



The Flag-Raising

Kate Douglas Wiggin

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Title: The Flag-raising

Author: Kate Douglas Wiggin

Posting Date: November 4, 2008 [EBook #2315]

Release Date: September, 2000

Language: English

*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE FLAG-RAISING ***

Produced by Susan L. Farley. HTML version by Al Haines.

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by

KATE DOUGLAS WIGGIN

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I

A DIFFERENCE IN HEARTS

"I DON' know as I cal'lated to be the makin' of any child," Miranda had said as she folded Aurelia's letter and laid it in the light-stand drawer. "I s'posed of course Aurelia would send us the one we asked for, but it's just like her to palm off that wild young one on somebody else."

"You remember we said that Rebecca, or even Jenny might come, in case Hannah could n't," interposed Jane.

"I know we did, but we hadn't any notion it would turn out that way," grumbled Miranda.

"She was a mite of a thing when we saw her three years ago," ventured Jane; "she's had time to improve."

"And time to grow worse!"

"Won't it be kind of a privilege to put her on the right track?" asked Jane timidly.

"I don't know about the privilege part; it'll be considerable work, I guess. If her mother hasn't got her on the right track by now, she won't take to it herself all of a sudden."

This depressed and depressing frame of mind had lasted until the eventful day dawned on which Rebecca was to arrive.

"If she makes as much work after she comes as she has before, we might as well give up hope of ever gettin' any rest," sighed Miranda as she hung the dish towels on the barberry bushes at the side door.

"But we should have had to clean house, Rebecca or no Rebecca," urged Jane; "and I can't see why you've scrubbed and washed and baked as you have for that one child, nor why you've about bought out Watson's stock of dry goods."

"I know Aurelia if you don't," responded Miranda. "I've seen her house, and I've seen that batch o' children, wearin' one another's clothes and never carin' whether they had 'em on right side out or not; I know what they've had to live and dress on, and so do you. That child will like as not come here with a bundle o' things borrowed from the rest o' the family. She'll have Hannah's shoes and John's undershirts and Mark's socks most likely. I suppose she never had a thimble on her finger in her life, but she'll know the feelin' o' one before she's been here many days. I've bought a piece of unbleached muslin and a piece o' brown gingham for her to make up; that'll keep her busy. Of course she won't

pick up anything after herself; she probably never saw a duster, and she'll be as hard to train into our ways as if she was a heathen."

"She'll make a difference," acknowledged Jane, "but she may turn out more biddable than we think."

"She'll mind when she's spoken to, biddable or not," remarked Miranda with a shake of the last towel.

Miranda Sawyer had a heart, of course, but she had never used it for any other purpose than the pumping and circulating of blood. She was just, conscientious, economical, industrious; a regular attendant at church and Sunday-school, and a member of the State Missionary and Bible societies, but in the presence of all these chilly virtues you longed for one warm little fault, or lacking that, one likable failing, something to make you sure that she was thoroughly alive. She had never had any education other than that of the neighborhood district school, for her desires and ambitions had all pointed to the management of the house, the farm, and the dairy. Jane, on the other hand, had gone to an academy, and also to a boarding-school for young ladies; so had Aurelia; and after all the years that had elapsed there was still a slight difference in language and in manner between the elder and the two younger sisters.

Jane, too, had had the inestimable advantage of a sorrow; not the natural grief at the loss of her aged father and mother, for she had been resigned to let them go; but something far deeper. She was engaged to marry young Tom Carter, who had nothing to marry on, it is true, but who was sure to have, some time or other. Then the war broke out. Tom enlisted at the first call. Up to that time Jane had loved him with a quiet, friendly sort of affection, and had given her country a mild emotion of the same sort. But the strife, the danger, the anxiety of the time, set new currents of feeling in motion. Life became something other than the three meals a day, the round of cooking, washing, sewing, and

churchgoing. Personal gossip vanished from the village conversation. Big things took the place of trifling ones,—sacred sorrows of wives and mothers, pangs of fathers and husbands, self-denials, sympathies, new desire to bear one another's burdens. Men and women grew fast in those days of the nation's trouble and danger, and Jane awoke from the vague dull dream she had hitherto called life to new hopes, new fears, new purposes. Then after a year's anxiety a year when one never looked in the newspaper without dread and sickness of suspense, came the telegram saying that Tom was wounded; and without so much as asking Miranda's leave, she packed her trunk and started for the South. She was in time to hold Tom's hand through hours of pain; to show him for once the heart of a prim New England girl when it is ablaze with love and grief; to put her arms about him so that he could have a home to die in, and that was all;—all, but it served.

It carried her through weary months of nursing—nursing of other soldiers for Tom's dear sake; it sent her home a better woman; and though she had never left Riverboro in all the years that lay between, and had grown into the counterfeit presentment of her sister and of all other thin, spare, New England spinsters, it was something of a counterfeit, and underneath was still the faint echo of that wild heartbeat of her girlhood. Having learned the trick of beating and loving and suffering, the poor faithful heart persisted, although it lived on memories and carried on its sentimental operations mostly in secret.

"You're soft, Jane," said Miranda once; "you allers was soft, and you allers will be. If't wa'n't for me keeping you stiffened up, I b'lieve you'd leak out o' the house into the dooryard."

It was already past the appointed hour for Mr. Cobb and his coach to be lumbering down the street.

"The stage ought to be here," said Miranda, glancing nervously at the tall clock for the twentieth time. "I guess everything's done. I've tacked up two

thick towels back of her washstand and put a mat under her slop-jar; but children are awful hard on furniture. I expect we sha'n't know this house a year from now." Jane's frame of mind was naturally depressed and timorous, having been affected by Miranda's gloomy presages of evil to come. The only difference between the sisters in this matter was that while Miranda only wondered how they could endure Rebecca, Jane had flashes of inspiration in which she wondered how Rebecca would endure them. It was in one of these flashes that she ran up the back stairs to put a vase of apple blossoms and a red tomato-pincushion on Rebecca's bureau.

The stage rumbled to the side door of the brick house, and Mr. Cobb handed Rebecca out like a real lady passenger. She alighted with great circumspection, put a bunch of flowers in her aunt Miranda's hand, and received her salute; it could hardly be called a kiss without injuring the fair name of that commodity. "You need n't 'a'bothered to bring flowers," remarked that gracious and tactful lady; "the garden's always full of 'em here when it comes time."

Jane then kissed Rebecca, giving a somewhat better imitation of the real thing than her sister.

"Put the trunk in the entry, Jeremiah, and we'll get it carried upstairs this afternoon," she said.

"I'll take it up for ye now, if ye say the word, girls."

"No, no; don't leave the horses; somebody'll be comin' past, and we can call 'em in."

"Well, good-by, Rebecca; good-day, Mirandy 'n' Jane. You've got a lively little girl there. I guess she'll be a first-rate company keeper."

Miss Sawyer shuddered openly at the adjective "lively" as applied to a child;

her belief being that though children might be seen, if absolutely necessary, they certainly should never be heard if she could help it. "We're not much used to noise, Jane and me," she remarked acidly.

Mr. Cobb saw that he had spoken indiscreetly, but he was too unused to argument to explain himself readily, so he drove away, trying to think by what safer word than "lively" he might have described his interesting little passenger.

"I'll take you up and show you your room, Rebecca," Miss Miranda said. "Shut the mosquito nettin' door tight behind you, so's to keep the flies out; it ain't fly time yet, but I want you to start right; take your parcel along with you and then you won't have to come down for it; always make your head save your heels. Rub your feet on that braided rug; hang your hat and cape in the entry as you go past."

"It's my best hat," said Rebecca.

"Take it upstairs then and put it in the clothes-press; but I shouldn't 'a' thought you'd 'a' worn your best hat on the stage."

"It's my only hat," explained Rebecca. "My every-day hat was n't good enough to bring. Sister Fanny's going to finish it."

"Lay your parasol in the entry closet."

"Do you mind if I keep it in my room, please? It always seems safer."

"There ain't any thieves hereabouts, and if there was, I guess they wouldn't make for your sunshade; but come along. Remember to always go up the back way; we don't use the front stairs on account o' the carpet; take care o' the turn and don't ketch your foot; look to your right and go in. When you've washed your face and hands and brushed your hair you can come down, and by and by we'll unpack your trunk and get you settled before supper. Ain't you got your

dress on hind side foremost?"

Rebecca drew her chin down and looked at the row of smoked pearl buttons running up and down the middle of her flat little chest. "Hind side foremost? Oh, I see! No, that's all right. If you have seven children you can't keep buttonin' and unbuttonin' 'em all the time—they have to do themselves. We're always buttoned up in front at our house. Mira's only three, but she's buttoned up in front, too."

Miranda said nothing as she closed the door, but her looks were more eloquent than words.

Rebecca stood perfectly still in the centre of the floor and looked about her. There was a square of oilcloth in front of each article of furniture and a drawn-in rug beside the single four poster, which was covered with a fringed white dimity counterpane.

Everything was as neat as wax, but the ceilings were much higher than Rebecca was accustomed to. It was a north room, and the window, which was long and narrow, looked out on the back buildings and the barn.

It was not the room, which was far more comfortable than Rebecca's own at Sunnybrook Farm, nor the lack of view, nor yet the long journey, for she was not conscious of weariness; it was not the fear of a strange place, for she adored new places and new sensations; it was because of some curious blending of uncomprehended emotions that Rebecca stood her beloved pink sunshade in the corner, tore off her best hat, flung it on the bureau with the porcupine quills on the under side, and stripping down the dimity spread, precipitated herself into the middle of the bed and pulled the counterpane over her head.

