

## MR. JACK'S PROMOTION.

## I.

THE winter had been very cold. Old Uncle Philander, who was a sort of Boswell of the weather, as he had been intimately acquainted with some seventy-five winters, and issued annual oral biographies of them all, said it was "the bitterest he ever see,—but just onct, when it was so cold it, actually put out his pipe"; and taking a piece of tobacco, handed him in response to this meteorological hint, he slowly puffed himself into silence.

But now, after many vain attempts to steal a march on winter, and after putting forth a few buds, as Noah sent out the doves from the Ark, spring had come in its beauty, and had brought the land which, a few weeks before, had seemed so very far off; and the Proteus-like New-Englanders found themselves suddenly transformed from Laplanders into Italians.

And the mind of Mrs. Captain Thacher was also moved by the return of pleasant weather.

"I've noticed," she remarked, one bright morning in the spring-time, "that after an extry cold winter we 'most allus have an extry hot summer; and I've half a mind to advertise for some of these city folks. I've heard that quite a number of 'em likes to go away into the country in summer, and sometimes they give as much as five dollars a week. They say they're 'most crazy after scup and blue-fish—can't seem to get enough, no how. Now, if anybody's anxious to pay five dollars for the privilege of doin' nothin' but just eat scup for a week, I'm sure I sha'n't refuse their money."

Now Mrs. Eleazer Thacher lived with her brother, Captain Hiram Baxter, in a large "yellow-washed" house near the bay. It had been built by the captain's grandfather nearly a century before, and had been altered and added to, until, if the salty spirit of the ancient sailor had returned on a tour of inspection, he would hardly have recognized his own. A large porch, then the main body of the house, with parlor and spare bedroom, then seven or eight L's, starting out in all directions. Almost room enough for the whole village to dwell within, and then, by crowding up a little, to ask the rest of the entire town to dinner. The older rooms were curiously built, with heavy carved beams overhead, and wide closets with glass doors for the display of blue-and-white china, and old silver. The panes in the

windows were hardly larger than one's hand—at least, than the captain's hand—and were of glass that twisted and distorted the corn-field, and the strip of barren shore, and the stretch of blue water that lay before them; and cut the mast of the captain's boat clean off the deck, and held it pitching and tossing over the boat in a truly miraculous manner. There was not a tree within stone's-throw. According to Captain Baxter, "What we want aint a lot o' old trees, all full o' worms, and rottin' the shingles on the roof. Let's hev all the sunlight we can git, and if it gits hot, why jes' take a nap till evenin', and forgit all about it. What do you s'pose they do in Injy, where the sun is twict as near to 'em as 'tis to us? They think they're lucky if they can keep from tannin' into niggers, to say nothin' of keepin' cool."

And the captain wiped his lips with the back of his hand, and laughed.

But, in spite of the lack of trees, the house was cool. The fresh, sweet breeze came tumbling up over the corn-fields from the water at all hours of the day and night, and the bluff along the bay was fringed with tall willows, which seemed to throw down a spray of cold sunshine on the shade beneath.

The first thought that occurred to Mis' Leazer, as she was called by her neighbors, was to hang up a notice, "Rooms with Board," in her parlor window, and trust to Fame to spread the news in the distant city. But after much deep thought, she decided to seek advice at the parsonage, that local Delphi of every New England village.

Now, the minister had not studied in vain the words: "Be ye wise as serpents." He knew that where one reads the paid advertisements of summer resorts, fifty will read a pleasant letter from the sea-shore; and where ten will believe the correspondent of a daily paper, a thousand will take for inspired truth even the headings and misspellings of a religious weekly.

And so he wrote a summer letter to the "Weekly Zion." He did not confine himself to telling of blue skies and green grass and summer breezes, such as might be found anywhere. He told, rather, of the great bay sweeping past the village; of the drives winding for miles along wooded bluffs skirting the sea; and then of Mrs. Thacher and her hospitable home, and of Captain Baxter and his boat.

