"Yes," said I,—I was thinking of the debts and mother and Betty. "Yes, indeed; I'd esteem it a great honor, and I'd be grateful to you." If I had thrust myself over-head into a sewer I should have felt less vile than I did as my fears and longings uttered those degrading words.

He grunted. "Well, we'll see. Tell the boys at the other table to come back." He nodded a dismissal and gave me that moist, strong grip again.

As I went toward the other table each man there had a hand round his glass in readiness for the message of recall. I mentally called the roll—wealth, respectability, honor, all on their knees before Dominick, each with his eye upon the branch of the plum tree that bore the kind of fruit he fancied. And I wondered how they felt inside—for I was then ignorant of the great foundation truth of practical ethics, that a man's conscience is not the producer but the product of his career.

Fessenden accompanied me to the door. "The old man's in a hell of a humor to-night," said he. "His wife's caught on to a little game he's been up to, and she's the only human being he's afraid of. She came in here, one night, and led him out by the ear. What a fool a man is to marry when there's a chance of running into a mess like that! But—you made a hit with him. Besides, he needs you. Your family—" Buck checked himself, feeling that drink was making him voluble.

"He's a strong man, isn't he?" said I; "a born leader."

"Middle-weight champion in his day," replied Fessenden. "He can still knock out anybody in the organization in one round."

"Good-night and thank you," said I. So I went my way, not elated but utterly depressed—more depressed than when I won the first case in which I knew my client's opponent was in the right and had lost only because I outgeneraled his stupid lawyer. I was, like most of the sons and daughters of the vigorous families of the earnest, deeply religious early West, an idealist by inheritance and by training; but I suppose any young man, however practical, must feel a shock when he begins those compromises between theoretical and practical right which are part of the daily routine of active life, and without which active life is impossible.

I had said nothing to my mother, because I did not wish to raise her hopes—or her objections. I now decided to be silent until the matter should be settled. The next day but one Fessenden came, bad news in his face. "The old man liked you," he began, "but—"

I had not then learned to control my expression. I could not help showing what ruins of lofty castles that ominous "but" dropped upon my head.

"You'll soon be used to getting it in the neck if you stay in politics," said Fessenden. "There's not much else. But you ain't so bad off as you think. The old man has decided that he can afford to run one of his reliable hacks for the place. He's suddenly found a way of sinking his hooks in the head devil of the reformers and Ben Cass' chief backer, Singer—you know him—the lawyer."

Singer was one of the leaders of the State bar and superintendent of our Sunday-school.

"Dominick has made De Forest give Singer the law business of the Gas and Street Railway Company, so Singer is coming over to us." Buck grinned. "He has found that 'local interests must be subordinated to the broader interests of the party in State and nation.'"

I had been reading in our party's morning paper what a wise and patriotic move Singer had made in advising the putting off of a reform campaign—and I had believed in the sincerity of his motive!

Fessenden echoed my sneer and went on: "He's a rotten hypocrite; but, then, we can always pull the bung out of these reform movements that way."

"You said it isn't as bad for me as it seems," I interrupted.

"Oh, yes. You're to be on the ticket. The old man's going to send you to the Legislature—lower house, of course."

I did not cheer up. An Assemblyman got only a thousand a year.

"The pay ain't much," confessed Buck, "but there ain't nothing to do except vote according to order. Then there's a great deal to be picked up on the side—the old man understands that others have got to live beside him. Salaries in politics don't cut no figure nowadays, anyhow. It's the chance the place gives for pick-ups."

At first I flatly refused, but Buck pointed out that I was foolish to throw away the benefits sure to come through the "old man's" liking for me. "He'll take care of you," he assured me. "He's got you booked for a quick rise." My poverty was so pressing that I had not the courage to refuse—the year and a half of ferocious struggle and the longing to marry Betty Crosby had combined to break my spirit. I believe it is Johnson who says the worst feature of genteel poverty is its power to make one ridiculous. I don't think so. No; its worst feature is its power to make one afraid.

