

the Truro Railroad to Harwich, having considered the same, report the same with the following resolution: Resolved, that the bill ought to pass. Chauncey Weed, for the Committee."

The Truro Franchise! The lights danced, and even a sudden weakness came upon the storekeeper. Jethro's trick! The Duncan and Lovejoy representatives in the theatre, the adherents of the bill here! Wetherell saw Mr. Duncan beside him, a tense figure leaning on the rail, calling to some one below. A man darted up the centre, another up the side aisle. Then Mr. Duncan flashed at William Wetherell from his blue eye such a look of anger as the storekeeper never forgot, and he, too, was gone. Tingling and perspiring, Wetherell leaned out over the railing as the Speaker rapped calmly for order. Hysterical laughter, mingled with hoarse cries, ran over the House, but the Honorable Heth Sutton did not even smile.

A dozen members were on their feet shouting to the chair. One was recognized, and that man Wetherell perceived with amazement to be Mr. Jameson of Wantage, adherent of Jethro's — he who had moved to adjourn for "Uncle Tom's Cabin"! A score of members crowded into the aisles, but the Speaker's voice again rose above the tumult.

"The doorkeepers will close the doors! Mr. Jameson of Wantage moves that the report of the Committee be accepted, and on this motion a roll-call is ordered."

The doorkeepers, who must have been inspired, had already slammed the doors in the faces of those seeking wildly to escape. The clerk already had the little, short-legged desk before him and was calling the roll with incredible rapidity. Bewildered and excited as Wetherell was, and knowing as little of parliamentary law as the gentleman who had proposed the woodchuck session, he began to form some sort of a notion of Jethro's generalship, and he saw that the innocent rural members who belonged to Duncan and Lovejoy's faction had tried to get away before the roll-call, destroy the quorum, and so adjourn the House. These, needless to say, were not par-

liamentarians, either. They had lacked a leader, they were stunned by the suddenness of the onslaught, and had not moved quickly enough. Like trapped animals, they wandered blindly about for a few moments, and then sank down anywhere. Each answered the roll-call sullenly, out of necessity, for every one of them was a marked man. Then Wetherell remembered the two members who had escaped, and Mr. Duncan, and fell to calculating how long it would take these to reach Foster's Opera House, break into the middle of an act, and get out enough partisans to come back and kill the bill. Mr. Wetherell began to wish he could witness the scene there, too, but something held him here, shaking with excitement, listening to each name that the clerk called.

Would the people at the theatre get back in time?

Despite William Wetherell's principles, whatever these may have been, he was so carried away that he found himself with his watch in his hand, counting off the minutes as the roll-call went on. Foster's Opera House was some six squares distant, and by a liberal estimate Mr. Duncan and his advance guard ought to get back within twenty minutes of the time he left. Wetherell was not aware that people were coming into the gallery behind him; he was not aware that one sat at his elbow until a familiar voice spoke directly into his ear.

"Er — Will — held Duncan pretty tight — didn't you? He's a hard one to fool, too. Never suspected a mite, did he? Look out for your watch!"

Mr. Bixby seized it or it would have fallen. If his life had depended on it, William Wetherell could not have spoken a word to Mr. Bixby then.

"You done well, Will, sure enough," that gentleman continued to whisper. "And Alvy's gal done well, too — you understand. I guess she's the only one that ever snarled up Al Lovejoy so that he didn't know where he was at. But it took a fine, delicate touch for her job and yours, Will. Godfrey, this is the quickest roll-call I ever seed! They've got halfway through Truro County. That fellow can talk faster than a side-show ticket-seller at a circus."

The clerk was, indeed, performing prodigies of pronunciation. When he reached Wells County, the last, Mr. Bixby so far lost his habitual *sang froid* as to hammer on the rail with his fist.

"If there hain't a quorum, we're done for," he said. "How much time has gone away? Twenty minutes! Godfrey, some of 'em may break loose and git here in five minutes!"

"Break loose?" Wetherell exclaimed involuntarily.

Mr. Bixby screwed up his face.

"You understand. Accidents is liable to happen."

Mr. Wetherell didn't understand in the least, but just then the clerk reached the last name on the roll; an instant of absolute silence, save for the June-bugs, followed, while the assistant clerk ran over his figures deftly and handed them to Mr. Sutton, who leaned forward to receive them.

