"And," cried Hugh, standing very stiff and rigid, "it is never too late for a man to try—and keep trying."

He seized his hat, turned on his heel, and a moment later was hurrying downtown.

CHAPTER XVI.

TWO FRIENDS IN NEED.

At Ben Locksley's saloon, a place all white and gold, blazing with electric lights and flashing glass, arrived Bannerton at last. The proprietor came to greet him and smilingly extending his hand said:

"So you have come at last. It wasn't the square thing to stay away so long, especially after not taking the fall shooting with me. But, then, I have no kick coming, for I have kept posted and I knew you must be working and had 'cut out' the grape. But you are just in time. There is a canvasback on the fire now and it will be up in a moment."

"I can't eat, Ben," said Hugh, dropping into a chair, and wiping the sweat from his brow, for he had walked at a terrific pace. "Eat!" he exclaimed bitterly. "Ben, I would go without eating for forty days to have in my hand to-night what I am looking for. I would, so help me God!"

"You have not been drinking," said Locksley, giving him a keen, searching glance, "and I never knew you gambled."

"That is the only hope," exclaimed the younger man, springing to his feet, and grasping Locksley by the arm. "Ben, loan me a hundred dollars at once. I must have it. The only way out is to win the money."

"Come right into the office," answered Locksley, without a moment's hesitation, at the same time wheeling about and leading the way.

Bannerton followed, a new light in his eyes—the blazing, hungry light of the gamester.

"Sit down," said Locksley, motioning Hugh to a seat. "Hugh Bannerton, you have been my friend—one of the best friends I ever had. There is $958 in that safe, and more out in the drawer. You can have every cent of it, Hugh, and not a scratch of the pen between us. Pay when you can. There it is; yours, under one condition."

"Yes," said Bannerton, his breath coming fast, "and what condition? Quick, every moment is precious."

"The one condition, Hugh," said Locksley, kindly, but firmly, "is that you will promise never to gamble again, and that not one cent of this money shall be gambled. If you stop it must be now—now!" and he brought his clenched fist down on the desk before him.

"Good God!" cried Bannerton, "I have not gambled, Ben. I never gambled in my life. But I must have $20,000 to-night."

Locksley fell back in his chair.

"Twenty thousand dollars to-night!" he exclaimed. "And expect to win it at another man's game. You are crazy, that's all."

"Ben Locksley," answered Bannerton, speaking in an even tone, "I am sober and sane. Look at me. I tell you I must have $20,000 to-night. I can get it to-morrow for its intended purpose, but I must have it to-night. Let me have that money."

"Hugh Bannerton," said Locksley, just as cool and speaking in much the same tone, "if it were anybody else but you I would ring for the patrol wagon."

"Listen," cried Hugh, "and then judge if I am not sound."

Quickly, concisely, wasting no words, he poured out the story, for he would have trusted Locksley with his life.

"It is a hard proposition and you are up against it," said Locksley, when Hugh had finished, and sat with his head buried in his hands. "My money is there for you to be used for anything except gambling. For, let me tell you one thing, there is not $20,000 in the combined bankroll of all the gambling houses in this city to-night."

"Then what is there for me to do?" groaned Bannerton.

"Cut it out. Eat; take a cup of black coffee and go to bed. I've half a notion to ditch the train that is to take the other fellows out to-morrow. I'd do that for you, Hugh," he added, half laughing, although there was a suggestion of tears in his eyes.

And Bannerton, looking up, believed him.

"Not that, Ben," he said, rising, and grasping his hands. "You are right. It is all up. But, somehow, do you know, I can't give it up."

He gave a little choking sob, pushed Locksley back gently when he would have detained him, and as he opened the door and backed out of the room he added: "I'll walk it off and then come back."

Now stumbling along with his head down, then with a steady and firm tread, Bannerton hurried through the streets. Suddenly he came to a full stop and looked about him. Again, as one night in the summer, he was standing in front of the gloomy old house of Dr. Dusseldorf. Without a moment's hesitation he walked up the steps and gave the signal on the bell, and ringing in his ears were the parting words of the strange old man:

"Should you ever be in trouble, sore in mind, or beset by evil influences of any kind, come to me."

He had no sooner touched the bell-button than the door was opened, and Said Abdul bowed low before him. The Oriental indicated by a gesture that Bannerton was to enter as quickly as possible, and he stepped in. A moment later he stood before the doctor, who remained seated, studying him from beneath the heavy gray eyebrows and stroking his long beard.

"Speak," he said, at last, for Bannerton stood dumb before this strange man. "I have told you to come to me if in trouble, and you have come. That you are in trouble you have already told me. The drawn features, the wrinkles under the eyes, the set mouth, tell me that. But I do not know all. There is yet a veil that I have not torn aside. Speak, and tell me, that I may judge whether I can be of any aid to you."

Keyed to a high tension, the absurdity of his call flashed on the mind of Bannerton, and he burst out laughing.

"A very commonplace physical phenomena," observed the physician. "Take a seat and calm yourself. Do not trouble yourself to apologize."

