THE MAKING OF TWO----By Sarah Comstock

DOLSON found his mill musty from disuse. The scant sunlight in it looked tarnished. The key had groaned rheumatically in the lock, not having been turned for weeks. To be sure, this was the dull season, but there was no longer any denying the fact that he and his wheel were at last deserted.

Accompanied by the mill cat, he returned to his house. Here, as in the mill, decay was evident; the curled hair stuffing was bursting through chair covers, rust dulled the stove, black cracks ran over the ceiling like rivers on a map. He set about getting supper from a stale smelling cupboard.

Beyond the open west door stretched a billow of prairie farm land. The farmhouses were distant; but now he paused and looked toward something nearer than the houses. Against the low copper disk of a sun stood a prairie schooner. He watched it until the disk slipped away from behind it.

Some years ago parts of the middle West used to be sprinkled in summer with the canvas covered homes of "the campers," coming nowhence, going nowhither. They would squat on the edge of towns, picking up odds and ends of work, of charity, sometimes of other people's possessions. Some were neither beggars nor thieves, though merely bits of flotsam. This man who had asked permission to camp upon Dolson's land looked honest enough. And the baby had burst into crows of cordiality upon meeting the miller. It was curious. He had not spoken to a child for years.

Long before the farmers around used to see Dolson's great figure on horseback night after night. He would loom up against the bare sky just as his voice loomed up against the prairie silence. He always sang as he rode, for he was "keepin' company" with a girl in Pleasant City.

He and his mill toiled a twelvemonth, making ready a home for her. A week before the wedding day he rode across the moonlight, a songful silhouette, to find that she had gone. A travelling prestidigitator had plucked a dove from the crown of her hat, thereby charming her; she had accompanied him to be divided with a sword in public, to be united with a ring in private.

For weeks Dolson had been making trips to Bolivia—the larger town beyond Pleasant City—purchasing treasures for the cottage. People saw him driving home with a black walnut parlor set—crimson rep upholstery, marble topped table, three cornered whatnot. Later he returned with a bedroom suite that eclipsed the other—towering bureau, huge cluster of fruit carved at the top of each piece. There followed a Brussels carpet covered with baskets which spilled red roses as big as cabbages, and a wire plant stand for the south window.

Then came that last fierce, silent ride home. He shut himself into his cottage for ten days, the wheel waiting, hushed. On the following night a fire was seen on his land; the morning revealed a heap of ashes—the remains of the black walnut furniture, the Brussels carpet, the countless knickknacks.

Stained marble tops were in the pile, the tortured limbs of the plant stand lay where they had writhed. A curved something stood up stark from the mass of ruin; all that remained of an heirloom once brought half across a continent in one of the old time prairie schooners. It was the rocker of the quaint little New England cradle.

Nothing was left of the cottage's finery. Dolson resumed life among his former meagre furnishings. The mill opened again, but the miller was no longer the same man. He attended to his work faithfully, as always; but he built a wall of taciturnity between himself and his kind.

Women and children especially he shunned. Taciturnity grew toward surliness. Of late, since a new mill had come into the district, farmers were taking their grists where sociability buzzed with the wheel. Dolson was left alone. His soul, like his mill, was falling into decay through disuse.

After night had fallen the cat went to the door, gave a swift glance about, then, her body to the ground, she was off to the night of adventure in the mill which the mice had not yet deserted. As she sped away Dolson was conscious of increased loneliness. He was reaping as he had sown; but the sight of the covered wagon gave him a sense of comfort. It stood out now against a moonlit sky.

He locked his door for the night, then took up his accordion and sang a number of songs, from force of habit rather than from any impulse to sing. He had been playing for an hour or more when "Jeannette and Jeannot" was broken off sharply by a knock. The man's dull face was white and frightened.

"She's dyin'," he said.

"Who?"

"Her." He thrust a thumb in the direction of his camp. "Come, kin yuh? She wants to tell yuh."

When the two reached the wagon there was no one beside the deathbed save the sleeping baby and "the healer"—a poor fanatic who travelled through the West. The ass upon which he had ridden stood near, his white robe caught the moonlight.

