CHAPTER XI

MR. WORTHINGTON BECOMES A REFORMER

THUS William Wetherell became established in Coniston, and was started at last — poor man — upon a life that was fairly tranquil. Lem Hallowell had once covered him with blushes by unfolding a newspaper in the store and reading an editorial beginning: "We publish today a new and attractive feature of the *Guardian*, a weekly contribution from a correspondent whose modesty is to be compared only with his genius as a writer. We are confident that the readers of our paper will appreciate the letter in another column signed 'W.W.'" And from that day William was accorded much of the deference due to a litterateur which the fates had hitherto denied him. Indeed, during the six years which we are about to skip over so lightly, he became a marked man in Coniston, and it was voted in town meeting that he be intrusted with that most important of literary labors, the Town History of Coniston.

During this period, too, there sprang up the strangest of intimacies between him and Jethro Bass. Surely no more dissimilar men than these have ever been friends, and that the friendship was sometimes misjudged was one of the clouds on William Wetherell's horizon. As the years went on he was still unable to pay off the mortgage; and sometimes, indeed, he could not even meet the interest, in spite of the princely sum he received from Mr. Willard of the *Guardian*. This was one of the clouds on Jethro's horizon, too, if men had but known it, and he took such moneys as Wetherell insisted upon giving him grudgingly enough. It is needless to say that he

refrained from making use of Mr. Wetherell politically, although no poorer vessel for political purposes was ever constructed. It is quite as needless to say, perhaps, that Chester Perkins never got to be Chairman of the Board of Selectmen.

After Aunt Listy died, Jethro was more than ever to be found, when in Coniston, in the garden or the kitchen behind the store. Yes, Aunt Listy is dead. She has flitted through these pages as she flitted through life itself, arrayed by Jethro like the rainbow, and quite as shadowy and unreal. There is no politician of a certain age in the state who does not remember her walking, clad in dragon-fly colors, through the streets of the capital on Jethro's arm, or descending the stairs of the Pelican House to supper. None of Jethro's detractors may say that he ever failed in kindness to her, and he loved her as much as was in his heart to love any woman after Cynthia Ware. As for Aunt Listy, she never seemed to feel any resentment against the child Jethro brought so frequently to Thousand Acre Hill. Poor Aunt Listy! some people used to wonder whether she ever felt any emotion at all. But I believe that she did, in her own way.

It is a well-known fact that Mr. Bijah Bixby came over from Clovelly, to request the place of superintendent of the funeral, a position which had already been filled. A special office, too, was created on this occasion for an old supporter of Jethro's, Senator Peleg Hartington of Brampton. He was made chairman of the bearers, of whom Ephraim Prescott was one.

After this, as we have said, Jethro was more than ever at the store — or rather in that domestic domain behind it which Wetherell and Cynthia shared with Miss Millicent Skinner. Moses Hatch was wont to ask Cynthia how her daddies were. It was he who used to clear out the road to the little schoolhouse among the birches when the snow almost buried the little village, and on sparkling mornings after the storms his oxen would stop to breathe in front of the store, a cluster of laughing children clinging to the snow-plough and tumbling over good-natured Moses in

"Through the streets of the capital on Jethro's arm."

their frolics. Cynthia became a country girl, and grew long and lithe of limb, and weather-burnt, and acquired an endurance that spoke wonders for the life-giving air of Coniston. But she was a serious child, and Wetherell and Jethro sometimes wondered whether she was ever a child at all. When Eben Hatch fell from the lumber pile on the ice, it was she who bound the cut in his head; and when Tom Richardson unexpectedly embraced the schoolhouse stove, Cynthia, not Miss Rebecca Northcutt, took charge of the situation.

It was perhaps inevitable, with such a helpless father, that the girl should grow up with a sense of responsibility, being what she was. Did William Wetherell go to Brampton, Cynthia examined his apparel, and he was marched shamefacedly back to his room to change; did he read too late at night, some unseen messenger summoned her out of her sleep, and he was packed off to bed. Miss Millicent Skinner, too, was in a like mysterious way compelled to abdicate her high place in favor of Cynthia, and Wetherell was utterly unable to explain how this miracle was accomplished. Not only did Millicent learn to cook, but Cynthia, at the age of fourteen, had taught her. Some wit once suggested that the national arms of the United States should contain the emblem of crossed frying-pans, and Millicent was in this respect a true American. When Wetherell began to suffer from her pies and doughnuts, the revolution took place — without stampeding, or recriminations, or trouble of any kind. One evening he discovered Cynthia, decked in an apron, bending over the stove, and Millicent looking on with an expression that was (for Millicent) benign.

