

The Gentleman from Indiana

By Booth Tarkington

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CHAPTER XI.

JOHN BROWN'S BODY.
ALL morning horsemen had been galloping through Six-Cross-Roads, sometimes singly, oftener in company. At 1 o'clock the last posse passed through on its return to the county seat, and after that there was a long, complete silence, while the nitry corners were undisturbed by the sun's rays. No unkempt coat poked from his dusty stall; the sparse young corn that was used to rasp and chuckle greenly stood rigid in the fields. Up the Platteville pike despoiled cocks led one old hen, with her waddling tail, and a single, supple, old turkey, with its neck stretched out in a dignified manner, as if it were in the shadow underneath a rickety barn and her shrieking ceased.

Only on the Wimby farm were there signs of life. The old lady who had sent Harkless roses all the while all morning and wiped her eyes, watching the horsemen ride by; sometimes they would holler her and tell her there was nothing yet. About 2 o'clock her husband rattled up in a buckboard and got out the late and more authentic Mr. Wimby's station, which he carefully cleaned and oiled, in spite of its hammerless and quite useless condition, sitting meanwhile by the window opposite his wife, and then looking up from his work to shake his weak fist at his neighbors' domes and creak decrepit curses and denunciations.

But the Cross-Roads was ready. It knew what was coming now. Frightened, desecrated, sullen, it was ready.

The afternoon wore on, and lengthening shadows fell upon a peaceful one would have said, a sleeping country. The sun-dried pike, already dusty, stretched its score length between green borders dotted with purple and yellow and white wood flowers; and the tree shadows were not shade, but warm blue and lavender glows in the general pervasion of still, bright light, the sky curving its deep, unburned, penetrable blue over all, with no single drift of fleece upon it to be reflected in the creek that would along just with the eye and eye-camers. A woodcock's telegrapher brought the quiet like a volley of pistol shots.

But far eastward on the pike there slowly developed a soft, white haze. It grew denser and larger. Gradually it filled the air. Dimly behind it could be discerned a darker, moving nucleus that extended far back upon the road. A heavy tremor began to stir the air-faint manifold sounds, a waxing, increasing, multitudinous rumour.

The pike extended a long, slight slope leading west up to the Cross-Roads. From a point of iron-wood at the foot of this slope was thrust the hard, lean visage of an undersized girl of 14. Her fierce eyes scanned the approaching cloud of dust intently. A redness rose under the burnt yellow skin and colored the wizened cheeks.

They were coming.

She stepped quickly out of the tangle and faced up the road, running with the speed of a fleet little terrier, not opening her lips, not calling out, but holding her two thin hands high above her head. That was all. But Hiram Wood was come to Harkless at last, and the messenger sped. Out of the weeds in the corners of the snake fence, in the upper part of the rise, silently lifted the heads of men whose sallowness became a sickish white as the child flew by.

The mob was carefully organized. They had taken their time and had prepared everything deliberately, knowing that nothing could stop them. No one had any thought of concealment; it was all as open as the light of day all done in the broad sunshine. Nothing had been determined as to what was to be done at the Cross-Roads more definite than that the place was to be wiped out. That was comprehensively enough; the details were quite certain to occur. They were all on foot, marching in fairly regular ranks. In front walked Mr. Watts, the man Harkless had abhorred in a public spirit and befriended in private to-day; he was a hero and a leader, marching to avenge his professional oppressor and personal brother. Cool, unruffled and, to outward vision, unarmed, marching the miles in his brown frock coat and generous linen, his carefully creased trousers neatly turned up out of the dust, he led the way. On one side of him were the two Bowlers, on the other was Lige Willetts. Mr. Watts preserving peace between the two young men with perfect tact and sang-froid.

They kept good order and a similitude of quiet for so many, except far to the rear, where old Wilkerson was bringing up the tail of the procession, dragging a wretched yellow dog by a slip-noose fastened around the poor cur's protesting neck, the knot carefully arranged under his right ear. In spite of every command and protest, Wilkerson had marched the whole way unobtrusively singing, "John Brown's Body."

