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,

and his sense of right and wrong came largely through his affections. It is safe to say that he never made an analysis of the sorrow which he knew was afflicting the girl, but he had had a general and most sympathetic understanding of it ever since the time when Jethro had gone back to the capital; and Ephraim never brought home his *Guardian* or his *Clarion* now, but read them at the office, that their contents might not disturb her.

No wonder that Cynthia was unhappy. The letters came, almost every day, with the postmark of the town in New Jersey where Mr. Broke's locomotive works were; and she answered them now (but oh, how scrupulously!), though not every day. If the waters of love rose up through the grains of sand, it was, at least, not Cynthia's fault. Hers were the letters of a friend. She was reading such and such a book — had he read it? And he must not work too hard. How could her letters be otherwise when Jethro Bass, her benefactor, was at the capital working to defeat and perhaps to ruin Bob's father? when Bob's father had insulted and persecuted her? She ought not to have written at all; but the lapses of such a heroine are very rare, and very dear.

Yes, Cynthia's life was very bitter that summer, with but little hope on the horizon of it. Her thoughts were divided between Bob and Jethro. Many a night she lay awake resolving to write to Jethro, even to go to him, but when morning came she could not bring herself to do so. I do not think it was because she feared that he might believe her appeal would be made in behalf of Bob's father. Knowing Jethro as she did, she felt that it would be useless, and she could not bear to make it in vain; if the memory of that evening in the tannery shed would not serve, nothing would serve. And again — he had gone to avenge her.

It was inevitable that she should hear tidings from the capital. Isaac Worthington's own town was ringing with it. And as week after week of that interminable session went by, the conviction slowly grew upon Brampton that its first citizen had been beaten by Jethro Bass. Something of Mr. Worthington's affairs was known: the mills, for instance, were not being run to their full capacity. And then had come the definite news that Mr. Worthington was beaten, a local representative having arrived straight from the rotunda. Cynthia overheard Lem Hallowell telling it to Ephraim, and she could not for the life of her help rejoicing, though she despised herself for it. Isaac Worthington was humbled now, and Jethro had humbled him to avenge her. Despite her grief over his return to that life, there was something to compel her awe and admiration in the way he had risen and done this thing after men had fallen from him. Her mother had had something of these same feelings, without knowing why.

People who had nothing but praise for him before were saying hard things about Isaac Worthington that night. When the baron is defeated, the serfs come out of their holes in the castle rock and fling their curses across the moat. Cynthia slept but little, and was glad when the day came to take her to her scholars, to ease her mind of the thoughts which tortured it.

And then, when she stopped at the post-office to speak to Ephraim on her way homeward in the afternoon, she heard men talking behind the partition, and she stood, as one stricken, listening beside the window. Other tidings had come in the shape of a telegram. The first rumor had been false. Brampton had not yet received the details, but the Consolidation Bill had gone into the House that morning, and would be a law before the week was out. A part of it was incomprehensible to Cynthia, but so much she had understood. She did not wait to speak to Ephraim, and she was going out again when a man rushed past her and through the partition door. Cynthia paused instinctively, for she recognized him as one of the frequenters of the station and a bearer of news.

"Jethro's come home, boys," he shouted; "come in on the four o'clock, and went right off to Coniston. Guess he's done for, this time, for certain. Looks it. By Godfrey, he looks eighty! Callate his day's over, from the way the boys talked on the train."

Cynthia lingered to hear no more, and went out, dazed, into the September sunshine. Jethro beaten, and broken, and gone to Coniston. Resolution came to her as she walked. Arriving home, she wrote a little note and left it on the table for Ephraim; and going out again, ran by the back lane to Mr. Sherman's livery stable behind the Brampton House, and in half an hour was driving along that familiar road to Coniston, alone; for she had often driven Jethro's horses, and knew every turn of the way. And as she gazed at the purple mountain through the haze and drank in the sweet scents of the year's fulness, she was strangely happy. There was the village green in the cool evening light, and the flagstaff with its tip silvered by the departing sun. She waved to Rias and Lem and Moses at the store, but she drove on to the tannery house, and hitched the horse at the rough granite post, and went in, and through the house, softly, to the kitchen.

