generation after generation for centuries."

He reached over as he finished, and, placing his hand on the astrolabe, said.

"Who can now read this, Hugh Bannerton?"

The young man started up at mention of his name.

"What trick is this? What mummery?" he cried.

"It is a trick, a mere trick," replied Dr. Dusseldorf, coolly. "A very simple one. Here; allow me to hold your hand in mine. Now, place the other on my forehead."

Bannerton felt a soft glow, a sinking into dreamland—Edith—Edith——

Dr. Dusseldorf removed his hands quickly, and smiled.

"No," he said, "I will not tell you of what you thought. It is of too tender and personal a nature."

"So you are a hypnotist," exclaimed the young man, with some scorn. "I ought to have known it."

"Hypnotism is a shallow attainment," answered Dr. Dusseldorf.

"Then, in God's name, what are you?" cried Bannerton, sinking back into his chair.

"I am a man, an honest man, and a God-worshiping man, who has dared to strive to enter into a wider field of human knowledge than I could find by following the men of to-day."

"I must admit that this is all beyond me," said Bannerton, rising, "and I cannot see what I can do for you. I have already imposed upon you. I must now take my leave, thanking you for your hospitality, and the most remarkable evening I have ever experienced."

"Very well, you must be the judge," said Dr. Dusseldorf, rising also; "but I hope that this is the beginning of a further acquaintance. I am drawn to you, and I feel, nay, I know, we shall be friends. And now, before you go, allow me to say a last word. At any hour between 10 in the evening and dawn you will find me here. My night is day; my day is either this mellow glow or the radiance of electricity."

"I should be pleased to call upon you some evening," began Bannerton. But Dr. Dusseldorf stopped him with a wave of his hand.

"Do not construe what I have said into such an invitation. But should you ever be in trouble, sore in mind, or beset by evil influence of any kind, come to me. There are some things that cannot be forced, and one of these is a true friendship between men—for women may be wooed and won. Ring thrice sharply, pause, and ring again four times—seven in all—and the door will be opened."

Then he opened the door and Bannerton went down the steps, out into the street, now black with a hurrying throng.

He was at his office almost before he realized it. The mail was light, and soon cleared away. He picked up the morning paper, and the first thing that caught his eye was the announcement of the introduction of the ordinance, set forth and dressed up by Shuttle's headlines. He sat staring at them for some time before he went further, and began to read the article in detail.

"It has come," he exclaimed, when he had finished; "it has come, and just when I hoped it would not. Oh, why did it come so soon, and what shall I do?"

And he arose and went up on to the mount—only the mount was the private room of the commissioners, in which he locked himself, telling his office boy that he was not to be disturbed.

In an hour he came forth again, and none knew the verdict but himself.

CHAPTER XI.

LOVE AND LIFE.

The introduction of the ordinance in the Common Council, coming in the devious way it did, caused very little comment. But while there was thus a period of inaction in the larger field, there were interesting events in several of the smaller circles—events that brought one man into a new sphere and that made better acquainted some who had mingled together on terms of social intimacy.

Miss Edith Crosby was a young woman who having once set her mind on a project proceeded to carry it through with all the directness of a young person accustomed to having her own way. Determined to know more of Mr. John Hannum, and secretly resolved that he should know more of her whether he would or not, she had gone to work to bring him within her circle first of all. Her first move became known to Bannerton almost as soon as she made it, and by reason of the estimate he had formed of his friend, coupled with a desire to humor Edith in what he considered a whim of the moment, he became her ally.

"See here," exclaimed the bachelor lawyer, stamping into the artist's studio one afternoon and finding Bannerton stretched out on the couch; "you have got me into a fine mess. Look at that."

He produced a bit of note paper, at which Bannerton glanced, and then laughed as he returned it to the lawyer.

"It does not appear so very serious to me," he said. "It is merely an invitation to a lawn party to be given on Mrs. Warrington's grounds. I shall be there, and I will do what I can to make it pleasant for you."

"Yes, but I shall not be there," answered Hannum, decisively. "I tell you, I won't be dragged into this sort of thing."

"Oh, but you can't help yourself," replied Bannerton. "What excuse could you make?"

Hannum groaned. Suddenly a light came to his face.

"Say, Hugh, couldn't I send her a present?"

"Send her the money," said the artist dryly.

The younger man laughed, while the blood came to Hannum's face. He was not as well pleased to be the subject of jest as to jest at the expense of others.

"Very well," he said, quietly, but with a tingle to the words that caused the artist to dart a quick glance at him, "I shall be there."

"Oh, now, John, don't be offended at a little joking," cried Bannerton, springing up. "I thought you were a good hand at taking a little chaff. You are always upbraiding me for being too ready to take offense."

"No offense, Hugh," said the lawyer, laughing and showing his white teeth. "I have never backed up for any thing yet, and I shall not begin now. If there is no decent way out of it I shall go."

"Now, that is what I call sensible," cried Hugh. "Of course, there is no way out of it. How can there be when a young lady has honored you with an invitation such as this?"

A stolid resolution to "go through" had entered into John Hannum's soul, very much as a soldier charges a battery. So he changed the subject with the ready skill of which he was master.

"I see your aldermanic friend, the foe of corporations, has started another crusade against the street railway company. I thought the ordinance introduced by Alderman Rabner sounded very much like you, Hugh. You will be suspected of having drawn it."

"I have no fears that Bidwell will suspect me," answered Hugh, dryly. "In fact, John, neither you nor I have very much to doubt as to the inspiration. But you are on a false scent so far as your efforts to stir me up are concerned. I have become a good citizen. It is not my business to save the community."

"I like to see a man go through, Hugh," said Hannum, speaking in a changed tone. "No man could talk me away from what I thought to be the right, were he friend or foe. Of course, a man has a right to change his opinions, but he should have some reason other than self-interest or faint-heartedness for so doing."

"John," said Hugh, "there is one thing in life you have never felt, and therefore cannot understand. I would not care a rap now if Bidwell and his companions tied this city up for a century and made slaves of all who dwell therein, if—if—well—if——"

He turned and threw himself face downward on the old couch of the artist.