Some time after, the minister sent down

the religious weekly for Mis' 'Leazer to read her eulogy. At the moment, the captain was seated on an overturned bushel-basket, just inside the barn-door, whittling out a whale for a weather-vane. The old sailor, with indescribable suggestions of salt, and sou'westers, and foreign cruises hovering about him, and with groups of domestic hens, and lofts full of sweet hay, and long rows of flaring dahlias close at hand, suggested such a picture as would be presented by Neptune digging potatoes with his trident.

But in spite of his masculine contempt for curiosity, he felt constrained to go into the house and hear the news. He found Mis' 'Leazer excitedly trying to turn the newspaper inside out and put on her glasses at the same time, but she soon sat down, and began to look for the letter. First, she saw a letter from a minister's wife in Santa Miranda, Texas, in which the printers had not spared italics and spacing and full-face type, telling how her husband had been cured of consumption in four days by the use of the Golden Restorative; and then a description of Whisker Lotion, with a picture of a thin, consumptive, clean-shaved man, with a crutch, named Before, and a fat, stylish gentleman in a beaver and with flowing beard, stepping briskly along, named After—the whole change having apparently been effected by Whisker Lotion; and then an advertisement of a perfectly safe investment in Wall street, yielding twenty-seven percent. a month; all of which the captain piously looked on as a sort of sequel to the gospels,—proofs of real miracles effected under the supervision of the reverend editor. At last, after wandering through a desert of obituaries, and of jests and political items which seemed inserted as a sort of sugar-coating and were considered, when part of the religious paper, as only tilting in the balance of expurgation, she arrived at the promised land, and found the letter.

When she came to read of the cool house and its pleasant owners,—what good company they were,—what fine stories the captain could tell,—she stopped—it was too much. She put her apron up to her eyes, and murmured:

“Be we dead or alive, Hiram? It reads like one o' these 'ere obituaries that tell how that Deacon some one or 'nother, that's taken the paper reg'lar for forty years, has just closed a useful life. It seems as if it ought to end up like an epitaf I see onct in the old buryin'-ground down to South Point, about

“A brother and a sister, side by side,  
They lived together till they died.”

“Oh, don't feel so bad, Marthy,” said the captain, in a gruff, comforting voice. “There

aint no danger of your dyin'; you're good to keep boarders for twenty year yet.”

Cheered by the prospect of this brilliant future, Mis' 'Leazer was just folding up the paper, when a small, barefooted urchin, all out of breath, burst through the open door-way, his hair flying in the wind and his eyes starting from their sockets.

“Wall,” said the captain, gazing at him with a calm, sarcastic look, “wall, what of it? I suppose one of your hens has laid an extr'y egg, or a pail o' butter's fallen down the well—hey? What's that in your hand? A letter? Le's see.”

And after holding off the letter at arm's length and staring at it a moment, he took his great jack-knife and opened the envelope like a clam, and drew out the letter.

“Wall!” he exclaimed. “Boarders a'ready, Marthy; they want to come next week.”

## II.

SEVERAL years ago, if you had gone into the custom-house in X——, you might have seen an intelligent, smart-looking man of perhaps fifty, writing at his high desk, or directing the work of a number of other clerks. His hair was steely gray, but he seemed vigorous and active, except that he limped so badly in walking that he had to carry a cane. His lameness was not a natural defect. Many years before, when he was an energetic and active young fellow, he had been salesman in a New York wholesale house, and, thanks to his untiring labor and great fitness for the work, was rising very rapidly. He was married and had one child, a little girl. Then Sumter was fired on; then it surrendered. He was one of the first to forget every other consideration, to give up his position and enlist as a volunteer. And through the long, weary months and years he never repented of his determination, never doubted that that course was best. He fought gallantly, rose in rank, became colonel, led his regiment at Gettysburg, and then came home in weak health, with a bullet in his leg. For a year he was unable to work at all. Then he had drifted too far from the current of his former business to get on in that successfully, even if his health had permitted. And he found himself in the enviable position of a patriot whom everybody will cheer and throw up his hat for, but who cannot find honorable employment fitted to what strength he has saved from his country's service.

