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,"

and then he was startled by another voice in his ear. It was Jethro who was standing beside him.

"G-guess he hain't missed his way a great deal. Er — come in — come in."

Mr. Worthington took a couple of steps forward.

"I understood that you were to be alone," he remarked, addressing Jethro with an attempted severity of manner.

"Didn't say so — d-didn't say so, did I?" answered Jethro.

"Very well," said Mr. Worthington, "any other time will do for this little matter."

"Er — good night," said Jethro, shortly, and there was the suspicion of a gleam in his eye as Mr. Worthington turned away. The mill-owner, in fact, did not get any farther than the edge of the porch before he wheeled again.

"The affair which I have to discuss with you is of a private nature, Mr. Bass," he said.

"So I callated," said Jethro.

"You may have the place to yourselves, gentlemen," Wetherell put in uneasily, and then Mr. Worthington came as far as the door, where he stood looking at the storekeeper with scant friendliness. Jethro turned to Wetherell.

"You a politician, Will?" he demanded.

"No," said Wetherell.

"You a business man?"

"No," he said again.

"You ever tell folks what you hear other people say?"

"Certainly not," the storekeeper answered; "I'm not interested in other people's business."

"Ex'actly," said Jethro. "Guess you'd better stay."

"But I don't care to stay," Wetherell objected.

"S-stay to oblige me — stay to oblige me?" he asked.

"Well, yes, if you put it that way," Wetherell said, beginning to get some amusement out of the situation. He did not know what Jethro's object was in this matter; perhaps others may guess.

Mr. Worthington, who had stood by with ill-disguised impatience during this colloquy, now broke in.

"It is most unusual, Mr. Bass, to have a third person present at a conference in which he has no manner of concern. I think on the whole, since you have insisted upon my coming to you —"

"H-hain't insisted that I know of," said Jethro.

"Well," said Mr. Worthington, "never mind that. Perhaps it would be better for me to come to you some other time, when you are alone."

In the meantime Wetherell had shut the door, and they had gradually walked to the rear of the store. Jethro parted his coat tails, and sat down again in the armchair. Wetherell, not wishing to be intrusive, went to his desk again, leaving the first citizen standing among the barrels.

"W-what other time?" Jethro asked.

"Any other time," said Mr. Worthington.

"What other time?"

"To-morrow night?" suggested Mr. Worthington, striving to hide his annoyance.

"B-busy to-morrow night," said Jethro.

"You know that what I have to talk to you about is of the utmost importance," said Worthington. "Let us say Saturday night."

"B-busy Saturday night," said Jethro. "Meet you to-morrow."

"What time?"

"Noon," said Jethro, "noon."

"Where?" asked Mr. Worthington, dubiously.

"Band stand in Brampton Street," said Jethro, and the storekeeper was fain to bend over his desk to conceal his laughter, busying himself with his books. Mr. Worthington sat down with as much dignity as he could muster on one of Jonah's old chairs, and Jonah Winch's clock ticked and ticked, and Wetherell's pen scratched and scratched on his weekly letter to Mr. Willard, although he knew that he was writing the sheerest nonsense. As a matter of fact, he tore up the sheets the next morning without reading them. Mr. Worthington unbuttoned his coat, fumbled in his pocket, and pulled out two cigars, one of which he pushed toward Jethro, who shook his

head. Mr. Worthington lighted his cigar and cleared his throat.

"Perhaps you have observed, Mr. Bass," he said, "that this is a rapidly growing section of the state — that the people hereabouts are every day demanding modern and efficient means of communication with the outside world."

"Struck you as a mill owner, has it?" said Jethro.

"I do not care to emphasize my private interests," answered Mr. Worthington, at last appearing to get into his stride again. "I wish to put the matter on broader grounds. Men like you and me ought not to be so much concerned with our own affairs as with those of the population amongst whom we live. And I think I am justified in putting it to you on these grounds."

"H-have to be justified, do you — have to be justified?" Jethro inquired. "Er — why?"

