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

light that was the doorway, "Judson's jewellery store, wahn't it? Judson's?"

"Yes, Judson's," Wetherell answered, as soon as he recovered from his amazement. There was no telling from Jethro's manner whether he were enemy or friend; whether he bore the storekeeper a grudge for having attained to a happiness that had not been his.

"Hain't made a great deal out of life, hev you? N-not a great deal?" Jethro observed at last.

Wetherell flushed, although Jethro had merely stated a truth which had often occurred to the storekeeper himself.

"It isn't given to all of us to find Rome in brick and leave it in marble," he replied a little sadly.

Jethro Bass looked at him quickly.

"Er — what's that?" he demanded. "F-found Rome in brick, left it in marble. Fine thought." He ruminated a little. "Never writ anything — did you — never writ anything?"

"Nothing worth publishing," answered poor William Wetherell.

"J-just dreamed — dreamed and kept store. S-something to have dreamed — eh — something to have dreamed?"

Wetherell forgot his uneasiness in the unexpected turn the conversation had taken. It seemed very strange to him that he was at last face to face again with the man whom Cynthia Ware had never been able to drive from her heart. Would he mention her? Had he continued to love her, in spite of the woman he had married and adorned? Wetherell asked himself these questions before he spoke.

"It is more to have accomplished," he said.

"S-something to have dreamed," repeated Jethro, rising slowly from the counter. He went toward the doorway that led into the garden, and there he halted and stood listening.

"C-Cynthy!" he said, "C-Cynthy!"

Wetherell dropped his pen at the sound of the name on Jethro's lips. But it was little Cynthia he was calling —

little Cynthia in the garden. The child came at his voice, and stood looking up at him silently.

"H-how old be you, Cynthy?"

"Nine," answered Cynthia, promptly.

"L-like the country, Cynthy — like the country better than the city?"

"Oh, yes," said Cynthia.

"And country folks? L-like country folks better than city folks?"

"I didn't know many city folks," said Cynthia. "I liked the old doctor who sent Daddy up here ever so much, and I liked Mrs. Darwin."

"Mis' Darwin?"

"She kept the house we lived in. She used to give me cookies," said Cynthia, "and bread to feed the pigeons."

"Pigeons? F-folks keep pigeons in the city?"

"Oh, no," said Cynthia, laughing at such an idea; "the pigeons came on the roof under our window, and they used to fly right up on the window-sill and feed out of my hand. They kept me company while Daddy was away, working. On Sundays we used to go into the Common and feed them, before Daddy got sick. The Common was something like the country, only not half as nice."

"C-couldn't pick flowers in the Common and go barefoot — c-couldn't go barefoot, Cynthy?"

"Oh, no," said Cynthia, laughing again at his sober face.

"C-couldn't dig up the Common and plant flowers — could you?"

"Of course you couldn't."

"P-plant 'em out there?" asked Jethro.

"Oh, yes," cried Cynthia; "I'll show you." She hesitated a moment, and then thrust her hand into his. "Do you want to see?"

"Guess I do," said he, energetically, and she led him into the garden, pointing out with pride the rows of sweet peas and pansies, which she had made herself. Impelled by a strange curiosity, William Wetherell went to the

door and watched them. There was a look on the face of Jethro Bass that was new to it as he listened to the child talk of the wondrous things around them that summer's day, — the flowers and the bees and the brook (they must go down and stand on the brink of it), and the songs of the vireo and the hermit thrush.

"Hain't lonely here, Cynthy — hain't lonely here?" he said.

"Not in the country," said Cynthia. Suddenly she lifted her eyes to his with a questioning look. "Are you lonely, sometimes?"

He did not answer at once.

"Not with you, Cynthy — not with you."

By all of which it will be seen that the acquaintance was progressing. They sat down for a while on the old millstone that formed the step, and there discussed Cynthia's tastes. She was too old for dolls, Jethro supposed. Yes, Cynthia was too old for dolls. She did not say so, but the only doll she had ever owned had become insipid when the delight of such a reality as taking care of a helpless father had been thrust upon her. Books, suggested Jethro. Books she had known from her earliest infancy: they had been piled around that bedroom over the roof. Books and book lore and the command of the English tongue were William Wetherell's only legacies to his daughter, and many an evening that spring she had read him to sleep from classic volumes of prose and poetry I hesitate to name, for fear you will think her precocious. They went across the green to Cousin Ephraim Prescott's harness shop, where Jethro had tied his horse, and it was settled that Cynthia liked books.

