CHAPTER XVI

"CYNTHIA LOVED YOU"

THERE are certain instruments used by scientists so delicate that they have to be wrapped in cotton wool and kept in dustless places, and so sensitive that the slightest shock will derange them. And there are certain souls which cannot stand the jars of life — souls created to register thoughts and sentiments too fine for those of coarser construction. Such was the soul of the storekeeper of Coniston. Whether or not he was one of those immortalized in the famous Elegy, it is not for us to say. A celebrated poet who read the letters to the *Guardian* — at Miss Lucretia Penniman's request — has declared Mr. Wetherell to have been a genius. He wrote those letters, as we know, after he had piled his boxes and rolled his barrels into place; after he had added up the columns in his ledger and recorded, each week, the small but ever increasing deficit which he owed to Jethro Bass. Could he have been removed from the barrels and the ledgers, and the debts and the cares and the implications, what might we have had from his pen? That will never be known.

We left him in the lobby of the Opera House, but he did not go in to see the final act of "Uncle Tom's Cabin." He made his way, alone, back to the hotel, slipped in by a side entrance, and went directly to his room, where Cynthia found him, half an hour later, seated by the open window in the dark.

"Aren't you well, Dad?" she asked anxiously. "Why didn't you come to see the play?"

"I — I was detained Cynthia," he said. "Yes — I am well."

She sat down beside him and felt his forehead and his hands, and the events of the evening which were on her lips to tell him remained unspoken.

"You ought not to have left Coniston," she said; "the excitement is too much for you. We will go back to-morrow."

"Yes, Cynthia, we will go back to-morrow."

"In the morning?"

"On the early train," said Wetherell, "and now you must go to sleep."

"I am glad," said Cynthia, as she kissed him good night. "I have enjoyed it here, and I am grateful to Uncle Jethro for bringing us, but — but I like Coniston best."

William Wetherell could have slept but a few hours. When he awoke the sparrows were twittering outside, the fresh cool smells of the morning were coming in at his windows, and the sunlight was just striking across the roofs through the green trees of the Capitol Park. The remembrance of a certain incident of the night before crept into his mind, and he got up and drew on his clothes and thrust his few belongings into the carpet-bag, and knocked on Cynthia's door. She was already dressed, and her eyes rested searchingly on his face.

"Dad, you aren't well. I know it," she said.

But he denied that he was not.

Her belongings were in a neat little bundle under her arm. But when she went to put them in the bag she gave an exclamation, knelt down, took everything out that he had packed, and folded each article over again with amazing quickness. Then she made a rapid survey of the room lest she had forgotten anything, closed the bag, and they went out and along the corridor. But when Wetherell turned to go down the stairs, she stopped him.

"Aren't you going to say goodby to Uncle Jethro?"

"I — I would rather go on and get in the train, Cynthia," he said. "Jethro will understand."

Cynthia was worried, but she did not care to leave him; and she led him, protesting, into the dining room. He had

a sinking fear that they might meet Jethro there, but only a few big-boned countrymen were scattered about, attended by sleepy waitresses. Lest Cynthia might suspect how his head was throbbing, Wetherell tried bravely to eat his breakfast. He did not know that she had gone out, while they were waiting, and written a note to Jethro, explaining that her father was ill, and that they were going back to Coniston. After breakfast, when they went to the desk, the clerk stared at them in astonishment.

"Going, Mr. Wetherell?" he exclaimed.

"I find that I have to get back," stammered the storekeeper. "Will you tell me the amount of my bill?"

"Judge Bass gave me instructions that he would settle that."

"It is very kind of Mr. Bass," said Wetherell, "but I prefer to pay it myself."

The man hesitated.

"The judge will be very angry, Mr. Wetherell."

"Kindly give me the bill."

The clerk made it out and handed it over in silence. Wetherell had in his pocket the money from several contributions to the *Guardian*, and he paid him. Then they set out for the station, bought their tickets and hurried past the sprinkling of people there. The little train for Truro was standing under the sheds, the hissing steam from the locomotive rising perpendicular in the still air of the morning, and soon they were settled in one of the straight-backed seats. The car was almost empty, for few people were going up that day, and at length, after what seemed an eternity of waiting, they started, and soon were in the country once more — in that wonderful Truro valley with its fruit trees and its clover scents; with its sparkling stream that tumbled through the passes and mirrored between green meadow-banks the blue and white of the sky. How hungrily they drank in the freshness of it.

