"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."

"I'm a-goin' down if there's trouble," declared Jake, who consistently ignored banter.

"Better git up and git," said Lem; "there's three out of the five railroads against Truro, and Steve Merrill layin' low. Bije Bixby's down there, and Heth Sutton, and Abner Parkinson, and all the big bugs. Better git aboard, Jake."

At this moment the discussion was interrupted by the sight of Cynthia Wetherell coming across the green with an open letter in her hand.

"It's a message from Uncle Jethro," she said.

The announcement was sufficient to warrant the sensation it produced on all sides.

"'Tain't a *letter* from Jethro, is it?" exclaimed Sam Price, overcome by a pardonable curiosity. For it was well known that one of Jethro's fixed principles in life was embodied in his own motto, "Don't write — send."

"It's very funny," answered Cynthia, looking down at the paper with a puzzled expression. "'Dear Cynthia: Judge Bass wished me to say to you that he would be pleased if you and Will would come to the capital and spend a week with him at the Pelican House, and see the sights. The judge says Rias Richardson will tend store. Yours truly, P. Hartington.' That's all," said Cynthia, looking up.

For a moment you could have heard a pine needle drop on the stoop. Then Rias thrust his hands in his pockets and voiced the general sentiment.

"Well, I'll be — goldurned!" said he.

"Didn't say nothin' about Jake?" queried Lem.

"No," answered Cynthia, "that's all — except two pieces of cardboard with something about the Truro Railroad and our names. I don't know what they are." And she took them from the envelope.

"Guess I could tell you if I was pressed," said Lem, amid a shout of merriment from the group.

"Air you goin', Will?" said Sam Price, pausing with his foot on the step of his buggy, that he might have the complete news before he left.



"Godfrey, Will," exclaimed Rias, breathlessly, "you hain't a-goin' to throw up a chance to stay a hull week at the Pelican, be you?" The mere possibility of refusal overpowered Rias.

* * * * * * *

Those who are familiar with that delightful French song which treats of the leave-taking of one Monsieur Dumollet will appreciate, perhaps, the attentions which were showered upon William Wetherell and Cynthia upon their departure for the capital next morning. Although Mr. Wetherell had at one time been actually a resident of Boston, he received quite as many cautions from his neighbors as Monsieur Dumollet. *Billets doux* and pistols were, of course, not mentioned, but it certainly behooved him, when he should have arrived at that place of intrigues, to be on the lookout for cabals.

They took the stage-coach from Brampton over the pass: picturesque stage-coach with its apple-green body and leather springs, soon to be laid away forever if the coveted Truro Franchise Bill becomes a law; stage-coach which pulls up defiantly beside its own rival at Truro station, where our passengers take the train down the pleasant waterways and past the little white villages among the fruit trees to the capital. The thrill of anticipation was in Cynthia's blood, and the flush of pleasure on her cheeks, when they stopped at last under the sheds. The conductor snapped his fingers and cried, "This way, Judge," and there was Jethro in his swallow-tailed coat and stove-pipe hat awaiting them. He seized Wetherell's carpet-bag with one hand and Cynthia's arm with the other, and shouldered his way through the people, who parted when they saw who it was.

"Uncle Jethro," cried Cynthia, breathlessly, "I didn't know you were a judge. What are you judge of?"

"J-judge of clothes, Cynthy. D-don't you wish you had the red cloth to wear here?"

"No, I don't," said Cynthia. "I'm glad enough to be here without it."

"G-glad to hev you in any fixin's, Cynthy," he said, giving her arm a little squeeze, and by that time they were up the hill and William Wetherell quite winded. For Jethro was strong as an ox, and Cynthia's muscles were like an Indian's.

They were among the glories of Main Street now. The capital was then, and still remains, a typically beautiful New England city, with wide streets shaded by shapely maples and elms, with substantial homes set back amidst lawns and gardens. Here on Main Street were neat brick business buildings and banks and shops, with the parklike grounds of the Capitol farther on, and everywhere, from curb to doorway, were knots of men talking politics; broad-faced, sunburned farmers in store clothes, with beards that hid their shirt fronts; keen-featured, sallow, country lawyers in long black coats crumpled from much sitting on the small of the back; country storekeepers with shrewd eyes, and local proprietors and manufacturers.

