first Selectman ever sence, though he turned Republican in '60. Old folks don't fancy Jethro's kind of politics much, but times change. Jethro saved my life, I guess."

"Saved your life!" exclaimed Wetherell.

"Got me a furlough," said Ephraim. "Guess I would have died in the hospital if he hadn't got it so all-fired quick, and he druv down to Brampton to fetch me back. You'd have thought I was General Grant the way folks treated me."

"You went back to the war after your leg healed?" Wetherell asked, in wondering admiration of the man's courage.

"Well," said Ephraim, simply, "the other boys was gettin' full of bullets and dysentery, and it didn't seem just right. The leg troubles me some on wet days, but not to amount to much. You hain't thinkin' of dyin' yourself, be ye, William?"

William was thinking very seriously of it, but it was Cynthia who spoke, and startled them both.

"The doctor says he will die if he doesn't go to the country."

"Somethin' like consumption, William?" asked Ephraim.

"So the doctor said."

"So I callated," said Ephraim. "Come back to Coniston with me; there hain't a healthier place in New England."

"How could I support myself in Coniston?" Wetherell asked.

Ephraim ruminated. Suddenly he stuck his hand into the bosom of his blue coat, and his face lighted and even flushed as he drew out a crumpled letter.

"It don't take much gumption to run a store, does it, William? Guess you could run a store, couldn't you?"

"I would try anything," said Wetherell.

"Well," said Ephraim, "there's the store at Coniston. With folks goin' West, and all that, nobody seems to want it much." He looked at the letter. "Lem Hallowell says there hain't nobody to take it."

"Jonah Winch's!" exclaimed Wetherell.

"Jonah made it go, but that was before all this hullabaloo about Temperance Cadets and what not. Jonah sold good rum, but now you can't get nothin' in Coniston but hard cider and potato whiskey. Still, it's the place for somebody without much get-up," and he eyed his cousin by marriage. "Better come and try it, William."

So much for dreams! Instead of a successor to Irving and Emerson, William Wetherell became a successor to Jonah Winch.

That journey to Coniston was full of wonder to Cynthia, and of wonder and sadness to Wetherell, for it was the way his other Cynthia had come to Boston. From the state capital the railroad followed the same deep valley as the old coach road, but ended at Truro, and then they took stage over Truro Pass for Brampton, where honest Ephraim awaited them and their slender luggage with a team. Brampton, with its wide-shadowed green, and terrace-steepled church; home once of the Social Library and Lucretia Penniman, now famous; home now of Isaac Dudley Worthington, whose great mills the stage driver had pointed out to them on Coniston Water as they entered the town.

Then came a drive through the cool evening to Coniston, Ephraim showing them landmarks. There was Deacon Lysander's house, where little Rias Richardson lived now; and on that slope and hidden in its forest nook, among the birches and briers, the little schoolhouse where Cynthia had learned to spell; here, where the road made an aisle in the woods, she had met Jethro. The choir of the birds was singing an evening anthem now as then, to the lower notes of Coniston Water, and the moist, hothouse fragrance of the ferns rose from the deep places.

At last they came suddenly upon the little hamlet of

Coniston itself. There was the flagpole and the triangular green, scene of many a muster; Jonah Winch's store, with its horse block and checker-paned windows, just as Jonah had left it; Nathan Bass's tannery shed, now weather-stained and neglected, for Jethro lived on Thousand Acre Hill now; the Prescott house, home of the Stark hero, where Ephraim lived, "innocent of paint" (as one of Coniston's sons has put it), "innocent of paint as a Coniston maiden's face"; the white meeting-house, where Priest Ware had preached — and the parsonage. Cynthia and Wetherell loitered in front of it, while the blue shadow of the mountain deepened into night, until Mr. Satterlee, the minister, found them there, and they went in and stood reverently in the little chamber on the right of the door, which had been Cynthia's.