John Hannum, keen to all the subterfuges and tricks of men, stood stupidly gazing at the recumbent figure, no sign of comprehension on his puzzled face. With all he knew, he did not know that one thing alone could make of a sensible, sober man a foolish one. He directed a questioning glance to the artist, who had half-turned from his easel. The artist raised his hand and motioned to him to go. With a little gesture of acquiescence he went out, closing the door softly behind him.

"He must be in debt," he muttered to himself as he went down the stairs. "Why doesn't he come to me if he has overplayed himself?" he asked, half-angrily. "He might know I would help him out."

For some time there was a dead silence in the studio. Presently the artist began to talk, as if to himself, but loud enough for the young man to hear. He spoke at intervals, in short sentences.

"Once, a long while ago, I loved. Then I came away. I crossed the ocean. But since then I have loved always, everything—the sun, the wind, children, flowers, some men."

The young man with his face buried in the pillows sprang to his feet.

"Laurie! Oh, Laurie, you do understand! I—I—am in love. In love, Laurie, with the sweetest, the purest, the most lovable of women, but—but—she doesn't understand; she doesn't understand."

"So," exclaimed the artist blandly. "I was thinking out loud, and you heard me, Hoo."

Then Hugh, with that sure instinct that bids men open their hearts to those they can trust, burst out with all there was in him.

It was the story of an understanding grown into a misunderstanding. Of how they had first met, he and Edith; how they had accepted one another without a spoken word. He told how they had loved, for when he recalled their early days, he felt sure she had loved him, as a child, as they went about together with perfect freedom, afield, in the woods, in the city life. And now, now that the full force of man's love had seized him, how was he to approach her with this?

When he was all through he sank into a chair and asked what he should do.

And the artist, his friend, smiled benignly and told him, in different words, the same as Mrs. Warrington had done.

"I have long watched the birds, Hoo," he said. "It is always alone that the pair mate. When another comes there is trouble."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Hugh, springing up and clenching his fists, "if only I had a rival!"

He seized his hat and bolted out of the studio.

The artist filled his pipe and smoked.

"Perhaps he gets one sooner than he thinks," he said at last. "But he is right. He has made the right wish, for then he will know."

When Edith had suggested a lawn party Mrs. Warrington had readily acquiesced.

"I am glad, my dear," she said, "to see that you are paying attention to some of the conventionalities of young women like yourself. I had supposed it was drawing to the time when you and Hugh would be off on another fishing trip. You must begin to realize that you are no longer a girl, my dear."

"Oh, aunty, do not say that," cried Edith. "I am a girl, and what is a girl but a woman who has not been spoiled by all the silly life of pink teas and functions and what not? I would not miss the fishing trip with Hugh for all the lawn parties and receptions that could be given in a year."

"You may be a girl to me, God bless you," answered Mrs. Warrington with a smile, "and to me you shall always be one. But to the world you are a young woman."

"Well, I care little, so long as I am not a young woman to you or Hugh," she returned gayly. "But I must lose no time in sending out invitations."

"To Hugh and myself," repeated the elder woman as she watched the girl running up the stairs as lightly as a fawn. "She is even now to Hugh more than a woman, a little less than an angel—the one he loves."

Henry Bidwell had made it a point to come oftener of late to see his old friend, Mrs. Warrington. It was on one of his short visits that he learned of the coming lawn party.

"A very good idea," he said, addressing the lady of the house.

"Thank you," said Mrs. Warrington, arching her handsome eyebrows, "but what shall we say of your conduct? A young man of your age—for wealth knows no dotage—should practice what he preaches."

"Perhaps I shall," returned Bidwell, casting a meaning glance at her, "for I never felt younger than I do this very evening. But whose fault is it that I have not had different habits, and perhaps been a different man in the later years of this youth of mine?"

"Certainly not mine," replied the widow, in a firm tone. "You are even now back here, Henry, engaged in a nerve-racking project against which I advised you, and in opposition to every influence I could bring to bear on you."

"No," said Bidwell; "not every one. There was one, Kate——"

At the sound of her maiden name uttered in the tone that it was Mrs. Warrington flushed and rose from her chair.

"A truce so often broken is——"

The sentence was not finished, for at that instant Edith came out on the porch where Bidwell and Mrs. Warrington had been sitting.

"Oh," she said, stopping as if about to return, "I have interrupted a tete-a-tete."

"Your uncle is much interested in your lawn party. Pray tell him about it, Edith."

Mrs. Warrington passed into the house. Edith pushed an ottoman to his side with her feet and, dropping down on it, looked up into his face and asked: "Can I really tell you all about it?"

"Go ahead," he said.

She needed no further word of encouragement and rattled away as only a young woman can on such a topic. At last she paused for breath.

"I am sure it will be a delightful affair," he said, stroking the silky hair from her forehead and speaking in his softest tone. "I have just one favor to ask you, my dear."

"Just one?" she cried. "Oh, Uncle Henry, I would grant you a thousand."

"I would like to have you invite my friend, Herman Sprogel."

"The fat old man, with the puffy eyelids and the horrible complexion, who talks way down in his throat? Why, uncle, what would he do at a lawn party among us young folks?"

"Young women are poor judges of age, Edith," returned Bidwell, with some asperity. "I have indicated a wish to you. I have my reasons for wishing him to be present."

"Why, of course, he shall have an invitation if you want him to have one, uncle," said the girl, rising. "But I thought he never went out."

"He doesn't; but I intend to bring him out," answered Bidwell, dryly.

For an instant the girl looked into the eyes of her uncle. Then she burst into merry laughter.

"Oh," she cried; "you are bringing him here for Aunty Warrington. I might have known. I will not breathe a word. How stupid of me!"

Bidwell made no reply beyond a smile. Then he drew his niece to him and kissed her on the forehead.

"Good night, my dear, and do not forget."

There was a grim little smile on his face as he went down the walk and passed out into the street.

CHAPTER XII.

A STRANGE FRIENDSHIP.

While the current of events seemed to move slowly, it nevertheless moved surely. On the surface there was nothing moving. The ordinance introduced by Alderman Rabner—the traction-baiting ordinance, as it was called by the friends of the company—was now in the hands of a special committee named by President Connie Moran, but really selected by Bidwell in advance. None doubted that it would remain with the committee, and the outside friends, even the conservative business men, with all their density, realized that the company was in little danger of being harassed. But Shuttle, the busy Shuttle, animated by what he thought a spirit of fairness, but in reality inspired by the subtle suggestions poured into his ears by Bidwell's agents, every now and then caused The Watchman to editorially bellow against the iniquity of the Aldermen who would thus attempt to cripple one of the city's great institutions—the traction company.

