Bob shot one look at him, — of which Mr. Duncan seemed blissfully unconscious, — and stalked off abruptly to second base.

The artist sat pensive for a few moments, wondering at the ways of women, his sympathies unaccountably enlisted in behalf of Mr. Worthington.

"Weren't you a little hard on him?" he said.

For answer Cynthia got to her feet.

"I think we ought to be going home," she said.

"Going home!" he ejaculated in amazement.

"I promised Uncle Jethro I'd be there for supper," and she led the way out of the grand stand.

So they drove back to Coniston through the level evening light, and when they came to Ephraim Prescott's harness shop the old soldier waved at them cheerily from under the big flag which he had hung out in honor of the day. The flag was silk, and incidentally Ephraim's most valued possession. Then they drew up before the tannery house, and Cynthia leaped out of the buggy and held out her hand to the painter with a smile.

"It was very good of you to take me," she said.

Jethro Bass, rugged, uncouth, in rawhide boots and swallowtail and coonskin cap, came down from the porch to welcome her, and she ran toward him with an eagerness that started the painter to wondering afresh over the contrasts of life. What, he asked himself, had Fate in store for Cynthia Wetherell?

CHAPTER III

JOURNEYS TO GO

"H-HAVE a good time, Cynthy?" said Jethro, looking down into her face. Love had wrought changes in Jethro, mightier changes than he suspected, and the girl did not know how zealous were the sentries of that love, how watchful they were, and how they told him often and again whether her heart, too, was smiling.

"It was very gay," said Cynthia.

"P-painter-man gay?" inquired Jethro.

Cynthia's eyes were on the orange line of the sunset over Coniston, but she laughed a little, indulgently.

"Cynthy?"

"Yes."

"Er — that Painter-man hain't such a bad fellow — w-why didn't you ask him in to supper?"

"I'll give you three guesses," said Cynthia, but she did not wait for them. "It was because I wanted to be alone with you. Milly's gone out, hasn't she?"

"G-gone a-courtin'," said Jethro.

She smiled, and went into the house to see whether Milly had done her duty before she left. It was characteristic of Cynthia not to have mentioned the subject which was agitating her mind until they were seated on opposite sides of the basswood table.

"Uncle Jethro," she said, "I thought you told Mr. Sutton to give Cousin Eph the Brampton post-office? Do you trust Mr. Sutton?" she demanded abruptly.

"Er — why?" said Jethro. "Why?"

"Because I don't," she answered with conviction; "I think he's a big fraud. He must have deceived you,

Uncle Jethro. I can't see why you ever sent him to Congress."

Although Jethro was in no mood for mirth, he laughed in spite of himself, for he was an American. His lifelong habit would have made him defend Heth to any one but Cynthia.

"'D you see Heth, Cynthy?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the girl, disgustedly, "I should say I did, but not to speak to him. He was sitting on Mr. Worthington's porch, and I heard him tell Mr. Worthington he would give the Brampton post-office to Dave Wheelock. I don't want you to think that I was eavesdropping," she added quickly; "I couldn't help hearing it."

Jethro did not answer.

"You'll make him give the post-office to Cousin Eph, won't you, Uncle Jethro?"

"Yes," said Jethro, very simply, "I will." He meditated awhile, and then said suddenly, "W-won't speak about it — will you, Cynthy?"

"You know I won't," she answered.

Let it not be thought by any chance that Coniston was given over to revelry and late hours, even on the Fourth of July. By ten o'clock the lights were out in the tannery house, but Cynthia was not asleep. She sat at her window watching the shy moon peeping over Coniston ridge, and she was thinking, to be exact, of how much could happen in one short day and how little in a long month. She was aroused by the sound of wheels and the soft beat of a horse's hoofs on the dirt road: then came stifled laughter, and suddenly she sprang up alert and tingling. Her own name came floating to her through the darkness.

The next thing that happened will be long remembered in Coniston. A tentative chord or two from a guitar, and then the startled village was listening with all its might to the voices of two young men singing "When I first went up to Harvard" — probably meant to disclose the identity of the serenaders, as if that were necessary! Coniston, never having listened to grand opera, was entertained

and thrilled, and thought the rendering of the song better on the whole than the church choir could have done it, or even the quartette that sung at the Brampton celebrations behind the flowers. Cynthia had her own views on the subject.