"One hundred and twelve gentlemen have voted in the affirmative and forty-eight in the negative, and the report of the Committee is accepted."

"Ten more'n a quorum!" ejaculated Mr. Bixby, in a voice of thanksgiving, as the turmoil below began again. It seemed as though every man in the opposition was on his feet and yelling at the chair: some to adjourn; some to indefinitely postpone; some demanding roll-calls; others swearing at these—for a division vote would have opened the doors. Others tried to get out, and then ran down the aisles and called fiercely on the Speaker to open the doors, and threatened him. But the Honorable Heth Sutton did not lose his head, and it may be doubted whether he ever appeared to better advantage than at that moment. He had a voice like one of the Clovelly bulls that fed in his own pastures in the valley, and by sheer bellowing he got silence, or something approaching it,—the protests dying down to a hum; had recognized another friend of the bill, and was putting another question.

"Mr. Gibbs of Wareham moves that the rules of the House be so far suspended that this bill be read a second and third time by its title, and be put upon its final pas-

sage at this time. And on this motion," thundered Mr. Sutton, above the tide of rising voices, "the yeas and nays are called for. *The doorkeepers will keep the doors shut.*"

"Abbey of Ashburton."

The nimble clerk had begun on the roll almost before the Speaker was through, and checked off the name. Bijah Bixby mopped his brow with a blue pocket-handkerchief.

"My God," he said, "what a risk Jethro's took! they can't git through another roll-call. Jest look at Heth! Ain't he carryin' it magnificent? Hain't as ruffled as I be. I've knowed him ever sence he wahn't no higher'n that desk. Never would have b'en in politics if it hadn't b'en for me. Funny thing, Will—you and I was so excited we never thought to look at the clock. Put up your watch. Godfrey, what's this?"

The noise of many feet was heard behind them. Men and women were crowding breathlessly into the gallery.

"Didn't take it long to git noised araound," said Mr. Bixby. "Say, Will, they're bound to have got at 'em in the thea'tre. Don't see how they held 'em off, c-cussed if I do."

The seconds ticked into minutes, the air became stifling, for now the front of the gallery was packed. Now, if ever, the fate of the Truro Franchise hung in the balance, and, perhaps, the rule of Jethro Bass. And now, as in the distance, came a faint, indefinable stir, not yet to be identified by Wetherell's ears as a sound, but registered somewhere in his brain as a warning note. Bijah Bixby, as sensitive as he, straightened up to listen, and then the whispering was hushed. The members below raised their heads, and some clutched the seats in front of them and looked up at the high windows. Only the Speaker sat like a wax statue of himself, and glanced neither to the right nor to the left.

"Harkness of Truro," said the clerk.

"He's almost to Wells County again," whispered Bijah, excitedly. "I didn't callate he could do it. Will?"

"Yes?"

"Will — you hear somethin'?"

A distant shout floated with the night breeze in at the windows; a man on the floor got to his feet and stood straining: a commotion was going on at the back of the gallery, and a voice was heard crying out: —

"For the love of God, let me through!"

Then Wetherell turned to see the crowd at the back parting a little, to see a desperate man in a gorgeous white necktie fighting his way toward the rail. He wore no hat, his collar was wilted, and his normally ashen face had turned white. And, strangest of all, clutched tightly in his hand was a pink ribbon.

"It's Al Lovejoy," said Bijah, laconically.

Unmindful of the awe-stricken stares he got from those about him when his identity became known, Mr. Lovejoy gained the rail and shoved aside a man who was actually making way for him. Leaning far out, he scanned the house with inarticulate rage while the roll-call went monotonously on. Some of the members looked up at him and laughed; others began to make frantic signs, indicative of helplessness; still others telegraphed him obvious advice about reinforcements which, if anything, increased his fury. Mr. Bixby was now fanning himself with the blue handkerchief.

"I hear 'em!" he said, "I hear 'em, Will!"

And he did. The unmistakable hum of the voices of many men and the sound of feet on stone flagging shook the silent night without. The clerk read off the last name on the roll.

"Tompkins of Ulster."

His assistant lost no time now. A mistake would have been fatal, but he was an old hand. Unmindful of the rumble on the wooden stairs below, Mr. Sutton took the list with an admirable deliberation.