"Uncle Jethro, I didn't know you were such a great man," she said.

"H-how did ye find out, Cynthy?"

"The way people treat you here. I knew you were great, of course," she hastened to add.

"H-how do they treat me?" he asked, looking down at her.

"You know," she answered. "They all stop talking when you come along and stare at you. But why don't you speak to them?"

Jethro smiled and squeezed her arm again, and then they were in the corridor of the famous Pelican Hotel, hazy with cigar smoke and filled with politicians. Some were standing, hanging on to pillars, gesticulating, some were ranged in benches along the wall, and a chosen few were in chairs grouped around the spittoons. Upon the appearance of Jethro's party, the talk was hushed, the groups gave way, and they accomplished a kind of triumphal march to the desk. The clerk, descrying them, desisted abruptly from a conversation across the cigar counter,



and with all the form of a ceremony dipped the pen with a flourish into the ink and handed it to Jethro.

"Your rooms are ready, Judge," he said.

As they started for the stairs, Jethro and Cynthia leading the way, Wetherell felt a touch on his elbow and turned to confront Mr. Bijah Bixby — at very close range, as usual.

"C-come down at last, Will?" he said. "Thought ye would. Need everybody this time — you understand."

"I came on pleasure," retorted Mr. Wetherell, somewhat angrily.

Mr. Bixby appeared hugely to enjoy the joke.

"So I callated," he cried, still holding Wetherell's hand in a mild, but persuasive grip. "So I callated. Guess I done you an injustice, Will."

"How's that?"

"You're a leetle mite smarter than I thought you was. So long. Got a leetle business now — you understand — a leetle business."

Was it possible, indeed, for the simple-minded to come to the capital and not become involved in cabals? With some misgivings William Wetherell watched Mr. Bixby disappear among the throng, kicking up his heels behind, and then went upstairs. On the first floor Cynthia was standing by an open door.

"Dad," she cried, "come and see the rooms Uncle Jethro's got for us!" She took Wetherell's hand and led him in. "See the lace curtains, and the chandelier, and the big bureau with the marble top."

Jethro had parted his coat tails and seated himself enjoyably on the bed.

"D-don't come often," he said, "m-might as well have the best."

"Jethro," said Wetherell, coughing nervously and fumbling in the pocket of his coat, "you've been very kind to us, and we hardly know how to thank you. I-I didn't have any use for these."

He held out the pieces of cardboard which had come in Cynthia's letter. He dared not look at Jethro, and his eye

was fixed instead upon the somewhat grandiose signature of Isaac D. Worthington, which they bore. Jethro took them and tore them up, and slowly tossed the pieces into a cuspidor conveniently situated near the foot of the bed. He rose and thrust his hands into his pockets.

"Er — when you get freshened up, come into Number 7," he said.

Number 7! But we shall come to that later. Supper first, in a great pillared dining room filled with notables, if we only had the key. Jethro sits silent at the head of the table eating his crackers and milk, with Cynthia on his left and William Wetherell on his right. Poor William, greatly embarrassed by his sudden projection into the limelight, is helpless in the clutches of a lady-waitress who is demanding somewhat fiercely that he make an immediate choice from a list of dishes which she is shooting at him with astonishing rapidity. But who is this, sitting beside him, who comes to William's rescue, and demands that the lady repeat the bill of fare? Surely a notable, for he has a generous presence, and jet-black whiskers which catch the light, which give the gentleman, as Mr. Bixby remarked, "quite a settin'." Yes, we have met him at last. It is none other than the Honorable Heth Sutton, Rajah of Clovelly, Speaker of the House, who has condescended to help Mr. Wetherell.

His chamberlain, Mr. Bijah Bixby, sits on the other side of the Honorable Heth, and performs the presentation of Mr. Wetherell. But Mr. Sutton, as becomes a man of high position, says little after he has rebuked the waitress, and presently departs with a carefully chosen toothpick; whereupon Mr. Bixby moves into the vacant seat — not to Mr. Wetherell's unqualified delight.