Bidwell smiled approvingly at the course of the paper, and took pains that Shuttle should know of his appreciation of what he was pleased to term "fair treatment."

The Watchman's hammering along these lines was by no means an unimportant factor in furthering the plans of Bidwell and his associates. It was laying a foundation of sympathy for the company in the business community, on which he expected to rely much in the future, and it would also have the effect of greatly diminishing the influence of the paper, should it ultimately oppose the ordinance which Bidwell intended to push through the Council. For Bidwell was not so sure of being able to secure complete control of The Watchman. Certain rich stockholders had not been as complaisant as he had expected, and even Martin Yarr, the largest stockholder, was now evincing a strong tendency to recede from earlier promises. Of these suspicions Bidwell had said nothing to either Ledlow or Sprogel.

Despite the fact that Bidwell was ready enough to attend the lawn party of Mrs. Warrington, and concerned himself about so trifling a matter as an invitation for his friend, the phlegmatic Sprogel, there was no man in all the city who worked harder than he those days. It was no easy matter to deceive and blind two hundred thousand persons to their own interests, to reach into their pockets and take each day a share of their earnings, to grab $10,000,000 in booty and risk neither life nor liberty.

Hard as he worked, much as he taxed his strength, his nervous vitality, Bidwell seemed to thrive on it. He had never looked or felt better. It was what he called nice, clean work. The boodle Aldermen were in Sprogel's care—a sort of sewerage department, organized and officered, with Mayor Thorn as active superintendent. To the mass of the people, the public, he gave no thought now. It was to be diverted, cajoled, or, if it came to the worst, to be dodged, like the slow-swinging blow of a beefy giant.

"Give me the officers," he said to himself, "and I will not worry about the rest of the army."

* * *

There was at this time in the office of the City Attorney, employed as a stenographer, a young woman whose relations with men and affairs could scarce be paralleled. Her name was Dolly Devine. From 9 in the morning until 4 in the afternoon she was the pink of propriety, deft in her work, soft voiced and with a bearing that kept all men at a respectful distance. An hour later, she was likely to be the center of an admiring group at some saloon table, taking drink after drink and thrilling her companions with the slang and repartee of the official set. There were times when the sweetness and purity of something unrevealed seemed to animate her, and it was then, and only then, she sang. Bannerton had first met her thus, and the song, sung in a dainty, trembling way, quite indescribable, had made a feeling of pity for this poor girl which never left him. And this was the burden of the song, and nothing more:

"Do dah, do dah, do dah day."

That Hugh should have conceived a liking for her was nothing strange, for all men liked her. But there was something different in his liking; it was tempered by more of an understanding of the strange nature of the girl than came to the rough and ready fellows who were her companions.

It was he who had, exercising an authority to which she yielded much to the surprise of other men who had seen her in defiant moods, picked her up and bundled her home when crazed by wine and excitement. She had submitted on these occasions and become as passive as a child, sobbing, with her head on his shoulder, as they rode to the little cottage where she lived, vowing to drink no more—for all the world like a man. And the next day, after Hugh's first rescue, she had come at noon, in her neat little black dress, with the high white collar, cool, sweet and demure, to thank him for his kindness. They had a good talk then, and Dolly listened to the first lecture that she had heard for many and many a day—words of true kindness from a man's lips. Bannerton knew she tried, but in a week she was drinking again. So it had been from day to day, from week to week, from month to month, until a comradeship had developed. There was never a word that might not have passed between them had she been a weak lad, and he a strong and steady man. But sometimes he found on his desk the flowers that new pursuers had left for the trim little stenographer. It was as if a man had left a cigar—there was an understanding between them, unspoken, but understood.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LOVE OF MONEY.

By society in general the Warrington reception was long remembered as an event notable for the preponderance of those who were not there, a matter which those who were there took care to keep green in the memories of others. Second only to this feature was the sensation made by Miss Edith, who chose on this occasion to blossom forth as a full-fledged woman of fashion. Formerly simple in her attire, she now chose to appear decollete in the grandest of costumes, her plump shoulders, her flashing eyes and the poise with which she carried herself completing a picture which astonished most those who had known her best.

The stream of guests beginning to arrive viewed with varied feeling the vision of girlish loveliness standing beside the hostess. Hugh Bannerton was speechless, and stood silently staring when he saw her.

"So pleased to see you here," she simpered, extending a little hand.

Mechanically, he grasped the hand she held out to him, but his voice refused to come.

"Yes," assented the young lady, with a smile that would have done credit to Olga Nethersole, "It is indeed a charming evening." And, deftly moving aside to make way for him, he had no recourse but to pass on.

Henry Bidwell came with Sprogel. The nervous manipulator could not repress a start of surprise as his eyes met those of his niece. His face darkened, but this had not the slightest effect upon the young beauty, who favored him with a smile, and then turned her full batteries on the millionaire who stood before her. The dull, leaden eyes of the rich man lighted as he looked down on the magnificent creature before him and a faint glow came to his flabby cheeks. A guttural mumbling sound came from between his lips, and he passed on.

"Your niece is a star," he said to Bidwell a moment later. "She's a winner in a parlor dress."

To John Hannum alone the appearance of Miss Edith was no surprise; it was just what he had surmised. Society girls! Pah, they were all alike!

Poor Hugh was beside himself with rage and disgust which centered upon Hannum, in whose complacent mien he saw the evidence that the mad girl's frolic was taken in all seriousness. He could not trust himself to speak to his friend, and, while he avoided meeting him, he was in turn avoided by Miss Edith, whom he sought in vain to catch alone, if only for an instant. Once, toward the close of the evening, their eyes met, and there was that in the black face of the young man that caused the girl's color to heighten and a tremor to run through her. Ah, who shall fathom what so trivial a thing as a single glance may tell? At any rate, Miss Edith raised her eyes, which had been downcast for an instant, and looked again at Hugh as he turned away. And she thought him never before so fine, so thoroughbred looking, so noble, as when he averted the eyes that had but an instant before flashed to her a message of sorrowful reproof and sincere attachment.