On the morning following this extraordinary conversation, Jethro Bass and his wife departed for the state capital. Listy was bedecked in amazing greens and yellows, and Jethro drove, looking neither to the right nor left, his coat tails hanging down behind the seat, the reins lying slack across the plump quarters of his horse — the same fat Tom who, by the way, had so indignantly spurned the Red Brook Seedlings. And Jake Wheeler went along to

bring back the team from Brampton. To such base uses are political lieutenants sometimes put, although Jake would have told you it was an honor, and he came back to the store that evening fairly bristling with political secrets which he could not be induced to impart.

One evening a fortnight later, while the lieutenant was holding forth in commendably general terms on the politics of the state to a speechless if not wholly admiring audience, a bomb burst in their midst. William Wetherell did not know that it was a periodical bomb, like those flung at regular intervals from the Union mortars into Vicksburg. These bombs, at any rate, never failed to cause consternation and fright in Coniston, although they never did any harm. One thing noticeable, they were always fired in Jethro's absence. And the bombardier was always Chester Perkins, son of the most unbending and rigorous of tithing-men, but Chester resembled his father in no particular save that he, too, was a deacon and a pillar of the church. Deacon Ira had been tall and gaunt and sunken and uncommunicative. Chester was stout, and said to perspire even in winter, apoplectic, irascible, talkative, and still, as has been said, a Democrat. He drove up to the store this evening to the not inappropriate rumble of distant thunder, and he stood up in his wagon in front of the gathering and shook his fist in Jake Wheeler's face.

"This town's tired of puttin' up with a King," he cried. "Yes, King — I said it, and I don't care who hears me. It's time to stop this one-man rule. You kin go and tell him I said it, Jake Wheeler, if you've a mind to. I guess there's plenty who'll do that."

An uneasy silence followed — the silence which cries treason louder than any voice. Some shifted uneasily, and spat, and Jake Wheeler thrust his hands in his pockets and walked away, as much as to say that it was treason even to listen to such talk. Lem Hallowell seemed unperturbed.

"On the rampage agin, Chet?" he remarked.

"You'd ought to know better, Lem," cried the enraged

Chester; "hain't the hull road by the Four Corners ready to drop into the brook? What be you a-goin' to do about it?"

"I'll show you when I git to it," answered Lem, quietly. And show them he did.

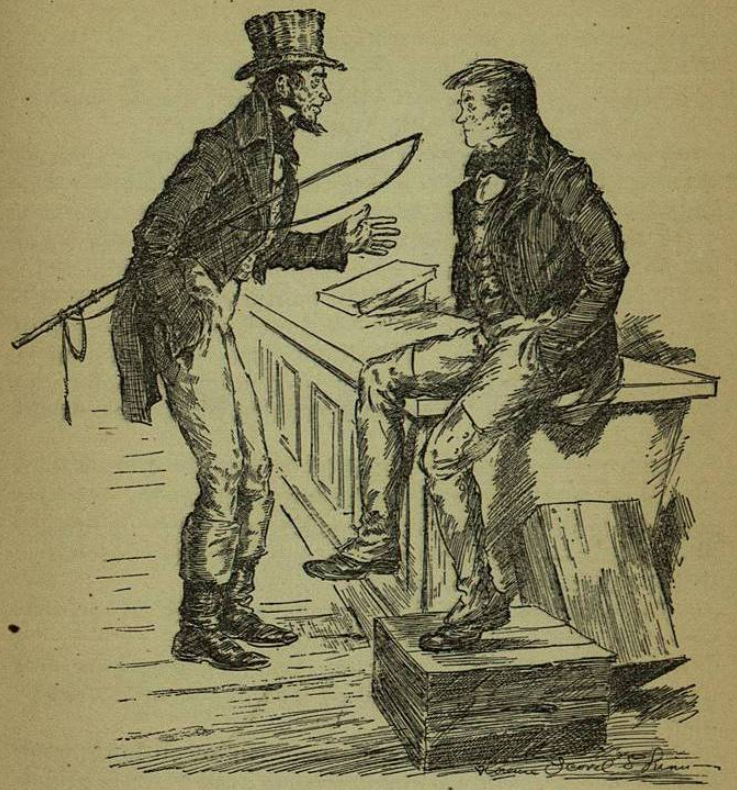
"Git to it!" shouted Chester, scornfully, "I'll git to it. I'll tell you right now I'm a candidate for the Chairman of the Selectmen, if town meetin' is eight months away. An', Sam Price, I'll expect the Democrats to git into line."

With this ultimatum Chester drove away as rapidly as he had come.

