the Aldermen of the better class there had grown a feeling that the ordinance was a proper one. On every side they were met by men who said a good word for the measure; the papers controlled by Bidwell continued to print interviews with leading citizens, while lawyers of standing, posing as property owners, had appeared before the council committee and argued in favor of the passage of the ordinance. Before the committee had also come business men to stammer a few commendatory words—driven there like so many sheep prodded by the drover. The members of the phalanx commanded by Sprogel were in high feather. They strutted and swaggered before their fellow-members.

"What did we tell you fellows?" said Connie Moran. "See what the business 'guys' say. I tell you this is right, this ordinance. The 'Duke' wouldn't stand for anything that wasn't dead on the square no more than I would."

"It is all cut off and ready to serve," said Locksley to Bannerton. "There isn't any more to it. They have some of the beer Aldermen down here, filling them up with champagne, and that settles it. When you get champagne into a Dutchman, he's lost, and that is all there is to it. The business 'guys' have fixed the thing. Make one of those Googleheiser boys think the business men want a thing, and he's for it. There ain't anything so set in the world as a conservative 'guy' with the wrong hunch."

It was little wonder that Bidwell was in high spirits. He frequented the club late in the afternoon and early evening and he had a warm grasp and a smile for all he met. His old chuckle, that had given him his first start as a lobbyist, had come back to him and many there were who wondered they had never before noticed what a genial gentleman he really was.

The three men—Bidwell, Sprogel and Ledlow—met one evening in one of the private dining-rooms on the second floor of the clubhouse.

Both Ledlow and Bidwell had agreed to stay down and take dinner with the bachelor millionaire.

"It does look promising," said the slender banker, rubbing his bony hands together. "But I wish The Watchman would let up a little. They are getting pretty close to some ugly facts."

"Let them go," cried Bidwell. "What do we care what that paper says?"

"But it is liable to wake the people up," continued the banker. "I have had quite a number of men ask me about the ordinance."

"Well, you told them, did you not?" said Bidwell, laughing. "That is just it. I tell you the people listen to the voice of the business men every time. Give me the foremen, and I will get the rest of the vote in a shop, no matter how big it is, or what the sentiment. The city is nothing but a big shop, and we have the foremen."

"We have not all of them," said Ledlow, dubiously. "Elliotson, for instance, is talking ugly, and, by the way, I hear that young man, Bannerton, has been busying about for the last few days, trying to stir up trouble."

"Elliotson is an old grandma," said Bidwell, "and his knitting is coarse. He is as far behind the times in this matter as he is in the banking business."

"Elliotson is a good banker," said Ledlow, with some gleam of professional spirit. "No matter what else you may say of him, he is a good banker."

"Yes," said Bidwell, laughing, for he was in the best of spirits; "he is a good banker, and that is the reason why you will have millions when he has hundreds of thousands. Yes, he is a good banker—a goody-goody banker, afraid to take chances. Why, Ledlow, you will clean up more on this one deal than he would make by his methods in the banking business in fifty years."

"Yes, if it goes through all right," assented the cautious money-lender.

"Goes through all right!" exclaimed Bidwell. "Why, what can stop it now? No power on earth. No, sir, no power on earth can block me now."

"Open another bottle," rumbled the ponderous Sprogel, opening his eyes; for he had been nodding while the two men talked.

"Yes," cried Bidwell, his eyes sparkling. "Sprogel is right. Bring another bottle. I have earned it, if ever a man has."

"Henry, I wouldn't, if I were you," said the banker, nervously. "You remember, you said once, you never took a glass of wine that it did not bring you bad luck in some form or another."

"Well," said Bidwell, again laughing like a boy, "it is a stand-off in that case, as I never had any real good luck when I did not open one."

Ledlow looked appealingly to Sprogel. But Sprogel merely shrugged his beefy shoulders and said:

"What's the use? Henry does as he pleases, any way."

Very little champagne had a great effect on Bidwell. He was of the nervous, high-strung temperament that cannot hold in check the exhilarating influences of the blended vintage. It released all his energy, like the tearing away of a dam. In a few moments an ecstasy of avarice came over him.

"Millions!" he cried, holding the glass aloft and watching the bubbles whirl up the long stem—for the old-fashioned glass still lingered in the club. "Millions for us three! Why, this is only the beginning. The next step is to consolidate them all into one company. Think of it! Capitalized for a billion dollars and held as a right that none can take away for fifty years!"

"But we won't be here then," remarked Sprogel, placidly.

"Why not? Why not? Who can tell?" cried Bidwell, his eyes blazing. "Give me money enough—enough, mind you—and I will defy death itself!" The glass fell from his fingers as he spoke and he grew ghastly white.

"I am not feeling well," he said, feebly, as Ledlow and Sprogel hastily rose from their chairs. "But I will be better in a moment. You were right, Ledlow; I should never drink it."

He recovered shortly and was taken home by Ledlow. But the dinner was not lost; for Sprogel, with the instinctive frugality to waste nothing, sent at once for two other guests, Mayor Thorn and Connie Moran.