But Miss Edith was not bred to retrace her steps or falter when once engaged in an adventure. This was only a momentary pause, and she concluded the evening in full command of the part she had started out to play. To the utilitarian mind of Bidwell, the favorable impression made by his niece on the fat millionaire was an advantage not to be overlooked. He contrived to push Sprogel forward, and Miss Edith, as if resolved to be in full accord with her uncle's wishes, was lavish and unabashed in her favors to the huge, spluttering creature. He could not dance, so she went to the refreshment room with him and saw him eat, with much the same feeling that little girls watch the feeding of the animals at the zoo. She was glad to return to the ballroom, and on the first opportunity she left him to promenade with Hannum, who, having taken a large number of private dancing lessons late in life, waltzed very badly. Mrs. Warrington had early in the evening given up all attempts at controlling her runaway charge, and the actions of Bidwell in connection with Sprogel had aroused in her mind a suspicion that there was something back of the girl's actions. But it so chanced that Edith's marked favor to Hannum had aroused in Bidwell's mind a suspicion that he at last found opportunity to express to Mrs. Warrington, for, despite his usual cunning, he was at times prone to jump at conclusions.

"I can hardly find words to express my appreciation of the remarkable development my niece has made under your tutelage," he said. "She is certainly creating a sensation to-night."

"I have an idea the inspiration came from another source than from me," answered the widow, coolly. "Your niece, Henry, is very miserable to-night."

"She shows it," responded Bidwell, dryly. "Let me ask—how long have you known this man, Hannum?"

"I met him once when you were present. It was Edith who invited him. He is a friend of Hugh's. You know when and where Edith met him."

"A pleasing fable," sneered Bidwell. "Are all women, my dear Mrs. Warrington, match-makers?"

"No, Henry," she answered, looking him straight in the eye, "but some men would do anything for money."

Bidwell coughed and colored, but immediately regained himself.

"Now, my dear friend," he began, changing his tone to one of purring softness, "let us be frank with each other, as should befit old friends. This young man, Hannum, and he is not so young, I will admit, is a worthy fellow. He is worth something like $50,000, and would, under ordinary circumstances, be an excellent match for Edith. But what are paltry thousands compared to ten millions, everything else equal?"

"Henry Bidwell," exclaimed the woman, her eyes flashing fire, "do you dare tell me that you would give your niece to Herman Sprogel?"

"And why not?" cried Bidwell. "There was never a man with kinder heart, and he can give her everything that is dear to a woman. And he is worth more than ten millions."

He paused for breath, and Mrs. Warrington looked at him with no attempt to conceal the scorn she felt.

"He is worth ten millions! It is the only word you have said that is true, Henry Bidwell. Prematurely old, coarse and brutal, he is like putty in your hands, and you have inspired him with an unnatural desire. Go back to your money schemes, break men in business, throttle honest competition, poison the whole world of business and politics, but, for God's sake, Henry, do not thus late in life go to breaking hearts!"

The madness for money was in him, and for once he held his ground before her. It was too much to give up—to have Sprogel as Edith's husband meant too much.

"Do you think I am blind not to have seen that you wished that young snob, Bannerton, for Edith's husband? But she does not care for him. I sounded her on that point a few days ago, when I took occasion to talk with her as her guardian, aye, almost as her father, for such I have been to her. She has no such abhorrence for Herman Sprogel as you have expressed. She will do as I wish. She shall do as I say."

"Oh, Henry!" cried Mrs. Warrington, catching one of his hands, for they were standing hidden by the drapery of an alcove, "do not persist in this. You will break the hearts of two women."

"Anything else, Kate," he answered, "but on this I am resolved. The girl shall marry Herman Sprogel, my friend."

"But if the girl loves Hugh?" she said, faintly.

"Always that young sprig," he cried, furiously, jerking his hand away from her clasp. "And yet," he added, "I shall perhaps make some allowance for the love of a mother for a son."

She stepped back a pace and threw her head up.

"Henry Bidwell," she said, in a tone so cold and icy that a thrill ran through him, "a man sometimes makes the one great mistake of his life late in life. You have done so now. A cruel taunt has come from your lips that can never be recalled. I will fight you now in every way that God may give me power. I will make you wish you had a hundred men opposed to you, rather than one woman."

He quailed before her glance, but as she moved past him to leave the alcove he put out his hand to detain her.

"Do not touch me," she said, with a little shudder. "There is nothing more. The girl will go to your house in the morning, and God protect her."

Clutching the heavy curtains, raging, and yet shaking with fear, Henry Bidwell remained behind. In a few moments he emerged, smiling and suave, to mingle with the departing guests, bowing, making good-humored salutations, the affable, cheery gentleman whom all envied.

When the last guest had gone, the big doors were closed and the lights turned off, Mrs. Warrington, in a last turn through the rooms, came upon a disheveled heap on a sofa in the deserted drawing-room.

CHAPTER XIV.

ALLIES.

Mrs. Warrington and Bidwell were each too shrewd to let the world know that a rupture had taken place between them. Miss Edith was now installed as the head of her uncle's establishment, a post which she filled to the complacent satisfaction of Bidwell, who knew much more of men than of women. She received, and made calls, and took part in the gay functions of the opening season. To Sprogel, who came to the house in company with her uncle on something more than a pretense of business, she was as affable and diverting as her uncle could desire. But for anything further she was as elusive to Sprogel as a butterfly would have been had he sought to pursue it with his lumbering gait. This was highly satisfactory to Bidwell, who deemed it shrewd to be in no hurry; while Sprogel, having no doubts as to the final outcome where such a preponderance of money was in his favor, burning as yet with no special ardor, was well content to enjoy the pleasing repose of assured anticipation. Her constant participation in the affairs of the set that called itself society gave Edith much freedom; and none danced harder, or was more vivacious, so it was small wonder that she had a train of young men following wherever she went. She was carelessly impartial, but if there could be said to be any one to whom she exhibited special favor it was John Hannum. That gentleman, as if to make up for lost time, had become one of fashion's devotees, and seldom was there a function of any sort at which he was not "among the present."

Mrs. Warrington and Bidwell were, to all outward appearances, the same friends as of old. But Bidwell was himself in doubt. Quick to realize his mistakes when his anger had subsided, he sought to renew his relations with the woman who had so long been his friend—the one friend who had the courage to tell him the truth. He found her willing to listen, but not inclined to talk.