This was to some extent explained, a few days later, when Wetherell found himself gazing across the counter at the motherly figure of Mrs. Moses Hatch, who held the well-deserved honor of being the best cook in Coniston.

"Hain't had so much stomach trouble lately, Will?" she remarked.

"No," he answered, surprised; "Cynthia is learning to cook."

"Cynthia became a country girl."

"Guess she is," said Mrs. Moses. "That gal is worth any seven grown-up women in town. And she was four nights settin' in my kitchen before I knowed what she was up to."

"So you taught her, Amanda?"

"I taught her some. She callated that Milly was killin' you, and I guess she was."

During her school days, Jethro used frequently to find himself in front of the schoolhouse when the children came trooping out — quite by accident, of course. Winter or summer, when he went away on his periodical trips, he never came back without a little remembrance in his carpet bag, usually a book, on the subject of which he had spent hours in conference with the librarian at the state library at the capital. But in June of the year when Cynthia was fifteen, Jethro yielded to that passion which was one of the man's strangest characteristics, and appeared one evening in the garden behind the store with a bundle which certainly did not contain a book. With all the gravity of a ceremony he took off the paper, and held up in relief against the astonished Cynthia a length of cardinal cloth. William Wetherell, who was looking out of the window, drew his breath, and even Jethro drew back with an exclamation at the change wrought in her. But Cynthia snatched the roll from his hand and wound it up with a feminine deftness.

"Wh-what's the matter, Cynthy?"

"Oh, I can't wear that, Uncle Jethro," she said.

"C-can't wear it! Why not?"

Cynthia sat down on the grassy mound under the apple tree and clasped her hands across her knees. She looked up at him and shook her head.

"Don't you see that I couldn't wear it, Uncle Jethro?"

"Why not?" he demanded. "Ch-change it if you've a mind to hev green."

She shook her head, and smiled at him a little sadly.

"T-took me a full hour to choose that, Cynthy," said he. "H-had to go to Boston, so I got it there."

He was, indeed, grievously disappointed at this recep-

tion of his gift, and he stood eying the cardinal cloth very mournfully as it lay on the paper. Cynthia, remorseful, reached up and seized his hand.

"Sit down here, Uncle Jethro." He sat down on the mound beside her, very much perplexed. She still held his hand in hers. "Uncle Jethro," she said slowly, "you mustn't think I'm not grateful."

"N-no," he answered; "I don't think that, Cynthy. I know you be."

"I am grateful — I'm very grateful for everything you give me, although I should love you just as much if you didn't give me anything."

She was striving very hard not to offend him, for in some ways he was as sensitive as Wetherell himself. Even Coniston folk had laughed at the idiosyncrasy which Jethro had of dressing his wife in brilliant colors, and the girl knew this.

"G-got it for you to wear to Brampton on the Fourth of July, Cynthy," he said.

"Uncle Jethro, I couldn't wear that to Brampton!"

"You'd look like a queen," said he.

"But I'm not a queen," objected Cynthia.

"Rather hev somethin' else?"

"Yes," she said, looking at him suddenly with the gleam of laughter in her eyes, although she was on the verge of tears.

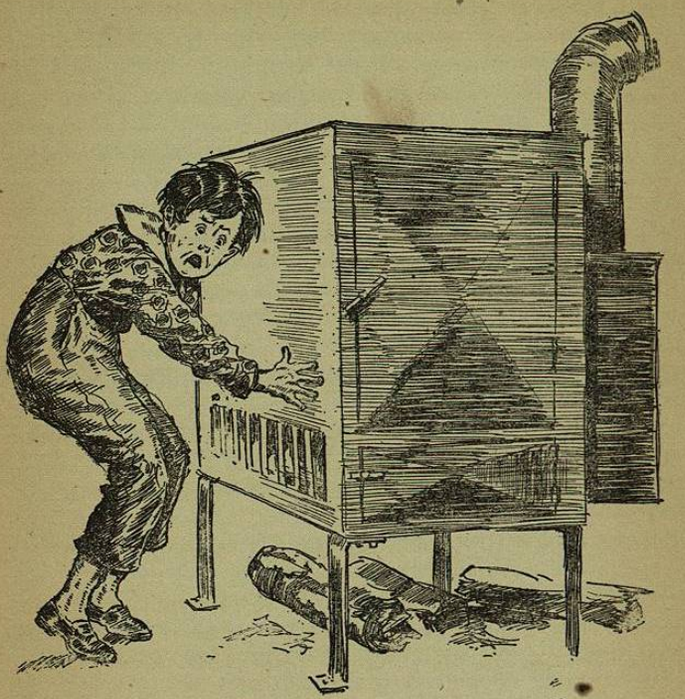
"Wh-what?" Jethro demanded.

