CHAPTER XXV

The year before this Judge Rutherford had been sent to Congress by the Republican Party of Hamlin County. His election had been a wildly exciting and triumphant one. Such fiery eloquence as his supporters displayed had rarely, if ever, been poured forth before. It was proved by each orator that the return of the Democratic candidate would plunge the whole country into the renewal of bloodshed and war. This catastrophe having been avoided by the Judge's election, the nation--as represented by Hamlin County--had settled down with prospects of peace, prosperity, and the righting of all old grievances. The Judge bought a new and shining valise, a new and shining suit of broadcloth, and a silk hat equally shining and new, and went triumphantly to Washington, the sole drawback to his exultation being that he was obliged to leave Jenny behind him with the piano, the parlour furniture, and the children.

"But he'll hev ye thar in the White House, ef ye give him time," said an ardent constituent who called to congratulate.

There seemed no end to a political career begun under such auspices but the executive mansion itself. The confidence of the rural communities in their representatives was great and respectful. It was believed that upon their arrival at the capital, business in both Houses was temporarily postponed until it had been supported by their expression of opinion and approval. It was believed also that the luxury and splendour of a

Congressman's life was such as ancient Rome itself might have paled before and envied.

"A man in Washin'ton city with a Congristman's wages has got to be a purty level-headed feller not to get into high-falutin' ways of livin' an' throwin' money about. He's got to keep in his mind that this yere's a republic an' not a 'ristycratic, despotic monarchy."

This was a sentiment often expressed, and Tom De Willoughby himself had had vaguely respectful views of the circumstances and possible surroundings of a representative of his country.

But when he made his first visit to Judge Rutherford, he did not find him installed in a palatial hotel and surrounded by pampered menials. He was sitting in a back room in a boarding-house--a room which contained a folding bedstead and a stove. He sat in a chair which was tilted on its hind legs, and his feet rested on the stove's ornamental iron top. He had just finished reading a newspaper which lay on the floor beside him, and his hands were thrust into his pockets. He looked somewhat depressed in spirits.

When Tom was ushered into the room, the Judge looked round at him, uttered a shout of joy, and sprang to his feet.

"Tom," he cried out, falling upon him and shaking his hand rather as if he would not object to shaking it off and retaining it as an agreeable

object forever. "Tom! Old Tom! Jupiter, Tom! I don't know how you got here or where you came from, but--Jupiter! I'm glad to see you."

He went on shaking his hand as he dragged him across the room and pushed
him into a dingy armchair by the window; and when he had got him there, he stood over him grasping his shoulder, shaking his hand still. Tom saw that his chin was actually twitching in a curious way which made his goatee move unsteadily.

"The legislation of your country hasn't made you forget home folks, has it?" said Tom.

"Forget 'em!" exclaimed the Judge, throwing himself into a seat opposite and leaning forward excitedly with his hands on his knees. "I never remembered anything in my life as I remember them. They're never out of my mind, night or day. I've got into a way of dreaming I'm back to Barnesville, talking to the boys at the post-office, or listening to Jenny playing 'Home, Sweet Home' or 'The Maiden's Prayer.' I was a bit down yesterday and couldn't eat, and in the night there I was in the little dining-room, putting away fried chicken and hot biscuits as fast as the nigger girl could bring the dishes on the table. Good Lord! how good they were! There's nothing like them in Washington city," he added, and he heaved a big sigh.

"Why, man," said Tom, "you're homesick!"

The Judge heaved another sigh, thrusting his hands deeper into his pockets and looking out of the window.

"Yes, by Jingo!" he said; "that's what I am."

He withdrew his gaze from the world outside the window and returned to Tom.