"Very well," she said, when he had finished what was no doubt an expression of sincere contrition (for who is not contrite when he has done something to hurt his own interests?), "there is no need for further consideration of the matter. As you plead, a man may say much in the heat of passion that he does not mean. So let us drop the matter now, and oblige me by never referring to it again."

Her tone was velvety, but there was lacking that note of kindly interest he would have liked to hear, and which he knew so well, from her lips.

His plans had worked out with the precision of a well-made timepiece, and everything was in readiness for the touch of the master hand that would set in motion the mechanism which was to enrich him and his associates. There had been just one hitch, but that would be overcome before long. It was securing the control of the morning paper—The Watchman—and without which he hesitated to pursue his enterprise. Martin Yarr, true to his agreement to betray his associates, was willing enough, but he alone could not turn over a majority of the stock. In some way, unknown to Bidwell, Elliotson and his associates had received an inkling of the project, and each in turn had remained proof against offers for stock, made in many devious ways, and without regard to the quoted value. But Bidwell had no fears of not being able to eventually secure control. He had a theory that no man could refuse to sell if he were but offered a big enough price. And what had become of Hugh Bannerton? The question was asked by many who knew the young man, by young women who missed his cheery face at the functions of the budding social season, by men who no longer heard his voice in their haunts, and by all those who knew and liked him.

"You have ofted laughed at me for being a boy," he said bitterly to Hannum, "but the time has come when I shall be a man."

And he said this when he had just done the most boyish of all things, for he had written a cruel and foolish letter to the woman for whom he would have laid down his life.

Away he dashed, leaving Hannum smiling cynically, and gazing into space through half-closed eyes.

"Humph," muttered the lawyer, "a man is a fool to fall in love before he is forty, let alone to think of marrying."

And being over forty, he thought a while.

Away to the hunting marsh went the young man, where, for the first week, he astonished even those who had known him as an active hunter by the way in which he paddled his boat from morning until night, facing the fiercest of gales, braving every danger of a dangerous sport and coming in each night so fagged that he often fell into his bunk without waiting for his supper.

But youth is recuperative, and at the end of ten days there was a decided change for the better. A young frame is elastic, it may bend, but it will seldom break. Another week of moderated exertion began to produce a marked change to the good.

One day there came from Mrs. Warrington a letter—a letter so full of motherly love and tenderness that the tears came to his eyes as he read it.

"And now, my dear boy," concluded the missive, "come back to the city and face your friends as well as your enemies. Remember, Hugh, that he who shirks a duty is not less culpable than he who does a wrong."

There was much in this letter that was news to Bannerton, for he had withdrawn himself as completely as though he had gone to Siberia. That Edith had gone to live with her uncle, that she appeared far from happy, despite the fact that she went much into society, were straws that he clutched at, as no doubt Mrs. Warrington intended that he should. It dawned on Hugh that he had made something of a fool of himself, but it is doubtful if he realized the fine judgment of Mrs. Warrington in allowing his mood to run its course before appealing to his better sense. So he packed up his things, cased his gun and, taking a brace of canvasbacks, bade farewell to the outdoor life that had done so much for him and which he dearly loved.

Mrs. Warrington greeted him with delight.

"Hugh," she began, "I have been your friend for many years."

"That you have," he cried, seizing one of her hands and carrying it to his lips.

"The time has come, Hugh, that in doing something for me you will be doing something for yourself and for many others. Between Henry Bidwell and myself there has existed for many years a sort of friendship, although on my part it had long been maintained by a desire to save him and others from the sorrow and suffering that must come from his actions. At one time I did wield some influence over him, but that has past. He has no longer the attributes of a sane and humane man. He has become a creature with the sole impulse of making money, a miser in an age when misers no longer hoard, but go on, and on, reaching out with constantly increasing rapacity."

She paused, and Hugh looked in wonder at the stern, handsome face of his friend, the mouth set, the eyes half closed and looking far away.

"Yes," she murmured, "we are to be partners hereafter, although," she added, speaking as if to herself, "I cannot tell you all at present."

Hugh hung eagerly, expectantly, on her words, a strange thrill running through him. But she recovered herself in an instant.

"Partners! Yes, Hugh, we are to be partners. The plans of Henry Bidwell are well laid, and this city is to see a contest such as it has never before dreamed of. You have not given heed for some time, but I know that the time is close at hand when he will strive to seize a great right that belongs to the people of this city."

"But what is the great harm, after all?" said Hugh, wearily.

"Harm!" exclaimed Mrs. Warrington. "Let me touch on just one phase of it, to show that it is the meanest of all forms of modern aggression. This man seeks to obtain the right to charge a 5-cent fare in this city for fifty years to come. Have you ever thought what 5 cents is to each of the army of working girls in this city? Living too far from the business centers to walk the distance, the street car becomes a necessity, and each day from the thin hands of women and children the great corporation—personified by Henry Bidwell—reaches out and seizes an unnatural part of their daily pittance. And this phase alone, were it all, should be enough to appeal to me as a woman—a fellow feeling for the poor and lowly of my sex, who have been forced to do the work of men, that some men may loll in an ever-increasing wealth, while other men look for work in vain."

"It is wrong, all wrong," burst forth Hugh; "I know it is all wrong, but what can we do to prevent it?"

"Who can tell, Hugh? But, being wrong, it is our duty to oppose it. Now, let me tell you how matters stand at present."

Concisely she rapidly sketched out the general situation. Of the hitch in acquiring the stock of The Watchman, of the control secured of the Common Council, and of Bidwell's plan to build up a public sentiment for the ordinance, she was fully aware; so thoroughly posted that Hugh's expression showed plainly his great surprise.

"Yes, Hugh," she said, as if divining his thoughts, "I do know a good deal about this, and Henry Bidwell did not tell me all of it. I know better than any one his methods and his aims. But there is nothing to be done as yet, and it is on another matter entirely that I wish to ask your aid. It is a service that I would do to no less a personage than the President of this country."

"A favor for the President!" exclaimed Hugh. "And how can we be of service to him?"

