coming convention who would be conscientiously opposed to Mr. Sutton's renomination: hence the departure from the capital of Mr. Sutton; hence the generous offer of Mr. Bixby to put his regiment at the disposal of Mr. Bass — free of charge.

The second factor on which victory hung (we can use the past tense now) was none other than his Excellency Alva Hopkins, governor of the state. The bill would never get to his Excellency now — so people said; would never get beyond that committee who had listened so patiently to the twelve weeks of argument. These were only rumors, after all, for the rotunda never knows positively what goes on in high circles; but the rotunda does figuring, too, when at length the problem is reduced to a simple equation, with Bijah Bixby as x. If it were true that Bijah had gone over to Jethro Bass, the Consolidation Bill was dead.

CHAPTER XVIII

A BIOGRAPHICAL EPISODE: HITHERTO UNPUBLISHED

When Jethro Bass walked out of the hotel that evening men looked at him, and made way for him, but none spoke to him. There was something in his face that forbade speech. He was a great man once more — a greater man than ever; and he had, if the persistent rumors were true, accomplished an almost incomprehensible feat, even for Jethro Bass. There was another reason, too, why they stared at him. In all those twelve weeks of that most trying of all sessions he had not once gone into the street, and he had been less than ever common in the eyes of men. Twice a day he had descended to the dining room for a simple meal — that was all; and fewer had gained entrance to Room Number 7 this session than ever before.

There is a river that flows by the capital, a wide and gentle river bordered by green meadows and fringed with willows; higher up, if you go far enough, a forest comes down to the water on the western side. Jethro walked through the hooded bridge, and up the eastern bank until he could see the forest like a black band between the orange sky and the orange river, and there he sat down upon a fallen log on the edge of the bank. But Jethro was thinking of another scene, — of a granite-ribbed pasture on Coniston Mountain that swings in limitless space, from either end of which a man may step off into eternity. William Wetherell, in one of his letters, had described that place as the Threshold of the Nameless Worlds, and so it had seemed to Jethro in the years of his desolation. He was thinking of it now, even as it had been in his mind that winter's evening when Cynthia had come to Coniston

and had surprised him with that look of terrible loneliness on his face.

Yes, and he was thinking of Cynthia. When, indeed, had he not been thinking of her? How many times had he rehearsed the events in the tannery house — for they were the events of his life now. The triumphs over his opponents and enemies fell away, and the pride of power. Such had not been his achievements. She had loved him, and no man had reached a higher pinnacle than that.

Why he had forfeited that love for vengeance, he could not tell. The embers of a man's passions will suddenly burst into flame, and he will fiddle madly while the fire burns his soul. He had avenged her as well as himself; but had he avenged her, now that he held Isaac Worthington in his power? By crushing him, had he not added to her trouble and her sorrow? She had confessed that she loved Isaac Worthington's son, and was not he (Jethro) widening the breach between Cynthia and the son by crushing the father? Jethro had not thought of this. But he had thought of her, night and day, as he had sat in his room directing the battle. Not a day had passed that he had not looked for a letter, hoping against hope. If she had written to him once, if she had come to him once, would he have desisted? He could not say — the fires of hatred had burned so fiercely, and still burned so fiercely, that he clenched his fists when it came over him that Isaac Worthington was at last in his power.

A white line above the forest was all that remained of the sunset when he rose up and took from his coat a silver locket and opened it and held it to the fading light. Presently he closed it again, and walked slowly along the river bank toward the little city twinkling on its hill. He crossed the hooded bridge and climbed the slope, stopping for a moment at a little stationery shop; he passed through the groups which were still loudly discussing this thing he had done, and gained his room and locked the door. Men came to it and knocked and got no answer. The room was in darkness, and the night breeze stirred among the trees in the park and blew in at the window.