The sun was in the west when they came in sight of the Cross-Roads, and the cabins on the low slope stood out angularly against the radiance beyond. As they beheld the hated settlement, the heretofore orderly ranks showed a disposition to depart from the stowed advance and rush the shanties. Willetts, the Bowlers, Parker, Ross Schofield and fifty others were on the march, away and set a sharp race up the slope.

Watts tried to call them back. "What's the use you gettin' killed?" he shouted.

"Why not?" answered Lige, who, like the others, was increasing his speed when old "Wimby" rose up suddenly from the roadside ahead of them and motioned them frantically to go back. "They're laid out along the fence, waitin' fer ye," he warned them. "Git out the road. Come by the fields, and although in the same second no weapon was seen in his hand, discharged a revolver at the bush behind the gun. Instantly ten or twelve men leaped from their hiding places along the fences of both fields, and firing hurriedly and harmlessly into the scattered ranks of the oncoming mob, broke for the shelter of the houses, where their fellows were

voice of Wilkerson: John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the ground. John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the ground.

A few near him, as they stood waiting, began to take up the burden of the song, singing in a row like a choir; then those further away took it up; it spread, reached the leaders; they, too, began to sing, taking off their hats as they joined in; and soon the whole concourse, solemn, earnest and uncovered, was singing a thunderous requiem for John Harkless.

The sun was winking lower and the edges of the world were embroidered with gold while that deep volume of sound shook the air, the song of a stern, savage, just cause—surely, perhaps, as some of the ancestors of these men sang with Hampden before the bristling walls of a hostile city. It had iron and steel in it. The men lying on their guns in the ambulance along the fence heard the drive rise and grow to its mighty fullness, and they shivered. One of them, post-driest, nearest the advance, had his rifle carefully leveled at Lige Willetts, a far target in the road. When he heard the singing he turned to the man next behind

pested. Taken on the flanks and from the rear, there was but one thing for them to do: keep from being hemmed in and shot or captured. (They excessively preferred being shot.) With a wild, high, joyous yell, sounding like the bay of young hounds breaking into view of their quarry, the Platteville men followed.

The most eastward of the debilitated officers of Six-Cross-Roads was the action, which bore the painted legends: on the west wall, "Last Chance"; on the east wall, "First Chance." Next to this and separated by two or three acres of weedy vacancy, from the corners where the population centred thicker, stood—of one may so predicate of a building which was in seven directions—the house of Mr. Robert Skillet, the proprietor of the saloon. Both buildings were shut up as tight as their state of repair permitted. As they were furthest to the east, they formed the nearest shelter and to them the Cross-Roaders bent their flight, though they stopped not here, but disappeared behind Skillet's shanty, putting it between them and their pursuers, whose guns were beginning to speak. The fugitives had a good start, and, being the

portion of the Skillet mansion, closely joined the "Last Chance" side of the family place of business. Scarcely had the guns of the defenders sounded, when, with a loud shout, Lige Willetts leaped from an upper window on that side of the burning saloon and landed on the woodshed, and, immediately climbing the roof of the house itself, applied a fiery brand to the time-worn clapboards. Ross Schofield dropped on the shed, close behind him, his arm lovingly enfolding a saloon sign of what, which he emptied (not without evident regret) upon the clapboards as Lige fired them. Flames burst forth almost instantly, and the smoke, uniting with that now rolling out of every window of the saloon, went up to heaven in a cumulous, gray column.