"Well, the fact is," said Bannerton, mastering himself, "I have made an ass of myself, and have presumed on your good-nature by intruding into your privacy. My trouble is such that there is little likelihood of your being able to help me out of it, and much less probability of your doing so. It is too much to ask of any man, much less of one I have met but once before in my life."

"I shall be the judge of that," responded the old man. "Proceed with your tale, and lose no time, for I presume from the appearance of your apparel that you have been in haste, and have now little time to spare."

"Time!" exclaimed the young man, laughing; "why I have now centuries before me. The time is past. It is too late."

"Young man," said the aged doctor, speaking in a sharp tone, "heed my wish, and tell me what evil fate pursues you."

"Well, I cannot do less, if you are inclined to know," said Bannerton, after a moment's thought. "I at least owe you some entertainment for having thus broken in on you."

Again he told the story as he had told it to Locksley. The old physician listened with an amused and critical attention.

"I can let you have the money," he said to Bannerton.

"What!" cried Bannerton, springing to his feet. "When?"

"Now," replied the old man, his keen eyes fastened on the face of his guest.

"Good God!" exclaimed Bannerton, his face blanching and his limbs growing so weak that he sank back into the chair. "Is this all a dream?"

"Listen," said the old man. "It is improbable, it is absurd on the face of it, but it is so. These are the things that are so. You shall have now from my hands in this room the sum of $20,000 as a loan from me to you if you answer me one question as I wish it to be answered. What security will you give, what oath will you take to bind you to repay?"

"I give you my word of honor," cried Bannerton.

"It is the right answer," said the old man, with a pleased expression on his face.

He clapped his hands together, and Said Abdul stood before them. He spoke a few words in a language strange to the young man, and the servant disappeared, only to return in an instant bearing a packet in his hand. This he presented to Dr. Dusseldorf, who in turn passed it to Bannerton.

"Open it," he said, "and count."

With trembling hands Bannerton tore the packet open and beheld a roll of bank-bills. He ran them over, and found $20,000.

"There is a thousand over," he said, looking up.

"There is" assented the physician. "But it will be as easy to return one sum as the other. Now, do your part, [illegible] what has passed between us to-night is a secret that is mine alone, and one that you have no right to disclose until I release you."

"My word of honor," cried Bannerton, as he dashed from the room.

Locksley was standing in front of his place as Bannerton turned the corner and dashed up to him.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed, "haven't you stopped running yet?"

"Ben," cried Bannerton, seizing him by the shoulders, "Ben, old boy, I have got it, and I am going to win out. Come into the office with me. But hold on. First order a cup of coffee. Your wheel is here. I want to borrow it. You know what I want it for—a little spin of sixty miles, and more at the end than any man has ridden for in many a day."

"The coffee part is the first sensible thing I have heard out of you to-night," replied Locksley, grimly. "I believe you are crazy, but the coffee angle is sound-headed enough. Go into the office and I will order it."

Locksley joined Bannerton in the office a moment later and found him busily counting the treasure.

"Holy smoke!" he exclaimed, starting back, "what a bundle! Where did you get it?"

"Never mind," answered Hugh; "I have it, and that is all there is to it."

"Hugh," said Locksley, laying his hand on his friend's shoulder, and looking him in the eye, "this is too much money for a man to have come by honestly at this time in the morning. Have you the combination of the city safes? If I thought that you had come by this wrongly, I would take it away from you now. You shall not go wrong if I can prevent it. You have taken some desperate chance. Was that all straight goods about the stock and the ride you intend to take?"

"On my honor, it is the truth, Ben," replied Bannerton, "and——"

"That's enough," cried Locksley. "Here," he cried, pushing his head out of the door, "rush that coffee along, and get out my wheel. There is no time to lose."

Five minutes later Bannerton rode down the street, and, turning the corner, straightened out for his long ride.

Through the streets of the city he wheeled at a pace that made the straggling workmen gaze at him in sleepy astonishment, and was soon in the suburbs. Then came the dirt roads of the outskirts and soon he was out in the country, with the smoky haze of the city behind him.

He came to a village and stopped at the town pump. He knew he had come twenty miles from the city, and his watch told him he had been gone just an hour. The pace was too fast, and he resolved to reserve his strength, for the exertion was beginning to tell on him, with his loss of sleep, and the previous night's excitement. An hour and ten minutes later he had covered another twenty miles.

"Only twenty miles more," he said to himself, and already he saw himself in the bank, counting out the money, and taking the coveted stock, that meant so much to so many people. He swung round a curve in a country road, caught one horrified flash of a fallen limb, and the next instant was tearing up dirt and gravel with his face. For a moment he lay motionless, stunned mentally by the horror of the disaster rather than injured physically. Then he sprang up and looked about him. Back in the branches was his wheel. He rushed to it and dragged it away, as if the motionless wood were a monster. One glance told him all, and a great sickness came over him, making him so weak that he staggered to the roadside and sank to the ground.