And while they feasted and made merry over the prospects of a victory over the people, whose interests the Mayor and Councilmen had taken solemn oaths to protect, Hugh Bannerton was parting with Elliotson, after a long talk.

"The columns of the paper shall be open to you," said Elliotson, "and I pledge myself to stand by you in the movement. I dislike to precipitate a fight of this nature, which may grow personal; but you are right, and there is no other way out of it. Get your man as soon as possible."

As Bannerton hurried away to see Mrs. Warrington and perfect his plans, he was filled with a fierce glow, a zest for battle such as had never before inspired him. For he felt sure Henry Bidwell had made him dishonored in the eyes of the woman he loved. But, even worse than that, his faith had been shattered; for he would have staked his life that Edith would have remained stanch and true to him, no matter who defamed him, so long as he followed what he thought his duty.

CHAPTER XXII.

HANNUM RECEIVES HIS ANSWER.

When Bidwell left Edith, after the interview in which he placed in her hands the proof of her lover's duplicity (for the damning evidence of the letter was not to be doubted) she sat for a long time dazed and numbed by the shock.

Her first feelings were those of a person who had received a blow and returns slowly to consciousness, striving to recall the incidents that preceded it and, as yet, but dimly aware of the extent of the injury. She did not weep; there was no feeling of keen anguish or acute pain; only a dull, dead sense of a great loss. It was a loss not alone of the man whom she had loved, but a loss of faith in all men. She had never thought that Hugh would love another woman. She had felt no jealousy. And, after this blind faith in him, to find that he had burned with love for another woman while professing love for her! The letter was before her. It was overflowing with love, with passionate love, and teemed with endearing expressions. It was a letter such as a man might have written who wished to tell all his love in one letter. And it was signed, "Your own faithful Hugh." Faithful! Pah! if this was the faithfulness of man, she was done with them all. She felt no sting of jealousy; only a sickening sense of loss of faith. There could be no explanation, no extenuation, no reconciliation. With a coolness that surprised her, she took pen and paper and wrote a short letter to Hugh. It was curt, brusque, business-like. It might have been a letter dismissing a housemaid. She told the man she had loved that they could never meet again. She made no accusation, expressed no regrets, and left no opening for a reply. She asked one thing only; that he should tell no one, not even Mrs. Warrington. It was a letter cold, formal and hard; one that left no doubt as to the firmness of the writer.

When she had posted the letter, for she went to the letter box on the corner and dropped it in herself, she drew a long breath, and instinctively clutched to regain it. It was her first weakness, her first wavering. In a panic of doubt and fear she hurried home; for the thought had come to her that perhaps there might be some mistake—that possibly the letter might not have been written by Hugh. This was the straw that she clutched at in a last agony of hope. For no sooner had she looked at the letter again than all hope fled. It was his handwriting, the signature was his—she knew the peculiar twist of the "H," and the way it was joined to the "u." The little spark of love, of tender recollection, that was yet alive in her heart went out that instant. She resolved to forget, to be thankful that she had found out in time. Henceforth she would trust no man, and no one should know. That night she wept over a much older letter, but she was alone in her room, where no one could see. This was repeated night after night, but each day she rose, strong and firm in her resolution, held up by her pride, and a great sense of wrong. She was soft and pleasant in her manners, she smiled often and easily, and was the delight of her uncle, who had expected an entirely different attitude on her part. So he chuckled to himself, and, knowing men, and not women, judged by the masculine standard, and said: "She did not care for him, after all. She is a sensible girl."

On every side in the set in which she moved Edith heard Hugh Bannerton held up to derision and scorn. He was denounced as a young anarchist, as an ingrate, who had been picked up and befriended by Henry Bidwell, and now repaid his kind benefactor with the basest ingratitude. Some wondered that such a fellow had been tolerated in the upper circle at all; others remembered that they had always been suspicious of him. Even very young men and women took up the gossip, and repeated the insinuation that Hugh had been dropped from his position by reason of some grave offense.

John Hannum was an exception. He made no excuses for the young man, but he stopped those who spoke to him directly by declaring that it was a matter which he did not care to discuss. He had no opinion on the ordinance, nor upon the motives of those who advocated or opposed its passage. His attitude was in such contrast to that of many who had professed friendship for Bannerton that it aroused in Edith a feeling of admiration and gratitude; for she held Hugh guiltless of everything but faithfulness to her. This feeling toward Hannum she revealed to him by a chance remark. With the quickness of a trained attorney to seize an opening, he asked a question concerning Hugh. Her reply released him from an obligation to which a sense of honor had thus far bound him. Instantly, cool-headed and shrewd as he was in all other things, he was carried away. He asked another question, a great and significant one to a woman. The answer came at once, and it came with the deadly kindliness that there is no mistaking. When there is kindness and pity in this answer it is immutable. This Hannum knew, for there are some things in which all women are alike.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FRIENDS AND FOES.