As the flames began to spread there was a rapid fusillade from the rear of the house, and a hundred men and more, who had kept on through the fields to the north, assailed it from behind. Their shots passed clear through the flimsy partitions, and there was a horrid screeching, like a beast's howl, from within. The front door was thrown open, and a lean, fierce-eyed girl, with a case-knife in her hand, ran out in the face of

standing on the roof, at the edge, out of the smoke, and both fired at the same time. The fugitives did not turn; they kept on running, and they had nearly reached the other side of the field when suddenly, without any premonitory gesture, the elder Skillet dropped flat on his face. The Cross-Roaders stood by each other that day, for four or five men ran out of the nearest shanty into the open, lifted the prostrate figure from the ground, and began to carry it back with them. But Mr. Skillet was alive; his curses were heard above all other sounds. Lige and Schofield fired again, and one of the rescuers staggered. Nevertheless, as the two men slid down from the roof, the burdened Cross-Roaders were seen to break into a run, and at that, with another yell, fiercer, wilder, more joyous than the first, the Platteville men followed.

The yell rang loudly in the ears of old Wilkerson, who had remained back in the road, and at the same instant he heard another shout behind him. Mr. Wilkerson had not shared in the attack, but, greatly pronounced with his own histrionic affairs, was proceeding up the pike alone

roared again: "Stop! A mistake! I have news! Stop! I say! Horner has got them!"

To make himself heard over that tempestuous advance was a feat; for him, moreover, whose counsels had so lately been decided to interest the pursuers at such a moment enough to make them listen—to find the word—was a greater; and by the word, and by gestures at once vehemently imperious and imploring, to stop them was a still greater; but he did it. He had come at just the moment before the moment that would have been too late. They all heard him. They all knew, too, that he was not trying to save the Cross-Roads as a matter of duty, because he had given that up before the mob left Platteville. Indeed, it was a question if, at the last, he had not tacitly approved, and no one feared indictments for Wilkerson's work. It would do no harm to listen to what he had to say. The work could wait; it would "keep" for five minutes. They began to gather around him, excited, flushed, perspiring, and smelling of smoke. Hartley Bowler, won by Lige's desperation and intrepidity, was

"It's all a mistake, boys," the lawyer said, as he handed the paper to Watts and Parker for inspection. "The ladies at the Judge's were mistaken, that's all, and this proves it. It's easy enough to understand, and, watching a fence a quarter-mile away by flashes of lightning, any one would have been confused, and inhaled all the horrors on earth. I don't deny but what I believed it for a while, and I don't deny but that Cross-Roads is a pretty tough, but you've done a good deal here already, to-day, and we're saved in time from a mistake that would have turned out mighty bad. This settles it. Horner got a wire from Rouen to come over here, soon as they got track of the first man; that was when we saw him on the Rouen accommodation."