Long Wetherell lay awake that night, in his room at the gable-end over the store, listening to the rustling of the great oak beside the windows, to the whippoorwills calling across Coniston Water. But at last a peace descended upon him, and he slept: yes, and awoke with the same sense of peace at little Cynthia's touch, to go out into the cool morning, when the mountain side was in myriad sheens of green under the rising sun. Behind the store was an old-fashioned garden, set about by a neat stone wall, hidden here and there by the masses of lilac and currant bushes, and at the south of it was a great rose-covered boulder of granite. And beyond, through the foliage of the willows and the low apple trees which Jonah Winch had set out, Coniston Water gleamed and tumbled. Under an arching elm near the house was the well, stone-rimmed, with its long pole and crotch, and bucket all green with the damp moss which clung to it.

Ephraim Prescott had been right when he had declared that it did not take much gumption to keep store in Coniston. William Wetherell merely assumed certain obligations at the Brampton bank, and Lem Hallowell, Jock's son, who now drove the Brampton stage, brought the goods to the door. Little Rias Richardson was willing to come in and help move the barrels, and on such occasions wore carpet slippers to save his shoes. William still had time for his books; in that Coniston air he began to feel stronger, and to wonder whether he might not be a Washington Irving yet. And yet he had one worry and one fear, and both of these concerned one man, — Jethro Bass. Him, by her own confession, Cynthia Ware had loved to her dying day, hating herself for it: and he, William Wetherell, had married this woman whom Jethro had loved so violently, and must always love — so Wetherell thought: that was the worry. How would Jethro treat him? that was the fear. William Wetherell was not the most courageous man in the world.

Jethro Bass had not been in Coniston since William's arrival. No need to ask where he was. Jake Wheeler, Jethro's lieutenant in Coniston, gave William a glowing account of that Throne Room in the Pelican Hotel at the capital, from whence Jethro ruled the state during the sessions of the General Court. This legislature sat to him as a sort of advisory committee of three hundred and fifty: an expensive advisory committee to the people, relic of an obsolete form of government. Many stories of the now all-powerful Jethro William heard from the little coterie which made their headquarters in his store — stories of how those methods of which we have read were gradually spread over other towns and other counties. Not that Jethro held mortgages in these towns and counties, but the local lieutenants did, and bowed to him as an overlord. There were funny stories, and grim stories of vengeance which William Wetherell heard and trembled at. Might not Jethro wish to take vengeance upon him?

One story he did not hear, because no one in Coniston knew it. No one knew that Cynthia Ware and Jethro Bass had ever loved each other.

At last, toward the end of June, it was noised about that the great man was coming home for a few days. One beautiful afternoon William Wetherell stood on the platform of the store, looking off at Coniston, talking to Moses

Hatch — young Moses, who is father of six children now and has forgotten Cynthia Ware. Old Moses sleeps on the hillside, let us hope in the peace of the orthodox and the righteous. A cloud of dust arose above the road to the southward, and out of it came a country wagon drawn by a fat horse, and in the wagon the strangest couple Wetherell had ever seen. The little woman who sat retiringly at one end of the seat was all in brilliant colors from bonnet to flounce, like a paroquet, red and green predominating. The man, big in build, large-headed, wore an old-fashioned blue swallow-tailed coat with brass buttons, a stock, and coonskin hat, though it was summer, and the thumping of William Wetherell's heart told him that this was Jethro Bass. He nodded briefly at Moses Hatch, who greeted him with genial obsequiousness.

"Legislatur' through?" shouted Moses.

The great man shook his head and drove on.

"Has Jethro Bass ever been a member of the Legislature?" asked the storekeeper, for the sake of something to say.

"Never would take any office but Chairman of the Selectmen," answered Moses, who apparently bore no ill will for his father's sake. "Jethro kind of fathers the Legislatur', I guess, though I don't take much stock in politics. Goes down sessions to see that they don't get too gumptious and kick off the swaddlin' clothes."

"And — was that his wife?" Wetherell asked, hesitatingly.

"Aunt Listy, they call her. Nobody ever knew how he come to marry her. Jethro went up to Wisdom once, in the centre of the state, and come back with her. Funny place to bring a wife from — Wisdom! Funnier place to bring Listy from. He loads her down with them ribbons and gewgaws — all the shades of the rainbow! Says he wants her to be the best-dressed woman in the state. Callate she is," added Moses, with conviction. "Listy's a fine woman, but all she knows is enough to say, 'Yes, Jethro,' and 'No, Jethro.' Guess that's all Jethro wants in a wife; but he certainly is good to her."

