

## CHAPTER X

### HOW THE REBELLION WAS QUENCHED

It so happened that there was a certain spinster whom Sam Price had been trying to make up his mind to marry for ten years or more, and it was that gentleman's habit to spend at least one day in the month in Harwich for the purpose of paying his respects. In spite of the fact that his horse had been "stun lame" the night before, Mr. Price was able to start for Harwich, via Brampton, very early the next morning. He was driving along through Northcutt's woods with one leg hanging over the wheel, humming through his nose what we may suppose to have been a love-ditty, and letting his imagination run riot about the lady in question, when he nearly fell out of his wagon. The cause of this was the sight of fat Tom coming around a corner, with Jethro Bass behind him. Lem Hallowell and the storekeeper had kept their secret so well that Sam, if he was thinking about Jethro at all, believed him at that moment to be seated in the Throne Room at the Pelican House, in the capital.

Mr. Price, however, was one of an adaptable nature, and by the time he had pulled up beside Jethro he had recovered sufficiently to make a few remarks on farming subjects, and finally to express a polite surprise at Jethro's return.

"But you come a little mite late, hain't you, Jethro?" he asked finally, with all of the indifference he could assume.

"H-how's that, Sam — how's that?"

"It's too bad, — I swan it is, — but Lem Hallowell rode over to Harwich last night and indicted the town for

### HOW THE REBELLION WAS QUENCHED 119

that piece of road by the Four Corners. Took Will Wetherell along with him."

"D-don't say so!" said Jethro.

"I callate he done it," responded Sam, pulling a long face. "The court'll hev to send an agent to do the job, and I guess you'll hev to foot the bill, Jethro."

"C-court'll hev to app'int an agent?"

"I callate."

"Er — you a candidate — Sam — you a candidate?"

"Don't know but what I be," answered the usually wary Mr. Price.

"G-goin' to Harwich — hain't you?"

"Mebbe I be, and mebbe I hain't," said Sam, not able to repress a self-conscious snicker.

"M-might as well be you as anybody, Sam," said Jethro, as he drove on.

It was not strange that the idea, thus planted, should grow in Mr. Price's favor as he proceeded: He had been surprised at Jethro's complaisance, and he wondered whether, after all, he had done well to help Chester stir people up at this time. When he reached Harwich, instead of presenting himself promptly at the spinster's house, he went first to the office of Judge Parkinson, as became a prudent man of affairs.

Perhaps there is no need to go into the details of Mr. Price's discomfiture on the occasion of this interview. The judge was by nature of a sour disposition, but he haw-hawed so loudly as he explained to Mr. Price the identity of the road agent that the judge of probate in the next office thought his colleague had gone mad. Afterward Mr. Price stood for some time in the entry, where no one could see him, scratching his head and repeating his favorite exclamation, "I want to know!" It has been ascertained that he omitted to pay his respects to the spinster on that day.

Cyamon Johnson carried the story back to Coniston, where it had the effect of eliminating Mr. Price from local politics for some time to come.

That same morning Chester Perkins was seen by many



driving wildly about from farm to farm, supposedly haranguing his supporters to make a final stand against the tyrant, but by noon it was observed by those naturalists who were watching him that his activity had ceased. Chester arrived at dinner time at Joe Northcutt's, whose land bordered on the piece of road which had caused so much trouble, and Joe and half a dozen others had been at work there all morning under the road agent whom Judge Parkinson had appointed. Now Mrs. Northcutt was Chester's sister, a woman who in addition to other qualities possessed the only sense of humor in the family. She ushered the unsuspecting Chester into the kitchen, and there, seated beside Joe and sipping a saucer of very hot coffee, was Jethro Bass himself. Chester halted in the doorway, his face brick-red, words utterly failing him, while Joe sat horror-stricken, holding aloft on his fork a smoking potato. Jethro continued to sip his coffee.

"B-busy times, Chester," he said, "b-busy times."