"He kep' givin' her th' edge of his dress to kiss, but it didn't do no good," the man eplained.

"Shan't I go for a doctor?"

"No. Th' aint time. Sh' wants t' see yuh quick b-fore she's took worse."

When the woman saw Dolson her face became eager. He bent close to hear her.

"Yuh spoke kind t' the baby," he made out. "I want yuh—to take him—and find him a home—with a woman to raise him. He mus' have a woman to raise him."

Dolson was at a loss, but the mother waited anxiously for his answer. This was no time to hesitate. "All right—I'll find—somebody," he said.

She sighed her relief. "We're strangers everywhere, but you know folks. You can find somebody. I can't have him raised this no 'count way on wheels," she went on. There was something dominant about her even on her deathbed. "I'd a' got him off of wheels myself if I hadn't a-died."

She fell silent for a little. The baby continued to sleep beside her. On the bare ground the healer knelt in prayer.

"I—must have—a woman—to raise the baby," she added, restlessly. "He couldn't do it, anyhow," she added, insisting her husband. "He allays was doteess, somehow."

"Yes, I never did seem t' amount t' much," the man responded. There was no bitterness in her tone, no repentance in his; it was as if they had commented upon a hopeless affliction, like the lack of sight or of hearing.

"No, a doteess man on wheels ain't one t' raise a boy," she said.

"No, he ain't," he assented again

"'Sides, I'm set on it, he must have a mother," she persisted.

Suddenly the baby roused, saw Dolson, and reached toward him with a delighted "Ah-g-g-g!" and the miller lifted it in his big arms.

The mother smiled contentedly. "You'll find him the right woman," she said, and died.

Stricken by his failure, the poor healer mounted his ass and rode away to the prairie for a period of fasting and prayer. Dolson took the baby home for the night.

Next day he and the camper made a grave not far from the mill, as the woman had requested. "I've travelled fur 'nough now, I want to quit right here," she had said.

"Reckon she'll rest better now," said the man. "Sh' used t' say her bones did get so tired o' the wagon. I'm different. Seems t' kind o' ease mine t' feel the joltin'. Reckon I'll be movin' on again."

Nevertheless, he lingered through the next day, keeping the baby constantly with him. He took the youngster into town when he went to buy a small envelope of morning glory seed, which he planted upon the grave. He sat on the miller's porch holding the child for hours, occasionally muttering under his breath: "No, as she said, a do-less man on wheels ain't one t' raise a boy."

He rocked the baby to sleep, then laid it in Dolson's bed, and stood looking at it with a tenderness which lighted the usually dull expression. Dolson thought that the man's face was as childish as the child's; there was a curious immaturity about him, as if he had never gripped life. Suddenly he stooped and kissed the baby, said a blundering goodby to the miller, and was off, calling back: "You'll find the right woman, I know." A little later Dolson watched the wagon moving off like a slow black beetle crawling against the sky.

"He's a queer one," said Dolson. "Thought maybe he'd wait 'round till he saw what kind o' home I could find for the little shaver. Looked like he kind o' hated to give him up and then had to do it all of a sudden before he backed down. They're a queer lot anyhow, them campers. Nobody never sees the same ones again—Lord knows what becomes of 'em."

He fell asleep soon beside the child. When he woke next morning he confronted the fact that he must now set about finding the foster mother.

A farmer drove in with a wagon load of corn that day, being in too much of a hurry to go to the further mill. He opened astonished eyes at the baby.

"Where 'd you get it?"

"Camper woman died, and she asked me a find a woman to bring it up. Know anybody?"

The farmer shook his head. "Everybody I know's got all they want."

"Well, maybe you'll hear o' somebody. Lemme know if you do."

The news that Dolson had a baby to give away spread promptly, and curiosity brought grists to the mill. Those who entered found the youngster sitting upon the dusty floor, grabbing in turn at the cat's tail and the coins of sunlight which the dancing cottonwood leaves flung twinkling about like those a naughty boy throws in school with a bit of mirror.

To every one was put the same question: "Know anybody wants him?"

From every one came the same reply: "Plenty of 'em already."