At last Jethro got up and lighted the gas and paused at the centre table. He was to violate more than one principle of his life that night, though not without a struggle; and he sat for a long while looking at the blank paper before him. Then he wrote, and sealed the letter — which contained three lines — and pulled the bell cord. The call was answered by a messenger who had been for many years in the service of the Pelican House, and who knew many secrets of the gods. The man actually grew pale when he saw the address on the envelope which was put in his hand and read the denomination of the crisp note under it that was the price of silence.

"F-find the gentleman and give it to him yourself. Er — John?"

"Yes, Mr. Bass?"

"If you don't find him, bring it back."

When the man had gone, Jethro turned down the gas and went again to his chair by the window. For a while voices came up to him from the street, but at length the groups dispersed, one by one, and a distant clock boomed out eleven solemn strokes. Twice the clock struck again, at the half-hour and midnight, and the noises in the house — the banging of doors and the jangling of keys and the hurrying of feet in the corridors — were hushed. Jethro took no thought of these or of time, and sat gazing at the stars in the depths of the sky above the capital dome until a shadow emerged from the black mass of the trees opposite and crossed the street. In a few minutes there were footsteps in the corridor, — stealthy footsteps — and a knock on the door. Jethro got up and opened it, and closed it again and locked it. Then he turned up the gas.

"S-sit down," he said, and nodded his head toward the chair by the table.

Isaac Worthington laid his silk hat on the table, and sat down. He looked very haggard and worn in that light, very unlike the first citizen who had entered Brampton in triumph on his return from the West not many months before. The long strain of a long fight, in which he had risked much for which he had labored a life to gain,

had told on him, and there were crow's-feet at the corners of his eyes, and dark circles under them. Isaac Worthington had never lost before, and to destroy the fruits of such a man's ambition is to destroy the man. He was not as young as he had once been. But now, in the very hour of defeat, hope had rekindled the fire in the eyes and brought back the peculiar, tight-lipped, mocking smile to the mouth. An hour ago, when he had been pacing Alexander Duncan's library, the eyes and the mouth had been different.

Long habit asserts itself at the strangest moments. Jethro Bass took his seat by the window, and remained silent. The clock tolled the half-hour after midnight.

"You wanted to see me," said Mr. Worthington, finally.

Jethro nodded, almost imperceptibly.

"I suppose," said Mr. Worthington, slowly, "I suppose you are ready to sell out." He found it a little difficult to control his voice.

"Yes," answered Jethro, "r-ready to sell out."

Mr. Worthington was somewhat taken aback by this simple admission. He glanced at Jethro sitting motionless by the window, and in his heart he feared him: he had come into that room when the gas was low, afraid. Although he would not confess it to himself, he had been in fear of Jethro Bass all his life, and his fear had been greater than ever since the March day when Jethro had left Coniston. And could he have known, now, the fires of hatred burning in Jethro's breast, Isaac Worthington would have been in terror indeed.

"What have you got to sell?" he demanded sharply.

"G-guess you know, or you wouldn't have come here."

"What proof have I that you have it to sell?"

Jethro looked at him for an instant.

"M-my word," he said.

Isaac Worthington was silent for a while: he was striving to calm himself, for an indefinable something had shaken him. The strange stillness of the hour and the stranger atmosphere which seemed to surround this transaction filled him with a nameless dread. The man in the

window had been his lifelong enemy: more than this, Jethro Bass was not like ordinary men — his ways were enshrouded in mystery, and when he struck, he struck hard. There grew upon Isaac Worthington a sense that this midnight hour was in some way to be the culmination of the long years of hatred between them.

He believed Jethro: he would have believed him even if Mr. Flint had not informed him that afternoon that he was beaten, and bitterly he wished he had taken Mr. Flint's advice many months before. Denunciation sprang to his lips which he dared not utter. He was beaten, and he must pay — the pound of flesh. Isaac Worthington almost thought it would be a pound of flesh.

"How much do you want?" he said.

Again Jethro looked at him.

"B-biggest price you can pay," he answered.

"You must have made up your mind what you want. You've had time enough."

"H-have made up my mind," said Jethro.

"Make your demand," said Mr. Worthington, "and I'll give you my answer."