"My God!" he moaned, with his face in his hands. "What have I done to deserve this? Only twenty miles away, and everything lost now."

Again he got on his feet, and started to run, but a sharp twinge in one of his ankles caused him to flinch, and he threw himself on the roadside, face downward.

"Well, I swear, if that ain't the darnest way to treat a borrowed wheel!"

Bannerton started up at the words to see before him in the roadway Ben Locksley, leaning on another bicycle, and grimly surveying the wreck.

"Ben!" he cried, rushing toward him with outstretched arms "Ben Locksley!"

He could say no more, but threw his arms about his friend, and burst into tears.

"There, there," said Locksley, trying to shake himself free. "You are all right, and that is the main thing. You will get there on time, after all."

"Yes," exclaimed Bannerton, pulling himself together and brushing the tears from his eyes; "I will get there on time, but I owe it all to you. How can I ever repay you?"

"Don't say anything like that to me," said Locksley, in a grieved tone. "It ain't right. You just climb aboard now, and put along a little more carefully. Remember I won't be following you with another ambulance. I thought you would just about do this very same thing, so I concluded I needed some exercise."

Bannerton needed no second invitation, and, concealing the pain his wrecked ankle gave him, he mounted and rode away.

"By the holy mackinaw!" Locksley suddenly exclaimed, "I believe I can fix that wheel so it will run."

And he did, after an hour's work, and rode into Malden on it.

"I want to see the president of the bank," said Bannerton, peering through the wicker grating that was supposed to protect the pale young man who acted as teller for the Malden bank.

The teller began drumming on the counter in front of him, as if he were playing a piano, all the while wondering if the stranger would shoot him in the back if he went into the vault for the big revolver that was hid snugly away in a pigeon-hole, where it could not possibly go off and shoot somebody.

"I am not a bank robber," said Bannerton, smiling. "I have merely had a bad fall on the road, and I have important business with the president. I carry this instead of a revolver."

He drew forth the packet of bank-notes and flared them before the teller. The effect was magical.

"Right back here," he said, slipping off his stool, smiling and obsequious. "He is at leisure now."

Bannerton followed back, and was ushered into the presence of Hon. Hiram Stubbitt, member of the Legislature and president of the Malden Bank.

"You have a block of stock in The Watchman," began Bannerton, bluntly, when the teller had bowed himself out. "I understand it is for sale."

Stubbitt was a wiry, dried-up little man, with fuzzy chin whiskers and the bright eyes of a money man.

"It has not been on the market very long," he answered cautiously.

"No," assented Bannerton, "just about eight minutes, if your clock is right. But it is on the market now, and I wish to buy it."

"The terms are cash," said the banker. "It is a valuable property. Whom do you represent?"

"If the terms are cash I cannot see what importance that can have in the transaction," answered Bannerton. "What is the price?"

The banker figured for a minute on a tiny scrap of paper that had been used on one side. It was to gain time while he was thinking.

"It can be bought by you for $20,300," he said, without looking up from the paper.

"And why the $300," asked the young man. "I understood the price was $20,000 flat."

"It was," replied the banker, "but you appear to want it pretty badly. I have taken that chance. Some one might offer me more before long."

"Can I have it for that figure?" asked Bannerton. "Can I have it in hand now?"

"Yes," replied the banker, "if the money is paid over now."

"It is a bargain," said Hugh, reaching in his pocket and bringing forth the money. "Produce the stock and write me a receipt."

The banker withdrew from the room and presently returned with the stock.

"To whom shall I make the receipt?" he asked.

"I prefer to have no names mentioned. It is a matter between us. You take the money and I take the stock. Indorse it in blank."

"A secret is never so well guarded as when it is protected by another secret," said the banker, in a low tone.

"Your receipt will read for $20,000 flat, but you pay the agreed price."

"It is a bargain," said Bannerton.

Half an hour later the Hon. Hiram Stubbitt was bland and suave before two men who raved and stamped about his little office.

"Gentlemen," he said, at last, "'pears to me I'm the one that ought to be doin' some of the kickin'. You come and offer me $30,000 for something I've just sold for $20,000, though 'tain't probable you'd a-pushed it on me if I hadn't already sold it. One way I ain't lost nothing, but another way I'm out just $10,000. Why didn't you tell me you was comin'? I reckon somebody told something to somebody."

"Yes," cried one of the men, ripping out a string of oaths, "somebody told, and there will be hell to pay."

"Well," said Stubbitt, dryly, "I got what was coming to me, and I reckon I ain't in on that last account."

"I don't know about that, Stubbitt," retorted the man, "you and I have done business before."

"Yes," returned the banker, his chin whiskers bristling, "and I'll have you understand, Bill Stalker, we'll do business on something besides promissory notes written in wind next session. And now you'll just get right out of here, or I'll call the town marshal. I'll have you understand this ain't no place for takin' the name of the Lord in vain."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE.