That night I told my mother of my impending "honors." We were in the dark on our little front porch. She was silent, and presently I thought I heard her suppressing a sigh. "You don't like it, mother?" said I.

"No, Harvey, but—I see no light ahead in any other direction, and I guess one should always steer toward what light there is." She stood behind my chair, put her hands on my shoulders, and rested her chin lightly on the top of my head. "Besides, I can trust you. Whatever direction you take, you're sure to win in the end."

I was glad it was dark. An hour after I went to bed I heard some one stirring in the house—it seemed to me there was a voice, too. I rose and went into the hall, and so, softly to my mother's room. Her door was ajar. She was near the window, kneeling there in the moonlight, praying—for me.

I had not been long in the Legislature before I saw that my position was even more contemptible than I anticipated. So contemptible, indeed, was it that, had I not been away from home and among those as basely situated as myself, it would have been intolerable—a convict infinitely prefers the penitentiary to the chain gang. Then, too, there was consolation in the fact that the people, my fellow citizens, in their stupidity and ignorance about political conditions, did not realize what public office had come to mean. At home they believed what the machine-controlled newspapers said of me—that I was a "manly, independent young man," that I was "making a vigorous stand for what was honest in public affairs," that I was the "honorable and distinguished son of an honorable and distinguished father." How often I read those and similar eulogies of young men just starting in public life! And is it not really amazing that the people believe, that they never say to themselves: "But, if he were actually what he so loudly professes to be, how could he have got public office from a boss and a machine?"

I soon gave up trying to fool myself into imagining I was the servant of the people by introducing or speaking for petty little popular measures. I saw clearly that graft was the backbone, the whole skeleton of legislative business, and that its fleshly cover of pretended public service could be seen only by the blind. I saw also that no one in the machine of either party had any real power. The State boss of our party, United States Senator Dunkirk, was a creature and servant of corporations. Silliman, the State boss of the opposition party, was the same, but got less for his services because his party was hopelessly in the minority and its machine could be useful only as a sort of supplement and scapegoat.

With the men at the top, Dunkirk and Silliman, mere lackeys, I saw my own future plainly enough. I saw myself crawling on year after year—crawling one of two roads. Either I should become a political scullion, a wretched party hack, despising myself and despised by those who used me, or I should develop into a lackey's lackey or a plain lackey, lieutenant of a boss, or a boss so-called—a derisive name, really, when the only kind of boss-ship open was head political procurer to one or more rich corporations or groups of corporations. I felt I should probably become a scullion, as I thought I had no taste or instinct for business, and as I was developing some talent for "mixing" and for dispensing "hot air" from the stump.

I turned these things over and over in my mind with an energy that sprang from shame, from the knowledge of what my mother would think if she knew the truth about her son and from a realization that I was no nearer marrying Betty Crosby than before. At last I wrought myself into a sullen fury beneath a calm surface. The lessons in self-restraint and self-hiding I learned in that first of my two years as Assemblyman have been invaluable.

When I entered upon my second and last winter I was outwardly as serene as—as a volcano on the verge of eruption.

CHAPTER III.

Sayler "Draws the Line."

In February the railways traversing our State sent to the capitol a bill that had been drawn by our ablest lawyers and reviewed by the craftiest of the great corporation lawyers of New York City. Its purpose, most shrewdly and slyly concealed, was to exempt the railways from practically all taxation. It was so subtly worded that this would be disclosed only when the companies should be brought into court for refusing to pay their usual share of the taxes. Such measures are usually "straddled" through a Legislature—that is, neither party takes the responsibility, but the boss of each machine assigns to vote for them all the men whose seats are secure beyond any ordinary assault of public indignation. In this case, of the ninety-one members of the lower house, thirty-two were assigned by Dunkirk and seventeen by Silliman to make up a majority with three to spare.