"B-biggest price you can pay," said Jethro, again.

Mr. Worthington's nerves could stand it no longer.

"Look here," he cried, rising in his chair, "if you've brought me here to trifle with me, you've made a mistake. It's your business to get control of things that belong to other people, and sell them out. I am here to buy. Nothing but necessity brings me here, and nothing but necessity will keep me here a moment longer than I have to stay to finish this abominable affair. I am ready to pay you twenty thousand dollars the day that bill becomes a law."

This time Jethro did not look at him.

"P-pay me now," he said.

"I will pay you the day the bill becomes a law. Then I shall know where I stand."

Jethro did not answer this ultimatum in any manner, but remained perfectly still looking out of the window. Mr. Worthington glanced at him, twice, and got his fingers on the brim of his hat, but he did not pick it up. He

stood so for a while, knowing full well that if he went out of that room his chance was gone. Consolidation might come in other years, but he, Isaac Worthington, would not be a factor in it.

"You don't want a check, do you?" he said at last.

"No — d-don't want a check."

"What in God's name do you want? I haven't got twenty thousand dollars in currency in my pocket."

"Sit down, Isaac Worthington," said Jethro.

Mr. Worthington sat down — out of sheer astonishment, perhaps.

"W-want the consolidation — don't you? Want it bad — don't you?"

Mr. Worthington did not answer. Jethro stood over him now, looking down at him from the other side of the narrow table.

"Know Cynthy Wetherell?" he said.

Then Isaac Worthington understood that his premonitions had been real. The pound of flesh was to be demanded, but strangely enough, he did not yet comprehend the nature of it.

"I know that there is such a person," he answered, for his pride would not permit him to say more.

"W-what do you know about her?"

Isaac Worthington was bitterly angry — the more so because he was helpless, and could not question Jethro's right to ask. What did he know about her? Nothing, except that she had intrigued to marry his son. Bob's letter had described her, to be sure, but he could not be expected to believe that: and he had not heard Miss Lucretia Penniman's speech. And yet he could not tell Jethro that he knew nothing about her, for he was shrewd enough to perceive the drift of the next question.

"Kn-know anything against her?" said Jethro.

Mr. Worthington leaned back in his chair.

"I can't see what Miss Wetherell has to do with the present occasion," he replied.

"H-had her dismissed by the prudential committee — had her dismissed — didn't you?"

"They chose to act as they saw fit."

"T-told Levi Dodd to dismiss her — didn't you?"

That was a matter of common knowledge in Brampton, having leaked out through Jonathan Hill.

"I must decline to discuss this," said Mr. Worthington.

"W-wouldn't if I was you."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say. T-told Levi Dodd to dismiss her, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did." Isaac Worthington had lost in self-esteem by not saying so before.

"Why? Wahn't she honest? Wahn't she capable? Wahn't she a lady?"

"I can't say that I know anything against Miss Wetherell's character, if that's what you mean."

"F-fit to teach — wahn't she — fit to teach?"

"I believe she has since qualified before Mr. Errol."

"Fit to teach — wahn't fit to marry your son — was she?"

Isaac Worthington clutched the table and started from his chair. He grew white to his lips with anger, and yet he knew that he must control himself.

"Mr. Bass," he said, "you have something to sell, and I have something to buy — if the price is not ruinous. Let us confine ourselves to that. My affairs and my son's affairs are neither here nor there. I ask you again, how much do you want for this Consolidation Bill?"

"N-no money will buy it."

"What!"

"C-consent to this marriage, c-consent to this marriage."

There was yet room for Isaac Worthington to be amazed, and for a while he stared up at Jethro, speechless.

"Is that your price?" he asked at last.

"Th-that's my price," said Jethro.

Isaac Worthington got up and went to the window and stood looking out above the black mass of trees at the dome outlined against the star-flecked sky. At first his anger choked him, and he could not think; he had just enough reason left not to walk out of the door. But presently

habit asserted itself in him, too, and he began to reflect and calculate in spite of his anger. It is strange that memory plays so small a part in such a man. Before he allowed his mind to dwell on the fearful price, he thought of his ambitions gratified; and yet he did not think then of the woman to whom he had once confided those ambitions — the woman who was the girl's mother. Perhaps Jethro was thinking of her.