In a moment the door opened with a clatter of the latch.

Knocking was a refinement quite unknown in Riverboro, and if it had been heard of, it would never have been wasted on a child. Miss Miranda entered, and as her eye wandered about the vacant room, it fell upon a white and tempestuous ocean of counterpane, an ocean breaking into strange movements of wave and crest and billow.

"Rebecca!"

The tone in which the word was voiced gave it all the effect of having been shouted from the housetops.

A dark ruffled head and two frightened eyes appeared above the dinnity spread.

"What are you layin' on your good bed in the daytime for, messin' up the feathers, and dirtyin' the comforter with your dusty boots?"

Rebecca rose guiltily. There seemed no excuse to make. Her offense was beyond explanation or apology.

"I'm sorry, Aunt Mirandy-something came over me; I don't know what."

"Well, if it comes over you very soon again we'll have to find out what 't is. Spread your bed up smooth this minute, for 'Bijah Flagg's bringin' your trunk upstairs, and I wouldn't let him see such a cluttered-up room for anything; he'd tell it all over town."

When Mr. Cobb had put up his horses that night he carried a kitchen chair to the side of his wife, who was sitting on the back porch.

"I brought a little Randall girl down on the stage from Maplewood to-day, mother. She's related to the Sawyer girls an' is goin' to live with 'em," he said, as he sat down and began to whittle. "She's Aurelia's child, the sister that ran

away with Susan Randall's son just before we come here to live."

"How old a child?"

"Bout ten, or somewhere along there, an' small for her age; but land! she might be a hundred to hear her talk! She kept me jumpin' tryin' to answer her! Of all the queer children I ever come across she's the queerest. She ain't no beauty—her face is all eyes; but if she ever grows up to them eyes an' fills out a little she'll make folks stare. Land, mother! I wish 't you could 'a' heard her talk."

"I don't see what she had to talk about, a child like that, to a stranger," replied Mrs. Cobb.

"Stranger or no stranger, 't would n't make no difference to her. She'd talk to a pump or a grindstone; she'd talk to herself ruther 'n keep still."

"What did she talk about?"

"Blamed if I can repeat any of it. She kept me so surprised I didn't have my wits about me. She had a little pink sunshade—it kind o' looked like a doll's umberella, 'n' she clung to it like a burr to a woolen stockin'. I advised her to open it up—the sun was so hot; but she said no, 't would fade, an' she tucked it under her dress. 'It's the dearest thing in life to me,' says she, 'but it's a dreadful care.' Them's the very words, an' it's all the words I remember. 'It's the dearest thing in life to me, but it's an awful care!'"—here Mr. Cobb laughed aloud as he tipped his chair back against the side of the house. "There was another thing, but I can't get it right exactly. She was talkin' 'bout the circus parade an' the snake charmer in a gold chariot, an' says she, 'She was so beautiful beyond compare, Mr. Cobb, that it made you have lumps in your throat to look at her.' She'll be comin' over to see you, mother, an' you can size her up for yourself, I don't know how she'll git on with Mirandy Sawyer—poor little soul!"

This doubt was more or less openly expressed in Riverboro, which, however, had two opinions on the subject; one that it was a most generous thing in the Sawyer girls to take one of Aurelia's children to educate, the other that the education would be bought at a price wholly out of proportion to its real value.

Rebecca's first letters to her mother would seem to indicate that she cordially coincided with the latter view of the situation.

II

REBECCA'S POINT OF VIEW

DEAR MOTHER,—I am safely here. My dress was not much tumbled and Aunt Jane helped me press it out. I like Mr. Cobb very much. He chews tobacco but throws newspapers straight up to the doors of the houses. I rode outside with him a little while, but got inside before I got to Aunt Miranda's house. I did not want to, but thought you would like it better. Miranda is such a long word that I think I will say Aunt M. and Aunt J. in my Sunday letters. Aunt J. has given me a dictionary to look up all the hard words in. It takes a good deal of time and I am glad people can talk without stoping to spell. It is much eesier to talk than write and much more fun. The brick house looks just the same as you have told us. The parler is splendid and gives YOU creeps and chills when you look in the door. The

furniture is ellergant too, and all the rooms but there are no good sitting-down places exsept in the kitchen. The same cat is here but they never save the kittens and the cat is too old to play with. Hannah told me once you ran away to be married to father and I can see it would be nice. If Aunt M. would run away I think I should like to live with Aunt J. She does not hate me as bad as Aunt M. does. Tell Mark he can have my paint box, but I should like him to keep the red cake in case I come home again. I hope Hannah and John do mot get tired doing my work.

Your afECTIONate friend
REBECCA.

P. S. Please give the piece of poetry to John because he likes my poetry even when it is not very good. This piece is not very good but it is true but I hope you won't mind what is in it as you ran away.

This house is dark and dull and dreer
No light doth shine from far or near
Its like the tomb.

And those of us who live herein
Are almost as dead as serraflim
Though not as good.

My guardian angel is asleep
At leest he doth not virgil keep
Ah! Woe is me!

Then give me back my lonely farm
Where none alive did wish me harm

Dear home of youth!

P.S. again. I made the poetry like a piece in a book but could not get it right at first. You see "tomb" and "good" do not sound well together but I wanted to say "tomb" dreadfully and as seraphim are always good I could n't take that out. I have made it over now. It does not say my thoughts as well but think it is more right. Give the best one to John as he keeps them in a box with his bird's eggs. This is the best one.

SUNDAY THOUGHTS
BY
REBECCA ROWENA RANDALL

This house is dark and dull and drear
No light doth shine from far or near
Nor ever could.

And those of us who live herein
Are most as dead as seraphim
Though not as good.

My guardian angel is asleep
At least he doth no vigil keep
But far doth roam.

Then give me back my lonely farm
Where none alive did wish me harm,
Dear childhood home!

DEAR MOTHER,—I am thrilling with unhappyness this morning. I got that out of a book called Cora The Doctor's

Wife. Cora's husband's mother was very cross and unfeeling to her like Aunt M. to me. I wish Hannah had come instead of me for it was Hannah that Aunt M. wanted and she is better than I am and does not answer back so quick. Are there any peaces of my buff calico. Aunt J. wants enough to make a new waste, button behind, so I wont look so outlandish. The stiles are quite pretty in Riverboro and those at Meeting quite ellergant, more so than in Temperance.

This town is stilish, gay and fair,
And full of wellthy riches rare,
But I would pillow on my arm
The thought of my sweet Brookside Farm

School is pretty good. The Teacher can answer more questions than the Temperance one but not so many as I can ask. I am smarter than all the girls but one but not so smart as two boys. Emma Jane can add and subtract in her head like a streak of lightning and knows the spelning book right through but has no thoughts of any kind. She is in the Third Reader but does not like stories in books. I am in the Sixth Reader but just because I cannot say the seven multiplication Table Miss Dearborn threttns to put me in the baby primer class with Elijah and Elisha Simpson little twins.

Sore is my heart and bent my stubborn pride,
With Ljah and with Lisha am I tied,
My soul recoyles like Cora Doctor's Wife,
Like her I feer I cannot bare this life.

I am going to try for the spelning prize but fear I cannot get it. I would not care but wrong spelning looks dreadful in poetry. Last

Sunday when I found seraphim in the dictionary I was ashamed I had made it serrafim but seraphim is not a word you can guess at like another long one, outlandish, in this letter which spells itself. Miss Dearborn says use the words you can spell and if you cant spell seraphim make angel do but angels are not just the same as seraphims. Seraphims are brighter whiter and have bigger wings and I think are older and longer dead than angels which are just freshly dead and after a long time in heaven around the great white throne grow to be seraphims.

I sew on brown gingham dresses every afternoon when Emma Jane and the Simpsons are playing house or running on the Logs when their mothers do not know it. Their mothers are afraid they will drown and aunt M. is afraid I will wet my clothes so will not let me either. I can play from half past four to supper and after supper a little bit and Saturday afternoons. I am glad our cow has a calf and it is spotted. It is going to be a good year for apples and hay so you and John will be glad and we can pay a little more morgage. Miss Dearborn asked us what is the object of eddication and I said the object of mine was to help pay off the morgage. She told Aunt M. and I had to sew extra for punishment because she says a morgage is disgrace like stealing or smallpox and it will be all over town that we have one on our farm. Emma Jane is not morgaged nor Richard Carter nor Dr. Winship but the Simpsons are.

Rise my soul, strain every nerve,
Thy morgage to remove,
Gain thy mother's heartfelt thanks
Thy family's grateful love.

Pronounce family quick or it won't sound right.

Your loving little friend
REBECCA.

DEAR JOHN,—YOU remember when we tide the new dog in the barn how he bit the rope and howled. I am just like him only the brick house is the barn and I can not bite Aunt M. because I must be grateful and eddication is going to be the making of me and help you pay off the mortgage when we grow up.

Your loving
BECKY.

III.

WISDOM'S WAYS

THE day of Rebecca's arrival had been Friday, and on the Monday following she began her education at the school which was in Riverboro Centre, about a mile distant. Miss Sawyer borrowed a neighbor's horse and wagon and drove her to the schoolhouse, interviewing the teacher, Miss Dearborn, arranging for books, and generally starting the child on the path that was to lead to boundless knowledge.