At the end of a week Dolson stated the case to the baby. "Don't seem to be nobody in town wants you. Soon's I can we'll make a trip to the city and look for the woman." So, temporarily, the two settled down together.

It occurred to Dolson one evening that the campers never called the baby by any name, and he sat up until 2 o'clock trying to choose one. In the end he was as much distraught as in the beginning. "Abraham Lincoln," "Billy," and "Nehemiah" clamored for place along with countless others.

Morning brought counsel. "I tell you how we'll do it," he said. "We'll try a new one every week till we get one that suits. Every Sunday it'll be like puttin' on clean clothes, to come out fresh and slick in a new name. We'll start off with Job."

His own words touching garments caught his attention. "You ain't got what might be called a full trousseau, have you?" he commented. This led to disturbing thoughts.

Babies that he recalled had had many things that Job lacked. They had worn shoes, sat in high chairs, eaten upon trays, ridden in carriages. His perplexity was much increased after the visit of a book agent.

"I am introducing a volume entitled "The Care of the Infant," she said.

"Lemme see it," responded Dolson.

It was a large, begilded volume of many spinster penned pages. It was intended, as set down in the introduction, to "safely guide the young mother from the moment when, with the rustle of departing angel wings, she finds the precious burden left in her arms." It was impressive. Dolson counted out five precious dollars, and the agent, happening to have an extra copy, left the Pandora's box with him then and there. That night he lighted the shadeless lamp, opened the book and let loose the troubles.

The writer insisted upon the importance of strangely prepared infant food—old fashioned milk was good enough, he had supposed. The depicted perils of the second summer caused him to quake. The chill of evening air, it was emphasized, must be warded from the frail and precious gift as if it were a blow.

"And there you used to lay out in that wagon all night, you poor little shaver," Dolson whispered. "You ought 'a' had a funeral by now if you'd done 'cordin' to the book. Hope it don't hender your teeth a-comin'. My goodness, you ain't feverish, are you?" he added, peering at the sleep flushed cheeks.

All night he dreamed of infantile convulsions, and he waked an hour before his usual time, oppressed by an undefined terror. What really weighed upon him was Job, astride his chest; the youngster had him by the forelock and was clk-clking while he jounced, as to the motion of a horse.

Dolson shook off the dream and tossed the baby, laughing. He had forgotten the sound of his own laugh, and it was odd to him. "You don't look much like an invalid. Guess you're able to go to the city and 'tend to your shoppin'. We'll shut up the mill to-morrow and go on a toot."

In Bolivia were toy and furniture and dry goods stores on Main street. Dolson's purchases were modest, but no young mother ever spent more time and effort in choosing high chair, crib and clothing.

"Guess we got to go home 'thout the carriage," he said at last, turning regretfully from an ornate vehicle of rattan shaded by a fluffy parasol. "I did want to see you ridin' in a real stylish rig, but 't won't do to go bust. You're gettin' pretty old for that kind too," he added in self-consolation.

Job, as usual, smiled affably. The dirty, loose jointed, paintless old prairie schooner had been as good a vehicle to lie and gurgle and suck a thumb in as the most elegantly upholstered affair.

On the way home Dolson seemed to feel that he must make explanation. "I was goin' to look for a home for you first time we went to the city," he said, "but we was so took up with buyin' all them things we didn't get to do it. When we do it we want to take time to find just the right woman."

But he became too busy at home to think of another journey for some time. When the shiny new crib and high chair entered the cottage they suddenly revealed the miserable shabbiness of their environment.

"By jing, I didn't know how seedy everything was," Dolson exclaimed, looking at the contrast in astonishment. "I have been livin' like that grubby old hermit up the creek. Time I cleaned house, now I got a partner."

The more he swept and scrubbed the more fastidious he grew. The first cleaning did not satisfy him and he went all over the cottage again. He repaired the furniture too as well as he could, declaring that he would buy new chairs and tables as soon as the autumn money began to come in. He levelled the bureau which for a decade had reeled for want of a caster. He whitewashed away the cracks in the ceiling. He scrubbed the mirror and saw himself as he had not done for years.