It may have been — I know not — that Isaac Worthington wondered at this revelation of the character of Jethro Bass, for it was a revelation. For this girl's sake Jethro was willing to forego his revenge, was willing at the end of his days to allow the world to believe that he had sold out to his enemy, or that he had been defeated by him.

But when he thought of the marriage, Isaac Worthington ground his teeth. A certain sentiment which we may call pride was so strong in him that he felt ready to make almost any sacrifice to prevent it. To hinder it he had quarrelled with his son, and driven him away, and threatened disinheritance. The price was indeed heavy — the heaviest he could pay. But the alternative — was not that heavier? To relinquish his dream of power, to sink for a while into a crippled state; for he had spent large sums, and one of those periodical depressions had come in the business of the mills, and those Western investments were not looking so bright now.

So, with his hands opening and closing in front of him, Isaac Worthington fought out his battle. A terrible war, that, between ambition and pride — a war to the knife. The issue may yet have been undecided when he turned round to Jethro with a sneer which he could not resist.

"Why doesn't she marry him without my consent?"

In a moment Mr. Worthington knew he had gone too far. A certain kind of an eye is an incomparable weapon, and armed men have been cowed by those who possess it, though otherwise defenceless. Jethro Bass had that kind of an eye.

"G-guess you wouldn't understand if I was to tell you," he said.

Mr. Worthington walked to the window again, perhaps to compose himself, and then came back again.

"Your proposition is," he said at length, "that if I give my consent to this marriage, we are to have Bixby and the governor, and the Consolidation Bill will become a law. Is that it?"

"Th-that's it," said Jethro, taking his accustomed seat.

"And this consent is to be given when the bill becomes a law?"

"Given now. T-to-night."

Mr. Worthington took another turn as far as the door, and suddenly came and stood before Jethro.

"Well, I consent."

Jethro nodded toward the table.

"Er — pen and paper there," he said.

"What do you want me to do?" demanded Mr. Worthington.

"W-write to Bob — write to Cynthy. Nice letters."

"This is carrying matters with too high a hand, Mr. Bass. I will write the letters to-morrow morning." It was intolerable that he, the first citizen of Brampton, should have to submit to such humiliation.

"Write 'em now. W-want to see 'em."

"But if I give you my word they will be written and sent to you to-morrow afternoon?"

"T-too late," said Jethro; "sit down and write 'em now."

Mr. Worthington went irresolutely to the table, stood for a minute, and dropped suddenly into the chair there. He would have given anything (except the realization of his ambitions) to have marched out of the room and to have slammed the door behind him. The letter paper and envelopes which Jethro had bought stood in a little pile, and Mr. Worthington picked up the pen. The clock struck two as he wrote the date, as though to remind him that he had written it wrong. If Flint could see him now! Would Flint guess? Would anybody guess? He stared at the white paper, and his rage came on again like a gust of wind, and he felt that he would rather beg in the

streets than write such a thing. And yet — and yet he sat there. Surely Jethro Bass must have known that he could have taken no more exquisite vengeance than this, to compel a man — and such a man — to sit down in the white heat of passion and write two letters of forgiveness! Jethro sat by the window, to all appearances oblivious to the tortures of his victim.

He who has tried to write a note — the simplest note — when his mind was harassed, will understand something of Isaac Worthington's sensations. He would no sooner get an inkling of what his opening sentence was to be than the flames of his anger would rise and sweep it away. He could not even decide which letter he was to write first: to his son, who had defied him and who (the father knew in his heart) contemned him? or to the schoolteacher, who was responsible for all his misery; who — Mr. Worthington believed — had taken advantage of his son's youth by feminine wiles of no mean order so as to gain possession of him. I can almost bring myself to pity the first citizen of Brampton as he sits there with his pen poised over the paper, and his enemy waiting to read those tender epistles of forgiveness which he has yet to write. The clock has almost got round to the half-hour again, and there is only the date — and a wrong one at that.