"Well," said Cynthia, demurely gazing down at her ankles, "shoes and stockings." The barefooted days had long gone by.

Jethro laughed. Perhaps some inkling of her reasons came to him, for he had a strange and intuitive understanding of her. At any rate, he accepted her decision with a meekness which would have astonished many people who knew only that side of him which he showed to the world. Gently she released her hand, and folded up the bundle again and gave it to him.

"B-better keep it — hadn't you?"

"No, you keep it. And I will wear it for you when I am rich, Uncle Jethro."



"Tom Richardson unexpectedly embraced the schoolhouse stove."

Jethro did keep it, and in due time the cardinal cloth had its uses. But Cynthia did not wear it on the Fourth of July.

That was a great day for Brampton, being not only the nation's birthday, but the hundredth year since the adventurous little band of settlers from Connecticut had first gazed upon Coniston Water at that place. Early in the morning wagon loads began to pour into Brampton Street from Harwich, from Coniston, from Tarleton Four Corners, and even from distant Clovelly, and Brampton was banner-hung for the occasion — flags across the stores, across the dwellings, and draped along the whole breadth of the meeting-house; but for sheer splendor the newly built mansion of Isaac D. Worthington outshone them all. Although its owner was a professed believer in republican simplicity, no such edifice ornamented any town to the west of the state capital. Small wonder that the way in front of it was blocked by a crowd lost in admiration of its Gothic proportions! It stands to-day one of many monuments to its builder, with its windows of one pane (unheard-of magnificence), its tower of stone, its porch with pointed arches and scroll-work. No fence divides its grounds from the public walk, and on the smooth-shaven lawn between the ornamental flower beds and the walk stand two stern mastiffs of iron, emblematic of the solidity and power of their owner. It was as much to see this house as to hear the oratory that the countryside flocked to Brampton that day.

All the day before Cynthia and Milly, and many another housewife, had been making wonderful things for the dinners they were to bring, and stowing them in the great basket ready for the early morning start. At six o'clock Jethro's three-seated farm wagon was in front of the store. Cousin Ephraim Prescott, in a blue suit and an army felt hat with a cord, got up behind, a little stiffly by reason of that Wilderness bullet; and there were also William Wetherell and Lem Hallowell, his honest face shining, and Sue, his wife, and young Sue and Jock and Lilian, all a-quiver with excitement in their Sunday best.

And as they drove away there trotted up behind them Moses and Amandy Hatch, with their farm team, and all the little Hatches, — Eben and George and Judy and Liza. As they jogged along they drank in the fragrance of the dew-washed meadows and the pines, and a great blue heron stood knee-deep on the far side of Deacon Lysander's old mill-pond, watching them philosophically as they passed.

It was eight o'clock when they got into the press of Brampton Street, and there was a hush as they made their way slowly through the throng, and many a stare at the curious figure in the old-fashioned blue swallowtail and brass buttons and tall hat, driving the farm wagon. Husbands pointed him out to their wives, young men to sisters and sweethearts, some openly, some discreetly. "There goes Jethro Bass," and some were bold enough to say, "Howdy, Jethro?" Jake Wheeler was to be observed in the crowd ahead of them, hurried for once out of his Jethro step, actually running toward the tavern, lest such a one arrive unheralded. Commotion is perceived on the tavern porch, — Mr. Sherman, the proprietor, bustling out, Jake Wheeler beside him; a chorus of "How be you, Jethros?" from the more courageous there, — but the farm team jogs on, leaving a discomfited gathering, into the side street, up an alley, and into the cool, ammonia-reeking sheds of lank Jim Sanborn's livery stable. No obsequiousness from lank Jim, who has the traces slipped and the reins festooned from the bits almost before Jethro has lifted Cynthia to the floor. Jethro, walking between Cynthia and her father, led the way, Ephraim, Lem, and Sue Hallowell following, the children, in unwonted shoes and stockings, bringing up the rear. The people parted, and presently they found themselves opposite the new-scrolled band stand among the trees, where the Harwich band in glittering gold and red had just been installed. The leader, catching sight of Jethro's party, and of Ephraim's corded army hat, made a bow, waved his baton, and they struck up "Marching through Georgia." It was, of course, not dignified to cheer, but I think that the

blood of every man and woman and child ran faster with the music, and so many of them looked at Cousin Ephraim that he slipped away behind the line of wagons. So the day began.