Rebecca walked to school after the first morning. She loved this part of the

day's programme. When the dew was not too heavy and the weather was fair there was a short cut through the woods. She turned off the main road, crept through Joshua Woodman's bars, waved away Mrs. Carter's cows, trod the short grass of the pasture, with its well-worn path running through gardens of buttercups and whiteweed, and groves of boxberry leaves and sweet fern. She descended a little hill, jumped from stone to stone across a woodland brook startling the drowsy frogs, who were always winking and blinking in the morning sun. Then came the "woody bit," with her feet pressing the slippery carpet of brown pine needles; the woody bit so full of dewy morning surprises,—fungous growths of brilliant orange and crimson springing up around the stumps of dead trees, beautiful things born in a single night; and now and then the miracle of a little clump of waxen Indian pipes, seen just quickly enough to be saved from her careless tread. Then she climbed a stile, went through a grassy meadow, slid under another pair of bars, and came out into the road again, having gained nearly half a mile.

How delicious it all was! Rebecca clasped her Quackenbos's Grammar and Greenleaf's Arithmetic with a joyful sense of knowing her lessons. Her dinner pail swung from her right hand, and she had a blissful consciousness of the two soda biscuits spread with butter and syrup, the baked cup-custard, the doughnut, and the square of hard gingerbread. Sometimes she said whatever "piece" she was going to speak on the next Friday afternoon.

"A soldier of the Legion lay dying in Algiers, There was lack of woman's nursing, there was dearth of woman's tears."

How she loved the swing and the sentiment of it! How her young voice quivered whenever she came to the refrain:—

"But we'll meet no more at Bingen, dear Bingen on the Rhine."

It always sounded beautiful in her ears, as she sent her tearful little treble into the clear morning air.

Another early favorite (for we must remember that Rebecca's only knowledge of the great world of poetry consisted of the selections in vogue in the old school Readers) was:—

"Woodman, spare that tree!
Touch not a single bough!
In youth it sheltered me,
And I'll protect it now."

When Emma Jane Perkins walked through the "short cut" with her, the two children used to render this with appropriate dramatic action. Emma Jane always chose to be the woodman because she had nothing to do but raise on high an imaginary axe. On the one occasion when she essayed the part of the tree's romantic protector, she represented herself as feeling "so awful foolish" that she refused to undertake it again, much to the secret delight of Rebecca, who found the woodman's role much too tame for her vaulting ambition. She reveled in the impassioned appeal of the poet, and implored the ruthless woodman to be as brutal as possible with the axe, so that she might properly put greater spirit into her lines. One morning, feeling more frisky than usual, she fell upon her knees and wept in the woodman's petticoat. Curiously enough, her sense of proportion rejected this as soon as it was done.

"That wasn't right, it was silly, Emma Jane; but I'll tell you where it might come in—in 'Give me Three Grains of Corn.' You be the mother, and I'll be the famishing Irish child. For pity's sake put the axe down; you are not the woodman any longer!"

"What'll I do with my hands, then?" asked Emma Jane.

"Whatever you like," Rebecca answered wearily; "you're just a mother—that's all. What does your mother do with her hands? Nowhere goes!"

"Give me three grains of corn, mother,
Only three grains of corn,
It will keep the little life I have
Till the coming of the morn."

This sort of thing made Emma Jane nervous and fidgety, but she was Rebecca's slave and obeyed her lightest commands. At the last pair of bars the two girls were sometimes met by a detachment of the Simpson children, who lived in a black house with a red door and a red barn behind, on the Blueberry Plains road. Rebecca felt an interest in the Simpsons from the first, because there were so many of them and they were so patched and darned, just like her own brood at the home farm.

The little schoolhouse with its flagpole on top and its two doors in front, one for boys and the other for girls, stood on the crest of a hill, with rolling fields and meadows on one side, a stretch of pine woods on the other, and the river glinting and sparkling in the distance. It boasted no attractions within. All was as bare and ugly and uncomfortable as it well could be, for the villages along the river expended so much money in repairing and rebuilding bridges that they were obliged to be very economical in school privileges. The teacher's desk and chair stood on a platform in one corner; there was an uncouth stove, never blackened oftener than once a year, a map of the United States, two blackboards, a ten-quart tin pail of water and long-handled dipper on a corner shelf, and wooden desks and benches for the scholars, who only numbered twenty in Rebecca's time. The seats were higher in the back of the room, and the more advanced and longer-legged pupils sat there, the position being greatly to be envied, as they were at once nearer to the windows and farther from the teacher.

There were classes of a sort, although nobody, broadly speaking, studied the same book with anybody else, or had arrived at the same degree of proficiency in any one branch of learning. Rebecca in particular was so difficult

to classify that Miss Dearborn at the end of a fortnight gave up the attempt altogether. She read with Dick Carter and Living Perkins, who were fitting for the academy; recited arithmetic with lispng little "Thuthan Thimphthon;" geography with Emma Jane Perkins, and grammar after school hours to Miss Dearborn alone. Full to the brim as she was of clever thoughts and quaint fancies, she made at first but a poor hand at composition. The labor of writing and spelling, with the added difficulties of punctuation and capitals, interfered sadly with the free expression of ideas. She took history with Alice Robinson's class, which was attacking the subject of the Revolution, while Rebecca was bidden to begin with the discovery of America. In a week she had mastered the course of events up to the Revolution, and in ten days had arrived at Yorktown, where the class had apparently established summer quarters. Then finding that extra effort would only result in her reciting with the oldest Simpson boy, she deliberately held herself back, for wisdom's ways were not those of pleasantness nor her paths those of peace if one were compelled to tread them in the company of Seesaw Simpson. Samuel Simpson was generally called Seesaw, because of his difficulty in making up his mind. Whether it were a question of fact, of spelling, or of date, of going swimming or fishing, of choosing a book in the Sunday-school library or a stick of candy at the village store, he had no sooner determined on one plan of action than his wish fondly reverted to the opposite one. Seesaw was pale, flaxen haired, blue eyed, round shouldered, and given to stammering when nervous. Perhaps because of his very weakness, Rebecca's decision of character had a fascination for him, and although she snubbed him to the verge of madness, he could never keep his eyes away from her. The force with which she tied her shoe when the lacing came undone, the flirt over shoulder she gave her black braid when she was excited or warm, her manner of studying,—book on desk, arms folded, eyes fixed on the opposite wall,—all had an abiding charm for Seesaw Simpson. When, having obtained permission, she walked to the water pail in the corner and drank from the dipper, unseen forces dragged Seesaw from his seat to go and drink after her. It was not only that there was something akin to association and intimacy in drinking next, but there was the fearful joy of meeting her in

transit and receiving a cold and disdainful look from her wonderful eyes.

On a certain warm day in summer Rebecca's thirst exceeded the bounds of propriety. When she asked a third time for permission to quench it at the common fountain Miss Dearborn nodded "yes," but lifted her eyebrows unpleasantly as Rebecca neared the desk. As she replaced the dipper Seesaw promptly raised his hand, and Miss Dearborn indicated a weary affirmative.

"What is the matter with you, Rebecca?" she asked.

"It is a very thirsty morning," answered Rebecca.

There seemed nothing humorous about this reply, which was merely the statement of a fact, but an irrepressible titter ran through the school. Miss Dearborn did not enjoy jokes neither made nor understood by herself, and her face flushed.

"I think you had better stand by the pail for five minutes, Rebecca; it may help you to control your thirst."

Rebecca's heart fluttered. She to stand in the corner by the water pail and be stared at by all the scholars! She unconsciously made a gesture of angry dissent and moved a step nearer her seat, but was arrested by Miss Dearborn's command in a still firmer voice.

"Stand by the pail, Rebecca!—Samuel Simpson how many times have you asked for water already?"

"This is the f-f-fourth."

"Don't touch the dipper, please. The school has done nothing but drink all day; it has had no time whatever to study. What is the matter with you, Samuel?"

"It is a v-very thirsty m-morning," remarked Samuel, looking at Rebecca while the school tittered.

"I judged so. Stand by the other side of the pail, with Rebecca." Rebecca's head was bowed with shame and wrath. Life looked too black a thing to be endured. The punishment was bad enough, but to be coupled in correction with Seesaw Simpson was beyond human endurance.

Singing was the last exercise in the afternoon, and Minnie Smellie chose "Shall we Gather at the River?" It was a curious choice and seemed to hold some secret association with the situation and general progress of events; or at any rate there was apparently some obscure reason for the energy and vim with which the scholars looked at the empty water pail as they shouted the choral invitation again and again:—

"Shall we gather at the river,
The beautiful, the beautiful river?"

Miss Dearborn stole a look at Rebecca's bent head, and was frightened. The child's face was pale save for two red spots glowing on her cheeks. Tears hung on her lashes; her breath came and went quickly, and the hand that held her pocket handkerchief trembled like a leaf.

"You may go to your seat, Rebecca," said Miss Dearborn at the end of the first song. "Samuel, stay where you are till the close of school. And let me tell you, scholars, that I asked Rebecca to stand by the pail only to break up this habit of incessant drinking, which is nothing but empty-mindedness and desire to walk to and fro over the floor. Every time Rebecca has asked for a drink to-day the whole school has gone to the pail like a regiment. She is really thirsty, and I dare say I ought to have punished you for following her example, not her for setting it. What shall we sing now, Alice?"

"'The Old Oaken Bucket,' please."

"Think of something dry, Alice, and change the subject. Yes, 'The Star Spangled Banner' if you like, or anything else." Rebecca sank into her seat and pulled the singing book from her desk. Miss Dearborn's public explanation had shifted some of the weight from her heart, and she felt a trifle raised in her self-esteem.