"My dear Miss Wetherell, — Circumstances (over which I have no control?)" — ought he not to call her Cynthia? He has to make the letter credible in the eyes of the censor who sits by the window. "My dear Miss Wetherell, — I have come to the conclusion" — two sheets torn up, or thrust into Mr. Worthington's pocket. By this time words have begun to have a colorless look. "My dear Miss Wetherell, — Having become convinced of the sincere attachment which my son Robert has for you, I am writing him to-night to give my full consent to his marriage. He has given me to understand that you have hitherto persistently refused to accept him because I have withheld that consent, and I take this opportunity of expressing my admiration of this praiseworthy resolution

on your part." (If this be irony, it is sublime! Perhaps Isaac Worthington has a little of the artist in him, and now that he is in the heat of creation has forgotten the circumstances under which he is composing.) "My son's happiness and career in life are of such moment to me that, until the present, I could not give my sanction to what I at first regarded as a youthful fancy. Now that my son, for your sake, has shown his determination and ability to make his own way in the world" (Isaac Worthington was not a little proud of this) "I have determined that it is wise to withdraw my opposition, and to recall Robert to his proper place, which is near me. I am sure that my feelings in this matter will be clear to you, and that you will look with indulgence upon any acts of mine which sprang from a natural solicitation for the welfare and happiness of my only child. I shall be in Brampton in a day or two, and I shall at once give myself the pleasure of calling on you. Sincerely yours, Isaac D. Worthington."

Perhaps a little formal and pompous for some people, but an admirable and conciliatory letter for the first citizen of Brampton. Written under such trying circumstances, with I know not how many erasures and false starts, it is little short of a marvel in art: neither too much said, nor too little, for a relenting parent of Mr. Worthington's character, and I doubt whether Talleyrand or Napoleon or even Machiavelli himself could have surpassed it. The second letter, now that Mr. Worthington had got into the swing, was more easily written. "My dear Robert" (it said), — "I have made up my mind to give my consent to your marriage to Miss Wetherell, and I am ready to welcome you home, where I trust I shall see you shortly. I have not been unimpressed by the determined manner in which you have gone to work for yourself, but I believe that your place is in Brampton, where I trust you will show the same energy in learning to succeed me in the business which I have founded there as you have exhibited in Mr. Broke's works. Affectionately, your Father."

A very creditable and handsome letter for a forgiving father. When Mr. Worthington had finished it, and had

addressed both the envelopes, his shame and vexation had, curious to relate, very considerably abated. Not to go too deeply into the somewhat contradictory mental and cardiac processes of Mr. Worthington, he had somehow tricked himself by that magic exercise of wielding his pen into thinking that he was doing a noble and generous action: into believing that in the course of a very few days — or weeks, at the most — he would have recalled his erring son and have given Cynthia his blessing. He would, he told himself, have been forced eventually to yield when that paragon of inflexibility, Bob, dictated terms to him at the head of the locomotive works. Better let the generosity be on his (Mr. Worthington's) side. At all events, victory had never been bought more cheaply. Humiliation, in Mr. Worthington's eyes, had an element of publicity in it, and this episode had had none of that element; and Jethro Bass, moreover, was a highwayman who had held a pistol to his head. In such logical manner he gradually bolstered up again his habitual poise and dignity. Next week, at the latest, men would point to him as the head of the largest railroad interests in the state.

He pushed back his chair, and rose, merely indicating the result of his labors by a wave of his hand. And he stood in the window as Jethro Bass got up and went to the table. I would that I had a pen able to describe Jethro's sensations when he read them. Unfortunately, he is a man with few facial expressions. But I believe that he was artist enough himself to appreciate the perfections of the first citizen's efforts. After a much longer interval than was necessary for their perusal, Mr. Worthington turned.

