The Panchronicon

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CHAPTER I

THE THEORY OF COPERNICUS DROOP

The two sisters were together in their garden.

Rebecca Wise, turned forty and growing slightly gray at the temples, was moving slowly from one of her precious plants to the next, leaning over each to pinch off a dead leaf or count the buds. It was the historic month of May, 1898, and May is the paradise of flower lovers.

Phœbe was eighteen years younger than her sister, and the beauty of the village. Indeed, many declared their belief that the whole State of New Hampshire did not contain her equal.

She was seated on the steps of the veranda that skirted the little white cottage, and the absent gaze of her frank blue eyes was directed through the gate at the foot of the little path bordered by white rose-bushes. In her lap was a bundle of papers yellowed by age and an ivory miniature, evidently taken from the carved wooden box at her side.

Presently Rebecca straightened her back with a slight grimace and looked toward her sister, holding her mold-covered hands and fingers spread away from her.

"Well," she inquired, "hev ye found anythin'?"

Phœbe brought her gaze back from infinity and replied:

"No, I ain't. Only that one letter where Isaac Burton writes her that the players have come to town."

"I don't see what good them letters'll do ye in the Shakespeare class, then."

Rebecca spoke listlessly—more interested in her garden than in her sister's search.

"I don't know," Phœbe rejoined, dreamily. "It's awful funny—but whenever I take out these old letters there comes over me the feelin' that I'm 'way off in a strange country—and I feel like somebody else."

Rebecca looked up anxiously from her work.

"Them sort o' philanderin' notions are foolish, Phœbe," she said, and flicked a caterpillar over the fence.

Phœbe gave herself a little shake and began to tie up the papers.

"That's so," she replied. "But they will come when I get these out, an' I got 'em out thinkin' the' might be somethin' about Shakespeare in 'em for our class."

She paused and looked wistfully at the letters again.

"Oh!" she cried, "how I do wonder if he was among those players at the Peacock Inn that day! You know 'players' is what they called play-actors in those days, and he was a play-actor, they say."

"Did he live very far back, then?" said Rebecca, wishing to appear interested, but really intent upon a new sprout at the foot of the lilac-bush.

"Yes, three hundred years ago. Three of these letters has a date in 1598 exactly."

There was a long silence, and at length Rebecca looked up from the ground to ascertain its cause. She frowned and drew her aching back stiffly straight again.

"Everlastin'ly lookin' at that pictur'!" she exclaimed. "I declare to goodness, Phœbe Wise, folks'll think you're vain as a pouter pigeon."

Phœbe laughed merrily, tossed the letters into the box and leaped to her feet. The miniature at which she had been gazing was still in her hands.

"Folks'll never see me lookin' at it, Rebecca—only you," she said.

Then with a coaxing tone and looking with appealing archness at her sister, she went on:

"Is it really like me, Rebecca? Honest true?"

The elder woman merely grunted and moved on to the next bed, and Phœbe, with another laugh, ran lightly into the house.

A few moments later she reappeared at the front door with consternation on her face.

"Land o' goodness, Rebecca!" she cried, "do you know what time it is? Near onto one o'clock, an' I've got to be at the Shakespeare class at half past. We'll have to dish up dinner right this minute, and I don't see how I can change my dress after it an' help with the dishes too."

She whisked into the house again, and Rebecca followed her as rapidly as possible.

She was very proud of her baby sister, proud of her having been "clear through high school," and proud of her eminence in the local literary society. There was certainly something inspiring in having a sister who was first corresponding secretary of the Women's Peltonville Association for the Study of Shakespearian History and Literature; and it was simply wonderful how much poetry she could repeat from the pages of her favorite author.

Peltonville Center, New Hampshire, was one of those groups of neatly kept houses surrounding a prettily shaded, triangular common which seem to be characteristic of New England. Standing two miles from the nearest railway station, this little settlement possessed its own combined store and post-office, from whose narrow veranda one might watch the rising generation playing Saturday base-ball on the grassy triangle.

The traditional old meeting-house stood on the opposite side of the common, facing the store. The good old days of brimstone theology were past, and the descendants of the godly Puritans who raised this steeple "in the fear of the Lord," being now deprived of their chief source of fear, found Sunday meetings a bore, and a village pastor an unnecessary luxury.

Indeed, there seemed little need of pastoral admonition in such a town as Peltonville Center. There was a grimly commonplace and universal goodness everywhere, and the village was only saved from unconsciousness of its own perfection by the individual shortcomings of one of its citizens. Fortunately for the general self-complacence, however, the necessary revealing contrast was found in him.

Copernicus Droop was overfond of the bottle, and in spite of the prohibition laws of his State, he proved himself a blessed example and warning by a too frequent and unmistakable intoxication in public. He was gentle and even apologetic in his cups, but he was clearly a "slave of rum" and his mission was therefore fulfilled.

On this first of May, 1898, a number of idle young men sat in a row on the edge of the store veranda. Some were whittling, some making aimless marks in the dust with a stick. All leaned limply forward, with their elbows on their knees.

It was clearly not a Sunday, for the meeting-house was open, and from time to time, one or perhaps two young women together passed into the cool and silent room. The loungers at the store let none escape their notice, and the name of each damsel was passed down the line in an undertone as its owner entered the church.

A lantern-jawed young farmer at the end of the row slowly brushed the shavings from his clothes and remarked:

"Thet's the secon' meetin' of the Shekspeare class this month, ain't it?"

"Yep, an' there'll be two more afore the summer boarders comes up——"

The second speaker would have continued, but he was here interrupted by a third, who whispered loudly:

"Say, fellers, there goes Copernicus."

All eyes were raised and unanimously followed the shabby figure which had just emerged from behind the church and now started into the road leading away from the common toward the north.

"Walks pretty straight fer him, don't he?" snickered the first speaker.

"He's not ben tight fer two days."

"Bet ye a jack-knife he'll be spreein' it fer all he's wuth to-morrow."

Fortunately these comments did not reach the ears of their object, who, all unconscious of the interest which he inspired, made good his way at a fairly rapid pace.

Presently he stopped.

With muslin skirts swaying, hair rumpled, and fair young face flushed with exertion, Phœbe Wise was hurrying toward the common. She was almost running in her haste, for she was late and the Shakespeare class was a momentous institution.

"Oh, say, Cousin Phœbe," was the man's greeting, "can you tell me ef yer sister's to home?"

The young girl came to a sudden full stop in her surprise. This cousinly greeting from the village reprobate was as exciting and as inexplicable as it was unheard of.

"Why, Mr. Droop!" she exclaimed, "I—I—I s'pose so."

The truth was the truth, after all. But it was hard on Rebecca. What *could* this man want with her sister?

Droop nodded and passed on.

"Thank ye. Don't stop fer me," he said.

Phœbe moved forward slowly, watching Copernicus over her shoulder. She noted his steady steps and pale face and, reassured, resumed her flying progress with redoubled vigor. After all, Rebecca was forty-two years old and well able to take care of herself.

Meanwhile, Rebecca Wise, having carefully wrung out her dishcloth, poured out the water and swept the little sink, was slowly untying her kitchen apron, full of a thankful sense of the quiet hour before her wherein to knit and muse beside the front window of her little parlor.

In the centre of this room there stood a wide, round table, bearing a large kerosene-lamp and the week's mending. At the back and opposite the two windows stood the well-blacked, shiny, air-tight stove. Above this was a wooden mantel, painted to imitate marble, whereon were deposited two photographs, four curious Chinese shells, and a plaster cross to which there clung a very plaster young woman in scant attire, the whole being marked "Rock of Ages" in gilt letters at the base.

Horse-hair furniture in all the glory of endless "tidies" was arranged against walls bedight with a rainbow-like wilderness of morning-glories. The ceiling was of white plaster, and the floor was painted white and decked here and there with knitted rag-carpets, on whose Joseph's-coated surfaces Rebecca loved to gaze when in retrospective mood. In those humble floor-coverings her knowing eyes recognized her first clocked stockings and Phœbe's baby cloak. There was her brother Robert's wool tippet embalmed in loving loops with the remnants of his wife's best Sunday-go-to-meetin' ribbons. These two had long been dead, but their sister's loving eyes recreated them in rag-carpet dreams wherein she lived again those by-gone days.

Rebecca had just seated herself and was unrolling her work, when her eyes caught a glimpse of a man's form through the window. He had passed into her gate and was approaching the door. She leaned forward for a good look and then dropped back into her chair with a gasp of surprise.

"Copernicus Droop!" she exclaimed, "did you ever!"

She sat in rigid astonishment until she heard his timid knock, followed by the sound of shoes vigorously wiped upon the door-mat.

"Well, come! Thet's a comfort!" she thought. "He won't muss the carpet"—and she rose to admit her visitor.

"Good mornin'," said Droop, timidly. "I seen Cousin Phœbe a-runnin' down the road, an' I sorter thought I'd run in an' see how you was."

"Come right in," said Rebecca, in non-committal tones. She shut the door and followed him into the parlor.

"Here, give me yer hat," she continued. "Set right there. How be ye?"

Droop obeyed. In a few moments the two were seated facing each other, and Rebecca's needles were already busy. There was an interval of awkward silence.

"Well, what did ye come fer?"

It was Rebecca who broke the spell. In her usual downright fashion, she came to the point at once. She thought it as well he should know that she was not deceived by his polite pretence of casual friendly interest.

Droop settled forward with elbows on his knees and brought his finger-tips carefully and accurately together. He found this action amazingly promotive of verbal accuracy.

"Well, Cousin Rebecca," he began, slowly, "I'm lookin' fer a partner." He paused, considering how to proceed.

The spinster let her hands drop in speechless wonder. The audacity of the man! He—to her—a proposal! At her age! From him!

Fortunately the next few words disclosed her error, and she blushed for it as she lifted her work again, turning nearer the window as if for better light.

"Yes," Droop proceeded, "I've a little business plan, an' it needs capital an' a partner."

He waited, but there was no response.

"Capital an' a partner," he repeated, "an' intelligence an' ambition. So I come to you."

Rebecca turned toward him again, scarcely less surprised now than before.

"To me! D'ye mean to say ye've me in yer mind fer a partner—with capital?"

Droop nodded slowly and compressed his lips.

"Well, I want to know!" she exclaimed, helplessly.

"Oh, I know you ain't overly rich right now," said Droop, apologetically; "but it warn't no secret thet ye might hev hed Joe Chandler ef ye hadn't ben so shifty in yer mind an' fell betwixt two stools—an' Lord knows Joe Chandler was as rich as—as Peter Craigin down to Keene—pretty nigh."

Again Rebecca blushed, but this time in anger.

"See here, Copernicus Droop—" she began.

"Oh, I don't mean nothin' mean, now," he insisted, earnestly. "I'm jest leadin' up to the pint sorter natural like—breakin' the thing easy, ye know."

"What *air* you a-drivin' at?"

Droop shifted uneasily in his seat and ran his finger around inside of his collar before he replied:

"Ye see, it's sorter hard to explain. It's this way. I hev a mighty fine plan in my mind founded on a mixin' up of astronomical considerations with prior inventions——"

"Mister Droop!" exclaimed his hostess, gazing severely into his eyes, "ef you think I'll let you go to drinkin' rum till——"

"Honest to goodness, Miss Wise, I've not teched a drop!" cried Droop, leaping to his feet and leaning forward quickly. "You may smell my breath ef——"

A violent push sent him back to his chair.

"Thet'll do, Mr. Droop. I'll undertake to believe ye fer once, but I'll thank ye to speak plain English."

"I'll do my best," he sighed, plaintively. "I don't blame ye fer not takin' to it quick. I didn't myself at first. Well—here. Ye see—ye know——"

He paused and swallowed hard, gazing at the ceiling for inspiration. Then he burst out suddenly:

"Ye know the graphophone an' the kodak and the biograph an' all them things what ye can see down to Keene?"

Rebecca nodded slowly, with suspicion still in her eye.

"Well, the's a heap o' things ben invented since the Centennial of 1876. Don't you s'pose they've made hills o' money out o' them things—with patents an' all?"

"Of course."

"An' don't you s'pose that ef anybody in 1876 was to up an' bring out sech inventions all at once he'd be bigger than all the other inventors put together!"

Rebecca slowly pushed her needle through her hair, which was a sign of thoughtfulness.

"Wal, o' course," she said, at length, "ef anybody hed aben smart enough to've invented all them things in 1876 he'd aben a pretty big man, I guess."

Droop edged forward eagerly.

"An' s'posen' that you hed married Joe Chandler back in 1876, an' you was rich enough to back up an inventor like that, an' he come to

you an' offered to give you half ef you'd up an' help him put 'em on the market, an' s'posen'——"

"What the land sake's the use o' s'posin'?" Rebecca cried, sharply. "This is 1898, an' I ain't married, thanks be to goodness!"

"Ah, but ye could be, ef we was in 1876! There, there—I know what you want to say—but 'taint so! What would ye say ef I was to tell ye that all ye've got to do is jest to get into a machine I've got an' I can take ye back to 1876 in next to no time! What would ye say——"

"I'd say ye was tighter'n a boiled owl, Copernicus Droop."

"But I ain't, I ain't!" he almost screamed. "I tell ye I hevn't teched liquor fer two days. I've reformed. Ef ye won't smell my breath——"

"Then you're plum crazy," she interrupted.

"No, nor crazy either," he insisted. "Why, the whole principle of it is so awful simple! Ef you'd ben to high school, now, an' knew astronomy an' all, you'd see right through it like nothin'."

"Well, then, you c'n explain it to them as hez ben to high school, an' that's sister Phœbe. Here she comes now."

She went at once to the door to admit the new-comer. Her visitor, watching the pretty younger sister as she stepped in, rosy and full of life, could not but remark the contrast between the two women.

"Twenty-two years makes a heap o' difference!" he muttered. "But Rebecca was jest as pretty herself, back in 1876."

"Look, Rebecca!" cried Phœbe, as she entered the door, "here's a new book Mrs. Bolton lent me to-day. All about Bacon writing Shakespeare's plays, an' how Bacon was a son of Queen Elizabeth. Do you s'pose he really did?"

"Oh, don't ask me, child!" was the nervous reply. "Mr. Droop's in the parlor."

Phœbe had forgotten her short interview with Droop, and she now snatched off her hat in surprise and followed her elder sister, nodding to their visitor as she entered.

"Set down, both o' ye," said Rebecca. "Now, then, Mr. Droop, perhaps you'll explain."

Rebecca was far more mystified and interested than she cared to admit. Her brusque manner was therefore much exaggerated—a dissimulation which troubled her conscience, which was decidedly of the tenderest New England brand.

Poor Copernicus experienced a sense of relief as he turned his eyes to those of the younger sister. She felt that Rebecca's manner was distinctly cold, and her own expression was the more cordial in compensation.

"Why, Miss Phœbe," he said, eagerly, "I've ben tellin' your sister about my plan to go back to the Centennial year—1876, ye know."

"To—to what, Mr. Droop?"

Phœbe's polite cordiality gave place to amazed consternation. Droop raised a deprecating hand.

"Now don't you go to think I'm tight or gone crazy. You'll understand it, fer you've ben to high school. Now see! What is it makes the days go by—ain't it the daily revolution of the sun?"

Phœbe put on what her sister always called "that schoolmarm look" and replied:

"Why, it's the turning round of the earth on its axis once in——"

"Yes—yes—It's all one—all one," Droop broke in, eagerly. "To put it another way, it comes from the sun cuttin' meridians, don't it?"

Rebecca, who found this technical and figurative expression beyond her, paused in her knitting and looked anxiously at Phœbe, to see how she would take it. After a moment of thought, the young woman admitted her visitor's premises.

"Very good! An' you know's well's I do, Miss Phœbe, that ef a man travels round the world the same way's the sun, he ketches up on time a whole day when he gets all the way round. In other words, the folks that stays at home lives jest one day more than the feller that goes round the world that way. Am I right?"

"Of course."

Droop glanced triumphantly at Rebecca. This tremendous admission on her learned young sister's part stripped her of all pretended coldness. Her deep interest was evident now in her whole pose and expression.

"Now, then, jest follow me close," Droop continued, sitting far forward in his chair and pointing his speech with a thin forefinger on his open palm.

"Ef a feller was to whirl clear round the world an' cut all the meridians in the same direction as the sun, an' he made the whole trip around jest as quick as the sun did—time wouldn't change a mite fer him, would it?"

Phœbe gasped at the suggestion.

"Why, I should think—of course——"

She stopped and put her hand to her head in bewilderment.

"Et's a sure thing!" Droop exclaimed, earnestly. "You've said yerself that the folks who stayed to home would live one day longer than the fellow that went round. Now, ef that feller travelled round as fast as the sun, the stay-at-homes would only be one day older by the time he got back—ain't that a fact?"

Both sisters nodded.

"Well, an' the traveller would be one day younger than they'd be. An' ain't that jest no older at all than when he started?"

"My goodness! Mr. Droop!" Phœbe replied, feebly. "I never thought of that."

"Well, ain't it so?"

"Of course—leastways—why, it must be!"

"All right, then!"

Droop rose triumphantly to his feet, overcome by his feelings.

"Follow out that same reasonin' to the bitter end!" he cried, "an' what will happen ef that traveller whirls round, cuttin' meridians jest twice as fast as the sun—goin' the same way?"

He paused, but there was no reply.

"Why, as sure as shootin', I tell ye, that feller will get jest one day younger fer every two whirls round!"

There was a long and momentous silence. The tremendous suggestion had for the moment bereft both women of all reasoning faculty.

At length the younger sister ventured upon a practical objection.

"But how's he goin' to whirl round as fast as that, Mr. Droop?" she said.

Droop smiled indulgently.

"Et does sound outlandish, when ye think how big the world is. But what if ye go to the North Pole? Ain't all the twenty-four meridians jammed up close together round that part of the globe?"

"Thet's so," murmured Rebecca, "I've seen it many's the time on the map in Phœbe's geography book."

"Sure enough," Droop rejoined. "Then ain't it clear that ef a feller'll jest take a grip on the North Pole an' go whirlin' round it, he'll be cuttin' meridians as fast as a hay-chopper? Won't he see the sun gettin' left behind an' whirlin' the other way from what it does in nature? An' ef the sun goes the other way round, ain't it sure to unwind all the time thet it's ben a-rollin' up?"

Rebecca's ball of yarn fell from her lap at this, and, as she followed it with her eyes, she seemed to see a practical demonstration of Droop's marvellous theory.

Phœbe felt all the tremendous force of Droop's logic, and she flushed with excitement. One last practical objection was obvious, however.

"The thing must be all right, Mr. Droop," she said; "an' come to think of it, this must be the reason so many folks have tried to reach the North Pole. But it never *has* been reached yet, an' how are you agoin' to do it?"

"You think it never hez," Copernicus replied. "The fact is, though, that I've ben there."

"You!" Phœbe cried.

"And is there a pole there?" Rebecca asked, eagerly.

"The's a pole there, an' I've swung round it, too," Droop replied, sitting again with a new and delightful sense of no longer being unwelcome.

"Here's how 'twas. About a year ago there come to my back door a strange-lookin' man who'd hurt his foot some way. I took him in an' fixed him up—you know I studied for a doctor once—an' while he was bein' fixed up, he sorter took a fancy to me an' he begun to give me the story of his life. He said he was born in the year 2582, an' had ben takin' what he called a historical trip into the past ages. He went on at a great rate like that, an' I thought he was jest wanderin' in his mind with the fever, so I humored him. But he saw through me, an' he wouldn't take no but I should go down into Burnham's swamp with him to see how he'd done it.

"Well, down we went, and right spang in the thickest of the bushes an' muck we come across the queerest lookin' machine that ever ye see!

"Right there an' then he told me all the scientific talk about time an' astronomy thet I've told you, an' then he tuck me into the thing. Fust thing I knew he give a yank to a lever in the machinery an' there was

a big jerk thet near threw me on the back o' my head. I looked out, an' there we was a-flyin' over the country through the air fer the North Pole!"

"There, now!" cried Rebecca, "didn't Si Wilkins' boy Sam say he seen a comet in broad daylight last June?"

"Thet was us," Droop admitted.

"And not a soul believed him," Phœbe remarked.

"Well," continued Droop, "to make a long story short, thet future-man whirled me a few times 'round the North Pole—unwound jest five weeks o' time, an' back we come to Peltonville a-hummin'!"

"And then?" cried the two women together.

"Ef you'll believe me, there we was back to the day he fust come—an' fust thing I knew, thet future-man was a-comin' up to my back door, same ez before, a-beggin' to hev his foot fixed. It was hard on him, but I was convinced fer keeps."

Copernicus shook his head sadly, with retrospective sadness.

"An' where is the future-man now?" Phœbe asked.

"Tuk cold on his lungs at the North Pole," said Droop, solemnly. "Hed pneumonia an' up'n died."

"But there warn't nobody round heerd of him except you," said Rebecca. "Who buried him?"

"Ah, thet's one o' the beauties o' the hull business. He'd showed me all the ropes on his machine—his Panchronicon, as he called it—an' so I up'n flew round the North Pole the opposite way as soon's he passed away, till I'd made up the five weeks we'd lost. Then when I got back it was five weeks after his funeral, an' I didn't hev to bother about it."

The two sisters looked at each other, quite overcome with admiration.

"My land!" Rebecca murmured, gathering up her yarn and knitting again. "Sence they've invented them X-rays an' took to picturin' folks' insides, I kin believe anythin'."

"You don't hev to take my word fer it," Droop exclaimed. "Ef you'll come right along with me this blessed minute, I'll show you the machine right now."

"I'd jest love to see it," said Rebecca, her coldness all forgotten, "but it's mos' too late fer this afternoon. There's the supper to get, you know, an'——"

"But the plan, Rebecca," Phœbe cried. "You've forgotten that I haven't heard Mr. Droop's plan."

"I wish 't you'd call me 'Cousin Copernicus,'" said Droop, earnestly. "You know I've sworn off—quit drinkin' now."

Phœbe blushed at his novel proposal and insisted on the previous question.

"But what is the plan?" she said.

"Why, my idea is this, Cousin Phœbe. I want we should all go back to 1876 again. Thet's the year your sister could hev married Joe Chandler ef she'd wanted to."

Rebecca murmured something unintelligible, blushing furiously, with her eyes riveted to her knitting. Phœbe looked surprised.

"You know you could, Cousin Rebecca," Droop insisted. "Now what I say is, let's go back there. I'll invent the graphophone, the kodak, the vitascope, an' Milliken's cough syrup an' a lot of other big modern inventions. Rebecca'll marry Chandler, an' she an' her husband can back up my big inventions with capital. Why, Cousin Phœbe," he cried, with enthusiasm, "we'll all hev a million apiece!"

The sentimental side of Droop's plan first monopolized Phœbe's attention.

"Rebecca Wise!" she exclaimed, turning with mock severity to face her sister. "Why is it I've never heard tell about this love affair before

now? Why, Joe Chandler's just a *fine* man. Is it you that broke his heart an' made him an old bachelor all his life?"

Rebecca must have dropped a stitch, for she turned toward the window again and brought her knitting very close to her face.

"What brought ye so early to home, Phœbe?" she said. "Warn't there no Shakespeare meetin' to-day?"

"No. Mis' Beecher was to lead, an' she's been taken sick, so I came right home. But you can't sneak out of answerin' me like that, Miss Slyboots," Phœbe continued, in high spirits.

Seating herself on the arm of her sister's chair, she put her arms about her neck and, bending over, whispered:

"Tell me honest, now, Rebecca, did Joe Chandler ever propose to you?"

"No, he never did!" the elder sister exclaimed, rising suddenly.

"Now, Mr. Droop," she continued, "your hull plan is jest too absurd to think of——"

Droop tried to expostulate, but she raised her voice, speaking more quickly.

"An' you come 'round again after supper an' we'll tell ye what we've decided," she concluded.

The humor of this reply was lost on Copernicus, but he moved toward the door with a sense of distinct encouragement.

"Remember the rumpus we'll make with all them inventions," Droop called back as he walked toward the gate, "think of the money we'll make!"

But Rebecca was thinking of something very different as she stood at the front door gazing with softened eyes at the pasture and woods beyond the road. She seemed to see a self-willed girl breaking her own heart and another's rather than acknowledge a silly error. She was wondering if that had really been Rebecca Wise. She felt again

all the old bewitching heart-pangs, sweetened and mellowed by time, and she wondered if she were *now* really Rebecca Wise.

CHAPTER II

A VISIT TO THE PANCHRONICON

At precisely eight o'clock that evening, a knock was again heard at the door of the Wise home, and Droop was admitted by the younger sister. She did not speak, and her face was invisible in the dark hall. The visitor turned to the right and entered the parlor, followed by his young hostess. Rebecca was sitting by the lamp, sewing. As she looked up and nodded, Droop saw that her features expressed only gloomy severity. He turned in consternation and caught sight for the first time of Phœbe's face. Her eyes and pretty nose were red and her mouth was drawn into a curve of plaintive rebellion.

"Set down, Mr. Droop. Give me yer hat," she said; and there was a suspicious catch in her voice.

The visitor seated himself by the centre-table beside the lamp and sat slowly rubbing his hands, the while he gazed mournfully from one to the other of the silent sisters. Phœbe sat on the long horse-hair "settle," and played moodily with the tassel hanging at its head.

There was a long pause. Each of the women seemed bent on forcing the other to break the silence.

Poor Droop felt that his plans were doomed, and he dared not urge either woman to speech, lest he hear the death-sentence of his hopes. Finally, however, the awkward silence became unbearable.

"Well?" he said, inquiringly, still rubbing his hands.

"Well," Rebecca exclaimed, "it seems it's not to be done," and she looked reproachfully at Phœbe.

The words fulfilled his fears, but the tone and glance produced a thrill of hope. It was evident that Rebecca at least favored his plans.

Turning now to the younger sister, Droop asked, in a melancholy tone:

"Don't you want to get rich, Cousin Phœbe?"

"Rich—me!" she replied, indignantly. "A mighty lot of riches it'll bring me, won't it? That's just what riles me so! You an' Rebecca just think of nothin' but your own selves. You never stop to think of me!"

Droop opened his eyes very wide indeed, and Rebecca said, earnestly:

"Phœbe, you know you ain't got any call to say sech a thing!"

"Oh, haven't I?" cried Phœbe, in broken accents. "Did either of you think what would happen to me if we all went back to 1876? Two years old! That's what I'd be! A little toddling baby, like Susan Mellick's Annie! Put to bed before supper—carried about in everybody's arms—fed on a bottle and—and perhaps—and perhaps getting *spanked*!"

With the last word, Phœbe burst into tears of mingled grief and mortification and rushed from the room.

The others dared not meet each other's guilty eyes. Droop gazed about the room in painful indecision. He could not bear to give up all hope, and yet—this unforeseen objection really seemed a very serious one. To leave the younger sister behind was out of the question. On the other hand, the consequences of the opposite course were—well, painful to her at least.

In his nervousness he unconsciously grasped a small object on the table upon which his left hand had been lying. It was a miniature daintily painted on ivory. He looked vacantly upon it; his mind at first quite absent from his eyes. But as he gazed, something familiar in the lovely face depicted there fixed his attention. Before long he was examining the picture with the greatest interest.

"Well, now!" he exclaimed, at length. "Ain't that pretty! Looks jest like her, too. When was that tuck, Miss Wise?"

"That ain't Phœbe," said Rebecca, dejectedly.

"Ain't Phœbe!" Droop cried, in amazement. "Why, it's the finest likeness—why—but—it *must* be yer sister!"

"Well, 'tain't. Thet pictur is jest three hundred years old."

"Three hundred—" he began—then very slowly, "Well, now, do tell!" he said.

"Phœbe's got the old letter that tells about it. The's a lot of 'em in that little carved-wood box there. They say it come over in the Mayflower."

Droop could not take his eyes from the picture. The likeness was perfect. Here was the pretty youthful oval of her face—the same playful blue eye—the sensitive red lips seeming about to sparkle into a smile—even the golden brown mist of hair that hid the delicately turned ear!

Then Droop suddenly remembered his plans, and with his hand he dropped the picture as his mind dismissed it. He rose and looked about for his hat.

"Ye wouldn't want to come back to '76 with me an' leave Cousin Phœbe behind, would ye?" he suggested, dismally.

"What!" cried Rebecca, giving vent to her pent-up feelings, "an' never see my sister again! Why, I'd hev to come livin' along up behind her, and, all I could do, I'd never catch up with her—never! You'd ought to be ashamed to stand there an' think o' sech a thing, Copernicus Droop!"

For some time he stood with bent head and shoulders, twirling his hat between his fingers. At length he straightened up suddenly and moved toward the door.

"Well," he said, "the' isn't any use you seem' the Panchronicon now, is the'?"

"What's it like, Mr. Droop?" Rebecca inquired.

He paused helpless before the very thought of description.

"Oh," he said, weakly, "et's like—et's a—why—Oh, it's a machine!"

"Hez it got wings?"

"Not exactly wings," he began, then, more earnestly, "why don't ye come and see it, anyway! It can't do ye any harm to jest look at it!"

Rebecca dropped her hands into her lap and replied, with a hesitating manner:

"I'd like to fust rate—it must be an awful queer machine! But I don't get much time fer traipsin' 'round now days."

"Why can't ye come right along now?" Droop asked, eagerly. "It's dry as a bone underfoot down in the swamp now. The's ben no rain in a long time."

She pondered some time before replying. Her first impulse was to reject the proposal as preposterous. The hour seemed very ill chosen. Rebecca was not accustomed to leaving home for any purpose at night, and she was extremely conservative.

On the other hand, she felt that only under cover of the darkness could she consent to go anywhere in company with the village reprobate. Every tongue in the place would be set wagging were she seen walking with Copernicus Droop. She had not herself known how strong was the curiosity which his startling theories and incredible story had awakened in her. She looked up at her visitor with indecision in her eyes.

"I don't see how I could go now," she said. "Besides, it's mos' too dark to see the thing, ain't it?"

"Not a mite," he replied, confidently. "The's lights inside I can turn on, an' we'll see the hull thing better'n by daylight."

Then, as she still remained undecided, he continued, in an undertone:

"Cousin Phœbe's up in her room, ain't she? Ye might not get another chance so easy."

He had guessed instinctively that, under the circumstances, Rebecca preferred not revealing to Phœbe her own continued interest in the wonderful machine.

The suggestion was vital. Phœbe was in all probability sulking in her own bedroom, and in that event would not quit it for an hour. It seemed now or never.

Rebecca rolled up her knitting work and rose to her feet.

"Jest wait here a spell," she said, rapidly. "I won't be a minute!"

Shortly afterward, two swiftly moving, shadowy figures emerged from the little white gate and turned into a dark lane made more gloomy by overhanging maples. This was the shortest route to Burnham's swamp.

Copernicus was now more hopeful. He could not but feel that, if the elder sister came face to face with his marvellous machine, good must result for his plans. Rebecca walked with nervous haste, dreading Phœbe's possible discovery of this most unconventional conduct.

The night was moonless, and the two stumbled and groped their way down the lane at a pace whose slowness exasperated Rebecca.

"Ef I'd a-known!" she exclaimed, under her breath.

"We're 'most there, Cousin Rebecca," said Copernicus, with deprecating softness. "Here, give me holt o' yer hand while we climb over the wall. Here's Burnham's swamp right now."

Accepting the proffered aid, Rebecca found herself in the midst of a thicket of bushes, many of which were thorny and all of which seemed bent upon repelling nocturnal adventurers.

Droop, going ahead, did his best to draw aside the obstinate twigs, and Rebecca followed him with half-averted head, lifting her skirts and walking sidewise.

"'Mighty lucky, 'tain't wet weather!" she mumbled.

At that moment her guide stood still.

"There!" he exclaimed, in a low, half-awed voice.

Rebecca stopped and gazed about. A little to the right the dark gray of the sky was cut by a looming black mass of uncertain form.

It looked like the crouching phantom of some shapeless sea-monster. Rebecca half expected to see it dissolve like a wind-driven fog.

Their physical sight could distinguish nothing of the outer characteristics of this mysterious structure; but for this very reason, the imagination was the more active. Rebecca, with all her directness of nature and commonplace experience, felt in this unwonted presence that sense of awed mystery which she would have called a "creepy feeling."

What unknown and incomprehensible forces were locked within that formless mass? By what manner of race as yet unborn had its elements been brought together—no, no—*would* they be brought together? How assume a comfortable mental attitude toward this creation whose present existence so long antedated its own origin?

One sentiment, at least, Rebecca could entertain with hearty consistency. Curiosity asserted its supremacy over every other feeling.

"Can't we get into the thing, an' light a candle or suthin'?" she said.

"Of course we can," said Droop. "That's what I brought ye here fer. Take holt o' my hand an' lift yer feet, or you'll stumble."

Leading his companion by the hand, Copernicus approached the dark form, moving with great caution over the clumps of grassy turf. Presently he reached the side of the machine. Rebecca heard him strike it with his hand two or three times, as though groping for something. Then she was drawn forward again, and suddenly found herself entering an invisible doorway. She stumbled on the threshold and flung out her free hand for support. She clutched at a hand-rail that seemed to lead spirally upward.

Droop's voice came out of the blackness.

"Jest wait here a minute," he said. "I'll go up an' turn on the light."

She heard him climbing a short flight of stairs, and a few moments later a flood of light streamed from a doorway above her head, amply lighting the little hallway in which Rebecca was standing.

The hand-rail to which she was already clinging skirted the iron stairs leading to the light, and she started at once up this narrow spiral.

She was met at the door by Copernicus, who was smiling with a proud complacency.

"Wal, Cousin Rebecca," he said, with a sweeping gesture indicating their general surroundings, "what d'ye think o' this?"

They were standing at the head of a sort of companion-way in a roomy antechamber much resembling the general cabin of a luxurious old-time sailing-packet. The top of the stairs was placed between two windows in one side wall of the machine, through which there was just then entering a gentle breeze. Two similar openings faced these in the opposite side wall, and under each of the four windows there was a long wooden bench carrying a flat mattress cushion.

In the middle of the room, on a square deep-piled rug, stood a table covered with a red cloth and surrounded by three or four solid-looking upholstered chairs. Here were some books and papers, and directly over the table a handsome electric chandelier hung from the ceiling of dark-wood panels. This was the source of their present illumination.

"This here's the settin'-room," Droop explained. "An' these are the state-rooms—that's what he called 'em."

He walked toward two doors in one of the end walls and, opening one of them, turned the switch of the lamp within.

"'Lectric lights in it, like down to Keene," Rebecca remarked, approaching the cabin and peering in.

She saw a small bedroom comfortably furnished. The carpet was apparently new, and on the tastefully papered walls hung a number of small oil-paintings.

Droop opened the other door.

"They're both alike," he said.

Rebecca glanced into the second apartment, which was indeed the counterpart of its companion.

"Well, it wouldn't do no harm to sweep an' beat these carpets!" she exclaimed. Then, slipping her forefinger gingerly over the edge of a chair: "Look at that dust!" she said, severely, holding up her hand for inspection.

But Droop had bustled off to another part of the room.

"Here's lockers under these window-seats," he explained, with a dignified wave of the hand. "Here's books an' maps in this set o' shelves. Here's a small pianner that plays itself when you turn on the electricity——"

There was a stumbling crash and a suppressed cry at the foot of the stairs.

With his heart in his mouth, Droop leaped to the chandelier and turned out the lights; then rushed to the state-rooms and was about to turn their switches as well, when a familiar voice greeted their ears from below—

"Don't be scared—it's only Phœbe."

"What ever possessed—" began Rebecca, in a low tone.

But at that moment Phœbe's head appeared over the stair rail in the light shed from the two state-rooms.

"Won't you light up again, Mr. Droop?" she said, merrily, smiling the while into her sister's crestfallen face. "I heard you two leavin' the house, an' I just guessed what you'd be up to. So I followed you down here."

She dropped into one of the chairs beside the table just as Droop relighted the lamps.

With one slender hand resting upon the table, she looked up into Droop's face and went on:

"I was havin' a dreadful time, stumbling over stocks an' stones at every step, till suddenly there was quite a light struck my face, and first I knew I was lookin' right into your lighted windows. I guess we'll have a pleasant meetin' here of all the folks in town pretty soon—not to mention the skeeters, which are comin' right early this year!"

"Lands sakes!" cried Rebecca.

"There now!" exclaimed Copernicus, bustling toward the windows, "I must be a nateral born fool!"

Phœbe laughed in high spirits at thought of her prank, while Droop closed the tight iron shutters at each window, thus confining every ray of light.

Rebecca seated herself opposite Phœbe and looked severely straight before her with her hands folded in her lap. She was ashamed of her curiosity and much chagrined at being discovered in this unconventional situation by her younger sister.

Phœbe gazed about her and, having taken in the general aspect of the antechamber in which they were assembled, she explored the two state-rooms. Thence she returned for a more detailed survey. Droop followed her about explaining everything, but Rebecca remained unmoved.

"What's all those dials on the wall, Mr. Droop?" asked the younger sister.

"I wish't you'd call me Cousin Copernicus," said Droop, appealingly.

Phœbe ran up very close to a large steel dial-plate covered with figures.

"Now what the land is this for?" she exclaimed.

"Thet," said Droop, slowly, "is an indicator of height above ground and tells yer direction."

"And what d'ye do with this little handle?"

"Why, you set that for north or west or any other way, an' the hull machine keeps headed that way until ye change it."

"Oh, is that the rudder?"

"No, that is fer settin' jest one course fer a long ride—like's ef we was goin' north to the pole, ye know. The rudder's in here, 'long with the other machinery."

He walked to one of the two doors which faced the state-rooms.

Phœbe followed him and found herself in the presence of a bewildering array of controlling and guiding handles—gauges—test cocks—meters and indicators. She was quite overawed, and listened with a new respect for her distant relative as he explained the uses of the various instruments. It was evident that he had quite mastered the significance of each implement.

When Droop had completed his lecture, Phœbe found that she understood the uses of three of the levers. The rest was a mystery to her.

"This is the starting-lever," she said. "This steers, and this reverses. Is that it?"

"That's correct," said Droop, "an' if——"

She cut him short by whisking out of the room.

"What drives the thing?" she asked, as he meekly followed her.

"Oh, the's power storage an' all kinds o' works down below stairs."

"An' what's this room for?" she asked, opening the door next the engine-room.

"Thet's the kitchen an' butler's pantry," said Droop. "It's mighty finely fitted up, I tell ye. That future-man was what ye call a conusure. My, but he could cook up fine victuals!"

Rebecca found this temptation stronger than her ill humor, and she rose with alacrity and followed her companions into the now brightly lighted kitchen.

Here the appointments were the completest possible, and, after she and Phœbe had mastered the theory of the electric range, they agreed that they had never seen such a satisfactory equipment.

Phœbe stood in the middle of the room and looked about her with kindling eyes. The novelty of this adventure had intoxicated her. Rebecca's enthusiasm was repeated threefold in the more youthful bosom of her sister.

"My!" she cried, "wouldn't it be lovely if we could make this our house down here for a while! What would the Mellicks an' the Tituses an'——"

"They'd take us for a lunatic asylum," Rebecca exclaimed, severely.

Phœbe considered a moment and then gravely replied:

"Yes, I s'pose they would."

Copernicus was pacing slowly up and down from range to china-closet and back, rubbing his hands slowly over each other.

"I wish't you'd try to see ef ye couldn't change yer mind, Cousin Phœbe," he said, earnestly. "Jest think of all there is in this extrordnery vessel—what with kitchen an' little cunnin' state-rooms—what with the hull machinery an' all—it's a sinful waste to leave it all to rot away down in this here swamp when we might all go back to the Centennial an' get rich as—as Solomon's temple!"

Phœbe led the way in silence to the outer room again, and Droop carefully extinguished the lights in the kitchen and engine-room.

As the three stood together under the main chandelier their faces were the exponents of three different moods.

Droop was wistful—anxious.

Rebecca looked grimly regretful.

In Phœbe's eyes there shone a cheerful light—but her expression was enigmatic.

"Now let's go home," she said, briskly. "I've got somethin' that I want to talk to Rebecca about. Can't you call in to-morrow mornin', Mr. Droop?"

"Don't ye believe ye might change yer mind?" he asked, mournfully.

"We'll be through with the breakfast an' have things set to rights by eight o'clock," said Phœbe.

CHAPTER III

A NOCTURNAL EVASION

Promptly at the appointed time, Copernicus Droop might have been seen approaching the white cottage. Still nursing a faint hope, he walked with nervous rapidity, mumbling and gesticulating in his excitement. He attracted but little attention. His erratic movements were credited to his usual potations, and no one whom he passed even gave him a second glance.

Nearing the house he saw Phœbe leaning out of one of the second-story windows. She had been gazing westward toward Burnham's swamp, but she caught sight of Droop and nodded brightly to him. Then she drew in her head and pulled down the window.

Phœbe opened the door as Copernicus entered the garden gate, and it was at once apparent that her buoyant mood was still upon her, for she actually offered her hand to her visitor as he stood at the threshold wiping his feet.

"Good mornin'," she said. "I've ben tryin' to see if I could find the Panchronicon out of my window. It's just wonderful how well it's hidden in the bushes."

She led him to the parlor and offered him a seat.

"Where's Cousin Rebecca?" he said, as he carefully placed his hat on the floor beside his chair.

Phœbe seated herself opposite to her visitor with her back to the windows, so that her face was in shadow.

"Rebecca's upstairs," she replied.

Then, after a moment's pause: "She's packin' up," she said.

Droop straightened up excitedly.

"What—packin'!" he cried. "Hev ye decided ye'll go, then?"

"Well," said Phœbe, slowly, "we have an'—an' we haven't."

"What d'ye mean?"

"Why, Mr. Droop, it's just like this," she exclaimed, leaning forward confidentially. "Ye see, Rebecca an' I are both just plumb crazy to try that wonderful plan of cuttin' meridians at the North Pole—an' we're wild fer a ride on that queer kind of a boat or whatever ye call it. At the same time, Rebecca has to acknowledge that it's askin' too much of me to go back to two years old an' live like a baby. For one thing, I wouldn't have a thing to wear."

"But ye might make some clothes before ye start," Droop suggested.

"Mr. Droop!" Phœbe exclaimed, severely, "what *do* you s'pose folks would say if Rebecca and I was to set to work makin' baby clothes—two old maids like us?"

Droop looked down in confusion and plucked at the edge of his coat.

"Phœbe Wise, you're only just tryin' to be smart fer argument!"

This sentence was delivered with a suddenness which was startling. Droop looked up with a jump to find Rebecca standing at the door with a pile of clean sheets on her arm.

She was gazing sternly at Phœbe, who appeared somewhat disconcerted.

"You know's well's I do," continued the elder sister, "that every one o' your baby clothes is folded an' put away as good as new in the attic."

Phœbe rallied quickly and repelled this attack with spirit.

"Well, I don't care. They'll stay right where they are, Rebecca," she answered, with irritation. "You know we settled it last night that I wasn't to be pestered about goin' back to 1876!"

"That's true," was the reply, "but don't you be givin' such fool reasons for it. It's really just because you're afraid o' bein' whipped an' put to bed—an' goodness knows, you deserve it!"

With this, Rebecca turned grimly and went into the garden to hang the sheets up for an airing.

There was a moment's awkward pause, and then Phœbe broke the silence.

"Our plan's this, Mr. Droop," she said, "an' I hope you'll agree. We want to have you take us to the North Pole and unwind about six years. That'll take us back before the World's Fair in Chicago, when I was eighteen years old, an' we can see fer ourselves how it feels to be livin' backward an' growin' younger instead of older every minute."

"But what's the good of that?" Droop asked, querulously. "I ain't goin' to do it jest fer fun. I'm growin' too old to waste time that way. My plan was to make money with all them inventions."

"Well, an' why can't ye?" she replied, coaxingly. "There's that X-ray invention, now. Why couldn't you show that at the World's Fair an' get a patent fer it?"

"I don't understand that business," he replied, sharply. "Besides I can't get one o' them X-ray machines—they cost a heap."

This was a blow to Phœbe's plan and she fell silent, thinking deeply. She had foreseen that Droop would take only a mercenary view of the matter and had relied upon the X-ray to provide him with a motive. But if he refused this, what was she to do?

Suddenly her face lighted up.

"I've got it!" she cried. "You know those movin' picture boxes ye see down to Keene, where ye turn a handle and a lot of photograph cards fly along like rufflin' the leaves of a book. Why, it just makes things look alive, Mr. Droop. I'm sure those weren't thought of six years ago. They're span spinter new. Why won't they do?"

"I ain't got one o' those either," Droop grumbled. "I've got a kodak an' a graphophone an' a lot o' Milliken's cough syrup with the recipe——"

"Why there!" cried Phœbe, exultantly. "Milliken's cough syrup is only four years old, ain't it?"

Droop did not reply, but his silence was a virtual assent.

"The's a mint o' money in that—you know there is, Mr. Droop," she urged. "Why, I guess Mr. Milliken must have two or three millions, hasn't he?"

Rebecca returned at this moment and seated herself on the haircloth settle, nodding silently to Droop.

"What's about Mr. Milliken's money, Phœbe?" she asked.

"Why Mr. Droop says the X-ray is no good because it costs a heap and he hasn't got a machine fer it—an' I was tellin' him that Milliken's cough syrup was just as good—for that wasn't invented six years ago, an'——"

"Phœbe Wise, what do you mean!" exclaimed Rebecca. "Why, it would be jest like robbery to take Mr. Milliken's syrup, an' palm it off as Mr. Droop's. I'm surprised at ye!"

This attack upon the ethical plane struck Phœbe speechless. She blushed and stammered, but had no reply to make. The seeming defeat really concealed a victory, however, for it instantly converted Copernicus into an ally.

"You don't understand the thing, Cousin Rebecca," he said, gently but firmly. "Ye see ef we go six years back, it'll be a time when Mr. Milliken hadn't ever thought of his cough syrup. How could we be robbin' him of somethin' he hasn't got?"

Rebecca looked confused for a moment, but was not to be so easily convinced.

"'Tain't somethin' he ain't thought of," she said, stoutly. "He's makin' money out of it, an' ef we get back before him, why, when time comes agin for him to invent it he won't have it to invent. I'm sure that's jest as bad as robbin' him, ain't it?"

Phœbe looked anxiously at Copernicus and was much pleased to find him apparently unmoved.

"Why, you certainly don't understand this yet," he insisted. "Milliken ain't agoin' back six years with us, is he? He'll jest go right along livin' as he's ben doin'."

"What!" Rebecca exclaimed. "Will he be livin' in one time an' we be livin' in another—both at the same—" She stopped. What *was* she saying!

"No—no!" replied Copernicus. "He'll go on livin'. That's what he *will* do. We'll go on havin' lived. Or to put it different—we *have* gone on livin' after we get back six years—to 1892. Ye see, we really have past all the six years—so the's no harm in it. Milliken won't be hurt."

Rebecca glanced at Phœbe, in whose face she found her own perplexity reflected. Then, throwing out her hands, as though pushing away her crowding mental obstructions, she cried:

"There—there! I can't get the hang of it. It's too much for me!"

"Oh, when you've done it once it'll be all easy and clear," said Droop, soothingly.

Phœbe looked hopefully into his face.

"Will you take us, Mr. Droop?" she asked.

"Oh, I s'pose I'll hev to."

"An' only unwind six years?"

"Yes—jest six years."

She jumped up excitedly.

"Then I'll be off to my packin'!"

She ran to the door and, pausing here, turned again to their visitor.

"Can we start to-night, Mr. Droop?"

"Yes, indeed!" he replied. "The sooner the better."

"That's splendid!" she cried, and ran quickly up the stairs.

The two older people sat for a while in melancholy silence, looking down. Each had hoped for more than this. Copernicus tried to convince himself that the profit from the cough syrup would comfort him for his disappointment. Rebecca dismissed with a sigh the dreams which she had allowed herself to entertain—those bright fictions centering on Joe Chandler—not the subdued old bachelor of 1898, but the jolly young fellow of the famous Centennial year.