One day there appeared on the first page of The Watchman a boxed notice, printed in black type, and headed "A Call to Arms!" It was read by every one who took the paper, and soon the news was taken up and carried about by word of mouth. It was a call for an uprising of citizens to fight the passage of the ordinance, to prevent the city from being tied down by a monopoly for fifty years. All persons ready to enlist were asked to send in their names, those wishing to take a public part in the fight to signify that such was their intention; others, who might not wish to be publicly identified with the movement could express themselves privately. A pledge was made that the names of those who might wish to contribute funds to help pay the expenses of the fight would not be published. A citizens' committee would be formed at once, and officers elected. The call was signed by John Brawley, a business man whose standing was of the highest. He was a Scotchman, honest and fearless.

The ice once broken, there was a quick response on the part of many men who had hung back for lack of a leader. The standing of Brawley was such that his name inspired confidence, and that afternoon a number of business men, Elliotson and Dee among the number, gathered in his private office to discuss plans. Outside, Bannerton was taking down the names of other men who came to enlist, men of all classes, and in various walks in life. It was decided to organize at once. Brawley was named as president, and Bannerton as secretary. The next day money began to come in, and the manner in which it came was a striking proof that the power that Bidwell and his associates wielded. Messengers brought the largest contributions in cash, and departed without telling from whom they came. A few sent checks—but none through Ledlow's bank. The next day small subscriptions poured in through the mails; letters came by the hundreds, commending the work, and pledging further assistance.

"The people are with us," said one of the men who had been chosen a member of the executive committee of the organization. "There will be little more heard of the ordinance now."

"I am not so sure of that," said Brawley. 'From the facts Mr. Bannerton has laid before me, I am convinced that Bidwell has resolved to go through with this at any cost. They are in too far to back out now. But as for the people being with us, there is no doubt of that. The people are always right when they understand."

"It is our aim to make them understand," said Bannerton, looking up from his desk. "It is also our duty."

"Precisely," assented Brawley, "and for that very reason we must arrange for meetings at once."

The story of a battle may be told in a paragraph, or made into a book. It held true of this battle; for the incidents of the two weeks' engagement, during which a people, tied and hampered by the law, and menaced by those who respected no law, fought to save a public right from being prostituted to private gain, were many and varied. They were enough to make a thrilling tale of attack, defense, trials and temptations, some men stanch and true, others bending to ignoble deeds under pressure. There were all phases of human nature that the friction of strife brings to the surface. Let it suffice to treat of this dark drama of modern life, this massacre of men's consciences, in general terms, and spare the details that would but lead to the slums and the brothels. Of Tubbett, Moran, Mayor Thorn and those of the hardy and reckless band that served for pay, what can be told but the same old story? Sworn to stand firm, caring naught for the threats of irate citizens, unless reinforced by numbers, and the dangling emblem of Judge Lynch, they passed a wild and hilarious existence during this memorable struggle, swaggering about, drinking, living on the fat of the land, and filled with the lust for booty that was promised in case of victory. But of other men who were at this time members of the Common Council, it is a different tale, and praise be to God that it is so. For, had it not been for the cunning artifices that deceived many of them, for sophistry that was beyond their grasp, and for a certain rugged sense of honor that bound others, there would have been small chance of success for Bidwell and his companions. On these men Bidwell turned the full force of his manifold and disguised influences.

The character of Bidwell was such that he fought best when hard pressed, and never before had he been so hard pressed when far into a project and no longer able to retreat. The organization of forces to combat him now brought him face to face with the public he feared, and which he had almost grown to hate. But to meet such a contingency he had behind him the powerful confederation made possible by his dual grasp of business and politics. In all the city there was not a business or professional man whose name he had not studied to find the one fulcrum by which he could be moved. The strain was beginning to tell on him—the strain of ceaseless mental activity, and an uneasy conscience. For—and it was something new to him—he had begun to doubt—to doubt if it really was right, this giving up of everything for money. The breaking off with Mrs. Warrington had left him alone and, being now always alone so far as his inner thoughts were involved, he had grown to think, advancing timidly, and unwillingly, along a new road. The very warnings and advice which she had given him had afforded him an opportunity to talk back, to justify by words, and thus relieve himself. Now it was all pent up within him. But he pulled himself together and resolved to meet the storm that was brewing and to push the ordinance through at any cost—to stop at nothing. The lust for gain glowed within him, and he soon put his forces in motion for the final assault with all the skill of a general old in the wars.

The citizens' committee called a mass meeting and arranged for speakers. At once Bidwell caused his papers to clamor for fair play. What was the sense of stirring up hatred and strife when all that was asked by the company was a calm discussion? Let other speakers be heard at the meeting! The Watchman commended this as proper enough, and the committee yielded. Then Tubbett and Moran sallied forth to rake the slums to pack the meeting in behalf of the company, while Bidwell and Sprogel brought every pressure to bear to secure the attendance of men of standing whom they controlled. Bidwell sent for one of the leading lawyers of the city, and said to him:

"You must speak at this meeting in behalf of the ordinance."