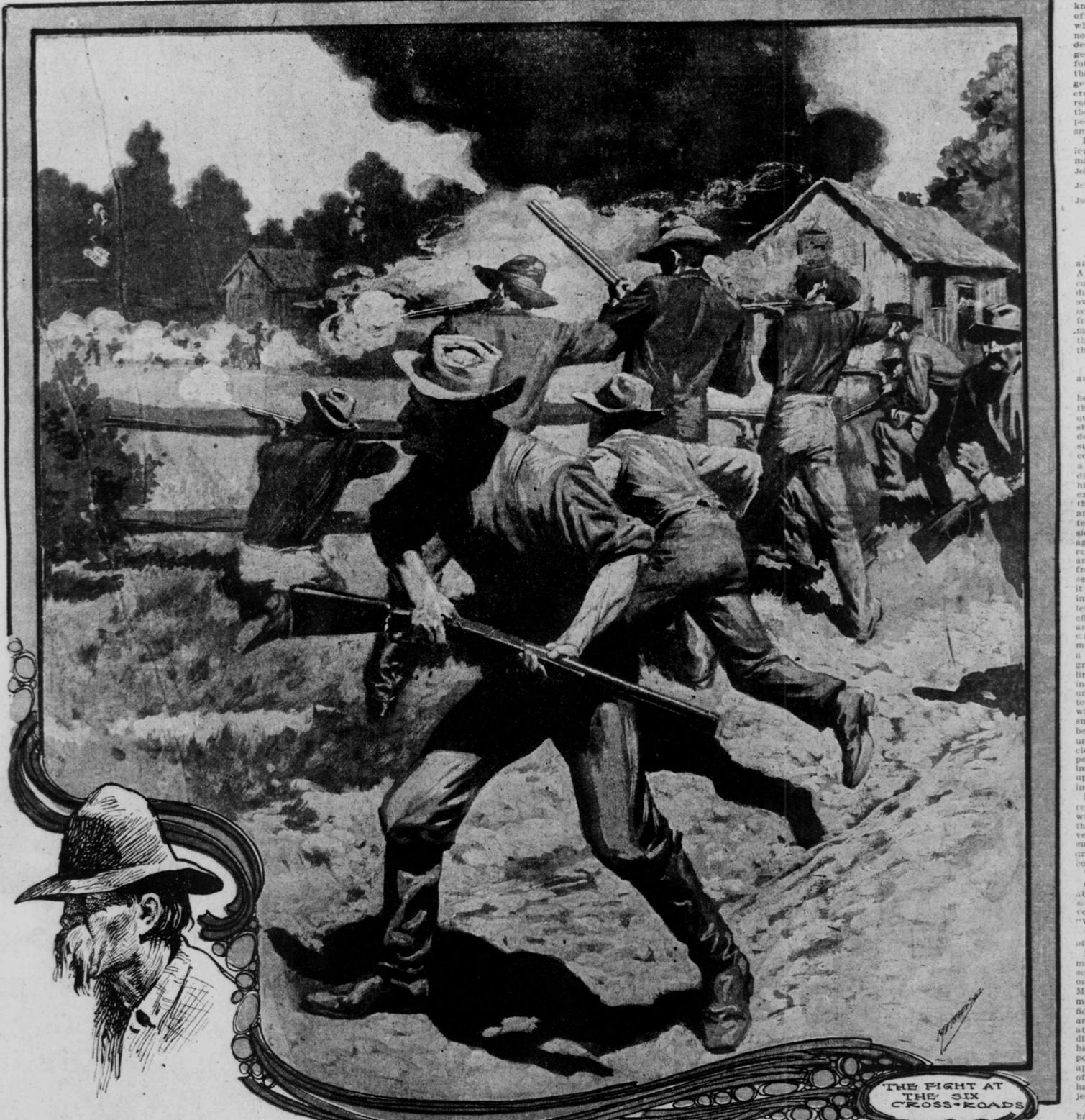
A slightly cracked voice, yet a huskily tuneful one, was lifted quaveringly on the air from the roadside, where an old man and a yellow dog sat in the dust together, his surprised head rakishly garnished with a bushy wreath of dog-fennel daisies. John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the ground.

While we go marching on!

Three-quarters of an hour later, the inhabitants of the Cross-Roads, saved, they knew not how; guilty; knowing nothing of the fantastic pendulum of opinion, which, swung by the events of the day, now on others, now on them, who deserved it—these natives and refugees, conscious of atrocity, dumfounded by a miracle, thinking the world gone mad, hoveled together in a dark, ragged mass at the crossing corners, while the skeleton of the rotting buggy in the slough rose behind them against the face of the west. They peered with stupefied eyes through the smoky twilight.

From afar, faintly through the gloaming, came mournfully through their ears the many-voiced refrain—fainter, fainter, John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the ground.

CHAPTER XII.



THE FIGHT AT THE SIX-CROSS-ROADS.

him and laughed harshly: "reckon we'll see a big jamboree, in hell to-night, huh?"

The huge murmur of the chorus expanded in rhythmic strength, and swelled to power, and rolled and thundered across the plain.

John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the ground. John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the ground. John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the ground.

His soul goes marching on!

Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!

His soul goes marching on!