Under cover of the general relaxation of singing, offerings of respectful sympathy began to make their appearance at her shrine. Living Perkins, who could not sing, dropped a piece of maple sugar in her lap as he passed her on his way to the blackboard to draw the map of Maine, while Alice Robinson rolled a perfectly new slate pencil over the floor with her foot until it reached Rebecca's place.

Altogether existence grew brighter, and when she was left alone with the teacher for her grammar lesson she had nearly recovered her equanimity, which was more than Miss Dearborn had. The last clattering foot had echoed through the hall, Seesaw's backward glance of penitence had been met and answered defiantly by one of cold disdain.

"Rebecca, I am afraid I punished you more than I meant," said Miss Dearborn, who was only eighteen herself, and in her year of teaching country schools had never encountered a child like Rebecca.

"I had n't missed a question this whole day, nor whispered either," quavered the culprit; "and I don't think I ought to be shamed just for drinking."

"You started all the others, or it seemed as if you did. Whatever you do they all do, whether you laugh, or write notes, or ask to leave the room, or drink; and it must be stopped."

"Sam Simpson is a copycoat!" stormed Rebecca. "I would n't have minded standing in the corner alone—that is, not so very much; but I couldn't bear

standing with him."

"I saw that you could n't, and that's the reason I told you to take your seat, and left him in the corner. Remember that you are a stranger in the place, and they take more notice of what you do, so you must be careful. Now let's have our conjugations. Give me the verb 'to be,' potential mood, past perfect tense."

"I might have been
Thou mightst have been
He might have been
We might have been
You might have been
They might have been"

"Give me an example, please."

"I might have been glad
Thou mightst have been glad
He, she, or it might have been glad"

"He' or 'she' might have been glad because they are masculine and feminine, but could 'it' have been glad?" asked Miss Dearborn, who was very fond of splitting hairs.

"Why not?" asked Rebecca.

"Because 'it' is neuter gender."

"Could n't we say, 'The kitten might have been glad if it had known it was not going to be drowned'?"

"Ye-es," Miss Dearborn answered hesitatingly, never very sure of herself under Rebecca's fire; "but though we often speak of a baby, a chicken, or a

kitten as 'it,' they are really masculine or feminine gender, not neuter."

Rebecca reflected a long moment and then asked, "Is a hollyhock neuter?"

"Oh yes, of course it is, Rebecca."

"Well, could n't we say, 'The hollyhock might have been glad to see it rain, but there was a weak little baby bud growing out of its stalk and it was afraid it might be hurt by the storm; so the big hollyhock was kind of afraid, instead of being real glad'?"

Miss Dearborn looked puzzled as she answered, "Of course, Rebecca, hollyhocks could not be sorry, or glad, or afraid, really."

"We can't tell, I s'pose," replied the child; "but I think they are, anyway. Now what shall I say?"

"The subjunctive mood, past perfect tense of the verb 'to know.'"

"If I had known
If thou hadst known
If he had known
If we had known
If you had known
If they had known"

"Oh, it is the saddest tense," sighed Rebecca with a little a little break in her voice; "nothing but ifs, ifs, ifs! And it makes you feel that if they only had known, things might have been better!"

Miss Dearborn had not thought of it before, but on reflection she believed the subjective mood was a "sad" one and "if" rather a sorry "part of speech."

"Give me some examples of the subjective, Rebecca, and that will do for this

afternoon," she said.

"If I had not eaten salt mackerel for breakfast I should not have been thirsty," said Rebecca with an April smile, as she closed her grammar. "If thou hadst love me truly thou wouldst not have stood me up in the corner. If Samuel had not loved wickedness he would not have followed me to the water pail."

"And if Rebecca had loved the rules of the school she would have controlled her thirst," finished Miss Dearborn with a kiss, and the two parted friends.

IV

THE SAVING OF THE COLORS

EVEN when Rebecca had left school, having attained the great age of seventeen and therefore able to look back over a past incredibly long and full, she still reckoned time not by years, but by certain important occurrences. Between these epoch-making events certain other happenings stood out in bold relief against the gray of dull daily life. There was the coming of the new minister, for though many were tried only one was chosen; and finally there was the flag-raising, a festivity that thrilled Riverboro and Edgewood society from centre to circumference, a festivity that took place just before she entered the Female Seminary at Wareham and said good-by to kind Miss Dearborn and the village school.

There must have been other flag-raising in history,—even the persons most

interested in this particular one would grudgingly have allowed that much,—but it would have seemed to them improbable that any such flag-raising, as theirs could twice glorify the same century. Of some pageants it is tacitly admitted that there can be no duplicates, and the flag-raising at Riverboro Centre was one of these; so that it is small wonder if Rebecca chose it as one of the important dates in her personal almanac. Mrs. Baxter, the new minister's wife, was the being, under Providence, who had conceived the first idea of the flag. Mrs. Baxter communicated her patriotic idea of a new flag to the Dorcas Society, proposing that the women should cut and make it themselves.

"It may not be quite as good as those manufactured in the large cities," she said, "but we shall be proud to see our home-made flag flying in the breeze, and it will mean all the more to the young voters growing up, to remember that their mothers made it with their own hands."

"How would it do to let some of the girls help?" modestly asked Miss Dearborn, the Riverboro teacher. "We might chose the best sewers and let them put in at least a few stitches, so that they can feel they have a share in it."

"Just the thing!" exclaimed Mrs. Baxter. "We can cut the stripes and sew them together, and after we have basted on the white stars the girls can apply them to the blue ground. We must have it ready for the campaign rally, and we could n't christen it at a better time than in this presidential year."

In this way the great enterprise was started, and day by day the preparations went forward in the two villages.

The boys, as future voters and soldiers, demanded an active share in the proceedings, and were organized by Squire Bean into a fife and drum corps, so that by day and night martial but most inharmonious music woke the echoes, and deafened mothers felt their patriotism oozing out at the soles of their shoes. Dick Carter was made captain, for his grandfather had a gold medal given him by Queen Victoria for rescuing three hundred and twenty-six passengers from a

sinking British vessel. Riverboro thought it high time to pay some graceful tribute to Great Britain in return for her handsome, conduct to Captain Nahum Carter, and human imagination could contrive nothing more impressive than a vicarious share in the flag-raising.

Miss Dearborn was to be Columbia and the older girls of the two schools were to be the States. Such trade in muslins and red, white, and blue ribbons had never been known since "Watson kep' store," and the number of brief white petticoats hanging out to bleach would leave caused the passing stranger to imagine Riverboro a continual dancing-school.

Juvenile virtue, both male and female, reached an almost impossible height, for parents had only to lift a finger and say, "You shan't go to the flag-raising!" and the refractory spirit at once armed itself for new struggles toward the perfect life. Mr. Jeremiah Cobb had consented to impersonate Uncle Sam, and was to drive Columbia and the States to the "raising" on the top of his own stage. Meantime the boys were drilling, the ladies were cutting and basting and stitching, and the girls were sewing on stars; for the starry part of the spangled banner was to remain with each of them in turn until she had performed her share of the work.

It was felt by one and all a fine and splendid service indeed to help in the making of the flag, and if Rebecca was proud to be of the chosen ones, so was her Aunt Jane Sawyer, who had taught her all her delicate stitches.

On a long-looked-for afternoon in August the minister's wife drove up to the brick-house door, and handed out the great piece of bunting to Rebecca, who received it in her arms with as much solemnity as if it had been a child awaiting baptismal rites.

"I'm so glad!" she sighed happily. "I thought it would never come my turn!"

"You should have had it a week ago, but Huldah Meserve upset the ink

bottle over her star, and we had to baste on another one. You are the last, though, and then we shall sew the stars and stripes together, and Seth Strout will get the top ready for hanging. Just think, it won't be many days before you children will be pulling the rope with all your strength, the band will be playing, the men will be cheering, and the new flag will go higher and higher, till the red, white, and blue shows against the sky!"

Rebecca's eyes fairly blazed. "Shall I 'hem on' my star, or buttonhole it?" she asked.

"Look at all the others and make the most beautiful stitches you can, that's all. It is your star, you know, and you can even imagine it is your state, and try and have it the best of all. If everybody else is trying to do the same thing with her state, that will make a great country, won't it?"

Rebecca's eyes spoke glad confirmation of the idea. "My star, my state!" she repeated joyously. "Oh, Mrs. Baxter, I'll make such fine stitches you'll think the white grew out of the blue!"

The new minister's wife looked pleased to see her spark kindle a flame in the young heart. "You can sew so much of yourself into your star," she went on in the glad voice that made her so winsome, "that when you are an old lady you can put on your specs and find it among all the others. Good-by! Come up to the parsonage Saturday afternoon; Mr. Baxter wants to see you."

"Judson, help that dear little genius of a Rebecca all you can!" she said that night. "I don't know what she may, or may not, come to, some day; I only wish she were ours! If you could have seen her clasp the flag tight in her arms and put her cheek against it, and watched the tears of feeling start in her eyes when I told her that her star was her state! I kept whispering to myself, "Covet not thy neighbor's child!"

Daily at four o'clock Rebecca scrubbed her hands almost to the bone,

brushed her hair, and otherwise prepared herself in body, mind, and spirit for the consecrated labor of sewing on her star. All the time that her needle cautiously, conscientiously formed the tiny stitches she was making rhymes "in her head," her favorite achievement being this:—

"Your star, my star, all our stars together,
They make the dear old banner proud
To float in the bright fall weather."