"Briefly and to the point, I will explain," answered Mrs. Warrington. "Henry was never aught but treacherous, and he has an old grudge against the man who has guided this country through the perils of war amid the dangerous clique of men who hold money above honor or country. Always a 'trimmer,' Henry Bidwell has secretly favored yielding to the clamor of the so-called German element among our population, and he has advised the President that the present foreign policy must be abandoned, or at least temporized with. It is to Bidwell's interest to have it appear that there is a strong German sentiment here against the President's policy as he outlines it. He has chosen the coming Presidential banquet as the place for its demonstration, and his tool, Mayor Thorn, is to spring the mine."

"But Thorn is a Democrat," exclaimed Hugh.

"So much the better tool," said Mrs. Warrington. "He is to speak at the banquet as Mayor of the city, and Bidwell has convinced him that he has the opportunity of a lifetime before him. He is to deliver a rabid speech against imperialism, as un-American, and opposed to the traditions of the German-American citizens of this State, and of the country."

"And what does Thorn get out of it? How can Bidwell induce him to take such chances?"

"By appealing to his vanity," responded Mrs. Warrington. "No one has a softer tongue than Henry, and no one is so easy for him as Thorn. Now, I wish the President to have word of this plan before he reaches this city. The banquet, as you have probably forgotten, is to be given to-morrow night. Can you see that this is done?"

The young man knitted his brows and thought deeply for a moment.

"Yes," he exclaimed, suddenly; "there is one man in this State who can always see the President, and he shall know from me in ample time. But what a shame that Bidwell cannot be exposed to his party associates."

"There is no chance for that," said Mrs. Warrington, "for even Thorn has no idea that Bidwell suggested the idea to him. He believes he originated it, and that Henry merely agrees with him that it is a brilliant plan. Henry has Thorn in his power through a foolish letter written some time ago. It is dangerous to write to Henry. But I will speed you, Hugh, and trust you will attend to this, and take none into your confidence whom you cannot trust implicitly. Merely a hint to the President is all that is needed. As evidence you may say that Thorn has consulted two people for advice as to the effect it might have on his own political chances."

"I know what you want, Hugh," she continued, as he stood fumbling with his watch chain, loth to take leave of her; "but we will talk of that some other time. Remember, we are partners, and that carries with it your aims and innermost ambitions as well as my own. Trust to my judgment, Hugh, and turn a cheery face to the world."

And he did trust her; so he merely laughed somewhat sheepishly, wrung her hand and went away without a word of what was nearest to his heart.

As he went briskly down the street, he had not the least idea that a pair of bright eyes were watching him from an upper window of the old house. And no sooner had he turned the corner and disappeared from sight than a certain young woman was weeping over a scrawly letter, all ink-splashed and stained, which she hastily placed back in her bosom as the maid came to say that Mrs. Warrington wished to see her down stairs.

"You should have told me he was coming," she said frigidly to Mrs. Warrington, a flush on her face, and forgetting all about the telltale eyelids. "I slipped out barely in time. I would not have met him for all the world. No; not for all the world."

And as she in turn went down the street under the great elm trees Mrs. Warrington watched the trim figure. She stood in the gathering dusk, looking out from the window, long after the girl had disappeared from sight, twirling a bit of the curtain in her hand, and—well, just twirling the bit of lace.

CHAPTER XV.

A BANQUET TO THE PRESIDENT.

With the timidity of too much money, with all the quaking cowardice of sweated wealth, Ledlow, the banker, was consumed with a great fear. It was the fear that Bidwell's plan would fail because of a thing upon which he had never reckoned. This thing was to the banker a hitherto incomprehensible fact—the fact that men would not sell for a price. The owners of Watchman stock, headed by Samuel Elliotson, refused to part with their holdings for even a double price.

"Ledlow," snapped Bidwell one day, as he and Sprogel came away from a conference with the banker, "Ledlow acts like a timid old woman with her savings invested in Government bonds."

"It is about the same thing one way," returned Sprogel, with a mumbling chuckle; "he is all in. I would not give much for the bank if you fell down in this. He is loaded to the guards with street railway stock."

"Yes, damn him, he cost me something," said Bidwell. "He rushed in and grabbed with both hands when he thought it was a sure thing."

"It is, isn't it?" queried the millionaire.

"Do you wish to sell to me?" asked Bidwell, quickly.

"No," responded Sprogel. "I always stick with the big show."

Ledlow continued to whine, to grow pale when Bidwell reported no progress in securing the block of Watchman stock necessary to control, and to show all the signs of a man heartily sick of a venture in which he was embarked. Suddenly, one day, Bidwell flared up and said:

"Ledlow, do you wish to sell some of your street railway stock?"

"Why, no," stammered the banker, his hawk-like face flushing slightly—he had not blood enough in his whole body to give it a crimson hue. "Why do you ask?"

"Oh, I mean to me," replied Bidwell.

"Oh, that is different," answered the banker, suddenly seized with a fit of nervous coughing. "I might let you have some of it, Henry," he said, when he had mastered himself. "How much do you want?"

"Half what you hold," returned Bidwell, calmly. "Will you take my paper for it?"

"Yes," said Ledlow; "I see no reason why I should not take your paper. You are good with this bank."

"It is a bargain," said Bidwell. "Let us make the transfer now. How much do you hold?"

Ledlow hesitated just the fraction of a second before he answered, but Bidwell noted it.

"I said I wished to take half," he said, meaningly.

"I bought more after we compared holdings," explained the banker. "But why not take it all, Henry? My health is failing, and I may be compelled to take a trip."

"No," replied Bidwell. "I want you here, Ledlow, so I take half or nothing."

"Very well," assented the banker, nervously arranging the papers for the transfer.

When the few necessary pen scratches that changed the ownership had been made, the gaunt banker rubbed his hands together, cracked his knuckles, and beamed on his associate.

"Do you think we can secure control of The Watchman, Henry?" he asked, as Bidwell prepared to take leave.

"Why, I always told you we would," returned Bidwell, somewhat indignantly. "That will all be arranged in a few days. That is settled."

When Bidwell had gone the banker dropped into a chair and held his head in his hands.

"Oh, oh," he groaned, the sweat breaking out on his forehead and forming little rolls of dirt under his palm as he rubbed, "I have lost a fortune! I have lost a fortune! I know I have." Then he fell to weeping, moaning like a child over a broken toy.