"I want to know!" said Sam Price, an exclamation peculiarly suited to his voice. But nevertheless Sam might be counted on in each of these little rebellions. He, too, had remained steadfast to Jacksonian principles, and he had never forgiven Jethro about a little matter of a state office which he (Sam) had failed to obtain.

Before he went to bed Jake Wheeler had written a letter which he sent off to the state capital by the stage the next morning. In it he indicted no less than twenty of his fellow-townsmen for treason; and he also thought it wise to send over to Clovelly for Bijah Bixby, a lieutenant in that section, to come and look over the ground and ascertain by his well-known methods how far the treason had eaten into the body politic. Such was Jake's ordinary procedure when the bombs were fired, for Mr. Wheeler was nothing if not cautious.

Three mornings later, a little after seven o'clock, when the storekeeper and his small daughter were preparing to go to Brampton upon a very troublesome errand, Chester Perkins appeared again. It is always easy to stir up dissatisfaction among the ne'er-do-wells (Jethro had once done it himself), and during the three days which had elapsed since Chester had flung down the gauntlet there had been more or less of downright treason heard in the store. William Wetherell, who had perplexities of his own, had done his best to keep out of the discussions that had raged on his cracker boxes and barrels, for his head



"He indicted no less than twenty of his fellow-townsmen."

was a jumble of figures which would not come right. And now as he stood there in the freshness of the early summer morning, waiting for Lem Hallowell's stage, poor Wetherell's heart was very heavy.

"Will Wetherell," said Chester, "you be a gentleman and a student, hain't you? Read history, hain't you?"

"I have read some," said William Wetherell.

"I callate that a man of parts," said Chester, "such as you be, will help us agin corruption and a dic'tator. I'm a-countin' on you, Will Wetherell. You've got the store, and you kin tell the boys the difference between right and wrong. They'll listen to you, because you're eddicated."

"I don't know anything about politics," answered Wetherell, with an appealing glance at the silent group, — group that was always there. Rias Richardson, who had donned the carpet slippers preparatory to tending store for the day, shuffled inside. Deacon Lysander, his father, would not have done so.

"You know somethin' about history and the Constitootion, don't ye?" demanded Chester, truculently. "Jethro Bass don't hold your mortgage, does he? Bank in Brampton holds it — hain't that so? You hain't afeard of Jethro like the rest on 'em, be you?"

"I don't know what right you have to talk to me that way, Mr. Perkins," said Wetherell.

"What right? Jethro holds my mortgage — the hull town knows it — and he kin close me out to-morrow if he's a mind to — "

"See here, Chester Perkins," Lem Hallowell interposed, as he drove up with the stage, "what kind of free principles be you preachin'? You'd ought to know better'n coerce."

"What be you a-goin' to do about that Four Corners road?" Chester cried to the stage driver.

"I give 'em till to-morrow night to fix it," said Lem. "Git in, Will. Cynthy's over to the harness shop with Eph. We'll stop as we go 'long."

"Give 'em till to-morrow night!" Chester shouted after them. "What you goin' to do then?"

But Lem did not answer this inquiry. He stopped at the harness shop, where Ephraim came limping out and lifted Cynthia to the seat beside her father, and they joggled off to Brampton. The dew still lay in myriad drops on the red herd's-grass, turning it to lavender in the morning sun, and the heavy scent of the wet ferns hung in the forest. Lem whistled, and joked with little Cynthia, and gave her the reins to drive, and at last they came in sight of Brampton Street, with its terrace-steepled church and line of wagons hitched to the common rail, for it was market day. Father and daughter walked up and down, hand in hand, under the great trees, and then they went to the bank.

It was a brick building on a corner opposite the common, imposing for Brampton, and very imposing to Wetherell. It seemed like a tomb as he entered its door, Cynthia clutching his fingers, and never but once in his life had he been so near to leaving all hope behind. He waited patiently by the barred windows until the clerk, who was counting bills, chose to look up at him.

"Want to draw money?" he demanded.

The words seemed charged with irony. William Wetherell told him, falteringly, his name and business, and he thought the man looked at him compassionately.

"You'll have to see Mr. Worthington," he said; "he hasn't gone to the mills yet."

"Dudley Worthington?" exclaimed Wetherell.

The teller smiled.

"Yes. He's the president of this bank."

He opened a door in the partition, and leaving Cynthia dangling her feet from a chair, Wetherell was ushered, not without trepidation, into the great man's office, and found himself at last in the presence of Mr. Isaac D. Worthington, who used to wander up and down Coniston Water searching for a mill site.