"Good God! Mr. Bidwell, how can I?" cried the lawyer, aghast. "I am on record as making the strongest speech of the evening at the mass meeting a year ago that passed the resolutions which resulted in the killing of the other ordinance. And it was not nearly as bad as this one."

"I cannot help that," answered Bidwell, grimly. "We need you now, and you must stand by us."

"I cannot afford to do it," said the lawyer.

"You can better afford to do it than you can to refuse," said Bidwell. "You want power of attorney in a very ticklish case, and I, together with Sprogel, am in control. Refuse me, and you are in the minority."

"I will do the best I can," said the attorney. "I will speak at the meeting. What do you wish me to say?"

"Whatever you would say if you were retained as a lawyer and were addressing a jury. Mind you, if you were addressing a jury—not a Judge. We will have the jury, too. I will see to that."

But this plan was miscalculated, for there was such an outpouring of men that the pluggers and heelers found themselves in the minority. But they decided to capture the chairmanship by force of noise and were marshaled to vote for a man friendly to the ordinance. Bannerton heard of it, and hurried to Brawley.

"Well, what can we do? The chairman must be elected, must he not?" asked the business man.

"No; not under these circumstances," answered Bannerton. "You just get up and announce that Samuel Elliotson has been selected as chairman."

"But that will be gag rule," protested the man of trade. "Will they stand any such high-handed procedure?"

"Stand it!" exclaimed Bannerton. "They have got to stand it. What can they do about it? This is our meeting."

It was a wild and stormy meeting. The great lawyer, white and trembling, made a sorry spectacle of himself, but he filled his contract. Then some of the speakers of the citizens' committee got the platform. They riddled the ordinance. They pointed out what it really meant, what a great steal it was. The people roared in approval. Other speakers followed and when the adherents of the ordinance began to interrupt there grew a savage spirit among the men who had come to the meeting in good faith. There were angry mutterings, and one by one the heelers slunk out of the hall, cowed and afraid to go through with their plan.

The next day The Watchman came out with a full-page account of the great uprising of the people. Men talked of it on the street corners, in the saloons, in the cars, everywhere. It became the opinion that the Aldermen would not dare to go ahead. The papers controlled by Bidwell came out in the afternoon denouncing the men who had called the meeting as little better than anarchists, and deploring that respectable citizens should have been hooted down by the riffraff of the city. The meeting was presented as one in which the better element favoring the ordinance had been outnumbered by things, brought there by the mischief-makers and busy-bodies, fighting organized capital out of pure envy.

Bannerton, who now saw much of Shuttle, and was welcomed as an ally, besought the editor to print the facts about the meeting. But Shuttle demurred. It would be undignified, he said, to notice such accusations.

"Who brought the thugs there?" he demanded. "Give me the proof, and I will print the facts," he said, at last.

"Ed Tubbett brought some of them," answered Bannerton.

"I don't believe it. I know Tubbett too well," returned Shuttle.

"I will bring you the word of a dozen men."

"Very well. You look that up," said the editor.

The next night Bannerton came with what he had found confirming his first information.

"I don't believe it," said Shuttle, shortly. "Tubbett wouldn't do anything of the kind."

"Look here," cried Bannerton, hotly; "I will not stand this. You ask me to get you certain information and when I give it to you you tell me you do not believe it. What do you mean?"

"Oh, I do not mean to question your word, Bannerton, or doubt the accuracy of your information. But I don't believe Tubbett would do anything of the sort. I see him every night and he is very reasonable about this wicked world."

Bannerton turned away in disgust. What was the use of talking to such a sincere and trustful man in such a wicked world?

To follow the combatants in this fight or even the leaders, would make a thrilling tale, but it would be an over-long one. The members of the citizens' committee were jubilant. Men congratulated them on every hand, some stealthily, it is true, but congratulated them just the same. The labor organizations passed resolutions denouncing the ordinance and commending the citizens' committee. So did the Turners and many other civic societies. A few ministers, in little, out-of-the-way churches, preached sermons against the passage of the ordinance. The people had risen, the ordinance was killed, said the people. Brawley and Elliotson and John Dee and the rest of the committee were sure the victory had been won. But Bannerton was not so sure. For Locksley, who had a keen sense of professional etiquette, and would tell nothing concerning the secrets of his patrons, had said to Bannerton:

"They will stick, Hugh. There are a few weak sisters, but they will hold enough of them in line."

Under the surface, Bidwell, Sprogel and Ledlow were hard at work. The pressure that they brought to bear on some of the Aldermen was powerful enough to have made even better men wince. One man, representing a constituency that was overwhelmingly opposed to the ordinance, and a man of business himself, was beset on every side. He had been the recipient of an office of honor at the hands of Bidwell. At the time he had pledged himself to return the favor with anything Bidwell might ask. And now Bidwell not only asked, but insisted. Another, Carl Zimmer, a simple and honest German, had given his word to the Mayor long before—his word to return a favor by anything the Mayor might demand of him in his capacity as an Alderman.

