"Have you anything to urge against it?" asked Mr. Lenox.

"Not exactly on my own account," replied John, "though I admit that the three years or more seems a long time to me, but I have been drawing on you exclusively all my life, except for the little money I earned in Rush & Company's office, and——"

"You have done so, my dear boy," said his father gently, "with my acquiescence. I may have been wrong, but that is a fact. If in my judgment the arrangement may be continued for a while longer, and in the mean time you are making progress toward a definite end, I think you need have no misgivings. It gratifies me to have you feel as you do, though it is no more than I should have expected of you, for you have never caused me any serious anxiety or disappointment, my son."

Often in the after time did John thank God for that assurance.

"Thank you, sir," he said, putting down his hand, palm upward, on the table, and his eyes filled as the elder man laid his hand in his, and they gave each other a lingering pressure.

Mr. Lenox divided the last of the wine in the bottle between the two glasses, and they drank it in silence, as if in pledge.

"I will go in to see Carey & Carey in the morning, and if they are agreeable you can see them afterward," said Mr. Lenox. "They are not one of the great firms, but they have a large and good practice, and they are friends of mine. Shall I do so?" he asked, looking at his son.

"If you will be so kind," John replied, returning his look. And so the matter was concluded.

CHAPTER VIII.

THIS history will not concern itself to any extent with our friend's career as a law clerk, though, as he promised himself, he took it seriously and laboriously while it lasted, notwithstanding that after two years of being his own master, and the rather desultory and altogether congenial life he had led, he found it at first even more irksome than he had fancied. The novice penetrates but slowly the mysteries of the law, and, unless he be of unusual aptitude and imagination, the interesting and remunerative part seems for a long time very far off. But John stuck manfully to the reading, and was diligent in all that was put upon him to do; and after a while the days spent in the office and in the work appointed to him began to pass more quickly.

He restrained his impulse to call at Sixty-ninth Street until what seemed to him a fitting interval had elapsed; one which was longer than it would otherwise have been, from an instinct of shyness not habitual to him, and a distrustful apprehension that perhaps his advent was not of so much moment to the people there as to him. But their greeting was so cordial on every hand that Mrs. Carling's remark that they had been almost afraid he had forgotten them embarrassed

while it pleased him, and his explanations were somewhat lame. Miss Blake, as usual, came to the rescue, though John's disconcert was not lessened by the suspicion that she saw through his inventions. He had conceived a great opinion of that young person's penetration.

His talk for a while was mostly with Mr. Carling, who was in a pleasant mood, being, like most nervous people, at his best in the evening. Mary made an occasional contributory remark, and Mrs. Carling, as was her wont, was silent except when appealed to. Finally, Mr. Carling rose and, putting out his hand, said: "I think I will excuse myself, if you will permit me. I have had to be down town to-day, and am rather tired." Mrs. Carling followed him, saying to John as she bade him good night: "Do come, Mr. Lenox, whenever you feel like it. We are very quiet people, and are almost always at home."

"Thank you, Mrs. Carling," responded John, with much sincerity. "I shall be most glad to. I am so quiet myself as to be practically noiseless."

The hall of the Carlings' house was their favorite sitting place in the evening. It ran nearly the whole depth of the house, and had a wide fireplace at the end. The further right hand portion was recessed by the stairway, which rose from about the middle of its length.

Miss Blake sat in a low chair, and John took its fellow at the other angle of the fireplace, which contained the smoldering remnant of a wood fire. She had a bit of embroidery stretched over a circular frame like a drum-head. Needlework was not a passion with her, but it was understood in the Carling household that in course of

time a set of table doilies of elaborate devices in colored silks would be forthcoming. It has been deplored by some philosopher that custom does not sanction such little occupations for masculine hands. It would be interesting to speculate how many embarrassing or disastrous consequences might have been averted if at a critical point in a negotiation or controversy a needle had had to be threaded or a dropped stitch taken up before a reply was made, to say nothing of an excuse for averting features at times without confession of confusion.