This was a poser, and for a moment he stared at Jethro, blankly, until he decided how to take it. Then he crossed his legs and blew smoke toward the ceiling.

"It is certainly fairer to everybody to take the broadest view of a situation," he remarked; "I am trying to regard this from the aspect of a citizen, and I am quite sure that it will appeal to you in the same light. If the spirit which imbued the founders of this nation means anything, Mr. Bass, it means that the able men who are given a chance to rise by their own efforts must still retain the duties and responsibilities of the humblest citizens. That, I take it, is our position, Mr. Bass, — yours and mine."

Mr. Worthington had uncrossed his legs, and was now by the inspiration of his words impelled to an upright position. Suddenly he glanced at Jethro, and started — for Jethro had sunk down on the small of his back, his chin on his chest, in an attitude of lassitude if not of oblivion. There was a silence perhaps a little disconcerting for Mr. Worthington, who chose the opportunity to relight his cigar.

"G-got through?" said Jethro, without moving, "g-got through?"

"Through?" echoed Mr. Worthington, "through what?"

"T-through Sunday-school," said Jethro.

Worthington dropped his match and stamped on it, and Wetherell began to wonder how much the man would stand. It suddenly came over the storekeeper that the predicament in which Mr. Worthington found himself — whatever it was — must be a very desperate one. He half rose in his chair, sat down again, and lighted another match.

"Er — director in the Truro Road, hain't you, Mr. Worthington?" asked Jethro, without looking at him.

"Yes."

"Er — principal stockholder — ain't you?"

"Yes — but that is neither here nor there, sir."

"Road don't pay — r-road don't pay, does it?"

"It certainly does not."

"W-would pay if it went to Brampton and Harwich?"

"Mr. Bass, the company consider that they are pledged to the people of this section to get the road through. I am not prepared to say whether the road would pay, but it is quite likely that it would not."

"Ch-charitable organization?" said Jethro, from the depths of his chair.

"The pioneers in such matters take enormous risks for the benefit of the community, sir. We believe that we are entitled to a franchise, and in my opinion the General Court are behaving disgracefully in refusing us one. I will not say all I think about that affair, Mr. Bass. I am convinced that influences are at work — " He broke off with a catch in his throat.

"T-tried to get a franchise, did you?"

"I am not here to quibble with you, Mr. Bass. We tried to get it by every legitimate means, and failed, and you know it as well as I do."

"Er — Heth Sutton didn't sign his receipt — er — did he?"

The storekeeper, not being a politician, was not aware that the somewhat obscure reference of Jethro's to the Speaker of the House concerned an application which Mr. Worthington was supposed to have made to that gentle-

man, who had at length acknowledged his inability to oblige, and had advised Mr. Worthington to go to headquarters. And Mr. Stephen Merrill, who had come to Brampton out of the kindness of his heart, had only arranged this meeting in a conversation with Jethro that day, after the reform speech.

Mr. Worthington sprang to his feet, and flung out a hand toward Jethro.

"Prove your insinuations, sir," he cried; "I defy you to prove your insinuations."

But Jethro still sat unmoved.

"H-Heth in the charitable organization, too?" he asked.

"People told me I was a fool to believe in honesty, but I thought better of the lawmakers of my state. I'll tell you plainly what they said to me, sir. They said, 'Go to Jethro Bass.'"

"Well, so you have, hain't you? So you have."

"Yes, I have. I've come to appeal to you in behalf of the people of your section to allow that franchise to go through the present Legislature."

"Er — come to appeal, have you — come to appeal?"

"Yes," said Mr. Worthington, sitting down again; "I have come to-night to appeal to you in the name of the farmers and merchants of this region — your neighbors, — to use your influence to get that franchise. I have come to you with the conviction that I shall not have appealed in vain."

"Er — appealed to Heth in the name of the farmers and merchants?"

"Mr. Sutton is Speaker of the House."

"F-farmers and merchants elected him," remarked Jethro, as though stating a fact.

Worthington coughed.

"It is probable that I made a mistake in going to Sutton," he admitted.