"One hundred and twelve gentlemen have voted in the affirmative, forty-eight in the negative, the rules of the House are suspended, and" (the clerk having twice mumbled the title of the bill) "the question is: Shall the bill

pass? As many as are of opinion that the bill pass will say *Aye*, contrary minded *No*."

Feet were in the House corridor now, and voices rising there, and noises that must have been scuffling — yes, and beating of door panels. Almost every member was standing, and it seemed as if they were all shouting, — "personal privilege," "fraud," "trickery," "open the doors." Bijah was slowly squeezing the blood out of William Wetherell's arm.

"The doorkeepers has the keys in their pockets!" Mr. Bixby had to shout, for once.

Even then the Speaker did not flinch. By a seeming miracle he got a semblance of order, recognized his man, and his great voice rang through the hall and drowned all other sounds.

"And on this question a roll-call is ordered. *The doorkeepers will close the doors!*"

Then, as in reaction, the gallery trembled with a roar of laughter. But Mr. Sutton did not smile. The clerk scratched off the names with lightning rapidity, scarce waiting for the answers. Every man's color was known, and it was against the rules to be present and fail to vote. The noise in the corridors grew louder, some one dealt a smashing kick on a panel, and Wetherell ventured to ask Mr. Bixby if he thought the doors would hold.

"They can break in all they've a mind to now," he chuckled; "the Truro Franchise is safe."

"What do you mean?" Wetherell demanded excitedly.

"If a member hain't present when a question is put, he can't git into a roll-call," said Bijah.

The fact that the day was lost was evidently brought home to those below, for the strife subsided gradually, and finally ceased altogether. The whispers in the gallery died down, the spectators relaxed a little. Lovejoy alone remained tense, though he had seated himself on a bench, and the hot anger in which he had come was now cooled into a vindictiveness that set the hard lines of his face even harder. He still clutched the ribbon. The last part of that famous roll-call was conducted so quietly that

a stranger entering the House would have suspected nothing unusual. It was finished in absolute silence.

"One hundred and twelve gentlemen have voted in the affirmative, forty-eight in the negative, and the bill passes. The House will attend to the title of the bill."

"An act to extend the Truro Railroad to Harwich," said the clerk, glibly.

"Such will be the title of the bill unless otherwise ordered by the House," said Mr. Speaker Sutton. "The doorkeepers will open the doors."

Somebody moved to adjourn, the motion was carried, and thus ended what has gone down to history as the Woodchuck Session. Pandemonium reigned. One hundred and forty belated members fought their way in at the four entrances, and mingled with them were lobbyists of all sorts and conditions, residents and visitors to the capital, men and women to whom the drama of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" was as nothing to that of the Truro Franchise Bill. It was a sight to look down upon. Fierce wrangles began in a score of places, isolated personal remarks rose above the din, but your New Englander rarely comes to blows; in other spots men with broad smiles seized others by the hands and shook them violently, while Mr. Speaker Sutton seemed in danger of suffocation by his friends. His enemies, for the moment, could get nowhere near him. On this scene Mr. Bijah Bixby gazed with pardonable pleasure.

"Guess there wahn't a mite of trouble about the river towns," he said, "I had 'em in my pocket. Will, let's amble round to the thea'tre. We ought to git in two acts."

William Wetherell went. There is no need to go into the psychology of the matter. It may have been numbness; it may have been temporary insanity caused by the excitement of the battle he had witnessed, for his brain was in a whirl; or Mr. Bixby may have hypnotized him. As they walked through the silent streets toward the Opera House, he listened perforce to Mr. Bixby's comments upon some of the innumerable details which Jethro

had planned and quietly carried out while sitting in the window of the Throne Room. A great light dawned on William Wetherell, but too late.