"Gosh!" he said, and turned away and thought.

"Guess a man runs down just like a house," he said at length. He took out a photograph of the handsome young miller who had once "kept comp'ny" with the girl who had run away and returned the portrait of him. "Gosh!" he said again, and the homely word took on the dignity of the tragic.

"Seein' 's I'm so partic'lar about your lookin' stylish I'd better look after my own appearance," he said to the baby, and he did.

The miller had purchased toys—a woolly dog, a Noah's ark, gayly colored books—"just as well to have 'em ready soon's you feel inclined to learn readin'," he said. But the baby preferred his own amusements.

The hulking brownish green grasshoppers furnished him much entertainment. He would scramble along the dusty ground after them as they crawled, saying "Clk, clk!" now and then whipping them with a bit of Long Tom grass, and yet they seldom flew away. They seemed to know that he was a child. The cat, with a cord around her neck, suffered him to belabor her with a heavy sunflower stalk.

His very thought turned to driving; a grasshopper, the cat, the miller, it was all the same to him what steed so long as he drove. He had been born in a wagon while it was crossing the prairie; he had begun life a wanderer, always pushing on to nowhere.

At first he was permitted to play wherever his wabbly legs carried him. He went as far as his mother's grave one day and pulled up all the little morning glories that had poked their green noses through the earth. But after the swimming experience Dolson never lost sight of him.

The miller opened his weekly paper one Sunday and read therein an interesting paragraph to the effect that the human young swim naturally. So he said to Adam: "Guess you better be startin' in right along. If you put it off too long you'll have to learn like anybody else."

It was one of those hot days in September when the air quivers above miles of glaring fields. Down under the thick growth of trees the creek lay cool and seductive. Dolson settled Adam in "the carriage" under the red and white umbrella and started for the water

He jumped into his boat and towed to a point above the dam. Here he stripped Adam to the likeness of the ancestor for whom he was named and held him up. "See the water? Like it? Ready?" he inquired.

"Ah-g-g-g!" exclaimed Adam with enthusiasm, stretching his arm toward the whimsical ripples.

"That's right. Shows it's your instinct, like the piece said. Here you go, then."

Adam dropped with a plop instead of striking out! Dolson, wet from terror, plunged after him and had him back in the boat before the fishes had gathered their wits. Adam sputtered, dripped like a hooked fish; then he cheerfully remarked "Ah-g-g-g!" and looked about for further adventure. But Dolson was overwhelmed with remorse and fear. From that day on the youngster played at the end of a tether.

A revivalist who had always had a liking for Dolson called at the cottage one evening.

"I hear you've got a young one now," said the Rev. Sam Smith after a tremendous handshaking. "I'm here to see him, not you." The two gray men smiled at each other as only friends can.

"Seems to me, you and the house look a good deal spruced up," the minister added.

The miller proudly presented Dicky. "Ain't he a smart little shaver?"

"He does you credit. What are you going to do with him?"

"Find him a good home with a woman to raise him. Know anybody?" The words seemed to come mechanically from long habit.

"Can't name anybody offhand, but I'll be on the lookout," the Rev. Sam responded, taking up the matter in his forceful way.

Dolson changed the subject. "There's somethin' been botherin' me. You got kids o' your own, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"I ain't got any women to ask. Maybe you know. I want to learn a song to sing to him. The ones I know are kind o' gloomy, like 'Nigh to a Grave' and that kind. Do you know any that's good for little kids?"

The Rev. Sam reflected. "There's an old song that runs, 'A froggie came to the mill door,'" he muttered.

Dolson pounced upon the idea. "That'd be fine," he cried. "That's the one for me. It's fittin', bein' we live at a mill."

But the Rev. Sam knew no more of the song. "I'll teach you another one about a frog," he said, and Dolson took down the accordion.

"A frog he would a-wooing go," sang the miller after him, and the accordion repeated the notes.

Line by line the song was taught as by mother to mother these two gray men bent earnestly upon their task, until the last "gammon and spinach" was mastered.

"I'll keep my eyes open for a good mother for Dickey," the minister said, as Dolson held the lamp for him to see the steps.