Jethro was standing in the doorway, and did not turn. He may have thought she was Millicent Skinner. Cynthia could see his face. It was older, indeed, and lined and worn, but that fearful look of desolation which she had once surprised upon it, and which she in that instant feared to see, was not there. Jethro's soul was at peace, though Cynthia could not understand why it was so. She stole to him and flung her arms about his neck, and with a cry he seized her and held her against him for I know not how long. Had it been possible to have held her there always, he would never have let her go. At last he looked down into her tear-wet face, into her eyes that were shining with tears.

"D-done wrong, Cynthy."

Cynthia did not answer that, for she remembered how she, too, had exulted when she had believed him to have accomplished Isaac Worthington's downfall. Now that he had failed, and she was in his arms, it was not for her to judge — only to rejoice.

"Didn't look for you to come back — didn't expect it."

"Uncle Jethro!" she faltered. Love for her had made him go, and she would not say that, either.

"D-don't hate me, Cynthy — don't hate me?"

She shook her head.

"Love me — a little?"

She reached up her hands and brushed back his hair, tenderly, from his forehead. Such — a loving gesture — was her answer.

"You are going to stay here always, now," she said, in a low voice, "you are never going away again."

"G-goin' to stay always," he answered. Perhaps he was thinking of the hillside clearing in the forest — who knows! "You'll come — sometime, Cynthy — sometime?"

"I'll come every Saturday and Sunday, Uncle Jethro," she said, smiling up at him. "Saturday is only two days away, now. I can hardly wait."

"Y-you'll come sometime?"

"Uncle Jethro, do you think I'll be away from you, except — except when I have to?"

"C-come and read to me — won't you — come and read?"

"Of course I will!"

"C-call to mind the first book you read to me, Cynthy?"

"It was 'Robinson Crusoe,'" she said.

"'R-Robinson Crusoe.' Often thought of that book. Know some of it by heart. R-read it again, sometime, Cynthy?"

She looked up at him a little anxiously. His eyes were on the great hill opposite, across Coniston Water.

"I will, indeed, Uncle Jethro, if we can find it," she answered.

"Guess I can find it," said Jethro. "R-remember when you saw him makin' a ship?"

"Yes," said Cynthia, "and I had my feet in the pool."

The book had made a profound impression upon Jethro, partly because Cynthia had first read it to him, and partly for another reason. The isolation of Crusoe, depicted by Defoe's genius, had been comparable to his own isolation, and he had pondered upon it much of late. Yes, and upon a certain part of another book which he had read earlier in life: Napoleon had ended his days on St. Helena.

They walked out under the trees to the brookside and

stood listening to the tinkling of the cowbells in the woodlot beyond. The light faded early on these September evenings, and the smoky mist had begun to rise from the water when they turned back again. The kitchen windows were already growing yellow, and through them the faithful Millicent could be seen bustling about in her preparations for supper. But Cynthia, having accomplished her errand, would not go in. She could not have borne to have any one drive back with her to Brampton then, and she must not be late upon the road.

"I will come Friday evening, Uncle Jethro," she said, as she kissed him and gave one last, lingering look at his face. Had it been possible, she would not have left him, and on her way to Brampton through the gathering darkness she mused anxiously upon that strange calmness he had shown after defeat.

She drove her horse on to the floor of Mr. Sherman's stable, that gentleman himself gallantly assisting her to alight, and walked homeward through the lane. Ephraim had not yet returned from the post-office, which did not close until eight, and Cynthia smiled when she saw the utensils of his cooking-kit strewn on the hearth. In her absence he invariably unpacked and used it, and of course Cynthia at once set herself to cleaning and packing it again. After that she got her own supper — a very simple affair — and was putting the sitting room to rights when Ephraim came thumping in.

"Well, I swan!" he exclaimed when he saw her. "I didn't look for you to come back so soon, Cynthy. Put up the kit — hev you?" He stood in front of the fireplace staring with apparent interest at the place where the kit had been, and added in a voice which he strove to make quite casual, "How be Jethro?"

"He looks older, Cousin Eph," she answered, after a pause, "and I think he is very tired. But he seems — he seems more tranquil and contented than I hoped to find him."

"I want to know," said Ephraim. "I am glad to hear it. Glad you went up, Cynthy — you done right to go.

I'd have gone with you, if you'd only told me. I'll git a chance to go up Sunday."

There was an air of repressed excitement about the veteran which did not escape Cynthia. He held two letters in his hand, and, being a postmaster, he knew the handwriting on both. One had come from that place in New Jersey, and drew no comment. But the other! That one had been postmarked at the capital, and as he had sat at his counter at the post-office waiting for closing time he had turned it over and over with many ejaculations and futile guesses. Past master of dissimulation that he was, he had made up his mind — if he should find Cynthia at home — to lay the letters indifferently on the table and walk into his bedroom. This campaign he now proceeded to carry out.