There were five other songs — Cynthia remembers all of them, although she would not confess such a thing. "Naughty, naughty Clara," was another one; the other three were almost wholly about love, some treating it flippantly, others seriously — this applied to the last one, which had many farewells in it. Then they went away, and the crickets and frogs on Coniston Water took up the refrain.

Although the occurrence was unusual, — it might almost be said epoch-making, — Jethro did not speak of it until they had reached the sparkling heights of Thousand Acre Hill the next morning. Even then he did not look at Cynthia.

"Know who that was last night, Cynthy?" he inquired, as though the matter were a casual one.

"I believe," said Cynthia, heroically, "I believe it was a boy named Somers Duncan — and Bob Worthington."

"Er — Bob Worthington," repeated Jethro, but said nothing more.

Of course Coniston, and presently Brampton, knew that Bob Worthington had serenaded Cynthia — and Coniston and Brampton talked. It is noteworthy that (with the jocular exceptions of Ephraim and Lem Hallowell) they did not talk to the girl herself. The painter had long ago discovered that Cynthia was an individual. She had good blood in her: as a mere child she had shouldered the responsibility of her father; she had a natural aptitude for books — a quality reverenced in the community; she visited, as a matter of habit, the sick and the unfortunate; and lastly (perhaps the crowning achievement) she had bound Jethro Bass, of all men, with the fetters of love. Of course I have ended up by making her a paragon, although I am merely stating what people thought of her. Coniston decided at once that she was to marry the heir to the Brampton Mills.

But the heir had gone West, and as the summer wore on, the gossip died down. Other and more absorbing gossip took its place: never distinctly formulated, but whispered; always wishing for more definite news that never came. The statesmen drove out from Brampton to the door of the tannery house, as usual, only it was remarked by astute observers and Jake Wheeler that certain statesmen did not come who had been in the habit of coming formerly. In short, those who made it a custom to observe such matters felt vaguely a disturbance of some kind. The organs of the people felt it, and became more guarded in their statements. What no one knew, except Jake and a few in high places, was that a war of no mean magnitude was impending.

There were three men in the State — and perhaps only three — who realized from the first that all former political combats would pale in comparison to this one to come. Similar wars had already started in other states, and when at length they were fought out another twist had been given to the tail of a long-suffering Constitution; political history in the United States had to be written from an entirely new and unforeseen standpoint, and the unsuspecting people had changed masters.

This was to be a war of extermination of one side or the other. No quarter would be given or asked, and every weapon hitherto known to politics would be used. Of the three men who realized this, and all that would happen if one side or the other were victorious, one was Alexander Duncan, another Isaac D. Worthington, and the third was Jethro Bass.

Jethro would never have been capable of being master of the state had he not foreseen the time when the railroads, tired of paying tribute, would turn and try to exterminate the boss. The really astonishing thing about Jethro's foresight (known to few only) was that he perceived clearly that the time would come when the railroads and other aggregations of capital *would* exterminate the boss, or at least subserviate him. This alone, the writer thinks, gives him some right to greatness. And Jethro

Bass made up his mind that the victory of the railroads, in his state at least, should not come in his day. He would hold and keep what he had fought all his life to gain.

Jethro knew, when Jake Wheeler failed to bring him a message back from Clovelly, that the war had begun, and that Isaac D. Worthington, commander of the railroad forces in the field, had captured his pawn, the hill-Rajah. By getting through to Harwich, the Truro had made a sad muddle in railroad affairs. It was now a connecting link; and its president, the first citizen of Brampton, a man of no small importance in the state. This fact was not lost upon Jethro, who perceived clearly enough the fight for consolidation that was coming in the next Legislature.

Seated on an old haystack on Thousand Acre Hill, that sits in turn on the lap of Coniston, Jethro smiled as he reflected that the first trial of strength in this mighty struggle was to be over (what the unsuspecting world would deem a trivial matter) the postmastership of Brampton. And Worthington's first move in the game would be to attempt to capture for his faction the support of the Administration itself.