The discovery that the essential block of stock had been sold by the Malden Bank carried consternation into the two wings of Watchman stockholders. The whole game was uncovered, and Elliotson, his associates aware of the plot by which Bidwell and his street railway following sought to gain control, believed this had been accomplished. For with this stock the opposition would have been in command, officering the company and dictating the policy of the paper. Shuttle jabbered and sputtered, pointing out what would have been done, and repeating it over and over again when not bewailing the misfortune. Elliotson, however, was made of better stuff, and took the matter philosophically.

"They have control, and that is all there is to it," he said. "We have lost and they have won by being alert and through the treachery of some of the men we trusted. Let them run it now."

"But cannot we compromise?" asked Shuttle. "I have seen a good deal of Mr. Bidwell of late, and he appears to be very reasonable. Would it not be well to make some sort of a compromise?"

"Mr. Shuttle," said Elliotson, "the only kind of a compromise you could make with Henry Bidwell when he is master is the same sort of a compromise a naked babe might make with an alligator. No. We will hold the annual meeting, and let them vote the stock they hold as if nothing had happened. We will say nothing about what has taken place unless they bring it up. The less you have to do with the matter the better it will be for you," he added. "We may hold you in place."

"I would be loyal to the paper, no matter who controlled," said the paper man, fervently.

"That is right," said Elliotson. "Our primary duty to the other stockholders is to make money for them."

With Bidwell, Sprogel and Ledlow it was a different matter. The failure to obtain this particular piece of stock was a crushing blow.

The three men were brought together when Bidwell opened the telegram that brought word that the stock had been sold. For a moment he was unable to speak.

"Gentlemen," he said at last, his voice betraying little of his agitation, "we have met with a slight repulse. Some plans will have to be rearranged. The Malden stock has been bought up by some one else."

The gaunt form of the banker became limp, his eyes rolled with an agonizing look from one to the other of his companions, and speech failed him utterly.

"Well," said Sprogel, after a long period of silence, "we are up against something. What do we do, Henry?"

Bidwell knit his brows and made no answer, but the banker found his tongue.

"Do!" he exclaimed. "Why, we are done. What can we do? You have got me into a trap. The whole scheme must fall. How can we face The Watchman with such an ordinance as we have drawn? We must compromise, and save ourselves if possible."

"I don't like compromises," growled Sprogel; "I would rather go through to a finish. A compromise is where you give up a chance to win in order to get only half-licked."

"It looks bad," said Bidwell, at last. "We might unload, but—but——"

"But what?" queried the banker, nervously.

Bidwell did not answer, but was again lost in thought. He was running over in his mind the magnificent preparations he had made for the battle. He could trick these men, the men of the business world, into line, before The Watchman would come out in its full opposition to the ordinance. This last came to him like an inspiration. He sprang up, and exclaimed:

"But we can win if we go through. What does The Watchman amount to, after all? It will dodge and feel along at first. Before it is ready we can commit the best element of this city to our cause. Perhaps we are better off without its support. It has lost oftener than it has won."

"They will expose us in the end," groaned the banker, for he alone felt the pangs of a man who esteems himself engaged in a bad cause.

"Expose us!" exclaimed Bidwell. "What are we doing that any other business man in this city would not do if he had a chance? We are making money, and making it strictly within the law. We are ending this strife, and we are giving permanency to one of the solid institutions of the city."

"You don't mean Ledlow's bank, do you?" broke in Sprogel, with a heavy, rumbling laugh, that grated on the nerves of the banker like the filing of a saw.

"What do you say, Herman?" cried Bidwell, suddenly turning on the millionaire, and ignoring his heavy flippancy. "Say the word, and I stand by your decision."

"I stand by what you say, Henry," returned the big man, "but I don't like to back up."

"Nor do I," cried Bidwell. "We will go ahead, and we shall win. Of that I am sure."

Sprogel leaned over the table and extended his hand, with a peculiar motion very much like the flutter of a fish's fin.

"Shake," he said; "there's nothing more to it."

The banker smiled feebly, and made haste to declare that he was also in. He was, too, for there was no way for him to back out and save his money.

"The word must be given at once," said Bidwell. "There is no time to lose. We must have the ordinance introduced before the committee, and then begin the work of building about it. Your men in the Council will stick, Herman, because there is no money on the other side. But there are others who will have to be worked upon night and day. Did you give that insurance to young Daubray? No? Good! Hold it back and deal him off small slices at a time. There is another man in the Council to whom the most attractive policy is the one with the revenue stamps on it. I would not have needed him if we had The Watchman, but now I must draw him over. These details, however, can be discussed later on. Ledlow," he said, turning to the thin and narrow banker, "we are in for a good fight, but we are going to win. I never made a mistake yet. I will make you more money than you could have made in the banking business in a hundred years as Elliotson runs his bank."

"Yes," said Sprogel, before the banker could reply, "but Ledlow doesn't run his bank that way, either."

"I hope you are right, Henry," said Ledlow, the first look of fright still lingering on his face, "and perhaps you are. At any rate, you can depend upon me to do my best."