They reached Truro village at eleven. Outside the little tavern there, after dinner, the green stage was

drawn up; and Tom the driver cracked his long whip over the Morgan leaders and they started, swaying in the sand ruts and jolting over the great stones that cropped out of the road. Up they climbed, through narrow ways in the forest — ways hedged with alder and fern and sumach and wild grape, adorned with oxeye daisies and tiger lilies, and the big purple flowers which they knew and loved so well. They passed, too, wild lakes overhung with primeval trees, where the iris and the water-lily grew among the fallen trunks and the water-fowl called to each other across the blue stretches. And at length, when the sun was beginning visibly to fall, they came out into an open cut on the western side and saw again the long line of Coniston once more against the sky.

"Dad," said Cynthia, as she gazed, "don't you love it better than any other place in the world?"

He did. But he could not answer her.

An hour later, from the hilltops above Isaac Worthington's mills, they saw the terraced steeple of Brampton church, and soon the horses were standing with drooping heads and wet sides in front of Mr. Sherman's tavern in Brampton Street; and Lem Hallowell, his honest face aglow with joy, was lifting Cynthia out of the coach as if she were a bundle of feathers.

"Upon my word," he cried, "this is a little might sudden! What's the matter with the capital, Will? Too wicked and sophisticated down thar to suit ye?" By this time, Wetherell, too, had reached the ground, and as Lem Hallowell gazed into his face the laughter in his own died away and gave place to a look of concern. "Don't wonder ye come back," he said, "you're as white as Moses's hoss."

"He isn't feeling very well, Lem;" said Cynthia.

"Jest tuckered, that's all," answered Lem; "you git him right into the stage, Cynthy, I won't be long. Hurry them things off, Tom," he called, and himself seized a huge crate from the back of the coach and flung it on his shoulder. He had his cargo on in a jiffy, clucked to his horses, and they turned into the familiar road to Coniston

just as the sun was dipping behind the south end of the mountain.

"They'll be surprised some, and disappointed some," said Lem, cheerily; "they was kind of plannin' a little celebration when you come back, Will — you and Cynthy. Amandy Hatch was a-goin' to bake a cake, and the minister was callatin' to say some word of welcome. Wahn't goin' to be anything grand — jest homelike. But you was right to come if you was tuckered. I guess Cynthy fetched you. Rias he kep' store and done it well, — brisker'n I ever see him, Rias was. Wait till I put some of them things back, and make you more comfortable, Will."

He moved a few parcels and packages from Wetherell's feet and glanced at Cynthia as he did so. The mountain cast its vast blue shadow over forest and pasture, and above the pines the white mist was rising from Coniston Water — rising in strange shapes. Lem's voice seemed to William Wetherell to have given way to a world-wide silence, in the midst of which he sought vainly for Cynthia and the stage driver. Most extraordinary of all, out of the silence and the void came the checker-paned windows of the store at Coniston, then the store itself, with the great oaks bending over it, then the dear familiar faces, — Moses and Amandy, Eph Prescott limping toward them, and little Rias Richardson in an apron with a scoop shovel in his hand, and many others. They were not smiling at the storekeeper's return — they looked very grave. Then somebody lifted him tenderly from the stage and said: —

"Don't you worry a mite, Cynthy. Jest tuckered, that's all."

William Wetherell was "just tuckered." The great Dr. Coles, authority on pulmonary troubles, who came all the way from Boston, could give no better verdict than that. It was Jethro Bass who had induced Dr. Coles to come to Coniston — much against the great man's inclination, and to the detriment of his patients: Jethro who, on receiving Cynthia's note, had left the capital on the next

train and had come to Coniston, and had at once gone to Boston for the specialist.

"I do not know why I came," said the famous physician to Dr. Abraham Rowell of Tarleton, "I never shall know. There is something about that man Jethro Bass which compels you to do his will. He has a most extraordinary personality. Is this storekeeper a great friend of his?"

"The only intimate friend he had in the world," answered Dr. Rowell; "none of us could ever understand it. And as for the girl, Jethro Bass worships her."

"If nursing could cure him, I'd trust her to do it. She's a natural-born nurse."

The two physicians were talking in low tones in the little garden behind the store when Jethro came out of the doorway.