My boss, Dominick, got wind that Dunkirk and Silliman were cutting an extra melon of uncommon size. He descended upon the capitol and served notice on Dunkirk that the eleven Dominick men assigned to vote for the bill would vote against it unless he got $7000 apiece for them—$77,000. Dunkirk needed every one of Dominick's men to make up his portion of the majority; he yielded after trying in vain to reduce the price. All Dominick would say to him on that point, so I heard afterward, was:

"Every day you put me off I go up $1000 a head."

We who were to be voted so profitably for Dunkirk, Silliman, Dominick and the railroads learned what was going on—Silliman went on a "tear" and talked too much. Nine of us, not including myself, got together and sent Cassidy, member from the Second Jackson County district, to Dominick to plead for a share. I happened to be with him in the Capital City Hotel bar when Cassidy came up, and hemming and hawing explained how he and his fellow insurgents felt.

Dominick's veins seemed cords straining to bind down a demon struggling to escape. "It's back to the bench you go, Pat Cassidy; back to the bench where I found you," he snarled, with a volley of profanity and sewage. "I don't know nothing about this here bill except that it's for the good of the party. Go back to that gang of damned wharf rats and tell 'em if I hear another squeak, I'll put 'em where I got 'em."

Cassidy shrank away with a furtive glance of envy and hate at me, whom Dominick treated with peculiar consideration—I think it was because I was the only man of education and of any pretensions to "family" in official position in his machine. He used to like to class himself and me together as "us gentlemen," in contrast to "them muckers," meaning my colleagues.

Next day, just before the voting began, Dominick seated himself at the front of the Governor's gallery—the only person in it. I see him now as he looked that day, black and heavy-jawed and scowling, leaning forward with both forearms on the railing, and his big, flat chin resting on his upturned, stubby thumbs. He was there to see that each of us, his creatures, dependent absolutely upon him for our political lives, should vote as he had sold us in block. There was no chance to shirk or even to squirm. As the roll-call proceeded, one after another, seven of us, obeyed that frowning from the gallery, jumped through the hoop of fire under the quivering lash. I was eighth on the roll.

"Sayler!" How my name echoed through that horrible silence!

I could not answer. Gradually every face turned toward me. I could see them, could feel them, and, to make bad enough worse, I yielded to an imperious fascination, the fascination of that incarnation of brute power—power of muscle and power of will. I turned my eyes upon the amazed, furious eyes of my master. It seemed to me that his lips must give passage to the oaths and filth swelling beneath his chest and seething behind his eyes.

"Sayler!" repeated the clerk in a voice that exploded within me.

"No!" I shouted—not in answer to the clerk, but in denial of that insolent master-to-dog command from the beast in the gallery.

The look in his eyes changed to relief and contemptuous approval. There was a murmur of derision from my fellow members. Then I remembered that a negative was, at that stage of the bill, a vote for it—I had done just the reverse of what I intended. The roll call went on and I sat debating with myself. Prudence, inclination, the natural timidity of youth, the utter futility of opposition, fear, above all else, fear—these joined in bidding me let my vote stand as cast. On the other side stood my notion of self-respect. I felt I must then and there and forever decide whether I was a thing or a man.

Yet again and again I had voted for measures just as corrupt—had voted for them with no protest beyond a cynical shrug and a wry look. Every man, even the laxest, if he is to continue to "count as one," must have a point where he draws the line beyond which he will not go. The liar must have things he will not lie about, the thief things he will not steal, the compromiser things he will not compromise, the practical man in the pulpit, in politics, in business, in the professor's chair, or editorial tribune, things he will not sacrifice, whatever the cost. That is "practical honor." I had reached my line of practical honor, my line between possible compromise and certain demoralization. And I realized it.

When the roll call ended I rose, and, in a voice that I knew was firm and clear, said: "Mr. Speaker, I voted in the negative by mistake. I wish my vote recorded in the affirmative. I am against the bill."

Amid a fearful silence I took my seat. With a suddenness that made me leap, a wild and crazy Assemblyman, noted as the crank of that session, emitted a fantastic yell of enthusiastic approval. Again there was that silence; then the tension of the assembly, floor and crowded galleries, burst in a storm of hysterical laughter.