The decision of Bidwell to go ahead at once brought about great activity in circles over which he held sway. The Aldermen on the judiciary committee were rounded up and coached by the lawyers in the employ of the company, the City Attorney was consulted often, and was early and late in session with Bidwell and lawyers of a higher grade than those thrown in contact with the members of the aldermanic committee.

No man ever stood more proudly or felt a keener thrill of honest pleasure than did Hugh Bannerton when he stood before Mrs. Warrington and placed The Watchman stock in her hands. For a moment she was speechless. Then she threw her arms about his neck and kissed him, crying: "Hugh, Hugh, my own brave Hugh!" He half drew back, with a questioning look in his eyes.

"No, not yet," she said, as if divining his thoughts; "not yet, Hugh."

"But tell me," she cried, "tell me at once. How did you get it? Sit down, for you look scarcely able to stand. And your face is cut and bruised. Did you fight for it, Hugh? Here, Annette! Martin! Bring a glass of wine for Mr. Bannerton at once."

"Coffee," said Hugh. "I never drink when I am in training, and I am in training now."

"Well, we will not quarrel about that," she said, gazing fondly in his face; "but be seated and tell me all about it."

They sat together while Hugh told the whole story of the night's adventure and its successful outcome.

"Strange and almost incredible," she said, reverting to that portion of the narrative dealing with the unknown friend who had furnished the money, for Hugh kept back the name. "and yet, Hugh, I have felt something of that indefinable influence which your friend seems to have fathomed—that something that tells us things we cannot quite understand, and which we neither hear nor see."

"Well," said Hugh, "he knows, and I know, and that he has loaned me $20,000, a sum never before so freely parted with in this city, I'll warrant."

"You are right to get back to business, Hugh, for such a debt must be promptly paid. Come downtown with me, and I will give you the money."

"And the stock," suggested Hugh; "should that not be entered on the books of The Watchman company?"

"For the present it is exactly as I wish it to be. With this out the present officers retain control. It is in blank now and blank it shall remain until the time when I shall write in the name I wish to see on it. Keep your own counsel, Hugh, and we will wait and watch a bit."

After a week had elapsed Edith came to see Mrs. Warrington one afternoon, much troubled.

"I do not know what to make of uncle," she said, "and I believe you should talk to him. Five days ago he came home one afternoon and said: 'Edith, I am in New York.' That evening I saw by the paper he had gone East for a business trip, and I understood he wished it thought he was out of the city. But I was not prepared for what has followed. I have seen him only twice since, once when he came into the house in the morning early, and once when he came down to use the telephone. He was so haggard and white that he actually frightened me. The worst of it is, I do not believe he has slept a wink during the whole time. The light in his room burns all night, and I can hear him moving about and talking to himself. What can we do?"

"My dear," answered Mrs. Warrington, "the quicker you learn to expect almost anything from your uncle the easier it will be for your peace of mind. He is a strange man. I have known him many years, and am more bewildered now than when I first began to take an interest in his actions. He has some work in hand, and no power on earth can break him from his purpose."

"But he may die," pleaded the girl, "and—and—he has always been kind to me."

"Men like your uncle do not die that way, Edith," replied the elder woman. "They may burn and shrivel up, but they do not die. He will emerge, when he has completed the task which he has set for himself, shattered and weak, perhaps, but alive; yes, very much alive."

"Aunt Warrington," said Edith, solemnly, as if telling a great secret, "excepting uncle, do you know I cannot like very rich men. They all seem alike, shallow or selfish."

"Mr. Hannum is rich, and yet, from what I have heard, you seem to find him quite interesting," returned Mrs. Warrington, quietly.

"How unkind of you," answered the girl, her cheeks taking on a flush. "The world is full of people who talk, who are full of misinterpretation, who wink at each other and wag their heads if two people exchange a few words. It is society. Mr. Hannum is not spoiled yet. He is more like— like——"

She stopped, and flushed again, until her face was crimson.

"More like Hugh," said Mrs. Warrington. "Edith, you have brought to mind something that I have wished to speak to you about. Have you and Hugh quarreled?"

"Why, no, indeed," answered the girl, throwing her head back, while her eyes flashed. "What a question to ask! How could we quarrel, if we had a mind to? I have not seen him since the night of the lawn party. He disappeared as if he had gone to Europe. He did himself away and avoided everybody, even Mr. Hannum, who is his stanch friend. He refused all invitations to go out; he dodged by the people in the street; he sulked, and then went off for the fall hunting without ever a word to me. He did that, and you ask me if we have quarreled."

She had spoken with rising heat, and, catching her breath, she continued, speaking rapidly, and with trembling lips:

"What had I done to him? Why should he show his resentment against me? We had been friends for years, almost brother and sister, and because I chose to do as women do for just one evening—you called me a woman yourself, you know you did—he flares up, and—and—treats me shamefully."

"Why, what has he done?" asked Mrs. Warrington, "Tell me what he has done, my dear, that another man would not have done in his place?"