At length Rebecca looked up and said:

"After all, Mr. Droop, come to think of it, you've no call to take us with ye. I can't do ye any good—goin' back only six years."

"Yes ye can," said Droop. "I'll need somebody to help me keep house in the Panchronicon. I ain't no hand at cookin' an' all, an' besides, it'll be mighty lonely without anybody in there."

"Well," she rejoined, rising, "I'll jest go up an' finish my packin'."

"An' I'll go tend to mine."

As they parted at the front door, it was arranged that Droop was to bring a wheelbarrow after supper and transport the sisters' belongings, preparatory to their departure.

The rest of the day was spent in preparation for the momentous voyage. Phœbe went to the little bank at Peltonville station and withdrew the entire savings of herself and sister, much to the astonishment and concern of the cashier. She walked all the way to the bank and back alone, for it was obviously necessary to avoid inconvenient questions.

When the two sisters stood in their little dining-room with the heap of greenbacks on the table before them, Rebecca was attacked by another conscientious scruple.

"I don't hardly know as we're doin' right, Phœbe," she said, shaking her head dubiously. "When we get back to 1892 we'd ought to find some money in the bank already. Ef we hev this with us, too, seems to me we'll hev more'n we're entitled to. Ain't it a good deal like cheatin' the bank?"

"Mercy, no!" Phœbe exclaimed, pettishly. "You're forever raisin' some trouble like that! Ain't this our money?"46]

"Yes—but——"

"Well, then, what's the use o' talkin' 'bout it? Just wait till we can mention your trouble to Mr. Droop. He'll have a good answer for you."

"But s'posin' he can't answer it?" Rebecca insisted.

"Well, if he can't we can give back the difference to the bank."

So saying, Phœbe took her share of the bills and quickly left the room.

"I've got lots of things to do before night," she remarked.

At promptly half-past nine all the lights in the house were extinguished, and the two sisters sat together in the dark parlor awaiting Copernicus. It was Rebecca who had insisted on putting out the lights.

"Ef folks was to see lights here so late in the night," she said, "they'd suspicion somethin' an' they might even call in."

Phœbe admitted the justness of this reasoning, and they had both directed every endeavor to completing all their arrangements before their accustomed bed-time.

It was not long after this that a stealthy step was heard on the gravel path and Phœbe hurried to the door. Copernicus came in with a low word of greeting and followed the ghostly shadow of his hostess into the parlor.

The three stood together in the dark and conversed in an undertone, like so many conspirators surrounded by spies.

"Hev ye got everythin' ready?" Droop asked.

"Yes," said Phœbe. "The's only two little trunks for you. Did you bring the wheelbarrow?"

"Yep—I left it outside the gate. 'Twould hev made a lot of noise on the gravel inside."

"That's right," said Phœbe. "I guess you'll not have any trouble to carry both o' those trunks at once. We haven't packed only a few things, 'cause I expect we'll find all our old duds ready for us in 1892, won't we?"

"Why, 'f course," said Droop.

"But how 'bout linen—sheets an' table-cloths an' all?" said Rebecca. "We'll need some o' them on the trip, won't we?"

"I've got a hull slew o' them things in the Panchronicon," said Copernicus. "Ye won't hev to bother a bit about sech things."

"How long do you s'pose it'll take to make the trip," asked Phœbe. "I mean by the clock? We won't have to do any washing on the way, will we?"

"I don't see how we can," Rebecca broke in. "The's not a blessed tub on the hull machine."

"No, no," said Droop, reassuringly. "We'll make a bee-line for the pole, an' we'll go 'bout three times as fast as a lightnin' express train. We'd ought to reach there in about twenty-four hours, I guess. Then we'll take it easy cuttin' meridians, so's not to suffer from side weight, an'——"

"Side weight!" exclaimed the two women together.

"Yes," said Droop. "That's a complaint ye get ef ye unwind the time too fast. Ye see, growin' young isn't a thing folks is used to, an' it disgrummages the hull constitution ef ye grow young too fast. Well, 's I was a-sayin', I guess it'll take 'bout eighteen hours by the clock to cut back six years. Thet's by the clock, ye understand. As a matter of fact, of course, we'll be just six years less'n no time in finishin' the trip."

"Well," said Phœbe, briskly, "that's no kind o' reason fer dawdlin' about it now. Let's be startin'."

"Where's the trunks?" said Droop.

The trunks were pointed out, and with very little trouble Copernicus put them onto the barrow. He then came to the door for his last instructions.

"'S anythin' more?" he asked.

"No," said Rebecca. "We'll bring on our special duds in our arms. We'll wait a spell an' come on separate."

The door was carefully closed and they soon heard the slight creak of the weighted wheel as Droop set off with the trunks for Burnham's swamp.

"Now, then," said Phœbe, bustling into the parlor, "let's get our things all together ready to start. Have ye got your satchel with the money in it?"

Rebecca gently slapped a black leather bag hanging at her side.

"Here 'tis," she said.

"Let's see," Phœbe went on. "Here's my box with the letters an' miniature, here's the box with the jewelry, an' here's that book Mrs. Bolton gave me about Bacon writin' Shakespeare."

"Whatever air ye takin' that old book fer, Phœbe?"

"Why, to read on the train—I mean on the way, ye know. We'll likely find it pretty pokey in that one room all day."

"I don't know what ye mean by 'all day,'" Rebecca exclaimed in a discouraged tone. "So far's I see, th'ain't goin' to be any days. What'll it feel like—livin' backward that way? D'ye guess it'll make us feel sick, like ridin' backward in the cars?"

"Don't ask me," Phœbe exclaimed, despairingly. "'F I knew what 'twas like, perhaps I wouldn't feel so like goin'."

She straightened herself suddenly and stood rigid.

"Hark!" she exclaimed. "Is that Mr. Droop comin' back, d'you s'pose?"

There were distinctly audible footsteps on the path.

Phœbe came out into the hall on tiptoe and stood beside her sister.

There was a knock on the door. The two sisters gripped each other's arms excitedly.

"'Taint Copernicus!" Rebecca whispered very low.

The knock was repeated; rather louder this time. Then—

"Miss Wise—Miss Wise—are ye to home?"

It was a woman's voice.

"Sarah Allen!" Phœbe exclaimed under her breath.

"Whatever shall we do?" Rebecca replied.

"Miss Wise," the voice repeated, and then their visitor knocked again, much more loudly.

"I'll go to the door," exclaimed Phœbe.

"But——"

"I must. She'll raise the whole town if I don't."

So saying, Phœbe walked noisily to the door and unlocked it.

"Is that you, Mis' Allen?" she asked.

The door was opened, and Phœbe found herself face to face with a short, light woman whose white garments shone gray in the night.

"Why, you're up'n dressed!" exclaimed Mrs. Allen. She did not offer to enter, but went on excitedly:

"Miss Phœbe," she said, "d'you know I b'lieve you've ben robbed."

"What!"

"Yes; on'y a minute ago I was a-comin' up the road from M'ria Payson's—you know she's right sick an' I've ben givin' her massidge—an' what sh'd I see but a man comin' out o' your gate with suthin' on his shoulder. I couldn't see who 'twas, an' he was so quiet an' sneaky without a light that I jest slipped behind a tree. You know I've ben dreadful skeery ever sence Tom was brought home with his arm broke after a fight with a strange man in the dark. Well, this man to-night he put the bundle or what not into a wheelbarrow an' set off quiet as a mouse. He went off down that way, an' says I to myself, 'It's a robber ben burglin' at the Wise's house,' says I, an' I come straight here to see ef ye was both murdered or what. Air ye all right? Hez he broken yer door? Hev ye missed anythin'?"

As the little woman paused for breath, Phœbe seized her opportunity.

"Did you say he went off to the north, Mis' Allen?" she said, with feigned excitement.

"Yes."

"Oh, dear—oh, dear!" cried Phœbe, wringing her hands. "Didn't I say I heard a noise—I told you I heard a burglar, Rebecca," she went on, hysterically, turning to her sister.

"Is Miss Rebecca there?" asked Mrs. Allen.

Rebecca came forward in silence. She was quite nonplussed. To tell the truth, Phœbe's sudden outburst was as great a tax upon her nerves as Mrs. Allen's unwelcome visit. Surely Phœbe had said nothing about a burglar! It was Droop that Mrs. Allen had seen—of course it was. She dared not say so in their visitor's presence, but she wondered mightily at Phœbe's apparent perturbation.

Phœbe guessed her sister's mental confusion, and she sought to draw Mrs. Allen's attention to herself to avoid the betrayal of their plans which would certainly follow Rebecca's joining the conversation.2]

"Mis' Allen," she exclaimed, excitedly, "the's just one thing to be done. Won't you run's quick's ever you can to Si Pray, an' ask him to

bring his gun? You won't meet the burglar 'cause he's gone the other way. Rebecca 'nd I'll jest wait here for you an' Si. I'll get some hot water from the kitchen, in case the burglar should come back while you're gone. Oh, please will you do it?"

"Course I will," was the nervous reply. This hint of the possible return of the robbers made an immediate retreat seem very desirable. "I'll go right now. Won't be gone a minute. Lock your door now—quick!"

She turned and sped down the path. She had not reached the gate before Phœbe walked rapidly into the parlor.

"Quick—quick!" she panted, frantically gathering up her belongings. "Get your duds an' come along."

"But what d'you——"

"Come—come—come!" cried Phœbe. "Come quick or they'll all be here. Gun and all!"

With her arm full of bundles, Phœbe rushed back through the hall and out of the front door. Rebecca followed her, drawn along by the fiery momentum of her sister.

"Lock the front door, Rebecca," Phœbe cried. Then, as she reached the gate and found it fastened: "Here, I can't undo the gate. My hands are full. Oh, *do* hurry, Rebecca! We haven't a minute!"

The elder sister locked the front door and started down the path in such a nervous fever that she left the key in the lock. Half way to the gate she paused.

"Come on—come on!" Phœbe cried, stamping her foot.

"My land!" stammered Rebecca. "I've forgot everythin'!" She started back, running with short, unaccustomed steps.

"My umbrella!" she gasped. "My recipes—my slips!"

Phœbe was speechless with anger and apprehension at this delay, and Rebecca was therefore allowed to re-enter the house without objection.

In a short time she reappeared carrying an umbrella, two flower-pots, and a folded newspaper.

"There!" she panted, as she came up to her sister and opened the gate. "Now I guess I've got everythin'!"

Silently and swiftly the two women sped northward, following the imaginary burglar, while the devoted Mrs. Allen ran breathless in the opposite direction for Si Pray and his gun.

"We'll hev to go more careful here," said Rebecca as they turned into the lane leading down to the swamp.

With many a stumble and some scratches they moved more slowly down the rutted track until at length they reached the point where they were to turn into the swamp.

Here the sisters leaned against the wall to rest and recover breath.

"My goodness, but that was a narrow escape!" murmured Phœbe.

"Yes," said Rebecca, with reproachful sadness; "but I'm afraid you paid a heavy price fer it, Phœbe!"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, 's fur's I could make out, you told Mis' Allen a deliberate wrong story, Phœbe Wise."

"What did I say?" said Phœbe, in shocked surprise.

"You said you hed told me you'd heerd a burglar!"

"Did I say that? Those very words?"

"Why, you know you did."

"Wasn't it a question, Rebecca?" Phœbe insisted. "Didn't I *ask* you ef I hadn't told you I heard a burglar?"

"No, it was a plain downright wrong story, Phœbe, an' you needn't to try to sneak out of it."

Phœbe was silent for a few moments, and then Rebecca heard her laugh. It was a very little, rippling thing—but it was genuine—there was real light-heartedness behind it.

"Phœbe Wise!" exclaimed Rebecca, "how ken you laugh so? I wouldn't hev the weight of sech a thing on my mind fer a good deal."

"Well, Rebecca," tittered her sister, "I didn't have it on my mind yesterday, did I?"

"Course not—but——"

"An' won't it be yesterday for us mighty soon—yes, an' a heap longer ago than that?"

She laughed again merrily and began to climb over the wall, a proceeding not rendered easier by the various articles in her hands.

A few minutes later the two women had joined Copernicus within his mysterious machine and were standing in the brightly lighted antechamber at the head of the stairs.

"Well—well!" cried Droop, as he caught sight of the two women for the first time in the light. "Where ever did ye get them funny dresses? Why, your sleeves is all puffed out near the shoulders!"

"These are some of our old dresses," said Rebecca. "They was made in 1891, an' we thought they'd prob'bly be more in the fashion back in 1892 when we get there than our newer dresses."

"Never mind our dresses, Mr. Droop," said Phœbe. "Where can we put down all these things? My arms are breakin' off."

"Right here, Cousin Phœbe."

Droop bustled over to the state-rooms, opening both the doors at once.

"Here's a room apiece fer ye. Take yer choice."

"Oh, but where'll you sleep?" said Phœbe. "P'raps Rebecca and I'd better have one room together."

"Not a bit of it," said Droop. "I'll sleep on one o' them settles under the windows. They're real comfortable."

"Well—just as you say."

The sisters entered their rooms and deposited their bundles, but Phœbe returned at once and called to Droop, who had started down the stairs.

"Mr. Droop, you've got to start right straight off. Mrs. Allen knows 't you've carried off the trunk and she's comin' after us with Si Pray an' a gun."

Just then they heard the loud barking of a dog. He was apparently running rapidly down the lane.

"Sakes alive!" cried Phœbe, in alarm. "Slam to that door, Copernicus Droop! Si has let his dog loose an' he's on your tracks!"

The baying was repeated—now much nearer. Droop clattered frantically down the stairs, and shut the door with a bang. At the next moment a heavy body leaped against it, and a man's voice was heard close at hand.

"Sic um, Touser, sic um! Where is he, boy?"

Up the stairs went Copernicus two steps at a time. He dashed into the anteroom, pale and breathless.

"Lie down on the floor!" he shouted. "Lie down or ye'll get throwed down. I'm agoin' to start her!"

By this time he had opened the engine-room door.

The two women promptly lay flat on their backs on the carpet.

Droop braced himself firmly and had just grasped the starting lever when a cry from Rebecca arrested him.

"Copernicus Droop—hold on!" she cried.

He turned to her, his face full of anxious fear. Rebecca lay on her back with her hands at her sides, but her head was raised stiffly from the floor.

"Copernicus Droop," she said, solemnly, "hev ye brought any rum aboard with ye? 'Cause if ye have I won't——"

She never concluded, for at this moment her head was jerked back sharply against the floor by a tremendous upward leap of the machine.

There was a hissing roar as of a thousand rockets, and even as Rebecca was wondering, half stunned, why she saw so many jumping lights, Si Pray gazed open-mouthed at the ascension of a mysterious dark body apparently aimed at the sky.

The Panchronicon had started.

CHAPTER IV

A CHANGE OF PLAN

It was long after their bed-time and the two sisters were utterly exhausted; but as the mysterious structure within which they lay glided northward between heaven and earth with the speed of a meteor, Rebecca and Phœbe long courted sleep in vain.

The excitement of their past adventures, the unreal wonder of their present situation, the bewildering possibilities and impossibilities of their future plans—all these conspired to banish sleep until long past midnight. It was not until, speeding due north with the unswerving obedience of a magnet, their vessel was sailing far above the waters of the upper Saguenay, that they at length sank to rest.

They were awakened next morning by a knocking upon Rebecca's door.

"It's pretty nigh eight-thirty," Droop cried. "I've got the kettle on the range, but I don't know what to do nex'."

"What! Why! Who! Where! Sakes! what's this?"

Rebecca sat up in bed, unable to place herself.

"It's pretty nigh half-past eight," Copernicus repeated. "Long after breakfast-time. I'm hungry!"

By this time Phœbe was wide awake.

"All right!" she cried. "We'll come in a minute."

Then Rebecca knew where she was—or rather realized that she did not know. But fortunately a duty was awaiting her in the kitchen and this steadied a mind which seemed to her to need some support in the midst of these unwonted happenings.

Phœbe was the first to leave her bedroom. She had dressed with frantic speed. In her haste to get to the windows and see the world from the sky, she had secured her hair very imperfectly, and Droop

was favored with a charming display of bright locks, picturesquely disarranged.

"Good-mornin', Cousin Phœbe," he said, with his suavest manner.

"Good-morning, Mr. Droop," Phœbe replied. "Where are we? Is everything all right?"

She made straight for one of the windows the iron shutters of which were now open.

"I wish't you'd call me Cousin Copernicus," Droop remarked.

"Oh—oh! What a beautiful world!"

Phœbe leaned her face close to the glass and gazed spell-bound at the wonderful landscape spread before her.

The whole atmosphere seemed filled with a clear, cold sunlight whose brilliance irradiated the giant sphere of earth so far away.

Directly below and to the right of their course, as far as she could see, there was one vast expanse of dark blue sea, gilded dazzlingly over one portion where the sun's beams were reflected. Far ahead to the north and as far behind them the sea was bordered with the fantastic curves of a faint blue coast dotted and lined with the shadows of many a hill and mountain. It was a map on which she was gazing. Nature's own map—the only perfect chart in the world.

So new—so intensely, almost painfully, beautiful was this scene that Phœbe stood transfixed—fascinated. She did not even think of speaking.

The scene was not so new to Droop—and besides he was a prey to an insistent appetite. His mental energies, therefore, sought expression in speech.

Approaching Phœbe's side, he said:

"Mighty pretty, ain't it?"

She did not reply, so he continued:

"That water right under us is Hudson Strait. The ocean to the right is the Atlantic. Ye can see Hudson's Bay off to the left out o' one o' them windows. I've ben lookin' it up on the map."

He strolled toward the table, as if inviting Phœbe to see his chart which lay there unrolled. She did not follow him.

"Yes," he continued, "that's Hudson Strait, and we're four miles high, an' that's all I'll tell ye till I have my breakfast."

He gazed wistfully at Phœbe, who did not move or speak, but let her eyes wander in awed delight over the wonders thus brought before them.

Just then Rebecca emerged from her room.

"Good-mornin'," she said. "I guess I'm late."

"Good-mornin', Cousin Rebecca; I guess ye are a mite late. Cousin Phœbe won't move—so I'm sayin' we're four miles high an' right over Hudson Strait, an' that's all I'll tell ye till I get my breakfast."

"Goodness me!" exclaimed Rebecca. "Ain't that mos' too high, Mr. Droop?" She hurried to the window and looked out.

"Sakes alive!" she gasped.

She was silent for a moment, awed in her turn by the immensity of the prospect.

"Why—but—it's all water underneath!" she exclaimed at last. "Ef we was to fall now, we'd be drowned!"

"Now don't you be a mite skeert," said Droop, with reassuring politeness. "We've ben scootin' along like this all night an'—an' the fact is, I've got the kettle on—p'raps it's b'iled over."

Rebecca turned from the window at once and made for the kitchen.

"Phœbe," she said, briskly, "you set the table now an' I'll hev breakfast ready in a twinklin'."

Reluctantly Phœbe left the window and Droop soon had the satisfaction of sauntering back and forth between kitchen and dining-table in pleased supervision of the progress of both.

In due time a simple but substantial breakfast was in readiness, and the three travellers were seated around the table partaking of the meal each in his own way.

Droop was business-like, almost enthusiastic, in his voracious hunger. Rebecca ate moderately and without haste, precisely as though seated in the little Peltonville cottage. Phœbe ate but little. She was overcome by the wonders she had seen, realizing for the first time the marvellous situation in which she found herself.

It was not until the table was cleared and the two women were busy with the dishes that conversation was resumed. Droop sat with his chair tilted backward against the kitchen wall enjoying a quiet satisfaction with his lot and a kindly mental attitude toward all men.

He glanced through the kitchen door at the barometer on the wall in the outer room.

"We've climbed near a mile since before breakfast," he remarked.

Rebecca paused before hanging up the soap-shaker.

"Look here, Mr. Droop," she said, anxiously, "we are mos' too high a'ready, I think. S'posin' we was to fall down. Where do you s'pose we'd be?"

"Why, Rebecca," said Phœbe, laughing, "do you suppose five miles is any worse than four? I guess we'd be killed by falling one mile jest as quick as five."

"Quicker!" Droop exclaimed. "Considerable quicker, Cousin Rebecca, fer it would take us a good deal longer to fall five miles than it would one."

"But what ever's the use o' keepin' on a-climbin'?"

"Why, that's the nature of this machine," he replied. "Ye see, it runs on the rocket principle by spurtin' out gases. Ef we want to go up off

the ground we squirt out under the machine an' that gives us a h'ist. Then, when we get 'way up high, we spread out a pair o' big wings like and start the propeller at the stern end o' the thing. Now them wings on'y holds us up by bein' inclined a mite in front, and consequence is we're mighty apt to climb a little right 'long."

"Well, but won't we get too high?" suggested Phœbe. "Ain't the air too thin up very high?"

"Of course, we mustn't go too high," Droop conceded, "an' I was just a-thinkin' it wouldn't go amiss to let down a spell."

He rose and started for the engine-room.

"How do you let down?" Phœbe asked, pausing in her work.

"Why, I jest turn the wings horizontal, ye know, an' then we sink very slow till I incline 'em up again."

He disappeared. Phœbe gave the last of the dishes a brief touch of the dish-towel and then ran into the main room to watch the barometer.

She was much interested to observe a gradual but continual decrease in their altitude. She walked to the window but could see no apparent change, save that they had now passed the sea and only the blue land with silver streaks of river and indigo hill shadows was beneath them.

"How fast do you s'pose we're flyin', Mr. Droop?" she asked.

"There's the speed indicator," he said, pointing to one of the dials on the wall. "Ye see it says we're a-hummin' along at about one hundred an' thirty miles an hour."

"My gracious!" cried Phœbe. "What if we was to hit something!"

"Nothin' to hit," said Droop, with a smile. "Ye see, the's no sort o' use goin' any slower, an' besides, this quick travellin' keeps us warm."

"Why, how's that?"

"The sides o' the machine rubbin' on the air," said Droop.

"That's so," Phœbe replied. "That's what heats up meteors so awful hot, ain't it?"

Rebecca came out of the kitchen at this moment.

"I must say ye wasn't particler about gettin' all the pans to rights 'fore ye left the kitchen, Phœbe. Ben makin' the beds?"

"Land, no, Rebecca!" said Phœbe, blushing guiltily.

"Well, there!"

Rebecca said no more, but her set lips and puckered forehead spoke much of displeasure as she stalked across to the state-rooms.

"Well, I declare to goodness!" she cried, as she opened her door. "Ye hevn't even opened the window to air the rooms!"

Phœbe looked quite miserable at thought of her remissness, but Copernicus came bravely to the rescue.

"The windows can't be opened, Cousin Rebecca," he said. "Ef ye was to open one, 'twould blow yer head's bald as an egg in a minute."

"What!"

"Yes," said Phœbe, briskly, "I couldn't air the beds an' make 'em because we're going one hundred and thirty odd miles an hour, Rebecca."

"D'you mean to tell me, Copernicus Droop," cried the outraged spinster, "that I've got to go 'thout airin' my bed?"

"No, no," Copernicus said, soothingly. "The's special arrangements to keep ventilation goin'. Jest leave the bed open half the day an' it'll be all aired."

Rebecca looked far from pleased at this.

"I declare, ef I'd known of all these doin's," she muttered.

Unable to remain idle, she set to work "putting things to rights," as she called it, while Phœbe took her book to the west window and was soon lost in certain modern theories concerning the Baconian authorship of Shakespeare's works.

"Is these duds yourn, Mr. Droop?" asked Rebecca, sharply, pointing to a motley collection of goods piled in one corner of the main room.

"Yes," Droop replied, coming quickly to her side. "Them's some of the inventions I'm carryin' along."

He stooped and gathered up a number of boxes and bundles in his arms. Then he stood up and looked about him as though seeking a safe place for their deposit.

"That's all right," said Rebecca. "Ye can put 'em right back, Mr. Droop. I jest wanted to see whether the' was much dust back in there."

Droop replaced his goods with a sigh of relief. One box he retained, however, and, placing it upon the table, proceeded to unpack it.

Rebecca now turned her attention to her own belongings. Lifting one of her precious flower-pots carefully, she looked all about for a more suitable location for her plants.

"Phœbe," she exclaimed at length, "where ever can I set my slips? They ought to be in the sun there by the east window, but it'll dirt up the coverin' of the settle."

Phœbe looked up from her book.

"Why don't ye spread out that newspaper you brought with you?" she said.

Rebecca shook her head.

"No," she replied, "I couldn't do thet. The's a lot o' fine recipes in there—I never could make my sweet pickle as good as thet recipe in the New York paper thet Molly sent me."

Phœbe laid down her book and walked over to her sister's side.

"Oh, the' must be some part of it you can use, Rebecca," she said. "Land sakes!" she continued, laughing. "Why, it's the whole of the *New York World* for a Sunday—pictures an' all! Here—take this advertisin' piece an' spread it out—so."

She tore off a portion of the voluminous paper and carefully spread it out on one of the eastern settles.

"Whatever did you bring those slips with you for?" she asked.

Rebecca deposited the flower-pots carefully in the sun and slapped her hands across each other to remove the dust on them.

"One o' them is off my best honeysuckle thet come from a slip thet Sam Mellick brought from Japan in 1894. This geranium come off a plant thet was given me by Arabella Slade, 'fore she died in 1896, an' she cut it off'n a geranium thet come from a lot thet Joe Chandler's father raised from slips cut off of some plants down to Boston in the ground that used to belong to our great-grandfather Wilkins 'fore the Revolution."

This train of reasoning seemed satisfactory, and Phœbe turned to resume her book.

Copernicus intercepted her as she passed the table.

"What d'ye think o' this little phonograph, Cousin Phœbe?" he said.

One of Droop's boxes stood open and beside it Phœbe saw a phonograph with the usual spring motor and brass megaphone.

"I paid twenty-five fer that, secon' hand, down to Keene," said the proud owner.

"There!" exclaimed Phœbe. "I've always wanted to know how those things worked. I've heard 'em, you know, but I've never worked one."

"It's real easy," said Droop, quite delighted to find Phœbe so interested. "Ye see, when it's wound up, all ye hev to do is to slip one o' these wax cylinders on here—so."

He adjusted the cylinder, dropped the stylus and pushed the starting lever.

Instantly the stentorian announcement rang out from the megaphone.

"The Last Rose of Summer—Sola—Sung by Signora Casta Diva—Edison Record!"

"Goodness gracious sakes alive!" cried Rebecca, turning in affright. "Who's that?"

Her two companions raised their right hands in a simultaneous appeal for silence. Then the song began.

With open eyes and mouth, the amazed Rebecca drew slowly nearer, and finally took her stand directly in front of the megaphone.

The song ended and Copernicus stopped the motor.

"Oh, ain't it lovely!" Phœbe cried.

"Well—I'll—be—switched!" Rebecca exclaimed, with slow emphasis. "Can it sing anythin' else?"

"Didn't you never hear one afore, Cousin Rebecca?" Droop asked.

"I never did," she replied. "What on the face of the green airth does it?"

"Have ye any funny ones?" Phœbe asked, quickly, fearful of receiving a long scientific lecture.

"Yes," said Droop. "Here's a nigger minstrels. The's some jokes in it."

The loud preliminary announcement made Rebecca jump again, but while the music and the songs and jokes were delivered, she stood earnestly attentive throughout, while her companions grinned and giggled alternately.

"Is thet all?" she asked at the conclusion.

"Thet's all," said Droop, as he removed the cylinder.

"Well, I don't see nothin' funny 'bout it," she said, plaintively.

Droop's pride was touched.

"Ah, but that ain't all it can do!" he cried. "Here's a blank cylinder. You jest talk at the machine while it's runnin', an' it'll talk back all you say."

This was too much for Rebecca's credulity, and Droop could not induce her to talk into the trumpet.

"You can't make a fool o' me, Copernicus Droop," she exclaimed.

"You try, Cousin Phœbe," he said at last.

Phœbe looked dubiously at her sister as though half of opinion that her shrewd example should be followed.

"You sure it'll do it?" she asked.

"Certain!" cried Copernicus, nodding his head with violence.

She stood a moment leaning over with her pretty lips close to the trumpet.

Then she straightened up with a face of comical despair.

"I don't know what to say," she exclaimed.

Droop stopped the motor and looked about the room. Suddenly his eyes brightened.

"There," he cried, pointing to the book Phœbe had been reading, "read suthin' out o' that into it."

Phœbe opened the book at random, and as Droop started the motor again she read the following lines slowly and distinctly into the trumpet:

"It is thus made clear from the indubitable evidence of the plays themselves that Francis Bacon wrote the immortal works falsely ascribed to William Shakespeare, and that the gigantic genius of this

man was the result of the possession of royal blood. In this unacknowledged son of Elizabeth Tudor, Queen of England, was made manifest to all countries and for all centuries the glorious powers inherent in the regal blood of England."

"That'll do," said Droop. "Now jest hear it talk back."

He substituted the repeating stylus for the recording point and set the motor in motion once more. To the complete stupefaction of Rebecca, the repetition of Phœbe's words was perfect.

"Why! It's Phœbe's voice," she began, but Phœbe broke in upon her suddenly.

"Why, see the hills on each side of us, Mr. Droop," she cried.

Droop glanced out and leaped a foot from the ground.

"Goramighty!" he screamed, "she'll strike!" He dashed to the engine-room and threw up the forward edges of the aeroplanes. Instantly the vessel swooped upward and the hills Phœbe had seen appeared to drop into some great abyss.

The two women ran to a window and saw that they were over a bleak and rocky island covered with ice and snow.

Droop came to their side, quite pale with fright.

"Great Moses!" he exclaimed. "I warn't more'n jest in time, I tell ye! We was a-settlin' fast. A little more'n we'd ha' struck—" He snapped the fingers of both hands and made a gesture expressive of the complete destruction which would have resulted.

"I tell you what, Mr. Droop," said Rebecca, sternly, but with a little shake in her voice, "you've got to jest tend to business and navigate this thing we're a-ridin' on. You can't work and play too. Don't you say anythin' more to Phœbe or me till we get to the pole. What time'll that be?"

"About six or half-past, I expect," said Droop, humbly. "But I don't see how I can be workin' all the time. The machine don't need it, an', besides, I've got to eat, haven't I?"

"When it comes time fer your victuals, Phœbe'll watch the windows an' the little clocks on the wall while I feed ye. But don't open yer head agin now, only fer necessary talkin' an' eatin', till we get there. I don't want any smash-ups 'round here."

Copernicus found it expedient to obey these instructions, and under Rebecca's watchful generalship he was obliged to pace back and forth from engine-room to window while Phœbe read and her sister knitted. So passed the remainder of the day, save when at dinner-time the famished man was relieved by his young lieutenant.

Immediately after supper, however, they all three posted themselves at the windows, on the lookout for the North Pole. Droop slowed down the propeller, and the aeroplanes being thus rendered less effective they slowly descended.

They were passing over an endless plain of rough and ragged ice. In every direction all the way to the horizon nothing could be seen but the glare of white.

"How'll you know when we get there?" asked Phœbe.

Droop glanced apprehensively at Rebecca and replied in a whisper:

"We'll see the pole a-stickin' up. We can't go wrong, you know. The Panchronicon is fixed to guide itself allus due north."

"You don't need to whisper—speak right up, Mr. Droop," said Rebecca, sharply.

Copernicus started, looked nervously about and then stared out of the window northward with a very business-like frown.

"Is the' really an' truly a pole there?" Phœbe asked.

"Yes," said Droop, shortly.

"An' can ye see the meridians jammed together like in the geographies?" asked Rebecca.

"No," said Droop, "no, indeed—at least, I didn't see any."

"Why, Rebecca," said Phœbe, "the meridians are only conventional signs, you know. They don't——"

"Hallo!" Droop cried, suddenly, "what's that?" He raised a spyglass with which he had hitherto been playing and directed it northward for a few seconds. Then he turned with a look of relief on his face.

"It's the pole!" he exclaimed.

Phœbe snatched the spyglass and applied it to her eye.

Yes, on the horizon she could discern a thin black line, rising vertically from the plain of ice. Even as she looked it seemed to be nearer, so rapid was their progress.

Droop went to the engine-room, lessened speed and brought the aeroplanes to the horizontal. He could look directly forward through a thick glass port directly over the starting-handle. Gradually the great machine settled lower and lower. It was now running quite slowly and the aeroplanes acted only as parachutes as they glided still forward toward the black upright line.

In silence the three waited for the approaching end of this first stage of their journey. A few hundred yards south of their goal they seemed about to alight, but Droop slightly inclined the aeroplanes and speeded up the propeller a little. Their vessel swept gently upward and northward again, like a gull rising from the sea. Then Droop let it settle again. Just as they were about to fall rather violently upon the solid mass of ice below them, he projected a relatively small volume of gas from beneath the structure. Its reaction eased their descent, and they settled down without noise or shock.

They had arrived!

Copernicus came forward to the window and pointed to a tall, stout steel pole projecting from the ice a few yards to the right of the vessel.

"Thet, neighbors, is the North Pole!" he said, with a sweeping wave of the hand.

For some minutes the three voyagers stood in silence gazing through the window at the famous pole. This, then, was the goal of so much heroic endeavor! It was to reach this complete opposite of all that is ordinarily attractive that countless ambitious men had suffered—that so many had died!

"Well!" exclaimed Rebecca at length. "I be switched ef I see what there is fer so many folks to make sech a fuss about!"

Droop scratched his head thoughtfully and made no reply. Surely it would have been hard to point out any charms in the endless plain of opaque ice hummocks, unrelieved save by that gaunt steel pole.

"Where's the open sea?" Rebecca asked, after a few moments' pause. "Dr. Kane said the' was an open sea up here."

"Oh, Dr. Kane!" said Droop, contemptuously. "He's no 'count fer modern facts."

"What I can't understand," said Phœbe, "is how it comes that, if nobody's ever been up here, they all seem to know there's a North Pole here."

"That's a fact," Rebecca exclaimed. "How'd they know about it? The' ain't anythin' in the Bible 'bout it, is the'?"

Droop looked more cheerful at this and answered briskly:

"Oh, they don't know 'bout it. Ye see, that pole there ain't a nat'ral product of the soil at all. Et's the future man done that—the man who invented this Panchronicon and brought me up here before. He told me how that he stuck that post in there to help him run this machine 'round and 'round fer cuttin' meridians."

"Oh!" exclaimed both sisters together.

"Yes," Droop continued. "D'ye see thet big iron ring 'round the pole, lyin' on the ground?"

"I don't see any ground," said Rebecca, ruefully.

"Well, on the ice, then. Don't ye see it lyin' black there against the snow?"

"Yes—yes, I see it," said Phœbe.

"Well, that's what I'm goin' to hitch the holdin' rope on to. You'll see how it's done presently."

He glanced at the clock.

"Seven o'clock," he said. "I guessed mighty close when I said 'twould take us twenty hours. We left Peltonville at ten-thirty last night."

"Seven o'clock!" cried Rebecca. "So 'tis. Why, what's the matter with the sun. Ain't it goin' to set at all?"

"Not much!" said Droop, chuckling. "Sun don't set up here, Cousin Rebecca. Not until winter-time, an' then et stays set till summer again."

"Well!" was the breathless reply. "An' where in creation does it go when it stays set?"

"Why, Rebecca," exclaimed Phœbe, "the sun is south of the equator in winter, you know."

"Shinin' on the South Pole then," Droop added, nodding.

For a moment Rebecca looked from one to the other of her companions, and then, realizing the necessity of keeping her mind within its accustomed sphere, she changed the subject.

"Come now—the' ain't any wind to blow us away now, I hope. Let's open our windows an' air out those state-rooms."

She started toward her door.

"Hold on!" cried Droop, extending his arm to stop her. "You don't want to fall down dead o' cold, do ye?"

"What!"

"Don't you know what a North Pole is like fer weather an' sich?" Droop continued. "Why, Cousin Rebecca, it's mos' any 'mount below zero outside. Don't you open a window—not a tiny crack—if ye don't want to freeze solid in a second."

"There!" Rebecca exclaimed. "You do provoke me beyond anythin', Copernicus Droop! Ef I'd a-knowed the kind o' way we'd had to live—why, there! It's wuss'n pigs!"

She marched indignantly into her room and closed the door. A moment later she put out her head.

"Phœbe Wise," she said, "if you take my advice, you'll make your bed an' tidy yer room at once. Ain't any use waitin' any longer fer a chance to air."

Phœbe smiled and moved toward her own door.

"Thet's a good idea," said Droop. "You fix yer rooms an' I'll do some figurin'. Ye see I've got to figure out how long it'll take us to get back six years. I've a notion it'll take about eighteen hours, but I ain't certain sure."

Poor Rebecca set to work in her rooms with far from enviable feelings. Her curiosity had been largely satisfied and the unwonted conditions were proving very trying indeed. Could she have set out with the prospect of returning to those magical days of youth and courtship, as Droop had originally proposed, the end would have justified the means. But they could not do this now if they would, for Phœbe had left her baby clothes behind. Thus her disappointment added to her burdens, and she found herself wishing that she had never left her comfortable home, however amazing had been her adventures.

"I could'v aired my bed at least," she muttered, as she turned the mattress of her couch in the solitude of her chamber.

She found the long-accustomed details of chamber work a comfort and solace, and, as she finally gazed about the tidy room at her completed work, she felt far more contented with her lot than she had felt before beginning.

"I guess I'll go help Phœbe," she thought. "The girl is that slow!"

As she came from her room she found Copernicus leaning over the table, one hand buried in his hair and the other wielding a pencil. He was absorbed in arithmetical calculations.

She did not disturb him, but turned and entered Phœbe's room without the formality of knocking. As she opened the door, there was a sharp clatter, as of a door or lid slamming.

"Who's there?" cried Phœbe, sharply.

She was seated on the floor in front of her trunk, and she looked up at her sister with a flushed and startled face.

"Oh, it's you!" she said, guiltily.

Rebecca glanced at the bed.

It had not been touched.

"Well, I declare!" Rebecca exclaimed. "Ain't you ever agoin' to fix up your room, Phœbe Wise?"

"Oh, in a minute, Rebecca. I was just agoin' over my trunk a minute."

She leaned back against the foot of the bed, and folding her hands gazed pensively into vacancy, while Rebecca stared at her in astonishment.

"Do you know," Phœbe went on, "I've ben thinkin' it's awful mean not to give you a chance to go back to 1876, Rebecca. Joe Chandler's a mighty fine man!"

Rebecca gave vent to an unintelligible murmur and turned to Phœbe's bed. She grasped the mattress and gave it a vicious shake as she turned it over. She was probably only transferring to this inoffensive article a process which she would gladly have applied elsewhere.

There was a long silence while Rebecca resentfully drew the sheets into proper position, smoothed them with swift pats and caressings,

and tucked them neatly under at head and sides. Then came a soft, apologetic voice.

"Rebecca!"

The spinster made no reply but applied herself to a mathematically accurate adjustment of the top edge of the upper sheet.

"Rebecca!"

The second call was a little louder than the first, and there was a queer half-sobbing, half-laughing catch in the speaker's voice that commanded attention.

Rebecca looked up.

Phœbe was still sitting on the floor beside her trunk, but the trunk was open now and the young woman's rosy face was peering with a pathetic smile over a—what!—could it be!

Rebecca leaned forward in amazement.

Yes, it was! In Phœbe's outstretched hands was the dearest possible little baby's undergarment—all of cambric, with narrow ribbons at the neck.

For a few seconds the two sisters looked at each other over this unexpected barrier. Then Phœbe's lips quivered into a pathetic curve and she buried her face in the little garment, laughing and crying at once.

Rebecca dropped helplessly into a chair.

"Phœbe Martin Wise!" she exclaimed. "Do you mean—hev you brought——?"

She fell silent, and then, darting at her sister, she took her head in her hands and deposited a sudden kiss on the smooth bright gold-brown hair and whisked out of Phœbe's room and into her own.

In the meantime Copernicus was too deeply absorbed in his calculations to notice these comings and goings. Apparently he had been led into the most abstruse mathematical regions. Nothing short

of the triple integration of transcendental functions should have been adequate to produce those lines of anxious care in his face as he slowly covered sheet after sheet with figures.

He was at length startled from his preoccupation by a gentle voice at his side.

"Can't I help, Mr. Droop?"

It was Phœbe, who, having made all right in her room and washed all traces of tears from her face, had come to note Droop's progress.

Dazed, he raised his head and looked unexpectedly into a lovely face made the more attractive by an expression only given by a sense of duty unselfishly done.

"I—I wish'd you'd call me Cousin Copernicus," he said for the fifth time.

She picked up one of the sheets on which he had been scribbling as though she had not heard him, and said:

"Why, dear me! How comes it you have so much figurin' to do?"

"Well," he began, in a querulous tone, "it beats all creation how many things a feller has to work out at once! Ye see, I've got a rope forty foot long that's got to tie the Panchronicon to the North Pole while we swing 'round to cut meridians. Now, then, the question is, How many times an hour shall we swing 'round to get to 1892, an' how long's it goin' to take an' how fast must I make the old thing hum along?"

"But you said eighteen hours by the clock would do it."

"Well, I jest guessed at that by the time the future man an' I took to go back five weeks, ye know. But I can't seem to figur it out right."

Phœbe seated herself at the table and took up a blank sheet of paper.

"Please lend me your pencil," she said. "Now, then, every time you whirl once 'round the pole to westward you lose one day, don't you?"

"That's it," said Droop, cheerfully. "Cuttin' twenty-four meridians——"

"And how many days in twenty-two years?" Phœbe broke in.

"You mean in six years."

"Why, no," she replied, glancing at Droop with a mischievous smile, "it's twenty-two years back to 1876, ain't it?"

"To '76—why, but——"

He caught sight of her face and stopped short.

There came a pleased voice from one of the state-rooms.

"Yes, we've decided to go all the way back, Mr. Droop."

It was Rebecca.

She came forward and stood beside her sister, placing one hand affectionately upon her shoulder.

Droop leaned back in his chair with both hands on the edge of the table.

"Goin' all the way! Why, but then——"

He leaped to his feet with a radiant face.

"Great Jumpin' Jerusha!" he cried.

Slapping his thigh he began to pace excitedly up and down.

"Why, then, we'll get all the big inventions out—kodak an' phonograph and all. We'll marry Joe Chandler an' set things agoin' in two shakes fer millions."

"Eight thousand and thirty-five," said Phœbe in a quiet voice, putting her pencil to her lips. "We'll have to whirl round the pole eight thousand and thirty-five times."

"Whose goin' to keep count?" asked Rebecca, cheerfully. Ah, how different it all seemed now! Every dry detail was of interest.

Phœbe looked up at Droop, who now resumed his seat, somewhat sobered.

"Don't have to keep count," he replied. "See that indicator?" he continued, pointing to a dial in the ceiling which had not been noticed before. "That reads May 3, 1898, now, don't it? Well, it's fixed to keep always tellin' the right date. It counts the whirls we make an' keeps tabs on every day we go backward. Any time all ye hev to do is to read that thing an' it'll tell ye jest what day 'tis."

"Then what do you want to calculate how often to whirl round?" asked Phœbe, in disgusted tones.

"Well, ye see I want to plan out how long it'll take," Droop replied. "I want to go slow so as to avoid side weight—but I don't want to go too slow."

"I see," said Phœbe. "Well, then, how many times a minute did the future man take you when you whirled back five weeks?"

"'Bout two times a minute."

"That's one hundred and twenty times every hour. Did you feel much side weight then?"

"Scarcely any."

"Well, let's see. Divide eight thousand and thirty-five whirls by one hundred and twenty, an' you get sixty-seven hours. So that, ef we go at that rate it'll be two days and nineteen hours 'fore we get back to 1876."

"Don't talk about days," Droop objected. "It's sixty-seven hours by the clock—but it's twenty-two years less than no time in days, ye know."

"Sixty-seven hours," said Phœbe. "Well, that ain't so bad, is it? Why not go round twice a minute?"

"We can't air our beds fer three days, Phœbe," said Rebecca.

"But if we go much faster, we'll all be sick with this side weight trouble that Mr. Droop tells about."

"I vote fer twice a minute," said Droop. And so twice a minute was adopted.

"Air ye goin' to start to-night, Mr. Droop?" asked Rebecca.

"Well, no," he replied. "I think it's best to wait till to-morrow. Ye see, the power that runs the Panchronicon is got out o' the sunlight that falls on it. Of course, we're not all run out o' power by a good lot, but we've used considerable, an' I think it's a little mite safer to lie still fer a few hours here an' take in power from the sun. Ye see, it'll shine steady on us all night, an' we'll store up enough power to be sure o' reachin' 1876 in one clip."

"Well," said Rebecca, "ef thet's the plan, I'm goin' to bed right now. It's after eight o'clock, an' I didn't get to sleep las' night till goodness knows when. Good-night! Hedn't you better go, too, Phœbe?"

"I guess I will," said Phœbe, turning to Copernicus. "Good-night, Mr. Droop."

"Good-night, Cousin Phœbe—good-night, Cousin Rebecca. I'll go to bed myself, I b'lieve."

The two doors were closed and Droop proceeded to draw the steel shutters in order to produce artificially the gloom not vouchsafed by a too-persistent sun.

In half an hour all were asleep within the now motionless conveyance.

CHAPTER V

DROOP'S THEORY IN PRACTICE

All were up betimes when the faithful clock announced that it ought to be morning. As for the sun, as though resenting the liberties about to be taken by these adventurers with its normal functions, it refused to set, and was found by the three travellers at the same altitude as the night before.

Promptly after breakfast Droop proceeded to don a suit of furs which he drew from a cupboard within the engine-room.

"Ye'd better hev suthin' hot ready when I come in again," he said. "I 'xpect I'll be nigh froze to death."

He drew on a huge cap of bear's fur which extended from his crown to his shoulders. There was a small hole in front which exposed only his nose and eyes.

"My, but you do look just like a pictur of Kris Kringle!" laughed Phœbe. "Don't he, Rebecca?"

Rebecca came to the kitchen door wiping a dish with slow circular movements of her towel.

"I don't guess you'll freeze very much with all that on," she remarked.

"Thet shows you don't know what seventy or eighty below zero means," said a muffled voice from within the fur cap. "You'll hev suthin' hot, won't ye?" Droop continued, looking appealingly at Phœbe.

"The'll be a pot o' good hot tea," she said. "That'll warm you all right."

Droop thought of something more stimulating and fragrant, but said nothing as he returned to the cupboard. Here he drew forth an apparently endless piece of stout rope. This he wound in a thick coil and hung over his head.

"Now, then," he said, "when I get down you shet the door at the top of the stairs tight, coz jest's soon's I open the outside door, thet hall's goin' to freeze up solid."

"All right!" said Phœbe. "I'll see to it."

Droop descended the stairs with a heavy tread, and as he reached the foot Phœbe closed the upper door, which she now noticed was provided with weather-strips.

Then the two women stood at the windows on the right-hand side of the vessel and watched Droop as he walked toward the pole. He raised the huge iron ring, snapping over it a special coupling hook fixed to the end of the rope.

Then he backed toward the vessel, unrolling the coil of rope as he moved away from the pole. Evidently they were within the forty-foot limit from the pole, for Droop had some rope to spare when he at length reached under the machine to attach the end to a ring which the sisters could not see.

He emerged from beneath the bulging side of the vessel swinging his arms and blowing a mighty volume of steam, which turned to snow as it left him. As he made directly for the entrance again, Phœbe ran to the kitchen.

"Poor man, he'll be perished!" she exclaimed.

As Droop entered the room, bringing with him a bitter atmosphere, Phœbe appeared with a large cup of hot tea.

"Here, Mr. Droop," she said, "drink this quick!"

Copernicus pulled off his cap and sat down to drink his tea without a word. When he had finished it, he pulled back his chair with a sigh.

"Whillikins! But 'twas cold!" he exclaimed. "Seems mos' like heaven to get into a nice warm room like this!"