At last, however, through the influence of a Congressman, he obtained a clerkship in the great custom-house at X——. Never

did Uncle Sam have a better servant. He worked as hard over his country's account-books as he had on her battle-fields. He threw all his energy into his work, and as his strength came gradually back, he did it better and better. John Hardy, or Mr. Jack, as he was called in the office, was not much of a politician, though he always attended the caucus, and generally voted the straight ticket; and so he saw better "workers," though poorer workmen, constantly appointed to office over his head. Gradually, since he did his work so perfectly, he rose little by little; came to be looked on as a sort of anomaly in the office—a good man to have on hand as a proof of the Collector's virtue in appointing a man simply because he had served his country, and could do his work to perfection, instead of because he could pack a caucus or pull wires.

But this spring, another prospective Congressman was looming above the horizon, and the Collector felt that his sun would soon sink, unless some political Joshua should arise to bid it hold for a season. To tell how he summoned his henchmen, pulled wires, raised subscriptions, and promised positions, would be to tell a very old story. At last, to leave no stone unturned, he sent for Mr. Jack.

Now it happened that, some five years before, Mr. Jack's wife had died, leaving him three children; that the youngest, a boy, was a sickly child, and the money had disappeared in the doctors' hands as a tiny rivulet would in trying to cross Sahara; that Mr. Jack had used up all his small savings, had borrowed ahead, had been unable to pay, and was now at his wit's end to know what to do.

He sat one evening at his desk when his day's work was done. He had shut his books, and was resting his head on his arms folded on the desk. He was trying once more to think of some way of escape. There was Rose, his eldest child—she must complete her schooling; there was little Ruth, a mere child yet; there was poor Harry, tossing his little limbs in pain; there were his debts, which would probably increase, and the creditors with the constant bills. Perhaps he could find some other employment that would pay better. But no; he had given that up long ago. A man of fifty, accustomed to the peculiar routine of official work, and unacquainted with business, stands a poor chance in the rush and tear of our commercial life. And then, for an instant—just one instant—he thought of what his life would have been if he had taken a selfish view of things, had let the war take care of itself, had staid in business and continued to rise. But he crushed down the very thought. He

was glad he had fought for his country, would be willing to fight again,—if need be, willing to die for her. But he would like a fair chance to rise in her service.

Just at this moment he felt a hand on his shoulder.

"The Collector would like to speak with you, sir."

As he walked toward the Collector's office, the burden was still pressing heavily upon him. He knocked, entered, and stood before his superior. The Collector was writing a note. When he had finished, he turned.

"Mr. Hardy," he said, "I have decided to promote you to the position of head-clerk of your division. The appointment will be made out next week. You deserve special praise for the manner in which you have performed your duties. Good-day, sir."

But just as Mr. Jack, with radiant face and heart too full for utterance, was closing the door, he heard:

"Mr. Hardy—one moment. I know that you are not interested in—in public affairs,"—while the Collector had been fighting for his custom-house, Mr. Jack had been fighting for his country,— "that you are not interested in matters of public moment. But this year it will be well for you to exert yourself a little—do you see?"

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Jack, slowly; but the smile faded from his face.

"We need not mince matters, Mr. Hardy," said the Collector. "Every man in this office must work. Otherwise—we are all"—and he jingled his watch-chain.

"And am I to understand that my promotion has any connection with the work I am to do?" said Mr. Jack, still more slowly.

"You need understand nothing," said the Collector, "except that you are promoted, and will be expected"—he stopped, and looked Mr. Jack full in the eye—"expected to do your utmost in the fall."

Mr. Jack bowed his head. There was silence.

"I can do my office-work," said Mr. Jack at last, in a low voice. "I can be a faithful workman; but on these new conditions I must decline the promotion."

Again silence.

When Mr. Jack looked up at length, he was surprised to see the Collector smiling. In fact he was a kindly man, and had hardly expected much from Mr. Jack.

"Well," he said, "I am sorry; I think you foolish. But you may be thankful, Mr. Hardy, that you have made yourself indispensable in this office. You shall have your promotion. I believe your vacation begins on Friday? Good-day, sir."