"In his place!" cried Edith. "Oh, Aunt Warrington, you knew and understood. Why should he be so blind? Why could he not see it all? What was I to do, with that detestable Sprogel forced upon me by my uncle? What am I to do now? What have I done for weeks, but to ask the question, over and over, to myself? And then to turn around and upbraid me at the first opportunity! What right has he to call me to account?"

"So you did quarrel, after all?" said Mrs. Warrington.

"No," cried Edith, "but he wrote me a letter that I could not answer. It was cruel; it was cowardly, on his part. How could he expect me to know? Why, he said he did not know himself until that night!"

"And you, Edith," said Mrs. Warrington, slipping an arm about the trembling girl; "you did not know until you received his foolish letter."

Her only answer was to put her head on her aunt's shoulder and burst into tears.

"There, there," said Mrs. Warrington, stroking the bowed head, "there, there, I know you love him."

"I don't. I hate him!" sobbed Edith.

Mrs. Warrington led the girl to a seat, and there, holding each other's hands, they sat together while the girl poured out her heart to the one true, womanly friend she had in the world.

"How can I tell Hugh that I do not love him?" she said at the last. "And I can never tell him that I do love him. No; it is too late now."

She sprang up, and her mood changed in an instant.

"I am a woman at last!" she exclaimed defiantly. "A woman of the world. Why shouldn't I marry a man who is rich, dull and good natured? What would half the girls in the city give for the chance!"

"Edith," said Mrs. Warrington, with deep displeasure in her tone, "the love of an honest man is something more precious than gold or silver. The woman who throws it aside in youth carries a heavy burden for the rest of her life."

"Yes," returned Miss Edith, "but one cannot cast aside what one does not possess. But I do not wish to give you pain. It has all been very foolish, this talk of love. I have charge of a business establishment, and I must be hurrying back. If there is nothing to do for my uncle now, I must at least be ready to greet him when he reappears after his tussle with the Money Devil. There, don't be shocked. Remember the books that Hugh and I read together. It is affectation to pretend to know too little. Oh, dear, I can see it in your face. When I was a girl, you wished me a woman, and now that I am grown a woman of the world, you wish me the girl again."

On the way home in her carriage she cried a little, and then, drying her eyes, she attacked a loose thread in one of her gloves so vigorously that she soon had the satisfaction of seeing a gaping seam. It was very much the same as when a man hurls a pet pipe to the floor, or breaks a cane. It was some relief.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS.

The presentation of the company's ordinance in the Common Council had not caused the stir Bannerton anticipated. Bidwell had been at great pains to prepare a copy for Shuttle in advance, and along with it went an interview in which Bidwell explained that the ordinance was merely submitted to the Council as the company's idea of what it would like. Of course, the wily manipulator said, it was open to many modifications.

Resigned to the belief that Bidwell had secured control of the majority of the stock by buying the block held by the Malden bank, Elliotson was inclined not to interfere in whatever course Shuttle might choose to take, although he frankly told the editor that he thought the ordinance the most daring and vicious piece of municipal legislation he had ever seen or read of. Now, while Shuttle believed Bidwell controlled the stock he was not so certain but that another shift might not place it back in Elliotson's hands. So he decided upon a course of careful trimming, which he called "being fair." The ordinance was therefore duly promulgated, with all the contributory advertising that Bidwell chose to work in with it.

Bidwell contrived to see a great deal of Shuttle, whom he commended for his upright and honorable treatment of the company. "Of course, we had to make the ordinance pretty strong at the beginning," he said, "because the sandbaggers and the demagogues in the Council will be after us. We must put ourselves in a position at the outset where we can gradually recede and make concessions to effect a compromise. We must protect the innocent purchasers of our stock, you know."

But Shuttle did not lack information as to the actual state of affairs. The City Hall reporter told him the ordinance was slated to go through as it stood and was given a lecture; the political man came in with the same story and was promptly rebuked for going outside of his field of endeavor. To this he demurred, claiming it was all politics and nothing else.

"Nothing of the kind, nothing of the kind," cried the irate editor. "You fellows all see politics whenever Bidwell does anything. He is a business man and this is a business proposition."

Bannerton, acting under instructions from Mrs. Warrington, in whose judgment he had every confidence, had gone back to his routine work and diversion. He stuck to his office, reading much while there and saw a great deal of Hannum and the artist in the evenings, the three meeting in the bachelor quarters of Hannum.

Thus two months dragged by. On the surface there was little to be seen, but Henry Bidwell was hard at work, burrowing and laying wires, reaching out here and there making connections, and steadily advancing along the lines so carefully mapped out by him. Gradually the public tired of the puttering objections of The Watchman; a feeling of security overcame the opponents of the ordinance and it became a prevailing sentiment that it would never be passed by the Council. It was the echo of The Watchman's policy of puerile opposition.

Suddenly, one day, there came a broadside in The Spinning Wheel that, in a measure, opened Shuttle's eyes. It was in the shape of a solid page of carefully worded interviews with the leading business men of the city, in which they were nearly all committed, either by inference or directly, for the ordinance.