The great and wise Charles Reade tells how his hero, who had an island, a treasure ship, and a few other trifles of the sort to dispose of, insisted upon Captain Fullalove's throwing away the stick he was whittling, as giving the captain an unfair advantage. The value of the embroidered doily as an article of table napery may be open to question, but its value, in an unfinished state, as an adjunct to discreet conversation, is beyond all dispute.

"Ought I to say good night?" asked John with a smile, as he seated himself on the disappearance of Mr. and Mrs. Carling.

"I don't see any reason," she replied. "It isn't late. Julius is in one of his periods of retiring early just now. By and by he will be sure to take up the idea again that his best sleep is after midnight. At present he is on the theory that it is before twelve o'clock."

"How has he been since your return?" John asked.

"Better in some ways, I think," she replied. "He seems to enjoy the home life in contrast with the traveling about and living in hotels; and

then, in a moderate way, he is obliged to give some attention to business matters, and to come in contact with men and affairs generally."

"And you?" said John. "You find it pleasant to be back?"

"Yes," she said, "I do. As my sister said, we are quiet people. She goes out so little that it is almost not at all, and when I go it has nearly always to be with some one else. And then, you know that while Alice and I are originally New Yorkers, we have only been back here for two or three years. Most of the people, really, to whose houses we go are those who knew my father. But," she added, "it is a comfort not to be carrying about a traveling bag in one hand and a weight of responsibility in the other."

"I should think," said John, laughing, "that your maid might have taken the bag, even if she couldn't carry your responsibilities."

"No," she said, joining in his laugh, "that particular bag was too precious, and Eliza was one of my most serious responsibilities. She had to be looked after like the luggage, and I used to wish at times that she could be labeled and go in the van. How has it been with you since your return? and," as she separated a needleful of silk from what seemed an inextricable tangle, "if I may ask, what have you been doing? I was recalling," she added, putting the silk into the needle, "some things you said to me on the Altruria. Do you remember?"

"Perfectly," said John. "I think I remember every word said on both sides, and I have thought very often of some things you said to me. In fact, they had more influence upon my mind than you imagined."

She turned her work so that the light would fall a little more directly upon it.

"Really?" she asked. "In what way?"

"You put in a drop or two that crystallized the whole solution," he answered. She looked up at him inquiringly.

"Yes," he said, "I always knew that I should have to stop drifting some time, but there never seemed to be any particular time. Some things you said to me set the time. I am under 'full steam a-head' at present. Behold in me," he exclaimed, touching his breast, "the future chief of the Supreme Court of the United States, of whom you shall say some time in the next brief interval of forty years or so, 'I knew him as a young man, and one for whom no one would have predicted such eminence!' and perhaps you will add, 'It was largely owing to me.'"

She looked at him with an expression in which amusement and curiosity were blended.

"I congratulate you," she said, laughing, "upon the career in which it appears I had the honor to start you. Am I being told that you have taken up the law?"

"Not quite the whole of it as yet," he said; "but when I am not doing errands for the office I am to some extent taken up with it," and then he told her of his talk with his father and what had followed. She overcame a refractory kink in her silk before speaking.

"It takes a long time, doesn't it, and do you like it?" she asked.

"Well," said John, laughing a little, "a weaker word than 'fascinating' would describe the pursuit, but I hope with diligence to reach some

of the interesting features in the course of ten or twelve years."

"It is delightful," she remarked, scrutinizing the pattern of her work, "to encounter such enthusiasm."

"Isn't it?" said John, not in the least wounded by her sarcasm.

"Very much so," she replied, "but I have always understood that it is a mistake to be too sanguine."

"Perhaps I'd better make it fifteen years, then," he said, laughing. "I should have a choice of professions by that time at any rate. You know the proverb that 'At forty every man is either a fool or a physician.'" She looked at him with a smile. "Yes," he said, "I realize the alternative." She laughed a little, but did not reply.

"Seriously," he continued, "I know that in everything worth accomplishing there is a lot of drudgery to be gone through with at the first, and perhaps it seems the more irksome to me because I have been so long idly my own master. However," he added, "I shall get down to it, or up to it, after a while, I dare say. That is my intention, at any rate."