I wish I could boast how brave I felt as I reversed my vote, how indifferent to that tempest of mockery, and how strong as I went forth to meet my master and hear my death warrant. But I can't, in honesty—I'm only a human being, not a hero, and these are my confessions, not my professions. So I must relate that, though the voice that requested the chance of vote was calm and courageous, the man behind it was agitated and sick with dread. There may be those who have the absolute courage some men boast—if not directly, then by implication in despising him who shows that he has it not. For myself, I must say that I never made a venture—and my life has been a succession of ventures, often with my whole stake upon the table—I never made a venture that I did not have a sickening sensation at the heart. My courage, if it can be called by so sounding a name, has been in daring to make the throw when every atom of me was shrieking, "You'll lose! You'll be ruined!"

I did not see Dominick until after supper. I had nerved myself for a scene—indeed, I had been hoping he would insult me. When one lacks the courage boldly to advance along the perilous course his intelligence counsels, he is lucky if he can and will goad some one into kicking him along it past the point where retreat is possible. Such methods of advance are not dignified, but then, is life dignified? To my surprise and alarm, Dominick refused to kick me into manhood. He had been paid, and the $77,000, in bills of large denomination, were warming his heart from the inner pocket of his waistcoat. So he came up to me, scowling, but friendly.

"Why didn't you tell me you wanted to be let off, Harvey?" he said reproachfully, "I'd 'a' done it. Now, damn you, you've put me in a place where I've got to give you the whip."

To flush at this expression from Dominick was a hypocritical refinement of sensitiveness. To draw myself up haughtily, to turn on my heel and walk away—that was the silliness of a boy. Still, I am glad I did both those absurd things. When I told my mother how I had ruined myself in politics she began to cry—and tears were not her habit. Then she got my father's picture and kissed it and talked to it about me, just as if he were there with us, and for a time I felt that I was of heroic stature.

But, as the days passed, with no laurels in the form of cases and fees, and as clients left me through fear of Dominick power, I shriveled back to human size, and descended from my pedestal. From the ground-level I began again to look about the matter-of-fact world.

I saw I was making only a first small payment on the heavy price for the right to say no, for the right to be free to break with any man or any enterprise that menaced my self-ownership. That right I felt I must keep, whatever its cost. Some men can, or think they can, lend their self-ownership and take it back at convenience; I knew I was not of them—and let none of them judge me. Especially let none judge me who only deludes himself that he owns himself who has sold himself all his life long for salaries and positions or for wealth, or for the empty reputation of power he wields only on another's sufferance.

A glance about me was enough to disclose the chief reason why so many men had surrendered the inner citadel of self-respect. In the crucial hour, when they had to choose between subservience and a hard battle with adversity, forth from their hearts had issued a traitor weakness, the feeling of responsibility to wife and children, and this traitor had easily delivered them captive to some master or masters. More or less than human, it seemed to me, was the courage that could make successful resistance to this traitor, and could strike down and drag down wife and children. "I must give up Elizabeth," I said to myself, "for her own sake as well as for mine. Marry her I must not until I am established securely in freedom. And when will that be?" In my mood of darkness and despair, the answer to that question was a relentless, "Never, especially if you are weighted with the sense of obligation to her, of her wasting her youth in waiting for you."

I wrote her all that was in my mind. "You must forget me," I said, "and I shall forget you—for I see that you are not for me."

The answer came by telegraph: "Please don't ever again hurt me in that way." And of the letter which came two days later I remember clearly this sentence: "If you will not let me go on with you, I will make the journey alone."

This shook me, but I knew only too well how the bright and beautiful legions of the romantic and the ideal could be put to flight, could be hurled headlong into the abyss of oblivion by the phalanxes of fact.

"I see what I must do," was my answer to her letter. "And I shall do it. Be merciful to me, Elizabeth. Do not tempt me to a worse cowardice than giving you up. I shall not write again."