"I've knowed him ever sence we was boys," said Mr. Bixby; "you saw how intimate we was. When he wants a thing done, he says, 'Bije, you go out and git 'em.' Never counts the cost. He was nice to you — wahn't he, Will?" And then Mr. Bixby leaned over and whispered in Mr. Wetherell's ear, "He knows — you understand — he knows."



"Knows what?" demanded Mr. Wetherell.

Mr. Bixby gave him another admiring look.

"Knows you didn't come down here with Jethro jest to see the sights."

At this instant the talk in the dining room fell flat, and looking up William Wetherell perceived a portly, rubicund man of middle age being shown to his seat by the head waiter. The gentleman wore a great, glittering diamond in his shirt, and a watch chain that contained much fine gold. But the real cause of the silence was plainly in the young woman who walked beside him, and whose effective entrance argued no little practice and experience. She was of a type that catches the eye involuntarily and holds it, — tall, well-rounded, fresh-complexioned, with heavy coils of shimmering gold hair. Her gown, which was far from unbecoming, was in keeping with those gifts with which nature had endowed her. She carried her head high, and bestowed swift and evidently fatal glances to right and left during her progress through the room. Mr. Bixby's voice roused the storekeeper from this contemplation of the beauty.

"That's Alvy Hopkins of Gosport and his daughter. Fine gal, hain't she? Ever sence she come down here t'other day she's stirred up more turmoil than any railroad bill I ever seed. She was most suffocated at the governor's ball with fellers tryin' to git dances — some of 'em old fellers, too. And you understand about Alvy?"

"What about him?"

"Alvy says he's a-goin' to be the next governor, or fail up." Mr. Bixby's voice sank to a whisper, and he spoke into Mr. Wetherell's ear. "Alvy says he has twenty-five thousand dollars to put in if necessary. I'll introduce you to him, Will," he added meaningly. "Guess you can help him some — you understand?"

"Mr. Bixby!" cried Mr. Wetherell, putting down his knife and fork.

"There!" said Mr. Bixby, reassuringly, "'twon't be no bother. I know him as well as I do you — call each other by our given names. Guess I was the first man he sent for last

spring. He knows I go through all them river towns. He says, 'Bije, you git 'em.' I understood."

William Wetherell began to realize the futility of trying to convince Mr. Bixby of his innocence in political matters, and glanced at Jethro.

"You wouldn't think he was listenin', would you, Will?" Mr. Bixby remarked.

"Listening?"

"Ears are sharp as a dog's. Callate he kin hear as far as the governor's table, and he don't look as if he knows anything. One way he built up his power — listenin' when they're talkin' sly out there in the rotunda. They're almighty surprised when they l'arn he knows what they're up to. Guess you understand how to go along by quiet and listen when they're talkin' sly."

"I never did such a thing in my life," cried William Wetherell, indignantly aghast.

But Mr. Bixby winked.

"So long, Will," he said, "see you in Number 7."

Never, since the days of Pompadour and Du Barry, until modern American politics were invented, has a state been ruled from such a place as Number 7 in the Pelican House — familiarly known as the Throne Room. In this historic cabinet there were five chairs, a marble-topped table, a pitcher of iced water, a bureau, a box of cigars and a Bible, a chandelier with all the gas jets burning, and a bed, whereon sat such dignitaries as obtained an audience, — railroad presidents, governors and ex-governors and prospective governors, the Speaker, the President of the Senate, Bijah Bixby, Peleg Hartington, mighty chiefs from the North Country, and lieutenants from other parts of the state. These sat on the bed by preference. Jethro sat in a chair by the window, and never took any part in the discussions that raged, but listened. Generally there was some one seated beside him who talked persistently in his ear; as at present, for instance, Mr. Chauncey Weed, Chairman of the Committee on Corporations of the House, who took the additional precaution of putting his hand to his mouth when he spoke.