"An' did ye get every thin' done right?" Rebecca asked.

"I guess I did," he said, emphatically. "I don't want to take no two bites out o' that kind o' cherry."

He rose and proceeded to remove his fur coverings.

"Goin' to start right now?" said Phœbe.

"Might's well, I guess."

He proceeded to the engine-room, followed by Phœbe, who watched his actions with the greatest interest.

"What you doin' with that handle?" she asked.

"That sets the airyplane on the uptilt. I'm only settin' it a mite—jest 'nough to keep the machine from sinkin' down when we get to movin'."

"How are you goin' to lift us up?"

"Just let out a mite o' gas below," said Droop. He suited the action to the word, and, with a tremendous hissing beneath it, the vessel rose slowly.

Droop pulled the starting lever and they moved forward with increasing speed. When they had gathered way, he shut off the gas escape and carefully readjusted the aeroplanes until the machine as a whole moved horizontally.

There was felt a slight jerk as they reached the end of the rope, and then they began to move in a circle from east to west.

Phœbe glanced at the clock.

"Just five minutes past eight," she said.

The sun was pouring its beams into the right-hand windows when they started, but the shafts of light now began to sweep circularly across the floor, and in a few moments, as they faced the sun, it ceased to shine in from the right. Immediately afterward it shone in at the left-hand windows and circled slowly around until again they were in shadow with the sun behind them.

Droop took out his watch and timed their revolutions by the sun's progress from window to window.

"'Bout one to the minute," he remarked. "Guess I'll speed her up a mite."

Carefully he regulated the speed, timing their revolutions accurately.

"There!" he said at length. "I guess that's pretty nigh two to the minute. D'ye feel any side weight?" he said, addressing his companions.

"No," said Rebecca.

Phœbe shook her head.

"You manage right well, Mr. Droop," she said. "You must have practised a good deal."

"Oh, not much," he replied, greatly pleased. "The future man showed me how to work it three—four times. It's simple 'nough when ye understand the principles."

These remarks brought a new idea to Rebecca's mind.

"Why, Mr. Droop," she exclaimed, "whatever's the use o' you goin' back to 1876! Why don't ye jest set up as the inventor o' this machine? I'm sure thet ought to make yer everlastin' fortune!"

"Oh, I thought o' that," he said. "But it's one thing to know how to work a thing an' it's a sight different to know how it's made an' all that. The future man tried to explain all the new scientific principles that was mixed into it—fer makin' power an' all—but I couldn't understand that part at all."

"An' besides," exclaimed Phœbe, "it's a heap more fun to be the only ones can use the thing, I think."

"Yes—seems like fun's all we're thinkin' of," said Rebecca, rising and moving toward the kitchen. "We're jest settin' round doin' nothin'. I'll finish with the breakfast things if you'll put to rights and

dust, Phœbe. We can't make beds till night with the windows tight shut."

These suggestions were followed by the two women, while Droop, picking up the newspaper which Rebecca had brought, sat down to read.

After a long term of quiet reading, his attention was distracted by Rebecca's voice.

"I declare to goodness, Phœbe!" she was saying. "Seems's if every chance you get, you go to readin' those old letters."

"Well, the's one or two that's spelled so funny and written so badly that I haven't been able yet to read them," Phœbe replied.

Droop looked over his paper. Phœbe and her sister were seated near one of the windows on the opposite side.

"P'raps I could help ye, Cousin Phœbe," he said. "I've got mighty strong eyesight."

"Oh, 'tain't a question of eyesight," Phœbe replied, laughing.

"Oh, I see," said Droop, smiling slyly, "letters from some young feller, eh?"

He winked knowingly at Rebecca, who drew herself up indignantly and looked severely down at her knitting.

Phœbe blushed, but replied quite calmly:

"Yes—some of them from a young man, but they weren't any of them written to me."

"No?" said Droop. "Who was they to—'f I may ask?"

"They were all written to this lady."

Phœbe held something out for Droop's inspection, and he walked over to take it.

He recognized at once the miniature on ivory which he had seen once before in Peltonville.

"Well," he said, taking the portrait from her and eying it with his head on one side, "if ye hadn't said 'twasn't you, I'd certainly a-thought 'twas. I'd mos' sworn 'twas your photygraph, Cousin Phœbe. Who is it, anyway?"

"It isn't anybody," she replied, "but it *was* Mistress Mary Burton of Burton Hall. I'm one of her descendants, an' these are some letters she had with her in this funny old carved box when she disappeared with her lover. They fled to Holland and were married there, the story goes, an' one o' their children came over in the early days o' New England. He brought the letters an' the picture with him."

"Well, now! I want to know!" exclaimed Droop, in great admiration. "'Twouldn't be perlite, I s'pose, to ask to hear some o' them letters?"

"Would you like to hear some of them?" Phœbe asked.

"I would fer a fact," he replied.

"Well, bring your chair over here and I'll read you one," she said.

Droop seated himself near the two sisters and Phœbe unfolded a large and rather rough sheet of paper, yellow with age, on which Droop perceived a bold scrawl in a faded ink.

"This seems to have been from Mary Burton's father," Phœbe said. "I don't think he can have been a very nice man. This is what he says:

"'Dear Poll'—horrid nickname, isn't it?"

"Seems so to me," said Droop.

"'Dear Poll—I'm starting behind the grays for London, on my way, as you know ere this, to be knighted by her Majesty. I send this ahead by Gregory on Bess—she being fast enow for my purpose—which is to get thee straight out of the grip of that'——"

Phœbe hesitated.

"He uses a bad word there," she said, in a low tone. "I'll go on and leave that out."

"Yes, do," said Droop.

"'That —— aunt of thine,'" she continued, reading. "'I know her tricks and I learn how she hath suffered that'——"

"There's another," said Phœbe.

"Skip it," said Droop, gravely.

"'That —— milk-and-water popinjay to come courting my Poll. So see you follow Gregory, mistress, and without wait or parley come with him to the Peacock Inn, where I lie to-night. The grays are in fine fettle and thy black mare grows too fat for want of exercise. Thy mother-in-law commands thy instant return with Gregory, having much business forward with preparing gowns and fallals against our presentation to her Majesty.'"

"It is signed 'Isaac Burton,'" said Phœbe, "and see, the paper was sealed with a steel gauntlet."

Droop examined the seal carefully and then returned it, saying:

"Looks to me like a bunch of 'sparagus tumbled over on one side."

Phœbe laughed.

"But what always interests me most in this letter is the postscript," she said. "It reads: 'Thy mother thinks thou wilt make better speed if I make thee to know that the players thou wottest of'——"

"What's a 'wottest'?" said Droop, in puzzled tones.

"Wottest means knowest—haven't you read Shakespeare?"

"No," said Droop.

"'The players thou wottest of are to stop at the Peacock, and will be giving some sport there.'

"Now, those players always interest me," Phœbe continued. "Somehow I can't help but believe that William Shakespeare——"

"Fiddle ends!" Rebecca interrupted. "I've heard that talk fifty-leven times an' I'm pinin' fer relief. Mr. Droop, would you mind tellin' us what the time o' year is now. Seems to me that sun has whirled in an' out o' that window 'nough times to bring us back to the days o' creation."

Droop consulted the date indicator and announced that it was now September 5, 1897.

"Not a year yet!" cried the two women together.

"Why, no," said Copernicus. "Ye see, we are takin' about three hours to lose a year."

"Fer the lands sakes!" cried Rebecca. "Can't we go a little faster?"

"My gracious, yes!" said Droop. "But I'm 'fraid o' the side weight fer ye."

"I'd rather hev side weight than wait forever," said Rebecca, with a grim smile.

"D'ye think ye could stand a little more speed, Cousin Phœbe?" said Droop.

"We might try," she replied.

"Well, let's try, then," he said, and turned promptly to the engine-room.

Very soon the difference in speed was felt, and as they found themselves travelling more rapidly in a circle, the centrifugal force now became distinctly perceptible.

The two women found themselves obliged to lean somewhat toward the central pole to counteract this tendency, and as Copernicus emerged from the engine-room he came toward the others at a decided angle to the floor.

"There! now ye feel the side weight," he exclaimed.

"My, ain't it funny!" exclaimed Rebecca. "Thet's the way I've felt afore now when the cars was goin' round a curve—kinder topplin' like."

"Why, that is the centrifugal force," Phœbe said, with dignity.

"It's the side weight—that's what I call it," Droop replied, obstinately, and for some time there was silence.

"How many years back are we makin' by the hour now, Mr. Droop?" Rebecca asked at length.

"Jest a little over two hours fer a year now," he replied.

"Well," said Rebecca, in a discontented tone, "I think the old Panchronicle is raythe a slow actin' concern, considerin' th' amount o' side weight it makes. I declare I'm mos' tired out leanin' over to one side, like old man Titus's paralytic cow."

Phœbe laughed and Droop replied:

"If ye can't stand it or set it, why lay, Cousin Rebecca. The's good settles all 'round."

With manifestly injured feelings Droop hunted up a book and sat down to read in silence. The Panchronicon was his pet and he did not relish its being thus contemned.

The remainder of the morning was spent in almost completely silent work or reading. Droop scarce took his eyes from his book. Phœbe spent part of the time deep in the Baconian work and part of the time contemplating the monotonous landscape. Rebecca was dreaming of her future past—or her past future, while her knitting grew steadily upon its needles.

The midday meal was duly prepared and disposed of, and, as the afternoon wore away, the three travellers began to examine the date indicator and to ask themselves surreptitiously whether or not they actually felt any younger. They took sly peeps at each other's faces to observe, if possible, any signs of returning youth.

By supper-time there was certainly a less aged air about each of the three and the elders inwardly congratulated themselves upon the unmistakable effects of another twelve hours.

Not long after the supper dishes had been washed, Rebecca took Phœbe aside and said:

"Phœbe, it seems to me you'd ought to be goin' to bed right soon, now. You're only 'bout eighteen years old at present, an' you'll certainly begin to grow smaller again very soon. It wouldn't hardly be respectable fer ye to do yer shrinkin' out here."

This view of the probabilities had not yet struck Phœbe.

"Why, no!" she exclaimed, rather startled. "I—I don't know's I thought about it. But I certainly don't want Mr. Droop to see me when my clothes begin to hang loose."

Then a new problem presented itself.

"Come to think of it, Rebecca," she said, dolefully, "what'll I do all the time between full-grown and baby size? I didn't bring anything but the littlest clothes, you know."

"Thet's so," said Rebecca, thoughtfully. Then, after a pause: "I don't see but ye'll hev to stay abed, Phœbe, till we get to th' end," she said, sympathetically.

"There it is," said Phœbe, crossly. "Gettin' sent to bed a'ready—even before I expected it."

"But 'tain't that, Phœbe," said Rebecca, with great concern. "I ain't sendin' ye to bed—but—but—whatever else *can* ye do with a *man* in the house!"

"Nothin'," Phœbe replied, with a toss of her chin.

She crossed the room and held out her hand to Droop.

"Good-night, Mr. Droop," she said.

Surprised at this sudden demonstration of friendship, he took her hand and tipped his head to one side as he looked into her face.

"Next time you see me, I don't suppose you'll know me, I'll be so little," she said, trying to laugh.

"I—I wish't you'd call me Cousin Copernicus," he said, coaxingly.

"Well, p'raps I will when I see ye again," she replied, freeing her hand with a slight effort.

Rebecca retired shortly after her sister and Copernicus was once more left alone. He rubbed his hands slowly, with a sense of satisfaction, and glanced at the date dial.

"July 2, 1892," he said to himself. "I'm only thirty-four years old. Don't feel any older than that, either."

He walked deliberately to the shutters, closed them and turned on the electric light. Surrounded thus by the wonted conditions of night, it was not long before he began to yawn. He removed his coat and shoes and lay back in an easy chair to meditate at ease. He faced toward the pole so that the "side weight" would tend to press him gently backward into his chair and therefore not annoy him by calling for constant opposing effort.

He soon dozed off and was whisked through a quick succession of fantastic dreams. Then he awoke suddenly, and as though someone had spoken to him. Listening intently, he only heard the low murmur of the machinery below and the ticking of the many clocks and indicators all about him.

He closed his eyes, intending to take up that last dream where he had been interrupted. He recollected that he had been on the very point of some delightful consummation, but just what it was he could not recall.

Sleep evaded him, however. His mind reverted to the all-important question of the recovered years. He began to plan again.

This time he should not make his former mistakes. No—he would not only make immense wealth promptly with the great inventions, he would give up liquor forever. It would be so easy in 1876, for he had never taken up the unfortunate habit until 1888.

Then—rich, young, sober, he would seek out a charming, rosy, good-natured girl—something of the type of Phœbe, for instance. They would be married and——

He got up at this and looked at the clock. It was after midnight. He looked at the date indicator. It said October 9, 1890.

"Well, come!" he thought. "The old Panchronicon is a steady vessel. She's keepin' right on."

He put on his shoes again, for something made him nervous and he wished to walk up and down.

The first thing he did after his shoes were donned was to gaze at himself in the mirror.

"Don't look any younger," he thought, "but I feel so." He walked across the room once or twice.

"Shucks!" he exclaimed. "Couldn't expect to look younger in these old duds, an' at this time o' night, too—tired like I am."

For some time he walked up and down, keeping his eyes resolutely from the date indicator. Finally he threw himself down in the chair again and closed his eyes, nervous and exhausted. He did not feel sleepy, but he must have dozed, for the next time he looked at the clock it was half-past one.

He put out the light and crossed to a settle. Here he lay at full length courting sleep. When he awoke, he thought, refreshed and alert, he would show his youth unmistakably.

But sleep would not return. He tried every position, every trick for propitiating Morpheus. All in vain.

At length he rose again and turned on the light. It was two-fifteen. This time he could not resist looking at the date indicator.

It said September 30, 1889.

Again he looked into the glass.

"My, but I'm nervous!" he thought as he turned away, disappointed. "I look older than ever!"

As he paced the floor there all alone, he began to doubt for the first time the success of his plan.

"It *must* work right!" he said aloud. "Didn't I go back five weeks with that future man? Didn't he——"

A fearful thought struck him. Had he perhaps made a mistake? Had they been cutting meridians the wrong way?

But no; the indicator could not be wrong, and that registered a constantly earlier date.

"Ah, I know!" he suddenly exclaimed. "I'll ask Cousin Phœbe."

He reflected a moment. Yes—the idea was a good one. She would be only fifteen years old by this time, and must certainly have changed to an extent of which he was at his age incapable. Besides, she had been asleep, and nervous insomnia could not be responsible for retarding the evidences of youth in her case. His agony of dread lest this great experiment fail made him bold.

He walked directly to Phœbe's door and knocked—first softly, then more loudly.

"Cousin Phœbe—Cousin Phœbe," he said.

After a few calls and knockings, there came a sleepy reply from within.

"Well—what—who is it?"

"It's Cousin Copernicus," he said. "Please tell me. Hev ye shrunk any yet?"

"What—how?" The tones were very sleepy indeed.

"Hev ye shrunk any yet? Are ye growin' littler in there? Oh, please feel fer the footboard with yer toe!"

He waited and heard a rustling as of someone moving in bed.

"Did ye feel the footboard?" he asked.

"Yes—kicked it good—now let me sleep." She was ill-natured with much drowsiness.

Poor Droop staggered away from the door as though he had been struck.

All had failed, then. They were circling uselessly. Those inventions would never be his. The golden dreams he had been nursing—oh, impossible! It was unbearable!

He put both hands to his head and walked across the room. He paused half-consciously before a small closet partly hidden in the wall.

With an instinctive movement, he touched a spring and the door slid back. He drew from the cupboard thus revealed two bottles and a glass and returned to seat himself at the table.

A half an hour later the Panchronicon, circling in the outer brightness and silence, contained three unconscious travellers, and one of them sat with his arms flung across the table supporting his head, and beside him an empty bottle.

CHAPTER VI

SHIPWRECKED ON THE SANDS OF TIME

Rebecca was the first of the three to waken. Over her small window she had hung a black shawl to keep out the light, and upon this screen were thrown recurrent flashes of sunlight.

"Still a-swingin'," she murmured. "Wonder how fur back we be now!"

She was herself surprised at the eagerness she felt to observe at last the results of their extraordinary attempt.

She rose quickly and was very soon ready to leave her room. She was longing to see Phœbe—Phœbe as she had been when a girl.

Opening her door, she was astonished to find the lamps of the main room aglow and to see Copernicus in his shirt-sleeves, asleep with his head on the table.

As she stepped out of her own room, her senses were offended by the odor of alcohol. With horror she realized that rum, the spirit of all the sources of evil, had found its way into their abode.

She entertained so violent a repugnance for liquors and for men under their influence that she could not bring herself to approach Copernicus.

"He's gone an' got drunk again," she muttered, glaring with helpless anger at the bottles and then at him.

"Mister Droop! Copernicus Droop!" she cried in a high, sharp voice.

There was no reply.

She looked about her for something to prod him with. There was an arm-chair on casters beside her door. She drew this to her and pushed it with all her might toward the unconscious man.

The chair struck violently against Droop's seat, and even caused his body to sway slightly, but he still slept and gave no sign.

"That settles it!" she exclaimed, with mingled disgust and alarm in her face.

"What's the matter?"

It was Phœbe who called.

"It's me," said Rebecca. "Can I come in?"

"Yes."

Rebecca walked into Phœbe's room, which she found darkened like her own. Her sister was in bed.

"What ever happened to you?" Phœbe asked. "Sounded as though ye'd fallen down or somethin'."

Rebecca stood stiffly with her back to the closed door, her hands folded before her.

"Copernicus Droop is tight! Dead drunk!" she exclaimed, with a shaking voice.

"Drunk!" cried Phœbe. "Lands sakes!—an'—" She looked about her with alarm. "Then what's happened to the machine?" she asked.

"Whirlin', whirlin', same as ever! Cuttin' meridians or sausage meat fer all I care. I jest wish to goodness an' all creation I'd never ben sech a plumb born nateral fool as to—oh, wouldn't I like to jest *shake* that man!" she broke out, letting her anger gain the upper hand.

Then Phœbe recalled their situation and their expectations of the night before.

"Why, then I ought to be gettin' little pretty fast," she said, feeling her arms. "I don't see's I've shrunk a mite, hev I?"

"No more'n I hev!" Rebecca exclaimed, hotly. "Nor you won't, nuther. Ye might jest's well make up yer mind to it thet the whole business is foolish folderols. We're a nice couple o' geese, we are, to

come out here to play 'Here we go round the mulberry bush' with the North Pole—an' all along of a shif'less, notorious slave o' rum!"

She plumped herself into a chair and glared at the darkened window as though fascinated by those ever-returning flashes of sunlight.

"Well—well—well!" murmured Phœbe.

She was much disappointed, and yet somehow she could not avoid a certain pleasure in the thought that at least there was no fear of a return to childhood.

"But what're we goin' to do?" she asked at length. "If Mr. Droop's so tight he can't manage the machine, what'll we do. Here we are tied up to the North Pole——"

"Oh, drat the old Panchronicon!" cried Rebecca.

Then rising in her wrath, she continued with energy: "The's one thing I'm goin' to do right this blessed minute. I'm goin' to draw a hull bucket o' cold water an' throw it over that mis'able critter in there! Think o' him sleepin' on the table—the table as we eat our victuals on!"

"No—no. Don't try to wake him up first!" cried Phœbe. "Let's have breakfast—we can have it in the kitchen—an' then you can douse him afterward. Just think of the wipin' an' cleanin' we'll have to do after it. We'll be starved if we wait breakfast for all that ruction!"

Rebecca reflected a moment. Then:

"I guess ye're right, Phœbe," she said. "My, won't that carpet look a sight! I'll go right an' fix up somethin' to eat, though goodness knows, I'm not hungry."

She left Phœbe to dress and made a wide circuit to avoid even approaching the table on her way to the kitchen. Not long afterward she was followed by her sister, who took a similar roundabout path, for Phœbe was quite as much in horror of drink and drinkers as Rebecca.

She glanced at the date indicator as she passed it.

"My sakes!" she said, as she entered the kitchen, "it's March 25, 1887. Why, then's the time that I had the measles so bad. Don't you remember when I was thirteen years old an' Dr. ——"

Rebecca broke in with a snort.

"Eighty-seven grandmothers!" she exclaimed. "Don't you get to frettin' 'bout gettin' the measles or anything else, Phœbe—only sof'nin' of the brain—I guess we've both got that right bad!"

"I don't know 'bout that," Phœbe replied, as she began to set the small table for two. "I believe we're gettin' back, after all, Rebecca. The's one thing sure. Everybody knows that ye lose a day every time you go round the world once from east to west, an' I'm sure we've gone round often enough to lose years. I believe that indicator's all right."

"We've not ben goin' round the world, though," Rebecca replied. "That's the p'int. This old iron clothes-pole out here ain't the hull world, I can tell ye!"

"Well, but all the meridians——"

"Oh, bother yer meridians! I ain't seen one o' the things yet—nor you hevn't, either, Phœbe Wise!"

Phœbe was not convinced. It seemed not at all unreasonable, after all, that they should lose time without undergoing any physical change. She concluded to argue the matter no further, however.

Their meal was eaten in silence. As they rose to clear the table, Phœbe said:

"Th' ain't any use of goin' back to 1876 now, is there, Rebecca. Though I do s'pose it won't make any difference to Mr. Droop. He can bring out his inventions an'——"

"Not with my money, or Joe Chandler's, either," Rebecca declared, firmly. "Not as Joe'd ask me to marry him now. He'd as soon think o' marryin' his grandmother."

"Then what's the use o' goin' back any further. We might's well stop the machine right now, so's not to have so many more turns to wind up again."

"Fiddlesticks!" Rebecca exclaimed. "Don't you fret about that! Don't I tell ye it's folderol! Tell ye what ye can do, though. Open them shutters out there an' let in some sunlight. I've more'n half a mind to open a window, too. Thet smell o' rum in there makes me sick."

"We'd freeze to death in a minute if we tried it," said Phœbe, as she entered the main room.

She went to each of the four windows and opened all the shutters, avoiding in the meantime even a glance at the middle of the room. She did not forget the date indicator, however.

"Merry Christmas!" she cried, with a little laugh. "It's Christmas-day, 1886, Rebecca."

The engine-room door was open. Perhaps it was a sign of her returning youth, but the fact is her fingers itched to get at those bright, tempting brass and steel handles. Droop had explained their uses and she felt sure she could manage the machinery. What a delightful thing it would be to feel the Panchronicon obeying her hand!

"Really, Rebecca," she exclaimed, "if we're not going back to '76 after all, I think it's a dreadful waste of time for us to be throwin' away six months every hour this way."

"'Twon't be long," Rebecca replied, as she turned the hot water into her dishpan. "You come in here an' help wash these dishes, an' ef I don't soon wake up that mis'able—" She did not trust herself further, but tightly compressed her lips and confined her rising choler.

"Why, Rebecca Wise," said Phœbe, "you know it will be hours before that man's got sense enough to run this machine. I'm goin' to stop it myself, right now."

Rebecca had just taken a hot plate from her pan, but she paused ere setting it down, alarmed at Phœbe's temerity.

"Don't you dast to dream o' sech a thing, Phœbe!" she cried, with frightened earnestness.

But Phœbe was confident, and crossed the threshold with a little laugh.

"Why, Rebecca, what you scared of?" she said. "It's just as easy as that—see!"

She pulled the starting lever.

The next instant found her flying out into the middle of the main room following Droop, the table, and all the movable furniture. In the kitchen there was a wild scream and a crash of crockery as Rebecca was thrown against the rear partition.

Phœbe had pulled the lever the wrong way and the Panchronicon was swiftly reaching full speed.

"Heavens and airth!" cried Rebecca.

"Whatever in gracious—" began the dismayed Phœbe.

She broke off in renewed terror as she found herself pushed by an irresistible force to the side of the room.

"Here—here!" she heard from the kitchen. "What's this a-pullin'? Land o' promise, Phœbe, come quick! I've got a stroke!"

"I can't come!" wailed Phœbe. "I'm jammed tight up against the wall. It's as though I was nailed to it."

"Oh, why—why did ye touch that machinery!" cried Rebecca, and then said no more.

The speed indicator pointed to one hundred and seventy-five miles an hour. They were making one revolution around the pole each second—and they were helpless.

As she found herself pushed outward by the immensely increased centrifugal force, Phœbe found it possible to seat herself upon one of the settles, and she now sat with her back pressed firmly against the south wall of the room, only able by a strong effort to raise her head.

She turned to the right and found that Droop had found a couch on the floor under the table and chairs at the rear of the room, also against the south wall.

In the kitchen Rebecca had crouched down as she found herself forced outward, and she now sat dazed on the kitchen floor surrounded by the fragments of their breakfast all glued to the wall as tightly as herself.

"Oh, dear—oh, dear!" she cried, closing her eyes. "Copernicus Droop said that side weight would be terrible if we travelled too fast. Why, I'm so heavy sideways I feel like as if I weighed 497½ pounds like that fat woman in the circus down to Keene."

"So do I," Phœbe said, "only I'm so dizzy, too, I can hardly think."

"Shet your eyes, like me," said Rebecca.

"I would only I can't keep 'em off the North Pole there," said Phœbe, as she gazed fascinated through the north window opposite.

"Why, what's the matter with the child!" Rebecca exclaimed, in alarm. "Air ye struck silly, Phœbe?"

"No, but I guess you'd want to watch it too if you could see that ring we're tied to spinnin' round right close to the top of the pole. There—there!" she continued, shrilly. "It'll fly right off in another minute! There! Oh, dear!"

Their attachment did indeed appear precarious. The increased speed acting through the inclined aeroplane had caused the vessel to rise sharply, and the rope had raised the ring by which it was attached to the pole until it came in contact with the steel ball at the top, when it could rise no farther. Here the iron ring was grinding against and under the retaining ball which alone prevented its slipping off the top of the pole.

"I don't see's we'd be any wuss off ef we did come loose," said Rebecca, with eyes still closed. "At least we wouldn't be gummed here ez tight's if the walls was fly-paper."

"No, but we'd fly off at a tangent into infinite space, Rebecca Wise," Phœbe said, sharply.

"Where's that?" asked her sister. "I'll engage 'tain't any wuss place than the North Pole."

"Why, it's off into the ether. There isn't any air there or anythin'. An' they say it's fifty times colder than the North Pole."

"Who's ben there?"

"Why, nobody—" Phœbe began.

"Then let's drop it," snapped Rebecca. "Dr. Kane said the' was an open sea at the North Pole—an' I'm sick o' bein' told about places nobody's ever ben to before."

Phœbe was somewhat offended at this and there was a long silence, during which she became more reassured touching the danger of breaking away from the Pole. Soon she, too, was able to shut her eyes.

The silence was broken by a meek voice from under the table.

"Would you mind settin' off my chist?" said Droop.

There was no answer and he opened his eyes. His bewilderment and surprise were intense when he discovered his situation.

Shutting his eyes again, he remarked:

"What you flashin' that bright light in my eyes so often for?"

Phœbe gave vent to a gentle sniff of contempt.

"My—my—my!" Droop continued, in meek amazement. "I s'pose I must hev taken two whole bottles. I never, never felt so heavy's this before! What's the old Pan lyin' on it's side fer?"

"'Tain't on its side," snapped Phœbe. "The old thing's run away, Copernicus Droop, an' it's all your fault." There was a quiver in her voice.

"Run away!" said Droop, opening his eyes again. "Where to?"

"Nowheres—jest whirlin'. Only it's goin' a mile a second, I do believe—an' it'll fly off the pole soon—an'—an' we'll all be killed!" she cried, bursting into tears.

She dragged her hands with great difficulty to her face against which she found them pressed with considerable energy. Crying under these circumstances was so very unusual and uncomfortable that she soon gave it up.

"Oh, I see! It's the side weight holds me here. Where are you?"

There was no reply, so he turned his head and eyes this way and that until at length he spied Phœbe on the settle, farther forward.

"Am I under the table?" he said. "Where's Cousin Rebecca? Was she pressed out through the wall?"

"I'm out here in the kitchen, Copernicus Droop," she cried. "I wish to goodness you'd ben pressed in through the walls of the lock-up 'fore ever ye brought me'n Phœbe into this mess. Ef you're a man or half one, you'll go and stop this pesky old Panchronicle an' give us a chance to move."

"How can I go?" he cried, peevishly. "What the lands sakes did you go an' make the machine run away for? Couldn't ye leave the machinery alone?"

"I didn't touch your old machine!" cried Rebecca. "Phœbe thought we'd be twisted back of our first birthday ef the thing wasn't stopped, an' she pulled the handle the wrong way, that's all!"

Droop rolled his eyes about eagerly for a glimpse of the date indicator.

"What's the date, Cousin Phœbe?" he asked.

"April 4, 1884—no, April 3d—2d—oh, dear, it's goin' back so fast I can't tell ye the truth about it!"

"Early in 1884," Droop repeated, in awe-struck accents. "An' we're a-whirlin' off one day every second—just about one year in six minutes. Great Criminy crickets! When was you born, Cousin Phœbe?"

"Second of April, 1874."

"Ten years. One year in six minutes—gives ye jest one hour to live. Then you'll go out—bang!—like a candle. I'll go next, and Cousin Rebecca last."

"Well!" exclaimed Rebecca, angrily, "ef I can hev the pleasure o' bein' rid o' you, Copernicus Droop, it'll be cheap at the price—but the's no sech luck. Ef you think ye can fool us any more with yer twaddle 'bout cuttin' meridians, ye're mistaken—that's all I can say."

Droop was making desperate efforts to climb along the floor and reach the engine-room, but, although by dint of gigantic struggles he managed to make his way a few feet, he was then obliged to pause for breath, whereupon he slid gently and ignominiously back to his nook under the table.

Here he found himself in contact with a corked bottle. He looked at it and felt comforted. At least he had access to forgetfulness whenever he pleased to seek it.

The two women found it wisest to lie quiet and speak but little. The combined rotary movement and sense of weight were nervously disturbing, and for a long time no one of the three spoke. Only once in the middle of the forenoon did Phœbe address Droop.

"Whatever will be the end o' this?" she said.

"Why, we'll keep on whirlin' till the power gives out," he replied. "Ye hevn't much time to live now, hev ye?"

With a throb of fear felt for the first time, Phœbe looked at the indicator.

"It's May, 1874," she said.

"Jest a month—thirty seconds," he said, sadly.

"Copernicus Droop, do you mean it?" screamed Rebecca from the kitchen.

"Unless the power gives out before then," he replied. "I don't suppose ye want to make yer will, do ye?"

"Stuff!" said Phœbe, bravely, but her gaze was fixed anxiously on the indicator, now fast approaching the 2d of April.

"Oh, dear! 'F I could only see ye, Phœbe!" cried Rebecca. "I know he's a mis'able deceivin' man, but if—if—oh, Phœbe, can't ye holler!"

"It's April 8th—good-bye!" Phœbe said, faintly.

"Phœbe—Phœbe!"

"Hurray—hurray! It's March 31st, and here I am!"

Phœbe tried to clap her hands, but the effort was in vain.

"I allus said it was folderol," said Rebecca, sternly. "Oh, but I'd like to throw somethin' at that Copernicus Droop!"

"Come to think of it," said Droop, "that future man must hev come back long, long before his birthday."

"Why didn't ye say that sooner?" cried Rebecca.

There was no further conversation until long afterward, when Rebecca suddenly remarked:

"Aren't ye hungry, Phœbe?"

"Why, it's gettin' along to dinner-time, ain't it?" she replied. "I don't see, though, how I'm to get any victuals, do you?"

"Why, the's bread an' other scraps slammed up against the wall here all round me," said Rebecca. "Couldn't we fix some way to get some of 'em to ye?"

Phœbe looked anxiously about and finally caught sight of her sister's knitting work near at hand. It proved to be just within reach, and by slow degrees and much effort she brought it into her lap within easy reach of both her heavy hands.

"Oh, dear!" she said, "I feel's if both my arms had turned to lead. Here, Rebecca, I'm goin' to see if I can roll your ball o' yarn along the floor through the kitchen door. The centrifugal force will bring it to you. Then you can cut the yarn an' tie somethin' on the end for me to eat an' I'll haul it back through the door."

"That's jest the thing, Phœbe. Go on—I'm ready."

The theory seemed excellent, as Rebecca had fortunately been working with a very tough flaxen yarn; but so great was the apparent weight of Phœbe's arms that it was only after a long series of trials ending in failures that she finally succeeded.

"I've got it!" cried Rebecca, triumphantly. "Now, then, I've got a slice of ham and two slices of bread——"

"Don't send ham," said Phœbe. "I'd be sure to eat it if I had it, an' 'twould make me fearful dry. I'm sure I don't see how I'm to get any water in here."

"Thet's so," said Rebecca. "Well, here's an apple and two slices of bread."

"Are you keepin' enough for yourself, Rebecca?"

"Enough an' to spare," she replied. "Now, then—all ready! Pull 'em along!"

Phœbe obeyed and soon had secured possession of the frugal meal which Rebecca had been able to convey to her.

She offered a portion of her ration to Droop, but he declined it, saying he had no appetite. He had lapsed into a kind of waking reverie and scarce knew what was going on about him.

The two women also were somewhat stupefied by the continual rotation and their enforced immobility. They spoke but seldom and

must have dozed frequently, for Phœbe was much surprised to find, on looking at the clock, that it was half-past five.

She glanced at the date indicator.

"Why, Rebecca!" she cried. "Here 'tis November, 1804!"

"My land!" cried Rebecca, forgetting her scepticism. "What do you s'pose they're doin' in New Hampshire now, Phœbe?"

"It's 'bout election time, Rebecca. They're probably votin' for Adams or Madison or somebody like that."

"My stars!" said Rebecca. "What ever shall we do ef this old machine goes on back of the Revolution! I should hate to go back an' worry through all them terrible times."

"We'll be lucky if we stop there," said Phœbe. "I only hope to gracious we won't go back to Columbus or King Alfred."

"Oh, I hope not!" said Rebecca, with a shudder. "Folks ud think we was crazy to be talkin' 'bout America then."

Phœbe tried to toss her head.

"If 'twas in Alfred's time," she said, "they couldn't understand *what* we was talkin' about."

"Phœbe Wise! What do you mean?"

"I mean just that. There wasn't any English language then. Besides—who's to say the old thing won't whirl us back to the days of the Greeks an' Romans? We could see Socrates and Pericles and Crœsus and——"

"Oh, I'd love to see Crœsus!" Rebecca broke in. "He's the richest man that ever lived!"

"Yes—and perhaps we'll go back of then and see Abraham and Noah."

"Ef we could see Noah, 'twould be worth while," said Rebecca. "Joe Forrest said he didn't believe about the flood. He said Noah couldn't

hev packed all them animals in tight enough to hev got 'em all in the Ark. I'd like mighty well if I could ask Noah himself 'bout it."

"He couldn't understand ye," said Phœbe. "All he spoke was Hebrew, ye know."

"Oh!" exclaimed Rebecca. Then, after a pause: "S'pose we went back to the tower of Babel. Couldn't we find the folks that was struck with the English language an' get one of 'em to go back an' speak to Noah?"

"What good would that do? If he was struck with English he wouldn't know Hebrew any more. That's what made— But there!" she exclaimed, "what ninnies we are!"

There was a long pause. After many minutes, Rebecca asked one more question.

"Do you s'pose the flood would come up as fur's this, Phœbe?"

"I don't know, Rebecca. The Bible says the whole earth, you know."

And so passed the slow hours. When they were not dozing they were either nibbling frugally the scant fare in reach or conversing by short snatches at long intervals.

For thirty hours had they thus whirled ceaselessly around that circle, when Phœbe, glancing through the window at the ring to which their rope was attached, noticed that its constant rubbing against the ball at the top of the pole had worn it nearly through.

"My goodness, Rebecca!" she cried. "I believe we're goin' off at a tangent in a minute."

"What? How?"

"The ring on the pole is nigh worn out. I believe it'll break in a minute."

"If it breaks we'll move straight an' get rid o' this side weight, won't we?"

"Yes—but goodness only knows where we'll fly to."

"Why—ain't Mr. Droop there? If the side weight goes, he can get into the engine-room an' let us down easy."

"That's so!" cried Phœbe. "Oh, won't it be grand to stand still a minute after all this traipsin' around and around! Mr. Droop," she continued, "do you hear? You'd better be gettin' ready to take hold an' stop the Panchronicon, 'cause we're goin' to break loose in half no time."

There was no reply. Nor could any calling or pleading elicit an answer. Droop had yielded to his thirst and was again sleeping the sleep of the unregenerate.

"Oh, Rebecca, what— Oh—oo—oo!"

There was a loud scream from both the sisters as the iron ring, worn through by long rubbing, finally snapped asunder.

The tremendous pressure was suddenly lifted, and the two women were free.

With a single impulse, they flew toward the kitchen door and fell into each other's arms.

The Panchronicon had gone off at a tangent at last!

"Oh, Rebecca—Rebecca!" cried Phœbe, in tears. "I was afraid I'd never see you again!"

Rebecca cried a little too, and patted her sister's shoulder in silence a moment.

"There, deary!" she said, after awhile. "Now let's set down an' hev a good cup o' tea. Then we can go to bed comfortable."

"But, Rebecca," said Phœbe, stepping back and wiping her eyes, "what shall we do about the Panchronicon? We're jest makin' fer Infinite Space, or somewheres, as fast as we can go."

"Can't help it, Phœbe. Ye sha'n't touch a thing in that engine-room this day—not while I'm here. Ye might blow us up the nex' time.

No—I guess we'll jest hev to trust in the Lord. He brought us into this pickle, an' it's fer Him to see us out of it."

With this comforting reflection the two sisters brewed a pot of tea, and after partaking of the refreshing decoction, went to their respective beds.

"I declare, I'm dog tired!" said Rebecca.

"So'm I," said Phœbe.

Those were their last words for many hours.

CHAPTER VII

NEW TIES AND OLD RELATIONS

How long they slept after their extraordinary experience with the runaway air-ship neither Rebecca nor Phœbe ever knew; but when they awoke all was still, and it was evidently dark outside, for no ray of light found its way past the hangings they had placed over their windows.

There was something uncanny in the total silence. Even the noise of the machinery was stilled, and the two sisters dressed together in Rebecca's room for company's sake.

"Do you suppose we've arrived in Infinite Space yet?" Rebecca asked.

"It's still enough fer it," Phœbe replied, in a low voice. "But I don't hear the Panchronicon's machinery any more. It must have run down entirely, wherever we are."

At that moment there was borne faintly to their ears the distant crowing of a cock.

"Well, there!" said Rebecca, with an expression of immense relief, "I don't believe the's any hens an' roosters in Infinite Space, is the'?"

Phœbe laughed and shook her head as she ran to the window. She drew aside the shawl hanging before the glass and peered out.

The first gleams of dawn were dispelling the night, and against a dark gray sky she saw the branches of thickly crowding trees.

Dropping the shawl, she turned eagerly to her sister.

"Rebecca Wise!" she exclaimed. "As sure as you're alive, we're back safe on the ground again. We're in the woods."

"Mos' likely Putnam's wood lot," said Rebecca, with great satisfaction as she finally adjusted her cameo brooch. "Gracious! Won't I be glad to see all the folks again!"

She pushed open her door and, followed by Phœbe, entered the main room. Here all was gloom, but they could hear Droop's breathing, and knew that he was still sleeping under the table in the corner.

"For the lands sakes! Let's get out in the fresh air," Rebecca exclaimed as she groped her way toward the stairs. "You keep a-holt o' me, Phœbe. That's right. We'll get out o' here an' make rabbit tracks fer home, I tell ye. We can come back later for our duds when that mis'able specimen is sober fer awhile again."

Slowly the two made their way down the winding stairs to the lower hall, where, after much fumbling, they found the door handle and lock.

As they emerged from the prison that had so long confined them, a cool morning zephyr swept their faces, bringing with it once more the well-known voice of distant chanticleer.

They walked across the springing turf a few yards and were then able to make out the looming black mass of some building beyond the end of the air-ship.

"Goodness!" Rebecca whispered. "This ain't Peltonville, Phœbe. There ain't a house in the town as high as that, 'less it's the meetin'-house, an' 'tain't the right shape fer that."

They advanced stealthily toward the newly discovered building, in which not a single light was to be seen.

"In good sooth," Phœbe exclaimed, putting one hand on her sister's arm, "it hath an air of witchcraft! Dost not feel cold chills in thee, Rebecca?"

Rebecca stopped short, stiff with amazement.

"What's come over ye?" she asked, trying to peer into her sister's face. "Whatever makes ye talk like that, child?"

Phœbe laughed nervously and, taking her sister's arm, pressed close up to her.

"I don't know, dear. Did I speak funny?" she asked.

"Why you know you did. What's the use o' tryin' to scare a body with gibberish? This place is creepy 'nough now."

As she spoke, they reached the door of the strange building. They could see that it stood open, and even as they paused near the threshold another puff of air passed them, and they heard a door squeak on its rusty hinges.

They stood and listened breathlessly, peering into the dark interior whence there was borne to their nostrils a musty odor. A large bat whisked across the opening, and as they started back alarmed he returned with swift zig-zag cuts and vanished ghostlike into the house.

"It's deserted," whispered Rebecca.

"Perhaps it's haunted," Phœbe replied.

"Well, we needn't go in, I guess," said Rebecca, turning from the door and starting briskly away. "Come on this way, Phœbe—look out fer the trees—lands! Did y'ever see so many?"

A few steps brought them to a high brick wall, against which flowers, weeds, and vines grew rank together. They followed this wall, walking more rapidly, for the day was breaking in earnest and groping was needless now. Presently they came to a spot where the wall was broken away, leaving an opening just broad enough to admit a man's body. Rebecca squeezed boldly through and Phœbe followed her, rather for company's sake than with any curiosity to see what was beyond.

They found themselves in a sort of open common, stretching to the edge of a broad roadway about a hundred yards from where they stood. On the other side of the road a cluster of gabled cottages was visible against the faint rose tint of the eastern sky.

As Phœbe came to her sister's side, she clutched her arm excitedly:

"Rebecca!" she exclaimed. "'Tis Newington, as true as I live! Newington and Blackman Street!"

Suddenly she sat down in the grass and hid her face in her hands.

"What d'ye mean?" said Rebecca, looking down at her sister with a puzzled expression. "Where's Newington—I never heerd tell of Blackman Street. Air ye thinkin' of Boston, or——"

Phœbe interrupted her by leaping to her feet and starting back to the opening in the wall.

"Come back, Rebecca!" she exclaimed. "Come back quick!"

Rebecca followed her sister in some alarm. Phœbe must have been taken suddenly ill, she thought. Perhaps they had reached one of those regions infected by fevers of which she had heard from time to time.

In silence the two women hurried back to the Panchronicon, whose uncouth form was now quite plainly visible behind the trees into the midst of which it had fallen when the power stored within it was exhausted.

Not until they were safely seated in Rebecca's room did Phœbe speak again.

"There!" she exclaimed, as she dropped to a seat on the edge of the bed, "I declare to goodness, Rebecca, I don't know what to make of it!"

"What is it? What ails ye?" said Rebecca, anxiously.

"Why, I don't believe I'm myself, Rebecca. I've been here before. I know that village out there, and—and—it's all I can do to talk same's I've always been used to. I'm wanting to talk like—like I did awhile back."

"It's all right! It's all right!" said Rebecca, soothingly. "Th' ain't nothing the matter with you, deary. Ye've ben shet up here with side weight an' what not so long—o' course you're not yerself."

She bustled about pretending to set things to rights, but her heart was heavy with apprehension. She thought that Phœbe was in the first stages of delirium.

"Not myself! No," said Phœbe. "No—the fact is, I'm somebody else!"

At this Rebecca straightened up and cast one horrified glance at her sister. Then she turned and began to put on her bonnet and jacket. Her mind was made up. Phœbe was delirious and they must seek a doctor—at once.

"Get your things on, Phœbe," she said, striving to appear calm. "Put on your things an' come out with me. Let's see if we can't take a little exercise."

Phœbe arose obediently and went to her room. They were neither of them very long about their preparations, and by the time the sun was actually rising, the two women were leaving the air-ship for the second time, Phœbe carrying the precious carved box and Rebecca her satchel and umbrella.

"What you bringin' that everlastin' packet o' letters for?" Rebecca asked, as they reached the opening in the wall.

"I want to have it out in the light," Phœbe replied. "I want to see something."

Outside of the brick wall she paused and opened the box. It was empty.

"I thought so!" she said.

"Why, ye've brought the box 'thout the letters, Phœbe," said Rebecca. "You're not agoin' back for them, air ye?"

"No," Phœbe replied, "'twouldn't do any good. Rebecca. They aren't there."

She dropped the box in the grass and looked wistfully about her.

"Not there!" said Rebecca, nonplussed. "Why, who'd take 'em?"

"Nobody. They haven't been written yet."

"Not—not—" Rebecca gasped for a moment and then hurried toward the road. "Come on!" she cried.

Surely, she thought—surely they must find a doctor without delay.

But before they reached the road, Rebecca was glad to pause again and take advantage of a friendly bush from whose cover she might gaze without being herself observed.

The broad highway which but so short a time ago was quite deserted, was now occupied by a double line of bustling people—young and old—men, women, and children. Those travelling toward their left, to the north, were principally men and boys, although now and then a pair of loud-voiced girls passed northward with male companions. Those who were travelling southward were the younger ones, and often whole families together. Among these the women predominated.

All of these people were laughing—calling rough jokes back and forth—singing, running, jumping, and dancing, till the whole roadway appeared a merry Bedlam.

"Must be a county fair near here!" exclaimed Rebecca. "But will ye listen to the gibberish an' see their clothes!"

Indeed, the language and the costumes were most perplexing to good New England ears and eyes, and Rebecca knew not whether to advance or to retreat.

The women all wore very wide and rather short skirts, the petticoat worn exposed up to where a full over-skirt or flounce gave emphasis to their hips. The elder ones wore long-sleeved jackets and high-crowned hats, while the young ones wore what looked like low-necked jerseys tied together in front and their braided hair hung from uncovered crowns.

The men wore short breeches, some full trunk hose, some tighter but puffed; their jackets were of many fashions, from the long-skirted open coats of the elders to the smart doublets or shirts of the young men.

The children were dressed like the adults, and most of them wore wreaths and garlands of flowers, while in the hands of many were baskets full of posies.

Phœbe gazed from her sister's side with the keenest delight, saying nothing, but turning her eyes hither and thither as though afraid of losing the least detail of the scene.

Presently two young girls approached, each with a basket in her hand. They moved slowly over the grass, stopping constantly to pick the violets under their feet. They were so engrossed in their task and in their conversation that they failed to notice the two sisters half hidden by the shrubbery.

"Nay—nay!" the taller of the two was saying, "I tell thee he made oath to't, Cicely. Knew ye ever Master Stephen to be forsworn?"

"A lover's oaths—truly!" laughed the other. "Why, they be made for breaking. I doubt not he hath made a like vow to a score of silly wenches ere this, coz!"

"Thou dost him wrong, Cicely. An he keep not the tryst, 'twill only be——"

"'Twill only be thy first misprision, eh?"

"Marry, then——"

Here their words were lost as they continued to move farther away, still disputing together.

"Well!" exclaimed Rebecca, turning to Phœbe. "Now I know where we've ben carried to. This is the Holy Land—Jerusalem or Bethlehem or Canaan or some sech place. Thou—thee—thy! Did ye hear those girls talkin' Bible language, Phœbe?"

Phœbe shook her head and was about to reply when there was a loud clamour of many tongues from the road near by.

"The May-pole! The May-pole!" and someone started a roaring song in which hundreds soon joined. The sisters could not distinguish the words, but the volume of sound was tremendous.

There was the tramp of many rushing feet and a Babel of cries behind them. They turned to see a party of twenty gayly clad young

men bearing down upon them, carrying a mighty May-pole crowned with flowers and streaming with colored ribbons.