Shuttle hurried to see Bidwell.

"What does this mean? What does this mean? What? What? Are you trying to get support for the ordinance you have submitted to the Council?" he demanded.

"The business men of the city seem to think pretty well of it," replied Bidwell, complacently spreading the page of interviews out in front of him. "If they are satisfied the men who make the city, who pay the taxes and employ thousands, why should you object?"

"They have been tricked into placing themselves in this position," fumed Shuttle.

"Possibly," said Bidwell, "and others have been forced. Make it at its worst. What of it?"

"You are making a mistake," said the editor. "The people will not stand such an imposition. Why, the fare in other cities may be three cents, two cents, or less, in twenty years."

"That is what we are looking out for," returned Bidwell. "It depends entirely upon the point of view. We are not paying car fares. We are collecting them."

"You are making a mistake. You are making a great mistake," sputtered the editor, nervously, shaking his head.

"Look here, Shuttle," said Bidwell, "you have told me that on several occasions and I have never before made any reply to it. Look at me now and then look back and see where I was thirteen years ago. Does the record show that I have made many mistakes? Now, it strikes me that you are the man who has made mistakes. What has it profited you to oppose me as you have done every now and then during that period? What is this to you now? Why not come over with us and make a legitimate profit? There is stock to be bought that will be increased a hundred-fold if this ordinance is passed. Be fair and reasonable in this matter and you will make good dividends."

"I am fair and reasonable," declared Shuttle, his eyes flashing, "and I do not have to be bribed to be so, Mr. Bidwell. I do not have to be bribed. What? What?"

"Bribery is an ugly word, Mr. Shuttle," said Bidwell, in a menacing tone. "I should dislike very much, for your sake, to have to tell any one that I tried to bribe you."

"What is the use of all this pretense?" cried Shuttle. "Why do you not ask for my resignation at once. You can have it now. What is the use of playing with me, Mr. Bidwell?"

"I do not quite understand you," observed Bidwell, quietly.

"Oh, of course not," sneered Shuttle. "Do you think I am a fool? Do you imagine that we do not know that you control the stock? Who got the Malden stock, if you did not?"

"Humph," said Bidwell, with a little shrug of his shoulders, "some one has been talking too much."

"Very little goes on that I do not find out," continued Shuttle, shaking his head decisively. "Now, what is the use of beating about the bush? You want me to support this ordinance. I decline to allow the paper to take such a stand as long as I am at its head. You can have my resignation now. It must come to that, so here it is now, to take effect at once."

He produced a lead pencil and began to scribble on a piece of paper that he found on the table in front of him. When he had finished he passed it over to Bidwell. The wily manipulator took it and looked it over. Then he slowly and carefully tore it to pieces, and threw the bits into the waste basket.

"Mr. Shuttle," he said, at last, "I decline to accept your resignation. I admire your courage and I respect your opinions. Now, I have just one thing to ask of you."

"I will grant it, if it is what an honorable man can do," responded Shuttle, much affected by Bidwell's generosity.

"It is to be fair with us," said Bidwell. "To allow the Common Council and the people to hear our side of the case. That is all I ask."

"I promise you that," cried Shuttle, jumping up and extending his hand, "come what may."

"Very well," said Bidwell, with all the manner of a man speaking to an employe. "There is nothing more for us to discuss."

"It pays to be firm. It pays to be firm," repeated Shuttle over and over to himself, as he hurried back to his den on the top floor of the Watchman building.

The moment the editor left the office Bidwell pushed a button.

"Tell Stalker to come to me at once," he said to the clerk who answered the buzzer. Then he paced back and forth in the room, talking to himself.

"They have not got it; they have not got it. There is a chance yet. Where can it be? There is also another move. Elliotson thinks I have the control. He might sell."

His soliloquy was cut short by the entrance of Stalker, whom he motioned to be seated.

"Stalker," he began in a way that made the big lobbyist quiver, "you have bungled several things for me. I have kept you with me for old times' sake. But there are some things I cannot forgive."

"What have I done?" answered Stalker, in vain trying to summon the little gurgling laugh that was his chief stock in trade.

"You reported to me that the other side had secured the Watchman stock held by the Malden bank," said Bidwell, sternly. "It is not true. Did you take it yourself?"

For a moment Stalker, who could bluff and browbeat a State Senator, or even a Governor, on a pinch, was dumb with fright, as Bidwell came nearer to him, all the while fixing his glittering eyes on him as if they would pierce the innermost secrets of his breast.

"Good God! No!" he managed to ejaculate. "It was bought in the Malden bank. I have Stubbitt's word for it, and I saw the money in cold, hard cash."

"Stalker," said Bidwell, after a moment's pause, "some one else, other than Elliotson and his crowd, has that stock now. I must have it. At any rate, it must be located. I will stand for anything—anything—do you understand?"

"I will find it, Mr. Bidwell," cried Stalker, rising and thumbing his hat. "I will find it if every power on earth must be invoked to aid me."