"And why has he come back before the Legislature's over?" said Wetherell.

"Cuttin' of his farms. Always comes back hayin' time. That's the way Jethro spends the money he makes in politics, and he hain't no more of a farmer than — " Moses looked at Wetherell.

"Than I'm a storekeeper," said the latter, smiling.

"Than I'm a lawyer," said Moses, politely.

They were interrupted at this moment by the appearance of Jake Wheeler and Sam Price, who came gaping out of the darkness of the store.

"Was that Jethro, Mose?" demanded Jake. "Guess we'll go along up and see if there's any orders."

"I suppose the humblest of God's critturs has their uses," Moses remarked contemplatively, as he watched the retreating figures of Sam and Jake. "Leastwise that's Jethro's philosophy. When you come to know him, you'll notice how much those fellers walk like him. Never seed a man who had so many imitators. Some of 'em's took to talkin' like him, even to stutterin'. Bijah Bixby, over to Clovelly, comes pretty nigh it, too."

Moses loaded his sugar and beans into his wagon, and drove off.

An air of suppressed excitement seemed to pervade those who came that afternoon to the store to trade and talk — mostly to talk. After such purchases as they could remember were made, they lingered on the barrels and on the stoop, in the hope of seeing Jethro, whose habit it was, apparently, to come down and dispense such news as he thought fit for circulation. That Wetherell shared this excitement, too, he could not deny, but for a different cause. At last, when the shadows of the big trees had crept across the green, he came, the customers flocking to the porch to greet him, Wetherell standing curiously behind them in the door. Heedless of the dust, he strode down the road with the awkward gait that was all his own, kicking up his heels behind. And behind him, heels kicking up likewise, followed Jake and Sam, Jethro apparently oblivious of their presence. A modest silence was

maintained from the stoop, broken at length by Lem Hallowell, who (men said) was an exact reproduction of Jock, the meeting-house builder. Lem alone was not abashed in the presence of greatness.

"How be you, Jethro?" he said heartily. "Air the Legislatur' behavin' themselves?"

"B-bout as common," said Jethro.

Surely nothing very profound in this remark, but received as though it were Solomon's.

Be prepared for a change in Jethro, after the galloping years. He is now fifty-seven, but he might be any age. He is still smooth-shaven, his skin is clear, and his eye is bright, for he lives largely on bread and milk, and eschews stimulants. But the lines in his face have deepened and his big features seem to have grown bigger.

"Who be you thinkin' of for next governor, Jethro?" queries Rias Richardson, timidly.

"They say Alvy Hopkins of Gosport is willin' to pay for it," said Chester Perkins, sarcastically. Chester, we fear, is a born agitator, fated to remain always in opposition. He is still a Democrat, and Jethro, as is well known, has extended the mortgage so as to include Chester's farm.

"Wouldn't give a Red Brook Seedling for Alvy," ejaculated the nasal Mr. Price.

"D-don't like Red Brook Seedlings, Sam? D-don't like 'em?" said Jethro. He had parted his blue coat tails and seated himself on the stoop, his long legs hanging over it.

"Never seed a man who had a good word to say for 'em," said Mr. Price, with less conviction.

"Done well on mine," said Jethro, "d-done well. I was satisfied with my Red Brook Seedlings."

Mr. Price's sallow face looked as if he would have contradicted another man.

"Haow was that, Jethro?" piped up Jake Wheeler, voicing the general desire.

Jethro looked off into the blue space beyond the mountain line.

"G-got mine when they first come round — seed cost me considerable. Raised more than a hundred bushels — L-Listy put some of 'em on the table — t-then gave some to my old hoss Tom. Tom said: 'Hain't I always been a good beast, Jethro? Hain't I carried you faithful, summer and winter, for a good many years? And now you give me Red Brook Seedlings?'"

Here everybody laughed, and stopped abruptly, for Jethro still looked contemplative.

"Give some of 'em to the hogs. W-wouldn't touch 'em. H-had over a hundred bushels on hand — n-new variety. W-what's that feller's name down to Ayer, Massachusetts, deals in all kinds of seeds? Ellett — that's it. Wrote to Ellett, said I had a hundred bushels of Red Brooks to sell, as fine a lookin' potato as I had in my cellar. Made up my mind to take what he offered, if it was only five cents. He wrote back a dollar a bushel. I-I was always satisfied with my Red Brook Seedlings, Sam. But I never raised any more — n-never raised any more."