"Jest to think of bein' that rich, Will!" exclaimed Amanda Hatch to the storekeeper, as they stood in the little group which had gathered in front of the first citizen's new mansion. "I own it scares me. Think how much that house must hev cost, and even them dogs," said Amanda, staring at the mastiffs with awe. "They tell me he has a grand piano from New York, and guests from Boston — railroad presidents. I call Isaac Worthington to mind when he wahn't but a slip of a boy with a cough, runnin' after Cynthy Ware." She glanced down at Cynthia with something of compassion. "Just to think, child, he might have be'n your father!"

"I'm glad he isn't," said Cynthia, hotly.

"Of course, of course," replied the good-natured and well-intentioned Amanda, "I'd sooner have your father than Isaac Worthington. But I was only thinkin' how nice it would be to be rich."

Just then one of the glass-panelled doors of this house opened, and a good-looking lad of seventeen came out.

"That's Bob Worthington," said Amanda, determined that they should miss nothing. "My! it wahn't but the other day when he put on long pants. It won't be a great while before he'll go into the mills and git all that money. Guess he'll marry some city person. He'd ought to take you, Cynthy."

"I don't want him," said Cynthia, the color flaming into her cheeks. And she went off across the green in search of Jethro.

There was a laugh from the honest country folk who had listened. Bob Worthington came to the edge of the porch and stood there, frankly scanning the crowd, with an entire lack of self-consciousness. Some of them shifted nervously, with the New Englander's dislike of being caught in the act of sight-seeing.

"What in the world is he starin' at me for?" said

Amanda, backing behind the bulkier form of her husband. "As I live, I believe he's comin' here."

Young Mr. Worthington was, indeed, descending the steps and walking across the lawn toward them, nodding and smiling to acquaintances as he passed. To Wetherell's astonishment he made directly for the place where he was standing and held out his hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Wetherell?" he said. "Perhaps you don't remember me, — Bob Worthington."

"I can't say that I should have known you," answered the storekeeper. They were all absurdly silent, thinking of nothing to say and admiring the boy because he was at ease.

"I hope you have a good seat at the exercises," he said, pressing Wetherell's hand again, and before he could thank him, Bob was off in the direction of the band stand.

"One thing," remarked Amanda, "he ain't much like his dad. You'd never catch Isaac Worthington bein' that common."

Just then there came another interruption for William Wetherell, who was startled by the sound of a voice in his ear — a nasal voice that awoke unpleasant recollections. He turned to confront, within the distance of eight inches, the face of Mr. Bijah Bixby of Clovelly screwed up into a greeting. The storekeeper had met Mr. Bixby several times since that first memorable meeting, and on each occasion, as now, his hand had made an involuntary movement to his watch pocket.

"Hain't seed you for some time, Will," remarked Mr. Bixby; "goin' over to the exercises? We'll move along that way," and he thrust his hand under Mr. Wetherell's elbow. "Whar's Jethro?"

"He's here somewhere," answered the storekeeper, helplessly, moving along in spite of himself.

"Keepin' out of sight, you understand," said Bijah, with a knowing wink, as much as to say that Mr. Wetherell was by this time a past master in Jethro tactics. Mr. Bixby could never disabuse his mind of a certain interpretation which he put on the storekeeper's intimacy with

Jethro. "You done well to git in with him, Will. Didn't think you had it in you when I first looked you over."

Mr. Wetherell wished to make an indignant denial, but he didn't know exactly how to begin.

"Smartest man in the United States of America — guess you know that," Mr. Bixby continued amiably. "*They* can't git at him unless he wants 'em to. There's a railroad president at Isaac Worthington's who'd like to git at him to-day, — guess you know that, — Steve Merrill."

Mr. Wetherell didn't know, but he was given no time to say so.

"Steve Merrill, of the Grand Gulf and Northern. *He* hain't here to see Worthington; he's here to see Jethro, when Jethro's a mind to. Guess you understand."