Jethro's trusted lieutenants (of whom, needless to say, Mr. Bixby was one) had been commanded to notify such of their supporters whose fidelity and secrecy could be absolutely depended upon to attend the Woodchuck Session; and, further to guard against surprise, this order had not gone out until the last minute (hence Mr. Amos Cuthbert's conduct). The seats of these members at the theatre had been filled by accommodating townspeople and visitors. Forestalling a possible vote on the morrow to recall and reconsider, there remained some sixty members whose loyalty was unquestioned, but whose reputation for discretion was not of the best. So much for the parliamentary side of the affair, which was a revelation of generalship and organization to William Wetherell. By the time he had grasped it they were come in view of the lights of Foster's Opera House, and they perceived, among a sprinkling of idlers, a conspicuous and meditative gentleman leaning against a pillar. He was ludicrously tall and ludicrously thin, his hands were in his trousers pockets, and the skirts of his Sunday broadcloth coat hung down behind him awry. One long foot was crossed over the other and rested on the point of the toe, and his head was tilted to one side. He had, on the whole, the appearance of a rather mournful stork. Mr. Bixby approached him gravely, seized him by the lower shoulder, and tilted him down until it was possible to speak into his ear. The gentleman apparently did not resent this, although he seemed in imminent danger of being upset.

"How be you, Peleg? Er—you know Will?"

"No," said the gentleman.

Mr. Bixby seized Mr. Wetherell under the elbow, and addressed himself to the storekeeper's ear.

"Will, I want you to shake hands with Senator Peleg Hartington, of Brampton. This is Will Wetherell, Peleg,—from Coniston—you understand."

The senator took one hand from his pocket.

"How be *you*?" he said. Mr. Bixby was once more pulling down on his shoulder.

"H-haow was it here?" he demanded.

"Almighty funny," answered Senator Hartington, sadly, and waved at the lobby. "There wahn't standin' room in the place."

"Jethro Bass Republican Club come and packed the entrance," explained Mr. Bixby with a wink. "You understand, Will? Go on, Peleg."

"Sidewalk *and* street, too," continued Mr. Hartington, slowly. "First come along Ball of Towles, hollerin' like blazes. They crumpled him all up and lost him. Next come old man Duncan himself."

"Will kep' Duncan," Mr. Bixby interjected.

"That was wholly an accident," exclaimed Mr. Wetherell, angrily.

"Will wahn't born in the country," said Mr. Bixby.

Mr. Hartington bestowed on the storekeeper a mournful look, and continued:—

"Never seed Duncan sweatin' before. He didn't seem to grasp why the boys was there."

"Didn't seem to understand," put in Mr. Bixby, sympathetically.

"For God's sake, gentlemen," says he, 'let me in! The Truro Bill!' 'The Truro Bill hain't in the thea'tre, Mr. Duncan,' says Dan Everett. 'Cussed if I didn't come near laughin'.' 'That's "Uncle Tom's Cabin," Mr. Duncan,' says Dan. 'You're a dam fool,' says Duncan. 'I didn't know he was profane. 'Make room for Mr. Duncan,' says Dan, 'he wants to see the show.' 'I'm a-goin' to see you in jail for this, Everett,' says Duncan. 'They let him push in about half a rod, and they swallowed *him*. He was makin' such a noise that they had to close the doors of the thea'tre—so's not to disturb the play-actors.'

"You understand," said Mr. Bixby to Wetherell. Whereupon he gave another shake to Mr. Hartington, who had relapsed into a sort of funereal meditation.

"Well," resumed that personage, "there was some more come, hollerin' about the Truro Bill. Not many. Guess

they'll all have to git their wimmen-folks to press their clothes to-morrow. Then Duncan wanted to git out again, but 'twan't ex'actly convenient. Callated he was suffocatin'—seemed to need air. Little mite limp when he broke loose, Duncan was."

The Honorable Peleg stopped again, as if he were overcome by the recollection of Mr. Duncan's plight.

"Er—er—Peleg!"

Mr. Hartington started.

"What'd they do?—what'd they do?"

"Do?"

"How'd they git notice to 'em?"

"Oh," said Mr. Hartington, "cussed if that *wahn't* funny. Let's see, where was I? After a while they went over t'other side of the street, talkin' sly, waitin' for the act to end. But goldarned if it ever did end."

For once Mr. Bixby didn't seem to understand.

"D-didn't end?"

"No," explained Mr. Hartington; "seems they hitched a kind of nigger minstrel show right on to it—banjos and thingumajigs in front of the curtain while they was changin' scenes, *and* they hitched the second act right on to that. Nobody come out of the thea'tre at all. Funny notion, wahn't it?"