Around these and following after were three or four score merry lads and lasses, all running and capering, shouting and dancing, singly or in groups, hand in hand.

In a trice Rebecca found herself clinging to Phœbe with whom she was borne onward helpless by the mad throng.

The new-comers were clad in all sorts of fantastic garbs, and many of them were masked. Phœbe and her sister were therefore not conspicuous in their long scant black skirts and cloth jackets with balloon sleeves. Their costumes were taken for disguises, and as they were swallowed up in the mad throng they were looked on as fellow revellers.

Had Rebecca been alone, she would probably have succeeded in time in working her way out of this unwelcome crowd, but to her amazement, no sooner had they been surrounded by the young roysterers than Phœbe, breaking her long silence, seized her sister by the hand and began laughing, dancing, and running with the best of them. To crown all, what was Rebecca's surprise to hear her sister singing word for word the madcap song of the others, as though she had known these words all her life. She did not even skip those parts that made Rebecca blush.

It was incredible—monstrous—impossible! Phœbe, the sweet, modest, gentle, prudish Phœbe, singing a questionable song in a whirl of roystering Jerusalemites!

Up the broad road they danced—up to the northward, all men making way for them as, with hand-bag and umbrella flying in her left hand, she was dragged forward on an indecorous run by Phœbe, who held her tightly by the right.

On—ever on, past wayside inn and many a lane and garden, house and hedge. Over the stones and ruts, choking in clouds of dust.

Once Rebecca stumbled and a great gawky fellow caught her around the waist to prevent her falling.

"Lips pay forfeit for tripping feet, lass!" he cried, and kissed her with a sounding smack.

Furious and blushing, she swung her hand-bag in a circle and brought it down upon the ravisher's head.

"Take that, you everlastin' rascal, you!" she gasped.

The bumpkin dodged with a laugh and disappeared in the crowd and dust, cuffing, pushing, scuffling, hugging, and kissing quite heedless of small rebuffs.

When they had proceeded thus until Rebecca thought there was nothing left for it but to fall in her tracks and be trampled to death, the whole crowd came suddenly to a halt, and the young men began to erect the May-pole in the midst of a shaded green on one side of the main road.

Rebecca stood, angry and breathless, trying to flick the dust off her bag with her handkerchief, while Phœbe, at her side, her eyes bright and cheeks rosy, showed her pretty teeth in a broad smile of pleasure, the while she tried to restore some order to her hair. As for her hat, that had long ago been lost.

"I declare—I declare to goodness!" panted Rebecca, "ef anybody'd told me ez you, Phœbe Wise, would take on so—so like—like a—a——"

"Like any Zanny's light-o-love," Phœbe broke in, her bosom heaving with the violence of her exercise. "But prithee, sweet, chide me not. From this on shall I be chaste, demure, and sober as an abbess in a play. But oh!—but oh!" she cried, stretching her arms high over her head, "'twas a goodly frolic, sis! I felt a three-centuries' fasting lust for it, in good sooth!"

Rebecca clutched her sister by the arm and shook her.

"Phœbe Wise—Phœbe Wise!" she cried, looking anxiously into her face, "wake up now—wake up! What in the universal airth——"

A loud shout cut her short, and the two sisters turned amazed.

"The bull! The bull!"

There was an opening in the crowd as four men approached leading and driving a huge angry bull, which was secured by a ring in his nose to which ropes were attached. Another man followed, dragged forward by three fierce bull-dogs in a leash.

The bull was quickly tied to a stout post in the street, and the crowd formed a circle closely surrounding the bull-ring. It was the famous bull-ring of Blackman Street in Southwark.

A moment later the dogs were freed, and amid their hoarse baying and growling and the deep roaring of their adversary, the baiting began—the chief sport of high and low in the merry days of good Queen Bess.

The sisters found themselves in the front of the throng surrounding the raging beasts, and, before she knew it, Rebecca saw one of the dogs caught on the horns of the bull and tossed, yelping and bleeding, into the air.

For one moment she stood aghast in the midst of the delighted crowd of shouting onlookers. Then she turned and fiercely elbowed her way outward, followed by her sister.

"Come 'long—come 'long, Phœbe!" she cried. "We'll soon put a stop to this! I'll find the selectmen o' this town an' see ef this cruelty to animals is agoin' on right here in open daylight. I guess the's laws o' some kind here, ef it *is* Bethlehem or Babylon!"

Hot with indignation, the still protesting woman reached the outskirts of the throng and looked about her. Close at hand a tall, swaggering fellow was loafing about. He was dressed in yellow from head to foot, save where his doublet and hose were slashed with dirty red at elbows, shoulders, and hips. A dirty ruff was around his neck, and on his head he wore a great shapeless hat peaked up in front.

"Hey, mister!" cried Rebecca, addressing this worthy. "Can you tell me where I can find one o' the selectmen?"

The stranger paused in his walk and glanced first at Rebecca and then, with evidently increased interest, at Phœbe.

"Selectmen?" he asked. "Who hath selected them, dame?"

He gazed quizzically at the excited woman.

"Now you needn't be funny 'bout it," Rebecca cried, "fer I'm not goin' to take any impidence. You know who I mean by the selectmen jest's well as I do. I'd be obliged to ye ef ye'd tell me the way—an' drop that Bible talk—good every-day English is good enough fer me!"

"In good sooth, dame," he replied, "'tis not every day I hear such English as yours."

He paused a moment in thought. This was May-day—a season of revelry and good-natured practical joking. This woman was evidently quizzing him, so it behooved him to repay her in kind.

"But a truce to quips and quillets, say I," he continued. "'Twill do me much pleasure an your ladyship will follow me to the selectman. As it happens, his honor is even now holding court near London Bridge."

"London Bridge!" gasped Rebecca. "Why, London ain't a Bible country, is it?"

Deigning no notice to a query which he did not understand, the young fellow set off to northward, followed closely by the two women.

"Keep close to him, Phœbe," said Rebecca, warningly. "Ef we should lose the man in all this rabble o' folks we would not find him in a hurry."

"Thou seest, sweet sister," Phœbe replied, "'tis indeed our beloved city of London. Did I not tell thee yon village was Newington, and here we be now in Southwark, close to London Bridge."

Rebecca had forgotten her sister's ailment in the fierce indignation which the bull-baiting had aroused. But now she was brought back

to her own personal fears and aims with a rude shock by the strange language Phœbe held.

She leaped forward eagerly and touched their guide's shoulder.

"Hey, mister!" she exclaimed, "I'd be obliged to ye if ye'd show us the house o' the nearest doctor before we see the selectman."

The man stopped short in the middle of the street, with a cunning leer on his face. The change of purpose supported his belief that a May-day jest was forward.

"Call me plain Jock Dean, mistress," he said. "And now tell me further, wilt have a doctor of laws, of divinity, or of physic. We be in a merry mood and a generous to-day, and will fetch forth bachelors, masters, doctors, proctors, and all degrees from Oxford, Cambridge, or London at a wink's notice. So say your will."

Rebecca would have returned a sharp reply to this banter, but she was very anxious to find a physician for Phœbe, and so thought it best to take a coaxing course.

"What I want's a doctor," she said. "I think my sister's got the shakes or suthin', an' I must take her to the doctor. Now look here—you look like a nice kind of a young man. I know it's some kind of antiques and horribles day 'round here, an' all the folks hes on funny clothes and does nothin' on'y joke a body. But let's drop comical talk jest fer a minute an' get down to sense, eh?"

She spoke pleadingly, and for a moment Jock looked puzzled. He only understood a portion of what she was saying, but he realized that she was in some sort of trouble.

"Why bait the man with silly questions, Rebecca," Phœbe broke in. "A truce to this silly talk of apothecaries. I have no need of surgeons, I. My good fellow," she continued, addressing Jock with an air of condescension that dumfounded her sister, "is not yonder the Southwark pillory?"

"Ay, mistress," he replied, with a grin. "It's there you may see the selectman your serving-maid inquired for."

Rebecca gasped and clinched her hands fiercely on her bag and umbrella.

"Serving-maid!" she cried.

"Ahoy—whoop—room! Yi—ki yi!"

A swarm of small white animals ran wildly past them from behind, and after them came a howling, laughing, scrambling mob that filled the street. Someone had loosed a few score rabbits for the delight of the rabble.

There was no time for reflection. With one accord, Jock and the two women ran with all speed toward the pillory and the bridge, driven forward by the crowd behind them. To have held their ground would have been to risk broken bones at least.

Fortunately the hunted beasts turned sharply to the right and left at the first cross street, and soon the three human fugitives could halt and draw breath.

They found themselves in the outskirts of a crowd surrounding the pillory, and above the heads of those in front they could see a huge red face under a thatch of tousled hair protruding stiffly through a hole in a beam supported at right angles to a vertical post about five feet high. On each side of the head a large and dirty hand hung through an appropriate opening in the beam.

Under the prisoner's head was hung an account of his misdeeds, placed there by some of his cronies. These crimes were in the nature of certain breaches of public decorum and decency, the details of which the bystanders were discussing with relish and good-humor.

"Let's get out o' here," said Rebecca, suddenly, when the purport of what she heard pierced her nineteenth-century understanding. "These folks beat me!"

She turned, grasping Phœbe's arm to enforce her request, but she found that others had crowded in behind them and had hemmed them in. This would not have deterred her but, unaccountably, Phœbe did not seem inclined to move.

"Nay—nay!" she said. "'Tis a wanton wastrel, and he well deserves the pillory. But, Rebecca, I've a mind to see what observance these people will give the varlet. Last time I saw one pilloried, alas! they slew him with shards and paving-stones. This fellow is liker to be pelted with nosegays, methinks."

"Mercy me, Phœbe! Whatever—what—oh, goodness gracious grandmother, child!" Poor Rebecca could find only exclamations wherein to express her feelings. She began to wonder if she were dreaming.

At this moment a sprightly, dashing lad, in ragged clothing and bareheaded, sprang to the platform beside the prisoner and waved his arms for silence.

There were cries of "Hear—hear!" "Look at Baiting Will!" "Ho—ho—bully rook!" "Sh-sh-h!"

After a time the tumult subsided so that Baiting Will could make himself heard. He was evidently a well-known street wag, for his remarks were received with frequent laughter and vocal applause.

"Hear ye—hear ye—all good folk and merry!" he shouted. "Here ye see the liege lord of all May merry-makers. Hail to the King of the May, my bully boys!"

"Ho—ho! All hail!"

"Hurrah—crown him, crown him!"

"The King of the May forever!"

By dint of bawling for silence till he was red in the face, the speaker at length made himself heard again.

"What say ye, my good hearts—shall we have a double coronation? Where's the quean will be his consort? Bring her forward, lads. We'll crown the twain."

This proposal was greeted with a roar of laughter and approval, and a number of slattern women showing the effects of strong ale in their faces stepped boldly forward as competitors for coronation.

But again Baiting Will waved his arms for a chance to speak.

"Nay, my merry lads and lasses," he cried, "it were not meet to wed our gracious lord the king without giving him a chance to choose his queen!"

He leaned his ear close to the grinning head, pretending to listen a moment. Then, standing forward, he cried:

"His gracious and sovereign majesty hath bid me proclaim his choice. He bids ye send him up for queen yon buxom dame in the black doublet and unruffed neck—her wi' the black wand and outland scrip."

He pointed directly at Rebecca. She turned white and started to push her way out of the crowd, but those behind her joined hands, laughing and shouting: "A queen—a queen!"

Two or three stout fellows from just beneath the pillory elbowed their way to her side and grasped her arms.

She struggled and shrieked in affright.

Phœbe with indignant face seized the arm of the man nearest her and pulled lustily to free her sister.

"Stand aside, you knaves!" she cried, hotly. "Know your betters and keep your greasy hands for the sluttish queans of Southwark streets!"

The lads only grinned and tightened their hold. Rebecca was struggling fiercely and in silence, save for an occasional shriek of fear.

Phœbe raised her voice.

"Good people, will ye see a lady tousled by knavish street brawlers! What ho—a rescue—a Burton—a Burton—a rescue—ho!"

Her voice rose high above the coarse laughter and chatter of the crowd.

"What's this? Who calls?"

The crowd parted to right and left with screams and imprecations, and on a sudden two horsemen reined up their steeds beside the sisters.

"Back, ye knaves! Unhand the lady!" cried the younger of the two, striking out with his whip at the heads of Rebecca's captors.

Putting up their hands to ward off these blows, the fellows hastily retreated a few steps, leaving Rebecca and Phœbe standing alone.

"What's here!" cried the young man. "God warn us, an it be not fair Mistress Burton herself!"

He leaped from his horse, and with the bridle in one hand and his high-crowned hat in the other, he advanced, bowing toward the sisters.

He was a strongly built young man of middle height. His smooth face, broad brow, and pleasant eyes were lighted up by a happy smile wherein were shown a set of strong white teeth all too rare in the England of his time. His abundant blond hair was cut short on top, but hung down on each side, curling slightly over his ears. He wore a full-skirted, long-sleeved jerkin secured by a long row of many small buttons down the front. A loose lace collar lay flat over his shoulders and chest. His French hose was black, and from the tops of his riding-boots there protruded an edging of white lace.

He wore a long sword with a plain scabbard and hilt, and on his hands were black gloves, well scented.

Phœbe's face wore a smile of pleased recognition, and she stretched forth her right hand as the cavalier approached.

"You come in good time, Sir Guy!" she said.

"In very sooth, most fair, most mellific damsel, your unworthy servitor was erring enchanted in the paradise of your divine idea when that the horrific alarum did wend its fear-begetting course through the labyrinthine corridors of his auricular sensories."

Phœbe laughed, half in amusement half in soft content. Then she turned to Rebecca, who stood with wide-open eyes and mouth contemplating this strange apparition.

"Be not confounded, sweetheart," she said. "Have I not told thee I have ta'en on another's self. Come—thou art none the less dear, nor I less thine own."

She stepped forward and put her hand gently on her sister's.

Rebecca looked with troubled eyes into Phœbe's face and said, timidly:

"Won't ye go to a doctor's with me, Phœbe?"

There was a rude clatter of hoofs as the elder of the new-comers trotted past the two women and, with his whip drove back the advancing crowd, which had begun to close in upon them again.

"You were best mount and away with the ladies, Sir Guy," he said. "Yon scurvy loons are in poor humor for dalliance."

With a graceful gesture, Sir Guy invited Phœbe to approach his horse. She obeyed, and stepping upon his hand found herself instantly seated before his saddle. She seemed to find the seat familiar, and her heart beat with a pleasure she could scarce explain when, a moment later, the handsome cavalier swung into place behind her and put one arm about her waist to steady her.

Rebecca started forward, terror-stricken.

"Phœbe—Phœbe!" she cried. "Ye wouldn't leave me here!"

"Nay—nay!" said a gruff but kindly voice at her side. "Here, gi'e us your hand, dame, step on my foot, and up behind you go."

Sir Guy's horse was turning to go, and in her panic Rebecca awaited no second bidding, but scrambled quickly though clumsily to a seat behind the serving-man.

They were all four soon free of the crowd and out of danger, thanks to the universal respect for rank and the essential good nature of the May-day gathering.

The horses assumed an easy ambling gait, a sort of single step which was far more comfortable than Rebecca had feared she would find it.

The relief of deliverance from the rude mob behind her gave Rebecca courage, and she gazed about with some interest.

On either side of the street the houses, which hitherto had stood apart with gardens and orchards between them, were now set close together, with the wide eaves of their sharp gables touching over narrow and dark alleyways. The architecture was unlike anything she had ever seen, the walls being built with the beams showing outside and the windows of many small diamond-shaped panes.

They had only proceeded a few yards when Rebecca saw the glint of sunbeams on water before them and found that they were approaching a great square tower, surmounted by numberless poles bearing formless round masses at their ends.

With one arm around her companion to steady herself, she held her umbrella and bag tightly in her free hand. Now she pointed upward with her umbrella and said:

“Do you mind tellin’ me, mister, what’s thet fruit they’re a-dryin’ up on thet meetin’-house?”

The horseman glanced upward for a moment and then replied, with something of wonder in his voice:

“Why, those are men’s heads, dame. Know you not London Bridge and the traitors’ poles yet?”

“Oh, good land!” said the horrified woman, and shut her mouth tightly. Evidently England was not the sort of country she had pictured it.

They rode into a long tunnel under the stones of this massive tower and emerged to find themselves upon the bridge. Again and again did they pass under round-arched tunnels bored, as it were, through

gloomy buildings six or seven stories high. These covered the bridge from end to end, and they swarmed with a squalid humanity, if one might judge from the calls and cries that resounded in the vaulted passageways and interior courts.

As they finally came out from beneath the last great rookery, the sisters found themselves in London, the great and busy city of four hundred thousand inhabitants.

They were on New Fish Street, and their nostrils gave them witness of its name at once. Farther up the slight ascent before them they met other and far worse smells, and Rebecca was disgusted.

"Where are we goin'?" she asked.

"Why, to your mistress' residence, of course."

Rebecca was on the point of objecting to this characterization of her sister, but she thought better of it ere she spoke. After all, if these men had done all this kindness by reason of a mistake, she needed not to correct them.

The street up which they were proceeding opened into Gracechurch Street, leading still up the hill and away from the Thames. It was a fairly broad highway, but totally unpaved, and disgraced by a ditch or "kennel" into which found their way the ill-smelling slops thrown from the windows and doors of the abutting houses.

"Good land o' Goshen!" Rebecca exclaimed at last. "Why in goodness' name does all the folks throw sech messes out in the street?"

"Why, where would you have them throw them, dame?" asked her companion, in surprise. "Are ye outlandish bred that ye put me such questions?"

"Not much!" she retorted, hotly. "It's you folks that's outlandish. Why, where I come from they hev sewers in the city streets an' pavements an' sidewalks an' trolley cars. Guess I've ben to Keene, an' I ought to know."

She tossed her head with the air of one who has said something conclusive.

The man held his peace for a moment, dumfounded. Then he laughed heartily, with head thrown back.

"That's what comes of a kittenish hoyden for a mistress. Abroad too early, dame, and strong ale before sunrise! These have stolen away your wits and made ye hold strange discourse. Sewers—side-walkers forsooth—troll carries, ho—ho!"

Rebecca grew red with fury. She released her hold to thump her companion twice on the arm and nearly fell from the horse in consequence.

"You great rascal!" she cried, indignantly. "How dare ye talk 'bout drinkin' ale! D'you s'pose I'd touch the nasty stuff? Me—a member of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union! Me—a Daughter of Temperance an' wearin' the blue ribbon! You'd ought to be ashamed, that's what you ought!"

But the servant continued to laugh quietly and Rebecca raged within. Oh how she hated to have to sit thus close behind a man who had so insulted her! Clinging to him, too! Clinging for dear life to a man who accused her of drinking ale!

They turned to the left into Leadenhall Street and Bucklesbury, where the two women sniffed with delighted relief the spicy odor of the herbs exposed on every hand for sale. They left Gresham's Royal Exchange on the right, and shortly afterward stopped before the door of one of the many well-to-do houses of that quarter.

Sir Guy and the two women dismounted, and, while the groom held the horses, the others approached the building before which they had paused.

Rebecca was about to address Phœbe, whose blushing face was beaming with pleasure, when the door was suddenly thrown open and a happy-looking buxom woman of advanced middle age appeared.

"Well—well—well!" she cried, holding up her fat hands in mock amazement. "Out upon thee, Polly, for a light-headed wench! What—sneaking out to an early tryst! Fie, girl!"

"Now, good mine aunt," Phœbe broke in, with a smile and a courtsey, "no tryst have I kept, in sooth. Sir Guy is my witness that he found me quite by chance."

"In very truth, good Mistress Goldsmith," said the knight, "it was but the very bounteous guerdon of fair Dame Fortune that in the auspicious forthcoming of my steed I found the inexpressible delectancy of my so great discovery!"

He bowed as he gave back one step and kissed his hand toward Phœbe.

"All one—all one," said Dame Goldsmith, laughing as she held out her hand to Phœbe. "My good man hath a homily prepared for you, mistress, and the substance of it runneth on the folly of early rising on a May-day morning."

Phœbe held forth her hand to the knight, who kissed it with a flourish, hat in hand.

"Shall I hear from thee soon?" she said, in an undertone.

"Forthwith, most fairly beautiful—most gracious rare!" he replied.

Then, leaping on his horse, he dashed down the street at a mad gallop, followed closely by his groom.

Rebecca stood stupefied, gazing first at one and then at the other, till she was rudely brought to her senses by no other than Dame Goldsmith herself.

"What, Rebecca!" she exclaimed. "Hast breakfasted, woman—what?"

"Ay, aunt," Phœbe broke in, hurriedly. "Rebecca must to my chamber to tire me ere I see mine uncle. Prithee temper the fury of his homily, sweet aunt."

Taking the dame's extended hand, she suffered herself to be led within, followed by Rebecca, too amazed to speak.

On entering the street door they found themselves in a large hall, at the farther end of which a bright wood fire was burning, despite the season. A black oak table was on one side of the room against the wall, upon which were to be seen a number of earthen beakers and a great silver jug or tankard. A carved and cushioned settle stood against the opposite wall, and besides two comfortable arm-chairs at the two chimney-corners there were two or three heavy chairs of antique pattern standing here and there. The floor was covered with newly gathered fresh-smelling rushes.

A wide staircase led to the right, and to this Phœbe turned at once as though she had always lived there.

"Hast heard from my father yet?" she asked, pausing upon the first stair and addressing Dame Goldsmith.

"Nay, girl. Not so much as a word. I trow he'll have but little to say to me. Ay—ay—a humorous limb, thy father, lass."

She swept out of the room with a toss of the head, and Phœbe smiled as she turned to climb the stairs. Immediately she turned again and held out one hand to Rebecca.

"Come along, Rebecca. Let's run 'long up," she said, relapsing into her old manner.

She led the way without hesitation to a large, light bedroom, the front of which hung over the street. Here, too, the floor was covered with sweet rushes, a fact which Rebecca seemed to resent.

"Why the lands sakes do you suppose these London folks dump weeds on their floors?" she asked. "An' look there at those two beds, still unmade and all tumbled disgraceful!"

"Why, there's where we slept last night, Rebecca," said Phœbe, laughing as she dropped into a chair. "As for the floors," she continued, "they're always that way when folks ain't mighty rich. The lords and all have carpets and rugs."

Rebecca, stepping very high to avoid stumbling in the rushes, moved over to the dressing-table and proceeded to remove her outer wraps, having first deposited her bag and umbrella on a chair.

"I don't see how in gracious you know so much about it," she remarked, querulously. "'Pon my word, you acted with that young jackanapes an' that fat old lady downstairs jest's ef you'd allus known em."

"Well, so I have," Phœbe replied, smiling. "I knew them all nearly three hundred years before you were born, Rebecca Wise."

Rebecca dropped into a chair and looked helplessly at her sister with her arms hanging at her sides.

"Phœbe Wise—" she began.

"No, not now!" Phœbe exclaimed, stopping her sister with a gesture. "You must call me Mistress Mary. I'm Mary Burton, daughter of Isaac Burton, soon to be Sir Isaac Burton, of Burton Hall. You are my dear old tiring-woman—my sometime nurse—and thou must needs yield me the respect and obedience as well as the love thou owest, thou fond old darling!"

The younger woman threw her arms about the other's neck and kissed her repeatedly.

Rebecca sat mute and impassive, making no return.

"Seems as though I ought to wake up soon now," she muttered, weakly.

"Come, Rebecca," Phœbe exclaimed, briskly, stepping to a high, carved wardrobe beside her bed, "this merry-making habit wearies me. Let us don a fitter attire. Come—lend a hand, dearie—be quick!"

Rebecca sat quite still, watching her sister as she proceeded to change her garments, taking from wardrobe and tiring chest her wide skirts, long-sleeved jacket, and striped under-vest with a promptitude and readiness that showed perfect familiarity with her surroundings.

"There," thought Rebecca, "I have it! She's been reading those old letters and looking at that ivory picture so long she thinks that she's the girl in the picture herself, now. Yes, that's it. Mary Burton was the name!"

When Phœbe was new-dressed, her sister could not but acknowledge inwardly that the queer clothes were mightily becoming. She appeared the beau ideal of a merry, light-hearted, healthy girl from the country.

On one point, however, Rebecca could not refrain from expostulating.

"Look a-here, Phœbe," she said, in a scandalized voice, as she rose and faced her sister, "ain't you goin' to put on somethin' over your chest? That ain't decent the way you've got yerself fixed now!"

"Nonsense!" cried Phœbe, with a mischievous twinkle in her eye. "Wouldst have me cover my breast like a married woman! Look to thine own attire. Come, where hast put it?"

Rebecca put her hands on her hips and looked into her sister's face with a stern determination.

"Ef you think I'm agoin' to put on play-actor clothes an' go round lookin' indecent, Phœbe Wise, why, you're mistaken—'cause I ain't—so there!"

"Nay, nurse!" Phœbe exclaimed, earnestly. "'Tis the costume thou art wearing now that is mummer's weeds. Come, sweet—come! They'll not yield thee admittance below else."

She concluded with a warning inflection, and shook her finger affectionately at her sister.

Rebecca opened her mouth several times and closed it again in despair ere she could find a reply. At length she seated herself slowly, folded her arms, and said:

"They can do jest whatever they please downstairs, Phœbe. As fer me, I'd sooner be seen in my nightgown than in the flighty, flitter-scatter duds the women 'round here wear. Not but you look good

enough in 'em, if you'd cover your chest, but play-actin' is meant for young folks—not fer old maids like me."

"Nay—but——"

"What the lands sakes d'ye holler neigh all the time fer? I'm not agoin' to neigh, an' you might's well make up your mind to't."

Phœbe bit her lips and then, after a moment's hesitation, turned to the door.

"Well, well! E'en have it thy way!" she said.

Followed by Rebecca, the younger woman descended the stairs. As she reached the entrance hall, she stopped short at sight of a tall, heavy man standing beside the table across the room with his face buried in a great stone mug.

He had dropped his flat round hat upon the table, and his long hair fell in a sort of bush to his wide, white-frilled ruff. He wore a long-skirted, loose coat of green cloth with yellow fringe, provided with large side-pockets, but without a belt. The sleeves were loose, but brought in tightly at the wrists by yellow bands. His green hose were of the short and tight French pattern, and he wore red stockings and pointed shoes of Spanish leather.

As he removed the cup with a deep sigh of satisfaction, there was revealed a large, cheerful red face with a hooked nose between bushy brows overhanging large blue eyes.

Phœbe stood upon the lowest stair in smiling silence and with folded hands as he caught her eye.

"Ha, thou jade!" cried Master Goldsmith, for he it was. "Wilt give me the slip of a May-day morn!"

He set down his cup with a loud bang and strode over to the staircase, shaking his finger playfully at his niece.

Rebecca had just time to notice that his long, full beard and mustache were decked with two or three spots of froth when, to her great

indignation, Phœbe was folded in his arms and soundly kissed on both cheeks.

"There, lass!" he chuckled, as he stepped back, rubbing his hands. "I told thy aunt I'd make thee do penance for thy folly."

Phœbe wiped her cheeks with her handkerchief and tipped her head impudently at the cheerful ravisher.

"Now, God mend your manners, uncle!" she exclaimed. "What! Bedew my cheeks with the froth of good ale on your beard while my throat lacks the good body o't! Why, I'm burned up wi' thirst!"

"Good lack!" cried the goldsmith, turning briskly to the table. "Had ye no drink when ye first returned, then?"

He poured a smaller cupful of foaming ale from the great silver jug and brought it to Phœbe.

Rebecca clutched the stair-rail for support, and, with eyes ready to start from her head, she leaned forward, incredulous, as Phœbe took the cup from the merchant's hand.

Then she could keep silence no longer.

"Phœbe Wise!" she screamed, "be you goin' to drink ALE!"

No words can do justice to the awful emphasis which she laid upon that last dread word.

Phœbe turned and looked up roguishly at her sister, who was still half-way up the stairs. The young girl's left hand leaned on her uncle's arm, while with her right she extended the cup in salutation.

"Here's thy good health, nurse—and to our better acquaintance," she laughed.

Rebecca uttered one short scream and fled up to their bed-room. She had seen the impossible. Her sister Phœbe with her face buried in a mug of ale!

CHAPTER VIII

HOW FRANCIS BACON CHEATED THE BAILIFFS

It was at about this time that Copernicus Droop finally awakened. He lay perfectly still for a minute or two, wondering where he was and what had happened. Then he began to mutter to himself.

"Machinery's stopped, so we're on dry land," he said. Then, starting up on one elbow, he listened intently.

Within the air-ship all was perfect silence, but from without there came in faintly occasional symptoms of life—the bark of a dog, a loud laugh, the cry of a child.

Droop slowly came to his feet and gazed about. A faint gleam of daylight found its way past the closed shutters. He raised the blinds and blinked as he gazed out into a perfect thicket of trees and shrubbery, beyond which here and there he thought he could distinguish a high brick wall.

"Well, we're in the country, anyhow!" he muttered.

He turned and consulted the date indicator in the ceiling.

"May 1, 1598," he said. "Great Jonah! but we hev whirled back fer keeps! I s'pose we jest whirled till she broke loose."

He gazed about him and observed that the two state-room doors were open. He walked over and looked in.

"I wonder where them women went," he said. "Seems like they were in a tremendous hurry 'bout gettin' way. Lucky 'tain't a city we're in, 'cause they might'v got lost in the city."

After an attempt to improve his somewhat rumpled exterior, he made his way down the stairs and out into the garden. Once here, he quickly discovered the building which had arrested the attention of the two women, but it being now broad daylight, he was able thoroughly to satisfy himself that chance had brought the Panchronicon into the deserted garden of a deserted mansion.

"Wal, we'll be private an' cosy here till the Panchronicon hez time to store up more force," he said out loud.

Strolling forward, he skirted the high wall, and ere long discovered the very opening through which the sisters had passed at sunrise.

Stepping through the breach, he found himself, as they had done, near the main London highway in Newington village. The hurly-burly of sunrise had abated by this time, for wellnigh all the villagers were absent celebrating the day around their respective May-poles or at bear or bull-baiting.

With his hands behind him, he walked soberly up and down for a few minutes, carefully surveying the pretty wooden houses, the church in the distance, and the stones of the churchyard on the green hill-slope beyond. The architecture was not entirely unfamiliar. He had seen such in books, he felt sure, but he could not positively identify it. Was it Russian, Japanese, or Italian?

Suddenly a distant cry came to his ears.

"Hi—Lizzie—Lizzie, wench! Come, drive the pig out o' the cabbages!"

He stopped short and slapped his thigh.

"English!" he exclaimed. "'Tain't America, that's dead sure. Then it's England. England in 1598," he continued, scratching his head. "Let's see. Who in Sam Hill was runnin' things in 1598? Richard Coor de Lion—Henry Eight—no—or was it Joan of Arc? Be darned ef I know!"

He looked about him again and selected a neighboring house which he thought promised information.

He went to the front door and knocked. There was no reply, despite many attempts to arouse the inmates.

"Might ha' known," he muttered, and started around the house, where he found a side door half hidden beneath the projection of an upper story.

Here his efforts were rewarded at last by the appearance of a very old woman in a peaked hat and coif, apparently on the point of going out.

"Looks like a witch in the story-books," he thought, but his spoken comment was more polite.

"Good-mornin', ma'am," he said. "Would you be so kind as to tell me the name of this town?"

"This be Newington," she replied, in a high, cracked voice.

"Newington," he replied, with a nod and a smile intended to express complete enlightenment. "Ah, yes—Newington. Quite a town!"

"Is that all you'd be askin', young man?" said the old woman, a little suspiciously, eying his strange garb.

"Why, yes—no—that is, can you tell me how far it is to London?" This was the only English city of which he had any knowledge, so he naturally sought to identify his locality by reference to it.

"Lunnun," said the woman. "Oh, it'll be a matter of a mile or better!"

Droop was startled, but highly pleased. Here was luck indeed.

"Thank you, ma'am," he said. "Good-mornin'," and with a cheerful nod, he made off.

The fact is that this information opened up a new field of enterprise and hope. At once there leaped into his mind an improved revival of his original plan. If he could have made a fortune with his great inventions in 1876, what might he not accomplish by the same means in 1598! He pictured to himself the delight of the ancient worthies when they heard the rag-time airs and minstrel jokes produced by his phonograph.

"By hockey!" he exclaimed, in irrepressible delight, "I'll make their gol darned eyes pop out!"

As he marched up and down in the deserted garden, hidden by the friendly brick wall, he bitterly regretted that he had limited himself to so few modern inventions.

"Ef I'd only known I was comin' this fur back!" he exclaimed, as he talked to himself that he might feel less lonely. "Ef I'd only known, I could hev brought a heap of other things jest's well as not. Might hev taught 'em 'bout telegraphin' an' telephones. Could ha' given 'em steam-engines an' parlor matches. By ginger!" he exclaimed, "I b'lieve I've got some parlor matches. Great Jehosaphat! Won't I get rich!"

But at this a new difficulty presented itself to his mind. He foresaw no trouble in procuring patents for his inventions, but how about the capital for their exploitation? Presumably this was quite as necessary here in England as it would have been in America in 1876. Unfortunately, his original plan was impossible of fulfilment. Rebecca had failed him as a capitalist. Besides, she and Phœbe had both completely disappeared.

It was long before he saw his way out of this difficulty, but by dint of persistent pondering he finally lit upon a plan.

He had brought with him a camera, several hundred plates, and a complete developing and printing outfit. He determined to set up as a professional photographer. His living would cost him nothing, as the Panchronicon was well stored with provisions. To judge by his surroundings, his privacy would probably be respected. Then, by setting up as a photographer he would at least earn a small amount of current coin and perhaps attract some rich and powerful backer by the novelty and excellence of his process. On this chance he relied for procuring the capital which was undoubtedly necessary for his purpose.

By noon of the next day he had begun operations, having taken two or three views of familiar scenes in the neighborhood, which he affixed as samples to a large cardboard sign on which he had printed, in large type:

AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHER
THE ONLY ONE IN EXISTENCE

Step up and have your picture taken

This sign he nailed to a tree near the road which he made his headquarters. He preferred to keep the location and nature of his abode a secret, and so spent his days under his tree or sitting in the porch of some neighboring house, for he was not long in making friends, and his marvellous tales made him very popular.

It was difficult for him to fix a price at first, not being acquainted with the coin of the realm, but he put his whole mind to the acquisition of reliable information on this point, and his native shrewdness brought him success.

He found that it was wisest for every reason to let it be believed that the pictures were produced by hand. The camera, he explained, was a mere aid to accuracy of observation and memory in reproduction of what he saw through it. Thus he was able to command much higher prices for the excellence and perfection of his work and, had he but known it, further avoided suspicion of witchcraft which would probably have attached to him had he let it be known that the camera really produced the picture.

In the course of his daily gossip with neighbors and with the customers, rustic and urban, who were attracted by his fame, he soon learned that "Good Queen Bess" ruled the land, and his speech gradually took on a tinge of the Elizabethan manner and vocabulary which, mingling with his native New England idioms, produced a very picturesque effect.

It was a warm night some weeks after Droop had "hung out his shingle" as a professional photographer that he sat in the main room of the Panchronicon, reading for perhaps the twentieth time Phœbe's famous book on Bacon and Shakespeare, which she had left behind. The other books on hand he found too dry, and he whiled away his idle hours with this invaluable historic work, feeling that its tone was in harmony with his recent experiences.

So to-night he was reading with the shutters tightly closed to prevent attracting the gaze of outsiders. No one had yet discovered his residence, and he had flattered himself that it would remain permanently a secret.

His surprise and consternation were great, therefore, when he was suddenly disturbed in his reading by a gentle knocking on the door at the foot of the stairs.

"Great Jonah!" he exclaimed, closing his book and cocking his head to listen. "Now, who—wonder ef it's Cousin Rebecca or Phœbe!"

The knock was repeated.

"Why, 'f course 'tis!" he said. "Couldn't be anybody else. Funny they never come back sooner!"

He laid his book upon the table and started down the stairs just as the knocking was heard for the third time.

"Comin'—comin'!" he cried. "Save the pieces!"

He threw open the door and started back in alarm as there entered a strange man wrapped in a black cloak, which he held so as to completely hide his features.

The new-comer sprang into the little hallway and hastily closed the door behind him.

"Close in the light, friend," he said.

Then, glancing about him, he ascended the stairs and entered the main room above.

Droop followed him closely, rubbing his hand through his hair in perplexity. This intrusion threatened to spoil his plans. It would never do to have the neighbors swarming around the Panchronicon.

The stranger threw off his cloak on entering the upper room and turned to face his host.

"I owe you sincere acknowledgment of thanks, good sir," he said, gravely.

He appeared to be about thirty-five years of age, a man of medium stature, dark of hair and eyes, with a pale, intellectual face and a close-clipped beard. His entire apparel was black, save for his well-starched ruff of moderate depth and the lace ruffles at his wrists.

"Wal, I dunno," Droop retorted. "Marry, an I hed known as thou wast not an acquaintance——"

"You would not have given me admittance?"

The calm, dark eyes gazed with disconcerting steadiness into Droop's face.

"Oh—well—I ain't sayin'——"

"I hope I have not intruded to your hurt or serious confusion, friend," said the stranger, glancing about him. "To tell the very truth, your hospitable shelter hath offered itself in the hour of need."

"What—doth it raineth—eh?"

"Oh, no!"

"What can I do fer ye? Take a seat," said Droop, as the stranger dropped into a chair. "Thou knowest, forsooth, that I don't take photygraphs at night—marry, no!"

"Are you, then, the new limner who makes pictures by aid of the box and glass?"

"Yea—that's what I am," said Droop.

"I was ignorant of the location of your dwelling. Indeed, it is pure accident—a trick of Fortune that hath brought me to your door to-night."

Droop seated himself and directed an interrogative gaze at his visitor.

"My name's Droop—Copernicus Droop," he said. "An' you——"

"My name is Francis Bacon, Master Droop—your servitor," he bowed slightly.

Droop started up stiff and straight in his chair.

"Francis Bacon!" he exclaimed. "What! Not the one as wrote Shakespeare?"

"Shakespeare—Shakespeare!" said the stranger, in a slow, puzzled tone. "I do admit having made some humble essays in writing—certain modest commentaries upon human motives and relations—but, in good sooth, the title you have named, Master Droop, is unknown to me. Shakespeare—Shakespeare. Pray, sir, is it a homily or an essay?"

"Why, ye see, et's—as fur's I know it's a man—a sorter poet or genius or play-writin' man," said Droop, somewhat confused.

"A man—a poet—a genius?" Bacon repeated, gravely. "Then, prithee, friend, how meant you in saying you thought me him who had written Shakespeare? Can a man—a poet—be written?"

"Nay—verily—in good sooth—marry, no!" stuttered Droop. "What they mean is thet 'twas you wrote the things Shakespeare put his name to—you did, didn't you?"

"Ahem!" said the stranger, with dubious slowness. "A poet—a genius, you say? And I understand that I am reputed to have been the true author of—eh?"

"Yes, indeed—yea—la!" exclaimed Droop, now sadly confused.

"Might I ask the name of some work imputed to me, and which this—this Shake—eh——"

"Shakespeare."

"Ay, this Shakespeare hath impudently claimed for his own credit and reputation?"

"Well—why—suffer me—jest wait a minute," said Droop. He clutched the book he had been reading and opened it at random. "Here," he said. "'Love's Labor's Lost,' for instance."

"What!" exclaimed Bacon, starting indignantly to his feet. "'Tis but a sennight I saw this same dull nonsense played by the Lord Chamberlain's players. 'Love's Labor's—" he broke off and repressed his choler with some effort. Then in a slow, grave voice he continued: "Why, sir, you have been sadly abused. Surely the few essays I have made in the field of letters may stand my warrant that I should not so demean myself as is implied in this repute of me. Pray tell me, sir, who are they that so besmirch my reputation as to impute to my poor authority the pitiful lines of this rascal player?"

"Why, in very truth—marry, it's in that book. It was printed in Chicago."

Bacon glanced contemptuously at the volume without deigning to open it.

"And prithee, Master Droop, where may Chicago be?"

"Why it *was* in—no! I mean it will be—oh, darn it all! Chicago's in Illinois."

"Illinois—yes—and Illinois?" Bacon's dark eyes were turned in grave question upon his companion.

"Why, that's in America, ye know."

"Oh!" said Bacon. Then, with a sigh of great relief: "Ah!" he exclaimed.

"Yea, verily—in sooth—or—or thereabouts," said Droop, not knowing what to say.

"Ah, in America! A land of heathen savages—red-skinned hunters of men. Yes—yes! 'Twere not impossible such persons might so misapprehend my powers. 'Twould lie well within their shallow incapacities, methinks, to impute to Francis Bacon, Barrister of Gray's Inn, Member of Parliament for Melcombe, Reversionary Clerk of the Star Chamber, the friend of the Earl of Essex—to impute to me, I say, these frothings of a villain player—this Shake—eh? What?"

"Shakespeare."

"Ay."

Bacon paced placidly up and down for a few moments, while Droop followed him apologetically with his eyes. Evidently this was a most important personage. It behooved him to conciliate such a power as this. Who could tell! Perhaps this friend of the Earl of Essex might be the capitalist for whom he was in search.

For some time Master Bacon paced back and forth in silence, evidently wrapped in his own thoughts. In the meantime Droop's hopes rose higher and higher, and at length he could no longer contain himself.

"Why, Master Bacon," he said, "I'm clean surprised—yea, marry, am I—that anybody could hev ben sech a fool—a—eh? Well, a loon—what?—as to hev said you wrote Shakespeare. You're a man o' science—that's what you are. You don't concern yourself with no trumpery poetry. I can see that stickin' out."

Bacon was startled and examined himself hurriedly.

"What!" he exclaimed, "what is sticking out, friend?"

"Oh, I was jest sayin' it in the sense of the word!" said Droop, apologetically. "What I mean is, it's clear that you're not a triflin' poet, but a man of science—eh?"

"Why, no. I do claim some capacity in the diviner flights of lyric letters, friend. You are not to despise poetry. Nay—rather contemn those who bring scorn to the name of poet—vain writers for filthy pence—fellows like this same Shakespeare."

"Yes—that's what I meant," said Droop, anxious to come to the point. "But your high-water mark is science—philosophy—all that. Now, you're somethin' of a capitalist, too, I surmise."

He paused expectant.

"A what, friend?"

"Why, you're in some Trust er other, ain't ye?—Member of Congress—I mean Parlyment—friend of Lord What's-'is-name—

Clerk of the Star—suthin' or other. Guess you're pretty middlin' rich, ain't ye?"

Bacon's face grew long at these words, and he seated himself in evident melancholy.

"Why, to speak truth, friend," he said, "I find myself at this moment in serious straits. Indeed, 'tis an affair of a debt that hath driven me thus to your door."

"A debt!" said Droop, his heart sinking.

"Ay. The plain truth is, that at this moment I am followed by two bailiffs—bearers of an execution of arrest upon my person. 'Twas to evade these fellows that I entered this deserted garden, leaving my horse without. 'Tis for this cause I am here. Now, Master Droop, you know the whole truth."

"Great Jonah!" said Droop, helplessly. "But didn't you say you had friends?"

"None better, Master Droop. My uncle is Lord Burleigh—Lord High Treasurer to her Gracious Majesty. My patron is the Earl of Essex—"

"Why don't they give ye a lift?"

Bacon's face grew graver.

"Essex is away," he said. "On his return my necessities will be speedily relieved. As for mine uncle, to him have I applied; but his lordship lives in the sunshine of her Majesty's smiles, and he cannot be too sudden in aid of Francis Bacon for fear of losing the Queen's favor else."

"Why so?"

"A long tale of politics, friend. A speech made by me in Parliament in opposing monopolies."

"Oh!" said Droop, dismally. "You're down on monopolies, air ye?"

Bacon turned a wary eye upon his companion.

"Why ask you this?" he said.

"Why, only to—" He paused. "To say sooth," he continued, with sudden resolution, "I want to get a monopoly myself—two or three of 'em. I've got some A1 inventions here, an' I want to get 'em patented. I thought, perhaps, you or your friends might help me."

"Ah!" Bacon exclaimed, with awakening interest. "You seek my influence in furtherance of these designs. Do I apprehend you?"

"That's jest it," said Droop.

"And what would be the—ahem—the recognition which——"

"Why, you'd git a quarter interest in the hull business," said Droop, hopefully. "That is, provided you've got the inflooence, ye know."

"Too slight—too slight for Francis Bacon, Master Droop."

Copernicus thought rapidly for a minute or two. Then he pretended indifference.

"Oh, very good!" he said. "I'll take up with Sir Thomas Thingumbob—What's-'is-name."

Bacon pretended to accept the decision and changed the subject.

"Now permit me to approach the theme of my immediate need," he said. "These bailiffs without—they must be evaded. May I have your assistance, friend, in this matter?"

"Why—what can I do?"

"Pray observe me with all attention," Bacon began. "These my habiliments are of the latest fashion and of rich texture. Your habit is, if I may so speak, of inferior fashion and substance. I will exchange my habit for yours on this condition—that you mount my horse forthwith and ride away. The moon is bright and you will be pursued at once by these scurvy bailiffs. Lead them astray, Master Droop, to the southward, whilst I slip away to London in your attire, wherein I feel sure no man will recognize me. Once in London, there is a friend of mine—one Master Isaac Burton—who is hourly

expected and from whom I count upon having some advances to stand me in present stead. What say you? Will you accept new clothing and rich—for old and worn?"

Droop approached his visitor and slowly examined his clothing, gravely feeling the stuff between thumb and finger and even putting his hand inside the doublet to feel the lining. Bacon's outraged dignity struggled within him with the sense of his necessity. Finally, just as he was about to give violent expression to his impatience, Droop stepped back and took in the general effect with one eye closed and his head cocked on one side.

"Jest turn round, will ye?" he said, with a whirling movement of the hand, "an' let me see how it looks in the back?"

Biting his lips, the furious barrister turned about and walked away.

"Needs must where the devil drives," he muttered.

Droop shook his head dismally.

"Marry, come up!" he exclaimed. "I guess I can't make the bargain, friend Bacon."

"But why?"

"I don't like the cut o' them clothes. I'd look rideec'lous in 'em. Besides, the's too much risk in it, Bacon, my boy," he said, familiarly, throwing himself into the arm-chair and stretching out his legs comfortably. "Ef the knaves was to catch me an' find out the trick I'd played 'em, why, sure as a gun, they'd put me in the lock-up an' try me fer stealin' your duds—your habiliments."

"Nay, then," Bacon exclaimed, eagerly, "I'll give you a writing, Master Droop, certifying that the clothes were sold to you for a consideration. That will hold you blameless. What say you?"

"What about the horse and the saddle and bridle?"

"These are borrowed from a friend, Master Droop," said Bacon. "These rascals know this, else had they seized them in execution."

"Ah, but won't they seize your clothes, Brother Bacon?" said Droop, slyly.

"Nay—that were unlawful. A man's attire is free from process of execution."

"I'll tell ye wherein I'll go ye," said Droop, with sudden animation. "You give me that certificate, that bill of sale, you mentioned, and also a first-class letter to some lord or political chap with a pull at the Patent Office, an' I'll change clothes with ye an' fool them bailiff chaps."

"I'll e'en take your former offer, then," said Bacon, with a sigh. "One fourth part of all profits was the proposal, was it not?"

"Oh, that's all off!" said Droop, grandly, with a wave of the hand. "If I go out an' risk my neck in them skin-tight duds o' yourn, I get the hull profits an' you get to London safe an' sound in these New Hampshire pants."

"But, good sir——"

"Take it or leave it, friend."

"Well," said Bacon, angrily, after a few moments' hesitation, "have your will. Give me ink, pen, and paper."

These being produced, the barrister curiously examined the wooden penholder and steel pen.