And I did not. Every one of her letters was answered—sometimes, I remember I wrote to her the whole night through, shading my window so that mother could not from her window see the reflection of my lamp's light on the ground and become anxious. But I destroyed those long and often agonized answers. And I can not say whether my heart was the heavier in the months when I was getting her letters, to which I dared not reply, or in those succeeding months when her small, clear handwriting first ceased to greet me from the mail.

CHAPTER IV.

The School of Life-as-It-Is.

A day or so after I lost the only case of consequence I had had in more than a year, Buck Fessenden came into my office, and, after dosing me liberally with those friendly protestations and assurances which please even when they do not convince, said: "I know you won't give me away, Sayler, and I can't stand it any longer to watch you going on this way. Don't you see the old man's after you hammer and tongs? He'll never let up. You won't get no clients, and, if you do, you won't win no cases."

Those last five words, spoken in Buck's most significant manner, revealed what my modesty—or, if you prefer, my stupidity—had hidden from me. I had known all along that Dominick was keeping away and driving away clients; but I had not suspected his creatures on the bench. To this day, after all these years of use, only with the greatest reluctance and with a moral uneasiness which would doubtless amuse most political managers, do I send "suggestions" or "intimations" to my men in judicial office—and I always do it, and always have done it, indirectly. And I feel relieved and grateful when my Judges, eager to "serve the party," anticipate me by sending me a reassuring hint.

I did not let Buck see into my mind. "Nonsense!" I pooh-poohed; "I've no cause to complain of lack of business, but even if I had I'd not blame Dominick or any one else but myself." Then I gave him a straight but good-humored look. "Drop it, Buck," said I. "What did the old man send you to me for? What does he want?"

He was too crafty to defend an indefensible position. "I'll admit he did send me," said he with a grin, "but I came on my own account, too. Do you want to make it up with him? You can get back under the plum tree if you'll say the word."

I could see my mother, as I had seen her two hours before at our poor midday meal—an old, old woman, so broken, so worn! And all through the misery this Dominick had brought upon us. Before I could control myself to speak Buck burst out, a look of alarm in his face, "Don't say it, Mr. Sayler—I know—I know. I told him it'd be no use. Honest, he ain't as bad as you think—he don't know no better and it's because he liked and still likes you that he wants you back." He leaned across the desk toward me, in his earnestness—and I could not doubt his sincerity. "Sayler," he went on, "take my advice, get out of the State. You ain't the sort that gives in and no more is he. You've got more nerve than any other man I know, bar none, but don't waste it on a fool fight. You know enough about politics to know what you're up against."

"Thank you," said I, "but I'll stay on."

He gave over trying to persuade me. "I hope," said he, "you've got a card up your sleeve that the old man don't know about."

I made some vague reply, and he soon went away. I felt that I had confirmed his belief in my fearlessness. Yet, if he could have looked into my mind, how he would have laughed at his credulity! Probably he would have pitied me, too, for it is one of the curious facts of human nature that men are amazed and even disgusted whenever they see—in others—the weaknesses that are universal. I doubt not, many who read these memoirs will be quite honestly Pharisaical, thank Heaven that they are not touched with any of my infirmities.

It may have been coincidence, though I think not, that, a few days after Fessenden's call, a reform movement against Dominick appeared upon the surface of Jackson County politics. I thought, at the time, that it was the first streak of the dawn I had been watching for—the awakening of the sluggish moral sentiment of the rank and file of the voters. I know now that it was merely the result of a quarrel among the corporations that employed Dominick. He had been giving the largest of them, Roebuck's Universal Gas and Electric Company, called the Power Trust, more than its proportional share of the privileges and spoils. The others had protested in vain, and as a last resort had ordered their lawyers to organize a movement to "purify" Jackson County, Dominick's stronghold.