Mr. Stephen Merrill was in the Throne Room that evening, and confidentially explained to the bewildered William Wetherell the exact situation in the Truro Franchise fight. Inasmuch as it has become our duty to describe this celebrated conflict, — in a popular and engaging manner, if possible, — we shall have to do so through Mr. Wetherell's eyes, and on his responsibility. The biographies of some of the gentlemen concerned have since been published, and for some unaccountable reason contain no mention of the Truro franchise.

"All Gaul," said Mr. Merrill — he was speaking to a literary man — "all Gaul is divided into five railroads. I am one, the Grand Gulf and Northern, the impecunious one. That is the reason I'm so nice to everybody, Mr. Wetherell. The other day a conductor on my road had a shock of paralysis when a man paid his fare. Then there's Balch, president of the 'Down East' road, as we call it. Balch and I are out of this fight, — we don't care whether Isaac D. Worthington gets his franchise or not, or I wouldn't be telling you this. The two railroads which don't want him to get it, because the Truro would eventually become a competitor with them, are the Central and the Northwestern. Alexander Duncan is president of the Central."

"Alexander Duncan!" exclaimed Wetherell. "He's the richest man in the state, isn't he?"

"Yes," said Mr. Merrill, "and he lives in a big square house right here in the capital. He ain't a bad fellow, Duncan. You'd like him. He loves books. I wish you could see his library."

"I'm afraid there's not much chance of that," answered Wetherell.

"Well, as I say, there's Duncan, of the Central, and the other is Lovejoy, of the Northwestern. Lovejoy's a bachelor and a skinflint. Those two, Duncan and Lovejoy, are using every means in their power to prevent Worthington from getting that franchise. Have I made myself clear?"

"Do you think Mr. Worthington will get it?" asked

Wetherell, who had in mind a certain nocturnal visit at his store.

Mr. Merrill almost leaped out of his chair at the question. Then he mopped his face, and winked very deliberately at the storekeeper. Then Mr. Merrill laughed.

"Well, well," he said, "for a man who comes down here to stay with Jethro Bass to ask me that!" Whereupon Mr. Wetherell flushed, and began to perspire himself. "Didn't you hear Isaac D. Worthington's virtuous appeal to the people at Brampton?" said Mr. Merrill.

"Yes," replied Wetherell, getting redder.

"I like you, Will," said Mr. Merrill, unexpectedly, "darned if I don't. I'll tell you what I know about it, and you can have a little fun while you're here, lookin' on, only it won't do to write about it to the *Newcastle Guardian*. Guess Willard wouldn't publish it, anyhow. I suppose you know that Jethro pulls the strings, and we little railroad presidents dance. We're the puppets now, but after a while, when I'm crowded out, all these little railroads will get together and there'll be a row worth looking at, or I'm mistaken. But to go back to Worthington," continued Mr. Merrill, "he made a little mistake with his bill in the beginning. Instead of going to Jethro, he went to Heth Sutton, and Heth got the bill as far as the Committee on Corporations, and there she's been ever since, with our friend Chauncey Weed, who's whispering over there."

"Mr. Sutton couldn't even get it out of the Committee!" exclaimed Wetherell.

"Not an inch. Jethro saw this thing coming about a year ago, and he took the precaution to have Chauncey Weed and the rest of the Committee in his pocket — and of course Heth Sutton's always been there."

William Wetherell thought of that imposing and manly personage, the Honorable Heth Sutton, being in Jethro's pocket, and marvelled. Mr. Chauncey Weed seemed of a species better able to thrive in the atmosphere of pockets.

"Well, as I say, there was the Truro Franchise Bill



sound asleep in the Committee, and when Isaac D. Worthington saw that his little arrangement with Heth Sutton wasn't any good, and that the people of the state didn't have anything more to say about it than the Crow Indians, and that the end of the session was getting nearer and nearer, he got desperate and went to Jethro, I suppose. You know as well as I do that Jethro has agreed to put the bill through."

"Then why doesn't he get the Committee to report it and put it through?" asked Wetherell.

"Bless your simple literary nature," exclaimed Mr. Merrill, "Jethro's got more power than any man in the state, but that isn't saying that he doesn't have to fight occasionally. He has to fight now. He has seven of the twelve senators hitched, and the governor. But Duncan and Lovejoy have bought up all the loose blocks of representatives, and it is supposed that the franchise forces only control a quorum. The end of the session is a week off, and never in all my experience have I seen a more praiseworthy attendance on the part of members."