"Why, Master Droop," he said, "from what unknown bird have you plucked forth this feather?"

"Feather!" Droop exclaimed. "What feather?"

"Why this?" Bacon held up the pen and holder.

"That ain't a feather. It's a pen-holder an' a steel pen, man. Say!" he exclaimed, leaning forward suddenly. "Ye hain't ben drinkin', hev ye?"

To this Bacon only replied by a dignified stare and turned in silence to the table.

"Which you agoin' to write first," said Droop, considerately dropping the question he had raised.

"The bill of sale."

"All right. I'd like to have ye put the one about the patent real strong. I don't want to fail on the fust try, you know."

Bacon made no reply, but dipped his pen and set to work. In due time the two documents were indited and carefully signed.

"This letter is addressed to my uncle, Lord Burleigh," said Bacon. "He is at the Palace at Greenwich, with the Queen."

"Shall I hev to take it to him myself?"

"Assuredly."

"Might hev trouble findin' him, I should think," said Droop.

"Mayhap. On more thought, 'twere better you had a guide. I know a worthy gentleman—one of the Queen's harbingers. Take you this letter to him, for which purpose I will e'en leave it unsealed that he may read it. He will conduct you to mine uncle, for he hath free access to the court."

"What's his name?"

"Sir Percevall Hart. His is the demesne with the high tower of burnt bricks, near the west end of Tower Street. But stay! 'Twere better you did seek him at the Boar's Head Tavern in Eastcheap."

"Sir Percevall Hart—Boar's Head—Eastcheap. That's in London City, I s'pose."

"Yes—yes," said Bacon, impatiently. "Any watchman or passer-by will direct you. Now, sir, 'tis for you to fulfil your promise."

"All right," said Droop. "It's my innin's—so here goes."

In a few minutes the two men had changed their costumes and stood looking at each other with a very evident disrelish of their respective situations.

Droop held his chin high in the air to avoid contact with the stiff ruff, while his companion turned up the collar of his nineteenth-century coat and held it together in front as though he feared taking cold.

"Why, Master Droop," said Bacon, glancing down in surprise at his friend's nether extremities, "what giveth that unwonted spiral look to your legs? They be ribbed as with grievous weals."

Droop tried to look down, but his wide ruff prevented him. So he put one foot on the table and, bringing his leg to the horizontal, gazed dismally down upon it.

"Gosh all hemlock—them's my underdrawers!" he exclaimed. "These here ding-busted long socks o' yourn air so all-fired tight the blamed drawers hez hiked up in ridges all round! Makes me look like a bunch o' bananas in a bag!" he said, crossly.

"Well—well—a truce to trivial complaints," said Bacon, hurriedly, fearful that Droop might withdraw his consent to the rescue. "Here are my cloak and hat, friend; and now away, I pray you, and remember—ride to southward, that I may have a clear field to London."

Droop donned the hat and cloak and gazed at himself sorrowfully in the glass.

"Darned ef I don't look like a cross 'tween a Filipino and a crazy cowboy!" he muttered.

"And think you I have not suffered in the exchange, Master Droop?" said Bacon, reproachfully. "In very truth, I were not worse found had I shrunken one half within mine own doublet!"

After some further urging, Droop was induced to descend the stairs, and soon the two men stood together at the breach in the brick wall. They heard the low whinnying of a horse close at hand.

"That is my steed," Bacon whispered. "You must mount with instant speed and away with all haste to the south, Master Droop."

"D'ye think I won't split these darned pants and tight socks?" said Droop.

"Hush, friend, hush!" Bacon exclaimed. "The bailiffs must not know we are here till they see you mount and away. Nay—nay—fear not. The hose and stockings will hold right securely, I warrant you."

"Well, so long!" said Droop, and the next moment he was in the saddle. "G'lang there! Geet ap!" he shouted, slapping the horse's neck with his bridle.

With a snort of surprise, the horse plunged forward dashing across the moonlit field. A moment later, Bacon saw two other horses leap forward in pursuit from the dark cover of a neighboring grove.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "The lure hath taken!"

Then leaning over he rubbed his shins ruefully.

"How the night wind doth ascend within this barbarous hose!" he grumbled.

CHAPTER IX

PHŒBE AT THE PEACOCK INN

While Copernicus Droop was acquiring fame and fortune as a photographer, Rebecca and Phœbe were leading a quiet life in the city.

Phœbe was perfectly happy. For her this was the natural continuation of a visit which her father, Isaac Burton, had very unwillingly permitted her to pay to her dead mother's sister, Dame Goldsmith. She was very fond of both her aunt and uncle, and they petted and indulged her in every possible way.

Her chief source of happiness lay in the fact that the Goldsmiths favored the suit of Sir Guy Fenton, with whom she found herself deeply in love from the moment when he had so opportunely arrived to rescue the sisters from the rude horse-play of the Southwark mob.

Poor Rebecca, on the other hand, found herself in a most unpleasant predicament. She had shut herself up in her room on the first day of her arrival on discovering that her new hosts were ale drinkers, and she had insisted upon perpetuating this imprisonment when she had discovered that she would only be accepted on the footing of a servant.

Phœbe, who remembered Rebecca both as her nineteenth-century sister and as her sixteenth-century nurse and tiring-woman, thought this determination the best compromise under the circumstances, and explained to her aunt that Rebecca was subject to recurring fits of delusion, and that it was necessary at such times to humor her in all things.

On the very day of the visit of Francis Bacon to the Panchronicon, the two sisters were sitting together in their bed-room. Rebecca was at her knitting by the window and Phœbe was rereading a letter for the twentieth time, smiling now and then as she read.

"'Pears to amuse ye some," said Rebecca, dryly, looking into her sister's rosy face. "How'd it come? I ain't seen the postman sence we've ben here. Seems to me they ain't up to Keene here in London. We hed a postman twice a day at Cousin Jane's house."

"No, 'twas the flesher's lad brought it," said Phœbe.

Rebecca grunted crossly.

"I wish the land sake ye'd say 'butcher' when ye mean butcher, Phœbe," she said.

"Well, the butcher's boy, then, Miss Particular!" said Phœbe, saucily.

Rebecca's face brightened.

"My! It does sound good to hear ye talk good Yankee talk, Phœbe," she said. "Ye hevn't dropped yer play-actin' lingo fer days and days."

"Oh, 'tis over hard to remember, sis!" said Phœbe, carelessly. "But tell me, would it be unmaidenly, think you, were I to grant Sir Guy a private meeting—without the house?"

"Which means would I think ye was wrong to spark with that high-falutin man out o' doors, eh?"

"Yes—say it so an thou wilt," said Phœbe, shyly.

"Why, ef you're goin' to keep comp'ny with him 'tall, I sh'd think ye'd go off with him by yerself. Thet's the way sensible folks do—at least, I b'lieve so," she added, blushing.

"Aunt Martha hath given me free permission to see Sir Guy when I will," Phœbe continued. "But she hath been full circumspect, and ever keepeth within ear-shot."

"Humph!" snapped Rebecca. "Y'ain't got any Aunt Martha's fur's I know, but ef ye mean that fat, beer-drinkin' woman downstairs, why, 'tain't any of her concern, an' I'd tell her so, too."

Phœbe twirled her letter between her fingers and gazed pensively smiling out of the window. There was a long pause, which was finally broken by Rebecca.

"What's the letter 'bout, anyway?" she said. "Is it from the guy?"

"You mean Sir Guy," said Phœbe, in injured tones.

"Oh, well, sir or ma'am! Did he write it?"

"Why, truth to tell," said Phœbe, slipping the note into her bosom, "'Tis but one of the letters I read to thee from yon carved box, Rebecca."

"My sakes—that!" cried her sister. "How'd the butcher's boy find it? You don't s'pose he stole it out o' the Panchronicle, do ye?"

"Lord warrant us, sis, no! 'Twas writ this very day. What o'clock is it?"

She ran to the window and looked down the street toward the clock on the Royal Exchange.

"Three i' the afternoon," she muttered. "The time is short. Shall I? Shall I not?"

"Talkin' o' letters," said Rebecca, suddenly, "I wish'd you take one down to the Post-Office fer me, Phœbe." She rose and went to a drawer in the dressing-table. "Here's one 't I wrote to Cousin Jane in Keene. I thought she might be worried about where we'd got to, an' so I've written an' told her we're in London."

"The Post-Office—" Phœbe began, laughingly. Then she checked herself. Why undeceive her sister? Here was the excuse she had been seeking.

"Yes; an' I told her more'n that," Rebecca continued. "I told her that jest's soon as the Panchronicle hed got rested and got its breath, we'd set off quick fer home—you an' me. Thet's so, ain't it, Phœbe?" she concluded, with plaintive anxiety in her voice.

"I'll take the letter right along," said Phœbe, with sudden determination.

But Rebecca would not at once relax her hold on the envelope.

"That's so, ain't it, dearie?" she insisted. "Won't we make fer home as soon's we can?"

"Sis," said Phœbe, gravely, "an I be not deeply in error, thou art right. Now give me the letter."

Rebecca relinquished the paper with a sigh of relief, then looked up in surprise at Phœbe, who was laughing aloud.

"Why, here's a five-cent stamp, as I live!" she cried. "Where did it come from?"

"I hed it in my satchel," said Rebecca. "Ain't that the right postage?"

"Yes—yes," said Phœbe, still laughing. "And now for the Post-Office!"

She donned her coif and high-crowned hat with silver braid, and leaned over Rebecca, who had seated herself, to give her a good-by kiss.

"Great sakes!" exclaimed Rebecca, as she received the unaccustomed greeting. "You do look fer all the world like one o' the Salem witches in Peter Parley's history, Phœbe."

With a light foot and a lighter heart for all its beating, Phœbe ran down the street unperceived from the house.

"Bishopsgate!" she sang under her breath. "The missive named Bishopsgate. He'll meet me within the grove outside the city wall."

Her feet seemed to know the way, which was not over long, and she arrived without mishap at the gate.

Here she was amazed to see two elderly men, evidently merchants, for they were dressed much like her uncle the goldsmith, approach two gayly dressed gentlemen and, stopping them on the street,

proceed to measure their swords and the width of their extravagant ruffs with two yardsticks.

The four were so preoccupied with this ceremony that she slipped past them without attracting the disagreeable attention she might otherwise have received.

As she passed, the beruffled gentlemen were laughing, and she heard one of them say:

"God buy you, friends, our ruffs and bilbos have had careful measurement, I warrant you."

"Right careful, in sooth," said one of those with the yardsticks. "They come within a hair's breadth of her Majesty's prohibition."

Phœbe had scant time for wonder at this, for she saw in a grove not a hundred yards beyond the gate the trappings of a horse, and near by what seemed a human figure, motionless, under a tree.

Making a circuit before entering the grove, she came up behind the waiting figure, far enough within the grove to be quite invisible from the highway.

She hesitated for some time ere she felt certain that it was indeed Sir Guy who stood before her. He was dressed in the extreme of fashion, and she fancied that she could smell the perfumes he wore, as they were borne on the soft breeze blowing toward her.

His hair fell in curls on either side from beneath a splendid murrey French hat, the crown of which was wound about with a gold cable, the brim being heavy with gold twist and spangles. His flat soft ruff, composed of many layers of lace, hung over a thick blue satin doublet, slashed with rose-colored taffeta and embroidered with pearls, the front of which was brought to a point hanging over the front of his hose in what was known as a peascod shape. The tight French hose was also of blue satin, vertically slashed with rose. His riding-boots were of soft brown Spanish leather and his stockings of pearl-gray silk. A pearl-gray mantle lined with rose-colored taffeta was fastened at the neck, under the ruff, and fell in elegant folds over

his left arm, half concealing the hand resting upon the richly jewelled hilt of a sword whose scabbard was of black velvet.

"God ild us!" Phœbe exclaimed in low tones. "What foppery have we here!"

Then, slipping behind a tree, she clapped her hands.

Guy turned his head and gazed about in wonder, for no one was visible. Phœbe puckered her lips and whistled softly twice. Then, as her lover darted forward in redoubled amazement, she stepped into view, and smiled demurely upon him with hands folded before her.

The young knight leaped forward, and, dropping on one knee, carried her hand rapturously to his lips.

"Now sink the orbed sun!" he exclaimed. "For behold a fairer cometh, whose love-darting eyes do slay the night, rendering bright day eternate!"

Smiling roguishly down into his face, Phœbe shook her head and replied:

"You are full of pretty phrases. Have you not been acquainted with goldsmiths' wives, and conned them out of rings?"

For an instant the young man was disconcerted. Then rising, he said:

"Nay, from the rings regardant of thine eyes I learned my speech. What are golden rings to these?"

"Why, how much better is thy speech when it ringeth true," said Phœbe. "Thy speech of greeting was conned with much pains from the cold book of prior calculation, and so I answered you from a poet's play. I would you loved me!"

"Loved thee, oh, divine enchantress—too cruel-lovely captress of my dole-breathing heart!"

"Tut—tut—tut!" she broke in, stamping her foot. "Thou dost it badly, Sir Guy. A truce to Euphuistic word-coining and phrase-shifting! Wilt show thy love—in all sadness, say!"

"In any way—or sad or gay!"

"Then prithee, good knight, stand on thy head by yonder tree."

The cavalier stepped back and gazed into his lady's face as though he thought her mad.

"Stand—on—my—head!" he exclaimed, slowly.

Phœbe laughed merrily and clapped her hands.

"Good my persuasion!" she rippled. "See how thou art shaken into thyself, man. What! No phrase of lackadaisical rapture! Why, I looked to see thee invert thine incorporate satin in an airy rhapsody—upheld and kept unruffled by some fantastical twist of thine imagination. Oh, Fancy—Fancy! Couldst not e'en sustain thy knight cap-à-pie!" and she laughed the harder as she saw her lover's face grow longer and longer.

"Why, mistress," he began, soberly, "these quips and jests ill become a lover's tryst, methinks——"

"As ill as paint and scent and ear-rings—as foppish attire and fantastical phrases do become an honest lover," said Phœbe, indignantly. "Dost think that Mary Burton prizes these weary labyrinthine sentences—all hay and wool, like the monstrous swelling of trunk hose? Far better can I read in Master Lilly's books. Thinkest thou I came hither to smell civet? Nay—I love better the honest odor of cabbages in mine aunt's kitchen! And all this finery—this lace—this satin and this pearl embroidery——"

"In God His name!" the knight broke in, stamping his foot. "Dost take me for a little half-weaned knave, that I'll learn how to dress me of a woman? An you like not my speech, mistress——"

Phœbe cut him short, putting her hand on his mouth.

Then she leaned her shoulder against a tree, and looking up saucily into his face:

"Now, don't get mad!" she said.

"Mad—mad!" said Sir Guy, with a puzzled look. "An this be madness, mistress, then is her Majesty's whole court a madhouse."

"Well, young man," Phœbe replied, with her prim New England manner, "if you want to marry me, you'll have to come and live in a country where they don't have queens, and you'll work in your shirt-sleeves like an honest man. You might just's well understand that first as last."

The knight moved back a step, with an injured expression on his face.

"Nay, then," he said, "an thou mock me with uncouth phrases, Mary, I'd best be going."

"Perhaps you'd better, Guy."

With a reproachful glance, but holding his head proudly, the young man mounted his horse.

"He hath a noble air on horseback," Phœbe said to herself, and she smiled.

The young man saw the smile and took courage.

He urged his horse forward to her side.

"Mary!" he exclaimed, tenderly.

"Fare thee well!" she replied, coolly, and turned her back.

He bit his lip, clinched his hand, and without another word, struck fiercely with his spurs. With a snort of pain, the horse bounded forward, and Phœbe found herself alone in the grove.

She gazed wistfully after the horseman and clasped her hands in silence for a few moments. Then, at thought of the letter she knew he was soon to write—the letter she had often seen in the carved box—she smiled again and, patting her skirts, stepped forth merrily from the edge of the grove.

"After all, 'twill teach the silly lad better manners!" she said.

Scarcely had she reached the highway again when she heard a man's voice calling in hearty tones.

"Well met, Mistress Mary! I looked well to find you near—for I take it 'twas Sir Guy passed me a minute gone, spurring as 'twere a shame to see."

She looked up and saw a stout, middle-aged countryman on horseback, holding a folded paper in his hand.

"Oh, 'tis thou, Gregory!" she said, coolly. "Mend thy manners, man, and keep thy place."

The man grinned.

"For my place, Mistress Mary," he said, "I doubt you know not where your place be."

She looked up with a frown of angry surprise.

"Up here behind me on young Bess," he grinned. "See, here's your father's letter, mistress."

She took the paper with one hand while with the other she patted the soft nose of the mare, who was bending her head around to find her mistress.

"Good Bess—good old mare!" she said, gently, gazing pensively at the letter.

How well she knew every wrinkle in that paper, every curve in the clumsy superscription. Full well she knew its contents, too; for had she not read this very note to Copernicus Droop at the North Pole? However, partly that he might not be set to asking questions, partly in curiosity, she unfolded the paper.

"DEAR POLL"—it began—"I'm starting behind the grays for London on my way to be knighted by her Majesty. I send this ahead by Gregory on Bess, she being fast enow for my purpose, which is to get thee out of the clutches of that ungodly aunt of thine. I know her tricks, and I learn how she hath suffered that damned milk-and-water popinjay to come courting my Poll. So see you follow Gregory,

mistress, and without wait or parley come with him to the Peacock Inn, where I lie to-night.

"The grays are in fine fettle, and thy black mare grows too fat for want of exercise. Thy mother-in-law commands thy instant return with Gregory, having much business forward with preparing gowns and fal lals against our presentation to her Majesty.—Thy father, Isaac Burton, of Burton Hall.

"Thy mother thinks thou wilt make better speed if I make thee to know that the players thou wottest of are to stop at the Peacock Inn and will be giving some sport there."

"The players!" she exclaimed, eagerly. "Be these the Lord Chamberlain's men?" she asked. "Is there not among them one Will Shakespeare, Gregory? What play give they to-night?"

"All one to me, mistress," said Gregory, slowly dismounting. "There be players at the Peacock, for the kitchen wench told me of them as I stopped there for a pint; but be they the Lord Chamberlain's or the Queen's, I cannot tell."

"Do they play at the Shoreditch Theatre or at the inn, good Gregory?"

"I' faith I know not, mistress," he replied, bracing his brawny right hand, palm up, at his knee.

Mechanically she put one foot into his palm and sprang lightly upon the pillion behind the groom's saddle.

As they turned and started at a jog trot northward, she remembered her sister and her new-found aunt.

"Hold—hold, Gregory!" she cried. "What of Rebecca? What of my aunt—my gowns?"

"I am to send an ostler from the Peacock for your nurse and clothing, mistress," said Gregory. "My orders was not to wait for aught, but bring you back instant quickly wheresoever I found you." After a pause he went on with a grin: "I doubt I came late, hows'ever. Sir Guy hath had his say, I'm thinkin'!" and he chuckled audibly.

"Now you mind your own business, Gregory!" said Phœbe, sharply.

His face fell, and during the rest of their ride he maintained a rigid silence.

The next morning found Phœbe sitting in her room in the Peacock Inn, silently meditating in an effort to establish order in the chaos of her mind. Her hands lay passively in her lap, and between her192] fingers was an open sheet of paper whose crisp folds showed it to be a letter.

Daily contact with the people, customs, dress, and tongue of Elizabethan England was fast giving to her memories of the nineteenth century the dim seeming of a dream. As she came successively into contact with each new-old acquaintance, he took his place in her heart and mind full grown—completely equipped with all the associations, loves, and antipathies of long familiarity.

Gregory had brought her to the inn the night before, and here she had received the boisterous welcome of old Isaac Burton and the cooler greeting of his dame, her step-mother. They took their places in her heart, and she was not surprised to find it by no means a high one. The old lady was overbearing and far from loving toward Mistress Mary, as Phœbe began to call herself. As for Isaac Burton, he seemed quite subject to his wife's will, and Phœbe found herself greatly estranged from him.

That first afternoon, however, had transported her into a paradise the joys of which even Dame Burton could not spoil.

Sitting in one of the exterior galleries overlooking the courtyard of the inn, Phœbe had witnessed a play given on a rough staging erected in the open air.

The play was "The Merchant of Venice," and who can tell the thrills that tingled through Phœbe's frame as, with dry lips and a beating heart, she gazed down upon Shylock. Behind that great false beard was the face of England's mightiest poet. That wig concealed the noble forehead so revered by high and low in the home she had left behind.

She was Phœbe Wise, and only Phœbe, that afternoon, enjoying to the full the privilege which chance had thrown in her way. And now, the morning after, she went over it all again in memory. She rehearsed mentally every gesture and intonation of the poet-actor, upon whom alone she had riveted her attention throughout the play, following him in thought, even when he was not on the stage.

Sitting there in her room, she smiled as she remembered with what a start of surprise she had recognized one among the groundlings in front of the stage after the performance. It was Sir Guy, very plainly dressed and gazing fixedly upon her. Doubtless he had been there during the entire play, waiting in vain for one sign of recognition. But Shylock had held her spellbound, and even for her lover she had been blind.

She felt a little touch of pity and compunction as she remembered these things, and suddenly she lifted to her lips the letter she was holding.

"Poor boy!" she murmured. Then, shaking her head with a smile: "I wonder how his letter found my room!" she said.

She rose, and, going to the window where the light was stronger, flattened out the missive and read it again:

"MY DEAR, DEAR MARY—dear to me ever, e'en in thy displeasure—have I fallen, then, so low in thy sight! May I not be forgiven, sweet girl, or shall I ever stand as I have this day, gazing upward in vain for the dear glance my fault hath forfeited?

"In sober truth, dear heart, I hate myself for what I was. What a sad mummery of lisping nothings was my speech—and what a vanity was my attire! Thou wast right, Mary, but oh! with what a ruthless hand didst thou tear the veil from mine eyes! I have seen my fault and will amend it, but oh! tell me it was thy love and not thine anger that hath prompted thee. And yet—why didst thou avert thine eyes from me this even? Sweet—speak but a word—write but a line—give some assurance, dear, of pardon to him who is forever thine in the bonds of love."

She folded the letter slowly and slipped it into the bosom of her dress with a smile on her lips and a far-away look in her eyes. She had known this letter almost by heart before she received it. Had it not been one of her New England collection? Foreknowledge of it had emboldened her to rebuke her lover when she met him by the Bishopsgate—and yet—it had been a surprise and a sweet novelty to her when she had found it on her dressing-table the night before.

At length she turned slowly from the window and said softly:

"Guy's a good fellow, and I'm a lucky girl!"

There was a quick thumping of heavy feet on the landing, and a moment later a young country girl entered. It was Betty, one of the serving girls whom Dame Burton had brought with her to London.

The lass dropped a clumsy courtesy, and said:

"Mistress bade me tell ye, Miss Mary, she would fain have ye wait on her at once. She's in the inn parlor." Then, after a pause: "Sure she hath matter of moment for ye, I warrant, or she'd not look so solemn satisfied."

Phœbe was strongly tempted to decline this peremptory invitation, but curiosity threw its weight into the balance with complaisance, and with a dignified lift of the chin she turned to the door.

"Show the way, Betty," she said.

Through several long corridors full of perplexing turns and varied by many a little flight of steps, the two young women made their way to the principal parlor of the inn, where they found Mistress Burton standing expectantly before a slow log fire.

Phœbe's worthy step-mother was a dame of middle age, ruddy, black-haired, and stout. Her loud voice and sudden movements betrayed a great fund of a certain coarse energy, and, as her step-daughter now entered the parlor, she was fanning her flushed face with an open letter. Her expression was one of triumph only half-concealed by ill-assumed commiseration.

"Aha, lass!" she cried, as she caught sight of Phœbe, "art here, then? Here are news in sooth—news for—" She broke off and turned sharply upon Betty, who stood by the door with mouth and ears wide open.

"Leave the room, Betty!" she exclaimed. "Am I to have every lazy jade in London prying and eavesdropping? Trot—look alive!"

She strode toward the reluctant maid and, with a good-natured push, hastened her exit. Then, closing the door, she turned again toward Phœbe, who had seated herself by the fire.

"Well, Polly," she resumed, "art still bent on thy foppish lover, lass? Not mended since yesternight—what?"

A cool slow inclination of Phœbe's head was the sole response.

"Out and alas!" the dame continued, tossing her head with mingled pique and triumph. "'Tis a sad day for thee and thine, then! This Sir Guy of thine is as good as dead, girl! Thy popinjay is a traitor, and his crimes have found him out!"

"A traitor!"

Phœbe stood erect with one hand on her heart.

Dame Burton repressed a smile and continued with a slow shake of the head:

"Ay, girl; a traitor to her blessed Majesty the Queen. His brother hath been discovered in traitorous correspondence with the rebel O'Neill, and is on his way to the Tower. Sir Guy's arrest hath been ordered, and the two brothers will lose their heads together."

Very pale, Phœbe stood with hands tight clasped before her.

"Where have you learned this, mother?" she said.

"Where but here!" the dame replied, shaking the open sheet she held in her hand. "Thy Cousin Percy, secretary to my good Lord Burleigh, he hath despatched me this writing here, which good Master Portman did read to me but now."

"Let me see it."

As Phœbe read the confirmation of her step-mother's ill news, she tried to persuade herself that it was but the fabrication of a jealous rival, for this Percy was also an aspirant to her hand. But it proved too circumstantial to admit of this construction, and her first fears were confirmed.

"Ye see," said Dame Burton, as she received the note again, "the provost guard is on the lad's track, and with a warrant. I told thee thy wilful ways would lead but to sorrow, Poll!"

Phœbe heard only the first sentence of this speech. Her mind was possessed by one idea. She must warn her lover. Mechanically she turned away, forgetful of her companion, and passing through the door with ever quicker steps, left her step-mother gazing after her in speechless indignation.

Phœbe's movements were of necessity aimless at first. Ignorant of Sir Guy's present abiding-place, knowing of no one who could reach him, she wandered blindly forward, up one hall and down another without a distinct immediate plan and mentally paralyzed with dread.

The sick pain of fear—the longing to reach her lover's side—these were the first disturbers of her peace since her return into this strange yet familiar life of the past. Now for the first time she was learning how vital was the hold of a sincere and deep love. The thought of harm to him—the fear of losing him—these swept her being clear of all small coquetries and maiden wiles, leaving room only for the strong, true, sensitive love of an anxious woman. Over and over again she whispered as she walked:

"Oh, Guy—Guy! Where shall I find you? What shall I do!"

She had wandered long through the mazes of the quaint old caravansary ere she found an exit. At length she turned a sharp corner and found herself at the top of a short flight of steps leading to a door which opened upon the main outer court. At that moment a new thought leaped into her mind and she stopped abruptly, a rush of warm color mantling on her cheeks.

Then, with a sigh of content, she sank down upon the top step of the flight she had reached and gently shook her head, smiling.

"Too much Mary Burton, Miss Phœbe!" she murmured.

She had recollected her precious box of letters. Of these there was one which made it entirely clear that Mary Burton and her lover were destined to escape this peril; for it was written from him to her after their flight from England. All her fears fell away, and she was left free to taste the sweetness of the new revelation without the bitterness in which that revelation had had its source.

Very dear to Phœbe in after life was the memory of the few moments which followed. With her mind free from every apprehension, she leaned her shoulder to the wall and turned her inward sight in charmed contemplation upon the new treasure her heart had found.

How small, how trifling appeared what she had until then called her love! Her new-found depth and height of tender devotion even frightened her a little, and she forced a little laugh to avert the tears.

Through the open door her eyes registered in memory the casual movements without, while her consciousness was occupied only with her soul's experience. But soon this period of blissful inaction was sharply terminated. Her still watching eyes brought her a message so incongruous with her immediate surroundings as to shake her out of her waking dream. She became suddenly conscious of a nineteenth-century intruder amid her almost medieval surroundings.

All attention now, she sat quickly upright and looked out again. Yes—there could be no mistake—Copernicus Droop had passed the door and was approaching the principal entrance of the inn on the other side of the courtyard.

Phœbe ran quickly to the door and, protecting her eyes with one hand from the flood of brilliant sunlight, she called eagerly after the retreating figure.

"Mr. Droop—Mr. Droop!"

The figure turned just as Phœbe became conscious of a small crowd of street loafers who had thronged curiously about the courtyard entrance, staring at the new-comer's outlandish garb. She saw the grinning faces turn toward her at sound of her voice, and she shrank back into the hallway to evade their gaze.

The man to whom she had called re-crossed the courtyard with eager steps. There was something strange in his gait and carriage, but the strong sunlight behind him made his image indistinct, and besides, Phœbe was accustomed to eccentricities on the part of this somewhat disreputable acquaintance.

Her astonishment was therefore complete when, on removing his hat as he entered the hallway, this man in New England attire proved to be a complete stranger.

Evidently the gentleman had suffered much from the rudeness of his unwelcome followers, for his face was flushed and his manner constrained and nervous. Bowing slightly, he stood erect just within the door.

"Did you do me the honor of a summons, mistress?" said he.

The look of amazement on Phœbe's face made him bite his lips with increase of annoyance, for he saw in her emotion only renewed evidence of the ridicule to which he had subjected himself.

"I—I crave pardon!" Phœbe stammered. "I fear I took you for another, sir."

"For one Copernicus Droop, and I mistake not!"

"Do you know him?" she faltered in amazement.

"I have met him—to my sorrow, mistress. 'Tis the first time and the last, I vow, that Francis Bacon hath dealt with mountebanks!"

"Francis Bacon!" cried Phœbe, delight and curiosity now added to puzzled amazement. "Is it possible that I see before me Sir Francis Bacon—or rather Lord Verulam, I believe." She dropped a courtesy, to which he returned a grave bow.

"Nay, good mistress," he replied. "Neither knight nor lord am I, but only plain Francis Bacon, barrister, and Secretary of the Star Chamber."

"Oh!" Phœbe exclaimed, "not yet, I see."

Then, as a look of grave inquiry settled over Bacon's features, she continued eagerly: "Enough of your additions, good Master Bacon. 'Twere better I offered my congratulations, sir, than prated of these lesser matters."

"Congratulations! Good lady, you speak in riddles!"

Smiling, she shook her head at him, looking meaningly into his eyes.

"Oh, think not *all* are ignorant of what you have so ably hidden, Master Bacon," she said. "Can it be that the author of that wondrous play I saw here given but yesternight can be content to hide his name behind that of a too greatly favored player?"

"Play, mistress!" Bacon exclaimed. "Why, here be more soothsaying manners from a fairer speaker—but still as dark as the uncouth ravings of that fellow—that—that Droop."

"Nay—nay!" Phœbe insisted. "You need fear no tattling, sir. I will keep your secret—though in very truth, were I in your worship's place, 'twould go hard but the whole world should know my glory!"

"Secret—glory!" Bacon exclaimed. "In all conscience, mistress, I beg you will make more clear the matter in question. Of what play speak you? Wherein doth it concern Francis Bacon?"

"To speak plainly, then, sir, I saw your play of the vengeful Jew and good Master Antonio. What! Have I struck home!"

She leaned against the wall with her hands behind her and looked up at him triumphantly. To her confusion, no answering gleam illumined the young man's darkling eyes.

"Struck home!" he exclaimed, shaking his head querulously. "Perhaps—but where? Do you perchance make a mock of me, Mistress—Mistress——?"

She replied to the inquiry in his manner and tone with disappointment in her voice:

"Mistress Mary Burton, sir, at your service."

Bacon started back a step and a new and eager light leaped into his eyes.

"The daughter of Isaac Burton?" he cried, "soon to be Sir Isaac?"

"The same, sir. Do you know my father?"

"Ay, indeed. 'Twas to seek him I came hither."

Then, starting forward, Bacon poured forth in eager accents a full account of his meeting with Droop in the deserted grove—of how they two had conspired to evade the bailiffs, and of his reasons for borrowing Droop's clothing.

"Conceive, then, my plight, dear lady," he concluded, "when, on reaching London, I found that the few coins which remained to me had been left in the clothes which I gave to this Droop, and I have come hither to implore the temporary aid of your good father."

"But he hath gone into London, Master Bacon," said Phœbe. "It is most like he will not return ere to-morrow even."

Droop's hat dropped from Bacon's relaxed grasp and he seemed to wilt in his speechless despair.

Phœbe's sympathy was awakened at once, but her anxiety to know more of the all-important question of authorship was perhaps the keenest of her emotions.

"Why," she exclaimed, "'tis a little matter that needs not my father, methinks. If ten pounds will serve you, I should deem it an honor to provide them."

Revived by hope, he drew himself up briskly as he replied:

"Why, 'twill do marvellous well, Mistress Mary—marvellous well—nor shall repayment be delayed, upon my honor!"

"Nay, call it a fee," she replied, "and give me, I beg of you, a legal opinion in return."

Bacon stooped to pick up the hat, from which he brushed the dust with his hand as he replied, with dubious slowness, looking down:

"Why, in sooth, mistress, I am used to gain a greater honorarium. As a barrister of repute, mine opinions in writing——"

"Ah, then, I fear my means are too small!" Phœbe broke in, with a smile. "'Tis a pity, too, for the matter is simple, I verily believe."

Bacon saw that he must retract or lose all, and he went on with some haste:

"Perchance 'tis not an opinion in writing that is required," he said.

"Nay—nay; your spoken word will suffice, Master Bacon."

"In that case, then——"

She drew ten gold pieces from her purse and dropped them into his extended palm. Then, seating herself upon a bench against the wall hard by, she said:

"The case is this: If a certain merchant borrow a large sum from a Jew in expectation of the speedy arrival of a certain argosy of great treasure, and if the merchant give his bond for the sum, the penalty of the bond being one pound of flesh from the body of the merchant, and if then the argosies founder and the bond be forfeit, may the Jew recover the pound of flesh and cut it from the body of the merchant?"

As she concluded, Phœbe leaned forward and watched her companion's face earnestly, hoping that he would betray his hidden interest in this Shakespearian problem by some look or sign.

The face into which she gazed was grave and judicial and the reply was a ready one.

"Assuredly not! Such a bond were contrary to public policy and void *ab initio*. The case is not one for hesitancy; 'tis clear and certain. No

court in Christendom would for a moment lend audience to the Jew. Why, to uphold the bond were to license murder. True, the victim hath to this consented; but 'tis doctrine full well proven and determined, that no man can give valid consent to his own murder. Were this otherwise, suicide were clearly lawful."

"Oh!" Phœbe exclaimed, as this new view of the subject was presented to her. "Then the Duke of Venice——"

She broke off and hurried into new questioning.

"Another opinion hath been given me," she said. "'Twas urged that the Jew could have his pound of flesh, for so said the bond, but that he might shed no blood in the cutting, blood not being mentioned in the bond, and that his goods were forfeit did he cut more or less than a pound, by so much as the weight of a hair. Think you this be law?"

Still could she see no shadow in Bacon's face betraying consciousness that there was more in her words than met the ear.

"No—no!" he replied, somewhat contemptuously. "If that A make promise of a chose tangible to B and the promise fall due, B may have not only that which was promised, but all such matters and things accessory as must, by the very nature of the agreed transfer, be attached to the thing promised. As, if I sell a calf, I may not object to his removal because, forsooth, some portion of earth from my land clingeth to his hoofs. So blood is included in the word 'flesh' where 'twere impossible to deliver the flesh without some blood. As for that quibble of nor more nor less, why, 'tis the debtor's place to deliver his promise. If he himself cut off too much, he injures himself, if too little he hath not made good his covenant."

Complete conviction seemed to spring upon Phœbe, as though it had been something visible to startle her. It shook off her old English self for a moment, and she leaped to her feet, exclaiming:

"Well, there now! That settles that! I guess if anybody wrote Shakespeare, it wasn't Bacon!"

The astonishment—almost alarm—in her companion's face filled her with amusement, and her happy laugh rang through the echoing halls.

"Many, many gracious thanks, good Master Bacon!" she exclaimed. "Right well have you earned your honorarium. And now, ere you depart, may I make bold to urge one last request?"

With a bow the young man expressed his acquiescence.

"If I mistake not, you will return forthwith to Master Droop, to the end that you may regain your proper garb, will you not?"

"That is my intention."

"Then I pray you, good Master Bacon, deliver this message to Master Droop from one Phœbe Wise, an acquaintance of his whom I know well. Tell him he must have all in readiness for flight and must not leave his abode until she come. May I rely on your faithful repetition of this to him?"

"Assuredly. I shall forget no word of the message wherewith I am so honored."

"Tell him that it is a matter of life and death, sir—of life and death!"

She held out her hand. Bacon pressed his lips to the dainty fingers and then, jamming the hard Derby hat as far down over his long locks as possible, he stepped forth once more into the courtyard.

CHAPTER X

HOW THE QUEEN READ HER NEWSPAPER

For Rebecca, left alone in the goldsmiths' city house, the past night and day had been a period of perplexity. She had been saved from any serious anxiety by the arrival of a messenger soon after Phœbe's departure, who had brought her word that her "mistress" was safe in the Peacock Inn, and had left a verbal message commanding her to come with him at once to rejoin her.

This command she naturally refused to comply with, and sent word to the much-puzzled man-servant that she wasn't to be "bossed around" by her younger sister, and that if Phœbe wanted to see her she knew where to find her. This message was delivered to old Mistress Burton, who refrained from repeating it to her step-daughter. For her own ends, she thought it best to keep Mistress Mary from her nurse, whose influence seemed invariably opposed to her own.

Left thus alone, Rebecca had had a hitherto unequalled opportunity for reflection, and the result of her deliberations was most practical. Whatever might be said of the inhabitants of London in general, it was clear to her mind that poor Phœbe was mentally unbalanced.

The only remedy was to lure her into the Panchronicon, and regain the distant home they ought never to have left.

The first step to be taken was therefore to rejoin Copernicus and see that all was in readiness. It was her intention then to seek her sister and, by humoring her delusion and exercising an appropriately benevolent cunning, to induce her to enter the conveyance which had brought them both into this disastrous complication. The latter part of this programme was not definitely formed in her mind, and when she sought to give it shape she found herself appalled both by its difficulties and by the probable twists that her conscience would have to undergo in putting her plan into practice.

"Well, well!" she exclaimed at length. "I'll cross that bridge when I come to it. The fust thing is to find Copernicus Droop."

It was at about eleven o'clock in the morning of the day after Phœbe's departure that Rebecca came to this audible conclusion, and she arose at once to don her jacket and bonnet. This accomplished, she gathered up her precious satchel and umbrella and approached her bed-room window to observe the weather.

She had scarcely fixed her eyes upon the muddy streets below her when she uttered a cry of amazement.

"Good gracious alive! Ef there ain't Copernicus right this minute!"

Out through the inner hall and down the stairs she hurried with short, shuffling steps, impatient of the clinging rushes on the floor. Speechless she ran past good Mistress Goldsmith, who called after her in vain. The only reply was the slam of the front door.

Once in the street, Rebecca glanced sharply up and down. The man she sought was not in sight, but she shrewdly counted upon his having turned into Leadenhall Street, toward which she had seen him walking. Thither she hurried, and to her infinite gratification she saw, about a hundred yards ahead, the unmistakable trousers, coat, and Derby hat so familiar on the person of Copernicus Droop.

"Hey!" she cried. "Hey, there, Mister Droop! Copernicus Droop!"

She ended with a shrill, far-carrying, long-drawn call that sounded much like a "whoop." Evidently he heard her, for he started, looked over his shoulder, and then set off with redoubled speed, as though anxious to avoid her.

She stopped short for a moment, paralyzed with astonishment.

"Well!" she exclaimed. "If I ever! I suppose it's a case of 'the wicked flee,' but he can't get away from me as easy's that."

And then began a race the like of which was never seen before. In advance, Francis Bacon scurried forward as fast as he dared without running, dreading the added publicity his rapid progress was sure to bring upon him, yet dreading even more to be overtaken by this

amazing female apparition, in whose accents and intonation he recognized another of the Droop species.

Behind Bacon came Rebecca, conspicuous enough in her prim New England gown and bonneted head, but doubly remarkable as she skipped from stone to stone to avoid the mud and filth of the unpaved streets, and swinging in one hand her little black satchel and in the other her faithful umbrella.

From time to time she called aloud: "Hey, stop there! Copernicus Droop! Stop, I say! It's only Rebecca Wise!"

The race would have been a short one, indeed, had she not found it impossible to ignore the puddles, rubbish heaps, and other obstacles which half-filled the streets and obstructed her path at every turn. Bacon, who was accustomed to these conditions and had no impeding skirts to check him, managed, therefore, to hold his own without actually running.

These two were not long left to themselves. Such a progress could not take place in the heart of England's capital without forming in its train an ever-growing suite of the idle and curious. Ere long a rabble of street-walkers, beggars, pick-pockets, and loafers were stamping behind Rebecca, repeating her shrill appeals with coarse variations, and assailing her with jokes which, fortunately for her, were worded in terms which her New England ears could not comprehend.

In this order the two strangely clad beings hurried down toward the Thames; he in the hope of finding a waterman who should carry him beyond the reach of his dreaded persecutors; she counting upon the river, which she knew to lie somewhere ahead, to check the supposed Copernicus in his obstinate flight.

To the right they turned, through St. Clement's Lane into Crooked Lane, and the ever-growing mob clattered noisily after them, shouting and laughing a gleeful chorus to her occasional solo.

Leaving Eastcheap and its grimy tenements, they emerged from New Fish Street and saw the gleam of the river ahead of them.

At this moment one of the following crowd, more enterprising than his fellows, ran close up behind Rebecca and, clutching the edge of her jacket, sought to restrain her.

"Toll, lass, toll!" he shouted. "Who gave thee leave to run races in London streets?"

Rebecca became suddenly fully conscious for the first time of the sensation she had created. Stopping short, she swung herself free and looked her bold assailant fairly in the face.

"Well, young feller," she said, with icy dignity, "what can I do fer you?"

The loafer fell back as she turned, and when she had spoken, he turned in mock alarm and fled, crying as he ran:

"Save us—save us! Ugly and old as a witch, I trow!"

Those in the background caught his final words and set up a new cry which boded Rebecca no good.

"A witch—a witch! Seize her! Stone her!"

As they now hung back momentarily in a new dread, self-created in their superstitious minds, Rebecca turned again to the chase, but was sorely put out to find that her pause had given the supposed Droop the advantage of a considerable gain. He was now not far from the river side. Hoping he could go no farther, she set off once more in pursuit, observing silence in order to save her breath.

She would apparently have need of it to save herself, for the stragglers in her wake were now impelled by a more dangerous motive than mere curiosity or mischief. The cry of "Witch" had awakened cruel depths in their breasts, and they pressed forward in close ranks with less noise and greater menace than before.

Two or three rough fellows paused to kick stones loose from the clay of the streets, and in a few moments the all-unconscious Rebecca would have found herself in a really terrible predicament but for an accident seemingly without bearing upon her circumstances.

Without warning, someone in the upper story of one of the houses near by threw from a window a pail of dirty water, which fell with a startling splash a few feet in front of Rebecca.

She stopped in alarm and looked up severely.

"I declare to goodness! I b'lieve the folks in this town are all plumb crazy! Sech doin's! The idea of throwin' slops out onto the road! Why, the Kanucks wouldn't do that in New Hampshire!"

Slipping her bag onto her left wrist, she loosened the band of her umbrella and shook the ribs free.

"Lucky I brought my umbrella!" she exclaimed. "I guess it'll be safer fer me to h'ist this, ef things is goin' to come out o' windows!"

All unknown to her, two or three of the rabble behind her were in the act of poising themselves with great stones in their hands, and their muscles were stiffening for a cast when, just in the nick of time, the obstinate snap yielded, and with a jerk the umbrella spread itself.

Turning the wide-spread gloria skyward, Rebecca hurried forward once more, still bent upon overtaking Copernicus Droop.

That simple act saved her.

A mere inactive witch was one thing—a thing scarce distinguishable from any other old woman. But this transformation of a black wand into a wide-spreading tent was so obviously the result of magic, that it was self-evident they had to do with a witch in full defensive and offensive state.

Stones fell from deadened hands and the threatening growls and cries were lost in a unanimous gasp of alarm. A moment's pause and then—utter rout. There was a mad stampede and in a trice the street was empty. Rebecca was alone under that inoffensive guardian umbrella.

To her grief, she found no one on the river's brim. He whom she sought was half-way across, his conveyance the only wherry in sight, apparently. Having passed beyond the houses, Rebecca now folded her umbrella and looked carefully about her. To her great relief, she

caught sight of a man's figure recumbent on a stone bench near at hand. A pair of oars lay by him and betrayed his vocation.

She stepped promptly to his side and prodded him with her umbrella.

"Here, mister!" she cried. "Wake up, please. What do you charge for ferryin' folks across the river?"

The waterman sat up, rubbed his eyes and yawned. Then, without looking at his fare, he led the way to his boat without reply. He was chary of words, and after all, did not all the world know what to pay for conveyance to Southwark?

Rebecca gazed after him for a moment and then, shaking her head pityingly, she murmured:

"Tut—tut! Deef an' dumb, poor man! Dear, dear!"

To hesitate was to lose all hope of overtaking the obstinate Copernicus. So, first pointing vigorously after the retreating boat with closed umbrella, and with many winks and nods which she supposed supplied full meaning to her gestures, she stepped into the wherry, and the two at once glided out on the placid bosom of the Thames.

Far different was the spectacle that greeted her then from that which may now be witnessed near London Bridge. In those days that bridge was alone visible, not far to the East, and the tide that moves now so darkly between stone embankments beneath a myriad of grimy steamers, then flowed brightly between low banks and wooden wharves, bearing a gliding fleet of sailing-vessels. To the south were the fields and woods of the open country, save where loomed the low frame houses and the green-stained wharves of Southwark village. Behind Rebecca was a vast huddle of frame buildings, none higher than three stories, sharp of gable overhanging narrow streets, while here a tower and there a steeple stood sentinel over the common herd. To the east the four great stone cylinders of the Tower, frowning over the moving world at their feet, loomed grimly then as now.

Rebecca had fixed her eyes at first with a fascinated stare on this mighty mass of building, penetrated by a chill of fear, although ignorant of its tragic significance. Turning after a minute or two from contemplation of that gloomy monument of tyrannical power, she gazed eagerly forward again, bent upon keeping sight of the man she was pursuing.

He and his boat had disappeared, but her disappointment was at once lost in admiring stupefaction as she gazed upon a magnificent craft bearing across the bows of her boat and coming from the direction of Westminster.

The hull, painted white, was ornamented with a bold arabesque of gilding which seemed to flow naturally in graceful lines from the garment of a golden image of Victory mounted high on the towering prow.

From the deck at the front and back rose two large cabins whose sides were all of brilliant glass set between narrow panels on which were paintings, which Rebecca could not clearly distinguish from where she was sitting.

At the waist, between and below the cabins, ten oars protruded from each side of the barge, flashing rhythmically as they swept forward together, seeming to sprinkle drops of sunlight into the river.

The splendor of this apparition, contrasting as it did with the small and somewhat dingy craft otherwise visible above the bridge, gave a new direction to Rebecca's thoughts and forced from her an almost involuntary exclamation.

"For the lands sakes!" she murmured. "Whoever in the world carries on in sech style's that!"

The waterman looked over his shoulder, and no sooner caught sight of the glittering barge than, with a powerful push of his oars, he backed water and brought his little boat to a stand.

"The Queen!" he exclaimed.

Rebecca glanced at the boatman with slightly raised brows.

"Thought you was deef an' dumb," she said. Then, turning once more to the still approaching barge, she continued: "An' so thet's Queen Victoria's ship, is it?"

"Victoria!" growled the waterman. "Ye seem as odd in speech as in dress, mistress. Who gave ye license to miscall our glorious sovereign?"

Rebecca's brows were knit in a thoughtful frown and she scarce knew what her companion said. The approach of the Queen suggested a new plan of action. She had heard of queens as all-powerful rulers, women whose commands would be obeyed at once and without question, in small and personal things as in matters of greater moment. Of Queen Victoria, too, some accounts had reached her, and all had been in confirmation of that ruler's justice and goodness of heart.