"I know nothing about it," answered Wetherell, shortly. Mr. Bixby gave him a look of infinite admiration, as though he could not have pursued any more admirable line.

"I know Steve Merrill better'n I know you," said Mr. Bixby, "and he knows me. Whenever he sees me at the state capital he says, 'How be you, Bije?' just as natural as if *I* was a railroad president, and slaps me on the back. When be you goin' to the capital, Will? You'd ought to come down and be thar with the boys on this Truro Bill. You could reach some on 'em the rest of us couldn't git at."

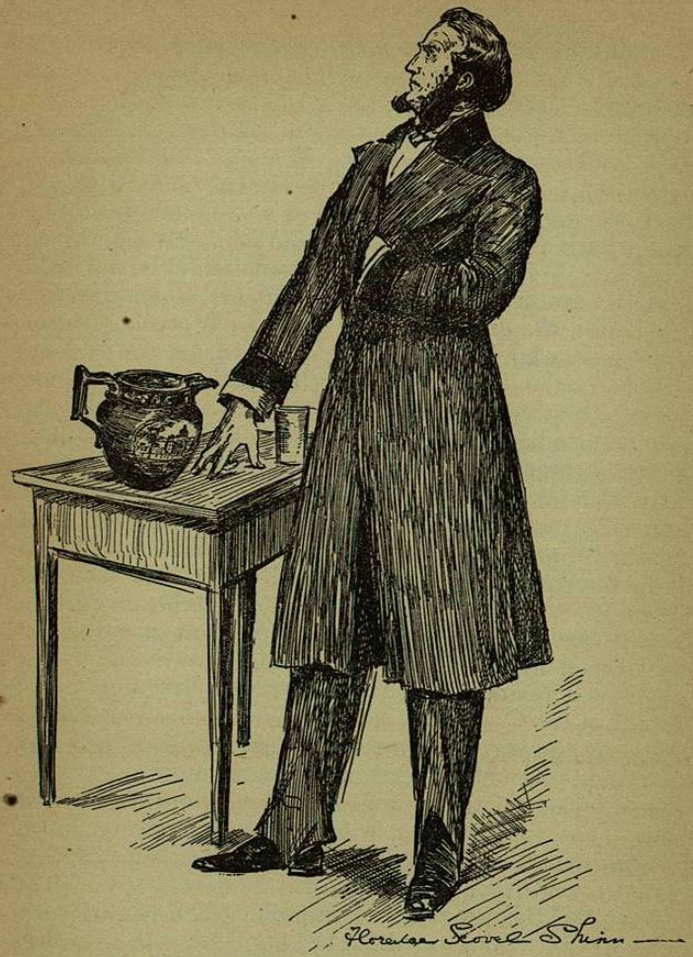
William Wetherell avoided a reply to this very pointed inquiry by escaping into the meeting-house, where he found Jethro and Cynthia and Ephraim already seated halfway up the aisle.

On the platform, behind a bank of flowers, are the velvet-covered chairs which contain the dignitaries of the occasion. The chief of these is, of course, Mr. Isaac Worthington, the one with the hawklike look, sitting next to the Rev. Mr. Sweet, who is rather pudgy by contrast. On the other side of Mr. Sweet, next to the parlor organ and the quartette, is the genial little railroad president Mr. Merrill, batting the flies which assail the unprotected crown of his head, and smiling benignly on the audience.

Suddenly his eye becomes fixed, and he waves a fat hand vigorously at Jethro, who answers the salute with a nod of unwonted cordiality for him. Then comes a hush, and the exercises begin.

There is a prayer, of course, by the Rev. Mr. Sweet, and a rendering of "My Country" and "I would not Change my Lot," and other choice selections by the quartette; and an original poem recited with much feeling by a lady admirer of Miss Lucretia Penniman, and the "Hymn to Coniston" declaimed by Mr. Gamaliel Ives, president of the Brampton Literary Club. But the crowning event is, of course, the oration by Mr. Isaac D. Worthington, the first citizen, who is introduced under that title by the chairman of the day; and as the benefactor of Brampton, who has bestowed upon the town the magnificent gift which was dedicated such a short time ago, the Worthington Free Library.