"He looks as if he were suffering, too," said the Boston physician, and he walked toward Jethro and laid a hand upon his shoulders. "I give him until winter, my friend," said Dr. Coles.

Jethro Bass sat down on the doorstep — on that same millstone where he had talked with Cynthia many years before — and was silent for a long while. The doctor was used to scenes of sorrow, but the sight of this man's suffering unnerved him, and he turned from it.

"D-doctor?" said Jethro, at last.

The doctor turned again. "Yes?" he said.

"D-doctor — if Wetherell hadn't b'en to the capital — would he have lived — if he hadn't been to the capital?"

"My friend," said Dr. Coles, "if Mr. Wetherell had always lived in a warm house, and had always been well fed, and helped over the rough places and shielded from the storms, he might have lived — longer. It is a marvel to me that he has lived so long."

And then the doctor went way, back to Boston. Many times in his long professional life had the veil been lifted for him — a little. But as he sat in the train he said to himself that in this visit to the hamlet of Coniston he had had the strangest glimpse of all.

William Wetherell rallied, as Dr. Coles had predicted,

from that first sharp attack, and one morning they brought up a reclining chair which belonged to Mr. Satterlee, the minister, and set it in the window. There, in the still days of the early autumn, Wetherell looked down upon the garden he had grown to love, and listened to the song of Coniston Water. There Cynthia, who had scarcely left his side, read to him from Keats and Shelley and Tennyson — yet the thought grew on her that he did not seem to hear. Even that wonderful passage of Milton's, beginning "So sinks the day-star in the ocean bed," which he always used to beg her to repeat, did not seem to move him now.

The neighbors came and sat with him, but he would not often speak. Cheery Lem Hallowell and his wife, and Cousin Ephraim, to talk about the war, hobbling slowly up the stairs — for rheumatism had been added to that trouble of the Wilderness bullet now, and Ephraim was getting along in years; and Rias Richardson stole up in his carpet slippers; and Moses, after his chores were done, and Amandy with her cakes and delicacies, which he left untouched — though Amandy never knew it. Yes, and Jethro came. Day by day he would come silently into the room, and sit silently for a space, and go as silently out of it. The farms were neglected now on Thousand Acre Hill. William Wetherell would take his hand, and speak to him, but do no more than that.

There were times when Cynthia leaned over him, listening as he breathed to know whether he slept or were awake. If he were not sleeping, he would speak her name: he repeated it often in those days, as though the sound of it gave him comfort; and he would fall asleep with it on his lips, holding her hand, and thinking, perhaps, of that other Cynthia who had tended and nursed and shielded him in other days. Then she would steal down the stairs to Jethro on the doorstep: to Jethro who would sit there for hours at a time, to the wonder and awe of his neighbors. Although they knew that he loved the storekeeper as he loved no other man, his was a grief that they could not understand.

Cynthia used to go to Jethro in the garden. Sorrow had brought them very near together; and though she had loved him before, now he had become her reliance and her refuge. The first time Cynthia saw him, when the worst of the illness had passed and the strange and terrifying apathy had come, she had hidden her head on his shoulder and wept there. Jethro kept that coat, with the tear stains on it, to his dying day, and never wore it again.

"Sometimes — sometimes I think if he hadn't gone to the capital, Cynthy, this mightn't hev come," he said to her once.

"But the doctor said that didn't matter, Uncle Jethro," she answered, trying to comfort him. She, too, believed that something had happened at the capital.

"N-never spoke to you about anything there — n-never spoke to you, Cynthia?"

"No, never," she said. "He — he hardly speaks at all, Uncle Jethro."

One bright morning after the sun had driven away the frost, when the sumachs and maples beside Coniston Water were aflame with red, Rias Richardson came stealing up the stairs and whispered something to Cynthia.

"Dad," she said, laying down her book, "it's Mr. Merrill. Will you see him?"

William Wetherell gave her a great fright. He started up from his pillows, and seized her wrist with a strength which she had not thought remained in his fingers.

"Mr. Merrill!" he cried — "Mr. Merrill here!"

"Yes," answered Cynthia, agitatedly, "he's downstairs — in the store."

"Ask him to come up," said Wetherell, sinking back again, "ask him to come up."