Jethro thought the view from Thousand Acre Hill, especially in September, to be one of the sublimest efforts of the Creator. It was September, first of the purple months in Coniston, not the red-purple of the Maine coast, but the blue-purple of the mountains, the color of the bloom on the Concord grape. His eyes, sweeping the mountain from the notch to the granite ramp of the northern buttress, fell on the weather-beaten little farmhouse in which he had lived for many years, and rested lovingly on the orchard, where the golden early apples shone among the leaves. But Jethro was not looking at the apples.

"Cynthy," he called out abruptly, "h-how'd you like to go to Washington?"

"Washington!" exclaimed Cynthia. "When?"

"N-now — to-morrow." Then he added uneasily, "C-can't you get ready?"

Cynthia laughed.

"Why, I'll go to-night, Uncle Jethro," she answered.

"Well," he said admiringly, "you hain't one of them clutterin' females. We can get some finery for you in New York, Cynthy. D-don't want any of them town ladies to put you to shame. Er — not that they would," he added hastily — "not that they would."

Cynthia climbed up beside him on the haystack.

"Uncle Jethro," she said solemnly, "when you make a senator or a judge, I don't interfere, do I?"

He looked at her uneasily, for there were moments when he could not for the life of him make out her drift.

"N-no," he assented, "of course not, Cynthy."

"Why is it that I don't interfere?"

"I callate," answered Jethro, still more uneasily, "I callate it's because you're a woman."

"And don't you think," asked Cynthia, "that a woman ought to know what becomes her best?"

Jethro reflected, and then his glance fell on her approvingly.

"G-guess you're right, Cynthy," he said. "I always had some success in dressin' up Listy, and that kind of set me up."

On such occasions he spoke of his wife quite simply. He had been genuinely fond of her, although she was no more than an episode in his life. Cynthia smiled to herself as they walked through the orchard to the place where the horse was tied, but she was a little remorseful. This feeling, on the drive homeward, was swept away by sheer elation at the prospect of the trip before her. She had often dreamed of the great world beyond Coniston, and no one, not even Jethro, had guessed the longings to see it which had at times beset her. Often she had dropped her book to summon up a picture of what a great city was like, to reconstruct the Boston of her early childhood. She remembered the Mall, where she used to walk with her father, and the row of houses where the rich dwelt, which had seemed like palaces. Indeed, when she read of palaces, these houses always came to her mind. And now

she was to behold a palace even greater than these, — and the house where the President himself dwelt. But why was Jethro going to Washington?

As if in answer to the question, he drove directly to the harness shop instead of to the tannery house. Ephraim greeted them from within with a cheery hail, and hobbled out and stood between the wheels of the buggy.

"That bridle bust again?" he inquired.

"Er — Ephraim," said Jethro, "how long since you b'en away from Coniston — how long?"

Ephraim reflected.

"I went to Harwich with Moses before that bad spell I had in March," he answered.

Cynthia smiled from pure happiness, for she began to see the drift of things now.

"H-how long since you've b'en in foreign parts?" said Jethro.

"'Sixty-five," answered Ephraim, with astonishing promptness.

"Er — like to go to Washington with us to-morrow — like to go to Washington?"

Ephraim gasped, even as Cynthia had.

"Washin'ton!" he ejaculated.

"Cynthy and I was thinkin' of takin' a little trip," said Jethro, almost apologetically, "and we kind of thought we'd like to have you with us. Didn't we, Cynthy? Er — we might see General Grant," he added meaningly.

Ephraim was a New Englander, and not an adept in expressing his emotions. Both Cynthia and Jethro felt that he would have liked to have said something appropriate if he had known how. What he actually said was: —

"What time to-morrow?"

"C-callate to take the nine o'clock from Brampton," said Jethro.