I did not then know it, but I got the nomination for county prosecutor chiefly because none of the other lawyers, not even those secretly directing the reform campaign, was brave enough publicly to provoke the Power Trust. I made a house to house, farm to farm, man to man, canvass. We had the secret ballot, and I was elected. The people rarely fail to respond to that kind of appeal if they are convinced that response can not possibly hurt, and may help, their pockets. And, by the way, those occasional responses, significant neither of morality nor of intelligence, lead political theorists far astray. As if honor or honesty could win other than sporadic and more or less hypocritical homage—practical homage, I mean—among a people whose permanent ideal is wealth, no matter how got or how used. That is another way of saying that the chief characteristic of Americans is that we are human and, whatever we may profess, cherish the human ideal universal in a world where want is man's wickedest enemy and wealth his most winning friend. But as I was relating, I was elected, and my majority, on the face of the returns, was actually ten and eleven hundred. It must actually have been many thousands, for never before had Dominick "doctored" the tally sheets so recklessly.

Financially I was now on my way to the surface. I supposed that I had become a political personage also. Was I not in possession of the most powerful office in the county? I was astonished that neither Dominick nor any other member of his gang made the slightest effort to conciliate me between election day and the date of my taking office. I did succeed in forcing from reluctant grand juries indictments against a few of the most notorious but least important members of the gang; and I got one conviction—which was reversed on trial errors by the higher court.

The truth was that my power had no existence. Dominick still ruled, through the Judges and the newspapers. The press was silent when it could not venture to deprecate or to condemn me.

But I fought on almost alone. I did not fail to make it clear to the people why I was not succeeding and what a sweep there must be before Jackson County could have any legal reform. I made an even more vigorous campaign for re-election than I had made four years before. The farmers stood by me fairly well, but the town went overwhelmingly against me. Why? Because I was "bad for business" and, if re-elected, would be still worse. The corporations with whose law-breaking I interfered were threatening to remove their plants from Pulaski—that would have meant the departure of thousands of the merchants' best customers, and the destruction of the town's prosperity. I think the election was fairly honest. Dominick's man beat me by about the same majority by which I had been elected.

"Bad for business!"—the most potent of political slogans. And it will inevitably result some day in the concentration of absolute power, political and all other kinds, in the hands of the few who are strongest and cleverest. For they can make the people bitterly regret and speedily repent having tried to correct abuses; and the people, to save their dollars, will sacrifice their liberty. I doubt if they will, in our time at least, learn to see far enough to realize that who captures their liberty captures them and, therefore, their dollars too.

By my defeat in that typical contest I was disheartened, embittered—and ruined. For, in my enthusiasm and confidence I had gone deeply into debt for the expenses of the reform campaign. At midnight of election day I descended into the black cave of despair. For three weeks I explored it. When I returned to the surface, I was a man, ready to deal with men on the terms of human nature. I had learned my lesson.

For woman the cost of the attainment of womanhood's maturity is the beautiful, the divine freshness of girlhood. For man, the cost of the attainment of manhood's full strength and power is equally great, and equally sad,—his divine faith in human nature, his divine belief that abstract justice and right and truth rule the world.

Even now, when life is redeeming some of those large promises to pay which I had long ago given up as hopeless bad debts, even now, it gives me a wrench to remember the cruelest chapter in that bitter lesson. So certain had I been of re-election that I had arranged to go to Boston the day after my triumph at the polls. For I knew from friends of the Crosbys in Pulaski that Elizabeth was still unmarried, was not engaged, and upon that I had built high a romantic hope.

I made up my mind that mother and I must leave Pulaski, that I must give up the law and must, in Chicago or Cleveland, get something to do that would bring in a living at once. Before I found courage to tell her that which would blast hopes wrapped round and rooted in her very heart, and, fortunately, before I had to confess to her the debts I had made, Edward Ramsay threw me a life-line.

He came bustling into my office one afternoon, big and broad, and obviously pleased with himself, and, therefore, with the world. He had hardly changed in the years since we were at Ann Arbor together. He had kept up our friendship, and had insisted on visiting me several times, though not in the past four years, which had been as busy for him as for me. Latterly his letters urging me to visit him at their great country place, away at the other end of the State, had set me a hard task of inventing excuses.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed, shaking my hand violently in both his. "You wouldn't come to see me, so I've come to you."