The miller did not reply. "If you come across that song about the frog and the mill, bring it around next time," he said.

It had been a wonderful season. Sombre gold was now spread over the fields; Dolson contemplated the prosperity in which he would soon share. The preparations for work and the care of the baby consumed so much time that he still deferred the trip to Bolivia.

But the revivalist remembered his promise. Late one afternoon a man and woman drove up to the cottage.

"Mr. Dolson?"

"That's my name."

"I am Mr. Warner." The person evidently thought this sufficient, and it was; the miller recognized the owner of one of the largest stores in the city and a pillar of Bolivian society.

Dolson ushered in the guests. There were elaborate preliminaries on the part of Mr. Warner before he arrived at what he had to say. During these his wife's eyes, which were small and swift, covered the room and then rested upon George Washington so pointedly that he toddled behind Dolson's legs and peeped out in trepidation.

At last it came. "The Rev. Samuel Smith has called upon us during his stay in Bolivia, and he has informed us that you are seeking a home for this little one. As he is motherless, so are we childless. We have consulted for days and have at last determined to take him and rear him as our own." With the rhetorical rounding of his phrase Mr. Warner reached for George Washington, intending to lift him to his knee in dramatic climax; but the youngster, squealing, hid completely behind the legs.

"My wife will be the mother he needs," said Mr. Warner.

The miller had gone white. He put a hand on the baby. "I dunno—" he stammered. "No—I don't think—he better go." His voice was in an ague.

Mr. Warner was surprised. "Is there a misunderstanding? Are you not seeking a home for the child?"

"I was," Dolson said miserably. "I—no, I think he better stay here—a while. I—no, I ain't lookin' for a home for him just now."

Mrs. Warner rose. "Do you know what kind of a home you're refusing for the child?" she asked indignantly. "I'd like to see you find a better. Come, Mr. Warner."

"I ain't got nothin' against the home," protested Dolson. "Only I—I ain't lookin' for a place just now——"

The couple bowed and departed, much offended. Dolson sank wretchedly into a chair, his face in his hands, while the baby plucked and tugged at them to uncover it.

He rose and prepared supper, but in silence. George Washington's bedtime came; the miller undressed the little chap, tucked him in, watched until the breaths were heavy and rhythmical. Then he flung himself into the easy chair, staring at the winking mica eyes of the baseburner.

Now, at last, he saw the truth. He faced self-accusation, and it was merciless. "I been stealin' that baby," he said; and his eyes strayed to the west window beyond which lay the pitiful, lonely grave.

"She gave him into my keepin' and she charged me to find him a mother. A mother. And what 've I been doin'? I ain't honestly tried to find one in all these weeks, and now one comes and offers herself, and I hang onto the kid like somebody was tryin' to steal him. I'm the one that's stealin' him—and she trusted me—her that's dead."

For hours it ran on, the bitter condemnation. He saw now that he had been pretending to himself all along; promising himself that he would carry out the wish of the dying mother, never in his unseen thoughts meaning to do so. He dragged these thoughts forth and charged them with the betrayal of a dying woman's trust. He sat there through the night, going over and over it all; when the first anemic light showed he had made up his mind.

When George Washington woke Dolson dressed and fed him, singing "Rowly-powly gammon and spinach" the while in a desperate effort at cheer. He closed the mill for the day and set out with the baby.

On Maple street, in Bolivia, Dolson found the Warner house. Its aspect chilled him. It was one of Bolivia's most pretentious homes, but there was a primness about the very gingerbread work. The miller gave a great gulp and twisted the doorbell.

In the rigidity of the parlor he waited for Mr. and Mrs. Warner. The crushed plush chairs — crimson, peacock blue, olive and old gold—were set out as if by chart. A Rogers group, "The Charity Patient," stood in the precise centre of a table. A pair of landscapes, "Winter" and "Summer," differed not a fraction of an inch in distance from the mantel. The picture of his simple cottage in its new tidiness assumed a comfort, a warmth, in contrast with this. He looked with misgiving at George Washington.