Chester choked. Where were the burning words of denunciation which came so easily to his tongue on other occasions? It is difficult to denounce a man who insists upon drinking coffee.

"Set right down, Chester," said Mrs. Northcutt, behind him.

Chester sat down, and to this day he cannot account for that action. Once seated, habit asserted itself, and he attacked the boiled dinner with a ferocity which should have been exercised against Jethro.

"I suppose the stores down to the capital is finer than ever, Mr. Bass," remarked Mrs. Northcutt.

"So-so, Mis' Northcutt, so-so."

"I was there ten years ago," remarked Mrs. Northcutt, with a sigh of reminiscence, "and I never see such fine silks and bonnets in my life. Now I've often wanted to ask you, did you buy that bonnet with the trembly jet things for Mis' Bass?"

"That bonnet come out full better'n I expected," answered Jethro, modestly.

"You have got taste in wimmin's fixin's, Mr. Bass.

Strange! Now I wouldn't let Joe choose my things for worlds."

So the dinner progressed, Joe with his eyes on his plate, Chester silent, but bursting with anger and resentment, until at last Jethro pushed back his chair, and said good day to Mrs. Northcutt and walked out. Chester got up instantly and went after him, and Joe, full of forebodings, followed his brother-in-law! Jethro was standing calmly on the grass plot, whittling a toothpick. Chester stared at him a moment, and then strode off toward the barn, unhitched his horse and jumped in his wagon. Something prompted him to take another look at Jethro, who was still whittling.

"C-carry me down to the road, Chester — c-carry me down to the road?" said Jethro.

Joe Northcutt's knees gave way under him, and he sat down on a sugar kettle. Chester tightened up his reins so suddenly that his horse reared, while Jethro calmly climbed into the seat beside him and they drove off. It was some time before Joe had recovered sufficiently to arise and repair to the scene of operations on the road.

It was Joe who brought the astounding news to the store that evening. Chester was Jethro's own candidate for senior Selectman! Jethro himself had said so, that he would be happy to abdicate in Chester's favor, and make it unanimous — Chester having been a candidate so many times, and disappointed.

"Whar's Chester?" said Lem Hollowell.

Joe pulled a long face.

"Just come from his house, and he hain't done a lick of work sence noon time. Jest sets in a corner — won't talk, won't eat — jest sets thar."

Lem sat down on the counter and laughed until he was forced to brush the tears from his cheeks at the idea of Chester Perkins being Jethro's candidate. Where was reform now? If Chester were elected, it would be in the eyes of the world as Jethro's man. No wonder he sat in a corner and refused to eat.



"Guess you'll ketch it next, Will, for goin' over to Harwich with Lem," Joe remarked playfully to the storekeeper, as he departed.

These various occurrences certainly did not tend to allay the uneasiness of Mr. Wetherell. The next afternoon, at a time when a slack trade was slackest, he had taken his chair out under the apple tree and was sitting with that same volume of Byron in his lap—but he was not reading. The humorous aspects of the doings of Mr. Bass did not particularly appeal to him now; and he was, in truth, beginning to hate this man whom the fates had so persistently intruded into his life. William Wetherell was not, it may have been gathered, what may be called vindictive. He was a sensitive, conscientious person whose life should have been in the vale; and yet at that moment he had a fierce desire to confront Jethro Bass and— and destroy him. Yes, he felt equal to that.

Shocks are not very beneficial to sensitive natures. William Wetherell looked up, and there was Jethro Bass on the doorstep.

"G-great resource—readin'—great resource," he remarked.

In this manner Jethro snuffed out utterly that passion to destroy, and another sensation took its place—a sensation which made it very difficult for William Wetherell to speak, but he managed to reply that reading had been a great resource to him. Jethro had a parcel in his hand, and he laid it down on the step beside him; and he seemed, for once in his life, to be in a mood for conversation.