An hour later Bidwell told Sprogel of his purchase from Ledlow, and also something further of the reason why.

"Ugh!" grunted Sprogel. "I like that. Why didn't you take me in?"

"You can go in as far as you wish with me. I will divide with you if you ask it," replied Bidwell.

"No," said Sprogel, "it was fairly won. But I'll buy the rest of his holding at once."

He clapped on his hat, and started for the door, but Bidwell called him back.

"No, Herman," he said, "see him at once, but do not buy. Offer to sell your stock to him. He will not buy, but it will strengthen the record."

The banker's eyes gleamed when Sprogel, fat and good-natured, offered to sell some of his holdings. But the caution of the banker rose to check the avarice of the man.

"I will let you know to-morrow," he said.

That was the day of the visit of the President.

What power could be invoked to check the thoughts that ran through the mind of Bannerton, as he sat in the banquet hall waiting for the play to begin—for it was a play to him. The great dining-room of the hotel blazed with electric lights, and the garish festal decorations of the money epoch were about him. On a raised platform facing the guests, or, rather, the patrons of the President on this occasion, were the President and the toastmaster, in the center. Extending to the right were the members of the Cabinet; also the entire official family of the President was there, in company array, to support its chief. To the left were Mayor Thorn, Bidwell, Sprogel, Ledlow and a few of the more distinguished members of the local committee.

On every side were faces that proclaimed a peasant ancestor—faces with thick lips, the heavy, squatty nose, and the slanting forehead, battered back by centuries of industrial oppression. This was the business face, as Bannerton saw it now, before him—not bad, or wicked, in a sense, but dense and stupid, save where the opportunity for money might kindle it to life and inspiration.

"And yet," thought Bannerton, "once let them see and understand! At heart they may be honest, but they have an instinct to bend the knee; they are timid, and they are stupid."

It was now close to the time for the speeches, and Bannerton felt all the thrills of a man who watches the play of a tense drama. He had been closeted earlier in the evening with a man close to the President, to whom he had told the full story of the plot; and later he had even seen the President for a few moments alone. The President was frank and outspoken in expressing opinions concerning certain great persons and some current events; so much so, that Bannerton was greatly surprised.

"I have no hesitancy in freeing my mind before those whom I trust," said the Chief Magistrate. "You have done me important service, sir, and I hope some day to repay you."

"I thank you," responded Bannerton, "but I want absolutely nothing now, nor shall I in the future."

"Hullo! What have we here?" exclaimed the President, laughing, and turning to his companion. "Here is a man who does me a favor, and bluntly declares he wants nothing in return. Are you a Republican, young man?"

"More wonderful, indeed," exclaimed the President, as Bannerton bowed assent in reply to the question. "I was told that I would meet strange men in the West, and I realize it now. But allow me to thank you again, and I hope some day to see you in Washington."

As Bannerton sat at the press table, with Jonathan Fluttery buzzing on one side of him and Shuttle jerking out interrogatory sentences on the other, he smiled at the humor of the whole thing—of Bidwell manipulating the committees on one hand and plotting with Thorn on the other; of business men, swelled with the importance of the occasion and their own component dignity; of Connie Moran and Ed Tubbett, in frock coats and high hats, as members of the reception committee at the railway station, where they stood in a drizzling rain for the culminating triumph of being bundled into a carriage to follow the President to Der Germania clubhouse.

There was the smart rap of a gavel. The clink of glasses and the buzz of conversation were hushed and Samuel Elliotson as toastmaster arose and introduced the President. When the burst of applause that greeted the head of the nation had subsided, this square-built man, with the heavy jaw and the hooked nose, began his address:

"The President has no policy against the wish of the people. The best policy in this world, for men, or nations, is the policy of duty, and wherever that calls we should follow. We should not halt. We should not hesitate. Responsibility born of duty cannot be evaded with honor. We are in the Philippines; our flag is there; the first requirement, the indispensable requirement, is peace. But no terms until the undisputed authority of the United States shall be acknowledged in every foot of territory in the archipelago. After that, Congress will make a government under the sovereignty of the United States. In no other way, gentlemen, can we give peace to the national conscience or peace to the world."

The roar that went up told Bannerton in an instant that the President had won. The audience sprang to its feet and cheered again and again; the city might have a German name, but its heart was American. "Der Bresident has right," roared the richest tanner of the city. "That I think," returned the richest brewer.

In the midst of the uproar Bannerton kept his eyes on Bidwell, whose face became pale for an instant. Then he turned and said a few words to Thorn, laughing as he did so. Thorn made no reply, but Bannerton saw in his eyes that the Mayor was beaten. One after another the Cabinet officers followed on the lines laid down by their chief. There was no uncertain note, no excuses, no beating about the bush, no expressions capable of double interpretation.

"It is the Spanish and the American fleets over again," thought Bannerton, "and about as even a match every way."

Mayor Thorn wilted early and the look that he gave to Bidwell would have embarrassed one less hardy; for he did not doubt for a moment that Bidwell had betrayed his plan to the President. On the other hand, Bidwell was filled with rage, for he felt sure some one had given word to the President. He understood the general import of the assault from the Cabinet, and there were sentences here and there that aroused the suspicion in his mind that perhaps he had been involved in the disclosure. At any rate the President and his associates had seen fit not only to ignore his advice, but they had boldly gone to the other extreme. And the result had proved the wisdom of their judgment. He was for the time being discredited, and he knew it. But he now wished Thorn to go ahead, that his failure might be so complete that he (Bidwell) might turn it to advantage as a shrewdly planned coup, by which the triumph of the President would be all the greater by comparison. So, when the speeches were about half made, he leaned toward the Mayor and said softly:

"The reaction will be all the stronger after this. You will catch on in great shape. They are overdoing it."

"Do you take me for a royal sucker?" demanded the Mayor through his teeth. "I shall follow my original intention."

Bidwell flushed a little, but made no reply. When it came to the toast, "Our City," the Mayor rose, with his grandest and most magnificent air, and, throwing his chest forward, with eyes looking upward, defiant and fearless, he began:

"In the storehouse of memory or experience we each have treasured up some thing of beauty, romance or fiction, the pleasing recollection of which brightens our gloomy moments and encourages exertion when courage falters."