"Do you mean that they are being paid to remain in their seats?" cried the amazed Mr. Wetherell.

"Well," answered Mr. Merrill, with a twinkle in his eye, "that is a little bald and — and unparliamentary, perhaps, but fairly accurate. Our friend Jethro is confronted with a problem to tax even his faculties, and to look at him, a man wouldn't suspect he had a care in the world."

Jethro was apparently quite as free from anxiety the next morning when he offered, after breakfast, to show Wetherell and Cynthia the sights of the town, though Wetherell could not but think that the Throne Room and the Truro Franchise Bill were left at a very crucial moment to take care of themselves. Jethro talked to Cynthia — or rather, Cynthia talked to Jethro upon innumerable subjects; they looked upon the statue of a great statesman in the park, and Cynthia read aloud the quotation graven on the rock of the pedestal, "The People's Government, made for the People, made by the

People, and answerable to the People." After that they went into the state library, where Wetherell was introduced to the librarian, Mr. Storrow. They did not go into the State House because, as everybody knows, Jethro Bass never went there. Mr. Bijah Bixby and other lieutenants might be seen in the lobbies, and the governor might sign bills in his own apartment there, but the real seat of government was that Throne Room into which we have been permitted to enter.

They walked out beyond the outskirts of the town, where there was a grove or picnic ground which was also used as a park by some of the inhabitants. Jethro liked the spot, and was in the habit sometimes of taking refuge there when the atmosphere of the Pelican House became too thick. The three of them had sat down on one of the board benches to rest, when presently two people were seen at a little distance walking among the trees, and the sight of them, for some reason, seemed to give Jethro infinite pleasure.

"Why," exclaimed Cynthia, "one of them is that horrid girl everybody was looking at in the dining room last night."

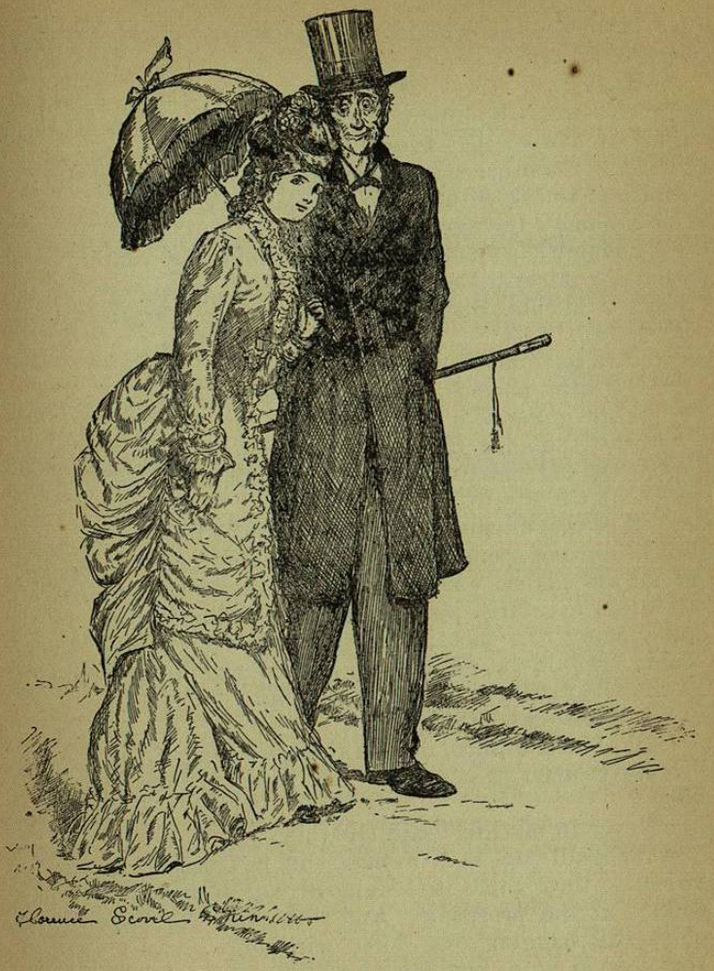
"D-don't like her, Cynthy?" said Jethro.