## III.

It was a bright, calm evening. The bay near the captain's house lay perfectly glassy and still, except when a "friar" or a "pogy" leaped into the air, and fell back with a splash; so glassy and so still that it reflected every glorious tint and form in the sky above, so that whether you looked at sky or bay, you would see the great cloud-giants fading away in stationary conflict, and the purple vessels sailing into a golden harbor. The sun had just gone to rest, and everything seemed hushed into silence for fear of disturbing his slumbers. A whip-poor-will, lamenting, went flying slowly over the island in the bay, until he was lost in the gathering darkness. And then, soft over the water, came faintly the chime from a distant village, telling the hour of nine.

"Nine o'clock, Marthy," cried the captain, who was tipped back in a chair at the doorway, cased in the stylish misery of a "store" suit; "better put on them fish, or they wont be done in time. The stage'll be right along now."

And sure enough, in a moment a faint rattle of wheels was heard in the distance; then silence; then a rumble growing louder; then the clatter of hoofs and the crack of a whip and a loud "geddap"; then a black form at the top of the hill, rolling and reeling against the dark sky; then rattle and rumble and clatter and crack all at once, as the great stage came plunging down the steep road, turned a sharp corner, and suddenly drew up within a foot of the captain's chair.

"Noise like the world comin' to an end," cried the captain, who felt like a dried specimen in a show-case; "sounded 's if the road was bein' ripped open from top to bottom; and when it's all over, what of it? Oh, 'twas jest Alec takin' a little drive."

Here the captain became suddenly aware of some strange faces within the stage, and as suddenly shrank into the seclusion of his boiled collar.

"Come, Cap'n," cried Alec, "here's some ladies come to see you. Hope you aint agoin' to leave 'em settin' in the stage all night."

So the captain, like a hermit-crab, moved up to the stage in his borrowed shell, and clumsily opened the door.

"If this 'ere was a boat," he said, "I'd know how to git ye out, but, I jimminy, these is the—wall, that is, the darndest things I ever did see. There ye be. Aint ye comin' in to have somethin' to eat, Alec? Oh yes, come right in. Alec, this is Mr. Hardy and his folks, from X——."

The sun rose the next morning with its accustomed punctuality, and the captain, like an attendant squire, rose too. He laid away the state garments which he had donned the night before in honor of his guests, and resumed his official robes; and a moment later, hoe in hand, he burst upon the little garden-patch, which was surrounded by a neat lattice-work fence.

"I've b'en to England, and to Chiny, and 'bout everywhere else," he sometimes said; "I've seed these 'ere yaller fellers with pig-tails, livin' in houses made out o' sticks, and I've seed the Queen's palace; but I tell you——" and then he would look at the straggling old house, with its resplendent brass knocker on the front door, and the climbing roses, and the neat patch of potatoes and corn, and Mis' 'Leazer sitting in her rocking-chair, in the open door-way, knitting a blue-yarn stocking—"I tell you——"; and then came a shrewd wink, as much as to say, "You and I know a thing or two that them 'ere Chinese and them queens aint got hold of yet."

The captain (whose work somewhat resembled that described by old Caspar, on the battle-field of Blenheim, inasmuch as he brought up from time to time pieces of defunct crabs and fish which had been plowed in that spring) had been at work some time, when he heard a step just the other side of the white lattice fence. He turned, and saw Mr. Jack.

"Oh, good-mornin'," he cried. "S'pose you've come out to see if these potatoes is hoed right;" and he looked at Mr. Jack's white hands, and laughed.

"Yes, Captain," answered Mr. Jack, "that's just what I came for;" and to the surprise of the captain, he hobbled briskly through the gate-way, and sticking his cane in the ground, he took the hoe and began to work.

"There," he said, after a moment, "that's the way I used to do it, thirty-five years ago; and, in fact," he added, quizzically, after a pause, "in fact, I believe I do it a little better now than you do."

The captain was just preparing to turn the tables on Mr. Jack, when Mis' 'Leazer appeared in the door-way, ringing the bell for breakfast.

"Now that 'ere bell may look jes' like any other bell," said the captain, "but I brought that to Marthy when I come home from one of my foreign trips—let's see, where did I go that trip? Oh, yes, to Chiny."