There was much discussion as to which of the girls should impersonate the State of Maine, for that was felt to be the highest honor in the gift of the committee.

Alice Robinson was the prettiest child in the village, but she was very shy and by no means a general favorite.

Minnie Smellie possessed the handsomest dress and a pair of white slippers and open-work stockings that nearly carried the day, but she was not at all the person to select for the central figure on the platform.

Huldah Meserve was next voted upon, and the fact that if she were not chosen her father might withdraw his subscription to the brass band fund was a matter for grave consideration.

"I kind of hate to have such a giggler for the State of Maine; let Huldah be the Goddess of Liberty," proposed Mrs. Burbank, whose patriotism was more local than national.

"How would Rebecca Randall do for Maine, and let her speak some of her verses?" suggested the new minister's wife, who, could she have had her way, would have given all the prominent parts to Rebecca, from Uncle Sam down.

So, beauty, fashion, and wealth having been tried and found wanting, the

committee discussed the claims of talent, and it transpired that to the awestricken Rebecca fell the chief plum in the pudding. It was a tribute to her gifts that there was no jealousy or envy among the other girls; they readily conceded her special fitness for the role.

Her life had not been pressed down full to the brim of pleasures, and she had a sort of distrust of joy in the bud. Not until she saw it in full radiance of bloom did she dare embrace it. She had never read any verse but Byron, Felicia Hemans, bits of "Paradise Lost," and the selections in the school readers, but she would have agreed heartily with the poet who said:—

"Not by appointment do we meet delight
And joy; they heed not our expectancy;
But round some corner in the streets of life
They on a sudden clasp us with a smile."

For many nights before the raising, when she went to her bed, she said to herself after she had finished her prayers: "It can't be true that I'm chosen for the State of Maine! It just can't be true! Nobody could be good enough, but oh, I'll try to be as good as I can! To be going to Wareham Seminary next week and to be the State of Maine too! Oh! I must pray hard to God to keep me meek and humble!"

The flag was to be raised on a Tuesday, and on the previous Sunday it became known to the children that Clara Belle Simpson was coming back from Acreville, coming to live with Mrs. Fogg and take care of the baby. Clara Belle was one of Miss Dearborn's original flock, and if she were left wholly out of the festivities she would be the only girl of suitable age to be thus slighted; it seemed clear to the juvenile mind, therefore, that neither she nor her descendants would ever recover from such a blow. But, under all the circumstances, would she be allowed to join in the procession? Even Rebecca, the optimistic, feared not, and the committee confirmed her fears by saying that Abner Simpson's daughter

certainly could not take any prominent part in the ceremony, but that they hoped Mrs. Fogg would allow her to witness it.

When Abner Simpson, urged by the town authorities, took his wife and seven children away from Riverboro to Acreville, just over the border in the next county, Riverboro went to bed leaving its barn and shed doors unfastened and drew long breaths of gratitude to Providence.

Of most winning disposition and genial manners, Mr. Simpson had not that instinctive comprehension of property rights which renders a man a valuable citizen.

Abner was a most unusual thief, and conducted his operations with a tact and neighborly consideration none too common in the profession. He would never steal a man's scythe in haying-time, nor his fur lap-robe in the coldest of the winter. The picking of a lock offered no attractions to him; "he wa'n't no burglar," he would have scornfully asserted. A strange horse and wagon hitched by the roadside was the most flagrant of his thefts; but it was the small things—the hatchet or axe on the chopping-block, the tin pans sunning at the side door, a stray garment bleaching on the grass, a hoe, rake, shovel, or a bag of early potatoes—that tempted him most sorely; and these appealed to him not so much for their intrinsic value as because they were so excellently adapted to "swapping." The swapping was really the enjoyable part of the procedure, the theft was only a sad but necessary preliminary; for if Abner himself had been a man of sufficient property to carry on his business operations independently, it is doubtful if he would have helped himself so freely to his neighbor's goods.

Riverboro regretted the loss of Mrs. Simpson, who was useful in scrubbing, cleaning, and washing, and was thought to exercise some influence over her predatory spouse. There was a story of their early life together, when they had a farm; a story to the effect that Mrs. Simpson always rode on every load of hay that her husband took to Milltown, with the view of keeping him sober

through the day. After he turned out of the country road and approached the metropolis, it was said that he used to bury the docile lady in the load. He would then drive on to the scales, have the weight of hay entered in the buyer's book, take his horses to the stable for feed and water, and when a favorable opportunity offered he would assist the hot and panting Mrs. Simpson out of the side or back of the rack, and gallantly brush the straw from her person. For this reason it was always asserted that Abner Simpson sold his wife every time he went to Milltown, but the story was never fully substantiated, and at all events it was the only suspected blot on meek Mrs. Simpson's personal reputation.

As for the Simpson children, they were missed chiefly as familiar figures by the roadside; but Rebecca honestly loved Clara Belle, notwithstanding her Aunt Miranda's opposition to the intimacy. Rebecca's curious taste in friends was a source of continual anxiety to her aunt.

"Anything that's human flesh is good enough for her!" Miranda groaned to Jane. "She'll ride with the rag-sack-and-bottle peddler just as quick as she would with the minister; she always sets beside the barefooted young ones at Sabbath school; and she's forever riggin' and onriggin' that dirty Simpson baby! She reminds me of a puppy that'll always go to everybody that'll have him!"

It was thought very creditable to Mrs. Fogg that she sent for Clara Belle to live with her and go to school part of the year. "She'll be useful," said Mrs. Fogg, "and she'll be out of her father's way, and so keep honest; though she's so awful homely I've no fears for her. A girl with her red hair, freckles, and cross-eyes can't fall into no kind of sin, I don't believe."

Mrs. Fogg requested that Clara Belle should be started on her journey from Acreville by train and come the rest of the way by stage, and she was disturbed to receive word on Sunday that Mr. Simpson had borrowed a horse from a new acquaintance, and would himself drive the girl from Acreville to Riverboro,

a distance of thirty-five miles. That he would arrive in their vicinity on the very night before the flag-raising was thought by Riverboro to be a public misfortune, and several residents hastily determined to deny themselves a sight of the festivities and remain watchfully on their own premises.

On Monday afternoon the children were rehearsing their songs at the meeting-house. As Rebecca came out on the broad wooden steps she watched Mrs. Peter Meserve's buggy out of sight, for in front, wrapped in a cotton sheet, lay the precious flag. After a few chattering good-byes and weather prophecies with the other girls, she started on her homeward walk, dropping in at the parsonage to read her verses to the minister.

He welcomed her gladly as she removed her white cotton gloves (hastily slipped on outside the door, for ceremony) and pushed back the funny hat with the yellow and black porcupine quills—the hat with which she made her first appearance in Riverboro society.

"You've heard the beginning, Mr. Baxter; now will you please tell me if you like the last verse?" she asked, taking out her paper. "I've only read it to Alice Robinson, and I think perhaps she can never be a poet, though she's a splendid writer. Last year when she was twelve she wrote a birthday poem to herself, and she made 'natal' rhyme with 'Milton,' which, of course, it wouldn't. I remember every verse ended:—

'This is my day so natal
And I will follow Milton.'

Another one of hers was written just because she couldn't help it she said. This was it:—

'Let me to the hills away,
Give me pen and paper;
I'll write until the earth will sway

The story of my Maker."

The minister could scarcely refrain from smiling, but he controlled himself that he might lose none of Rebecca's quaint observations. When she was perfectly at ease, unwatched and uncriticised, she was a marvelous companion.

"The name of the poem is going to be 'My Star,'" she continued, "and Mrs. Baxter gave me all the ideas, but somehow there's a kind of magicness when they get into poetry, don't you think so?" (Rebecca always talked to grown people as if she were their age, or, a more subtle and truer distinction, as if they were hers.)

"It has often been so remarked, in different words," agreed the minister.

"Mrs. Baxter said that each star was a state, and if each state did its best we should have a splendid country. Then once she said that we ought to be glad the war is over and the States are all at peace together; and I thought Columbia must be glad, too, for Miss Dearborn says she's the mother of all the States. So I'm going to have it end like this: I did n't write it, I just sewed it while I was working on my star:—

"For it's your star, my star, all the stars together,
That make our country's flag so proud
To float in the bright fall weather.
Northern stars, Southern stars, stars of the East and West,
Side by side they lie at peace
On the dear flag's mother-breast."

"Oh! many are the poets that are sown by Nature," thought the minister, quoting Wordsworth to himself. "And I wonder what becomes of them! That's a pretty idea, little Rebecca, and I don't know whether you or my wife ought to have the more praise. What made you think of the stars lying on the flag's 'mother-breast'? Were did you get that word?"

"Why" (and the young poet looked rather puzzled), "that's the way it is; the flag is the whole country—the mother—and the stars are the states. The stars had to lie somewhere: 'lap' nor 'arms' wouldn't sound well with 'West,' so, of course, I said 'breast,'" Rebecca answered, with some surprise at the question; and the minister put his hand under her chin and kissed her softly on the forehead when he said good-by at the door.

Rebecca walked rapidly along in the gathering twilight, thinking of the eventful morrow.