"Never mind, it's a fine home, with a mother, and we'll go on toots," he whispered. "And she must 'a' been right—you need a woman."

Dolson's host and hostess greeted him rigidly. He rose in embarrassment. "I've—brung him," he said.

The offended couple had no intention of giving in readily. They felt it due their dignity that Dolson should be forced to plead for the privileges he had rejected. "I was kind o' took all of a sudden," he explained, "and I couldn't make up my mind to give him up right off. Him and me's got on pretty good together. But I aint got no right to keep him, I know that."

In the end it was agreed upon. George Washington was to be reared in charted rooms, to be taught charted manners. The miller said a brusque goodby to him, choking back his misery.

"Will Saturdays be convenient for me to call and take him on his toots?" he asked at the door.

"His toots?"

"Little benders, I mean—when I ride him in his carriage and buy him toys and that kind o' thing."

Mrs. Warner's eyes snapped. "If we take him it's understood that all former ties are severed."

Dolson's eyes swung to George Washington where he sat in the peacock blue rocker. His thoughts tottered for an instant; then, with only one idea distinct, he snatched the baby and almost ran. Hugging him close, as if rescuing him from kidnappers, he was out upon the street. He heard the Warner door shut tartly.

He walked rapidly to the station. His thoughts knew no let now. In their reaction, after the hours of renunciation, they stopped at nothing. The baby was his, he had a right to it, he defied any one to take it from him. Who had a better right to this little waif? he demanded.

Deserted, he had rescued the baby, had clothed and fed it, had been father and mother to it. Yes, mother. Who dared say that a woman could have done more? What of his promise to her? He had fulfilled it in spirit if not in letter. He would never give up the baby now.

Once more taking up housekeeping with his "partner" he openly announced that the partnership was to continue. "He's my kid now, I've decided to raise him," he told every one.

The community had from the first been interested in the baby with a history, and the news that he was to be reared a member of it increased the interest. "Dolson's kid" was known for his hospitality, the Warner couple being the only guests to whom he had ever failed to extend cordiality. Farmers, driving to the mill, brought him little gifts. Children begged their fathers to take them along to see the famous baby.

But the popularity was not his alone. The miller had thrown down the wall which shut out others. He did not understand it all; but, in truth, he had opened the doors of the disused soul when the baby came, like those of the shabby old mill; had let in the sun, had put it in repair. Children, once afraid of his silence, now chattered to him.

His prosperity had returned and was more than in the old years. The new miller had not been honest, and now that Dolson was friendly again his customers were glad to come back. Gradually the corn was "shucked out" and, as Christmas approached, an ever growing procession turned in at his road—wagons that for so long had passed on—Mennen's with its old familiar creak, Rain's with its clatter, Forman's with its vivid green paint, Elsbree's with its yellow umbrella, closed for the winter and standing like a mast. Dolson hired a man and ran the mill night and day.

His plans for the future galloped now. Jim or Seth or Richard Henry (he must soon settle upon a name, the miller told himself) would be sent to the school in Pleasant City, then to the Bolivia High School, then to the university at Lawrence. He smiled at himself, but for all that he sent to the university for a catalogue and read it from cover to cover.

Seeing a holiday display in the store he bethought him of a Christmas tree. He went to Bolivia for one, bought it for the fabulous price charged in that prairie region, to which evergreens have to be brought from great distances, and spent lavishly on its adornment. He would give Richard Henry a party and invite all the children to be found.

One evening shortly before Christmas he put the baby to bed early, then went to the sitting room and brought forth the tree from the closet where it stood, planted in a butter tub. He opened the boxes of golden balls and tinsel, festoons, took off his coat and began the task of trimming.

When some, one knocked he was sprinkling diamond dust upon the cotton snow of the lower branches and he did not rise from his knees, supposing it to be the hired man. "Come in!" he shouted, and went on sprinkling the dust.

"How do, Mr. Dolson?" said the visitor shyly.

Dolson looked up and gazed dumbly at the man. It was—no, it could not be—he was changed in some wonderful, indefinable way—yet it was—

"Sitting on the dusty mill floor."