"I gif you my word of honor, Mr. Mayor, that my vote is yours when you ask for it," he had said. "That a German never breaks."

Now, on every side, Carl Zimmer heard things that made him doubt. But, worst of all, men came to him, saying:

"How much do you get, Carl Zimmer? It is a big robbery, and, if you get nothing, you are a fool. If you take something, you are then a thief, Carl Zimmer. That I do not think. No; Carl Zimmer will vote for the people."

The series of meetings were all but over; the matter was to come up in the Council on Monday, and it was now Friday. Bidwell had planned his last public move. It was to hold a business men's meeting at one of the theaters on Saturday night. He would demonstrate that the business men of the community were in favor of the ordinance. The citizens' committee was also to hold its last meeting on the same evening. Bannerton went to Shuttle.

"Mr. Shuttle," he said, "I have worked pretty hard through this fight, and I wish to ask one thing now. I deem it an essential."

"What is it?" asked Shuttle. "I will do it if I can."

"It is to handle this business men's meeting of the company as it deserves. If it really is a meeting of business men, say so. But if it is a packed and made-up meeting, with simply the business men who have bought stock in this speculation, or who have been notorious in their support of the measure, why, say so, cold and flat. A good deal depends on the way the meeting is handled."

"I suppose you want me to say it is a gang of toughs, no matter who is there," sneered Shuttle. "I will be fair, Mr. Bannerton."

"Tell just what the meeting really proves to be," said Bannerton. "That is all I ask."

"I hear they are going to pass the ordinance, anyway," said Shuttle, his countenance falling. "I have inside information that they have a majority."

"It is a question whether they can hold them," replied Bannerton. "They had them before we stirred up the people. A number of them are pretty weak now."

"Yes," said Shuttle, perking up. "The Watchman has done great work."

That evening Bannerton received a message saying John Hannum wished to see him. He found the lawyer waiting for him in his study.

"Come in, my anarchistic young friend," he cried. "Well, Hugh," he continued, when Bannerton had taken a seat, "I am really pleased at what you have done. You may not make anything out of this, but you have had a heap of satisfaction. There is nothing so good for a man, both at the time and long after, as to do what he thinks is right."

Hugh made no reply, for, to tell the truth, he had grown wary, and knew not where he might not find some cunning move by Bidwell.

"Hugh," resumed the lawyer, rising and beginning to walk back and forth, "this ordinance is one of the most outrageous measures ever prepared by a corporation in this country. It is such work as this that will bring the storm down on the heads of all corporations, be they ever so honest, and I hold there are honest corporations."

"So do I, John. You have heard me say that many a time," said Bannerton.

"This measure is one that will disgrace the city," continued the lawyer. "It is so bold that I am astounded at the effrontery of the men who are behind it. Why, do you know what it means? It takes away from the city by force of contract the rights of citizens yet unborn. It seizes vested rights that no body of men should dare deed away to become the instrument of taxation for private enrichment. A king would not dare do what this Council will do. He would lose his throne, and perhaps his head."

"That the Council will pass!" repeated Hugh. "Do you mean that the ordinance will be passed after all?"

"It looks very much that way, Hugh," replied the lawyer. "I have information that leads me to believe they have got all they need."

"John," said Hugh after a pause, "if you feel the way you do about the ordinance, why have you not come to our help?"

"How do you know I have not?" asked Hannum.

"I beg your pardon, John, if you have felt this way for any length of time," cried Hugh, "for I did not mean by money contribution, but by your voice, and the weight it would have brought to our cause."

"Nonsense," exclaimed Hannum, "lawyers do not carry any weight out of court. The only hope for the people is in the courts. This trust will not be misplaced, in my opinion. The courts will never sustain the ordinance after it has passed. The courts are the bulwark of the people. I wish to do my part, Hugh, to prevent a great wrong; to prevent the agents of the people from making a binding bargain wherein they knowingly betray their trust."

"Well, let me put you down for one of the speeches to-morrow night" said Hugh.

"I will appeal to juries, or to judges, not to mobs," replied Hannum significantly.

"Then why don't you begin suit yourself?" asked Hugh.

"Hugh Bannerton, have you lost all your old quickness? I am a lawyer."

Suddenly a great light came to the younger man.

"Oh, John!" he cried, "will you—will you take the case?"

The lawyer gave a sigh of relief.

"Why, of course. Why not?"

"Then I engage you now," said Hugh decisively. "I have that authority, and if there is not money enough, you can have all I have when you present your bill. We have plenty of money to go ahead with proceedings."

"For my services," said Hannum, "my fee shall be a nominal one. You could pay it and not suffer much. Hugh, sometimes the man, the citizen, and the lawyer may be blended in one."

"There is more than lawyer in you, after all," cried Hugh, throwing his arms about his friend, now come back to him. "You are all man."

"I hope not," said the lawyer dryly. "Men—simply men—draw a dollar a day. But jog along now, Hugh, as I expect to work to-night. The papers will be ready, when they are needed, if ever they are."

The next day Bannerton reported to Elliotson and Brawley concerning the retaining of John Hannum.