Mr. Isaac D. Worthington stood erect beside the table, his hand thrust into the opening of his coat, and spoke at the rate of one hundred and eight words a minute, for exactly one hour. He sketched with much skill the creed of the men who had fought their way through the forests to build their homes by Coniston Water, who had left their clearings to risk their lives behind Stark and Ethan Allen for that creed; he paid a graceful tribute to the veterans of the Civil War, scattered among his hearers — a tribute, by the way, which for some reason made Ephraim very indignant. Mr. Worthington went on to outline the duty of citizens of the present day, as he conceived it, and in this connection referred, with becoming modesty, to the Worthington Free Library. He had made his money in Brampton, and it was but right that he should spend it for the benefit of the people of Brampton. The library, continued Mr. Worthington when the applause was over, had been the dream of a certain delicate youth who had come, many years ago, to Brampton for his health. (It is a curious fact, by the way, that Mr. Worthington seldom recalled the delicate youth now, except upon public occasions.)



"At the rate of one hundred and eight words a minute."

Yes, the dream of that youth had been to benefit in some way that community in which circumstances had decreed that he should live, and in this connection it might not be out of place to mention a bill then before the Legislature of the state, now in session. If the bill became a law, the greatest modern factor of prosperity, the railroad, would come to Brampton. The speaker was interrupted here by more applause. Mr. Worthington did not deem it dignified or necessary to state that the railroad to which he referred was the Truro Railroad; and that he, as the largest stockholder, might indirectly share that prosperity with Brampton. That would be wandering too far from his subject, which, it will be recalled, was civic duties. He took a glass of water, and went on to declare that he feared—sadly feared—that the ballot was not held as sacred as it had once been. He asked the people of Brampton, and of the state, to stop and consider who in these days made the laws and granted the franchises. Whereupon he shook his head very slowly and sadly, as much as to imply that, if the Truro Bill did not pass, the corruption of the ballot was to blame. No, Mr. Worthington could think of no better subject on this Birthday of Independence than a recapitulation of the creed of our forefathers, from which we had so far wandered.

In short, the first citizen, as became him, had delivered the first reform speech ever heard in Brampton, and the sensation which it created was quite commensurate to the occasion. The presence in the audience of Jethro Bass, at whom many believed the remarks to have been aimed, added no little poignancy to that sensation, although Jethro gave no outward signs of the terror and remorse by which he must have been struck while listening to Mr. Worthington's ruminations of the corruption of the ballot. Apparently unconscious of the eyes upon him, he walked out of the meeting-house with Cynthia by his side, and they stood waiting for Wetherell and Ephraim under the maple tree there.

The beribboned members of the Independence Day committee were now on the steps, and behind them came Isaac

Worthington and Mr. Merrill. The people, scenting a dramatic situation, lingered. Would the mill owner speak to the boss? The mill owner, with a glance at the boss, did nothing of the kind, but immediately began to talk rapidly to Mr. Merrill. That gentleman, however, would not be talked to, but came running over to Jethro and seized his hand, leaving Mr. Worthington to walk on by himself.

"Jethro," cried the little railroad president, "upon my word. Well, well. And Miss Jethro," he took off his hat to Cynthia, "well, well. Didn't know you had a girl, Jethro."

"W-wish she was mine, Steve," said Jethro. "She's a good deal to me as it is. Hain't you, Cynthy?"

"Yes," said Cynthia.

"Well, well," said Mr. Merrill, staring at her, "you'll have to look out for her some day — keep the boys away from her — eh? Upon my word! Well, Jethro," said he, with a twinkle in his eye, "are you goin' to reform? I'll bet you've got an annual over my road in your pocket right now."

"Enjoy the speech-makin', Steve?" inquired Mr. Bass, solemnly.

Mr. Merrill winked at Jethro, and laughed heartily.

"Keep the boys away from her, Jethro," he repeated, laying his hand on the shoulder of the lad who stood beside him. "It's a good thing Bob's going off to Harvard this fall. Seems to me I heard about some cutting up at Andover — eh, Bob?"

Bob grinned, showing a line of very white teeth.

Mr. Merrill took Jethro by the arm and led him off a little distance, having a message of some importance to give him, the purport of which will appear later. And Cynthia and Bob were left face to face. Of course Bob could have gone on, if he had wished it.

"Don't remember me, do you?" he said.

"I do now," said Cynthia, looking at him rather timidly through her lashes. Her face was hot, and she had been very uncomfortable during Mr. Merrill's remarks. Furthermore, Bob had not taken his eyes off her.

"I remembered you right away," he said reproachfully; "I saw you in front of the house this morning, and you ran away."