"Yes, and all the powers in hell, if necessary," said Bidwell. "Your report threw me off completely. On the success of your efforts depends your further connection with this company—and your connection with anything else in this State."

There were times when Bidwell did things straight and direct. He left his office and went at once to the office of Samuel Elliotson.

"It is something out of the ordinary run to see you here, Henry," said Elliotson, in greeting. "We meet often enough in the club, but I do not remember when I have had a call from you."

"Elliotson," began Bidwell, "let us be frank and straight in the talk that we are to have together. We have been opposed to each other in a good many deals, but that should cut little figure in a straight business proposition."

"If it is on the street railway ordinance," said Elliotson, "you ought to be satisfied with what your man has made me say in that interview. I do not believe in that ordinance, and I never shall. I know too much of the whole speculation that is back of it. You should not expect me to think otherwise under the circumstances."

"It is not in reference to the ordinance," returned Bidwell. "It has to do with The Watchman. You know how matters stand now."

"I know that you have control by a small margin," assented Elliotson.

"Very well," continued Bidwell. "I wish you to continue as president of the company."

"Under what conditions?" asked Elliotson.

"Under absolutely no conditions," replied Bidwell. "I am willing to trust to your judgment and sense of fairness."

For some moments Elliotson was lost in thought. At last he looked up and said:

"Henry, I cannot accept it. I appreciate your confidence in me one way, but in another way your confidence in me is misplaced. I am absolutely and irrevocably opposed to the ordinance that your company now has before the Common Council. I believe in the indeterminate franchise and the fixing of rates of fare every five years, based on the earnings of the road. I am willing to allow you 10 per cent dividends even on your watered stock. Will you withdraw the present ordinance and make such a proposition to the people of this city?"

"Would you favor a new banking law that would cut your profits down?"

"I might," said Elliotson, "if I knew my profits were excessive and a burden on the people. No, Henry; we cannot come to terms, and I have no idea why you have offered to allow me to remain as president of The Watchman company. For, should I remain, I would fight the ordinance tooth and nail in the paper, as I shall do out of it when the time comes."

"Well," remarked Bidwell, "enough of that now. Will you sell some of your stock? As you say, we have control, so your refusal in the past can have no bearing on your position now."

"Henry Bidwell," returned Elliotson, "I told you once I would never sell a penny's worth of The Watchman stock to you. In a business sense I consider you a bad man to own a good newspaper. You have control. You are a shrewd manager. You may make money for us stockholders, and as for the policy of the paper I will not be held responsible. No; I stand where I did before. Not a penny's worth of stock at any price."

"Samuel Elliotson," said Bidwell, livid with rage, "you are an old man, and——"

"Oh, I don't know about that, Henry," interrupted Elliotson. "I would not trade with you. My body is tolerably sound, and so is my conscience."

Bidwell rushed from the room, tottered about for a moment outside and then, pulling himself together with a great effort, made his way back to the office.

That night Edith heard him stirring about in his den, working and talking to himself far into the morning hours. He came to his breakfast trembling and white, but was much improved when he had eaten.

"You did not rest well last night, did you, uncle?" asked the girl.

"Rest!" he began, smiling across the table at his niece. "Rest! I never rest, my dear. Sometimes I sleep, but that is a habit."

Elliotson sent for Shuttle the day after Bidwell called upon him.

"Shuttle," he said, "I am tired of this dilly-dallying. Either the paper must come out flat-footed against this ordinance or support it, the way the rest of the papers are doing. I am tired of seeing editorial writers doing a daily tight-rope act."

Shuttle hemmed and hawed.

"We are merely being fair," he said at last. "There has been nothing done as yet. The ordinance is merely up for discussion now."

"And in the meantime Bidwell is making capital for it in every section and among every class. But I tired of having the responsibility and not the free control. I do not care to give imperative orders, under the circumstances, and I do not propose, even by inference, to stand for the present policy. The annual meeting has been twice postponed at Bidwell's request, which, by the way, I thought very peculiar. I shall call the meeting for to-morrow."

"Might as well write out my resignation in that case," said Shuttle.

"Oh, I do not know about that," said Elliotson. "You have been doing quite well. Mind, I do not blame you at all, Shuttle."

"I have always wished to do what was best for the paper," said Shuttle.

"I know you have," returned Elliotson, speaking in a kindly tone. "You have been a faithful and hard-working servant, loyal to the paper and honest. I regret as much as you do the change in the situation. But you will have to learn to conduct the paper in the interest of something else than the paper in the future. You will have to keep your eye on the trolley."

The call came for the meeting just when Bidwell least wished it. But there was no getting away from it. So he made the best of the situation, and, possessed of a knowledge which he had shared with no one else, he was present when the roll was called. The stock controlled by Elliottson was filed with the secretary, as was also the stock held by Bidwell and his associates. The secretary ran it over and verified it, and then, turning to Bidwell, said:

"You have forgotten the block held by the Malden Bank, Mr. Bidwell."

"I beg your pardon," returned Bidwell, "but I have not forgotten it. I do not think I shall, either."

"But it