"G-guess they'll do," said Jethro, as he folded them up. He was too generous not to indulge, for once, in a little well-deserved praise. "Hain't underdone it, and hain't overdone it a mite — hev you? M-man of resource. Callate you couldn't hev beat that if you was to take a week to it."

"I think it only fair to tell you," said Mr. Worthington, picking up his silk hat, "that in those letters I have merely anticipated a very little my intentions in the matter. My

son having proved his earnestness, I was about to consent to the marriage of my own accord."

"G-goin' to do it anyway — was you?"

"I had so determined."

"A-always thought you was high-minded," said Jethro.

Mr. Worthington was on the point of giving a tart reply to this, but restrained himself.

"Then I may look upon the matter as settled?" he said. "The Consolidation Bill is to become a law?"

"Yes," said Jethro, "you'll get your bill." Mr. Worthington had got his hand on the knob of the door when Jethro stopped him with a word. He had no facial expressions, but he had an eye, as we have seen — an eye that for the second time appeared terrible to his visitor. "Isaac Worthington," he said, "a-act up to it. No trickery — or look out — look out."

Then, the incident being closed so far as he was concerned, Jethro went back to his chair by the window, but it is to be recorded that Isaac Worthington did not answer him immediately. Then he said: —

"You seem to forget that you are talking to a gentleman."

"That's so," answered Jethro, "so you be."

He sat where he was long after the sky had whitened and the stars had changed from gold to silver and gone out, and the sunlight had begun to glance upon the green leaves of the park. Perhaps he was thinking of the life he had lived, which was spent now: of the men he had ruled, of the victories he had gained from that place which would know him no more. He had won the last and the greatest of his victories there, compared to which the others had indeed been as vanities. Perhaps he looked back over the highway of his life and thought of the woman whom he had loved, and wondered what it had been if she had trod it by his side. Who will judge him? He had been what he had been; and as the Era was, so was he. Verily, one generation passeth away, and another generation cometh.

* * * * * * *

When Mr. Isaac Worthington arrived at Mr. Duncan's house, where he was staying, at three o'clock in the morning, he saw to his surprise light from the library windows lying in bars across the lawn under the trees. He found Mr. Duncan in that room with Somers, his son, who had just returned from a seaside place, and they were discussing a very grave event. Miss Janet Duncan had that day eloped with a gentleman who — to judge from the photograph Somers held — was both handsome and romantic-looking. He had long hair and burning eyes, and a title not to be then verified, and he owned a castle near some place on the peninsula of Italy not on the map.

CHAPTER XIX

CONTAINING FREE TRANSPORTATION TO BRAMPTON

We are back in Brampton, owning, as we do, an annual pass over the Truro Railroad. Cynthia has been there all the summer, and as it is now the first of September, her school has begun again. I do not by any means intend to imply that Brampton is not a pleasant place to spend the summer: the number of its annual visitors is a refutation of that; but to Cynthia the season had been one of great unhappiness. Several times Lem Hallowell had stopped the stage in front of Ephraim's house to beg her to go to Coniston, and Mr. Satterlee had come himself; but she could not have borne to be there without Jethro. Nor would she go to Boston, though urged by Miss Lucretia; and Mrs. Merrill and the girls had implored her to join them at a seaside place on the Cape.

Cynthia had made a little garden behind Ephraim's house, and she spent the summer there with her flowers and her books, many of which Lem had fetched from Coniston. Ephraim loved to sit there of an evening and smoke his pipe and chat with Ezra Graves and the neighbors who dropped in. Among these were Mr. Gamaliel Ives, who talked literature with Cynthia; and Lucy Baird, his wife, who had taken Cynthia under her wing. I wish I had time to write about Lucy Baird. And Mr. Jonathan Hill came — his mortgage not having been foreclosed, after all. When Cynthia was alone with Ephraim she often read to him, — generally from books of a martial flavor, — and listened with an admirable hypocrisy to certain narratives which he was in the habit of telling.

They never spoke of Jethro. Ephraim was not a casuist,