"Ah, it came from China?" exclaimed Mr. Jack; and he looked at the conventional Yankee dinner-bell in surprise.

"Oh, Lor' bless your soul," cried the captain; "that never come from Chiny. There

aint nothin' in Chiny that Marthy would pick up with the tongs. There's them pagodias, now,—very fine structures, but they would look rayther peculiar a-settin' in my back-yard near them hen-coops, the bells all a-jinglin', and that 'ere whale a-flyin' on top for a weather-vane. So I didn't buy nothin' for Marthy till I got back to New Bedford, and thar I see a peddler, second cousin to my father's first wife's daughter. 'Hullo!' says I, 'what'll ye take for that bell?' says I; 'want it for a momento of Chiny,' says I.

"'Well,' says he, 'considerin' the pe-culiar circumstances, one thirty-seven and a half,' says he; and so," he added, as they entered the kitchen, "that 'ere bell allus makes me think of Chiny."

Captain Baxter had offered to take the children clamming, across the bay, and so, in the afternoon, they all went down to the shore—the captain, with Harry in his arms; and Ruth, flying about on all sides after toads, and darnin'-needles, and the pretty humming-birds among the captain's scarlet beans; and Rose walking beside Harry, and telling him of what she had seen that morning before breakfast—the scarlet toad-stools and the trailing morning-glories; and Mr. Jack, who, with metropolitan enthusiasm, was telling the captain of a new method of draining swamp-land, which the captain heard with rustic apathy.

"I'd jes' like to see 'em try a lick at my swamp," he remarked. "Fust man what went in to dig the dreem would sink clean out o' sight afore he had time to stick in his shovel."

And so they came on their way, as Bunyan would have said, till they reached the wharf. There were several boats lying off from the shore at a little distance, at their stakes, and with their sails raised and shaking gently in the wind, they looked like great birds just ready to fly up and join their brothers, the white gulls, which were skimming and screaming over the bay. Then the captain slowly raised his sail—creak, creak, creak; and the boom swung from side to side, slowly but resolutely. And after they were all seated, the captain "cast off," and the boat swung around, and the mast creaked, and the streamer waved, and the sail filled, and the boat tipped, and the shore sank away behind them. The water lapped gently against the boat, "as if it was tasting the paint," Ruth said. And Harry, who was lying on the seat beside Rose, looking up at the sky, said the white clouds were having a race with them across the bay.

And then they talked of boats, and fish, and foreign voyages, interrupted by frequent exclamations and questions from the children,

who came to Rose for nautical information when the captain was busy. And then Rose sung them a song that told of a sailor who sailed away from his sweetheart, and of how she longed for his return, and of the stormy sea, and the wreck on the shoals.

• Mr. Jack was sailing the boat, under the close supervision of the captain.

"Now I've no doubt myself," he said, "that I could sing a good song, too, only you'd all laugh. Perhaps the captain and I could sing a duet. Can you sing, Captain?"

The children clapped their hands.

"Wall, no," answered the captain; "singin' aint jest in my line. No reason, neither," he added. "When I was a boy, all the children was goin' to singin'-school, and I says to my father, 'Le' me go, too,' says I. 'Let's hear ye sing *do, re, mi,*' says he. So I lets out as loud as I could. 'Thar!' says he. 'That's enuf and gret plenty,' says he. 'Anythin' reasonable, but as for a fog-horn learnin' to lead a choir, I sha'n't try no experiments with you,' says he. And so I never learned how to sing. Allus sorry; allus wanted to be able to bear down on 'Old Hunderd' in church, anyhow."

They were approaching the shore where the clams resided; and so the captain hauled out his anchor from "under for'ard," and made ready to land.

And very soon they were scattered along the beach; and while Rose sat down to build a fort for Harry, and Ruth scoured the whole shore for shells, and fiddler-crabs, and pretty pebbles, which she kept bringing up to show him, Captain Baxter rolled up his trowsers—he couldn't take off his shoes, for he had none on—and waded into the water, and began the amphibious operation of hoeing for clams. Mr. Jack sat near him on the shore.