For, although the Mayor talked loud and long, that was all he really said—nothing less and nothing more. And he made a great hit, too, for the consensus of opinion among a portion of the solid business element was expressed by Gottlieb Schuesterheisen, the greatest of all hardware manufacturers, who said: "There is no use talking, der Mayor speaks English beautiful." As for the political following, well, Connie Moran said Edmund Burke never saw the day when he could trot in the same class with the Mayor. "Why," said he, "he made the President look like thirty cents."

Shuttle clung to Bannerton as the crowd surged out of the banquet-room, those in the van jostling and pushing to get as close a view as possible of the only ruler on earth whose dignity is not hedged about by some form of protection from the vulgarity of a well-clothed mob.

"They tried to get it. They tried to get it," he said, in his quick, jerky way. "Did you hear about it? What—what?"

"Hear about what?" asked Bannerton.

"Why, about them trying to get The Watchman—Ledlow and Sprogel. But we found it out in time and fooled them. It is fixed up now so they can't get it. What—what?"

"I told you some weeks ago that Bidwell had his eye on The Watchman stock," returned Bannerton, coolly.

"Bidwell had nothing to do with it," responded the managing editor, sharply, for he wanted nothing but assent from all whose copy had ever passed through his hands. "Bidwell denied it when I asked him. He gave me his word. Was that not enough? Do you think he would lie? What—what? Besides, there was nothing in it at the time you spoke."

The Hon. August Himmell, on his way to meet the President, came from the rear at this point and Bannerton and Shuttle were parted as if they had been two dories in the path of an ocean steamer.

"So they have finally seen a gleam of light, have they?" thought Bannerton. "Well, it is better than if they had remained in the outer darkness. So Bidwell had nothing to do with it, and Shuttle knows it, because Bidwell told him so. But I am glad they have been discovered and the weapon that may protect the people is in the hands of honest men, at least, if not bright ones."

The celebration that followed the banquet in many respects excelled the main affair. It was a roaring, swearing mass of outer cleanliness and inner foulness. Through it moved Sprogel, greeted on every hand by bowing and scraping from those unused to the festivities of his court, and with devil-may-care easy good fellowship by his courtiers. At last the great man spied Bannerton, and toward him he steered his clumsy course.

"Hullo, Bannerton," he said, laying a kindly hand on the young man's shoulder. "You're all right. Bottle of wine, boy" (addressing a waiter). "I like you, Bannerton, and I'll have you working for me before long. Give up that City Hall job. It's no good. Politics will ruin any young man."

"I do not think so very much of the place," answered Bannerton, with a laugh, "but I guess I will hold on to it a while longer."

"Guess again, and take my tip," said the fat millionaire. "I don't give many, but they are good ones. I like you and I am going to have you work for me. I like your work."

"I am much obliged," said Bannerton, "but it takes two to make a bargain of that sort."

"Don't you think so," returned the millionaire, "not when the salary offered is so big that a man can't refuse it. I know my business."

Before Bannerton could reply to this enunciation of divine truth, Stalker, the lobbyist, pushed through the crowd and, leaning over the table, whispered in Sprogel's ear.

"That's all damn nonsense," sputtered Sprogel. "We have got it pegged, and that is all there is to it. We will be there ten minutes after the bank opens. Don't bother me any more to-night."

A messenger boy slipped a note into Bannerton's hand. He tore it open and read:

"Come to me at once.—K. W."

Before Bannerton realized his intention, Sprogel had reached over and seized the note, which he read. Bannerton's eyes blazed, but he smothered his anger with an effort. A leer came to Sprogel's purple features.

"Wait for me," he mumbled, thickly. "There is nothing like having a good buyer with you. You can't fool the duke."

He gave the note back, and again he laughed when he saw the scarlet flush on Bannerton's face.

"Never mind," he said; "I like a young fellow that can win them. It's the champagne buyers with beer incomes that cause the trouble in the banks."

Glad to seize the excuse afforded by Sprogel's surmise, Bannerton laughed and made his escape. A minute later he was in a cab, bound for Mrs. Warrington's house. He stopped the cab four blocks away, for he knew cabmen.

As he hurried along the street he wondered what could have caused the summons, for it was now past 2 o'clock in the morning. Mrs. Warrington was waiting for him at the door.

"What has happened?" he cried, seizing her hands and turning very white. "Has anything happened to—to—to Edith?"

"No, Hugh," she answered, a look of pain coming to her handsome face for an instant, as she returned the eager, questioning gaze of the boy—for all men are boys when in love. "No, nothing has happened to Edith. But something that carries greater import has occurred. Bidwell will have control of The Watchman to-morrow, and then God help the people of a city where a bad man owns a good newspaper."

The reaction came so quickly that Hugh could not repress an exclamation of relief.

"Hugh! Hugh! Do you not understand what this means?" she cried, almost fiercely. "It is the keystone to all of Bidwell's plans. I sought to thwart him and gave information to Elliotson a month ago."

"Yes," broke in Hugh, "and so did I to Shuttle, and he asked Bidwell if it were true."

"Not alone that," continued the woman, pacing back and forth in the room with an energy that was almost tigerish, "but I only a week ago paid $10,000 for the holdings of a woman who was asked to sell and would have done so. But let me tell you what has happened."

She paused a moment, as if to collect her thoughts, and then began again, speaking rapidly:

"In the bank at Malden there are shares that can be bought for $20,000 cash by any one who will lay the money down. I would buy it in an instant. It is the balance of stock. It is enough to give Bidwell control if he can get it."

"I will start on the first train in the morning," cried Hugh.

"In the morning!" she exclaimed, with scorn. "Oh, Hugh, do you think I would be standing here to-night if it were a matter for the morning? Bidwell's man will leave with money on the first train to-morrow. It reaches Malden fifteen minutes after the bank opens."

"Sixty miles!" cried Hugh. "Why, I can ride that on my wheel and never turn a hair."

"And pay for it with a willing heart, but an empty hand. Where am I to get $20,000 in cash at this time in the morning?"

The young man sank into a chair, but Kate Warrington moved back and forth in the room.

"No, Hugh, there is nothing to do," she said, at last, speaking in a calmer tone.

"But we should not give up," urged Hugh, though his heart was not in his words.

"No; we should not give up, Hugh," she exclaimed. "It is never too late for a woman to do one thing—to trust in God, and to pray for help."