Cynthia smiled again when he was gone, and shook her head and picked up the letters. Bob's was uppermost and she read that first, without a thought of the other one. And she smiled as she read — for Bob had had a promotion. He was not yet at the head of the locomotive works, he hastened to add, for fear that Cynthia might think that Mr. Broke had resigned the presidency in his favor; and Cynthia never failed to laugh at these little facetious asides. He was now earning the princely sum of ninety dollars a month — not enough to marry on, alas! On Saturday nights he and Percy Broke scrubbed as much as possible of the grime from their hands and faces and went to spend Sunday at Elberon, the Broke place on the Hudson; from whence Miss Sally Broke, if she happened to be at home, always sent Cynthia her love. As Cynthia is still a heroine, I shall not describe how she felt about Sally Broke's love. There was plenty of Bob's own in the letter. Cynthia would not have blamed him if he had fallen in love with Miss Broke. It seemed to her little short of miraculous that, amidst such surroundings, he could be true to her.

After a period which was no briefer than that usually occupied by Bob's letters, Cynthia took the other one from her lap, and stared at it in much perplexity before

she tore it open. We have seen its contents over Mr. Worthington's shoulder, and our hearts will not stop beating — as Cynthia's did. She read it twice before the full meaning of it came to her, and after that she could not well mistake it, — the language being so admirable in every way. She sat very still for a long while, and presently she heard Ephraim go out. But Cynthia did not move. Mr. Worthington relented and Bob recalled! The vista of happiness suddenly opened up, widened and widened until it was too bright for Cynthia's vision, and she would compel her mind to dwell on another prospect, — that of the father and son reconciled. Although her temples throbbed, she tried to analyze the letter. It implied that Mr. Worthington had allowed Bob to remain away on a sort of probation; it implied that it had been dictated by a strong paternal love mingled with a strong paternal justice. And then there was the appeal to her: "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." A terrible insight is theirs to whom it is given to love as Cynthia loved.

Suddenly there came a knock which frightened her, for her mind was running on swiftly from point to point: had, indeed, flown as far as Coniston by now, and she was thinking of that strange look of peace on Jethro's face which had troubled her. One letter she thrust into her dress, but the other she laid aside, and her knees trembled under her as she rose and went into the entry and raised the latch and opened the door. There was a moon, and the figure in the frock coat and the silk hat was the one which she expected to see. The silk hat came off very promptly.

"I hope I am not disturbing you, Miss Wetherell," said the owner of it.

"No," answered Cynthia, faintly.

"May I come in?"

Cynthia held open the door a little wider, and Mr. Worthington walked in. He seemed very majestic and out of place in the little house which Gabriel Post had built, and he carried into it some of the atmosphere of the

walnut and high ceilings of his own mansion. His manner of laying his hat, bottom up, on the table, and of unbuttoning his coat, subtly indicated the honor which he was conferring upon the place. And he eyed Cynthia, standing before him in the lamplight, with a modification of the hawklike look which was meant to be at once condescending and conciliatory. He did not imprint a kiss upon her brow, as some prospective fathers-in-law would have done. But his eyes, perhaps involuntarily, paid a tribute to her personal appearance which heightened her color. She might not, after all, be such a discredit to the Worthington family.

"Won't you sit down?" she asked.

"Thank you, Cynthia," he said; "I hope I may now be allowed to call you Cynthia?"

She did not answer him, but sat down herself, and he followed her example, with his eyes still upon her.

"You have doubtless received my letter," began Mr. Worthington. "I only arrived in Brampton an hour ago, but I thought it best to come to you at once, under the circumstances."

"Yes," replied Cynthia, "I received the letter."

"I am glad," said Mr. Worthington. He was beginning to be a little taken aback by her calmness and her apparent absence of joy. It was scarcely the way in which a school-teacher should receive the advances of the first citizen, come to give a gracious consent to her marriage with his son. Had he known it, Cynthia was anything but calm. "I am glad," he said, "because I took pains to explain the exact situation in that letter, and to set forth my own sentiments. I hope you understood them."

"Yes, I understood them," said Cynthia, in a low tone.