Cynthia, as she stood in the passage, was of two minds about it. She was thoroughly frightened, and went first to the garden to ask Jethro's advice. But Jethro, so Milly Skinner said, had gone off half an hour before, and did not know that Mr. Merrill had arrived. Cynthia went back again to her father.

"Where's Mr. Merrill?" asked Wetherell.

"Dad, do you think you ought to see him? He — he might excite you."

"I insist upon seeing him, Cynthia."

William Wetherell had never said anything like that before. But Cynthia obeyed him, and presently led Mr. Merrill into the room. The kindly little railroad president was very serious now. The wasted face of the storekeeper, enhanced as it was by the beard, gave Mr. Merrill such a shock that he could not speak for a few moments — he who rarely lacked for cheering words on any occasion. A lump rose in his throat as he went over and stood by the chair and took the sick man's hand.

"I am glad you came, Mr. Merrill," said Wetherell, simply, "I wanted to speak to you. Cynthia, will you leave us alone for a few minutes?"

Cynthia went, troubled and perplexed, wondering at the change in him. He had had something on his mind — now she was sure of it — something which Mr. Merrill might be able to relieve.

It was Mr. Merrill who spoke first when she was gone.

"I was coming up to Brampton," he said, "and Tom Collins, who drives the Truro coach, told me you were sick. I had not heard of it."

Mr. Merrill, too, had something on his mind, and did not quite know how to go on. There was in William Wetherell, as he sat in the chair with his eyes fixed on his visitor's face, a dignity which Mr. Merrill had not seen before — had not thought the man might possess.

"I was coming to see you, anyway," Mr. Merrill said. "I did you a wrong — though as God judges me, I did not think of it at the time. It was not until Alexander Duncan spoke to me last week that I thought of it at all."

"Yes," said Wetherell.

"You see," continued Mr. Merrill, wiping his brow, for he found the matter even more difficult than he had imagined, — "it was not until Duncan told me how you had acted in his library that I guessed the truth — that I remembered myself how you had acted. I knew that you

were not mixed up in politics, but I also knew that you were an intimate friend of Jethro's, and I thought that you had been let into the secret of the woodchuck session. I don't defend the game of politics as it is played, Mr. Wetherell, but all of us who are friends of Jethro's are generally willing to lend a hand in any little manœuvre that is going on, and have a practical joke when we can. It was not until I saw you sitting there beside Duncan that the idea occurred to me. It didn't make a great deal of difference whether Duncan or Lovejoy got to the House or not, provided they didn't learn of the matter too early, because some of their men had been bought off that day. It suited Jethro's sense of humor to play the game that way — and it was very effective. When I saw you there beside Duncan I remembered that he had spoken about the *Guardian* letters, and the notion occurred to me to get him to show you his library. I have explained to him that you were innocent. I — I hope you haven't been worrying."

William Wetherell sat very still for a while, gazing out of the window, but a new look had come into his eyes.

"Jethro Bass did not know that you — that you had — used me?" he asked at length.

"No," replied Mr. Merrill, thickly, "no. He didn't know a thing about it — he doesn't know it now, I believe."

A smile came upon Wetherell's face, but Mr. Merrill could not look at it.

"You have made me very happy," said the storekeeper, tremulously. "I — I have no right to be proud — I have taken his money — he has supported my daughter and myself all these years. But he had never asked me to — to do anything, and I liked to think that he never would."

Mr. Merrill could not speak. The tears were streaming down his cheeks.

"I want you to promise me, Mr. Merrill," he went on presently, "I want you to promise me that you will never speak to Jethro of this, or to my daughter, Cynthia."

Mr. Merrill merely nodded his head in assent. Still he could not speak.

"They might think it was this that caused my death. It was not. I know very well that I am worn out, and that I should have gone soon in any case. And I must leave Cynthia to him. He loves her as his own child."

William Wetherell, his faith in Jethro restored, was facing death as he had never faced life. Mr. Merrill was greatly affected.

"You must not speak of dying, Wetherell," said he, brokenly. "Will you forgive me?"

"There is nothing to forgive, now that you have explained matters, Mr. Merrill," said the storekeeper, and he smiled again. "If my fibre had been a little tougher, this thing would never have happened. There is only one more request I have to make. And that is, to assure Mr. Duncan, from me, that I did not detain him purposely."

"I will see him on my way to Boston," answered Mr. Merrill.