"It's hard for me to read a book," he observed. "I own to it—it's a little mite hard. H-hev to kind of spell it out in places. Hain't had much time for readin'. But it's kind of pleasant to l'arn what other folks has done in the world by pickin' up a book. T-takes your mind off things—don't it?"

Wetherell felt like saying that his reading had not been able to do that lately. Then he made the plunge, and shuddered as he made it.

"Mr. Bass—I—I have been waiting to speak to you about that mortgage."

"Er—yes," he answered, without moving his head, "er—about the mortgage."

"Mr. Worthington told me that you had bought it."

"Yes, I did—yes, I did."

"I'm afraid you will have to foreclose," said Wetherell; "I cannot reasonably ask you to defer the payments any longer."

"If I foreclose it, what will you do?" he demanded abruptly.

There was but one answer—Wetherell would have to go back to the city and face the consequences. He had not the strength to earn his bread on a farm.

"If I'd a b'en in any hurry for the money—g-guess I'd a notified you," said Jethro.

"I think you had better foreclose, Mr. Bass," Wetherell answered; "I can't hold out any hopes to you that it will ever be possible for me to pay it off. It's only fair to tell you that."

"Well," he said, with what seemed a suspicion of a smile, "I don't know but what that's about as honest an answer as I ever got."

"Why did you do it?" Wetherell cried, suddenly goaded by another fear; "why did you buy that mortgage?"

But this did not shake his composure.

"H-have a little habit of collectin' 'em," he answered, "same as you do books. G-guess some of 'em hain't as valuable."

William Wetherell was beginning to think that Jethro knew something also of such refinements of cruelty as were practised by Caligula. He drew forth his cowhide wallet and produced from it a folded piece of newspaper which must, Wetherell felt sure, contain the mortgage in question.

"There's one power I always wished I had," he observed, "the power to make folks see some things as I see 'em. I was acrost the Water to-night, on my hill farm, when the



sun set, and the sky up thar above the mountain was all golden bars, and the river all a-flamin' purple, just as if it had been dyed by some of them Greek gods you're readin' about. Now if I could put them things on paper, I wouldn't care a haycock to be President. No, sir."

The storekeeper's amazement as he listened to this speech may be imagined. Was this Jethro Bass? If so, here was a side of him the existence of which no one suspected. Wetherell forgot the matter in hand.

"Why don't you put that on paper?" he exclaimed.

Jethro smiled, and made a deprecating motion with his thumb.

"Sometimes when I hain't busy, I drop into the state library at the capital and enjoy myself. It's like goin' to another world without any folks to bother you. Er — er — there's books I'd like to talk to you about — sometime."

"But I thought you told me you didn't read much, Mr. Bass?"

He made no direct reply, but unfolded the newspaper in his hand, and then Wetherell saw that it was only a clipping.

"H-happened to run across this in a newspaper — if this hain't this county, I wahn't born and raised here. If it hain't Coniston Mountain about seven o'clock of a June evening, I never saw Coniston Mountain. Er — listen to this."

Whereupon he read, with a feeling which Wetherell had not supposed he possessed, an extract: and as the storekeeper listened his blood began to run wildly. At length Jethro put down the paper without glancing at his companion.

"There's somethin' about that that fetches you spinnin' through the air," he said slowly. "Sh-showed it to Jim Willard, editor of the *Newcastle Guardian*. Er — what do you think he said?"

"I don't know," said Wetherell, in a low voice.

"Willard said, 'Bass, w-wish you'd find me that man. I'll give him five dollars every week for a letter like that — er — five dollars a week.'"

He paused, folded up the paper again and put it in his pocket, took out a card and handed it to Wetherell.

James G. Willard, Editor.

*Newcastle Guardian.*

"That's his address," said Jethro. "Er — guess you'll know what to do with it. Er — five dollars a week — five dollars a week."

"How did you know I wrote this article?" said Wetherell, as the card trembled between his fingers.