"Wall, now, sir," said the captain, as he tossed up the first clam with his hoe, "I've heard a good deal over to the store, lately, about how these 'ere government offices is distributed 'round. Can you tell me the truth about it?"

"I think I can," he answered.

"Why, I've heard," said the captain, raising his hoe in one hand and holding a clam in the other, "I've heard that men is put in that can't do the work, 'cause they've helped some one or 'nother to git 'lected. Mebbe they're car'less—no matter; mebbe they can't figger—no matter; mebbe they steal—no matter; mebbe they git drunk—no matter; that don't make no difference. Is that so?"

"Sometimes."

"I've heard that the clerks all hev to help pay 'lection expenses, or they're discharged. Is that so?"

"Sometimes."

"I've heard that every time a new officer goes in he makes a clean sweep, so as to put in all his friends. Is that true?"

"Yes, very often."

"I suppose there's thousands o' these 'ere offices, fust and last?"

"Yes, nearly a hundred thousand."

"And do you mean to tell me," asked the captain, looking savagely at the clam in his hand, "do you mean to tell me that a' honest man, what's able to do the work better than anybody else, can't git any place in our own government unless he's helped some one or 'nother to git 'lected, and that when a man's once in and doin' well, he's noways sure o' stayin' in?"

"I'm afraid that's so."

Captain Baxter examined the clam as if he had never seen one before. Then he looked at Mr. Jack blankly.

"Wall, I sw'ar!" said he; and he began to dig again.

After a while he looked up and said:

"I've got a gran'child over yunder to Pine Beach. Smart boy; allus ahead in school. Honest? Oh, Lor', honest's no name for it. He aint got no mother, poor boy; father's a worthless kind o' man. Now, I'd like to see him git ahead. I thought, p'r'aps, —you might—say there was some chance—if he was fit for the place—he might git in to some o' these 'ere government offices, bimeby. But 'twouldn't pay to try, would it?"

"No," said Mr. Jack. "If there's any honest business for him, he'd better go into it. He'd have no chance. I've had good luck. I never could have got a place but for being a soldier. Public opinion was strong soon after the war: every soldier must have a place. But it died out quick enough, God knows. I've seen scores of soldiers with clerkships, working hard, doing as much with one arm as most men with two—hard time to get along, but thankful for any work; and all of a sudden, with no notice, off they're sent, and some rough, dishonest politician gets the place. I've had good luck. In fact, I've just been promised promotion; but, generally—oh, no, don't let the boy try that."

"Wall, I sw'ar!" said the captain, again; and he threw down a clam on the sand and smashed it with his hoe. "That's what I'd do to them fellers if I had hold of 'em," he said.

After his bucket was full, they sailed home in the peaceful light of the late afternoon. The captain sat in a deep reverie all the way, with his eyes fixed on the horizon. Occasionally he roused himself a little, and they heard him murmur:

"Wall, I sw'ar!"

As they walked up the footpath from the bay, they saw Mis' 'Leazer standing on the steps and shading her eyes with her hand as she watched for them. And then after tea they sat outdoors while the quiet darkness was closing in, and the children sang, and they talked of their pleasant life in X—, and laid plans for the next winter; and Harry seemed so happy that Mr. Jack smiled, and told the children he had decided to leave them with the captain for a month,—he could afford to be a little free now. And then they relapsed into silence, which seemed in harmony with the peaceful sky and fields. No one spoke. Suddenly they heard a gruff voice from behind the net-door:

"Wall, I sw'ar!"

#### IV.

"BE you Mr. Hardy, that's stoppin' with Captain Baxter? Well, I see a man from the Corners this mornin'—told me the' was a letter from Washington for you, over to the office. Thought you might like to know. G' mornin'."

And the messenger drove on.