Rebecca's new plan was therefore to appeal at once to this benign sovereign for aid, entreat her to command the Burtons to release Phœbe and to order Copernicus Droop to carry both sisters back to their New England home. This course recommended itself strongly to the strictly honest Rebecca, because it eliminated at once all necessity for "humoring" Phœbe's madness, with its implied subterfuges and equivocations. The moment was propitious for making an attempt which could at least do no harm, she thought. She determined to carry out the plan which had occurred to her.

Standing up in the boat: "What's the Queen's last name?" she asked.

"Be seated, woman!" growled the waterman, who was growing uneasy at sight of the increasing eccentricity of his fare. "The Queen's name is Elizabeth, as well ye know," he concluded, more gently. He hoped to soothe the woman's frenzy by concessions.

"Now, mister," said Rebecca, severely, "don't you be sassy to me, fer I won't stand it. Of course, I don't want her first name—she ain't hired help. What's the Queen's family name—quick!"

The waterman, now convinced that his fare was a lunatic, could think of naught better than to use soothing tones and to reply promptly, however absurd her questions. "I' faith," he said, in a mild

voice, "I' faith, mistress, her Gracious Majesty is of the line of Tudor. Methought——"

But he broke off in horror.

Waving her umbrella high above her head, Rebecca, still standing upright in the boat, was calling at the top of her voice:

"Hallo there! Mrs. Tudor! Stop the ship, will ye! I want to speak to Mrs. Tudor a minute!"

All nature seemed to shiver and shrink in silence at this enormous breach of etiquette—to use a mild term. Involuntarily the ten pairs of oars in the royal barge hung in mid-air, paralyzed by that sudden outrage. The great, glittering structure, impelled by momentum, glided forward directly under the bows of Rebecca's boat and not a hundred yards away.

Again Rebecca's cry was borne shrill and clear across the water.

"Hallo! Hallo there! Ain't Mrs. Tudor on the ship? I want to speak to her!" Then, turning to the stupefied and trembling waterman:

"Why don't you row, you? What's the matter, anyway? Don't ye see they've stopped to wait fer us?"

Someone spoke within the after cabin. The command was repeated in gruff tones by a man's voice, and the ten pairs of oars fell as one into the water and were held rigid to check the progress of the barge.

"Wherry, ahoy!" a hail came from the deck.

"Ay, ay, sir!" the waterman cried.

"Come alongside!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

Pale and weak with dread, the boatman pulled as well as he could toward the splendid vessel ahead, while Rebecca resumed her seat, quite satisfied that all was as it should be.

A few strokes of the oars brought them to the barge's side, and Rebecca's waterman threw a rope to one of the crew.

A young man in uniform glowered down upon them, and to him the waterman turned, pulling off his cap and speaking with the utmost humility.

"The jade is moon-struck, your worship!" he exclaimed, eagerly. "I would not for a thousand pound——"

"Moon-struck!" snapped the lieutenant. "Who gave thee commission to ferry madmen, fellow?"

The poor waterman, at his wits' end, was about to reply when Rebecca interposed.

"Young man," she said, standing up, "I'll thank you to 'tend to business. Is Mrs. Victoria Tudor at home?"

At this moment a young gentleman, magnificently apparelled, stepped forth from the after cabin and approached the man in uniform.

"Lieutenant," he said, "her Majesty commands that the woman be brought before her in person. As for you," he continued, turning to the waterman, "return whence you came, and choose your fares better henceforth."

Two of the barge's crew extended each a hand to Rebecca.

"Bend onto that, Poll!" said one, grinning.

"Well, I declare!" exclaimed Rebecca. "I never see sech impident help in all my born days! Ain't ye got any steps for a body to climb?"

A second gorgeously dressed attendant backed hastily out of the cabin.

"Look alive!" he said, peremptorily. "Her Majesty waxes impatient. Where is the woman?"

"Ay, ay, sir!" replied the sailors. "Here she be!"

They leaned far forward and, grasping the astonished Rebecca each by a shoulder, lifted her quickly over the rail.

The first gentleman messenger beckoned to her and started toward the cabin.

“Follow me!” he said, curtly.

Rebecca straightened her skirt and bonnet, shook her umbrella, and turned quietly to the rail, fumbling with the catch of her bag.

“I pity yer manners, young man!” she said, coldly. Then, with some dismay:

“Here you, mister, don’t ye want yer money?”

But the waterman, only too glad to escape at all from being involved in her fate, was pulling back to the northern shore as fast as his boat would go.

“Suit yourself,” said Rebecca, simply. “Saves me a dime, I guess.”

Turning then to the impatient gentleman waiting at the door:

“Guess you’re one o’ the family, ain’t ye? Is your ma in, young man?”

Fortunately her full meaning was not comprehended, and the person addressed contented himself with drawing aside the heavy curtain of cloth of gold and motioning to Rebecca to precede him.

She nodded graciously and passed into the cabin.

“That’s better,” she said, with an ingratiating smile. “Good manners never did a mite o’ harm, did they?”

Before following her, the messenger turned again to the young lieutenant.

“Give way!” he said.

At once the sweeps fell together, and the great barge resumed its course down the river.

As Rebecca entered the glass and gold enclosure, she was at first quite dazzled by the crowd of gorgeously arrayed courtiers who stood in two compact groups on either side of her. Young and old alike, all these men of the sword and cloak seemed vying one with another for precedence in magnificence and foppery. The rarest silks of every hue peeped forth through slashed velvets and satins whose rustling masses bedecked men of every age and figure. Painted faces and ringed ears everywhere topped snowy ruffles deep and wide, while in every hand, scented gloves, fans, or like toys amused the idle fingers.

In the background Rebecca was only vaguely conscious of a group of ladies in dresses of comparatively sober pattern and color; but seated upon a luxurious cushioned bench just in front of the others, one of her sex struck Rebecca at once as the very centre and climax of the magnificence that surrounded her.

Here sat Elizabeth, the vain, proud, tempestuous daughter of "bluff King Hal." Already an old woman, she yet affected the dress and carriage of young maidenhood, possessing unimpaired the vanity of a youthful beauty, and, despite her growing ugliness, commanding the gallant attentions that gratified and supported that vanity.

Her face, somewhat long and thin, was carefully painted, but not so successfully as to hide the many wrinkles traced there by her sixty-five years. Her few blackened teeth and her false red hair seemed to be mocked by the transcendent lustre of the rich pearl pendants in her ears. Her thin lips, hooked nose, and small black eyes betokened suppressed anger as she glared upon her admiring visitor; but, far from being alarmed by the Queen's expression, Rebecca was only divided between her admiration of her magnificent apparel and blushing uneasiness at sight of the frankly uncovered bosom which Elizabeth exhibited by right of her spinsterhood. Rebecca remembered ever afterward how she wished that "all those men" would sink through the floor of the cabin.

The Queen was at first both angry at the unheard-of language Rebecca had used, and curious to see what manner of woman dared so to express herself. But now that she set eyes upon the outlandish garb of her prisoner, her curiosity grew at the expense of her wrath,

and she sat silent for some time while her little black eyes sought to explore the inmost depths of Rebecca's mind.

Rebecca, for her part, was quite unconscious of having infringed any of the rules of courtly etiquette, and, without expressing her belief in her complete social equality with the Queen or anyone else present, was so entirely convinced of this equality that she would have deemed a statement of it ridiculously superfluous.

For a few moments she stood in the middle of the open space immediately before the Queen, partly dazed and bewildered into silence, partly expectant of some remark from her hostess.

At length, observing the grimly rigid aspect of the silent Queen, Rebecca straightened herself primly and remarked, with her most formal air: "I s'pose you are the Queen, ma'am. You seem to be havin' a little party jest now. I hope I'm not intruding but to tell ye the truth, Mrs. Tudor, I've got into a pretty pickle and I want to ask a little favor of you."

She looked about to right and left as though in search of something.

"Don't seem to be any chairs around, only yours," she continued. Then, with a quick gesture of the hand: "No, don't get up. Set right still now. One o' your friends here can get me a chair, I guess," and she looked very meaningly into the face of a foppish young courtier who stood near her, twisting his thin yellow beard.

At this moment the rising wonder of the Queen reached a climax, and she burst into speech with characteristic emphasis.

"What the good jere!" she cried. "Hath some far planet sent us a messenger. The dame is loyal in all her fantasy. Say, my Lord of Nottingham, hath the woman a frenzy, think you?"

The gentleman addressed stood near the Queen and was conspicuous for his noble air. His prominent gray eyes under rounded brows lighted up a long, oval face surmounted by a high, bald forehead. The long nose was aquiline, and the generous, full-lipped mouth was only half hidden by a neatly trimmed full blond beard. Rebecca noticed his dress particularly as he stepped forward

at the Queen's summons, and marvelled at the two doublets and heavy cape coat over which hung a massive gold chain supporting the brilliant star of some order. She wondered how he could breathe with that stiff ruff close up under his chin and inclined downward from back to front.

Dropping on one knee, Nottingham began his reply to the Queen's inquiry, though ere he finished his sentence he rose to his feet again at a gracious sign from his royal mistress.

"May it please your Majesty," he said, "I would humbly crave leave to remove the prisoner from a presence she hath nor wit nor will to reverence. Judicial inquiry, in form appointed, may better determine than my poor judgment whether she be mad or bewitched."

This solemn questioning of her sanity produced in Rebecca's mind a teasing compound of wrath and uneasiness. These people seemed to find something fundamentally irregular in her behavior. What could it be? The situation was intolerable, and she set to work in her straightforward, energetic way to bring it to an end.

Stepping briskly up to the astonished Earl of Nottingham, she planted herself firmly before him, turning her back upon Elizabeth.

"Now look a-here, Mr. Nottingham," she said, severely, "I'd like to know what in the world you see that's queer about me or my ways. What's the matter, anyway? I came here to make a quiet call on that lady," here she pointed at the Queen with her umbrella, "and instead of anybody bringin' a chair, or sayin' 'How d'ye do,' the whole raft of ye hev done nothin' but stare or call me loony. I s'pose you're mad because I've interrupted your party, but didn't that man there invite me in? Ef you're all so dreadful particler, I'll jest get out o' here till Mrs. Tudor can see me private. I'll set outside, ef I can find a chair."

With an air of offended dignity she stalked toward the door, but turned ere she had gone ten steps and continued, addressing the assembled company collectively:

"As fer bein' loony, I can tell you this. Ef you was where I come from in America, they'd say every blessed one of ye was crazy as a hen with her head off."

"America!" exclaimed the Queen, as a new thought struck her. "America! Tell me, dame, come you from the New World?"

"That's what it's sometimes called in the geographies," Rebecca stiffly replied. "I come from Peltonville, New Hampshire, myself. Perhaps I'd ought to introduce myself. My name's Rebecca Wise, daughter of Wilmot and Nancy Wise, both deceased."

She concluded her sentence with more of graciousness than she had shown in the beginning, and the Queen, now fully convinced of the innocent sincerity of her visitor, showed a countenance of half-amused, half-eager interest.

"Why, Sir Walter," she cried, "this cometh within your province, methinks. If that this good woman be an American, you should be best able to parley with her and learn her will."

A dark-haired, stern-visaged man of middle height, dressed less extravagantly than his fellows, acknowledged this address by advancing and bending one knee to the deck. Here was no longer the gay young courtier who so gallantly spoiled a handsome cloak to save his sovereign's shoes, but the Raleigh who had fought a hundred battles for the same mistress and had tasted the bitterness of her jealous cruelty in reward.

There was in his pose and manner, however, much of that old grace which had first endeared him to Elizabeth, and even now served to fix her fickle favor.

"Most fair and gracious Majesty," he said in a low, well-modulated voice, turning upward a seeming fascinated eye, "what Walter Raleigh hath learned of any special knowledge his sovereign hath taught him, and all that he is is hers of right."

"'Tis well, my good knight," said Elizabeth, beckoning with her slender finger that he might rise. "We know your true devotion and require now this service, that you question this stranger in her own tongue concerning her errand here and her quality and estate at home."

As Raleigh rose and advanced toward Rebecca, without turning away from the Queen, the half-bewildered American brought the end of her umbrella sharply down upon the floor with a gesture of impatience.

"What everlastin' play-actin' ways!" she snapped. Then, addressing Sir Walter: "Say, Mr. Walter," she continued, "ef you can't walk only sideways, you needn't trouble to travel clear over here to me. I'll come to you."

Suiting the action to the word, Rebecca stepped briskly forward until she stood in front of the rather crestfallen courtier.

He rallied promptly, however, and marshalling by an effort all he could remember of the language of the red man, he addressed the astonished Rebecca in that tongue.

"What's that?" she said.

Again Sir Walter poured forth an unintelligible torrent of syllables which completed Rebecca's disgust.

With a pitying smile, she folded her hands across her stomach.

"Who's loony now?" she said, quietly.

Raleigh gazed helplessly from Rebecca to the Queen and back again from the Queen to Rebecca.

Elizabeth, who had but imperfectly heard what had passed between the two, leaned forward impatiently.

"What says she, Raleigh?" she demanded. "Doth she give a good account?"

"Good my liege," said Raleigh, with a despairing gesture, "an the dame be from America, her tribe and race must needs be a distant one, placed remote from the coast. The natives of the Floridas——"

"Florida!" exclaimed Rebecca. "What you talkin' about, anyway? That's away down South. I come from New Hampshire, I tell you."

"Know you that region, Raleigh?" said the Queen, anxiously.

Raleigh shook his head with a thoughtful expression.

"Nay, your Majesty," he replied. "And if I might venture to hint my doubts—" He paused.

"Well, go on, man—go on!" said the Queen, impatiently.

"I would observe that the name is an English one, and 'tis scarce credible that in America, where our tongue is unknown, any region can be named for an English county."

"Land sakes!" exclaimed Rebecca, in growing amazement. "Don't know English! Why—don't I talk as good English as any of ye? You don't have to talk Bible talk to speak English, I sh'd hope!"

Elizabeth frowned and settled back in her chair, turning her piercing eyes once more upon her mysterious visitor.

"Your judgment is most sound, Sir Walter," she said. "In sooth, 'twere passing strange were our own tongue to be found among the savages of the New World! What have ye to say to this, mistress?"

Rebecca turned her eyes from one to the other of the bystanders, doubtful at first whether or not they were all in a conspiracy to mock her. Her good sense told her that this was wellnigh impossible, and she finally came to the conclusion that sheer ignorance was the only explanation.

"Well, well!" she exclaimed at last. "I've heerd tell about how simple Britishers was, but this beats all! Do you reely mean to tell me," she continued, vehemently nodding her head at the Queen, "that you think the's nothin' but Indians in America?"

A murmur of indignation spread through the assembly caused by language and manners so little suited to the address of royalty.

"The woman hath lost her wits!" said the Queen, dryly.

"There 'tis again!" said Rebecca, testily. "Why, ef it comes to talk of simpletons and the like, I guess the pot can't call the kettle black!"

Elizabeth gripped the arm of her chair and leaned forward angrily, while two or three gentlemen advanced, watching their mistress for the first sign of a command. At the same moment, a triumphant thought occurred to Rebecca, and, dropping her umbrella, she opened her satchel with both hands.

"Ye needn't to get mad, Mrs. Tudor," she said. "I didn't mean any offence, but I guess you wouldn't like to be called a lunatic yerself. See here," she continued, dragging forth a section of the newspaper which she had brought with her, "ef you folks won't believe my word, jest look at this! It's all here in the newspaper—right in print. There!"

She held the paper high where all might see, and with one accord Queen and courtiers craned forward eagerly, burning with curiosity at sight of the printed columns interspersed with nineteenth-century illustrations.

Rebecca stepped forward and handed the paper to the Queen, and then, drawing forth another section from her bag, she carried it to the bewildered Raleigh, who took it like one in a trance.

For some time no one spoke. Elizabeth turned the paper this way and that, reading a bit here and a bit there, and gazing spellbound upon the enigmatic pictures.

Having completely mastered the situation, Rebecca now found time to consider her comfort. Far on one side, near the door through which she had entered, there stood a youth of perhaps sixteen, clad in the somewhat fantastic garb of a page. Having picked up her umbrella, Rebecca approached this youth and said in a sharp whisper:

"Couldn't you get me a chair, sonny?"

The lad disappeared with startling promptitude, but he did not return. It was an agony of perplexity and shyness which had moved him, not a willingness to serve.

Rebecca gazed about at the etiquette-bound men and women around her and muttered, with an indignant snort and toss of the head:

"Set o' decorated haystacks!"

Then, with head held high and a frigid "Beg pardon, mister!" she elbowed her way through the dense throng of gentlemen-in-waiting and seated herself on the bench arranged along the side of the cabin.

"Oof!" she exclaimed. "Feels though my legs would drop clear off!"

At length the Queen looked up.

"Why, what now!" she exclaimed. "Whither hath the strange woman gone?"

A tall man dressed in black and gold stepped forward and dropped upon one knee. He had a long, humorous face, with high cheek bones, a straight, good-humored mouth, with a high mustache well off the lip and a pointed beard. The eyes, set far apart, twinkled with the light of fun as he awaited permission to speak.

"Well, my Lord of Southampton," said the Queen, kindly, "I doubt some gay mischief be afoot. Your face tells me as much, my lord."

"Nay, my liege," was the humble reply. "Can my face so far forget the duty owed to Royalty as to speak thus, not being first admitted to discourse!"

Elizabeth smiled and replied:

"Even so, my lord, but we forgive the offence if that your face hath spoken truth. Know you aught of the strange woman? Pray be standing."

The earl arose and replied:

"Of her rank and station, she must be a queen at least, or she doth forget herself. This may your Majesty confirm if but these your Majesty's servants be commanded to cross the room."

Elizabeth, puzzled, bowed her head slightly, and the courtiers behind whom Rebecca had sought rest walked with one accord to the other side of the cabin, revealing to the astonished eyes of the Queen her visitor quietly seated upon the bench.

Rebecca nodded with a pleased look.

"Well, there!" she exclaimed. "Much obliged to you all. That's certainly better."

"Dame," said Elizabeth, sternly, "is this the respect you show to them above you in America?"

"Above me!" said Rebecca, straightening up stiffly. "There ain't anybody put above me at home, I can tell you. Ef the' was, I'd put 'em down mighty quick, I guess."

Elizabeth raised her brows and, leaning toward the lord treasurer, who stood at her side, she said in an undertone:

"This must be some sovereign princess in her own country, my lord. How comes it I have not had earlier intelligence of her arrival in this realm?"

Lord Burleigh bowed profoundly and mumbled something about its being out of his immediate province—he would have investigation made—etc., etc.

The Queen cut him short a little impatiently.

"Let it be done, my lord," she said.

Then turning to Rebecca, she continued:

"Our welcome is somewhat tardy, but none the less sincere. England hath e'er been friendly to the American, and you had been more fittingly received had our informants been less negligent."

Here the Queen shot a glance at poor Sir Walter Raleigh, who now seemed the personification of discomfiture.

"By what name are you called?" Elizabeth continued.

"Wise," said Rebecca, very graciously, "Rebecca Wise."

"Lady Rebecca, will you sit nearer?"

Instantly one of the pages sprang forward with a low chair, which, in obedience to a sign from the Queen, he placed at her right hand.

"Why, I'd be right pleased," said Rebecca. "That is, if the other folks don't mind," she continued, looking around. "I don't want to spile your party."

So saying, she advanced and sat beside the Queen, who now turned once more to the luckless Raleigh.

"Well, Sir Walter," she said, "what say you now? You have the printed proof. Can you make aught of it? How comes it that in all your fine travels in the New World you have heard no English spoken?"

"Oh, I dare say 'tain't his fault!" said Rebecca, indulgently. "I'm told they have a mighty queer way o' talkin' down South, where he's ben. Comes o' bein' brought up with darkies, ye know."

Elizabeth took up the newspaper once more.

"Was this printed in your realm, Lady Rebecca?" she asked.

"Hey!"

Elizabeth started haughtily, but recollected herself and repeated:

"Was this leaf printed in your country?"

"Oh, yes—yes, indeed! Down to New York. Pretty big paper, ain't it?"

"Not voluminous alone, but right puzzling to plain English minds," said the Queen, scanning the paper severely. "Instance this."

Slowly she read the opening lines of a market report:

"The bulls received a solar-plexus blow yesterday when it was reported that the C. R. and L. directors had resigned in a body owing to the extensive strikes."

"What words are these?" Elizabeth exclaimed in a despairing tone. "What is a plexus of the sun, and how doth it blow on a bull?"

Rebecca jumped up and brought her head close to the Queen's, peering over the paper which she held. She read and reread the paragraph in question and finally resumed her chair, slowly shaking her head.

"I guess that's the Wall Street talk I've heerd tell of," she said. "I don't understand that kind myself."

"Why, Sir Walter," Elizabeth exclaimed, triumphantly, "here have we two separate tribes at least, each speaking its proper dialect. Can it be that you have heard no word of these before?"

"Even so, my liege," was the dejected reply, "the tribes of the North are known to no man as yet."

"Passing strange!" mused the Queen, running a critical eye over the printed page before her. "Your talk, and that of others, hath been only of wild, copper-colored savages, living in rude huts and wearing only skins. Sure such as these have not types and printing-presses! What is this book, Lady Rebecca?"

"That's a newspaper, ma'am. Don't you have 'em in London? They come out every day an' people pay a penny apiece fer 'em."

Elizabeth flashed a stern glance upon her visitor.

"'Twere best not go too far, my lady," she said, harshly. "E'en traveller's tales must in some sort ape the truth at least. Now, prithee, to what end is such a pamphlet printed—why, 'tis endless!"

"I'll shet right up, Mis' Tudor, ef ye think I'm tellin' wrong stories," said Rebecca, indignantly. "Thet's a newspaper an' thet's all there is to it."

Elizabeth evaded the issue and turned now to the illustrations.

"These be quaint-wondrous images!" she said. "Pray, what now may this be? Some fantastic reverie limned for amusement?"

Rebecca jumped up again and peered over the Queen's shoulder.

"Why, thet's a picture of the troops marchin' down Broadway, in New York City. See, it's all explained in print underneath it."

"But these men carry arquebuses and wear a livery. And these temples—to what false gods are they set up?"

"False gods!" exclaimed Rebecca. "Bless your simple heart, those ain't temples. They're jest the buildin's where the men hev their offices."

Elizabeth sat in mute contemplation, vainly seeking to realize it all.

"My lords!" she burst forth suddenly, casting the paper violently to the floor, "or this be rank forgery and fraud or else have we been strangely deceived."

She frowned at Sir Walter, who dropped his eyes.

"'Tis not to be believed that such vast cities and great armies habited by peoples polite and learned may be found across the sea and no report of it come to them that visit there. How comes it that we must await so strange a chance as this to learn such weighty news?"

She paused and only silence ensued.

Rebecca stooped and recovered the paper, which in falling had opened so as to expose new matter.

"Don't be surprised," she said, soothingly. "I allus did hear that Britishers knew mighty little 'bout America."

Still frowning, Elizabeth mechanically stretched forth her hand and Rebecca gave her the paper. The Queen glanced at the sheet and her face lost its stern aspect as she eagerly brought the print nearer to her eyes.

"Why, what now!" she exclaimed. "God mend us, here have we strange attire! Is this a woman of your tribe, my lady?"

Rebecca looked and blushed. Then, in an uneasy tone, she said:

"That's jest an advertisement fer a new corset, Mis' Tudor. I never did see how folks ever allowed sech things to be printed—'tain't respectable!"

"A corset, call you it! And these, then?"

"Oh, those are the styles, the fashions! That's the fashion page, ye know. That's where they tell all about what the rich folks down to New York are wearin'."

There was a murmur and a rustle among the ladies-in-waiting, who had hitherto made no sign, and upon the Queen's cheek there spread an added tinge, betokening a high degree of interest and gratification.

"Ah!" she sighed, and glanced pleasantly over her shoulder, "here be matters of moment, indeed! Your Grace of Devonshire, what say you to this?"

Eagerly the elderly lady so addressed stepped forward and made a low reverence.

"Look—look here, ladies all!" Elizabeth continued, with a tremor of excitement in her voice. "Saw you ever such an array as this?"

With one accord the whole bevy of assembled ladies pressed forward, trembling with delighted anticipation. A fashion sheet—and from the New World! What wonder they were moved!

Her Majesty was about to begin perusal of one of the fascinating paragraphs wherein were described those marvellous fashion-plates when there was a cry outside of "Way 'nough!" and a moment later the smart young lieutenant who had before accosted Rebecca entered and stood at attention.

Elizabeth looked up and frowned slightly. Folding the paper carefully, she called to Sir Walter, who still held in his unconscious hand the other section of the paper.

"Bring hither yon sheet, Sir Walter," she cried. "Perchance there may be further intelligence of this sort therein. We will peruse both pamphlets at our leisure anon."

Then, turning to the Lord High Admiral:

"My Lord of Nottingham," she said, "you may depart. Your duties await you without. Let it be the charge of your Grace," she continued, addressing the Duchess of Devonshire, "to attend her Highness the Lady Rebecca. See that she be maintained as suits her rank, and let her be near our person that we may not lose aught of her society."

The ceremony of landing prevented further discourse between Rebecca and the Queen, and it was with the greatest interest that the stranger observed every detail of the formal function.

Peering through the glass sides of the cabin, Rebecca could see the landing wharf, thronged with servants and magnificently dressed officers, while beyond there loomed a long, two-storied white stone building, with a round-arched entrance flanked by two towers. This was Greenwich Palace, a favorite summer residence of the Queen.

CHAPTER XI

THE FAT KNIGHT AT THE BOAR'S HEAD

When Francis Bacon, having evaded Rebecca's mistaken pursuit, reached the deserted grove in which the Panchronicon still rested, he found to his dismay that Droop was absent.

Copernicus was not the man to let the grass grow under his feet, and he had set off that morning with his letter of introduction to seek Sir Percevall Hart, the Queen's knight harbinger.

He had determined to begin with moderation, or in other words to ask at first for only two patents. The first of these was to cover the phonograph. The second was to give him a monopoly of bicycles.

Accordingly he set forth fully equipped, carrying a box of records over his shoulder by a strap and his well-oiled bicycle trundling along beside him, with a phonograph and small megaphone hung on the handle-bar. He thought it best to avoid remark by not riding his wheel, being shrewdly mindful of the popular prejudice against witchcraft. Thanks to his exchange with Master Bacon, he feared no comment upon his garb. A pint flask, well filled, was concealed within his garments, and thus armed against even melancholy itself, he set forth fearlessly upon his quest.

Droop had set out from the Panchronicon in the middle of the forenoon, but, as he was obliged to distribute a large number of photographs among his customers before going to London, it was not until some time after Bacon had crossed the river and Rebecca had departed with the Queen that he found himself on London Bridge.

On reaching the London side, he stood awhile in the ill-smelling street near the fish markets gazing about him in quest of someone from whom he might ask his way.

"Let's see!" he mused. "Bacon said Sir Percevall Hart, Boar's Head Tavern, Eastcheap. First thing to find is Eastcheap, I guess. Hullo there, forsooth!" he cried, addressing a baker's boy who was

shuffling by with his basket on his head. "Hullo there, boy—knave! What's the shortest cut to Eastcheap?"

The lad stopped and stared hard at the bright wheels. He seemed thinking hard.

"What mean you, master, by a cut?" he said, at length.

"Oh, pshaw—bother!" Droop exclaimed. "Jest tell me the way to Eastcheap, wilt thee?"

The boy pointed straight north up New Fish Street.

"Eastcheap is yonder," he said, and turned away.

"Well, that's somethin'," muttered Droop. "Gives me a start, anyway."

Following the route pointed out, he retraced the very course along which earlier in the day Rebecca had proceeded in the opposite direction, thinking she saw him ahead of her. By dint of making numerous inquiries, he found himself at length in a region of squalid residences and second-rate shops and ale-houses, in the midst of which he finally discovered the Boar's Head Tavern.

The entrance was by a dark archway, overhung by the upper stories of the building, down which he could see a reddish glow coming and going, now faint now bright, against the dead wall to the left. Passing cautiously down this passage, he soon found that the glow was projected through a half-curtained window to the right, and was caused by the dancing light of a pleasant fire of logs within.

He thought it wise to reconnoitre before proceeding farther, and, peeping through the small leaded panes, he found he could survey the entire apartment.

The room into which Droop stood gazing was the common tap-room of the inn, at that moment apparently the scene of a brisk altercation.

To the left of the great brick fireplace, a large pewter mug in his right hand, an immensely fat man was seated. He was clad as became a cavalier, although in sober colors, and his attitude was suggestive of

defence, his head being drawn far back to avoid contact with a closed fist held suggestively before his face. The fist was that of a woman who, standing before the fire with her other hand resting on her hip, was evidently delivering her sentiments in no gentle terms.

A long table, black with age and use, stood parallel to the right-hand wall, and behind this three men were sitting with mugs before them, eying the disputants with evident interest. To the left a large space was devoted to three or four bulky casks, and here an aproned drawer sat astride of a rush-bottomed chair, grinning delightedly and exchanging nods and winks from time to time with an impish, undersized lad who lay on his stomach on a wine-butt with his head craning forward over the edge.

Only an occasional word reached the watcher at the window, but among these few he recognized a number which were far more forcible than decent. He drew back, shook his head, and then slowly returned to the door and looked up.

Yes—he had made no mistake. Above his head there swung the sign of the Boar's Head. And yet—was it likely or even possible that Sir Percevall Hart could make such a vulgar haunt as this his headquarters? Sir Percevall—the Queen's harbinger and the friend of the Prime Minister!

With a sinking heart and a face clouded with anxiety, Droop propped his bicycle against the wall within the passage and resolutely raised the heavy latch.

To his surprise, instead of the torrent of words which he had expected to hear when he opened the door, complete silence reigned as he entered. The fat man in the chair by the fire was still leaning backward, but his tankard was now inverted above his head, and a glance showed that his companions at the long table were similarly employed.

Copernicus turned about and closed the door very carefully, unwilling to break the profound silence. Then he tiptoed his way to the fire, and leaning forward rubbed his hands before the crackling logs, nervously conscious of six pairs of eyes concentrated upon his

back. Droop was not unfamiliar with the bar-rooms of such a city as Boston, but he found an Elizabethan tavern a very different sort of place. So, although already warmer than desirable, he could only stand half bent before a fire all too hot and wonder what he should do next.

Finally he mustered courage enough to turn about and survey with shamefaced mien the tavern interior. As he turned the four guests dropped their eyes with painful unanimity and the drawer fell to scouring a pewter mug with his apron. Only the boy perched on the cask kept his eyes obstinately fixed on the stranger.

Droop now noticed for the first time that behind the casks there was a snug recess containing a table and two well-worn benches, evidently intended for the entertainment of guests desirous of a *tête-à-tête*.

Thither he at once directed his steps, and seating himself upon one of the benches, looked about him for a bell. He could hear the three men at the long table whispering busily, and could see that they had their heads together.

The fat man stirred in his chair with a rolling motion.

"Drawer!" he called.

"Here!" cried the drawer, bustling up to the fire.

"A second tankard of that same sack, boy. Bustle, bustle!"

"I must first to my mistress, sir," was the reply. "Nothing for credit, sir, save by permission."

"A pox upon thee!" growled the thirsty man. "On thee and thy mistress, too!"

Muttering and shaking his head, the ponderous guest stretched forth his legs, closed his eyes, and composed himself for a nap.

The drawer tipped a wink to the grinning pot-boy on the cask, and then bustled over to Droop's table, which he proceeded to wipe vigorously with his apron.

"Did you call, sir?" he said.

"Yes," said Copernicus. "Bring me a schooner of light lager."

The drawer's busy apron hand stopped at once and its owner leaned hard on the table.

"What command gave you, sir?" he said.

"Marry—a schooner of lager—light, forsooth!" Droop repeated.

"Cry you mercy, sir," said the drawer, straightening up, "this be the Boar's Head Tavern, sir. What may your worship require by way of food and drink?"

"These old-timers beat all creation for ignorance," muttered Droop. Then, looking up into the man's face, he called for one drink after another, watching hopefully for some sign of answering intelligence.

"Give me a Scotch high-ball. No? Then a gin sling. Hot Tom and Jerry, then. Marry, an egg flip, i' faith! Ain't got 'em? Get me a brandy smash—a sherry cobbler—a gin rickey—rock and rye—a whisky sour—a mint julep! What! Nothin'? What in thunder *do* ye sell, then?"

The drawer scratched his head, and then grinned suddenly and gave vent to a dry laugh.

"Well said! Well said, master! The jest is a merry one—call me a Jew else!" Then, sobering as briskly as he had taken to laughing: "Will you have a cup of sack, master, to settle the stomach after fasting—or a drop of Canary or Xeres or a mug of ale, perchance——"

"That's right, by my halidom!" Droop broke in. "Bring me some ale, waiter."

The drawer whisked away and returned in a few moments with a huge power tankard topped with a snowy foam.

"That's the stuff!" said Droop, smacking his lips. He half-emptied the beaker, and then, turning to the drawer:

"Can you tell me," he said, "if I can find a man by the name of Hart here—Sir Percevall Hart?"

"Sir Percevall," said the drawer, in an undertone. "Why, there's your man, master. The fat knight snoring by yon fire."

"What!" exclaimed Droop. "The man who—" He broke off and stared awhile in silence. Finally, shaking his head: "Never would have thought it!" he said.

Copernicus lapsed into meditation and the drawer withdrew. At length Droop roused himself with a shake.

"Won't do no good to set here doin' nothin'," he muttered. Then, swallowing the remainder of his ale, he drew his letter of introduction from his pocket and walked back to the fireplace.

The knight, who was not sleeping very soundly, slightly opened one eye, and to his surprise, beheld a letter which Droop held almost under his nose.

Sitting up straight and now fully awake, Sir Percevall stared first at Copernicus and then at the letter.

"A letter!" he exclaimed. "For me?"

"Verily, yea," Droop replied, very politely.

The knight opened the letter slowly and turned so that the light from a window fell full upon it.

"What's here!" he exclaimed. "This direction is to my Lord Burleigh."

"Yep—oh, yes, yea!" said Droop, confusedly. "But you was to read it—peruse it, you wot—Bacon said as much. He said you knew the lord and could take me around, forsooth, and sorter interduce me, ye see."

With leisurely gravity, Sir Percevall slowly read the note, and then, returning it with a polite gesture:

"This letter hath reference to certain monopolies," he said. "My cousin Bacon doth write in high terms of your skill and high merit, Master—Master——"

"Droop, sir. Copernicus Droop's my name."

"Ah, yes! And the service you require—? I beg your indulgence, but, sooth to say, being nigh starved of late in this tavern of ill repute, my poor wits have grown fat. I am slow of apprehension, Master Wither——"

"Droop, sir—Droop."

"Nay—cry you mercy—Master Droop."

"Why, now, Sir Percy," said Copernicus, with oily grace, "ef you wouldn't mind, I'd be proud ef you'd set down over yonder, perchance, and have a glass with me. We'd be more private then, and I could make this hull business clear to ye. What say ye, sir?"

"Why, there's my hand, Master Dupe—Droop," said the knight, his face brightening mightily. "Five yards are a mile for a man of my girth, Master Droop, but praise God such words as these of yours cheer my heart to still greater deeds than faring a mile afoot."

Slowly and painfully the corpulent knight drew himself to his feet, and with one hand bearing affectionately but heavily on Droop's shoulder, he shuffled over to the recess and seated himself.

"What ho, there! Drawer!" he shouted, as soon as they were comfortably disposed face to face.

"Anon, sir, anon!" came the familiar reply, and the drawer, who had just served two new guests at the long table, now hurried over to the nook behind the casks.

"A quart of sack, villain!" said Sir Percevall.

"And for you, sir?" said the drawer, turning to Droop.

"Yes, yea, bring me the same." He had no idea what sack was, but he felt that in all probability it was a mild beverage, or no one would order a quart at once.

"And this same letter, now," Sir Percevall began. "To warn you truly, friend, this matter of monopolies hath something of an ill savor in the public mind. What with sweet wines, salt, hides, vinegar, iron, oil, lead, yarn, glass, and what not in monopoly, men cry out that they are robbed and the Queen's advisers turn pale at the very word."

He interrupted himself to give his attention to the wine which had just been placed before him.

"To better acquaintance!" he said, and the two drank deep together.

Droop smacked his lips critically and turned up his eyes for greater abstraction. The wine was pleasant to the palate, he thought, but—well—it wasn't whiskey.

"Of this letter, now," the knight resumed, anxious to discover his own advantage in Droop's plans. "'Twere vain for you, a stranger to the Lord High Treasurer, to accost him with it. A very circumspect and pragmatical old lord, believe me. Not every man hath admittance to him, I promise ye. As for me, why, God 'ild you, man! 'twas but yesterday a fortnight Burleigh slapped me o' the shoulder and said: 'Percevall, ye grow fat, you rogue—on the word of a Cecil!' Oh, trust me, Master Droop; my lord much affects my conversation!"

"Is that a fact?" said Droop, admiringly. "It certainly ain't done your conversation any harm to be affected that way."

"Oh, then, an you jest, Master——"

"Not a mite!" exclaimed Copernicus, anxiously. "Verily, nay, friend. Trust me—never!"

"Or never trust thee!" quoth the knight, with a twinkle in his eye.

Droop took refuge in his wine, and Sir Percevall imitating him, the two emptied their cups together and sighed with a simultaneous content.

"That's not bad swizzle," said Droop, patronizingly. "But, as fer me, give me whiskey every time!"

"Whiskey!" said the knight with interest. "Nay, methought I knew every vintage and brew, each label and brand from Rhine to the Canaries. But this name, Master Droop, I own I never heard. Whiskey, say you?"

"Well, now, do tell!" said Droop, drawing forth his flask of nineteenth-century rye, "never heerd o' whiskey, eh? Never tasted it, either, I s'pose?"

"How should I taste it, man, not knowing its very name?"

"Verily, thou sayest sooth!" said Droop. Then, glancing all about him: "Ain't there any smaller glasses 'round here?"

"Drawer—ho, drawer, I say!" roared the knight.

"Here, sir—here! What is your pleasure?"

"The pleasure is to come, rogue! Fetch hither two of yon scurvy glass thimbles you wot of. Hostess calls them cordial glasses. Haste now! Scramble, varlet!"

When the two small glasses were brought, Droop uncorked his flask and poured each full to the brim.

"Th' ain't any seltzer in this one-hoss town," he said, "so I can't make ye a high-ball. We'll jest hev to drink it straight, Sir Knight. Here's luck! Drink hearty!" and with a jerk of hand and head he tossed the spirits down his throat at a gulp and smacked his lips as he set down his glass.

Sir Percevall followed his friend's movements with a careful eye and imitated him as exactly as possible, but he did not escape a coughing fit, from which he emerged with a purple face and tear-filled eyes.

"Have another?" said Droop, cheerfully.

"A plague on queezy gullets!" growled the knight. "Your spirits sought two ways at once, Master Droop, and like any other half-

minded equivocal transaction, contention was the outcome. But for the whiskey, mind you—why, it hath won old Sir Percevall's heart. Zounds, man! Scarce two fingers of it, and yet I feel the wanton laugh in me a'ready. Good fellows need good company, my master! So pour me his fellow! So—so!"

They drank again, and this time the more cautious knight escaped all painful consequences.

"Look you, Master Droop," said the delighted old toper, leaning back against the wall as he beamed across the table at his companion, "look you! An you have a butt of this same brew, Sir Percevall Hart is your slave, your scullion, your foot-boy! Why, man, 'tis the elixir of life! It warms a body like a maid's first kiss! Whence had you it?"

"Oh, they make it by the million gallons a year where I come from," Droop replied. "Have another. Take it with hot water and sugar—I mean honey."

The advice was followed, and while they sipped the enlivening decoction, Copernicus explained his plans touching the patenting of his phonograph and bicycle. When he concluded his relation, the knight leaned back and gazed at him with an affectionate squint.

"See, now, bully rook, if I take you," he said. "It behooves you to have fair inductance at court. For this ye come to Sir Percevall Hart, her Majesty's harbinger and—though he says so himself—a good friend to Cecil. Now, mark me, lad. Naught do I know or care of thy 'funny craft' or 'bicycle.' Master Bacon is a philosopher and you have here his certificate. Say I well—what?"

He paused and Droop nodded.

"Good—and so to better. Naught care I, or know I, or should or could I trow, being a man of poetical turn and no base mechanic—no offence meant to yourself, Master Droop. But this I do say—and now mark me well—I say—and dare maintain it (and all shall tell ye that is a fair maintenance and a good champion), that for a sure and favorable inductance to the favors of the court there's no man living takes the wall o' Percevall Hart, Knight!"

"Bacon told me as much," said Droop.

"And he told thee well, my master. Frank is a good lad, though vain, and his palm itcheth. So to terms, eh? Now, methinks 'twere but equity and good fellowship for two such as we are to go snacks, eh? Cut through the middle—even halves, bully—even halves! How say you?"

"You don't mean," said Droop, "that you'd want half the profits, jest fer introducin' me to Lord What's-is-name, do ye?"

"With a small retainer, of course, to bind fast. Say—oh, a matter of twenty gold angels or so."

"Why, blame your confounded overstretched skin!" cried Droop, hotly, "I'd sooner drop the hull darn thing! You must take me fer a nat'ral born fool, I guess!"

"Nay, then—'twixt friends," said the knight, soothingly. "'Twixt friends, say we remit one half the profits. Procure me but the angels, Master Droop, and drop the remainder."

"As many devils sooner!" said Droop, indignantly. "I'll take my pigs to another market."

He rose and beckoned to the drawer.

"Nay, then, why so choleric!" pleaded the knight, leaning anxiously across the table. "What terms do ye offer, Master Droop? Come, man, give a show of reason now—name your terms."

It was to this point that Copernicus had counted upon bringing the helpless knight, who was far from a match for a Yankee. He had driven his own bargain with Bacon, and he now resolved that Bacon's friend should fare no better. In pursuit of this plan, he moved from his seat with a sour face.

"I don't feel much like takin' up with a man who tries to do me," he grumbled, shaking his head and beckoning again to the drawer.

"Do thee, man—do thee!" cried the knight. "Why, an I do thee good, what cause for grief?" Spreading forth his two fat hands, he

continued: "Spake I not fairly? An my offer be not to thy taste—say thine own say. What the devil, man; must we quarrel perforce?"

Droop scratched his head and seemed to hesitate. Finally he slapped the table with his open hand and cried with a burst of generosity:

"I'll tell ye what I *will* do. I've got two quart bottles of that same ripe whiskey, and I'll give 'em both to ye the day the Queen gives me my patents!"

"Nay—nay!" said the knight, straightening himself with dignity. "'Twere a mere fool's prank at such terms!"

"Oh, all right!" cried Droop, turning away.

"Hold—hold! Not so fast!" cried Sir Percevall. But Copernicus merely slapped his hat on his head and started toward the door.

Sir Percevall leaned over the table in flushed desperation.

"Listen, friend!" he cried. "Wilt make a jolly night of it in the bargain?"

Droop stopped and turned to his companion.

"D'ye mean right now?"

A nod was the reply.

"And you'll take my offer if I do?"

The knight sat upright and slapped the table.

"On my honor!" he cried.

"Then it's a go!" said Droop.

CHAPTER XII

HOW SHAKESPEARE WROTE HIS PLAYS

As Francis Bacon returned to London from the Peacock, Phœbe had stood at the foot of the steps leading into the courtyard and watched him depart. She little foresaw the strange adventure into which he was destined to lead her sister. Indeed, her thoughts were too fully occupied with another to give admittance to Rebecca's image.

Her lover was in danger—danger to his life and honor. She knew he was to be saved, yet was not free from anxiety, for she felt that it was to be her task to save him. To this end she had sent Bacon with his message to Copernicus. She believed now that a retreat was ready for young Fenton. How would her confidence have been shaken could she have known that Copernicus had already left the Panchronicon and that Bacon had been sent in vain!

In ignorance of this, she stood now at the foot of the stairs and let her thoughts wander back to the day before, dwelling with tenderness upon the memory of her lover's patient attendance upon her in that group of rustic groundlings. With a self-reproachful ache at the heart she pictured herself as she had sat far up in the gallery gazing downward with every faculty centred upon the stage, while he, thinking only of her——

She started and looked quickly to right and left. Why, it was here, almost upon these very stones, that he had stood. Here she had seen him for one moment at the last as she was leaving her seat. He was leaning upon a rude wooden post. She sought it with her eyes and soon caught sight of it not ten feet away.

Then she noticed for the first time that she was not alone. A young fellow in the garb of a hostler stood almost where Guy had been the day before. He paid no attention to Phœbe, for he was apparently deeply preoccupied in carving some device upon the very post against which Guy had leaned.

Already occupied with her own tenderness, she was quick to conclude that here, too, was a lover, busy with some emblem of affection. Had not Orlando cut Rosalind's name into the bark of many a helpless tree?

Clasping her hands behind her, she smiled at the lad with head thrown back.

"A wager, lad!" she cried. "Two shillings to a groat thou art cutting a love-token!"

The fellow looked up and tried to hide his knife. Then, grinning, he replied:

"I'll no take your challenge, mistress. Yet, i' good faith, 'tis but to crown another's work."

Then, pointing with his blade:

"See where he hath carved letters four," he continued. "Wi' love-links, too. A watched un yestre'en, whiles the play was forward. A do but carve a heart wi' an arrow in't."

She blushed suddenly, wondering if it were Guy who had done this. Stepping to the side of the stable-boy, she examined the post.

The letters were in pairs. They were M. B. and G. F.

Her feeling bubbled over in a little half-stifled laugh.

"Silly!" she exclaimed. Then to the boy: "Know you him who cut the letters?" she asked, with affected indifference.

"Nay, mistress," he replied, falling again to his work, "but he be a rare un wi' the bottle."

"The bottle!" Phœbe exclaimed, in amazement. Then quite sternly: "Thou beliest him, knave! No more sober—" She checked herself, suddenly conscious of her indiscretion.

"Why, how knowest his habits?" she asked, more quietly.

"A saw un, mistress, sitting in the kitchen wi' two bottles o' Spanish wine. Ask the player else."

"The player! What player?"

"Him as was drinking wi' him. Each cracked his bottle, and 'twas nip and tuck which should call first for the second."

So Guy had spent the evening—those hours when she was tenderly dreaming of him with love renewed—drinking and carousing with some dissolute actor!

Within her Phœbe Wise and Mary Burton struggled for mastery of her opinion.

What more natural than that a poor lad, tired with waiting on his feet for hours for one look from the mistress who disdained him, should seek to forget his troubles quaffing good wine in the company of some witty player? This was Mary's view.

What! To leave the presence of his sweetheart—the girl to whom he had just written that penitent letter—to go fresh from the inspiration of all that should uplift a lover, and befuddle his brains with "rum," gossiping with some coarse-grained barn-stormer! So Phœbe railed.

"Who was the player?" she asked, sharply.

"Him as wore the long white beard," said the boy. "The Jew, to wit. Eh, but a got his cess, the runnion!"

"Shylock!" she cried, in spite of herself.

So this was the gossiping barn-stormer, the dissolute actor. Will Shakespeare it was with whom her Guy had spent the evening! Phœbe Wise could but capitulate, and Mary Burton took for a time triumphant possession of the heart that was Guy Fenton's.

"Have the players left the Peacock?" she asked, eagerly.

"Nay, mistress, know you not that they play to-night at the home of Sir William Percy?"

"Then they are here, at the inn, boy?"

"A saw him that played the Jew i' the garden not a half hour since. He's wont to wander there and mutter the words of the play. I'll warrant him there now, mistress."

Here, indeed, was good fortune! Shakespeare was in the garden. He should tell her where to find Guy that she might warn him. Quickly she turned away and hurried out of the yard and around the north L, beyond which was the garden, laid out with ancient hedges and long beds of old-fashioned flowers.