Then Cynthia was called. She was waiting anxiously in the passage for the interview to be ended, and when she came in one glance at her father's face told her that he was happier. She, too, was happier.

"I wish you would come every day, Mr. Merrill," she said, when they descended into the garden after the three had talked awhile. "It is the first time since he fell ill that he seems himself."

Mr. Merrill's answer was to take her hand and pat it. He sat down on the millstone and drew a deep breath of that sparkling air and sighed, for his memory ran back to his own innocent boyhood in the New England country. He talked to Cynthia until Jethro came.

"I have taken a fancy to this girl, Jethro," said the little railroad president, "I believe I'll steal her; a fellow can't have too many of 'em, you know. I'll tell you one thing, — you won't keep her always shut up here in Coniston. She's much too good to waste on the desert air." Perhaps Mr. Merrill, too, had been thinking of the Elegy that morning. "I don't mean to run down Coniston — it's one of the most beautiful places I ever saw. But seriously, Jethro, you and Wetherell ought to send her to

school in Boston after a while. She's about the age of my girls, and she can live in my house. Ain't I right?"

"D-don't know but what you be, Steve," Jethro answered slowly.

"I am right," declared Mr. Merrill, "you'll back me in this, I know it. Why, she's like your own daughter. You remember what I say. I *mean* it. — "What are you thinking about, Cynthia?"

"I couldn't leave Dad and Uncle Jethro," she said.

"Why, bless your soul," said Mr. Merrill, "bring Dad along. We'll find room for him. And I guess Uncle Jethro will get to Boston twice a month if you're there."

And Mr. Merrill got into the buggy with Mr. Sherman and drove away to Brampton, thinking of many things.

"S-Steve's a good man," said Jethro. "C-come up here from Brampton to see your father — did he?"

"Yes," answered Cynthia, "he is very kind." She was about to tell Jethro what a strange difference this visit had made in her father's spirits, but some instinct kept her silent. She knew that Jethro had never ceased to reproach himself for inviting Wetherell to the capital, and she was sure that something had happened there which had disturbed her father and brought on that fearful apathy. But the apathy was dispelled now, and she shrank from giving Jethro pain by mentioning the fact.

He never knew, indeed, until many years afterward, what had brought Stephen Merrill to Coniston. When Jethro went up the stairs that afternoon, he found William Wetherell alone, looking out over the garden with a new peace and contentment in his eyes. Jethro drew breath when he saw that look, as if a great load had been lifted from his heart.

"F-feelin' some better to-day, Will?" he said.

"I am well again, Jethro," replied the storekeeper, pressing Jethro's hand for the first time in months.

"S-soon be, Will," said Jethro, "s-soon be."

Wetherell, who was not speaking of the welfare of the body, did not answer.

"Jethro," he said presently, "there is a little box lying

in the top of my trunk over there in the corner. Will you get it for me?"

Jethro rose and opened the rawhide trunk and handed the little rosewood box to his friend. Wetherell took it and lifted the lid reverently, with that same smile on his face and far-off look in his eyes, and drew out a small daguerreotype in a faded velvet frame. He gazed at the picture a long time, and then he held it out to Jethro; and Jethro looked at it, and his hand trembled.

It was a picture of Cynthia Ware. And who can say what emotions it awoke in Jethro's heart? She was older than the Cynthia he had known, and yet she did not seem so. There was the same sweet, virginal look in the gray eyes, and the same exquisite purity in the features. He saw her again — as if it were yesterday — walking in the golden green light under the village maples, and himself standing in the tannery door; he saw the face under the poke-bonnet on the road to Brampton, and heard the thrush singing in the woods. And — if he could only blot out that scene from his life! — remembered her, a transformed Cynthia, — remembered that face in the lantern-light when he had flung back the hood that shaded it; and that hair which he had kissed, wet, then, from the sleet. Ah, God, for that briefest of moments she had been his!

So he stared at the picture as it lay in the palm of his hand, and forgot him who had been her husband. But at length he started, as from a dream, and gave it back to Wetherell, who was watching him. Her name had never been mentioned between the two men, and yet she had been the one woman in the world to both.

"It is strange," said William Wetherell, "it is strange that I should have had but two friends in my life, and that she should have been one and you the other. She found me destitute and brought me back to life and married me, and cared for me until she died. And after that — you cared for me."