It seemed to Mr. Jack that his heart leaped up to his mouth. It had come—the letter from Washington. He must have it—have it now. He found a good horse and a carriage at one of the neighbors', and off he went, his heart beating high and his mind full of pleasant anticipations. He snapped the whip and urged on the horse. The road lay along the bay, and as he came out of the woods into a clearing two or three miles from the village, he chanced to look down toward the water; a sail-boat was in sight, with a man at the helm, two women, and some children. They were dressed in bright colors, and had pinned a long scarlet scarf to the sail, and it was streaming in the breeze, and they were singing some sweet old song as they went flying over the water. In a moment the sail swung over, and first the mast disappeared around a bend, then the deck, then inch by inch the boat floated by and was gone.

"Perhaps I shall be back before them," he thought. "How happy Rose will be. No more lack of money now, no pinching to make both ends meet, no need to cheat yourself to make the children happy. Noble girl, now she shall have her rest. And further promotion, too; far easier to go on when once they begin to realize one's ability and honesty."

In his excitement he shouted and whipped on his horse, which was already dashing along over the rough road. As he went on, his

spirits rose higher and higher. To think of the happy years ahead even yet; of the comfort; of the chance so long deferred to lay up something for old age. He was almost too happy.

As he turned a bend in the road, just before him he saw a white-haired old man, with wizened face and bent back, creeping slowly along in the sunshine. He looked so wretched, so forsaken, that a wave of compassion swept over the soul of the happy man who was riding by. He stopped.

"Will you ride?" he said, in a pleasant, ringing voice.

But the old fellow trudged on unheeding. Mr. Jack leaped out and seized him by the arm.

"Will you ride with me?" he shouted in his ear.

The old man looked at him with a vacant stare, and then a weak smile played over his worn face.

"I can't hear what you say," he answered; "I'm pretty tired; I wish you'd give me a lift."

Mr. Jack led him gently to the carriage, and almost lifted him up to his seat. His heart was large enough to take in a whole world just now.

"You look happy enough," said the old fellow beside him, in a trembling, childish voice. "Well, I used to be once. Long ago I was cap'n of a big foreign vessel, and had a fine family of children. But the vessel went on the rocks, and my children died, one after another." There was a pause. "I live over yonder now," he said, as if anticipating a question he could not hear; and he pointed to a great, barren white house, with a white-washed stone-wall about it.

"Poor fellow," said his happy companion; "poor fellow."

And then he began to think of the children, and what they would say when he showed them the appointment; and he forgot the poor wreck at his side till he felt him pluck at his sleeve.

"Here we are," he said.

Mr. Jack jumped out and helped him down, and then, giving him a kindly, patronizing nod, drove on again. He was nearly there now, and he took out the whip. He knew just how the letter would look and feel. He knew how it would read: a little complimentary, perhaps,—“In consideration of faithful and efficient service in the past,” etc., etc. Here he drove into a little settlement; he slackened his speed as he drove through the peaceful, shady street, lighted by the rays of the setting sun. These last few moments were delightful in their anticipation. There was

the post-office; there, there within was *the* letter. He leaped out.

"You have a letter for Mr. Hardy?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said the postmaster, looking at the horse covered with foam, and then at the man before him. "Important, I suppose."

"Yes, yes," he answered, and smiled to think how important.

His hand trembled, his eyes beamed. He saw the letter in the man's hand, yes, just as he had seen it before. He seized it, tore it open, and—

"Well," said the postmaster, in recounting the event that evening to a group of villagers; "he turned just as white as a sheet, kind of trembled and tottered a half a minute, and then out of the door and into his buggy, and off like a streak. Seemed to be struck all of a heap. I looked out after him, and when he got some ways up the road, the horse stopped; stopped five minutes, I should say; then he started up slow-like, and went along. Some bad news, I suppose."

The road home lay for the most part through the woods. It was growing dark. What difference did that make to him? The horse plodded slowly along, moved solely by thoughts of supper and bed, for no hand kept him to his duty—the reins were trailing beside him on the ground. Inside the carriage, it was darker still,—pitch dark; but something was crouched in the corner almost indistinguishable,—a straggling mass of gray hair streaming over the face; the hands hanging listlessly by the sides. And still the horse plodded on, now *clatter, clatter* over a bit of gravel road, now *thud, thud* on the soft leaves, now *rumble, rumble* over the loose boards of the bridge. Darker and darker. Cold, too, and chill—*thud, thud, thud*. Still no movement. None when the carriage passed by the great white house with the cold white stone-wall; none when they reached the clearing where he had seen the boat, with the children and the flying streamer, and had heard the song; none when they drove through the village street, and the horse's hoofs pounded at last on the floor of his master's barn.