"How do," said the miller dully, and rose and shook hands. As yet he could not grasp the situation—the appearance of this man whom he had thought never to see again. "Just fixin' up a tree for—some little neighbors," he said.

"I didn't come on wheels this time," said the man with a smile of pleasure.

"No?"

"No. I'm off'm now for good." He drew himself erect. It seemed as if something within him had drawn itself erect too.

"What you doin'?" the miller asked after a pause.

"Workin' in the Chicago imp'ment works. Good job too. I managed t' get off jus' long 'nough t' come here and right back. My sister's keepin' house for me. I'm off'm wheels for good," he repeated proudly.

After a long pause: "You found—a good home for him?" he asked.

A terrible foreshadowing fell upon Dolson. There was a silence in which one of the frail golden balls, falling, shivering, seemed to make a resounding crash.

"Yes," he said at length.

The visitor waited, but Dolson did not continue.

"That's what I come t' see about," the man said. "I'll tell you how 'tis. After I went off 'thout him I couldn't quit thinkin' about him, and I just made up my mind I'd got to get him back if they was any way to do it.

"Fust I had to give up campin', cause she said he wasn't to be raised on wheels. So I settled down and got a steady job. And she said he'd got to have a woman t' raise him, so I got my sister to keep house.

"I dunno about the woman's got him, givin' him up—but I'll beg her—and if she's 'got s'm' others of her own—oh, I used t' be no 'count, but I ain't now, and I've earned the right t' my own kid, she can't say I ain't," he burst out with a maturity, a dignity of passion that bespoke the man born at last.

Dolson saw his own hand shake like a sick man's. He made excuse to leave the room. * * * He closed the door and went to the little bed.

For minutes the battle waged, silent, terrible. At first he speculated as to whether the law would not give him the child, anyway. Then, although he had never told a lie in his life, a dozen fantastic ones rose. He could say that the baby had been taken to California to England. It would be easy enough to deceive this simple man. A plausible told story—then Dolson could see him off on the night train, he would talk with no one in town, would never be the wiser. The plot unfolded as smoothly as those in the weekly papers' patent insides.

But one fact pressed forward insistently, would not be pushed back. It was this man's child, and however he might have failed before, it was plain that he told the truth when he said that he had at last earned the right to it. Dolson sat beside the crib, his body bent, his hands dangling between his knees, until the cat came sniffing tentatively at his fingers. He roused * * * realized that the decision must be made * * * must be acted upon. * * * He took up the sleeping baby and laid it in his father's arms.

Alone with his Christmas tree he felt himself living over that other night of years before when he had sat in the midst of his cottage's wedding finery. At first it seemed the same—the preparations for happiness; suddenly, their futility. But new thoughts dawned as he sat there—dim at first—growing clearer——

There was a hearty stamping on the porch. Dolson opened the door to the Rev. Sam, who burst in, shaking off snow like a great Newfoundland.

"Hip, hip!" the Reverend said. "Had to look in on you and the young one. Hear the Warners didn't take him after all. Say, I've got the song now." He bowed: "A froggie came to the mill door."

Dolson smiled gently. "He's gone," he said.

"Eh? What?"

The miller's voice caught a moment. "His dad come for him. He deserves him. He's made a man of himself."

"Good!" said the revivalist with enthusiasm.

"Yes. It all come about from his thinkin' o' that little kid and wanting him so."

"Good!"

"Yes. It's wonderful what a little shaver can do, ain't it? Made a man of him and made another o' me. Yes, sir, he was the makin' o' both of us."

The minister responded with wise affectionate eyes.

Dolson glanced at the tree. "I bought everything before," he said. "And it was more'n the things burned somethin' inside me. * * * I'm diff'rent now. I'm goin' to have the tree for the other little kids just the same." He sat meditatively. "I'm wondering," he said at length, "whether that wasn't the real kind o' love after all." He pulled me down, but some way it has set me up."

He took up a pail of cranberries and two darning needles. "Come on and help me string 'em," he said. He fell to singing "'Heigho!' said Anthony Rowley."

(Copyright by the North American Company.)

"Dolson brought the sleeping baby in."