A gun spat fire from the higher ground and Willetts dropped where he stood, but was up again in a second with a red line across his forehead when the ball had grazed his temple. Then the mob spread out like a fan, hundreds of men climbing the fence and beginning to advance through the fields, closing on the ambulance from both sides. Mr. Watts, wading through the high grass in the field north of the road, perceived the barrel of a gun shining from a bush some distance in front of him and, although in the same second no weapon was seen in his hand, discharged a revolver at the bush behind the gun. Instantly ten or twelve men leaped from their hiding places along the fences of both fields, and firing hurriedly and harmlessly into the scattered ranks of the oncoming mob, broke for the shelter of the houses, where their fellows were

picked runners of the Cross-Roads, they crossed the open, weedy acres in safety and made for their homes. Every house had become a fort and the defenders would have to be fought and torn out one by one. As the guns sounded a woman in a shanty near the forge began to scream, and kept on screaming.

On came the farmers and the men of Platteville. They took the saloon at a run; battered down the crazy doors with a fence rail and swarmed inside like busy insects, making the place hum like a hive, but with the hotter industries of destruction. It was empty of life as a tomb, but they beat and tore and battered and broke and hammered and shattered like madmen; they reduced the tawdry interior to a mere chaos and came pouring forth laden with trophies of ruin. And then there was a chary smell in the air and a slender feather of smoke floated up from a second-story window.

At the same time Watts led an assault on the adjoining house—an assault which came to a sudden pause, for, from cracks in the front wall a squirrel rifle and a shotgun snapped and banged and the crowd fell back in disorder. Homer Tibbs had a hot blown away, full of buckshot holes, while Mr. Watts solicitously examined a small aperture in the skirts of his brown coat. The house commanded the road, and the rush of the mob into the village was checked, but only for the instant.

A rickety woodshed, which formed a

—except for the unhappy yellow mongrel, still dragged along by the slip-noose—and alternating, as was his natural wont, from one fence to the other; crouching behind every bush to fire an imaginary rifle at his dog, and then springing out, with triumphant bellows, to fall prone upon the terrified animal. It was after one of these victories that a shout of warning was raised behind him, and Mr. Wilkerson, by grace of the rod Bacchus, rolling out of the way in time to save his life, saw a horse dash by him—a big, black horse whose polished flanks were dripping with lather. Warren Smith was the rider. He was waving a slip of yellow paper high in the air.

He rode up the slope, and drew rein beyond the burning buildings, just ahead of these foremost in the pursuit. He threw his horse across the road to oppose their progress, rose in his stirrups, and waved the paper over his head. "Stop!" he roared. "Give me one minute. Stop!" He had a grand voice; and he was known in many parts of the State for the great bass roar with which he startled his juries. To be heard at a distance most men lift the pitch of their voices; Smith lowered his an octave or two, and the result was like an earthquake playing an organ in a catacomb. "Stop!" he thundered. "Stop!"

In answer, one of the flying Cross-Roaders turned and sent a bullet whistling close to him. The lawyer paused long enough to bow deeply in satirical response; then, flourishing the paper, he

helping the latter tie up his head; no one else was hurt a hair.

"What is it?" they clamored impatiently. "Speak quick!" There was another harmless shot from a fugitive, and then the Cross-Roaders, divining that the diversion was in their favor, secured themselves in their decrepit fastnesses and held their fire. Meanwhile, the flames crackled cheerfully in Platteville, no matter what the prosecutor had to say, at least the Skillet saloon and homestead were gone, and Bob Skillet and one other would be sick enough to be good for a while. Hope this question him the flames cover whereabouts body. Other man refuses talk so far. Check any movement Cross-Roads. This clears Skillet, etc. Come over on 9:12.

The telegram was signed by Horner and by Barrett, the superintendent of police at Rouen.

The two men who had been talking with the superintendent turned quickly and stared at the speaker. He went on: "Mr. Harkless was an old—and" He broke off, with a sudden, sharp choking, and for a moment was unable to control an emotion that seemed, for some reason, as surprising and unbecoming, in a person of his cultivated presence, as was his gravity. An astonished tear glittered in the corner of his eye. The grief of the gayer sort of stout people appears, sometimes, to dumfound even themselves. The young man took off his glasses and wiped them slowly. "—An old and very dear friend of mine." He replaced the glasses insecurely upon his nose. "I telephoned you your headquarters, and they said you had come here."