"What be yer—asleep or dead?" cried the owner, coming out a moment after. "Come, wake up!" And he pushed him along on the seat.

At last he stirred; he crept slowly down and passed out into the darkness, without a word.

"Well!" said the farmer. "Didn't s'pose by his looks he was that kind of a man; wouldn't have let him the team if I had. Jehoshaphat! look at that horse!"

Hardy, meanwhile, crept down the road.

Here was where the man told him of the letter, but he did not know it. He did not stop to rest—but went straight on. It seemed as if he were untreading the happy steps he had made over that same path on that same afternoon.

There was the captain's house ahead—he did not see it. There was a light in the window—he did not know it.

Across the road he went, into the house, to his room. He cast himself down, half on the bed, half on the floor, and buried his face in his hands. The clock in the next room was ticking away the time—*tick, tick, tick, tick*, but all else was still.

Hark! they were coming now. He heard at last, rose a little, and listened; yes, they were coming home. He heard their merry voices.

"And where is father?" he heard Rose ask. "Oh, why didn't he go with us?"

There were steps in the hall, and a hand turned the knob. Silence.

"Father! . . . . No, he's not here. He'll be so glad to hear of our sail."

The door closed; there was a rustle; and she was gone.

## v.

A FEW days after Mr. Jack's interview with the Collector, a fat, greasy fellow sat in the same office, with his feet on the table.

"Now jest you look here, Collector," he said, and he pushed his rumpled stove-pipe to the back of his head, and stuffed his hands into his pockets and rocked himself on the back legs of his chair; "now jest you look here. Do you mean business, or don't ye? Come!"

"I can't let you have that place, any way," answered the Collector, who was resting his elbows on his desk, and his head on his hands. "I've promised it to Hardy, and I've given Hardy's old place to Jim Watkins. I can't do it."

"Confound that Hardy!" said the Collector's visitor. "He's a low, sneaking fellow—don't care a snap for nobody but himself. Why, I asked him only last month to sign a recommendation for me, and you

oughter have seen how he glared at me. A low sneak!"

"He does his work well," said the Collector, slowly, without looking up.

"Oh, yes; you're very pious all of a sudden, aint ye?" said the visitor, lighting a cigar and then putting his hands back in his pockets. "That'll do very well to talk, but you know well enough you don't care if your office goes to the devil if you can only keep hold of it. Come, what do you say?"

And he put down his feet, tipped his hat on one side, shook his coat by the lapels, and stood up.

"No," answered the Collector, "I can't do it."

"Oh, very well, sir," said the caller; "very well; next month you'll wish you'd sung a different tune—that's all. Them votes of mine are worth money. I sha'n't have no trouble in gettin' red of 'em, at all. Good-day."

"Good heavens! I don't know what to do," said the Collector, in despair. "I can't get along without him—haven't any excuse, either."

"Well, we'll find excuses enough to get along without you before long," said the other. Then he turned the knob.

"Why, hang it," said the Collector, looking up at last. His face was pale, his hair disheveled. "How many more removals do you suppose I can make?"

"Oh, none at all," said the fellow; and he re-arranged his scarlet neck-tie. "I wouldn't make a single one more, if I was you. Better stop jest one too soon, ye know;" again grinning.

"Well," said the Collector, burying his face in his hands again; "well,—you shall have the place."

"Ha! ha!" cried the fellow, stepping up to the Collector and snatching his hand. "Good enough, good enough. I thought you'd come 'round. Have a cigar with me now? No? Ha! ha! now we'll have some courage to work together. I'll bring you up some friends of mine this evening, that will take right hold. You must find some corner or other to fit 'em into. Shake hands again. It makes me laugh to think how Hardy will look when he gets his dismissal. Ha! ha!"