As she approached the turning on the left, called the old Milltown road, she saw a white horse and wagon, driven by a man with a rakish, flapping, Panama hat, come rapidly around the turn and disappear over the long hills leading down to the falls. There was no mistaking him; there never was another Abner Simpson, with his lean height, his bushy reddish hair, the gay cock of his hat, and the long, piratical, upturned mustaches, which the boys used to say were used as hat-racks by the Simpson children at night. The old Milltown road ran past Mrs. Fogg's house, so he must have left Clara Belle there, and Rebecca's heart glowed to think that her poor little friend need not miss the raising.

She began to run now, fearful of being late for supper, and covered the ground to the falls in a brief time. As she crossed the bridge she again saw Abner Simpson's team, drawn up at the watering-trough.

Coming a little nearer with the view of inquiring for the family, her quick eye caught sight of something unexpected. A gust of wind blew up a corner of a linen lap-robe in the back of the wagon, and underneath it she distinctly saw the white-sheeted bundle that held the flag; the bundle with a tiny, tiny spot of red bunting peeping out at one corner. It is true she had eaten, slept, dreamed red, white, and blue for weeks, but there was no mistaking the evidence of her senses; the idolized flag, longed for, worked for, sewed for, that flag was in the back of Abner Simpson's wagon, and if so, what would become of the raising?

Acting on blind impulse, she ran toward the watering-trough, calling out in her clear treble "Mr. Simpson! Oh, Mr. Simpson, will you let me ride a little way with you and hear all about Clara Belle? I'm going over to the Centre on an errand." (So she was; a most important errand,—to recover the flag of her country at present in the hands of the foe!)

Mr. Simpson turned round in his seat and cried heartily, "Certain sure I will!" for he liked the fair sex, young and old, and Rebecca had always been a prime favorite with him. "Climb right in! How's everybody? Glad to see you! The folks talk 'bout you from sun-up to sun-down, and Clara Belle can't hardly wait for a sight of you!"

Rebecca scrambled up, trembling and pale with excitement. She did not in the least know what was going to happen, but she was sure that the flag, when in the enemy's country, must be at least a little safer with the State of Maine sitting on top of it! Mr. Simpson began a long monologue about Acreville, the house he lived in, the pond in front of it, Mrs. Simpson's health and various items of news about the children, varied by reports of his personal misfortunes. He put no questions, and asked no replies, so this gave the inexperienced soldier a few seconds to plan a campaign. There were three houses to pass; the Browns' at the corner, the Millikens', and the Robinsons' on the brow of the hill. If Mr. Robinson were in the front yard she might tell Mr. Simpson she wanted to call there and ask Mr. Robinson to hold the horse's head while she got out of the wagon. Then she might fly to the back before Mr. Simpson could realize the situation, and dragging out the precious bundle, sit on it hard, while Mr. Robinson settled the matter of ownership with Mr. Simpson.

This was feasible, but it meant a quarrel between the two men, who held an ancient grudge against each other, and Mr. Simpson was a valiant fighter, as the various sheriffs who had attempted to arrest him could cordially testify. It also meant that everybody in the village would hear of the incident and poor Clara

Belle be branded again as the child of a thief.

Another idea danced into her excited brain; such a clever one she could hardly believe it hers. She might call Mr. Robinson to the wagon, and when he came close to the wheels she might say, suddenly: "Please take the flag out of the back of the wagon, Mr. Robinson. We have brought it here for you to keep overnight." Then Mr. Simpson might be so surprised that he would give up his prize rather than be suspected of stealing.

But as they neared the Robinsons' house there was not a sign of life to be seen; so the last plan, ingenious though it was, was perforce abandoned.

The road now lay between thick pine woods with no dwelling in sight. It was growing dusk and Rebecca was driving along the lonely way with a person who was generally called Slippery Simpson.

Not a thought of fear crossed her mind, save the fear of bungling in her diplomacy, and so losing the flag. She knew Mr. Simpson well, and a pleasanter man was seldom to be met. She recalled an afternoon when he came home and surprised the whole school playing the Revolutionary War in his helter-skelter dooryard, and the way in which he had joined the British forces and impersonated General Burgoyne had greatly endeared him to her. The only difficulty was to find proper words for her delicate mission, for, of course, if Mr. Simpson's anger were aroused, he would politely push her out of the wagon and drive away with the flag. Perhaps if she led the conversation in the right direction an opportunity would present itself. Clearing her throat nervously, she began:—

"Is it likely to be fair to-morrow?"

"Guess so; clear as a bell. What's on foot; a picnic?"

"No; we're to have a grand flag-raising!" ("That is," she thought, "if we have

any flag to raise!")

"That so? Where?"

"The three villages are to club together and have a rally, and raise the flag at the Centre. There'll be a brass band, and speakers, and the Mayor of Portland, and the man that will be governor if he's elected, and a dinner in the Grange Hall, and we girls are chosen to raise the flag."

"I want to know! That'll be grand, won't it?" (Still not a sign of consciousness on the part of Abner.)

"I hope Mrs. Fogg will take Clara Belle, for it will be splendid to look at! Mr. Cobb is going to be Uncle Sam and drive us on the stage. Miss Dearborn—Clara Belle's old teacher, you know is going to be Columbia; the girls will be the States of the Union, and oh, Mr. Simpson, I am the one to be the State of Maine!" Mr. Simpson flourished the whipstock and gave a loud, hearty laugh. Then he turned in his seat and regarded Rebecca curiously.

"You're kind o' small, ain't ye, for so big a state as this one?" he asked.

"Any of us would be too small," replied Rebecca with dignity, "but the committee asked me, and I am going to try hard to do well."

The tragic thought that there might be no occasion for anybody to do anything, well or ill, suddenly overcame her here, and putting her hand on Mr. Simpson's sleeve, she attacked the subject practically and courageously.

"Oh, Mr. Simpson, dear Mr. Simpson, it's such a mortifying subject I can't bear to say anything about it, but please give us back our flag! Don't, don't take it over to Acreville, Mr. Simpson! We've worked so long to make it, and it was so hard getting the money for the bunting! Wait a minute, please; don't be angry, and don't say no just yet, till I explain more. It'll be so dreadful for

everybody to get there to-morrow morning and find no flag to raise, and the band and the mayor all disappointed, and the children crying, with their muslin dresses all bought for nothing! Oh, dear Mr. Simpson, please don't take our flag away from us!"

The apparently astonished Abner pulled his mustaches and exclaimed: "But I don't know what you're drivin' at! Who's got yer flag? I hain't!"

Could duplicity, deceit, and infamy go any further, Rebecca wondered, and her soul filling with righteous wrath, she cast discretion to the winds and spoke a little more plainly, bending her great swimming eyes on the now embarrassed Abner, who looked like an angle-worm wriggling on a pin.

"Mr. Simpson, how can you say that, when I saw the flag in the back of your wagon myself, when you stopped to water the horse? It's wicked of you to take it, and I cannot bear it!" Her voice broke now, for a doubt of Mr. Simpson's yielding suddenly darkened her mind. "If you keep it, you'll have to keep me, for I won't be parted from it! I can't fight like the boys, but I can pinch and scratch, and I will scratch, just like a panther—I'll lie right down on my star and not move, if I starve to death!" "Look here, hold your hosses 'n' don't cry till you git something to cry for!" grumbled the outraged Abner, to whom a clue had just come; and leaning over the wagon-back he caught hold of a corner of white sheet and dragged up the bundle, scooping off Rebecca's hat in the process, and almost burying her in bunting.

She caught the treasure passionately to her heart and stifled her sobs in it, while Abner exclaimed "I declare to man, if that hain't a flag! Well, in that case you're good 'n' welcome to it! Land! I seen that bundle lyin' in the middle o' the road and I says to myself, that's somebody's washin' and I'd better pick it up and leave it at the post-office to be claimed; 'n' all the time it was a flag!"

This was a Simpsonian version of the matter, the fact being that a white-covered bundle lying on the Meserves' front steps had attracted his practiced

eye, and slipping in at the open gate he had swiftly and deftly removed it to his wagon on general principles; thinking if it were clean clothes it would be extremely useful, and in any event there was no good in passing by something flung into one's very arms, so to speak. He had had no leisure to examine the bundle, and indeed took little interest in it. Probably he stole it simply from force of habit, and because there was nothing else in sight to steal, everybody's premises being preternaturally tidy and empty, almost as if his visit had been expected! Rebecca was a practical child, and it seemed to her almost impossible that so heavy a bundle should fall out of Mrs. Meserve's buggy and not be noticed; but she hoped that Mr. Simpson was telling the truth, and she was too glad and grateful to doubt any one at the moment.

"Thank you, thank you ever so much, Mr. Simpson. You're the nicest, kindest, politest man I ever knew, and the girls will be so pleased you gave us back the flag, and so will the Dorcas Society; they'll be sure to write you a letter of thanks; they always do."

"Tell 'em not to bother 'bout any thanks," said Simpson, beaming virtuously. "But land! I'm glad 't was me that happened to see that bundle in the road and take the trouble to pick it up."

("Jest to think of it's bein' a flag!" he thought; "if ever there was a pesky, wuthless thing to trade off, 't would be a great, gormin' flag like that!")

"Can I get out now, please?" asked Rebecca. "I want to go back, for Mrs. Meserve will be dreadfully nervous when she finds out she dropped the flag, and it hurts her health to be nervous."

"No, you don't," objected Mr. Simpson gallantly, turning the horse. "Do you think I'd let a little creeter like you lug that great heavy bundle? I hain't got time to go back to Meserve's, but I'll take you to the corner and dump you there, flag'n' all, and you can get some o' the men-folks to carry it the rest o' the way."