"Yes, sir; yes, sir," the superintendent of police responded cheerfully. "These gentlemen are from Platteville; Mr. Smith just got in. They might near had well trouble down there to-day, but I guess we'll settle things for 'em here by. Yes, me make you acquainted with my friend, Mr. Smith, and my friend, Mr. Horner. Gentlemen, my friend, Mr. Meredith, one of our well known citizens."

"You hear it from the police, gentlemen," added Mr. Meredith, perking up a little. "I know Dr. Gray." He nodded to the surgeon.

"I suppose you have heard some of the circumstances—those that we've given up," said Barrett.

"I read the account in the evening paper. I had heard of Harkless of Carlow, but it never occurred to me that it was

CHAPTER XII.

JERRY THE TELLER.

At midnight a small brougham stopped at the gates of the city hospital in Rouen. A short distance ahead, the lamps of a cab, drawn up at the curbing, made two dull orange sparks under the electric light, swinging on the shafts, as a cigarette devilled brief parabola as it was tossed from the brougham, and a short young man jumped out and entered the gates, then paused and spoke to the driver of the cab.

"Did you bring Mr. Barrett here?"

"Yes, sir," answered the driver; "him and two other gentlemen."

Lighting another cigarette, from which he drew but two inspirations before he threw it away, the young man proceeded quickly up the walk. As he ascended the short flight of steps which led to the main doors, he panted a little, in a way which suggested that (although his white waistcoat outlined an ellipse still respectable) a crescendo of portliness was playing dimly with his youth. And though the expression of his very red face indicated that his briskness was spurred by anxiety, and a fatish groan he emitted on the top-step added the impression that his comfortable body protested against the mental spur. In the hall he removed his narrow-brimmed straw hat and presented a rotund and amiable head, from the top of which his auburn hair seemed to retire with a sense of defeat; it fell back, however, not in confusion, but in perfect order, and the sparse pink mist left upon his crown gave, by a supreme effort, an effect of arrangement, so that an imaginative observer would have deduced that there was a part down the middle. The gentleman's plump face bore a grave and troubled expression, and gravity and trouble were patent in all the lines of his figure and in every gesture; in the way he turned his head; in the uneasy shifting of his hat from one hand to the other and in his fanning himself with it in a nervous fashion, and in his small, blue eyes, which did not twinkle behind his rimless glasses and looked unused to not twinking. His gravity clothed him like an ill-fitting coat; possibly, he might have reminded the imaginative observer, just now conjured up of a music-box set to turning its cylinder backward.

He spoke to an attendant, and was directed to an office, which he entered without delay. There were five men in the room, three of them engaged in conversation near the door; another, a young surgeon, was sitting at a desk; the fifth, a man in a dark suit, was sitting at a desk. The newcomer bowed as he entered.

"Mr. Barrett?" he said, inquiringly.

One of the men near the door turned about. "Yes, sir," he answered, with a stern disfavor of the applicant; a disfavor possibly a prerequisite of his office.

"What's wanted?"

"I think I have met you," returned the other. "My name is Meredith."

Mr. Barrett probably did not locate the meeting, but the name proved an open sesame to his geniality; for he smiled at once and saying "My course, of course, Mr. Meredith; did you want to talk with me?" clasped the young man's hand confidentially in his, and with an appearance of assuring him that whatever the atrocity which had occurred in the Meredith household it should be discreetly handled and hushed up, indicated a disposition to conduct him toward a more appropriate apartment for the rehearsal of scandal. The young man accepted the hand-casp with some resignation, but rejected the suggestion of privacy.

"A telegram from Platteville reached me half an hour ago," he said. "I should have had it sooner, but I have been in the country all day."