"He will have nothing to do," said Elliotson, in a confident tone. "Why, they will never dare to pass the ordinance now. The best men in the city are quietly opposing its passage."

"Yes," said Bannerton, "and some of the 'best' men in the city are quietly urging it on. You yourself told me the stock has been widely distributed among men ready always to get in on a speculation promising big returns."

"Well, there will be no returns on this investment," said Elliotson. "The ordinance will never pass."

"He has incurred no expense, Elliotson," said the cautious Scotchman, "and perhaps a lawyer may come in handy. There is no telling when a man like Bidwell is beaten. It is a great clan he has raised up to follow him on this raid."

The meeting at the theater—the meeting of the business men in Bidwell's behalf—filled Bannerton with a great and overwhelming joy when he beheld it. The business men had been hoodwinked into giving interviews, they had been browbeaten into silence, and some of them had even been made to say a kindly word for the ordinance. But when it came to coming down to attend a meeting for a cause to which they were opposed at heart, it was another matter. Here was a chance to show their independence, and nothing to fear—for who cannot give a good excuse for not having attended a meeting? We learn that early in life.

As Bannerton looked about him, he first saw a sprinkling of men who had been prominent in supporting the company in its fight. They numbered scarcely a score. On every side he saw the faces of political heelers whom he knew well, men gathered from lodging-houses and cheap saloons, the followers of any standard for one night and for a price. There were even boys, showing that the recruiting agents had been unable to fill their quota with men.

"We have won," he said to himself, as he hurried to the office of The Watchman.

To Shuttle he told the character of the meeting, with no attempt to conceal his satisfaction.

"I'm afraid you are prejudiced. I am afraid you are prejudiced," said the editor, mixing copy on the desk before him with both hands. "I shall have to wait until I hear from my men."

"Well, you will hear all right," said Bannerton. "There were enough members of the staff there. By the way, Shuttle, come over with me yourself. It's not far."

"How can I get away Saturday night? How can I get away Saturday night?" cried the editor, aghast, still mixing the Associated Press report with the death notices. "Saturday night! Saturday night!"

"Well," thought Bannerton, as he dragged himself home, foot-sore and half-dead for lack of sleep, "they cannot make capital out of that meeting. It was Bidwell's last chance, and he has failed. We will not need John Hannum, for which I am sorry, in a way."

The next morning Bannerton arose, bright and early, and, without waiting to dress, he got The Watchman. He took one glance at the first page, and then dropped into a chair, with a sickening sensation in the pit of his stomach. For, in great, staring headlines, he saw:

GREAT MEETING OF BUSINESS MEN.

Merchants, Manufacturers and Business Men Turn Out to Support the Ordinance.

Theater Packed to the Doors."

Calmly, very softly, he laid the paper down. Then he went back to his bed. He drew the covers up until they enveloped his head, so as to cut off all view of the world—and then he dropped off to sleep. The strain of the fight was over—he felt, he knew, he was beaten.

When he at last awoke, the sun was high in the heavens. At first the old sickening sensation came to him when he thought of the news, the "fake" that had been distributed that day among the people of the city. But he shook it off, took up the paper again and read it all through. When he laid it aside at last, he said, speaking aloud to himself:

"The greatest of all curses that can befall a man and his friends is an ambition to be a good fellow with everybody. Poor Shuttle!"

He could not trust himself to see Elliotson; for he would not have said anything against Shuttle for the world. Nobody else did. Why should he? Shuttle was immune by mutual consent of all those whom he nagged, or whose plans he toppled over.

The street railway fight passed from his mind and his own deep sorrow rose up to harrow him. The packet of letters! Her letters! His letters! Why had she sent them back to him? It was a bleak and dreary day, but he boarded a car and rode as far as it went. Then he walked, not caring whither, so long as he knew it was away from the city. At last he came to the grounds of the Country Club, now dreary and desolate, and dropped on a bench overlooking the lake. And there, under the same tree where Bidwell had stood and yielded to his great temptation, he shaped a little mound with his foot, and, as he was finished, a tear fell upon the earth. For there he buried his love.

All that day, that bleak Sabbath, Bidwell's men of every station and degree worked on the wavering Aldermen. "The business men are with us! Here, look at The Watchman, if you don't believe it. Would that paper say so, if it were not true?"

There was no answering—it was strong proof. In the evening there had been arranged a meeting of the Aldermen who had promised to vote for the ordinance. To this meeting came the lawyers in the service of the corporation. Each spoke in turn, told of the duty that lay before them, and with every sophistry of cunning minds stilled the conscience of the doubting Aldermen and assumed the sin themselves. The passage of the ordinance was rehearsed, the motions made by designated men, the chair ruled, the roll-call taken, the ordinance passed.