He sat behind a table covered with green leather, on which papers were laid with elaborate neatness, and he wore a double-breasted skirted coat of black, with braided lapels, a dark purple blanket-cravat with a large red

cameo pin. And Mr. Worthington's features harmonized perfectly with this costume — those of a successful, ambitious man who followed custom and convention blindly; clean-shaven, save for reddish chops, blue eyes of extreme keenness, and thin-lipped mouth which had been tightening year by year as the output of the Worthington Mills increased.

"Well, sir," he said sharply, "what can I do for you?"

"I am William Wetherell, the storekeeper at Coniston."

"Not the Wetherell who married Cynthia Ware!"

No, Mr. Worthington did not say that. He did not know that Cynthia Ware was married, or alive or dead, and — let it be confessed at once — he did not care.

This is what he did say: —

"Wetherell — Wetherell. Oh, yes, you've come about that note — the mortgage on the store at Coniston." He stared at William Wetherell, drummed with his fingers on the table, and smiled slightly. "I am happy to say that the Brampton Bank does not own this note any longer. If we did, — merely as a matter of business, you understand" (he coughed), — "we should have had to foreclose."

"Don't own the note!" exclaimed Wetherell. "Who does own it?"

"We sold it a little while ago — since you asked for the extension — to Jethro Bass."

"Jethro Bass!" Wetherell's feet seemed to give way under him, and he sat down.

"Mr. Bass is a little quixotic — that is a charitable way to put it — quixotic. He does — strange things like this once in a while."

The storekeeper found no words to answer, but sat mutely staring at him. Mr. Worthington coughed again. "You appear to be an educated man. Haven't I heard some story of your giving up other pursuits in Boston to come up here for your health? Certainly I place you now. I confess to a little interest in literature myself — in libraries."

In spite of his stupefaction at the news he had just

received, Wetherell thought of Mr. Worthington's beaver hat, and of that gentleman's first interest in libraries, for Cynthia had told the story to her husband.

"It is perhaps an open secret," continued Mr. Worthington, "that in the near future I intend to establish a free library in Brampton. I feel it my duty to do all I can for the town where I have made my success, and there is nothing which induces more to the popular welfare than a good library." Whereupon he shot at Wetherell another of his keen looks. "I do not talk this way ordinarily to my customers, Mr. Wetherell," he began; "but you interest me, and I am going to tell you something in confidence. I am sure it will not be betrayed."

"Oh, no," said the bewildered storekeeper, who was in no condition to listen to confidences.

He went quietly to the door, opened it, looked out, and closed it softly. Then he looked out of the window.

"Have a care of this man Bass," he said, in a lower voice. "He began many years ago by debauching the liberties of that little town of Coniston, and since then he has gradually debauched the whole state, judges and all. If I have a case to try" (he spoke now with more intensity and bitterness), "concerning my mills, or my bank, before I get through I find that rascal mixed up in it somewhere, and unless I arrange matters with him, I — "

He paused abruptly, his eyes going out of the window, pointing with a long finger at a grizzled man crossing the street with a yellow and red horse blanket thrown over his shoulders.

"That man, Judge Baker, holding court in this town now, Bass owns body and soul."

"And the horse blanket?" Wetherell queried, irresistibly.

Dudley Worthington did not smile.

"Take my advice, Mr. Wetherell, and pay off that note somehow." An odor of the stable pervaded the room, and a great unkempt grizzled head and shoulders, horse blanket and all, were stuck into it.

"Mornin', Dudley," said the head, "busy?"

"Come right in, Judge," answered Mr. Worthington. "Never too busy to see you." The head disappeared.

"Take my advice, Mr. Wetherell."

And then the storekeeper went into the bank.

For some moments he stood dazed by what he had heard, the query ringing in his head: Why had Jethro Bass bought that note? Did he think that the storekeeper at Coniston would be of use to him, politically? The words Chester Perkins had spoken that morning came back to Wetherell as he stood in the door. And how was he to meet Jethro Bass again with no money to pay even the interest on the note? Then suddenly he missed Cynthia, hurried out, and spied her under the trees on the common so deep in conversation with a boy that she did not perceive him until he spoke to her. The boy looked up, smiling frankly at something Cynthia had said to him. He had honest, humorous eyes, and a browned, freckled face, and was, perhaps, two years older than Cynthia.

"What's the matter?" said Wetherell.

Cynthia's face was flushed, and she was plainly vexed about something.

"I gave her a whistle," said the boy, with a little laugh of vexation, "and now she says she won't take it because I owned up I made it for another girl."

Cynthia held it out to him, not deigning to appeal her case.

"You must take it back," she said.

"But I want you to have it," said the boy.

"It wouldn't be right for me to take it when you made it for somebody else."