"If I w-wanted to catch a pike, w-wouldn't use a pinhook."

"I might have known," remarked Worthington, after a pause, "that Sutton could not have been elected Speaker without your influence."

Jethro did not answer that, but still remained sunk in his chair. To all appearances he might have been asleep.

"W-worth somethin' to the farmers and merchants to get that road through — w-worth somethin', ain't it?"

Wetherell held his breath. For a moment Mr. Worthington sat very still, his face drawn, and then he wet his lips and rose slowly.

"We may as well end this conversation, Mr. Bass," he said, and though he tried to speak firmly his voice shook; "it seems to be useless. Good night."

He picked up his hat and walked slowly toward the door, but Jethro did not move or speak. Mr. Worthington reached the door, opened it, and the night breeze started the lamp to smoking. Wetherell got up and turned it down, and the first citizen was still standing in the doorway. His back was toward them, but the fingers of his left hand working convulsively caught Wetherell's eye and held it; save for the ticking of the clock and the chirping of the crickets in the grass, there was silence. Then Mr. Worthington closed the door softly, hesitated, turned, and came back and stood before Jethro.

"Mr. Bass," he said, "we've got to have that franchise."

William Wetherell glanced at the countryman who, without moving in his chair, without raising his voice, had brought the first citizen of Brampton to his knees. The thing frightened the storekeeper, revolted him, and yet its drama held him fascinated. By some subtle process which he had actually beheld, but could not fathom, this cold Mr. Worthington, this bank president who had given him sage advice, this preacher of political purity, had been reduced to a frenzied supplicant. He stood bending over Jethro.

"What's your price? Name it, for God's sake."

"B-better wait till you get the bill — hadn't you? — b-better wait till you get the bill."

"Will you put the franchise through?"

"Goin' down to the capital soon?" Jethro inquired.

"I'm going down on Thursday."

"B-better come in and see me," said Jethro.

"Very well," answered Mr. Worthington; "I'll be in at two o'clock on Thursday." And then, without another word to either of them, he swung on his heel and strode quickly out of the store. Jethro did not move.

William Wetherell's hand was trembling so that he could not write, and he could not trust his voice to speak. Although Jethro had never mentioned Isaac Worthington's name to him, Wetherell knew that Jethro hated the first citizen of Brampton.

At length, when the sound of the wheels had died away, Jethro broke the silence.

"Er — didn't laugh — did he, Will? Didn't laugh once — did he?"

"Laugh!" echoed the storekeeper, who himself had never been further from laughter in his life.

"M-might have let him off easier if he'd laughed," said Jethro, "if he'd laughed just once, m-might have let him off easier."

And with this remark he went out of the store and left Wetherell alone.

CHAPTER XIII

MR. WETHERELL DESCENDS INTO THE ARENA

THE weekly letter to the *Newcastle Guardian* was not finished that night, but Coniston slept, peacefully, unaware of Mr. Worthington's visit; and never, indeed, discovered it, since the historian for various reasons of his own did not see fit to insert the event in his plan of the Town History. Before another sun had set Jethro Bass had departed for the state capital, not choosing to remain to superintend the haying of the many farms which had fallen into his hand, — a most unusual omission for him.

Presently rumors of a mighty issue about the Truro Railroad began to be discussed by the politicians at the Coniston store, and Jake Wheeler held himself in instant readiness to answer a summons to the capital — which never came.

Delegations from Brampton and Harwich went to petition the Legislature for the franchise, and the *Brampton Clarion* and *Harwich Sentinel* declared that the people of Truro County recognized in Isaac Worthington a great and public-spirited man, who ought by all means to be the next governor — if the franchise went through.

One evening Lem Hallowell, after depositing a box of trimmings at Ephraim Prescott's harness shop, drove up to the platform of the store with the remark that "things were gittin' pretty hot down to the capital in that franchise fight."

"Hain't you b'en sent for yet, Jake?" he cried, throwing his reins over the backs of his sweating Morgans; "well, that's strange. Guess the fight hain't as hot as we hear about. Jethro hain't had to call out his best men."