But why follow with further details of the race passage of the ordinance at the meeting the next day? What if policemen did stand guard at the doors and refuse admission to citizens? What if the whole thing was cut and dried and carried through with a high hand, in accordance with the well-laid plans of two corporation lawyers, who sat concealed behind the president—the smart little Connie Moran—lest there should be some slip in parliamentary procedure? And what if the Mayor, the official head of this fine American city, did strut down to the clerk's desk in his shirt sleeves and sign the ordinance ere the clerk had announced the vote? What of it? The ordinance passed and there was the end of it. No; not quite the end of it, for ten minutes later Henry Bidwell and his associates were enjoined from accepting the ordinance in behalf of the corporation. John Hannum had moved. It was up to the courts now, the bulwark of the people.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A LATE REPENTANCE.

Who shall fathom the vast and deep mystery of a city? Who has a fair and just conception of its manifold life? For what American has delved beneath the surface, has penetrated this wilderness of brick and mortar, to the inner life of its countless caves and caverns? Who has trained an ear to catch the heart-throbs of this composite mass, to know and interpret the governing impulse of its life? From the liberty of the country swarm men and women to a new bondage, to be warped and twisted by the fierce heat of competition—competition for all things, for the very air they breathe. From the bottom vice and crime reach up and meet excesses, abuses of power and selfish aggrandizement, coming from the top. Between the two the great middle class is exposed to the contagion of familiarity on the one hand and is plundered on the other. The boss from the slums locks hands with men who pose as men of worth and integrity and who stand at the top with a serene countenance for those about them, but with a cunning leer for those below. The city is the Dark Continent of this country, into the depths of which have gone many explorers, each returning with but a fragment of knowledge; none with the whole truth.

The ordinance once passed, the Aldermen ran to cover, fearful of the storm that might break over their heads. The adherents of the corporation were filled with apprehension. But no storm arose; the very boldness of the Aldermen and the high-handedness of their action challenged admiration.

"It is no use to 'buck' against money," was the great and all-pervading sentiment, uttered in a different mood by different men. It was all over. What was the use? Good men shrugged their shoulders, bad men swore and made threats. Some hurled taunts at the Aldermen whom they knew, accusing them of having sold themselves. But what was the use?

A few grasped at a straw and placed faith in the courts declaring the measure illegal. But the great mass was skeptical. It winked and shrugged. Among those who were confident that the courts would not sustain the action of the Council were Samuel Elliotson, John Brawley, and men of the same type, and with them many who had thought it unwise to openly oppose the passage of the ordinance. These men sent in money to pay the cost of the legal proceedings, and, when they were sure of their company, they consoled each other and deplored existing conditions. John Hannum was filled now with the heat of battle. He had arrayed against him the flower of the legal talent of the city, but he felt that he had the law on his side. He was confident of ultimate victory.

The legal action was a setback for Bidwell, and it came in a form that kept him and his associates from realizing the expected profits on their great stock speculation. The stock jumped five points and there it stopped.

Ledlow, the banker, was in a tremor of fear, and sold what he could unload without attracting attention. Sprogel, calm and passive, looked to Bidwell for guidance.

"The courts!" exclaimed Bidwell. "Why, of course it must go to the courts. Of what use would the ordinance be if it had dangling over it the danger of an adverse ruling? The court decision is the trade mark that gives value to the goods."

"But are the courts sure to sustain us?" asked the trembling banker. "May the Supreme Court not declare the ordinance invalid?"

"Good courts, honest courts, such as we have, Ledlow, sustain the acts of dishonest councils, if those acts be legal. This is simply a matter of law now, in a purely technical sense. The men who drew this ordinance would not take a place on the Supreme Bench if it were offered them. They are too good at the business of law. They interpret, and thus make the law; courts merely mark their work with the stamp of official approval."

"I guess I won't sell," said Sprogel.

"Sell!" exclaimed Bidwell. "Why, we have a sure thing for millions. It is as good as gold now—with what I shall use to see that we are fairly treated in the courts. No, gentlemen, we have won, and we now own the greatest property in this country. Think of it! We are safe from competition or legislative annoyance for half a century. What is there like it on this earth? It was well worth the fight."

Then up spoke the big millionaire, an unusual light in his eyes, his face animated.

"I don't know about that, Henry," he began, speaking faster than was his usual custom. "I would not go through it again for the rest of the money on earth. It ain't right. You know it ain't, and I know it ain't. I haven't been any too good, but I draw the line at any more of this work. What have I been doing, and what have you been doing? You know, and I know. Robbing a lot of people that never did us any harm, and mixing in with a gang of pirates and sand-baggers. It's all right for you, but I had the dirty end of the deal. I found it out before I got through, but it was too late to back up and be on the square. What am I going to do with this money? I had more than I knew what to do with when I came into this deal. No, Henry, you are all right, but I am going to cut it out in the future."

This outbreak surprised Bidwell even more than it did the banker, who was not perturbed, seeing that the profits were in no wise endangered by this late recantation.

"Why, Herman," he exclaimed, trying to treat it lightly, "has the Municipal League outfit converted you?"

"No," answered Sprogel, the rumbling menace in his tone causing Bidwell to start a little, "but I heard a couple of my employes, good, loyal fellows, talking about the whole deal, and they had right. They had me just where I stand in the eyes of most of the people in this city. I tell you I don't like it, and never again."