After all, people with consciences are born, not made. But this was a finer distinction than the boy had ever met with in his experience.

"I didn't know you when I made the whistle," he objected, puzzled and downcast.

"That doesn't make any difference."

"I like you better than the other girl."

Florence Scovel Shinn

"'Mornin', Dudley.'"

"You have no right to," retorted the casuist; "you've known her longer."

"That doesn't make any difference," said the boy; "there are lots of people I don't like I have always known. This girl doesn't live in Brampton, anyway."

"Where does she live?" demanded Cynthia, — which was a step backward.

"At the state capital. Her name's Janet Duncan. There, do you believe me now?"

William Wetherell had heard of Janet Duncan's father, Alexander Duncan, who had the reputation of being the richest man in the state. And he began to wonder who the boy could be.

"I believe you," said Cynthia; "but as long as you made it for her, it's hers. Will you take it?"

"No," said he, determinedly.

"Very well," answered Cynthia. She laid down the whistle beside him on the rail, and went off a little distance and seated herself on a bench. The boy laughed.

"I like that girl," he remarked; "the rest of 'em take everything I give 'em, and ask for more. She's prettier'n any of 'em, too."

"What is your name?" Wetherell asked him, curiously, forgetting his own troubles.

"Bob Worthington."

"Are you the son of Dudley Worthington?"

"Everybody asks me that," he said; "I'm tired of it. When I grow up, they'll have to stop it."

"But you should be proud of your father."

"I am proud of him, everybody's proud of him, Brampton's proud of him — he's proud of himself. That's enough, ain't it?" He eyed Wetherell somewhat defiantly, then his glance wandered to Cynthia, and he walked over to her. He threw himself down on the grass in front of her, and lay looking up at her solemnly. For a while she continued to stare inflexibly at the line of market wagons, and then she burst into a laugh.

"Thought you wouldn't hold out forever," he remarked.

"It's because you're so foolish," said Cynthia, "that's

Florence Scovel Shinn

"Deep in conversation with a boy."

why I laughed." Then she grew sober again and held out her hand to him. "Good-by."

"Where are you going?"

"I must go back to my father. I—I think he doesn't feel very well."

"Next time I'll make a whistle for you," he called after her.

"And give it to somebody else," said Cynthia.

She had hold of her father's hand by that, but he caught up with her, very red in the face.

"You know that isn't true," he cried angrily, and taking his way across Brampton Street, turned, and stood staring after them until they were out of sight.

"Do you like him, Daddy?" asked Cynthia.

William Wetherell did not answer. He had other things to think about.

"Daddy?"

"Yes."

"Does your trouble feel any better?"

"Some, Cynthia. But you mustn't think about it."

"Daddy, why don't you ask Uncle Jethro to help you?"

At the name Wetherell started as if he had had a shock.

"What put him into your head, Cynthia?" he asked sharply. "Why do you call him 'Uncle Jethro'?"

"Because he asked me to. Because he likes me, and I like him."

The whole thing was a riddle he could not solve—one that was best left alone. They had agreed to walk back the ten miles to Coniston, to save the money that dinner at the hotel would cost. And so they started, Cynthia flitting hither and thither along the roadside, picking the stately purple iris flowers in the marshy places, while Wetherell pondered.

CHAPTER IX

SHAKE HANDS WITH MR. BIJAH BIXBY

When William Wetherell and Cynthia had reached the last turn in the road in Northcutt's woods, quarter of a mile from Coniston, they met the nasal Mr. Samuel Price driving silently in the other direction. The word "silently" is used deliberately, because to Mr. Price appertained a certain ghostlike quality of flitting, and to Mr. Price's horse and wagon likewise. He drew up for a brief moment when he saw Wetherell.

"Wouldn't hurry back if I was you, Will."

"Why not?"

Mr. Price leaned out of the wagon.

"Bije has come over from Clovelly to spy araound a little mite."

It was evident from Mr. Price's manner that he regarded the storekeeper as a member of the reform party.

"What did he say, Daddy?" asked Cynthia, as Wetherell stood staring after the flitting buggy in bewilderment.

"I haven't the faintest idea, Cynthia," answered her father, and they walked on.

"Don't you know who 'Bije' is?"

"No," said her father, "and I don't care."

It was almost criminal ignorance for a man who lived in that part of the country not to know Bijah Bixby of Clovelly, who was paying a little social visit to Coniston that day on his way home from the state capital,—tending, as it were, Jethro's flock. Still, Wetherell must be excused because he was an impractical literary man with troubles of his own. But how shall we chronicle Bijah's rank and precedence in the Jethro army, in which there