"You see," he said, "I've lived different. When a man has been born and brought up among the mountains and lived a country life among folks that are all neighbours and have neighbourly ways, city life strikes him hard. Politics look different here; they are different. They're not of the neighbourly kind. Politicians ain't joking each other and having a good time. They don't know anything about the other man, and they don't care a damn. What's Hamlin County to them? Why, they don't know anything about
Hamlin County, and, as far as I've got, they don't want to. They've got their own precincts to attend to, and they're going to do it. When a new man comes in, if he ain't a pretty big fellow that knows how to engineer things and say things to make them listen to him, he's only another greenhorn. Now, I'm not a big fellow, Tom; I've found that out! and the first two months after I came, blamed if I wasn't so homesick and discouraged that if it hadn't been for seeming to go back on the boys, durned if I don't believe I should have gone home."

Big Tom sat and regarded his honest face thoughtfully.

"Perhaps you're a bigger man than you know," he said. "Perhaps you'll find that out in time, and perhaps other people will."

The Judge shook his head.

"I've not got education enough," he said. "And I'm not an orator. All there is to me is that I'm not going back on the boys and Hamlin. I came here to do the square thing by them and the United States, and blamed if I ain't going to do it as well as I know how."

"Now, look here," said Big Tom, "that's pretty good politics to start with. If every man that came here came to stand by his party--and the United States--and do the square thing by them, the republic would be pretty safe, if they couldn't do another durned thing."

The Judge rubbed his already rather rough head and seemed to cheer up a little.

"Do you think so?" he said.

Big Tom stood up and gave him a slap on his shoulder.

"Think so?" he exclaimed, in his great, cheerful voice. "I'm a greenhorn myself, but, good Lord! I know it. Making laws for a few million people

is a pretty big scheme, and it's the fellows who intend to do the square thing who are going to put it through. This isn't ancient Greece, or Sparta, but it's my impression that the men who planned and wrote the Constitution, and did the thinking and orating in those days, had a sort of idea of building up a thing just as ornamental and good to write history about as either one; and, what's more, they counted on just such fellows as you to go on carrying the stones and laying them plumb, long after they were gone."

"Jupiter, Tom!" the Judge said, with something actually like elation in his voice, "it's good to hear you. It brings old Hamlin back and gives a man sand. You're an orator, yourself."

"Am I?" said Tom. "No one ever called my attention to it before. If it's true, perhaps it'll come in useful."

"Now, just think of me sitting here gassing," exclaimed the Judge, "and never asking what you are here for. What's your errand, Tom?"

"Perhaps I'm here to defraud the Government," Tom answered, sitting down again; "or perhaps I've got a fair claim against it. That's what I've come to Washington to find out--with the other claimant."

"A claim!" cried the Judge. "And you've left the Cross-roads--and Sheba?"

"Sheba and the other claimant are in some little rooms we've taken out

near Dupont Circle. The other claimant is the only De Willoughby left beside myself, and he is a youngster of twenty-three. He's my brother De Courcy's son."

The Judge glowed with interest. He heard the whole story, and his excitement grew as he listened. The elements of the picturesque in the situation appealed to him greatly. The curiously composite mind of the American contains a strong element of the romantic. In its most mercantile forms it is attracted by the dramatic; when it hails from the wilds, it is drawn by it as a child is drawn by colour and light.

"It's a big thing," the Judge ejaculated at intervals. "When I see you sitting there, Tom, just as you used to sit in your chair on the store-porch, it seems as if it could hardly be you that's talking. Why, man, it'll mean a million!"

"If I get money enough to set the mines at work," said Tom, "it may mean more millions than one."

The dingy square room, with its worn carpet, its turned-up bedstead, shabby chairs, and iron stove, temporarily assumed a new aspect. That its walls should contain this fairy tale of possible wealth and power and magnificence made it seem quite soberly respectable, and that Big Tom, sitting in the second-hand looking armchair, which creaked beneath his weight, should, in matter-of-fact tones, be relating such a story, made Judge Rutherford regard him with a kind of reverent trouble.

"Sheba, now," he said, "Sheba may be one of the biggest heiresses in the States. Lord! what luck it was for her that fellow left her behind!"

"It was luck for me," said Tom. And a faint, contemplative grin showed itself on his countenance. He was thinking, as he often did, of the afternoon when he returned from Blair's Hollow and opened the door of the room behind the store to find the wooden cradle stranded like a small ark in the corner.