I tried not to show the nervousness this announcement stirred. "I'm afraid you'll find our hospitality rather uncomfortable," was all I said. Mother and I had not spread much sail to our temporary gust of prosperity; and when the storm began to gather, she straightway close-reefed.

"Thanks, but I can't stop with you this time," said he. "I'm making an inspection of the Power Trust's properties, and I've got mother and sister along. We're living in the private car the company gives me for the tour." He went on to tell how, since his father's death, he had been forced into responsibilities, and was, among many other things, a member of the Power Trust's executive committee.

Soon came the inevitable question, "And how are you getting on?"

"So so," replied I; "not too well, just at the present. I was beaten, you know, and have to go back to my practice in January."

"Wish you lived in my part of the State," said he. "But the Ramsay Company hasn't anything down here." He reflected a moment, then beamed. "I can get you the legal business of the Power Trust if you want it," he said. "Their lawyer down here goes on the bench, you know—he was on the ticket that won. Roebuck wanted a good, safe, first-class man on the bench in this circuit."

But he added nothing more about the Power Trust vacancy at Pulaski. True, my first impulse was that I couldn't and wouldn't accept; also, I told myself it was absurd to imagine they would consider me. Still, I wished to hear, and his failure to return to the subject settled once more the clouds his coming had lifted somewhat.

Mother was not well enough to have the Ramsays at the house that evening, so I dined with them in the car. Mrs. Ramsay was the same simple, silent, ill-at-ease person I had first met at the Ann Arbor commencement—probably the same that she had been ever since her husband's wealth and her children's infection with new-fangled ideas had forced her from the plain ways of her youth. I liked her, but I was not so well pleased with her daughter. Carlotta was then twenty-two, had abundant, noticeably nice brown hair, an indifferent skin, pettish lips and restless eyes, a little too close together—a spoiled willful young woman, taking to herself the deference that had been paid chiefly to her wealth. She treated me as if I were a candidate for her favor whom she was testing so that she might decide whether she would be graciously pleased to tolerate him.

Usually, superciliousness had not disturbed me. It is a cheap and harmless pleasure of cheap and harmless people. But just at that time my nerves were out of order, and Miss Ramsay's airs of patronage "got" on me. I proceeded politely to convey to her the impression that she did not attract me, that I did not think her worth while—this not through artful design of interesting by piquing, but simply in the hope of rasping upon her as she was rasping upon me. When I saw that I had not gained my point I ignored her. I tried to talk with Ed, then with his mother, but neither would interfere between me and Carlotta. I had to talk to her until she voluntarily lasped into offended silence. Then Ed, to save the evening from disaster, began discussing with me the fate of our classmates. I saw that Carlotta was studying me curiously—even resentfully, I thought; and she was coldly polite when I said good-night.

She and her mother called on my mother the next morning. "And what a nice girl Miss Ramsay is—so sensible, so intelligent and so friendly!" said my mother, relating the incidents of the visit in minute detail when I went home at noon.

"I didn't find her especially friendly," said I. Whereat I saw, or fancied I saw, a smile deep down in her eyes—and it set me to thinking.

In the afternoon Ed looked in at my office in the courthouse to say good-by. "But first, old man, I want to tell you I got that place for you. Old Roebuck is delighted—telegraphed me to close the arrangement at once—congratulated me on being able to get you. I knew it'd be so. He has his eyes skinned for bright young men—all those big men have. Whenever a fellow, especially a bright young lawyer, shows signs of ability they scoop him in."

"I can't believe it," said I, dazed. "I've been fighting him for four years—hard."

"That's it!" said he. "And don't you fret about its being a case of trying to heap coals of fire on your head. Roebuck don't use the fire shovel for that sort of thing. He's snapping you up because you've shown him what you can do. That's the way to get on nowadays, they tell me. Whenever the fellows on top find the chap, especially one in public office, who makes it hot for them, they hire him. Good business all around."