You'll wear it out, huggin' it so!"

"I helped make it and I adore it!" said Rebecca, who was in a grandiloquent mood. "Why don't you like it? It's your country's flag."

Simpson smiled an indulgent smile and looked a trifle bored at these appeals to his extremely rusty better feelings. "I don't know's I've got any particular int'rest in the country," he remarked languidly. "I know I don't owe nothin' to it, nor own nothin' in it!"

"You own a star on the flag, same as everybody," argued Rebecca, who had been feeding on patriotism for a month; "and you own a state, too, like all the rest of us!"

"Land! I wish't I did! or even a quarter section of one!" sighed Mr. Simpson, feeling somehow a little more poverty-stricken and discouraged than usual.

As they approached the corner and the watering-trough where four cross-roads met, the whole neighborhood seemed to be in evidence, and Mr. Simpson suddenly regretted his chivalrous escort of Rebecca; especially when, as he neared the group, an excited lady, wringing her hands, turned out to be Mrs. Peter Meserve, accompanied by Huldah, the Browns, Mrs. Milliken, Abijah Flagg, and Miss Dearborn. "Do you know anything about the new flag, Rebecca?" shrieked Mrs. Meserve, too agitated, for a moment, to notice the child's companion.

"It's right here in my lap, all safe," responded Rebecca joyously.

"You careless, meddlesome young one, to take it off my steps where I left it just long enough to go round to the back and hunt up my door-key! You've given me a fit of sickness with my weak heart, and what business was it of yours? I believe you think you own the flag! Hand it over to me this minute!"

Rebecca was climbing down during this torrent of language, but as she turned she flashed one look of knowledge at the false Simpson, a look that went through him from head to foot, as if it were carried by electricity.

He saw that he had not deceived her after all, owing to the angry chatter of Mrs. Meserve. He had been handcuffed twice in his life, but no sheriff had ever discomfited him so thoroughly as this child. Fury mounted to his brain, and as soon as she was safely out from between the wheels he stood up in the wagon and flung the flag out in the road in the midst of the excited group.

"Take it, you pious, stingy, scandal-talkin', flag-raisin' crew!" he roared. "Rebecca never took the flag; I found it in the road, I say!"

"You never, no such a thing!" exclaimed Mrs. Meserve. "You found it on the doorsteps in my garden!"

"Mebbe 't was your garden, but it was so chock full o' weeds I thought 't was the road," retorted Abner. "I vow I wouldn't 'a' given the old rag back to one o' you, not if you begged me on your knees! But Rebecca's a friend o' my folks and can do with her flag's she's a mind to, and the rest o' ye can do what ye like an' go where ye like, for all I care!"

So saying, he made a sharp turn, gave the gaunt white horse a lash and disappeared in a cloud of dust, before the astonished Mr. Brown, the only man in the party, had a thought of detaining him.

"I'm sorry I spoke so quick, Rebecca," said Mrs. Meserve, greatly mortified at the situation. "But don't you believe a word that lyin' critter said! He did steal it off my doorstep, and how did you come to be ridin' and consortin' with him? I believe it would kill your Aunt Miranda if she should hear about it!"

The little school-teacher put a sheltering arm round Rebecca as Mr. Brown picked up the flag and dusted and folded it.

"I'm willing she should hear about it," Rebecca answered. "I didn't do anything to be ashamed of! I saw the flag in the back of Mr. Simpson's wagon and I just followed it. There weren't any men or any Dorcas ladies to take care of it so it fell to me! You would n't have had me let it out of my sight, would you, and we going to raise it to-morrow morning?"

"Rebecca's perfectly right, Mrs. Meserve!" said Miss Dearborn proudly. "And it's lucky there was somebody quick-witted enough to 'ride and consort' with Mr. Simpson! I don't know what the village will think, but seems to me the town clerk might write down in his book, 'This day the State of Maine saved the flag!'"

V.

THE STATE O' MAINE GIRL

THE foregoing episode, if narrated in a romance, would undoubtedly have been called "The Saving of the Colors," but at the nightly chats in Watson's store it was alluded to as the way little Becky Randall got the flag away from Slippery Simpson. Dramatic as it was, it passed into the crowd of half-forgotten things in Rebecca's mind, its brief importance submerged in the glories of the next day.

There was a painful prelude to these glories. Alice Robinson came to spend the night with Rebecca, and when the bedroom door closed upon the two girls, Alice announced her intention of "doing up" Rebecca's front hair in leads and

rag, and braiding the back in six tight, wetted braids.

Rebecca demurred. Alice persisted.

"Your hair is so long and thick and dark and straight," she said, "that you'll look like an Injun!"

"I am the State of Maine; it all belonged to the Indians once," Rebecca remarked gloomily, for she was curiously shy about discussing her personal appearance.

"And your wreath of little pine-cones won't set decent without crimps," continued Alice.

Rebecca glanced in the cracked looking-glass and met what she considered an accusing lack of beauty, a sight that always either saddened or enraged her according to circumstances; then she sat down resignedly and began to help Alice in the philanthropic work of making the State of Maine fit to be seen at the raising.

Neither of the girls was an expert hairdresser, and at the end of an hour, when the sixth braid was tied, and Rebecca had given one last shuddering look in the mirror, both were ready to weep with fatigue.

The candle was blown out and Alice soon went to sleep, but Rebecca tossed on her pillow, its goose-feathered softness all dented by the cruel lead knobs and the knots of twisted rag. She slipped out of bed and walked to and fro, holding her aching head with both hands. Finally she leaned on the window-sill, watching the still weather-vane on Alice's barn and breathing in the fragrance of the ripening apples, until her restlessness subsided under the clear starry beauty of the night.

At six in the morning the girls were out of bed, for Alice could hardly wait

until Rebecca's hair was taken down, she was so eager to see the result of her labors.

The leads and rags were painfully removed, together with much hair, the operation being punctuated by a series of squeaks, squeals, and shrieks on the part of Rebecca and a series of warnings from Alice, who wished the preliminaries to be kept secret from the aunts, that they might the more fully appreciate the radiant result.

Then came the unbraiding, and then—dramatic moment—the "combing out;" a difficult, not to say impossible process, in which the hairs that had resisted the earlier stages almost gave up the ghost.

The long front strands had been wound up from various angles and by various methods, so that, when released, they assumed the strangest, most obstinate, most unexpected attitudes. When the comb was dragged through the last braid, the wild, tortured, electric hairs following, and then rebounding from it in a bristling, snarling tangle, Massachusetts gave one encompassing glance at the State o' Maine's head, and announced her intention of going home to breakfast! Alice was deeply grieved at the result of her attempted beautifying, but she felt that meeting Miss Miranda Sawyer at the morning meal would not mend matters in the least, so slipping out of the side door, she ran up Guide-Board hill as fast as her feet could carry her.

The State o' Maine, deserted and somewhat unnerved, sat down before the glass and attacked her hair doggedly and with set lips, working over it until Miss Jane called her to breakfast; then, with a boldness born of despair, she entered the dining-room, where her aunts were already seated at table. There was a moment of silence after the grotesque figure was fully taken in; then came a moan from Jane and a groan from Miranda.

"What have you done to yourself?" asked Miranda sternly.

"Made an effort to be beautiful and failed!" jauntily replied Rebecca, but she was too miserable to keep up the fiction. "Oh, Aunt Miranda, don't scold, I'm so unhappy! Alice and I rolled up my hair to curl it for the raising. She said it was so straight I looked like an Indian!"

"Mebbe you did," vigorously agreed Miranda, "but 't any rate you looked like a Christian Injun, 'n' now you look like a heathen Injun; that's all the difference I can see. What can we do with her, Jane, between this and nine o'clock?"

"We'll all go out to the pump just as soon as we're through breakfast," answered Jane soothingly. "We can accomplish considerable with water and force."

Rebecca nibbled her corn-cake, her tearful eyes cast on her plate and her chin quivering.

"Don't you cry and red your eyes up," chided Miranda quite kindly; "the minute you've eaten enough run up and get your brush and meet us at the back door."

"I would n't care myself how bad I looked," said Rebecca, "but I can't bear to be so homely that I shame the State of Maine!"

Oh, what an hour followed this plaint! Did any aspirant for literary or dramatic honors ever pass to fame through such an antechamber of horrors? Did poet of the day ever have his head so maltreated? To be dipped in the rain-water tub, soused again and again; to be held under the spout and pumped on; to be rubbed furiously with rough roller towels; to be dried with hot flannels! And is it not well-nigh incredible that at the close of such an hour the ends of the long hair should still stand out straight, the braids having been turned up two inches by Alice, and tied hard in that position with linen thread?

"Get out the skirt-board, Jane," cried Miranda, to whom opposition served as a tonic, "and move that flat-iron on to the front o' the stove. Rebecca, set down in that low chair beside the board, and, Jane, you spread out her hair on it and cover it up with brown paper. Don't cringe, Rebecca; the worst's over, and you've borne up real good! I'll be careful not to pull your hair nor scorch you, and oh, how I'd like to have Alice Robinson acrost my knee and a good slipper in my right hand! There, you're all ironed out and your Aunt Jane can put on your white dress and braid your hair up again good and tight. Perhaps you won't be the homeliest of the States, after all; but when I see you comin' in to breakfast I said to myself: 'I guess if Maine looked like that, it would n't never 'a' been admitted into the Union!'"