"K-knewed the place was Coniston seen from the east, knowed there wahn't any one in Brampton or Harwich could have done it — g-guessed the rest — guessed the rest."

Wetherell could only stare at him like a man who, with the halter about his neck, has been suddenly reprieved. But Jethro Bass did not appear to be waiting for thanks. He cleared his throat, and had Wetherell not been in such a condition himself, he would actually have suspected him of embarrassment.

"Er — Wetherell?"

"Yes?"

"W-won't say nothin' about the mortgage — p-pay it when you can."

This roused the storekeeper to a burst of protest, but he stemmed it.

"Hain't got the money, have you?"

"No — but —"

"If I needed money, d'ye suppose I'd bought the mortgage?"

"No," answered the still bewildered Wetherell, "of course not." There he stuck, that other suspicion of political coercion suddenly rising uppermost. Could this be what the man meant? Wetherell put his hand to his head, but he did not dare to ask the question. Then Jethro Bass fixed his eyes upon him.

"Hain't never mixed any in politics — hev you — n-never mixed any?"



Wetherell's heart sank.

"No," he answered.

"D-don't—take my advice—d-don't."

"What!" cried the storekeeper, so loudly that he frightened himself.

"D-don't," repeated Jethro, imperturbably.

There was a short silence, the storekeeper being unable to speak. Coniston Water, at the foot of the garden, sang the same song, but it seemed to Wetherell to have changed its note from sorrow to joy.

"H-hear things, don't you—hear things in the store?"

"Yes."

"Don't hear 'em. Keep out of politics, Will, s-stick to storekeepin' and— and literature."

Jethro got to his feet and turned his back on the storekeeper and picked up the parcel he had brought.

"C-Cynthy well?" he inquired.

"I—I'll call her," said Wetherell, huskily. "She—she was down by the brook when you came."

But Jethro Bass did not wait. He took his parcel and strode down to Coniston Water, and there he found Cynthia seated on a rock with her toes in a pool.

"How be you, Cynthy?" said he, looking down at her.

"I'm well, Uncle Jethro," said Cynthia.

"R-remembered what I told you to call me, hev you," said Jethro, plainly pleased. "Th-that's right. Cynthy?"

Cynthia looked up at him inquiringly.

"S-said you liked books—didn't you? S-said you liked books?"

"Yes, I do," she replied simply, "very much."

He undid the wrapping of the parcel, and there lay disclosed a book with a very gorgeous cover. He thrust it into the child's lap.

"It's 'Robinson Crusoe'!" she exclaimed, and gave a little shiver of delight that made ripples in the pool. Then she opened it—not without awe, for William Wetherell's books were not clothed in this magnificent

manner. "It's full of pictures," cried Cynthia. "See, there he is making a ship!"

"Y-you read it, Cynthy?" asked Jethro, a little anxiously.

No, Cynthia hadn't.

"L-like it, Cynthy—l-like it?" said he, not quite so anxiously.

Cynthia looked up at him with a puzzled expression.

"F-fetched it up from the capital for you, Cynthy—for you."

"For me!"

A strange thrill ran through Jethro Bass as he gazed upon the wonder and delight in the face of the child.

"F-fetched it for you, Cynthy."

For a moment Cynthia sat very still, and then she slowly closed the book and stared at the cover again, Jethro looking down at her the while. To tell the truth, she found it difficult to express the emotions which the event had summoned up.

"Thank you—Uncle Jethro," she said.

Jethro, however, understood. He had, indeed, never failed to understand her from the beginning. He parted his coat tails and sat down on the rock beside her, and very gently opened the book again, to the first chapter.

"G-goin' to read it, Cynthy?"

"Oh, yes," she said, and trembled again.

"Er—read it to me?"

So Cynthia read "Robinson Crusoe" to him while the summer afternoon wore away, and the shadows across the pool grew longer and longer.