This was enigmatical, to say the least. But Mr. Worthington had come with such praiseworthy intentions that he was disposed to believe that the girl was overwhelmed by the good fortune which had suddenly overtaken her. He was therefore disposed to be a little conciliatory.

"My conduct may have appeared harsh to you," he continued. "I will not deny that I opposed the matter at first.

Robert was still in college, and he has a generous, impressionable nature which he inherits from his poor mother — the kind of nature likely to commit a rash act which would ruin his career. I have since become convinced that he has — ahem — inherited likewise a determination of purpose and an ability to get on in the world which I confess I had underestimated. My friend, Mr. Broke, has written me a letter about him, and tells me that he has already promoted him."

"Yes," said Cynthia.

"You hear from him?" inquired Mr. Worthington, giving her a quick glance.

"Yes," said Cynthia, her color rising a little.

"And yet," said Mr. Worthington, slowly, "I have been under the impression that you have persistently refused to marry him."

"That is true," she answered.

"I cannot refrain from complimenting you, Cynthia, upon such rare conduct," said he. "You will be glad to know that it has contributed more than anything else toward my estimation of your character, and has strengthened me in my resolution that I am now doing right. It may be difficult for you to understand a father's feelings. The complete separation from my only son was telling on me severely, and I could not forget that you were the cause of that separation. I knew nothing about you, except — " He hesitated, for she had turned to him.

"Except what?" she asked.

Mr. Worthington coughed. Mr. Flint had told him, that very morning, of her separation from Jethro, and of the reasons which people believed had caused it. Unfortunately, we have not time to go into that conversation with Mr. Flint, who had given a very good account of Cynthia indeed. After all (Mr. Worthington reflected), he had consented to the marriage, and there was no use in bringing Jethro's name into the conversation. Jethro would be forgotten soon.

"I will not deny to you that I had other plans for my son," he said. "I had hoped that he would marry a

daughter of a friend of mine. You must be a little indulgent with parents, Cynthia," he added with a little smile, "we have our castles in the air, too. Sometimes, as in this case, by a wise provision of providence they go astray. I suppose you have heard of Miss Duncan's marriage."

"No," said Cynthia.

"She ran off with a worthless Italian nobleman. I believe, on the whole," he said, with what was an extreme complaisance for the first citizen, "that I have reason to congratulate myself upon Robert's choice. I have made inquiries about you, and I find that I have had the pleasure of knowing your mother, whom I respected very much. And your father, I understand, came of very good people, and was forced by circumstances to adopt the means of livelihood he did. My attention has been called to the letters he wrote to the *Guardian*, which I hear have been highly praised by competent critics, and I have ordered a set of them for the files of the library. You yourself, I find, are highly thought of in Brampton" (a not unimportant factor, by the way); "you have been splendidly educated, and are a lady. In short, Cynthia, I have come to give my formal consent to your engagement to my son Robert."

"But I am not engaged to him," said Cynthia.

"He will be here shortly, I imagine," said Mr. Worthington.

Cynthia was trembling more than ever by this time. She was very angry, and she had found it very difficult to repress the things which she had been impelled to speak. She did not hate Isaac Worthington now — she despised him. He had not dared to mention Jethro, who had been her benefactor, though he had done his best to have her removed from the school because of her connection with Jethro.

"Mr. Worthington," she said, "I have not yet made up my mind whether I shall marry your son."

To say that Mr. Worthington's breath was taken away when he heard these words would be to use a mild expression. He doubted his senses.

"What?" he exclaimed, starting forward, "what do you mean?"

Cynthia hesitated a moment. She was not frightened, but she was trying to choose her words without passion.

"I refused to marry him," she said, "because you withheld your consent, and I did not wish to be the cause of a quarrel between you. It was not difficult to guess your feelings toward me, even before certain things occurred of which I will not speak. I did my best, from the very first, to make Bob give up the thought of marrying me, although I loved and honored him. Loving him as I do, I do not want to be the cause of separating him from his father, and of depriving him of that which is rightfully his. But something is due to myself. If I should ever make up my mind to marry him," continued Cynthia, looking at Mr. Worthington steadfastly, "it will not be because your consent is given or withheld."

"Do you tell me this to my face?" exclaimed Mr. Worthington, now in a rage himself at such unheard-of presumption.

"To your face," said Cynthia, who got more self-controlled as he grew angry. "I believe that that consent, which you say you have given freely, was wrung from you."

It was unfortunate that the first citizen might not always have Mr. Flint by him to restrain and caution him. But Mr. Flint could have no command over his master's sensations, and anger and apprehension goaded Mr. Worthington to indiscretion.