"I didn't run away," replied Cynthia, indignantly.

"It looked like it to me," said Bob. "I suppose you were afraid I was going to give you another whistle."

Cynthia bit her lip, and then she laughed. Then she looked around to see where Jethro was, and discovered that they were alone in front of the meeting-house. Ephraim and her father had passed on while Mr. Merrill was talking.

"What's the matter?" asked Bob.

"I'm afraid they've gone," said Cynthia. "I ought to be going after them. They'll miss me."

"Oh, no, they won't," said Bob, easily, "let's sit down under the tree. They'll come back."

Whereupon he sat down under the maple. But Cynthia remained standing, ready to fly. She had an idea that it was wrong to stay — which made it all the more delightful.

"Sit down — Cynthia," said he.

She glanced down at him, startled. He was sitting, with his legs crossed, looking up at her intently.

"I like that name," he observed. "I like it better than any girl's name I know. Do be good-natured and sit down." And he patted the ground close beside him.

She laughed again. The laugh had in it an exquisite note of shyness, which he liked.

"Why do you want me to sit down?" she asked suddenly.

"Because I want to talk to you."

"Can't you talk to me standing up?"

"I suppose I could," said Bob, "but I shouldn't be able to say such nice things to you."

The corners of her mouth trembled a little.

"And whose loss would that be?" she asked.

Bob Worthington was surprised at this retort, and correspondingly delighted. He had not expected it in a country storekeeper's daughter, and he stared at Cynthia so frankly that she blushed again, and turned away. He

was a young man who, it may be surmised, had had some experience with the other sex at Andover and elsewhere. He had not spent all of his life in Brampton.

"I've often thought of you since that day when you wouldn't take the whistle," he declared. "What are you laughing at?"

"I'm laughing at you," said Cynthia, leaning against the tree, with her hands behind her.

"You've been laughing at me ever since you've stood there," he said, aggrieved that his declarations should not be taken more seriously.

"What have you thought about me?" she demanded. She was really beginning to enjoy this episode.

"Well—" he began, and hesitated—and broke down and laughed—Cynthia laughed with him.

"I can tell you what I didn't think," said Bob.

"What?" asked Cynthia, falling into the trap.

"I didn't think you'd be so—so good-looking," said he, quite boldly.

"And I didn't think you'd be so rude," responded Cynthia. But though she blushed again, she was not exactly displeased.

"What are you going to do this afternoon?" he asked. "Let's go for a walk."

"I'm going back to Coniston."

"Let's go for a walk now," said he, springing to his feet. "Come on."

Cynthia looked at him and shook her head smilingly.

"Here's Uncle Jethro—"

"Uncle Jethro!" exclaimed Bob, "is he your uncle?"

"Oh, no, not really. But he's just the same. He's very good to me."

"I wonder whether he'd mind if I called him Uncle Jethro, too," said Bob, and Cynthia laughed at the notion. This young man was certainly very comical, and very frank. "Good-by," he said; "I'll come to see you some day in Coniston."

CHAPTER XII

"A TIME TO WEEP, AND A TIME TO LAUGH"

THAT evening, after Cynthia had gone to bed, William Wetherell sat down at Jonah Winch's desk in the rear of the store to gaze at a blank sheet of paper until the Muses chose to send him subject-matter for his weekly letter to the *Guardian*. The window was open, and the cool airs from the mountain spruces mingled with the odors of corn meal and kerosene and calico print. Jethro Bass, who had supped with the storekeeper, sat in the wooden armchair silent, with his head bent. Sometimes he would sit there by the hour while Wetherell wrote or read, and take his departure when he was so moved without saying good night. Presently Jethro lifted his chin, and dropped it again; there was a sound of wheels without, and, after an interval, a knock at the door.

William Wetherell dropped his pen with a start of surprise, as it was late for a visitor in Coniston. He glanced at Jethro, who did not move, and then he went to the door and shot back the great forged bolt of it, and stared out. On the edge of the porch stood a tallish man in a double-breasted frock coat.

"Mr. Worthington!" exclaimed the storekeeper.

Mr. Worthington coughed and pulled at one of his mutton-chop whiskers, and seemed about to step off the porch again. It was, indeed, the first citizen and reformer of Brampton. No wonder William Wetherell was mystified.

"Can I do anything for you?" he asked. "Have you missed your way?"

Wetherell thought he heard him muttering, "No, no,"