Mr. Bixby's face took on a look of extreme cunning. He smiled broadly and poked Mr. Wetherell in an extremely sensitive portion of his ribs. On such occasions the nasal quality of Bijah's voice seemed to grow.

"You see?" he said.

"Know that little man, Gibbs, don't ye?" inquired Mr. Hartington.

"Airley Gibbs, hain't it? Runs a livery business daown to Rutgers, on Lovejoy's railroad," replied Mr. Bixby, promptly. "I know him. Knew old man Gibbs well's I do you. Mean cuss."

"This Airley's smart—wahn't quite smart enough, though. His bright idea come a little mite late. Hunted up old Christy, got the key to his law office right here in the Duncan Block, went up through the skylight, clumb

down to the roof of Randall's store next door, shinned up the lightnin' rod on t'other side, and stuck his head plump into the Opery House window."

"I want to know!" ejaculated Mr. Bixby.

"Somethin' terrible pathetic was goin' on on the stage," resumed Mr. Hartington, "the folks didn't see him at first, — they was all cryin' and everythin' was still, but Airley wahn't affected. As quick as he got his breath he holered right out loud's he could: 'The Truro Bill's up in the House, boys. We're skun if you don't git thar quick.' Then they tell me the lightnin' rod give way; anyhow, he came down on Randall's gravel roof considerable hard, I take it."

Mr. Hartington, apparently, had an aggravating way of falling into mournful revery and of forgetting his subject. Mr. Bixby was forced to jog him again.

"Yes, they did," he said, "they did. They come out like the thea'tre was afire. There was some delay in gettin' to the street, but not much — not much. All the Republican Clubs in the state couldn't have held 'em then, and the profanity they used wahn't especially edifyin'."

"Peleg's a deacon — you understand," said Mr. Bixby.

"Say, Peleg, where was Al Lovejoy?"

"Lovejoy come along with the first of 'em. Must have hurried some — they tell me he was settin' way down in front alongside of Alvy Hopkins's gal, and when Airley hollered out she screeched *and* clutched on to Al, and Al said somethin' he hadn't ought to and tore off one of them pink gew-gaws she was covered with. He was the *maddest* man I ever see. Some of the club was crowded inside, behind the seats, standin' up to see the show. Al was so anxious to git through he hit Si Dudley in the mouth — injured him some, I guess. Pity, wahn't it?"

"Si hain't in politics, you understand," said Mr. Bixby.

"Callate Si paid to git in there, didn't he, Peleg?"

"Callate he did," assented Senator Hartington.

A long and painful pause followed. There seemed, indeed, nothing more to be said. The sound of applause floated out of the Opera House doors, around which the remaining loiterers were clustered.

"Goin' in, be you, Peleg?" inquired Mr. Bixby.

Mr. Hartington shook his head.

"Will and me had a notion to see somethin' of the show," said Mr. Bixby, almost apologetically. "I kep' my ticket."

"Well," said Mr. Hartington, reflectively, "I guess you'll find some of the show left. That hain't b'en hurt much, so far as I can ascertain."

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The next afternoon, when Mr. Isaac D. Worthington happened to be sitting alone in the office of the Truro Railroad at the capital, there came a knock at the door, and Mr. Bijah Bixby entered. Now, incredible as it may seem, Mr. Worthington did not know Mr. Bixby — or rather, did not remember him. Mr. Worthington had not had at that time much of an experience in politics, and he did not possess a very good memory for faces.

Mr. Bixby, who had, as we know, a confidential and winning manner, seated himself in a chair very close to Mr. Worthington — somewhat to that gentleman's alarm. "How be you?" said Bijah, "I-I've got a little bill here — you understand."

Mr. Worthington didn't understand, and he drew his chair away from Mr. Bixby's.

"I don't know anything about it, sir," answered the president of the Truro Railroad, indignantly; "this is neither the manner nor the place to present a bill. I don't want to see it."

Mr. Bixby moved his chair up again. "Callate you will want to see this bill, Mr. Worthington," he insisted, not at all abashed. "Jethro Bass sent it — you understand — it's *engrossed*."

Whereupon Mr. Bixby drew from his capacious pocket a roll, tied with white ribbon, and pressed it into Mr. Worthington's hands. It was the Truro Franchise Bill.

It is safe to say that Mr. Worthington understood.