"Jethro Bass told you this!" he cried out.

"No," Cynthia answered, not in the least surprised by the admission, "he did not tell me — but he will if I ask him. I guessed it from your letter. I heard that he had come back to-day, and I went to Coniston to see him, and he told me — he had been defeated."

Tears came into her eyes at the remembrance of the scene in the tannery house that afternoon, and she knew now why Jethro's face had worn that look of peace. He had made his supreme sacrifice — for her. No, he had told her nothing, and she might never have known. She sat thinking of the magnitude of this thing Jethro had done, and she ceased to speak, and the tears coursed down her cheeks unheeded.

Isaac Worthington had a habit of clutching things when he was in a rage, and now he clutched the arms of the chair. He had grown white. He was furious with her, furious with himself for having spoken that which might be construed into a confession. He had not finished writing the letters before he had stood self-justified, and he had been self-justified ever since. Where now were these arguments so wonderfully plausible? Where were the refutations which he had made ready in case of a barely possible need? He had gone into the Pelican House intending to tell Jethro of his determination to agree to the marriage. That was one. He had done so — that was another — and he had written the letters that Jethro might be convinced of his good will. There were still more, involving Jethro's character for veracity and other things. Summoning these, he waited for Cynthia to have done speaking, but when she had finished — he said nothing. He looked at her, and saw the tears on her face, and he saw that she had completely forgotten his presence.

For the life of him, Isaac Worthington could not utter a word. He was a man, as we know, who did not talk idly, and he knew that Cynthia would not hear what he said; and arguments and denunciations lose their effect when repeated. Again, he knew that she would not believe him. Never in his life had Isaac Worthington been so ignored, so put to shame, as by this school-teacher of Brampton. Before, self-esteem and sophistry had always carried him off between them; sometimes, in truth, with a wound — the wound had always healed. But he had a feeling, to-night, that this woman had glanced into his soul, and had turned away from it. As he looked at her the texture of his anger changed; he forgot for the first time that which he had been pleased to think of as her position in life, and he feared her. He had matched his spirit against hers.

Before long the situation became intolerable to him, for Cynthia still sat silent. She was thinking of how she had blamed Jethro for going back to that life, even though his love for her had made him do it. But Isaac Worthington did not know of what she was thinking — he thought only of himself and his predicament. He could not remain, and yet he could not go — with dignity. He who had come to bestow could not depart like a whipped dog.

Suddenly a fear transfixed him: suppose that this woman, from whom he could not hide the truth, should tell his son what he had done. Bob would believe her. Could he, Isaac Worthington, humble his pride and ask her to keep her suspicions to herself? He would then be acknowledging that they were more than suspicions. If he did so, he would have to appear to forgive her in spite of what she had said to him. And Bob was coming home. Could he tell Bob that he had changed his mind and withdrawn his consent to the marriage? There would be the reason, and again Bob would believe her. And again, if he withdrew his consent, there was Jethro to reckon with. Jethro must have a weapon still, Mr. Worthington thought, although he could not imagine what it might be. As Isaac Worthington sat there, thinking, it grew clear to him at last that there was but one exit out of a very desperate situation.

He glanced at Cynthia again, this time appraisingly. She had dried her eyes, but she made no effort to speak. After all, she would make such a wife for his son as few men possessed. He thought of Sarah Hollingsworth. She had been a good woman, but there had been many times when he had deplored — especially in his travels — the lack of other qualities in his wife. Cynthia, he thought, had these qualities, — so necessary for the wife of one who would succeed to power — though whence she had got them Isaac Worthington could not imagine. She would become a personage; she was a woman of whom they had no need to be ashamed at home or abroad. Having completed these reflections, he broke the silence.

"I am sorry that you should have been misled into

thinking such a thing as you have expressed, Cynthia," he said, "but I believe that I can understand something of the feelings which prompted you. It is natural that you should have a resentment against me after everything that has happened. It is perhaps natural, too, that I should lose my temper under the circumstances. Let us forget it. And I trust that in the future we shall grow into the mutual respect and affection which our nearer relationship will demand."

He rose, and took up his hat, and Cynthia rose too. There was something very fine, he thought, about her carriage and expression as she stood in front of him.

"There is my hand," he said, — "will you take it?"

"I will take it," Cynthia answered, "because you are Bob's father."

And then Mr. Worthington went away.