"Oh, you will feel differently, Herman, when the dividends begin coming in," ventured Bidwell, trying to laugh.

"No, I won't," roared Sprogel. "That is just the worst of it. I won't feel any different, and I know it. But I'll be different, though, and don't you forget it."

He caught up his hat, jammed it on his head, and went out of the room, mumbling to himself.

"Well, Henry," said the banker, "you have lost your partner at last."

"Oh, no," returned Bidwell, seeking to conceal the uneasiness that he felt, "he likes money as well as the rest of us."

"I don't know about that," said the banker; "he has always been too free with his subscriptions to suit me. He is getting what the ycall higher ideals, and you'd better watch out. They won't mix with yours, Henry."

It was the first joke the banker had cracked in twenty years. But, then, he had just made a great deal of money, so he was not greatly shocked at himself.

The words of his friend Sprogel, the man who knew so little of the ethics of a cause, haunted Bidwell. He tried in vain to drive them out of his mind. What annoyed him most was the fact that it all sounded very much to him like the gospel Mrs. Warrington had so often preached. In coarser, more direct language, it was true, but much the same. What had he gained? What did men think of him? But that was nonsense. What could any man gain, but—but—some old remembrances crowded themselves forward and filled his mind, despite his protests. For the first time in many years he looked back. The mood seized him and he tried in vain to shake it off. He went home early and tried to talk with Edith, who was now grown very quiet, attentive and dutiful; and for the first time he noticed that a change had come over the girl which was not for the better.

"You need a trip, Edith," he said; "you need to get away."

"Yes," she said, "I should like to get away, uncle—away from myself, somewhere."

He ignored the suggestion conveyed—one that, followed up, might lead to a talk which he wished to avoid as long as possible, but her words struck home. They were so close to his own thoughts.

"Very well," he said. "Pack your trunks to-night, and to-morrow we will start for the East."

He went up to his room, but the words of Sprogel were with him, and he kept repeating them over and over again in his mind.

To Bannerton the shock of defeat had come sooner than to any one, for he saw it the moment he read The Watchman's account of Bidwell's mass meeting, and it remained with him longer than with any other. A dull, blank feeling of despair took possession of him. He did not go to the Council chamber to witness the triumph of his enemies. He balanced his accounts as secretary of the citizens' committee, turned them over to the treasurer, and went back to his lodgings. The life seemed all gone out of him as he climbed the stairs and fumbled at the lock with his key. He staggered into the room and dropped into a chair. His body was weak, but his mind burned with the thoughts that came to him. Edith! To think that she should have sent him such a letter; that she should have cast him aside for doing simply what was to him a duty. For what else could she mean by her words: "You have only your own acts to blame, and they have brought sorrow to me as well as to you." He had read the note a hundred times, had read it through nightly when he came home after trying ordeals of the great fight which gave him no time to think. But that fight was over now, and there was nothing left but to think—to think of all he had lost. It was hard, it was cruel, but he did not regret the course he had taken. What would it have profited him to have won the love of a woman, and ever after despised himself? Suddenly a thought came to him. Perhaps he had not read her note aright. He had read it a hundred times, but, after all, there might be some mistake. He rose, catching a chair to support himself, and drew it from the place where he had laid it away. No! It was clear and plain—the white sheet, the black letters. Suddenly the sheet grew black also and Hugh Bannerton passed away for many a day—away from himself, out into the borderland where hot fever holds sway.

CHAPTER XXV.

DR. DUSSELDORF'S PRESCRIPTION.

Hugh awoke one morning to find himself lying in bed in a great white-walled room, with a high ceiling and an old-fashioned chandelier hanging from the center of it. He tried to raise himself, and discovered, with surprise, that he was too weak to even lift his head from the pillow. He heard the rustle of a woman's garments, and a nurse, in the striped uniform of her calling, stood before him and raised a warning finger.

"You must be very quiet," she said, "and not ask any questions now. You are in Mrs. Warrington's home and you will soon grow stronger. Here, drink this."

She pressed a glass to his lips and he drank the contents as directed. A peaceful glow suffused him and he dropped off to sleep.

When he awoke Mrs. Warrington was by the bedside. She placed a cool hand on his forehead and kissed him.

"You are back with us again, Hugh," she murmured, and a tear-drop fell and ran down his pale and sunken cheek.

"I am repaid," he said, looking up at her dear face with love in his eyes, trying to raise his wasted hands from the counterpane on which they lay.

"Now, you must be very, very quiet," she said, in her old, authoritative tone. "You have been very sick, Hugh, and you have come back to us as if by a miracle. When you have gained your strength you shall know all about it."

Under careful nursing he improved rapidly, until at the end of a week he was able to sit up in a great easy chair. Hannum found him thus and was rejoiced to see him on the sure road to recovery.

"Mr. Hannum has called every day, Hugh," said Mrs. Warrington. "I don't know what I should have done without his cheerful aid. He is the most persistently optimistic man