Now this same garden was the chief pride of the neighborhood, the more especially that gardens were but seldom found attached to inns in those days. Here there had been a partly successful attempt to imitate Italian landscape gardening; but the elaborately arranged paths, beds, and parterres, with their white statues and fountains, lost their effectiveness closed in as they were by high walls of vine-covered brick. It was rumored that once a stately peacock had here once flaunted his gorgeous plumage, giving his name to the inn itself—but this legend rested upon little real evidence.

When Phœbe reached the entrance to the main walk she stopped and looked anxiously about her. Nowhere could she see or hear anyone. Sadly disappointed, she moved slowly forward, glancing quickly to right and left, still hoping that he whom she sought had not utterly departed.

She reached a small stone basin surmounted by a statue of Plenty, whose inverted horn suggested a copious stream long since choked up. Behind the fountain there was a stone bench with a high back. Peeping behind this, Phœbe found that a second seat was placed beyond the back, inviting a seclusion whose expected purpose was distinctly suggested by a sly little Cupid on a pedestal, holding one forefinger to his smiling lips.

At this moment Phœbe was conscious of a distant mumbling to her left, and, glancing quickly in that direction, she saw a plainly dressed, bareheaded man of medium height just turning into the main walk out of a by-path, where he had been hidden from view by a thick hedge of privet. His eyes were turned upon some slips of paper which he held in one hand.

Could this be he? Shakespeare! The immortal Prince of Poets!

To Mary Burton, the approach of a mere player would have given little concern. But Phœbe Wise, better knowing his unrivalled rank, was seized with a violent attack of diffidence, and in an instant she dodged behind the stone seat and sat in hiding with a beating heart.

The steps of the new-comer slowly approached. Phœbe knew not whether pleasure or a painful fear were stronger within her. Here was indeed the culmination of her strange adventure! There, beyond the stone which mercifully concealed her, He was approaching—the wondrous Master Mind of literature.

Would he go by unheeding? Could she let him pass on without one glance—one word? And yet, how address him? How dare to show her face?

The slow steps ceased and at the same time he fell silent. She could picture him gazing with unconscious eyes at the fountain while within he listened to the Genius that prompted his majestic works. Again the gravel creaked, and then she knew that he had seated himself on the other bench. The two were sitting back to back with only a stone partition between them.

To her own surprise, the diffidence which had oppressed her seemed now to be gradually passing off. She still realized the privilege she enjoyed in thus sharing his seat, but perhaps Mary Burton was gaining her head as well as her heart, for she positively began to think of leaving her concealment, contemplating almost unmoved a meeting with her demi-god.

Then he spoke.

"The infant first—then the school-boy," he muttered. "So far good! The third age—m—m—m—" There was a pause before he proceeded, slowly and distinctly:

> "Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
> Sighing his heart out in a woful ballad—

m—m—m—Ah!—

Made to his mistress' eyebrow."

He chuckled audibly a moment, and then, speaking a little louder:

"Fenton to the life, poor lad!" he said.

Phœbe sat up very straight with a startled movement. Oh, to think of it! That she should have forgotten Sir Guy! To have sought Will Shakespeare for the sole purpose of tracing her threatened lover—and then to forget him for a simple name—a mere celebrity!

Unconscious of the small inward drama so near at hand, the playwright proceeded with his composition.

"'Sighing his heart out,'" he mused. "Nay, that were too strong a touch for Jacques. Lighter—lighter." Then, after a moment of thought: "Ay—ay!" he chuckled. "'Sighing like furnace'—poor Fenton! How like a very furnace in his dolor! Yet did he justice to the Canary. So—so! To go back now:

"Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
Sighing like furnace with a woful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow."

'Twill pass, in sooth, 'twill pass!"

Lightly Phœbe climbed onto the bench and peeped over the back. She looked down sidewise upon the author, who was writing rapidly in an illegible hand upon one of his paper slips.

There was the head so familiar to us all—the domelike brow, the long hair hanging over the ears. This she could see, but of his face only the outline of his left cheek was visible. Strange and unexpected to herself was the light-hearted calm with which, now that she really saw him, she could contemplate the great poet.

He ceased writing and leaned against the back, gazing straight ahead.

"The third age past, what then? Why the soldier, i' faith—the soldier——"

Full of strange oaths"

came a mischievous whisper from an invisible source—

"and bearded like the pard.
Jealous in honor, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth."

For a moment the poet sat as though paralyzed with astonishment. Then rising, he turned and faced the daring girl.

Now she saw the face so well remembered and yet how little known before. Round it was and smooth, save for the small, well-trimmed mustache above the beautifully moulded mouth and chin—sensitive yet firm. But above all, the splendid eyes! Eyes of uncertain color that seemed to Phœbe mirrors of universal life, yet just now full of a perplexed admiration.

For she was herself the centre of a picture well fitted to arrest a poet's attention. Her merry face was peering over the smooth white stone, with four pink finger-tips on each side clinging for greater security. Behind her a cherry-tree was dropping its snowy blossoms, and two or three had fallen unheeded upon her wavy brown hair, making a charming frame for the young eyes and tender lips whose smiling harmony seemed to sing with arrant roguishness.

With a trilling laugh, half-suppressed, she spoke at last.

"A penny for your thoughts, Master Shakespeare!" she said.

The mood of the astonished player had quickly yielded to the girl's compelling smile, and his fine lips opened upon a firm line of teeth.

"'Show me first your penny,'" he quoted.

"I'll owe you it."

He laughed and shook his head.

"That would I not my thoughts, damsel."

"Pay them, then. Pay straightway!" she pouted, "and see the account be fair."

"Nay, then," he replied, bowing half-mockingly, "an the accountant be so passing fair, must not the account suffer in the comparison?"

The face disappeared for a moment, and then Phœbe emerged from behind the stone rampart, dusting her hands off daintily one against the other.

"Did not your wit exceed your gallantry, sir," she said, courtesying slightly, "I had had my answer sooner."

Shakespeare was somewhat taken aback to see a developed young woman, evidently of gentle birth, where he had thought to find the mere prank-loving child of some neighboring cottager. Instantly his manner changed. Bowing courteously, he stepped forward and began in a deferential voice:

"Nay, then, fair mistress, an I had known——"

"Tut—tut!" she interrupted, astonished at her own boldness. "You thought me a chit, sir. Let it pass. Pray what think you of my lines?"

"They seemed the whisper of a present muse," he said, gayly, but with conviction in his voice. "'Twas in the very mood of Jacques, my lady—a melancholy fellow by profession——"

"Holding that light which another might presently approve"—she broke in—"and praise bestowing on ill deserts in the mere wantonness of a cynic wit! What!—doth the cap fit?"

The amazement in her companion's face was irresistible, and Phœbe burst forth into a spontaneous laugh of purest merriment.

"'A hit—a hit—a very palpable hit!'" she quoted, clapping her hands in her glee.

"Were not witches an eldritch race," said Shakespeare, "you, mistress, might well lie under grave suspicion."

"What—what! Do I not fit the wizened stamp of Macbeth's sisters three?"

Shakespeare flung out his arms with a gesture of despair.

"Yet more and deeper mystery!" he cried. "My half-formed plots—half-finished scraps—the clear analysis of souls whose only life is here!" he tapped his forehead. "Say, good lady, has Will Shakespeare spoken, perchance, in sleep—yet e'en so, how could——"

He broke off and coming to her side, spoke earnestly in lowered tones.

"Tell me. Have you the fabled power to read the soul? Naught else explains your speech."

"Tell me, sir, first the truth," said Phœbe. "In all sadness, Master Shakespeare, have you had aught from Francis Bacon? I mean by way of aid in writing—or e'en of mere suggestion?"

"Bacon—Francis Bacon," said he, evidently at a loss. "There was one Nicholas Bacon——"

"Nay, 'tis of his son I speak."

"Then, in good sooth, I can but answer 'No,' mistress; since that I knew not even that this Nicholas had a son."

Phœbe heaved a sigh of relief and then went on with a partial return of her former spirit.

"Then all's well!" she exclaimed. "I am a muse well pleased; and now, an you will, I'll teach you straight more verses for your play."

"As you like it," said Shakespeare, bowing, half-amused and wholly mystified.

"Good!" she retorted, brightly. "'As You Like It' shall you name the piece, that henceforth this our conversation you may bear in mind."

Smiling, he took up his papers and wrote across the top of one of them "As You Like It" in large characters.

"Now write as I shall bid you," Phœbe said. "Pray be seated, good my pupil, come."

Then, seated there by Phœbe's side, the poet committed to paper the whole of Jacques's speech on "The Seven Ages," just as Phœbe spoke it from her memory of the Shakespeare club at home.

When he ceased scribbling, he leaned forward with elbows on his knees and ran his eyes slowly and wonderingly over each line in turn, whispering the words destined to become so famous. Phœbe leaned a little away from her companion, resting one hand on the bench, while she watched his face with a smile that slowly melted to the mood of dreamy meditation. They sat thus alone in silence for some time, so still that a wren, alighting on the path, hopped pecking among the stones at their very feet.

At length the poet, without other change in position, turned his head and looked searchingly and seriously into the young girl's eyes. What amazing quality was it that stamped its impress upon the maiden's face—a something he had never seen or dreamed of? Even a Shakespeare could give no name to that spirit of the future out of which she had come.

"Is it then true?" he said, in an undertone. "Doth the muse live? Not a mere prompting inward sense, but in bodily semblance visiting the poet's eye? Or art thou a creature of Fancy's colors blended, feigning reality?"

Never before had the glamour of her situation so penetrated her to whom these words were addressed. She was choked by an irrepressible sob that was half a laugh, and a film of moisture obscured her vision. With a sudden movement, she seized the poet's hand and pressed it to her lips. Then, half-ashamed, she rose and turned away to toy with the foliage of a shrub that stood beside the path.

"Nay, then!" Shakespeare cried, with something like relief in his voice, "you are no insubstantial spirit, damsel. Yet would I fain more clearly comprehend thee!"

There was a minute's pause ere Phœbe turned toward the speaker, that spirit of mischief dancing again in her eyes and on her lips.

"I am Mary Burton, of Burton Hall," she said.

"Oh!" he exclaimed. And then again: "Oh!" with much of understanding and something of disappointment.

"Is all clear now?" she asked, roguishly.

Shakespeare rose, and, shaking one finger playfully at her, he said:

"Most clear is this—that Sir Guy knows well to choose in love; although, an I read you aright, my Mistress Mockery, his wife is like to prove passing mettlesome. For the rest, your lover knows poor Will Shakespeare's secrets—his Macbeth and half-written Hamlet. 'Tis with these you have made so bold to-day! My muse, in sooth! Oh, fie—fie!" And he shook his head, laughing.

"Indeed! In very sooth!" said Phœbe, with merry sarcasm. "And was it, then, Guy who brought me these same lines of Jacques the melancholy?" And she pointed to the papers in his hand.

"Nay, there I grant you," said the poet, shaking his head, while the puzzled expression crept once more into his face.

"Ay, there, and in more than this!" Phœbe exclaimed. "You have spoken of Hamlet, Master Shakespeare. Guy hath told me something of that tragedy. This Prince of Denmark is a most unhappy wight, if I mistake not. Doth he not once turn to thought of self-murder?"

"Ay, mistress. I have given Sir Guy my thoughts on the theme of Hamlet, and have told him I planned a speech wherein should be made patent Hamlet's desperate weariness of life, sickened by brooding on his mother's infamy."

"'To be or not to be, that is the question,'" quoted Phœbe. "Runs it not so?"

"This passes!" cried Shakespeare, once more all amazement. "I told not this to your friend!"

"Nor did I from Guy receive it," said Phœbe. "Tell me, Master Shakespeare, have you yet brought that speech to its term?"

"No," he replied, "nor have I found the task an easy one. Much have I written, but 'tis all too slight. Can you complete these lines, think you?"

"My life upon it!" she cried, eagerly.

He shook his head, smiling incredulously.

"You scarce know what you promise," he said. "Can one so young—a damsel, too—sound to its bitter deeps the soul of Hamlet!"

"Think you so?" Phœbe replied, her eyes sparkling. "Then what say you to a bargain, Master Shakespeare? You know where Sir Guy Fenton may be found?"

"Ay, right well! 'Tis a matter of one hour's ride."

"So I thought," she said. "Hear, then, mine offer. I must perforce convey a message straight that touches the life and honor of Sir Guy. To send my servant were over-dangerous, for there may be watchers on my going and coming. Will you go, sir, without delay, if that I speak for you the missing lines completing young Hamlet's soliloquy?"

Shakespeare looked into her face for a few moments in silence.

"Why, truly," he said at last, "I have here present business with my fellow-player Burbidge." He paused, and then, yielding to the pleading in her eyes: "Yet call it a bargain, mistress," he said. "Speak me the lines I lack and straightway will I take your word to Sir Guy."

"Now blessings on thee!" cried Phœbe. "Give me straight the line you last have written."

At once the poet began:

"When he himself might his quietus make——"

"With a bare bodkin"—broke in the excited girl. "Who would fardels bear, to grunt and sweat beneath a weary life, but that the thought of

something after death—the undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller returns—puzzles the will, and makes us rather bear the ills we have than fly to others that we know not of. Thus conscience does make cowards of us all, and so the native hue of resolution is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought, and enterprises of great pith and moment by this regard their currents turn awry and lose the name of action."

"No more—no more!" cried Shakespeare, in an ecstasy. "More than completely hast thou made thy bargain good, damsel unmatchable! What! Can it be! Why here have we the very impress of young Hamlet's soul—'To grunt and sweat beneath a weary life'—feel you not there compunction and disgust, seeing in life no cleanly burden, but a 'fardel' truly, borne on the greasy shoulders of filthy slaves!"

He turned and paced back and forth upon the gravel, repeating without mistake and with gestures and accents inimitable the lines which Phœbe had dictated. She watched him, listening attentively, conscious that what she saw and heard, though given in a moment, were to be carried with her forever; convinced as well that she was for something in this, and thankful while half afraid.

Reaching the end of the soliloquy, Shakespeare turned to the maiden, who was still standing, backed by the warm color of a group of peonies.

"Nay, but tell me, damsel," he cried, appealingly. "Explain this power! Art thou, indeed, no other than Mary Burton?"

How refuse this request? And yet—what explanation would be believed? Perhaps, if she had time, she thought, some intelligible account of the truth would occur to her.

"And have you forgot your bargain so soon?" she said, reproachfully shaking her head. "Away, friend, away! Indeed, the matter is urgent and grave. If, when you return, you will ask for Mary Burton, knowing your task fulfilled, she may make clear for you what now must rest in mystery."

"You say well," he replied. "Give me your message, and count fully on Will Shakespeare to carry it with all despatch and secrecy."

Phœbe's face grew grave as she thought of all that depended on her messenger. She stepped closer to her companion and glanced to right and left to make sure they were still alone. Then, drawing from her finger a plain gold ring, she offered it to her companion, who took it as she spoke.

"If you will show this to Sir Guy," she said, "he will know that the case is serious. It beareth writing within the circle—'Sois fidèle'—do you see?"

"Be faithful—ay."

"'Twill be an admonition for you both," said Phœbe, with a faint smile. "Tell him to be in the lane behind the Peacock garden at sunset to-morrow even with two good horses, one for himself and one for me. Tell him to come alone and to travel by back ways. Bid him in my name—in God's name—close till then, trusting in me that there is need. Tell him to obey now, that later he may have the right to command."

"Good!" said Shakespeare. "And now good-by until we meet again."

A parting pressure of the hand, and he turned to go to the stables. She stood by the fountain musing, her eyes fixed on the entrance gate of the garden until at length a horseman galloped past. He rose in his stirrups and waved his hand. She ran forward, swept by a sudden dread of his loss, waving her hands in a passionate adieu.

When she reached the gate no one was in sight.

CHAPTER XIII

HOW THE FAT KNIGHT DID HOMAGE

On Rebecca's arrival with the royal attendants at Greenwich Palace, the Queen had ordered that she be given a splendid suite of apartments for her own use, and that she be constantly attended by a number of young gentlewomen assigned to her establishment. The news soon spread through the palace that an American princess or empress had arrived, and she was treated in every way on the footing of a sort of inferior royalty. Elizabeth invited her to share every meal with her, and took delight in her accounts of the manners and customs of the American aborigines.

As for Rebecca, she finally yielded to the conviction that Elizabeth was not Victoria, and found it expedient to study her companions with a view to avoiding gross breaches of etiquette. Of these, the first which she corrected was addressing Elizabeth as "Mrs. Tudor."

In twenty-four hours the shrewd and resourceful New England woman was able to learn many things, and she rapidly found her bearings among the strange people and stranger institutions by which she was surrounded.

Seated in her own "presence chamber," as she called it, surrounded by her civil and assiduous attendants, she discovered a charm in being constantly taken care of which was heightened by the contrast which it presented with her usually independent habits of life. The pleasing effect of novelty had never more strongly impressed her.

Her anxiety in Phœbe's behalf had been dispelled when she learned that Isaac Burton was expected at the palace, and was to bring his family with him. With diplomatic shrewdness, she resolved to improve every opportunity to win the Queen's favor, in order that when the time came she might have the benefit of her authority in removing her younger sister from her pretended relatives.

It was about five in the afternoon of the day succeeding her adventure on the Thames, and Rebecca sat near a window

overlooking the entrance court. She was completing the knitting upon which she had been engaged when Droop made his first memorable call on her in Peltonville.

On either side of Rebecca, but on stools set somewhat lower than her chair, were her two favorites, the Lady Clarissa Bray, daughter of Walter Bray, Lord Hunsforth, and the Honorable Lady Margaret Welsh, daughter of the Earl of March.

Clarissa was employed in embroidering a stomacher whose green, gold, and russet set off her dark curls very agreeably. The Lady Margaret was playing a soft Italian air upon the cithern, which she managed with excellent taste, to the entertainment of her temporary mistress and her half dozen attendants.

Rebecca's needles moved in time with the graceful measure of the music, while her head nodded in unison, and she smiled now and then.

As the air was concluded she let her hands sink for a moment into her lap, turning to bend an approving look upon the fair young musician.

"There, now!" she said. "I declare, Miss Margaret, that's real sweet music. I'm much obliged to ye, I'm sure."

Margaret arose and courtesied, blushing.

"Would your Highness that I play again?" she asked.

"No, thank ye," said Rebecca, resuming her knitting. "The's no sort o' use in drivin' folks to death as are kind to ye. Sit right down an' rest now, an' I'll tell ye all a story thet hez a bearin' right on that point."

She turned to the four maids of honor seated behind her.

"Now you girls can jest's well come an' set in front o' me while I'm talkin'. I'll like it a heap better, I'm sure."

With great diffidence on the part of her attendants, and after much coaxing on Rebecca's part, this change was accomplished. The idea

of being seated in the presence of royalty was in itself quite distasteful to these young courtiers, but upon this Rebecca had insisted from the first. It made her feel tired, she said, to see people standing continually on their feet.

"Well," she began, when all were disposed to their satisfaction, "it all happened in my country, ye know. 'Twas 'bout ten years ago now, I guess—or rather then—I mean it will be——"

Clarissa's wondering eyes caught the speaker's attention and she coughed.

"Never mind when 'twas," she went on. "Ye see, things are very different here—time as well's the rest. However, 'long 'bout then, my cousin Ann Slocum took a notion to 'nvite me down to Keene fer a little visit. Phœbe—thet's my sister—she said I could go jest's well's not, an' so I went. The fust night I was there, when dinner was over, of course I offered to wash up the dishes, seem'——"

An involuntary and unanimous gasp of amazement from her fair auditors cut Rebecca short at this point.

"Well," she said, a little anxiously, "what's the matter? Anythin' wrong?"

The Lady Clarissa ventured to voice the general sentiment.

"Did we hear aright, your Highness?" she asked. "Said you—'wash up the dishes'?"

"Oh!" said Rebecca, conscious for the first time of her slip, "did that puzzle ye?"

"Do queens and princesses perform menial offices in America?" asked the Honorable Lady Margaret.

Short as was the time allowed, it had sufficed for Rebecca to compose a form of words which should not wound her conscience by direct falsehood, while not undeceiving her hearers as to her rank.

"Why, to tell ye the truth," she said, in a semi-confidential manner, "all the queens and princesses there are in America wash the dishes after dinner."

There was some whispering among the girls at this, and Rebecca's ears caught the expressions "passing strange" and "most wonderful" more than once.

She waited until the first excitement thus produced had subsided and then proceeded.

"Of course Cousin Ann hadn't no objection, an' so I went into the kitchen. When we got through, blest ef she didn't ask me to wash out the dish-towels while she filled the lamps! Now——"

The growing amazement in the round, open eyes and shaking curls of her audience brought Rebecca once more to a standstill. Evidently some further explanation of this unwonted state of things would be expected. To gain time for further invention, Rebecca rose and carried her knitting to the window as though to pick up a stitch. Mechanically she glanced down into the court-yard, where there was now a large assemblage, and uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"Gracious alive!" she cried. "If there ain't a bicycle! Well, well, don't that look nat'ral, now! Makes me feel homesick."

She turned to her companions, each of whom was ceremoniously standing, but all showing clearly in their faces the curiosity which consumed them.

"Come 'long!" said Rebecca, smiling. "Come one and all! I'm blest ef ye don't make me think of Si Pray's dog waitin' to be whistled fer when Si goes out to walk."

The obedience to this summons was prompt and willing, and Rebecca turned again to observe those who came with the mysterious bicycle.

"Land o' sunshine!" she exclaimed, "did ye ever see sech a fat man as that! Do any of you girls know who 'tis?"

"'Tis Sir Percevall Hart, harbinger to the Queen, I ween," Clarissa replied.

"Gracious!" said Rebecca, anxiously. "I do hope now he ain't bringin' any *very* bad news!"

"Wherefore should he, your Highness?" said Clarissa.

"Why, if he's a harbinger of woe—ain't that what they call 'em?" she spoke, with some timidity.

"Nay," said the Lady Margaret. "Sir Percevall is reputed a wit and a pleasant companion, your Highness. He is harbinger to the Queen."

"An' who's the man with him in black togs an' rumpled stockin's?" said Rebecca. "The one holdin' the bicycle?"

"Mean you him holding the two bright wheels, your Highness?"

"Yes."

Lady Margaret could not answer, nor could any of the other attendants. Could Rebecca have had a more advantageous view of the stranger, she would herself have been the only one in the palace to recognize him. She could only see his hat and his borrowed clothes, however, and her curiosity remained unsatisfied.

"That looks like Copernicus Droop's wheel," she muttered. "I wonder ef somebody's ben an' stole it while he was away. 'Twould serve him right fer givin' me the slip."

Then turning to Lady Margaret again, she continued:

"Would you mind runnin' down to ask who that man is, Miss Margaret? Seems to me I know that bicycle."

Courtesying in silence, the maid backed out of the room and hurried down the stairs quite afire with the eagerness of her curiosity. This strange, bright-wheeled thing to which the American princess so easily applied a name, could only be some wonderful product of the New World. She was overjoyed at the thought that she was to be the first to closely examine and perhaps to touch this curiosity.

Her plans were delayed, however, for when she reached the courtyard she found herself restrained by a row of men with halberds, one of whom informed her that her Majesty was returning from chapel.

The Queen and her retinue were obliged to pass across the courtyard on the way to the apartment where Elizabeth was to take her evening meal. Her progress at such times was magnificently accompanied, and was often much delayed by her stopping to notice her favorites as she passed them, and even at times to receive petitions.

Copernicus, who, as we have seen, had just arrived, was inclined to bewail the interruption caused by this procession, but his companion insisted that, on the contrary, all was for the best.

"Why, man," said he, "Dame Fortune hath us in her good books for a surety. What! Could we have planned all better had we willed it? To meet the Queen in progress from chapel! 'Twill go hard but Sir Percevall shall win his suit—and you, Master Droop, your monopolies. Mark me now—mark me well!"

So saying, the fat knight advanced and joined one of the long lines of courtiers already forming a hedge on each side of the direct way which the Queen was to traverse. Droop, leaning his bicycle against the palace wall and taking in his hands his phonograph and box of cylinders, placed himself behind his guide and watched the proceedings with eager curiosity.

A door opened at one end of the lane between the two courtiers and there appeared the first of a long procession of splendidly apparelled gentlemen-in-waiting, walking bareheaded two by two. Of these, the first were simple untitled knights and gentlemen. These were followed by barons, then earls, and lastly knights of the garter, each gentleman vying with the others in richness of apparel and lavish display of collars, orders, jewelled scabbards, and heavy chains of gold.

Behind these there came three abreast. These were the Lord High Chancellor, in wig and robes, carrying the Great Seal of England in a red silk bag. On his right walked a gentleman carrying the golden

sceptre, jewelled and quaintly worked, while he on the left carried the sword of state, point up, in a red scabbard, studded with golden fleur-de-lis.

A few steps behind this imposing escort came the Queen, with a small but richly covered prayer-book in her hand. She looked very majestic on this occasion, being dressed in white silk bordered with pearls of the size of beans, over which was thrown a mantle of black silk shot with silver threads. An oblong collar of jewelled gold lay upon her otherwise bare bosom.

The Queen's train was very long and was carried by a marchioness, whose plain attire set off the magnificence of royalty.

As Elizabeth proceeded across the yard, she spoke to one by-stander or another, and Droop, looking on, made up his mind that the rule was that anyone to whom she addressed a word, or even a look, should drop forthwith to his knees and so remain until she had passed, unless she pleased to extend her hand to raise him up.

On each side of this main procession there was a single file of five and twenty gentlemen pensioners, each carrying a gilt battle-axe.

The remainder of the procession consisted of a train of court ladies all dressed in white and nearly destitute of ornaments. Evidently the Royal Virgin would suffer no rivalry in dress from those of her own sex.

Just behind Elizabeth and to one side, in such a position as to be within easy reach for consultation, walked the Lord High Treasurer, William Cecil, Baron of Burleigh. It was to this nobleman that his nephew, Francis Bacon, had addressed the letter which he had given to Copernicus Droop.

By dint of much squeezing and pushing, Sir Percevall made his way to the front of the waiting line, and, as Elizabeth approached, he dropped painfully to his knees, and, with hat in hand, gazed earnestly into the Queen's face, not daring to speak first, but with a petition writ large in every feature.

Now, Elizabeth was most jealous of her dignity, and valued her own favors very highly. In her eyes it was downright impertinence at a time like this for anyone to solicit the honor of her attention by kneeling before he was noticed.

Knowing this, Burleigh, who recognized the knight and wished him well, motioned to him earnestly to rise. Alarmed, Sir Percevall made a desperate effort to obey the hint, and, despite his huge bulk, would perhaps have succeeded in regaining his feet without attracting the notice of the Queen but for the impatient movement of the crowd behind him. Unfortunately, however, he had but half risen when the bustling multitude moved forward a little against his expansive rear. The result was disastrous.

Sir Percevall lost his balance, and, feeling himself toppling, threw his hands out forward with a cry and fell flat on his face.

Elizabeth was at this moment addressing a few gracious words to a white-haired courtier, who kneeled among those gathered on the right of her line of progress. Startled by the loud cry of the falling knight, she turned swiftly and saw at her feet a man of monstrous girth struggling in vain to raise his unwieldy form. His plumed hat had rolled to some distance, exposing a bald head with two gray tufts over the ears. His sword stood on its hilt, with point in air, and his short, fat legs made quick alternate efforts to bend beneath him—efforts which the fleshy knees successfully resisted.

The helpless, jerking limbs, the broad, rolling body, and the mixture of expletives and frantic apologies poured forth by the prostrate knight turned the Queen's first ready alarm to irrepressible laughter, in which the bystanders joined to their great relief. Droop alone was grave, for he could only see in this accident the ruin of his plans.

"Now, by the rood!" cried the Queen, as soon as she could speak distinctly, "fain would we see your face, good gentleman. Of all our subjects, not one doth us such low obeisance!" Then, beckoning to those of her gentleman pensioners who stood nearest:

"Raise us yon mighty subject of ours, whose greatness we might in our majesty brook but ill did not his humble bearing proclaim a loyal submission."

Four gentlemen, dropping their gilt axes, hastened to Sir Percevall's aid, raising him by the arms and shoulders.

"Enough—enough, lads!" cried the knight, when they had got him to his knees. "Let it not be said that Sir Percevall Hart dared to tempt erect the dreadful glance of majesty. Here let him lowly bend beneath the eyes that erstwhile laid him low."

Still holding him, the four gentlemen turned their eyes to the Queen for orders, and Sir Percevall, clasping his mud-stained hands, addressed himself directly to Elizabeth, in whose still laughing face he foresaw success.

"O Majesty of England!" he cried. "Marvel not at this my sudden fall—for when, with more than royal glory is linked the potency of virgin loveliness, who can withstand!"

"Why, how now, Sir Knight!" said Elizabeth, banteringly. "Are we less lovely or less awful now than a moment since? You seem at least one half restored."

"Nay, your Majesty," was the reply. "'Tis his sovereign's will and high command that stiffens poor Percy's limbs, and in obedience only that he finds strength to present his suit."

"A suit!" she exclaimed. "Pride cometh before a fall, 'tis said. Then, in sooth, by the rule of contraries, a fall should presage humility's reward. What says my Lord Baron?"

She turned to Burleigh, who smiled and, bowing, replied:

"So witty a flight to so sound a conclusion Cecil could not have winged alone, but where majesty teacheth wisdom, who shall refuse it!"

"'Tis well!" said Elizabeth, more soberly. "Rise, Sir Knight, and, when that we have supped, seek audience again. An the petition be in reason, 'twill not suffer for the fall you have had."

With this speech, Sir Percevall's first audience ended, and it was with a happy face that he suffered himself to be helped to his feet by the four gentlemen who had first been sent to his aid.

As the Queen resumed her progress and entered the apartments wherein she was to prepare for her evening meal, there resounded through the palace the ringing notes of trumpets and the musical booming of a kettle-drum.

In a large antechamber immediately outside of the room where the Queen was to sup there was placed a splendidly carved table of black oak, and here were made all the preparations for her repast, accompanied by the usual ceremonies.

Moving to the sound of trumpets and drum, two gentlemen entered the room, the first bearing a rod and the second a table-cloth. Advancing one behind the other, they kneeled three times between the door and table, apparently expressing the deepest veneration. Having spread the table, they retired backward, not forgetting to repeat the genuflections as performed on their approach.

These first two were followed immediately by two other gentlemen, the first with a rod and the other carrying a salt-seller, plates, and bread. These articles were carried to the table with the same ceremony as had attended the spreading of the cloth.

Next there entered a young lady, whose coronet indicated the rank of countess and whose uncovered bosom proclaimed the unmarried state. She was accompanied by a married lady of lower rank, carrying a knife. The Countess rubbed the plates with bread and salt, and then the two ladies stood awhile by the table, awaiting the arrival of the supper.

Finally there entered, one at a time, twenty-four yeomen of the guard, the tallest and handsomest men in the royal service, bareheaded and clothed in scarlet coats, with roses embroidered in gold thread on their backs. Each yeoman carried a separate special dish intended for the royal repast, and, as each approached the table, the lady with the knife cut off and placed in his mouth a portion of the food which he was carrying. After depositing their dishes upon

the table, the yeomen departed and the maids of honor then approached and carried the dishes into the inner room, where the Queen sat at her supper.

Of all those who thus advanced to the table and departed walking backward, none omitted the reverent kneelings, nor did anyone concerned in all this ceremony speak a word until it was concluded. Although the Queen was actually absent, in fiction she was present, and it was to this fiction that so much reverence was paid.

Shortly after the commencement of these preparations, Droop and his guide appeared among other petitioners and other lookers-on around the doorways. Copernicus carried his phonographic apparatus, but the bicycle had been left in the court-yard in the care of a man-at-arms.

"Jiminy!" said Droop, looking curiously about him, "ain't this A No. 1, though! Et must be fun to be a queen, eh, Percevall?"

"To speak truly, my lad," said the knight, "there is something too much of bravery and pomp in the accidents of royalty. What! Can a king unbend—be merry—a good fellow with his equals? No! And would you or I barter this freedom for a crown?" He shook his head. "Which think you passed the merrier night—or the Queen (God's blessing on her) or you and I?"

Droop paid little heed to his companion, for his eyes were busy with the unwonted scene before him.

"Well, now!" he exclaimed. "Look there, Sir Knight. See how the old lady digs out a piece o' that pie and pokes it into that lord's mouth! He must be mighty hungry! I'm darned ef I'd thought they'd hev let him hev his grub before the Queen—and out of her own dish, too!"

"Nay, Brother Droop," said the Englishman, "this custom hath its origin in the necessary precaution of our sovereign. Who knows but that poison be in this food! Have not a score of scurvy plots been laid against her life? 'Tis well to test what is meant for the use of majesty."

Droop whistled low.

"Thet's the wrinkle, eh?" he said. "I don't guess I'd be much tempted to take a job here as a taster, then! Hello!" he said. "Why, they're takin' the victuals out o' the room. What's that fer? Did they find p'ison in 'em?"

Sir Percevall did not reply. His attention had been caught by the arrival of a strangely dressed woman, apparently attended by six maids of honor.

Turning to a gentleman at his elbow:

"Can you tell me, sir," he said, "who is yonder stranger in outlandish apparel?"

Following the speaker's eyes, the gentleman stared for a few moments and then replied:

"Marry, sir, it can but be the American princess with her retinue. They say that her Majesty much affects this strange new-comer."

It was, indeed, Rebecca who, in response to an invitation brought by a page in the Queen's livery, was on the way to take supper with Elizabeth. On her arrival at the anteroom door, an attendant went in before the Queen to announce her presence; and, while awaiting admission, Rebecca gazed about her with a curiosity still unsatisfied.

"There, now," she was saying, "'twas suttenly too bad to send you off on a wild-goose chase, Miss Margaret. Ef you could hev found the man, I'd hev ben glad, though."

At that very moment, a voice close beside her made her start violently.

"Well—well! I declare! Rebecca Wise, how do you do!"

She turned and saw him of whom she was at that moment speaking, and lo! to her amazement, it was Copernicus Droop who held out his right hand.

"Copernicus Droop!" she gasped. Then, remembering her adventure of the previous day, she went on coldly, without noticing the proffered hand: "Ye seem right glad to see me *now*, Mr. Droop."

Droop was taken aback at her manner and at the sarcastic emphasis laid upon the word "now."

"Why—why—of course," he stammered. "I thought you was lost."

"Lost!" she cried, indignantly. "Lost! Why, you know right well I chased you up one street and down the other all the mornin' yesterday. You tried to lose me, Mr. Droop—and now you find me again, you see. Oh, yes, you *must* be glad to see me!"

Droop was at first all astonishment at this accusation, but in a few moments he guessed the true state of the case. Without delay he explained the exchange of clothes, and had no difficulty in persuading Rebecca that it was Francis Bacon whom she had pursued by mistake.

"Poor young man!" Rebecca exclaimed, in a low voice of contrition. "Why, he must hev took me fer a lunatic!"

Then she suddenly recollected her young attendants, and turned so as to bring them on one hand and Droop on the other.

"Young ladies," she said, primly, "this here's Mr. Copernicus Droop, from America."

With one accord the six girls dropped their eyes and courtesied low.

"Mr. Droop," Rebecca continued, as she indicated one of the girls after the other with her forefinger, "make you acquainted with Miss Clarissa, Miss Margaret, Miss Maria, Miss Gertrude, Miss Evelina, and Miss Dorothy. They've got sech tangled-up last names, I declare I can't keep 'em in my head. Mr. Droop's the same rank I am," she concluded, addressing the girls.

Droop fidgeted and bowed six awkward bows with eyes riveted to the ground. He had never been a ladies' man, and this unexpected presentation was a doubly trying ordeal.

There was a murmur of "your Highness" from the courtesying young women which convinced the abashed Yankee that he was being mocked, and this impression was deepened by the ill-

suppressed giggles occasioned by the sight of his sadly rumpled hose. His confusion was complete.

"Now, tell me," said Rebecca, curiously, "whatever brought you up here? Hev ye some errand with the Queen?"

"Yes," said Droop. "My friend and me came up here to get a patent. Say," he exclaimed, brightening up with startling suddenness, "praps you know the racket—got the inside track, eh?"

"Inside track!"

"Yes. Don't you know the Patent Examiner—or Commissioner, or Lord High Thingummy that runs the Patent Office here? I hate to bother the Queen about sech things! Goodness knows, I'd never ha' thought o' troublin' President McKinley about patents!"

Rebecca shook her head.

"I'm blest ef I know the fust thing about it," she declared. "Ef you take my advice, you'll not bother Miss Elizabeth 'bout your old patents."

At this moment the page returned.

"Her Majesty awaits your Royal Highness within," he said, bowing deeply.

Droop's jaws fell apart and his eyes opened wide.

"Royal Highness!" he murmured.

"Well, I've got to go now," said Rebecca, smiling at her friend's astonishment. "But don't you go 'way fer a while yet. I'll try an' get the Queen to let you in soon. I want to talk with you 'bout lots of things."

In a moment she was gone, leaving Copernicus rooted to the floor and dumb with amazement.

Someone touched his elbow and, turning, he saw Sir Percevall, with the light of triumph on his fat face.

"Fortune's smiles have turned to mere laughter, my lad," he said, chuckling. "This American princess hath the Queen's good-will. How the fiend's name came you acquainted?"

CHAPTER XIV

THE FATE OF SIR PERCEVALL'S SUIT

In the inner chamber, Elizabeth was seated at a small table, at the opposite end of which sat Rebecca. Burleigh, Nottingham, and two or three other great lords stood near at hand, while one dish after another was brought in from the outer room by maids of honor.

Standing to the right of the Queen's chair was a dark man of foreign aspect, wearing the robes of a Doctor of Laws. In his hand was Rebecca's copy of the New York *World*, which he was perusing with an expression of the utmost perplexity.

"Well, Master Guido," said the Queen, "what make you of it?"

"Maestà eccellentissima—" the scholar began.

"Nay—nay. Speak good plain English, man," said the Queen. "The Lady Rebecca hath no Italian."

Messer Guido bowed and began again, speaking with a scarcely perceptible accent.

"Most Excellent Majesty, I have but begun perusal of this document. It promiseth matter for ten good years' research in the comparison of parts, interpretation of phrases, identifying customs, manners, dress, and the like."

"Nay, then," said the Queen, "with the help of the Lady Rebecca, 'twill be no weighty task, methinks. My lady, why partake you not of the pasty?" she said, turning to Rebecca. "Hath it not a very proper savor?"

"My, yes," Rebecca replied; "it's mighty good pie! Somehow, though, pie don't lay very good with me these days. Ye don't happen to have any tea, do ye?"

"Tea!"

"If I may venture—" said Guido, eagerly.

"Speak, Messer Guido."

"Why, it would appear, your Majesty, that tea is a sort of stuff for dresses—silk, belike."

"Stuff for dresses!" said Rebecca. "Stuff and nonsense! Why, tea's a drink!"

"A beverage! Then how explain you this?" the Italian cried, triumphantly. Lifting the newspaper, he read from it the following passage: "The illustration shows a charming tea-gown, a creation of Mme. Décolleté."

"You see, Maestà—your Majesty—it is clear. A 'tea-gown' is shown in the drawing—a gown made of tea."

Rebecca had opened her mouth to overwhelm the poor savant with the truth when a page entered and stood before the Queen.

"Well, sirrah," said Elizabeth, "what is your message?"

"Sir Percevall Hart craves an audience, your Majesty, for himself and his American friend and client."

"Another American!" exclaimed the Queen.

"Copernicus Droop!" cried Rebecca.

"Know you Sir Percevall's friend, Lady Rebecca?" asked Elizabeth.

"Why, yes, your Majesty. He and I came over together from Peltonville. I believe he's after a patent."

"A patent? What mean you? Doth he ask for a patent of nobility—a title? Can this be the suit of the fat knight?"

"I don't know," said Rebecca. "'Tain't nothin' 'bout nobility, I'm sure, though. It's a patent on a phonograph, I b'lieve."

"Know you aught of this, my lord?" said Elizabeth, turning to Burleigh.

"Why, yes, your Majesty. I have to-day received from Sir Percevall Hart a letter written by my nephew, Francis Bacon——"

"Bacon! What! Ay—methinks we know somewhat of this same Francis," said the Queen, grimly. "A member of Parliament, is he not?"

"Even so, your Majesty," said Burleigh, somewhat crestfallen. "From this letter I learn," he continued, while Elizabeth shook her head, "that this American—a Master Dupe, I believe——"

"No—no—Droop!" cried Rebecca. "Copernicus Droop."

The baron bowed.

"That this Master Droop desires the grant of a monopoly in——"

"A monopoly!" cried Elizabeth. "What! This independent young barrister—this parliamentary meddler in opposition, forsooth! He craveth a monopoly? God's death! A monopoly in all the impudence in this our realm is of a surety this fellow's right! We grant it—we grant it. Let the papers be drawn forthwith!"

The baron bent before the storm and, bowing, remained silent. Rebecca, however, could scarce see the justice of the Queen's position.

"Well, but look here, your Majesty," she said. "'Tain't Mr. Bacon as wants this patent; it's Mr. Droop. Mr. Bacon only gave him a letter to Mr. Burleigh here."

Astonishment was depicted in every face save in that of the Queen, whose little eyes were now turned upon her sister sovereign in anger.

"Harkye, Lady Rebecca!" she exclaimed. "Is it the custom to take the Queen to task in your realm?"

Rebecca's reply came pat. The type was prepared beforehand, and she answered now with a clear conscience.

"Why, of course. We talk jest as we feel like to all the queens there is in my country."

The equivocation in this reply must have struck the Queen, for she said, without taking her eyes from Rebecca's face:

"And, prithee, Lady Rebecca, how many queens be there in America? We begin to doubt if royalty be known there."

Again Messer Guido evinced signs of an anxious desire to speak, and Rebecca shrewdly took advantage of this at once.

"Messer Guido can tell you all 'bout that, I guess," she said.

Elizabeth turned her eyes to the savant.

"What knowledge have you of this, learned doctor?" she asked, coldly.

"Why, your Majesty," said Guido, with delighted zeal, "the case is plain. Will your Majesty but look at this drawing on one of the inner pages of the printed document brought by the Lady Rebecca? Behold the effigy of a powder canister, with the words 'Royal Baking Powder' thereon. This would appear evidence that in America gunpowder is known and is used by the sovereigns of the various tribes. Here again we see 'The Royal Corset,' and there 'Crown Shirts.' Can it be doubted that the Americans have royal governors?"

The Queen's face cleared a little at this, and Guido proceeded with increased animation:

"Behold further upon the front page, your Majesty, the effigy of a man wearing a round crown with a peak or projecting shelf over the eyes. Under this we read the legend 'The Czar of the Tenderloin.' Now, your Majesty will remember that the ruler of Muscovy is termed the Czar. The Tenderloin signifieth, doubtless, some order, akin, perchance, to the Garter."

"This hath a plausible bent, Messer Guido," said Elizabeth, with more good-nature. "Lady Rebecca, can you better explain this matter of the Czar?"

"No, indeed," Rebecca replied, with perfect truth. "Mister Guido must have a fine mind to understand things like that!"

"In sooth, good Messer Guido," said Elizabeth, with a smile, "your research and power of logic do you great credit. We doubt not to learn more of these new empires from your learned pains than ever from Raleigh, Drake, and the other travellers whose dull wits go but to the surface of things. But, Lord warrant us!" she continued, "here standeth our page, having as yet no answer. Go, sirrah, and bid Sir Percevall and this great American to our presence straight."

Then, turning again to Guido, she said:

"Messer Guido, we enjoin it upon your learning that you do make a note of the petition of this American, as well as of those things which he may answer in explanation of his design."

With a bow, Guido stepped to one side and, carefully folding the newspaper, drew from his bosom his tablets and prepared to obey.

All eyes turned curiously to the door as it opened to admit the two suitors, who were followed by the page. Sir Percevall, with plumed hat in one hand and sword hilt in the other, advanced ponderously, bowing low at every other step. Droop hurriedly deposited his two boxes upon the floor and followed his monitor, closely imitating his every step and gesture. Having no sword, he thought it best to put his left hand into his bosom, an attitude which he recollected in a picture of Daniel Webster.

The fat knight was about to kneel to kiss the royal hand, but Elizabeth, smiling, detained him.

"Nay, nay!" she said. "You, Sir Percevall, have paid your debt of homage in advance for a twelvemonth. He who kisses the dust at our feet hath knelt for ten." Then, turning to Droop, who was down on both knees, with his hand still in his breast: "What now!" she exclaimed. "Hath your hand suffered some mischance, Sir American, that you hide it in your bosom?"

"Not a mite—not a mite!" Droop stuttered, quickly extending the member in question. "Nay, your Majesty—in sooth, no—my hand beeth all right!"

"We learn from the Lord Treasurer," said Elizabeth, addressing Sir Percevall, "that your petition hath reference to a monopoly. Know you not, Sir Knight, that these be parlous days for making of new monopolies? Our subjects murmur, and 'tis said that we have already been too generous with these great gifts. Have you considered of this?"

"My liege," said Sir Percevall, "these things have we considered. Nor would we tempt this awful Presence with petitions looking to tax further the public patience. But, please your Majesty, Master Droop, my client here," indicating the still kneeling man with a sweeping gesture, "hath brought into being an instrument, or rather two instruments, of marvellous fashion and of powers strange. Of these your Majesty's subjects have had hitherto no knowledge, and it is in the making and selling of these within this realm that we do here crave a right of monopoly under the Great Seal."

"Excuse me, forsooth, your Majesty," Droop broke in, "but would thou mind if I get up, my liege?"

"Nay, rise, rise, Master Droop!" exclaimed the Queen, smothering a laugh. "We find matter for favor in your sponsor's speech. Can you more fully state the nature of this petition?"

"Yes, ma'am—your Majesty," said Droop, rising and dusting off his knees. "I am the inventor of a couple of things, forsooth, that are away ahead of the age. Marry, yes! I call 'em a bicycle and a phonograph."

"Well, did you ever!" murmured Rebecca, amazed at this impudent claim to invention.

Messer Guido paused in his writing and began to unfold his precious American newspaper, while Droop went on, encouraged by the attentive curiosity which he had evidently excited in the Queen.

"Now, the bicycle—or the bike, fer short—is a kind of a wagon or vehycle, you wot. When you mount on it, you can trundle yerself along like all possessed——"

"Gramercy!" broke in the Queen, in a tone of irritation. "What have we here! We must have plain English, Master Droop. American idioms are unknown to us."

As Droop opened his mouth to reply, Guido stepped forward with a great rustling of paper.

"May it please your Gracious Majesty—" he panted, eagerly.

"Speak, Messer Guido."

"I would fain question this gentleman, your Majesty, touching certain things contained herein." He shook the paper at arm's length and glared at Droop, who returned the look with a calm eye.

"You may proceed, sir," said Elizabeth.

"Why, Master Droop, you that are the inventor of this same 'bicycle,' how explain you this?"

He thrust the paper under Droop's nose, pointing to an advertisement therein.

"Here," he continued, "here have we a picture bearing the legend, 'Baltimore Bicycle—Buy No Other'—" He paused, but before Copernicus could speak he went on breathlessly: "And look on this, Master Droop—see here—here! Another drawing, this time with the legend, 'Edison's Phonographs.' How comes it that you have invented these things? Can you invent on this 21st day of May, in the year of our Lord 1598, what was here set forth as early as—as—" he turned the paper back to the first page, "as early as April—" he stopped, turned pale, and choked. Droop looked mildly triumphant.

"Well—well!" cried Elizabeth, "hast lost thy voice, man?"

"My liege," murmured the bewildered savant, "the date—this document——"

"Is dated in 1898," said Droop, solemnly. "This here bike and phonograph won't be invented by anyone else for three hundred years yet."