"You — you mustn't think of that, Will, 'twahn't much what I did — no more than any one else would hev done."

"It was everything," answered the storekeeper, simply; "each of you came between me and destruction. There is something that I have always meant to tell you, Jethro, — something that it may be a comfort for you to know. Cynthia loved you."

Jethro Bass did not answer. He got up and stood in the window, looking out.

"When she married me," Wetherell continued steadily, "she told me that there was one whom she had never been able to drive from her heart. And one summer evening, — how well I recall it! — we were walking under the trees on the Mall and we met my old employer, Mr. Judson, the jeweller. He put me in mind of the young countryman who had come in to buy a locket, and I asked her if she knew you. Strange that I should have remembered your name, wasn't it? It was then that she led me to a bench and confessed that you were the man whom she could not forget. I used to hate you then — as much as was in me to hate. I hated and feared you when I first came to Coniston. But now I can tell you — I can even be happy in telling you."

Jethro Bass groaned. He put his hand to his throat as though he were stifling. Many, many years ago he had worn the locket there. And now? Now an impulse seized him, and he yielded to it. He thrust his hand in his coat and drew out a cowhide wallet, and from the wallet the oval locket itself. There it was, tarnished with age, but with that memorable inscription still legible, — "Cynthy, from Jethro"; not Cynthia, but Cynthy. How the years fell away as he read it! He handed it in silence to the storekeeper, and in silence went to the window again. Jethro Bass was a man who could find no outlet for his agony in speech or tears.

"Yes," said Wetherell, "I thought you would have kept it. Dear, dear, how well I remember it! And I remember how I patronized you when you came into the shop. I believed I should live to be something in the world, then. Yes, she loved you, Jethro. I can die more easily now that I have told you — it has been on my mind all these years."

The locket fell open in William Wetherell's hand, for the clasp had become worn with time, and there was a picture of little Cynthia within: of little Cynthia,—not so little now,—a photograph taken in Brampton the year before. Wetherell laid it beside the daguerreotype.

"She looks like her, he said aloud; "but the child is more vigorous, more human—less like a spirit. I have always thought of Cynthia Ware as a spirit."

Jethro turned at the words, and came and stood looking over Wetherell's shoulder at the pictures of mother and daughter. In the rosewood box was a brooch and a gold ring—Cynthia Ware's wedding ring—and two small slips of yellow paper. William Wetherell opened one of these, disclosing a little braid of brown hair. He folded the paper again and laid it in the locket, and handed that to Jethro.

"It is all I have to give you," he said, "but I know that you will cherish it, and cherish her, when I am gone. She—she has been a daughter to both of us."

"Yes," said Jethro, "I will."

William Wetherell lived but a few days longer. They laid him to rest at last in the little ground which Captain Timothy Prescott had hewn out of the forest with his axe, where Captain Timothy himself lies under his slate headstone with the quaint lettering of bygone days. That same autumn Jethro Bass made a pilgrimage to Boston, and now Cynthia Ware sleeps there, too, beside her husband, amid the scenes she loved so well.

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

IN THE TANNERY HOUSE

ONE day, in the November following William Wetherell's death, Jethro Bass astonished Coniston by moving to the little cottage in the village which stood beside the disused tannery, and which had been his father's. It was known as the tannery house. His reasons for this step, when at length discovered, were generally commended: they were, in fact, a disinclination to leave a girl of Cynthia's tender age alone on Thousand Acre Hill while he journeyed on his affairs about the country. The Rev. Mr. Satterlee, gaunt, red-faced, but the six feet of him a man and a Christian, from his square-toed boots to the bleaching yellow hair around his temples, offered to become her teacher. For by this time Cynthia had exhausted the resources of the little school among the birches.

The four years of her life in the tannery house which are now briefly to be chronicled were, for her, full of happiness and peace. Though the young may sorrow, they do not often mourn. Cynthia missed her father; at times, when the winds kept her wakeful at night, she wept for him. But she loved Jethro Bass and served him with a devotion that filled his heart with strange ecstasies—yes, and forebodings. In all his existence he had never known a love like this. He may have imagined it once, back in the bright days of his youth; but the dreams of its fulfilment had fallen far short of the exquisite touch of the reality in which he now spent his days at home. In summer, when she sat, in the face of all the conventions of the village, reading under the but-