Uproarious laughter greeted the end of this story, and continued in fits as some humorous point recurred to one or the other of the listeners. William Wetherell perceived that the conversation, for the moment at least, was safely away from politics, and in that dubious state where it was difficult to reopen. This was perhaps what Jethro wanted. Even Jake Wheeler was tongue-tied, and Jethro appeared to be lost in reflection.

At this instant a diversion occurred — a trifling diversion, so it seemed at the time. Around the corner of the store, her cheeks flushed and her dark hair flying, ran little Cynthia, her hands, browned already by the Coniston sun, filled with wild strawberries.

"See what I've found, Daddy!" she cried, "see what I've found!"

Jethro Bass started, and flung back his head like a man who has heard a voice from another world, and then he looked at the child with a kind of stupefaction. The cry died on Cynthia's lips, and she stopped, gazing up at him with wonder in her eyes.

"'M-may I call you Cynthy?'"

"F-found strawberries?" said Jethro, at last.

"Yes," she answered. She was very grave and serious now, as was her manner in dealing with people.

"S-show 'em to me," said Jethro.

Cynthia went to him, without embarrassment, and put her hand on his knee. Not once had he taken his eyes from her face. He put out his own hand with an awkward, shy movement, picked a strawberry from her fingers, and thrust it in his mouth.

"Mm," said Jethro, gravely. "Er — what's your name, little gal — what's your name?"

"Cynthia."

There was a long pause.

"Er-er — Cynthia?" he said at length, "Cynthia?"

"Cynthia."

"Er-er, Cynthia — not Cynthy?"

"Cynthia," she said again.

He bent over her and lowered his voice.

"M-may I call you Cynthy — Cynthy?" he asked.

"Y-yes," answered Cynthia, looking up to her father and then glancing shyly at Jethro.

His eyes were on the mountain, and he seemed to have forgotten her until she reached out to him, timidly, another strawberry. He seized her little hand instead and held it between his own — much to the astonishment of his friends.

"Whose little gal be you?" he asked.

"Dad's."

"She's Will Wetherell's daughter," said Lem Hallowell. "He's took on the store. Will," he added, turning to Wetherell, "let me make you acquainted with Jethro Bass."

Jethro rose slowly, and towered above Wetherell on the stoop. There was an inscrutable look in his black eyes, as of one who sees without being seen. Did he know who William Wetherell was? If so, he gave no sign, and took Wetherell's hand limply.

"Will's kinder hipped on book-l'arnin'," Lemuel continued kindly. "Come here to keep store for his

health. Guess you may have heerd, Jethro, that Will married Cynthy Ware. You call Cynthy to mind, don't ye?"

Jethro Bass dropped Wetherell's hand, but answered nothing.

CHAPTER VIII

IT IS SOMETHING TO HAVE DREAMED

A WEEK passed, and Jethro did not appear in the village, report having it that he was cutting his farms on Thousand Acre Hill. When Jethro was farming, — so it was said, — he would not stop to talk politics even with the President of the United States were that dignitary to lean over his pasture fence and beckon to him. On a sultry Friday morning, when William Wetherell was seated at Jonah Winch's desk in the cool recesses of the store slowly and painfully going over certain troublesome accounts which seemed hopeless, he was thrown into a panic by the sight of one staring at him from the far side of a counter. History sometimes reverses itself.

"What can I do for you — Mr. Bass?" asked the storekeeper, rather weakly.

"Just stepped in — stepped in," he answered. "W-where's Cynthy?"

"She was in the garden — shall I get her?"

"No," he said, parting his coat tails and seating himself on the counter. "Go on figurin', don't mind me."

The thing was manifestly impossible. Perhaps Wetherell indicated as much by his answer.

"Like storekeepin'?" Jethro asked presently, perceiving that he did not continue his work.

"A man must live, Mr. Bass," said Wetherell; "I had to leave the city for my health. I began life keeping store," he added, "but I little thought I should end it so."

"Given to book-l'arnin' then, wahn't you?" Jethro remarked. He did not smile, but stared at the square of