Thus, so suddenly that it giddied me, I was translated from failure to success, from poverty to affluence, from the most harassing anxiety to ease and security. Two months before I should have rejected the Power Trust's offer with scorn and should have gloried in my act as proof of superior virtue. But in those crucial two months I had been apprentice to the master whom all men that ever come to anything in this world must first serve. I had reformed my line of battle, had adjusted it to the lines laid down in the tactics of life-as-it-is.

Before I was able to convince myself that my fortunes had really changed Ed Ramsay telegraphed me to call on him in Fredonia on business of his own. It proved to be such a trifle that I began to puzzle at his real reason for sending for me. When he spun that trifle out over ten days, on each of which I was alone with Carlotta at least half my waking hours, I thought I had the clew to the mystery. I saw how I could increase the energy of his new enthusiasm for me, and also how I could cool it if I wished to be rash and foolish and to tempt fate again.

"Oh, the business didn't amount to much," was my answer to one of my mother's first questions on my return. She smiled peculiarly. In spite of my efforts the red came—at least I felt red.

"How did you like his sister?" she went on, again with that fluttering smile in the eyes only.

"A very nice girl," said I, in anything but a natural manner. My mother's expression teased me into adding: "Don't be silly. Nothing of that sort. You are always imagining that every one shares your opinion of me. She isn't likely to fall in love with me. Certainly I shan't with her."

Mother's silence somehow seemed argumentative.

"I couldn't marry a girl for her money," I retorted to it.

"Of course not," rejoined mother. "But there are other things to marry for besides money, or love—other things more sensible than either. For instance, there are the principal things—home and children."

I was listening with an open mind.

"The glamour of courtship and honeymoon passes," she went on. "Then comes the sober business of living—your career and your home. The woman's part in both is better played if there isn't the sort of love that is exacting, always interfering with the career, and making the home life a succession of ups and downs, mostly downs."

"Carlotta is very ambitious," said I.

"Ambitious for her husband," replied my mother, "as a sensible woman should be. She appreciates that a woman's best chance for big dividends in marriage is by being the silent partner in her husband's career. She'll be very domestic when she has children. I saw it the instant I looked at her. She has the true maternal instinct. What a man who's going to amount to something needs isn't a woman to be taken care of, but a woman to take care of him."

She said no more—she had made her point; and, when she had done that, she always stopped.

Within a month Ed Ramsay sent for me again, but this time it was business alone. I found him in a panic, like a man facing an avalanche and armed only with a shovel. Dunkirk, the senior United States Senator for our State, lived at Fredonia. He had seen that, by tunneling the Mesaba Range, a profitable railroad between Fredonia and Chicago could be built that would shorten the time at least three hours. But it would take away about half the carrying business of the Ramsay Company, besides seriously depreciating the Ramsay interest in the existing road. "And," continued Ed, "the old scoundrel has got the capital practically subscribed in New York. The people here are hot for the new road. It'll be sure to carry at the special election, next month. He has the Governor and the Legislature in his vest pocket, so they'll put through the charter next winter."

"I don't see that anything can be done," said Ed's lawyer, old Judge Barclay, who was at the consultation. "It means a big rake-off for Dunkirk. Politics is on a money basis nowadays. That's natural enough, since there is money to be made out of it. I don't see how those in politics that don't graft, as they call it, are any better than those that do. Would they get office if they didn't help on the jobs of the grafters? I suppose we might buy Dunkirk off."

"What do you think, Harvey?" asked Ed, looking anxiously at me. "We've got to fight the devil with fire, you know."

I shook my head. "Buying him off isn't fighting—it's surrender. We must fight him—with fire."

I let them talk themselves out, and then said, "Well, I'll take it to bed with me. Perhaps something will occur to me that can be worked up into a scheme."

In fact, I had already thought of a scheme, but before suggesting it I wished to be sure it was as good as it seemed. Also, there was a fundamental moral obstacle—the road would be a public benefit; it ought to be built. That moral problem caused most of my wakefulness that night, simple though the solution was when it finally came. The first thing Ed said to me, as we faced each other alone at breakfast, showed me how well spent those hours were.

(Continued Next Sunday.)