"No," said Cynthia, "I don't."

"Pretty — hain't she — pretty?"

"She's brazen," declared Cynthia.

It was, indeed, Miss Cassandra Hopkins, daughter of that Honorable Alva who — according to Mr. Bixby — was all ready with a certain sum of money to be the next governor. Miss Cassandra was arrayed fluffily in cool, pink lawn, and she carried a fringed parasol, and she was gazing upward with telling effect into the face of the gentleman by her side. This would have all been very romantic if the gentleman had been young and handsome, but he was certainly not a man to sweep a young girl off her feet. He was tall, angular, though broad-shouldered, with a long, scrawny neck that rose out of a very low collar, and a large head, scantily covered with hair — a head that gave a physical as well as a mental effect of hardness. His smooth-shaven face seemed to bear witness that



"It was, indeed, Miss Cassandra Hopkins."

its owner was one who had pushed frugality to the borders of a vice. It was not a pleasant face, but now it wore an almost benign expression under the influence of Miss Cassandra's eyes. So intent, apparently, were both of them upon each other that they did not notice the group on the bench at the other side of the grove. William Wetherell ventured to ask Jethro who the man was.

"N-name's Lovejoy," said Jethro.

"Lovejoy!" ejaculated the storekeeper, thinking of what Mr. Merrill had told him of the opponents of the Truro Franchise Bill. "President of the 'Northwestern' Railroad?"

Jethro gave his friend a shrewd look.

"G-gettin' posted — hain't you, Will?" he said.

"Is she going to marry that old man?" asked Cynthia.

Jethro smiled a little. "G-guess not," said he, "guess not, if the old man can help it. Nobody's married him yet, and hain't likely to."

Jethro was unusually silent on the way back to the hotel, but he did not seem to be worried or displeased. He only broke his silence once, in fact, when Cynthia called his attention to a large poster of some bloodhounds on a fence, announcing the fact in red letters that "Uncle Tom's Cabin" would be given by a certain travelling company at the Opera House the next evening.

"L-like to go, Cynthy?"

"Oh, Uncle Jethro, do you think we can go?"

"Never b'en to a show — hev you — never b'en to a show?"

"Never in my life," said Cynthia.

"We'll all go," said Jethro, and he repeated it once or twice as they came to Main Street, seemingly greatly tickled at the prospect. And there was the Truro Franchise Bill hanging over him, with only a week left of the session, and Lovejoy's and Duncan's men sitting so tight in their seats! William Wetherell could not understand it.

## CHAPTER XIV

### IN WHICH THE BACK SEATS ARE HEARD FROM

HALF an hour later, when Mr. Wetherell knocked timidly at Number 7, — drawn thither by an irresistible curiosity, — the door was opened by a portly person who wore a shining silk hat and ample gold watch chain. The gentleman had, in fact, just arrived; but he seemed perfectly at home as he laid down his hat on the marble-topped bureau, mopped his face, took a glass of iced water at a gulp, chose a cigar, and sank down gradually on the bed. Mr. Wetherell recognized him instantly as the father of the celebrated Cassandra.

"Well, Jethro," said the gentleman, "I've got to come into the Throne Room once a day anyhow, just to make sure you don't forget me — eh?"

"A-Alvy," said Jethro, "I want you to shake hands with a particular friend of mine, Mr. Will Wetherell of Coniston. Er — Will, the Honorable Alvy Hopkins of Gosport."

Mr. Hopkins rose from the bed as gradually as he had sunk down upon it, and seized Mr. Wetherell's hand impressively. His own was very moist.

"Heard you was in town, Mr. Wetherell," he said heartily. "If Jethro calls you a particular friend, it means something, I guess. It means something to me, anyhow."

"Will hain't a politician," said Jethro. "Er — Alvy?"

"Hello!" said Mr. Hopkins.

"Er — Will don't talk."

"If Jethro had been real tactful," said the Honorable Alvy, sinking down again, "he'd have introduced me as