"I'll report for duty at seven," said Ephraim, and it was then he squeezed the hand that he found in his. He watched them calmly enough until they had disappeared in the barn behind the tannery house, and then his thoughts became riotous. Rumors had been rife that

summer, prophecies of changes to come, and the resignation of the old man who had so long been postmaster at Brampton was freely discussed — or rather the matter of his successor. As the months passed, Ephraim had heard David Wheelock mentioned with more and more assurance for the place. He had had many nights when sleep failed him, but it was characteristic of the old soldier that he had never once broached the subject since Jethro had spoken to him two months before. Ephraim had even looked up the law to see if he was eligible, and found that he was, since Coniston had no post-office, and was within the limits of delivery of the Brampton office.

The next morning Coniston was treated to a genuine surprise. After loading up at the store, Lem Hallowell, instead of heading for Brampton, drove to the tannery house, left his horses standing as he ran in, and presently emerged with a little cowhide trunk that bore the letter W. Following the trunk came a radiant Cynthia, following Cynthia, Jethro Bass in a stove-pipe hat, with a carpet-bag, and hobbling after Jethro, Ephraim Prescott, with another carpet-bag. It was remarked in the buzz of query that followed the stage's departure that Ephraim wore the blue suit and the army hat with a cord around it which he kept for occasions. Coniston longed to follow them, in spirit at least, but even Milly Skinner did not know their destination.

Fortunately we can follow them. At Brampton station they got into the little train that had just come over Truro Pass, and steamed, with many stops, down the valley of Coniston Water until it stretched out into a wide range of shimmering green meadows guarded by blue hills veiled in the morning haze. Then, bustling Harwich, and a wait of half an hour until the express from the north country came thundering through the Gap ; then a five-hours' journey down the broad river that runs southward between the hills, dinner in a huge station amidst a pleasant buzz of excitement and the ringing of many bells. Then into another train, through valleys and factory towns and cities until they came, at nightfall, to the metropolis itself.

Cynthia will always remember the awe with which that first view of New York inspired her, and Ephraim confessed that he, too, had felt it, when he had first seen the myriad lights of the city after the long, dusty ride from the hills with his regiment. For all the flags and bunting it had held in '61, Ephraim thought that city crueller than war itself. And Cynthia thought so, too, as she clung to Jethro's arm between the carriages and the clanging street-cars, and looked upon the riches and poverty around her. There entered her soul that night a sense of that which is the worst cruelty of all — the cruelty of selfishness. Every man going his own pace, seeking to gratify his own aims and desires, unconscious and heedless of the want with which he rubs elbows. Her natural imagination enhanced by her life among the hills, the girl peopled the place in the street lights with all kinds of strange evil-doers of whose sins she knew nothing, — adventurers, charlatans, alert cormorants, who preyed upon the unwary. She shrank closer to Ephraim from a perfumed lady who sat next to her in the car, and was thankful when at last they found themselves in the corridor of the Astor House standing before the desk.

Hotel clerks, especially city ones, are supernatural persons. This one knew Jethro, greeted him deferentially as Judge Bass, and dipped the pen in the ink and handed it to him that he might register. By half-past nine Cynthia was dreaming of Lem Hallowell and Coniston, and Lem was driving a yellow street-car full of queer people down the road to Brampton.

There were few guests in the great dining room when they breakfasted at seven the next morning. New York, in the sunlight, had taken on a more kindly expression, and those who were near by smiled at them and seemed full of good-will. Persons smiled at them that day as they walked the streets or stood spellbound before the shop windows, and some who saw them felt a lump rise in their throats at the memories they aroused of forgotten days: the three seemed to bring the very air of the hills with them into that teeming place, and many who had

"Of their progress along Broadway."

come to the city with high hopes, now in the shackles of drudgery, looked after them. They were a curious party, indeed: the straight, dark girl with the light in her eyes and the color in her cheeks; the quaint, rugged figure of the elderly man in his swallow-tail and brass buttons and square-toed, country boots; and the old soldier hobbling along with the aid of his green umbrella, clad in the blue he had loved and suffered for. Had they remained until Sunday, they might have read an amusing account of their visit, — of Jethro's suppers of crackers and milk at the Astor House, of their progress along Broadway. The story was not lacking in pathos, either, and in real human feeling, for the young reporter who wrote it had come, not many years before, from the hills himself. But by that time they had accomplished another marvellous span in their journey, and were come to Washington itself.