Elizabeth frowned angrily and grasped the arms of her chair in an access of wrath which, after a pause, found vent in a torrent of words:

"Now, by God's death, my masters, you will find it ill jesting in this presence! What in the fiend's name! Think ye, Elizabeth of England may be tricked and cozened—made game of by a scurvy Italian bookworm and a witless——"

The adjectives and expletives which followed may not be reported here. As the storm of words progressed, growing more violent in its continuance, Droop stood open-mouthed, not comprehending the cause of this tirade. Of the others, but one preserved his wits at this moment of danger.

Sir Percevall, well aware that the Queen's fury, unless checked, would produce his and his client's ruin, determined to divert this flood of emotion into a new channel. With the insight of genius, the fat knight realized that only a woman's curiosity could avert a queen's rage, and with what speed he could he stumbled backward to where Droop had left his exhibits. He lifted the box containing the phonograph and, taking the instrument out, held it on the palm of his huge left hand and bent his eyes upon it in humble and resigned contemplation.

The quick roving eye of the angry Queen caught sight of this queer assemblage of cogs, levers, and cylinder, and for the first time her too-ready tongue tripped. She looked away and recovered herself to the end of the sentence. She could not resist another look, however, and this time her words came more slowly. She paused—wavered—and then fixed her gaze in silence upon the enigmatical device. There was a unanimous smothered sigh as the bystanders recognized their good fortune. Guido, frightened half to death, slipped unobserved out of a side door, and was never seen at Greenwich again. Nor has that fatal newspaper been heard from since.

"What may that be, Sir Percevall?" the Queen inquired at length, settling back in her chair as comfortably as her ruff would permit.

"This, my liege, is the phonograph," said the knight, straightening himself proudly.

"An my Greek be not at fault," said the Queen, "this name should purport a writer of sound."

Sir Percevall's face fell. He was no Greek scholar, and this query pushed him hard. Fortunately for him, Elizabeth turned to Droop as she concluded her sentence.

"Hath your invention this intent, Master Droop?" she said.

"Verily, I guess you've hit it—I wot that's right!" stammered the still frightened man.

A very audible murmur of admiration passed from one to another of the assembled courtiers and ladies-in-waiting. These expressions reached the ears of the Queen, for whom they were indeed intended, and the consciousness of her acumen restored Elizabeth entirely to good-humor.

"The conceit is very novel, is it not, my lord?" she said, turning to Baron Burleigh.

"Novel, indeed, and passing marvellous if achieved, your Majesty," was the suave reply.

"How write you sounds with this device, Master Droop?" she asked.

"Why, thusly, ma'am—your Majesty," said Droop, with renewed courage. "One speaketh, you wot—talketh-like into this hole—this aperture." He turned and pointed to the mouth-piece of the instrument, which was still in Sir Percevall's hands. "Hevin' done this, you wot, this little pin-like pricketh or scratcheth the wax, an' the next time you go over the thing, there you are!"

Conscious of the lameness of this explanation, Droop hurried on, hoping to forestall further questions.

"Let me show ye, my liege, how she works, in sooth," he said, taking the phonograph from the knight. Looking all about, he could see nothing at hand whereon to conveniently rest the device.

"Marry, you wouldn't mind ef I was to set this right here on your table, would ye, my liege?" he asked.

Permission was graciously accorded, and, depositing the phonograph, Droop hurried back to get his records. Holding a wax cylinder in one hand, he proceeded.

"Now, your Majesty can graciously gaze on this wax cylinder," he said. "On here we hev scrawled—written—a tune played by a cornet. It is 'Home, Sweet Home.' Ye've heerd it, no doubt?"

"Nay, the title is not familiar," said the Queen, looking about her. With one accord, the courtiers shook their heads in corroboration.

"Is that so? Well, well! Why, every boy and gal in America knows that tune well!" said Droop.

He adjusted the cylinder and a small brass megaphone, and, having wound the motor, pressed the starting-button. Almost at once a stentorian voice rang through the apartment:

"Home, Sweet Home—Cornet Solo—By Signor Paolo Morituri—Edison Record."

The sudden voice, issuing from the dead revolving cylinder, was so unexpected and startling that several of the ladies screamed and at least one gentleman pensioner put his hand to his sword-hilt. Elizabeth herself started bolt upright and turned pale under her rouge as she clutched the arms of her chair. Before she could express her feelings the cornet solo began, and the entire audience gradually resumed its wonted serenity before the close of the air.

"Marvellous beyond telling!" exclaimed Elizabeth, in delight. "Why, this contrivance of yours, Master Droop, shall make your name and fortune throughout our realm. Have you many such ingenious gentlemen in your kingdom, Lady Rebecca?"

"Oh, dear me, yes!" said Rebecca, somewhat contemptuously. "Copernicus Droop ain't nobody in America."

Droop glanced reproachfully at his compatriot, but concluded not to give expression to his feelings. Accordingly, he very quickly substituted another cylinder, and turned again to the Queen.

"Now, your Majesty," said he, "here's a comic monologue. I tell you, verily, it's a side-splitter!"

"What may a side-splitter be, Master Droop?"

"Why, in sooth, somethin' almighty funny, you know—make a feller laugh, you wot."

Elizabeth nodded and, with a smile of anticipation, which was copied by all present, prepared to be amused.

Alas! The monologue was an account of how a farmer got the best of a bunco steerer in New York City, and was delivered in the esoteric dialect of the Bowery. It was not long before willing smiles gave place to long-drawn faces of comic bewilderment, and, although Copernicus set his best example by artificial grins and pretended inward laughter, he could evoke naught but silence and bored looks.

"Marry, sir," said Elizabeth, when the monologue was at an end, "this needs be some speech of an American empire other than that you come from. Could you make aught of it, Lady Rebecca?"

"Nothin' on airth!" was the reply. "Only a word now an' then about a farmer—an' somethin' about hayseed."

"Now, here's a reg'lar bird!" said Droop, hastily, as he put in a new cylinder.

"Can you thus record e'en the voices of fowls?" said the Queen, with renewed interest.

Hopeless of explaining, Droop bowed and touched the starting-button. The announcement came at once.

"Liberty Bells March—Edison Record," and after a few preliminary flourishes, a large brass band could be heard in full career.

This proved far more pleasing to the Queen and her suite.

"So God mend us, a merry tune and full of harmony!" said the Queen.

"But that ain't all, your Majesty," said Droop. "Here's a blank cylinder, now." He adjusted it as he spoke and unceremoniously pushed the instrument close to the Queen. "Here," he said, "jest you talk anythin' you want to in there and you'll see suthin' funny, I'll bet ye!" He was thoroughly warmed to his work now, and the little court etiquette which he had acquired dropped from him entirely.

The Queen's eager interest had been so aroused that she was unconscious of his too familiar manner. Leaning over the phonograph as Droop started the motor, she looked about her and said, with a titter: "What shall we say? Weighty words should grace so great an occasion, my lords."

"Oh, say the Declaration of Independence or the 'Charge of the Light Brigade'!" Droop exclaimed. "Any o' them things in the school-books!"

Elizabeth saw that the empty cylinder was passing uselessly and wasted no time in discussion, but began to declaim some verses of Horace.

"M—m—m—" exclaimed Droop, doubtfully. "I don't know as this phonograph will work on Latin an' Greek!"

The Queen completed her quotation and, sitting back again in her chair:

"Now, Master Droop, we have done our part," she said.

Droop readjusted the repeating diaphragm and started the motor once more. There were two or three squeaks and then an affected little chuckle.

"What shall we say?" it began. "Weighty words should grace so great an occasion, my lords."

Elizabeth laughed a little hysterically to hear her unstudied phrase repeated, and then, with a look of awe, listened to the repetition of the verses she had recited.

"Can any voice be so repeated?" she asked, seriously, when this record was completed.

"Anyone ye please—any ye please!" said the delighted promoter, visions of uncounted wealth dancing in his head. "Now, here's a few words was spoken on a cylinder jest two or three weeks ago by Miss Wise," he continued, hunting through his stock of records. "Ah, here it is! It's all 'bout Mister Bacon—I daresay you know him." The Queen looked a little stern at this. "Tells all 'bout him, I believe. I ferget jest what it said, but we can soon see."

The cylinder was that before which Phœbe had read an extract from the volume on Bacon's supposed parentage and his writings while she was at the North Pole. Little did Droop conceive what a train he was unconsciously lighting as he adjusted the cylinder in place. As he said, he had forgotten the exact purport of the extract in question, but, even had he recollected it, he would probably have so little understood its terrific import that his course would have been the same. Ignorant of his danger, he pushed the starting-button and looked pleasantly at the Queen, whose dislike of anything having to do with Francis Bacon had already brought a frown to her face.

All too exactly the fateful mechanism ground out the very words and voice of Phœbe:

"It is thus made clear from the indubitable evidence of the plays themselves, that Francis Bacon wrote the immortal works falsely ascribed to William Shakespeare, and that the gigantic genius of this man was the result of the possession of royal blood. In this unacknowledged son of Elizabeth Tudor, Queen of England, was made manifest to all countries and for all centuries the glorious powers inherent in the regal blood of England."

As the fearful meaning of these words was developed by the machine, amazement gave place to consternation in those present and consternation to abject terror. Each fear-palsied courtier looked with pale face to right and left as though to seek escape. The fat knight, hitherto all complacency, listening to this brazen traducer of the Queen's virgin honor, seemed to shrink within himself, and his very clothing hung loose upon him.

Droop and Rebecca, ignorant of the true bearing of the spoken words, gazed in amazement from one to another until, glancing at the Queen, their eyes remained fixed and fascinated.

The unthinkable insult implied in the words repeated was trebled in force by being spoken thus publicly and in calm accents to her very face. She—the daughter of Henry the Eighth; she—Elizabeth of England—the Virgin Queen—to be thus coolly proclaimed the mother of this upstart barrister!

As a cyclone approaches, silent and terrific, visible only in the swift swirling changes of a livid and blackened sky, so the fatal passion in that imperial bosom was known at first only in the gleaming of her black eyes beneath contorted brows and the spasmodic changes that swept over the pale red-painted face.

The danger thus portended was clear even to the bewildered Droop, and, before the instrument had said its say, he began to slip very quietly toward the door.

As the speech ended, Elizabeth emitted a growl that grew into a shriek of fury, and, with her hair actually rising on her head, she threw herself bodily upon the offending phonograph.

In her two hands she raised the instrument above her, and with a maniac's force hurled it full at the head of Copernicus Droop.

Instinctively he dodged, and the mass of wood and steel crashed against the door of the chamber, bursting it open and causing the two guards without to fall back.

Droop saw his chance and took it. Turning, with a yell he dashed past the guards and across the antechamber to the main entrance-

hall. The Queen, choked with passion, could only gasp and point her hand frantically after the fleeing man, but at once her gentlemen, drawing their swords, rushed in a body from the room with cries of "Treason—treason! Stop him! Catch him!"

Down the main hallway and out into the silent court-yard Droop fled on the wings of fear, pursued by a shouting throng, growing every moment larger.

As he emerged into the yard a sentry tried to stop him, but, with a single side spring, the Yankee16] eluded this danger and flung himself upon his bicycle, which he found leaning against the palace wall.

"Close the gates! Trap him!" was the cry, and the ponderous iron gates swung together with a clang. But just one second before they closed, the narrow bicycle, with its terror-stricken burden, slipped through into the street beyond and turned sharply to the west, gaining speed every instant. Droop had escaped for the moment, and now bent every effort upon reaching the Panchronicon in safety.

Then, as the tumult of futile chase faded into silence behind the straining fugitive, there might have been seen whirling through the ancient streets of London a weird and wondrous vision.

Perched on a whirl of spokes gleaming in the moonlight, a lean black figure in rumpled hose, with flying cloak, slipped ghostlike through the narrow streets at incredible speed. Many a footpad or belated townsman, warned by the mystic tinkle of a spectral bell, had turned with a start, to faint or run at sight of this uncanny traveller.

His hat was gone and his close-cropped head bent low over the handle-bars. The skin-tight stockings had split from thigh to heel, mud flew from the tires, beplastering the luckless figure from nape to waist, and still, without pause, he pushed onward, ever onward, for London Bridge, for Southwark, and for safety. The way was tortuous, dark and unfamiliar, but it was for life or death, and Copernicus Droop was game.

CHAPTER XV

HOW REBECCA RETURNED TO NEWINGTON

Within the palace all was confusion and dismay. Only a very few knew the cause of this riot which had burst so suddenly upon the wonted peace of the place, and those few never in all their lives gave utterance to what they had learned.

Within the presence chamber Elizabeth lay on the floor in a swoon, surrounded by her women only. Among these was Rebecca, whose one thought was now to devise some plan for overtaking Droop. From the window she had witnessed his flight, and she had guessed his destination. She felt sure that if Droop reached the Panchronicon alone, he would depart alone, and then what was to become of Phœbe and herself?

Just as the Queen's eyes were opening and her face began to show a return of her passion with recollection of its cause, Rebecca had an inspiration, and with the promptitude of a desperate resolution, she acted upon it.

"Look a-here, your Majesty!" she said, vigorously, "let me speak alone with you a minute and I'll save you a lot of trouble. I know where that man keeps more of them machines."

This was a new idea to Elizabeth, who had destroyed, as she supposed, the only existing specimen of the malignant instrument.

With a gesture she sent her attendants to the opposite end of the room.

"Now speak, woman! What would you counsel?" she said.

"Why, this," said Rebecca, hurriedly. "You don't want any more o' them things talkin' all over London, I'm sure."

A groan that was half a growl broke from the sorely tried sovereign.

"Of course you don't. Well—I told you him and I come from America together. I know where he keeps all his phonograph things,

and I know how to get there. But you must be quick or else he'll get there fust and take 'em away."

"You speak truly, Lady Rebecca," said the Queen. "How would you go—by what conveyance? Will you have horses—men-at-arms?"

"No, indeed!" was the reply. "Jest let me hev a swift boat, with plenty o' men to row it, so's to go real fast. Then I'll want a carryall or a buggy in Southwark——"

"A carryall—a buggy!" Elizabeth broke in. "What may these be?"

"Oh, any kind of a carriage, you know, 'cause I'll hev to ride some distance into the country."

"But why such haste?" asked the Queen. "Had this American a horse?"

"He had a bicycle an' that's wuss," said Rebecca. "But ef I can start right away and take a short cut by the river while he finds his way through all them dirty, dark streets, I'll get there fust an' get the rest of his phonographs."

"Your wit is nimble and methinks most sound," said the Queen, decisively. Then, turning to the group of ladies, she continued:

"Send us our chamberlain, my Lady Temple, and delay not, we charge you!"

In ten minutes Rebecca found herself once more upon the dark, still river, watching the slippery writhings of the moonbeams' path. She was alone, save for the ten stalwart rowers and two officers; but in one hand was her faithful umbrella, while in the other she felt the welcome weight of her precious satchel.

The barge cut its way swiftly up the river in silence save for the occasional exclamations of the officers urging the willing oarsmen to their utmost speed.

Far ahead to the right the huge bulk of the Tower of London loomed in clumsy power against the deep dark blue of the moonlit sky. Rebecca knew that London Bridge lay not far beyond that landmark,

although it was as yet invisible. For London Bridge she was bound, and it seemed to her impatience that the lumbering vessel would never reach that goal.

She stood up and strained her eyes through the darkness, trying to see the laboring forms of the rowers in the shadow of the boat's side, but only the creak of the thole-pins and the steady recurrent splash and tinkle from the dripping oars told of their labor.

"Air ye goin' as fast as ye can?" she called. "Mr. Droop'll get there fust ef ye ain't real spry."

"If spry be active, mistress," said a voice from the darkness aft, "then should you find naught here amiss. Right lusty workers, these, I promise you! Roundly, men, and a shilling each if we do win the race!"

"Ay—ay, sir!" came the willing response, and Rebecca, satisfied that they could do no more, seated herself again, to wait as best she might.

At length, to her great delight, there arose from the darkness ahead an uneven line of denser black, and at a warning from one of the officers the boat proceeded more cautiously. Rebecca's heart beat high as they passed under one of the low stone arches of the famous bridge and their strokes resounded in ringing echoes from every side.

Having passed to the upper side of the bridge, the boat was headed for the south shore, and in a few moments Rebecca saw that they had reached the side of a wooden wharf which stood a little higher than their deck. One of the officers leaped ashore with the end of a rope in his hand, and quickly secured the vessel. As he did so a faint light was seen proceeding toward them, and they heard the steps of a half dozen men advancing on the sounding planks. It was the watch, and the light shone from a primitive lantern with sides of horn scraped thin.

"Who goes there?" cried a gruff voice.

"The Queen's barge—in the service of her Majesty," was the reply.

The watchman who carried the lantern satisfied himself that this account was correct, and then asked if he could be of service.

"Tell me, fellow," said he who had landed, "hast seen one pass the bridge to-night astride of two wheels, one before the other, riding post-haste?"

There was a long pause as the watchman sought to comprehend this extraordinary question.

"Come—come!" cried the officer, who had remained on the boat. "Canst not say yes or no, man?"

"Ay, can I, master!" was the reply. "But you had as well ask had I seen a witch riding across the moon on a broomstick. We have no been asleep to dream of flying wheels."

"Well—well!" said he who had landed. "Go you now straight and stand at the bridge head. We shall follow anon."

The watch moved slowly away and Rebecca was helped ashore by the last speaker.

"Our speed hath brought us hither in advance, my lady," he said. "Now shall we doubtless come in before the fugitive."

"Well, I hope so!" said Rebecca. Then, with a smothered cry: "Oh, Land o' Goshen! I've dropped my umbrella!"

They stooped together and groped about on the wharf in silence for a few moments. The landing was encumbered with lumber and stones for building, and, as the moon was just then covered by a thick cloud, the search was difficult.

"I declare, ain't this provokin'!" Rebecca cried, at length.

"These beams and blocks impede us," said the officer. "We must have light, perforce. Ho there! The watch, ho! Bring your lanthorn!"

"Why, 'tain't worth while to trouble the watchman," said Rebecca. "I'll jest strike a light myself."

She fumbled in her satchel and found a card of old-fashioned silent country matches, well tipped with odorous sulphur. The officer at her side saw nothing of her movements, and his first knowledge of her intention was the sudden and mysterious appearance of a bluish flame close beside him and the tingle of burning brimstone in his nostrils.

With a wild yell, he leaped into the air and then, half crazed by fear, tumbled into the boat and cut the mooring-rope with his sword.

"Cast off—cast off!" he screamed. "Give way, lads, in God's name! A witch—a witch! Cast off!"

A gentle breeze off the shore carried the sulphurous fumes directly over the boat, and these, together with their officer's terror-stricken tones and the sight of that uncanny, sourceless light, struck the crew with panic. Fiercely and in sad confusion did they push and pull with boat-hook and oar to escape from that unhallowed vicinity, and, even after they were well out in the stream, it was with the frenzy of superstitious horror that they bent their stout backs to their oars and glided swiftly down stream toward Greenwich.

As for Rebecca—comprehending nothing of the cause of this commotion at first—she stood with open mouth, immovable as a statue, watching the departure of her escort until the flame reached her fingers. Then, with a little shriek of pain, she flicked the burnt wood into the river.

"Well, if I ever!" she exclaimed. "I'm blest ef I don't b'lieve those ninnies was scared at a match!"

Shaking her head, she broke a second match from her card, struck it, and when it burned clear, stooped to seek her umbrella. It was lying between two beams almost at her feet, and she grasped it thankfully just as her light was blown out by the breeze.

Then, with groping feet, she made her way carefully toward the inshore end of the wharf, and soon found herself in the streets of Southwark, between London Bridge and the pillory. From this point she knew her way to the grove where the Panchronicon had landed,

and thither she now turned a resolute face, walking as swiftly as she dared by the light of the now unobscured moon.

"If Copernicus Droop ketches up with me," she muttered, "I'll make him stop ef I hev to poke my umbrella in his spokes."

CHAPTER XVI

HOW SIR GUY KEPT HIS TRYST

For one hour before sunset of that same day Phœbe had been patiently waiting alone behind the east wall of the inn garden. As she had expected, her step-mother had accompanied her father to London that afternoon, and she found herself free for the time of their watchfulness. She did not know that this apparent carelessness was based upon knowledge of another surveillance more strict and secret, and therefore more effective than their own.

The shadow of the wall within which she was standing lengthened more and more rapidly, until, as the sun touched the western horizon, the whole countryside to the east was obscured.

Phœbe moved out into the middle of the road which ran parallel to the garden wall and looked longingly toward the north. A few rods away, the road curved to the right between apple-trees whose blossoms gleamed more pink with the touch of the setting sun.

"Nothing—no one yet!" she murmured. "Oh, Guy, if not for love, could you not haste for life!"

As though in answer to her exclamation, there came to her ears a faint tapping of horses' hoofs, and a few moments later three horsemen turned the corner and bore down upon her.

One glance was enough to show her that Guy was not one of the group, and Phœbe leaped back into the shadow of the wall. She felt that she must not be seen watching here alone by anyone. As she stood beneath the fringe of trees that stood outside of the garden wall, she looked about for means of better concealment, and quickly noticed a narrow slit in the high brick enclosure, just wide enough for a man to enter. It had been barred with iron, but two of the bars had fallen from their sockets, leaving an aperture which looked large enough to admit a slender girl.

Phœbe felt instinctively that the approaching riders were unfriendly in their purpose and, without pausing to weigh reasons, she quickly

scrambled through this accidental passage, not without tearing her dress.

She found herself within the garden and not far from the very seat where she had hidden from Will Shakespeare. How different her situation now, she thought. Not diffidence, but fear, was now her motive—fear for the man she loved and whom she alone could save.

While she listened there, half choked by the beating of her own heart, she heard the three cavaliers beyond the wall. Their horses were walking now, and the three conversed together in easily audible tones.

"My life on it, Will," said one, "'twas here the wench took cover!"

"Thine eyes are dusty, Jack," replied a deep voice. "'Twas farther on, was it not, Harry?"

The horses stopped.

"Ay—you are i' the right, Will," was the answer. "By the same token, how could the lass be here and we not see her? There's naught to hide a cat withal."

"Nay—nay!" said Will. "Count upon it, Jack, the maid fled beyond the turn yonder. Come on, lads!"

"I'll not stir hence!" said Jack, obstinately. "Who finds the girl, catches the traitor, too. Go you two farther, an ye will. Jack Bartley seeks here."

"Let it be e'en so, Will," said Harry, the third speaker. "Dismount we here, you and me. Jack shall tie the nags to yon tree and seek where he will. Do you and I creep onward afoot. So shall the maid, hearing no footfall, be caught unaware."

"Have it so!" said Will.

Phœbe heard the three dismount and, trembling with apprehension, listened anxiously for knowledge of what she dared not seek to see.

She heard the slow walk of the three horses, shortly interrupted, and she knew that they were being tethered. Then there was a murmur of voices and silence.

This was the most agonizing moment of that eventful night for Phœbe. Strain her ears as she might, naught could she hear but the shake of a bridle, the stamp of an occasional hoof, and the cropping of grass. The next few seconds seemed an hour of miserable uncertainty and suspense. She knew now that she was watched, that perhaps her plans were fully known, and all hope for her lover seemed past. She had called him hither and he would walk alone and unaided into the arms of these three mercenaries.

She clasped her hands and looked desperately about her as though for inspiration. To the right an open sward led the eye to the out-buildings surrounding the inn. To the left a dense thicket of trees and bushes shut in the view.

Suddenly she started violently. Her ear had caught the snapping of a twig close at hand, beyond the concealing wall. At the next moment she saw a stealthy hand slip past the opening by which she had entered, and the top of a man's hat appeared.

Like a rabbit that runs to cover, she turned noiselessly and dashed into the friendly thicket. Here she stopped with her hand on her heart and glanced wildly about her. Well she knew that her concealment here could be but momentary. Where next could she find shelter?

A heap of refuse, stones and dirt, leaves and sticks, was heaped against that portion of the wall, and at sight of this a desperate plan crossed her mind.

"'Tis that or nothing!" she whispered, and, still under cover of the shrubbery, she hurried toward the rubbish heap.

In the meantime, Jack, whose quick eye had descried that ancient opening in the wall, perceived by neither of his companions, was standing just within the wall gazing about for some clue to his prey's location.

Phœbe leaped upon the refuse heap and scrambled to the top. To her dismay, there was a great crashing of dead wood as she sank nearly to her knees in the accumulated rubbish.

Jack uttered a loud exclamation of triumph and leaped toward the thicket. Poor Phœbe heard his cry, and for an instant all seemed hopeless. But hers was a brave young soul, and, far from fainting in her despair, a new vigor possessed her.

Grasping the limb of a tree beside her, she drew herself up until, with one foot she found a firm rest on the top of the wall. Then, forgetting her tender hands and limbs, straining, gripping, and scrambling, she knew not how, she flung herself over the wall and fell in a bruised and ragged heap on the grass beyond.

When her pursuer reached the thicket, he was confounded to find no one in sight.

Phœbe lay for one moment faint and relaxed upon the ground. The landscape turned to swimming silhouettes before her eyes, and all sounds were momentarily stilled. Then life came surging back in a welcome tide and she rose unsteadily to her feet. She walked as quickly as she could to where the three horses stood loosely tied by their bridles to a tree. At any moment the man she feared might appear again at the opening in the wall.

She untied all three horses and, choosing a powerful gray for her own, she slipped his bridle over her arm so as to leave both hands free. Then, bringing together the bridles of the other two, she tied them together in a double knot, then doubled that, and struck the two animals sharply with the bridle of the gray. Naturally they started off in different directions, and, pulling at their bridles, dragged them into harder knots than her weak fingers could have tied.

She laughed in the triumph of her ingenuity and scrambled with foot and knee and hand into place astride of the remaining steed. Thus in the seclusion of the pasture had she often ridden her mare Nancy home to the barn.

There was a shout of anger and amazement from the road, and she saw the two men who had elected to walk farther on running toward her.

Turning her steed, she slapped his neck with the bridle and chopped at his flanks with the stirrups as best she could. The horse broke into an easy canter, and for the moment she was free.

Unfortunately, Phœbe found herself virtually without means for urging her steed to his best pace. Accustomed as he was to the efficient severity of a man's spurred heel, he paid little attention to her gentle, though urgent, voice, and even the stirrups were hardly available substitutes for spurs, since her feet could not reach them and she could only kick them flapping back against the horse's sides.

Her one chance was that she might meet Sir Guy in time, and she could only pray that the knots in the bridles of the remaining horses would long defy every effort to release them. As she turned the curve among the apple-trees, she looked back and saw that the horses had been caught and that all three men were frantically tugging and picking with fingers and teeth at those obstinate knots.

Phœbe drew up for a moment a few yards beyond the curve and broke off a long, slender switch from an overhanging bough. Then, urging the horse forward again, she picked off the small branches until at length she had produced a smooth, pliant switch, far more effective than bridle or stirrup. By the help of this new whip, she made a little better speed, but well she knew that her capture was only a matter of time unless she could find her lover.

Great was her joy, therefore, when she turned the next curve in the road; for, straight ahead, not twenty rods away, she saw Sir Guy approaching at a canter, leading a second horse.

By this time the twilight was deepening, and the young cavalier gazed in astonishment upon the ragged girl riding toward him astride, making silent gestures of welcome and warning. Not until he was within twenty yards of her did Sir Guy recognize his sweetheart.

"Mary!" he cried.

Together they reined in their horses, and instantly Phœbe slipped to the ground.

"Quick, Guy—quick!" she exclaimed. "Help me to mount yon saddle. Come—come!"

Leaping at once from his horse, Sir Guy lifted Phœbe to the back of the beast he had been leading, which was provided with a side-saddle, the stirrup of which carried a spur. Stopping only to kiss her hand, he mounted his own steed, turned about, and followed Phœbe, who had already set off at her best speed. Even as they started, they heard a shout behind them, and Phœbe knew that the pursuit had begun in earnest.

"What is it—who are they whom you flee?" asked the young knight, as he came to Phœbe's side.

"Men seeking thee, Guy—for reward! There is a price on thy head, dear. For high treason! Oh, may God aid us this night!"

"High treason!" he exclaimed. Then, after a pause, he continued, in a stern voice:

"How many be they?"

"Two."

Sir Guy laughed in evident relief.

"But two! By my troth, why should we fear them, sweetheart?" he said. "An I be not a match for four of these scurvy rascals, call me not knight!"

"Alas—alas!" cried Phœbe, in alarm, as she saw Sir Guy slacken his pace. "Stay not to fight, Guy. Urge on—urge on! The whole countryside is awake. How, then, canst thou better thee by fighting two? Nay, on—on!" and she spurred again, beckoning him after with an imperious hand.

He yielded to her reasoning, and soon reached her side again.

"We must to London Bridge, Guy," Phœbe said. "Know you a way back thither?"

"Wherefore to London, sweet?" asked Guy. "Were we not safer far afield? Why seek the shadow of the Tower?"

"One way is left thee," said she, with intense earnestness. "A way that is known to me alone. Thereby only canst thou escape. Oh, trust me—trust me, dear heart! Only I can guide thee to safety and to freedom!"

"On, my Mary!" he cried, gayly. "Lead on! Thou art my star!"

For the moment both forgot the danger behind them. The intoxication of an ideal and self-forgetting trust—a merger of all else in tenderness—flooded their souls and passed back and forth between them in their mutual glances.

Then came that pursuing shout again, much nearer than before, and with a shock the two lovers remembered their true plight.

Sir Guy reined in his steed.

"Halt—halt, Mary!" he commanded. "We must conceal us here in this dell till that these fellows pass us. Then back to London by the way we came. There is no other road."

Obedient now in her turn, Phœbe drew rein and followed her lover up the bed of a small stream which crossed the road at this point. Behind a curtain of trees they waited, and ere long saw their two pursuers dart past them and disappear in a cloud of dust down the road.

"They will stop at the next dwelling to ask news of us, and thus learn of our evasion," said Guy. "The chase has but begun. Come, sweet, let us hasten southward again."

Darkness had now begun to fall in earnest, and as the two fugitives passed the Peacock Inn, no one saw them.

They were soon near enough to the city gate to find many houses on either hand, and Sir Guy deemed it wiser to move at a reasonable

pace, for fear of attracting suspicion in a neighborhood already aroused by rumors of the man-hunt which had begun. They could count upon the obscurity to conceal their identity.

They had not proceeded far beyond the inn when they met a party of travellers on horseback, one of whom uttered a pleasant "Good-even!"

"Good-even!" said Phœbe, thinking only of due courtesy.

"What the good jere!" cried a voice from the rear of the group. "What dost thou here, Poll?"

"My father!" exclaimed Phœbe, in terror.

"Hush!" whispered Sir Guy, putting his hand upon her bridle. "Ride forward at an easy gait until I give example of haste."

They trotted quietly past the greater number of the group until a dark figure approached and a voice in the gloom said, severely:

"What dost thou here? Who rides with thee, lass?"

Sir Guy now leaned forward and spurred his horse, leaping away into the darkness without a word. In equal silence Phœbe followed his example and galloped headlong close behind her lover.

"Help, ho!" yelled old Sir Isaac. "'Tis the traitor Fenton, with my daughter! After them—stop them—a Burton—a Burton!" and, mad with excitement, the angry father set off in hot pursuit. With one accord the others wheeled about and joined in the chase, uttering cries and imprecations that rang through the country for a mile around.

"Now have we need of speed!" said Sir Guy, as they galloped together toward London, whose walls were now visible in the distance. "Soon will the whole country join the hue-and-cry. The watch will meet us at the gate."

"'Twere better, were it not," Phœbe suggested, "that we turn to the left and make a circuit into the Aldersgate?"

"Good wit, my lady!" cried Guy, whose excitement had taken on the form of an exalted gayety. "Who rides with thee rides safe, my love—e'en as Theseus of old did ride, scathless 'neath the spell of protecting Pallas!"

"Stuff!" said Phœbe, spurring again, with a smile.

Guy led the way at once across country to the eastward, the soft English turf so deadening their hoof-beats that those behind them had no clue to their change of route.

When the pursuing party reached the Bishopsgate, they met the watch and learned that no one had passed since the hue-and-cry was heard.

"Here divide we, then," cried stout Sir Isaac Burton. "Let eight follow them around the wall, while I with other six ride on, that, if haply they have entered London by the Aldersgate, we may meet them within the city."

The suggestion was adopted, and, all unconscious of their peril, the lovers were rapidly hemmed in between two bands of pursuers. Sir Guy and Phœbe reached the Aldersgate unmolested and were allowed to pass in without protest, as the hue-and-cry had not yet reached so far. They ambled quietly past the watch, arousing no suspicion, but no sooner had they turned the first corner than once more they urged their tired horses to greater exertion.

"Choose we the side streets," said Guy. "Who knows what watch hath been set on Gracechurch Street. 'Tis for London Bridge we are bound, is't not?"

"Yes," said Phœbe. "I pray no prying watch detain us ere we pass that way!"

Picking their way through the dark and narrow streets at a pace necessarily much reduced, they slowly approached their goal, until at length, on emerging into New Fish Street, they discerned the towering walls of London Bridge.

Here they reined in suddenly with one accord, for, plainly visible in the moonlight, a group of horsemen was gathered and there was borne to their ears the sturdy voice of Sir Isaac.

"Hallo!" he cried. "There be riders in New Fish Street. See where they lurk in the shadow! What ho, there! Give a name! Stand forth there!"

Sir Guy drew his sword.

"'Tis time for steel to answer!" he laughed.

"Nay—nay! Wait—wait!" said Phœbe, earnestly. "There must be other issue than in blood!"

Two or three horsemen now detached themselves from the group near the bridge and cantered up New Fish Street. Sir Isaac was among them.

"Are ye there, traitor?" he cried. "Where is my daughter?"

Sir Guy was about to reply when Phœbe put her hand on his arm.

"Hush!" she whispered. "Hearken!"

Faint at first, but growing momentarily louder, there came the clear trilling of a mysterious bell. It floated out from the dark by-ways whence they had themselves just emerged, and something eerie and uncanny in its clamor brought a thrill of terror to the young knight's nerves for the first time.

"Now, what in God's name—" he began.

But he broke off in horror, for there flashed past him, as silent as the wind and swifter, a dark, bent figure, with flying cloak, under which, as the moonlight struck him, there whirled a web of glittering tissue whereon he seemed to ride. That uncanny tinkling floated back from this strange vision, confirming to the ear what otherwise might have appeared a mere trick of the vision.

As for Sir Isaac and his band, the distant bell had early brought them to a wondering stand; and now, as this rushing phantom—trilling—

trilling—trilling—swept down on a living moonbeam, with one accord they put spurs to their steeds, and with cries of horror fled in all directions.

"Forward!" cried Phœbe, exultantly. "Why, what now!" she exclaimed, as she saw her lover still sitting petrified with fear. "How now, my knight! Why sit you here amazed? Is not the way clear? Come—follow—follow!" and she started forward on a trot.

But her lover did not move, and she was obliged to turn back. Laying her hand on his arm:

"Why, what ails thee, dear heart?" she asked.

"The spectre—the ghostly steed!" he stammered.

"Oh—oh!" laughed Phœbe. "Why, this was but some venturous bicyclist on his wheel!"

"A bicyclist!" exclaimed Sir Guy. "Can you thus give a name to this black phantom, Mary?"

"'Tis naught, dear Guy, believe me!" she said. Then, in pleading tones, she continued: "Didst not agree to trust thy lady, dear?"

The young knight passed his hand over his eyes and straightened himself resolutely in his saddle.

"E'en to the death, love. Lead on! I shall not falter!"

They trotted forward through a now silent street to the bridge, and soon found themselves enveloped in the darkness and assailed by the countless odors of London Bridge. From time to time they crossed a path of moonlight, and here Phœbe would smile into the eyes of her still much-puzzled lover and murmur words of encouragement.

Before they reached Southwark, there rang out behind them the sound of hoofs upon the stones of the bridge.

"Can these be your father's minions, think you?" said Sir Guy.

"Nay!" Phœbe exclaimed. "Rest assured, they were scattered too far to dog our steps again to-night."

They emerged some moments later on the Southwark side and saw the pillory towering ahead of them.

"How far shall we fare to-night, love?" asked the knight.

"To Newington on horseback," Phœbe replied, "and then—well, then shalt thou see more faring."

There was a loud cry from the bridge, startling the pair from their fancied security.

"There they ride! The watch, ho! Stop the traitor! Stop him! For the Queen! For the Queen!"

"God help us!" cried Phœbe. "'Tis the two yeomen of the Peacock Inn!"

With one accord the pair clapped spurs to their horses' sides and resumed once more the flight which they had thought concluded.

CHAPTER XVII

REBECCA'S TRUMP CARD

When Rebecca set out for the Panchronicon from London Bridge, she knew that she had a long walk in prospect, and settled down to the work with dogged resolution. Her trip was quite uneventful until she neared the village of Newington, and then she realized for the first time that she did not know exactly where to find the deserted grove. One grove looked much like another, and how was she to choose between garden walls "as like as two peas," as she expressed it?

"Look here, Rebecca Wise," she said, aloud, as she paused in the middle of the road, "you'll be lost next you know!"

She looked about dubiously and shook her head.

"The thing fer you to do is to set right down an' wait fer that pesky good-fer-nothin' Copernicus Droop!" she remarked, and suiting action to speech she picked her way to a convenient mile-stone and seated herself.

Having nothing better to do, she began to review mentally the events of the last two days, and as she recalled one after the other the unprecedented adventures which had overtaken her, she wondered in a dreamy way what would next befall. She built hazy hypotheses, sitting there alone in the moonlight, nodding contentedly. Suddenly she straightened up, realizing that she had been aroused from a doze by a cry near at hand.

Turning toward London, she saw a wriggling mass about fifty feet away which, by a process of slow disentanglement, gradually developed into a man's form rising from the ground and raising a fallen bicycle.

"Darn the luck!" said this dark figure. "Busted my tire, sure as shootin'!"

"Copernicus Droop!" cried Rebecca, in a loud voice.

Droop jumped high in the air, so great was his nervousness. Then, realizing that it was Rebecca who had addressed him, he limped toward her, rolling his bicycle beside him.

"How in creation did you get here?" he asked. "Ain't any steam-cars 'round here, is there?"

"Guess not!" Rebecca replied. "I come by short cut up river. I guessed you'd make fer the Panchronicle, and I jest made up my mind to come, too. Thinks I, 'that Copernicus Droop ud be jest mean enough to fly away all by himself an' leave me an' Phœbe to shift fer ourselves.' So I'm here to go, too—an' what's more, we've got to take Phœbe!"

"How'll ye find yer sister, Cousin Rebecca?" said Droop. "We must git out to-night. When the Queen gets on her ear like that, it's now or never. Can you find Cousin Phœbe to-night?"

"Where is the old machine, anyhow?" Rebecca asked, not heeding Droop's question.

"Right over yonder," said he, pointing to a dark group of trees a few rods distant.

"Well, come on, then. Let's go to it right away," said Rebecca. "I'd like to rest a bit. I'm tired!"

"Tired!" Droop exclaimed. "What about me, then?"

Without further parley, the two set off toward the grove which Droop had indicated. Having dwelt here for several weeks, he knew his bearings well, but it was not until they came much nearer to the deserted mansion that Rebecca recognized several landmarks which convinced her that he had made no mistake.

Under the trees, the shadows were so black that they were unable to find the breach in the wall.

"Got any matches, Cousin Rebecca?" Droop asked.

"Yes. Wait a minute an' I'll strike a light. I know that blessed hole is somewhere right near here."

She found again her card of matches, and breaking off one of them, soon had a tiny taper which lit up their surroundings wonderfully.

"There 'tis! I've found it," cried Droop, and, taking Rebecca by the arm, he led her toward the broken place in the wall. The match went out just as they reached it.

Droop was about to suggest that he go in first to see if all was well, when he was startled by Rebecca's hand on his arm.

"Hark!" she cried.

He listened and distant cries coming nearer through the night were borne to his ears.

"What's that?" Rebecca exclaimed again.

Rigid with excitement and dread, they stood there listening. At length Droop pulled himself free of Rebecca's hold.

"That's some o' them palace folks chasin' after me!" he cried, in a panic.

"Fiddle-dee-dee!" Rebecca exclaimed, with energy. "How should they know where you are?"

By this time the sounds were more distinct, and they could easily make out cries of: "Traitor! Stop him! For the Queen! Stop him!"

The two listeners had just mentally concluded that this alarm did not in any wise concern them when Rebecca was startled beyond measure to hear her sister Phœbe's voice, loud above all other sounds.

"Nay—nay, Guy!" she was screaming. "Stop not to fight! Fly—follow! Shelter is here at hand!"

Forgetting everything but possible danger for Phœbe, Rebecca dashed out from under the trees.

There in the moonlight she saw Phœbe on horseback, her head uncovered, her hair floating free and her clothing in tatters. A few paces behind her was Sir Guy, also mounted, fiercely attacking two

pursuing horsemen with his sword. Farther back, rendered indistinct by distance, was a larger group of mingled horse and foot travellers. There was a lantern among them, and Rebecca inferred that the watch was with them.

A moment later, one of the two men engaged with Sir Guy fell from his horse. Instantly the young knight turned upon the second pursuer, who fled at once toward the larger group now rapidly approaching.

Rebecca ran forward and waved her card of matches frantically, apparently thinking in her excitement that she held a flag.

"Here, Phœbe—here, child!" she screamed. "This way, quick! Here we are awaitin' fer ye. Come, quick—quick!"

With a loud cry of joy, Phœbe slipped from her horse and ran toward her sister.

"Oh, Rebecca, Rebecca!" she cried, throwing herself into her sister's arms. "Oh, you dear, lovely, sweet old darling!"

Rebecca kissed her younger sister with tears in her eyes, almost as affected as the girl herself, who was now laughing and crying hysterically on her breast.

While they stood thus tightly locked in each other's arms, Guy came to their side with sword in hand.

"Quick!" he said, sharply. "You must away to shelter. Here comes the watch apace. I will protect the rear."

The two women started apart and Phœbe set forward obediently, but Rebecca only gave the fast-approaching crowd a look of proud contempt.

"Fiddle-ends!" she exclaimed. "You go on ahead, Guy. I'll fix them queer folks!"

Whether Rebecca's voice convinced him of her power to make good her words or that he felt his first duty was at Phœbe's side, the fact is

that the young knight strode forward with his sweetheart toward the breach in the wall, leaving Rebecca behind to bear the first attack.

Droop had already passed within the enclosure and was groping his way toward the black mass of the Panchronicon.

Phœbe, led by an accurate memory of her surroundings, had but little difficulty in finding the opening, and, by her voice, Sir Guy and Rebecca were guided to it.

Phœbe passed through first and Sir Guy followed just as the advance guard of the pursuing mob rushed under the trees, swinging their two lanterns and shouting aloud:

"Here—this way! We have 'em fast!"

Rebecca coolly stooped and drew the edge of her entire card of matches across a stone at her feet. Then, standing erect, she thrust the sulphurous blue blaze into the faces of two rough-looking fellows just advancing to seize her.

Sir Guy, who stood within the wall, found cause for deep amazement in the yell of startled fear with which Rebecca's act was met; and deeper yet grew his astonishment when that cry was re-echoed by the whole terror-stricken mob, who turned as one man to flee from this flaming, sulphurous sorceress.

Rebecca quietly waited until the sulphur had burned off and the wood blazed bright and clear. Then she pushed through the broken wall and showed the way to their destination by the light of the small torch.

Sir Guy's feelings may be imagined when he suddenly found that they were all four standing before a strangely formed structure in the side of which Copernicus had just opened a door.

"Why, Mary!" he exclaimed, pausing in his walk. "What have we here?"

She took his hand with a smile and drew him gently forward.

"Trust thy Mary yet further, Guy," she said. "Thy watchword must be, 'Trust and question not.'"

He smiled in reply and, sheathing his sword, stepped boldly forward into the interior of the Panchronicon. Phœbe knew the power of superstition in that age, and she glowed with pride and tenderness, conscious that in this act of faith in her the knight evinced more courage than ever he might need to bear him well in battle.

When the electric lights shed a sudden bright glare down the spiral staircase, Sir Guy cowered and stopped short again, turning pale with a fear irrepressible. But Phœbe put one arm about his neck and drew his head down to hers, whispering in his ear. What she said none heard save him, but the spell of her words was potent, for the young knight stood erect once more and firmly ascended to the room above.

Droop stood nervously waiting at the engine-room door.

"Are ye all in?" he said, sharply. "Where's Cousin Rebecca?"

"Here I be!" came a voice from below. "I'm jest lockin' the door tight."

"Well, hurry up—hurry! Come up here an' lay down. I'm goin' to start."

In a few moments all was in readiness. Droop pulled the lever, and with a roar and a mighty bound the Panchronicon, revived by its long period of waiting, sped upward into the night.

As the four fugitives sat upright again, and Droop, rubbing his hands with satisfaction, was about to speak, the door of one of the bedchambers was opened, and a stranger dressed in nineteenth-century attire stepped forward, shading his blinking eyes with his hand.

The two women screamed, but Droop only dropped amazed into a chair.

"Francis Bacon!" he exclaimed.

Then, leaping forward eagerly, he cried aloud:

"Gimme them clothes!"

Of the return trip of the five, little need be said save to record one untoward incident which has been the occasion of a most unfortunate historic controversy.

The date-recording instrument must have been deranged in some way, for when, after a great number of eastward turns around the pole, it marked the year 1898, they had really only reached 1857. Supposing themselves to have actually reached the year erroneously indicated by the recorder, they set off southward and made a first landing in Hartford, Connecticut.

Here they discovered their mistake, and returned to the pole to complete their journey in time. All but Francis Bacon. He declared that so much whirling made him giddy, and remained in Connecticut. Alas! Had Phœbe known the result of this desertion, she would never have consented to it.

Bacon, who had read much of Shakespeare while in the Panchronicon, found on returning thus accidentally to modern America, that this playwright was esteemed the first and greatest of poets and dramatists by the modern world. Then and there he planned a conspiracy to rob the greatest character in literary history of his just fame; and, under the pseudonym of "Delia Bacon," advanced those theories of his own concealed authorship which have ever since deluded the uncritical and disgusted all lovers of common-sense and of justice.

Copernicus Droop, on returning his three remaining passengers to their proper dates and addresses, discovered that his sole remaining phonograph, with certain valuable records of Elizabethan origin, had disappeared. As he owed a grudge to Francis Bacon, that worthy fell at once under suspicion, and accordingly Droop promptly returned to 1857, sought out the deserter, and charged him with having stolen these instruments.

It was not until the accused man had indignantly denied all knowledge of Droop's property that the crestfallen Yankee

recollected that he had left the apparatus in question in the deserted mansion of Newington, where he had stored it for greater safety after Bacon's first unexpected visit.

Without hesitation, he determined to return to 1598 and reclaim his own. Bacon, who had learned from modern historical works of the brilliant future in store for himself in England, begged Droop to take him back; and as an atonement for his unjust accusation, Droop consented.

It is not generally known that, contrary to common report, Francis Bacon was *not* arrested for debt in 1598; but that, during the time he was supposed to have been in prison, he was actually engaged in building up in his own behalf the greatest hoax in history.

Let those who may be inclined to discredit this scrupulously authentic chronicle proceed forthwith to Peltonville, New Hampshire, and there ask for Mr. and Mrs. Guy Fenton. From them will be gained complete corroboration of this history, not only in the account which they will give of their own past adventures, but in the unmistakable Elizabethan flavor distinguishable to this day in their speech and manner. Indeed, the single fact that both ale and beer are to be found behind their wood-pile should be convincing evidence on this point.

As for Rebecca, fully convinced at last of the marvellous qualities of the Panchronicon, she never tires of taking her little nephew, Isaac Burton Wise Fenton, on her knee and telling him of her amazing adventures in the palace of "Miss Tudor."