"I don't think I have ever wished that I were a man," she said after a moment, "but I often find myself envying a man's opportunities."

"Do not women have opportunities, too?" he said. "Certainly they have greatly to do with the determination of affairs."

"Oh, yes," she replied, "it is the usual answer that woman's part is to influence somebody. As for her own life, it is largely made for her. She has, for the most part, to take what comes to her by the will of others."

"And yet," said John, "I fancy that there has seldom been a great career in which some woman's help or influence was not a factor."

"Even granting that," she replied, "the career was the man's, after all, and the fame and visible reward. A man will sometimes say, 'I owe all my success to my wife, or my mother, or sister,' but he never really believes it, nor, in fact, does any one else. It is *his* success, after all, and the influence of the woman is but a circumstance, real and powerful though it may be. I am not sure," she added, "that woman's influence, so called, isn't rather an overrated thing. Women like to feel that they have it, and men, in matters which they hold lightly, flatter them by yielding, but I am doubtful if a man ever arrives at or abandons a settled course or conviction through the influence of a woman, however exerted."

"I think you are wrong," said John, "and I feel sure of so much as this: that a man might often be or do for a woman's sake that which he would not for its sake or his own."

"That is quite another thing," she said. "There is in it no question of influence; it is one of impulse and motive."

"I have told you to-night," said John, "that what you said to me had influenced me greatly."

"Pardon me," she replied, "you employed a figure which exactly defined your condition. You said I supplied the drop which caused the solution to crystallize—that is, to elaborate your illustration, that it was already at the point of saturation with your own convictions and intentions."

"I said also," he urged, "that you had set the time for me. Is the idea unpleasant to you?" he asked after a moment, while he watched her face. She did not at once reply, but presently she turned to him with slightly heightened color and said, ignoring his question:

"Would you rather think that you had done what you thought right because you so thought, or because some one else wished to have you? Or, I should say, would you rather think that the right suggestion was another's than your own?"

He laughed a little, and said evasively: "You ought to be a lawyer, Miss Blake. I should hate to have you cross-examine me unless I were very sure of my evidence."

She gave a little shrug of her shoulders in reply as she turned and resumed her embroidery. They talked for a while longer, but of other things, the discussion of woman's influence having been dropped by mutual consent.

After John's departure she suspended operations on the doily, and sat for a while gazing reflectively into the fire. She was a person as frank with herself as with others, and with as little vanity as was compatible with being human, which is to say that, though she was not without it, it was of the sort which could be gratified but not flattered—in fact, the sort which flattery wounds rather than pleases. But despite her apparent skepticism she had not been displeased by John's assertion that she had influenced him in his course. She had expressed herself truly, believing that he would have done as he had without her intervention; but she thought that he was sincere, and it was pleasant to her to have him think as he did.

Considering the surroundings and conditions under which she had lived, she had had her share of the acquaintance and attentions of agreeable men, but none of them had ever got with her beyond the stage of mere friendliness. There had never been one whose coming she had particularly looked forward to, or whose going she had deplored. She had thought of marriage as something she might come to, but she had promised herself that it should be on such conditions as were, she was aware, quite improbable of ever being fulfilled. She would not care for a man because he was clever and distinguished, but she felt that he must be those things, and to have, besides, those qualities of character and person which should attract her. She had known a good many men who were clever and to some extent distinguished, but none who had attracted her personally. John Lenox did not strike her as being particularly clever, and he certainly was not distinguished, nor, she thought, ever very likely to be; but she had had a pleasure in being with him which she had never experienced in the society of any other man, and underneath some boyish ways she divined a strength and steadfastness which could be relied upon at need. And she admitted to herself that during the ten days since her return, though she had unsparingly snubbed her sister's wonderings why he did not call, she had speculated a good deal upon the subject herself, with a sort of resentful feeling against both herself and him that she should care——

Her face flushed as she recalled the momentary pressure of his hand upon hers on that last night on deck. She rang for the servant, and went up to her room.