When Uncle Sam and the stagecoach drew up to the brick house with a grand swing and a flourish, the Goddess of Liberty and most of the States were already in their places on the "harricane deck." Words fail to describe the gallant bearing of the horses, their headstalls gayly trimmed and their harnesses dotted with little flags. The stage windows were hung in bunting, and from within beamed Columbia, looking out from the bright frame as if proud of her freight of loyal children. Patriotic streamers floated from whip, from dash-board and from rumble, and the effect of the whole was something to stimulate the most phlegmatic voter. Rebecca came out on the steps and Aunt Jane brought a chair to assist in the ascent. Miss Dearborn peeped from the window, and gave a despairing look at her favorite.

What had happened to her? Who had dressed her? Had her head been put through a wringing-machine? Why were her eyes red and swollen? Miss Dearborn determined to take her behind the trees in the pine grove and give her some finishing touches; touches that her skillful fingers fairly itched to bestow.

The stage started, and as the roadside pageant grew gayer and gayer, Rebecca began to brighten and look prettier, for most of her beautifying came from within. The people, walking, driving, or standing on their doorsteps,

cheered Uncle Sam's coach with its freight of gossamer-muslined, fluttering-ribboned girls, and just behind, the gorgeously decorated haycart, driven by Abijah Flagg, bearing the jolly but inharmonious fife and drum corps. Was ever such a golden day; such crystal air; such mellow sunshine; such a merry Uncle Sam!

The stage drew up at an appointed spot near a pine grove, and while the crowd was gathering, the children waited for the hour to arrive when they should march to the platform; the hour toward which they seemed to have been moving since the dawn of creation. As soon as possible Miss Dearborn whispered to Rebecca: "Come behind the trees with me; I want to make you prettier!"

Rebecca thought she had suffered enough from that process already during the last twelve hours, but she put out an obedient hand and the two withdrew.

Now Miss Dearborn was, I fear, a very indifferent teacher. Her stock in trade was small, her principal virtues being devotion to children and ability to gain their love, and a power of evolving a schoolroom order so natural, cheery, serene, and peaceful that it gave the beholder a certain sense of being in a district heaven. She was poor in arithmetic and weak in geometry, but if you gave her a rose, a bit of ribbon, and a seven-by-nine looking-glass she could make herself as pretty as a pink in two minutes.

Safely sheltered behind the pines, Miss Dearborn began to practice mysterious feminine arts. She flew at Rebecca's tight braids, opened the strands and rebraided them loosely; bit and tore the red, white, and blue ribbon in two and tied the braids separately. Then with nimble fingers she pulled out little tendrils of hair behind the ears and around the nape of the neck. After a glance of acute disapproval directed at the stiff balloon skirt she knelt on the ground and gave a strenuous embrace to Rebecca's knees, murmuring, between her hugs, "Starch must be cheap at the brick house!"

This particular line of beauty attained, there ensued great pinchings of ruffles; the fingers that could never hold a ferule nor snap children's ears being incomparable fluting-irons. Next the sash was scornfully untied, and tightened to suggest something resembling a waist. The chastened bows that had been squat, dowdy, spiritless, were given tweaks, flirts, bracing little pokes and dabs, till, acknowledging a master hand, they stood up, piquant, pert, smart, alert!

Pride of bearing was now infused into the flattened lace at the neck, and a pin (removed at some sacrifice from her own toilette) was darned in at the back to prevent any cowardly lapsing. The short white cotton gloves that called attention to the tanned wrists and arms were stripped off and put in her own pocket. Then the wreath of pine-cones was adjusted at a heretofore unimagined angle, the hair was pulled softly into a fluffy frame, and finally, as she met Rebecca's grateful eyes, she gave her two approving, triumphant kisses. In a second the sensitive face lighted into happiness; pleased dimples appeared in the cheeks, the kissed mouth was as red as a rose, and the little fright that had walked behind the pine-tree stepped out on the other side Rebecca, the lovely.

As to the relative value of Miss Dearborn's accomplishments, the decision must be left to the gentle reader; but though it is certain that children should be properly grounded in mathematics, no heart of flesh could bear to hear Miss Dearborn's methods vilified who had seen her patting, pulling, squeezing Rebecca from ugliness into beauty.

Now all was ready; the moment of fate was absolutely at hand; the fife and drum corps led the way and the States followed; but what actually happened Rebecca never knew; she lived through the hours in a waking dream. Every little detail was a facet of light that reflected sparkles, and among them all she was fairly dazzled. The brass band played inspiring strains; the mayor spoke eloquently on great themes; the people cheered; then the rope on which so much depended was put into the children's hands, they applied superhuman

strength to their task, and the flag mounted, mounted, smoothly and slowly, and slowly unwound and stretched itself until its splendid size and beauty were revealed against the maples and pines and blue New England sky.

Then after cheers upon cheers and after a patriotic chorus by the church choirs, the State of Maine mounted the platform, vaguely conscious that she was to recite a poem, though for the life of her she could not remember a single word.

"Speak up loud and clear, Rebecky," whispered Uncle Sam in the front row, but she could scarcely hear her own voice when, tremblingly, she began her first line. After that she gathered strength, and the poem "said itself," while the dream went on. She saw her friend Adam Ladd leaning against a tree; Aunt Jane and Aunt Miranda palpitating with nervousness; Clara Belle Simpson gazing cross-eyed but adoring from a seat on the side; and in the far, far distance, on the very outskirts of the crowd, a tall man standing in a wagon—a tall, loose-jointed man with red upturned mustaches, and a gaunt white horse whose head was turned toward the Acreville road.

Loud applause greeted the State of Maine, the slender little white-clad figure standing on the mossy boulder that had been used as the centre of the platform. The sun came up from behind a great maple and shone full on the star-spangled banner, making it more dazzling than ever, so that its beauty drew all eyes upward.

Abner Simpson lifted his vagrant shifting gaze to its softly fluttering folds and its splendid massing of colors, thinking:—

"I don't know's anybody'd ought to steal a flag, the thunderin' idjuts seem to set such store by it, and what is it, anyway? Nothin' but a sheet o' buntin'!"

Nothing but a sheet of bunting? He looked curiously at the rapt faces of the mothers, their babies asleep in their arms; the parted lips and shining eyes of the

white-clad girls; at Cap'n Lord, who had been in Libby Prison, and Nat Strout, who had left an arm at Bull Run; at the friendly, jostling crowd of farmers, happy, eager, absorbed, their throats ready to burst with cheers. Then the breeze served, and he heard Rebecca's clear voice saying:—

"For it's your star, my star, all the stars together,
That make our country's flag so proud
To float in the bright fall weather!"

"Talk about stars! She's got a couple of 'em right in her head," thought Simpson. "If I ever seen a young one like that layin' on anybody's doorstep I'd hook her quicker'n a wink, though I've got plenty to home, the Lord knows! And I wouldn't swap her off neither.—Spunky little creeter, too; settin' up in the wagon lookin' 'bout's big as a pint o' cider, but keepin' right after the flag!—I vow I'm 'bout sick o' my job! Never with the crowd, allers jest on the outside, 's if I wa'n't as good's they be! If it paid well, mebbe would n't mind, but they're so thunderin' stingy round here, they don't leave out anything decent for you to take from 'em, yet you're reskin' your liberty 'n' reputation jest the same!—Countin' the poor pickin's 'n' the time I lose in jail I might most's well be done with it 'n' work out by the day, as the folks want me to; I'd make 'bout's much, n' I don' know's it would be any harder!"

He could see Rebecca stepping down from the platform, while his own red-headed little girl stood up on her bench, waving her hat with one hand, her handkerchief with the other, and stamping with both feet.

Now a man sitting beside the mayor rose from his chair and Abner heard him call:—

"Three cheers for the women who made the flag!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"Three cheers for the State of Maine!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"Three cheers for the girl who saved the flag from the hands of the enemy!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

It was the Edgewood minister, whose full, vibrant voice was of the sort to move a crowd. His words rang out into the clear air and were carried from lip to lip. Hands clapped, feet stamped, hats swung, while the loud huzzahs might almost have wakened the echoes on old Mount Ossipee.

The tall, loose-jointed man sat down in the wagon suddenly and took up the reins.

"They're gettin' a little mite personal, and I guess it's 'bout time for you to be goin', Simpson!"

The tone was jocular, but the red mustaches drooped, and the half-hearted cut he gave to start the white mare on her homeward journey showed that he was not in his usual reckless mood.

"It's a lie!" he burst out in a vindictive undertone, as the mare swung into her long gait. "It's a lie! I thought 't was somebody's wash! I ain't an enemy!"

While the crowd at the raising dispersed in happy family groups to their picnics in the woods; while the Goddess of Liberty, Uncle Sam, Columbia, and the proud States lunched grandly in the Grange Hall with distinguished guests and scarred veterans of two wars, the lonely man drove, and drove, and drove through silent woods and dull, sleepy villages, never alighting to replenish his wardrobe or his stock of swapping material.

At dusk he reached a miserable tumble-down house on the edge of a pond.

The faithful wife with the sad mouth and the habitual look of anxiety in her faded eyes came to the door at the sound of wheels and went doggedly to the horse-shed to help him unharness. "You did n't expect to see me back to-night, did you?" he asked satirically; "leastwise not with this same horse? Well, I'm here! You need n't be scairt to look under the wagon-seat, there ain't nothin' there, not even my supper, so I hope you're suited for once! No, I guess I ain't goin' to be an angel right away, neither. There wa'n't nothin' but flags layin' roun' loose down Riverboro way, 'n' whatever they say, I ain't sech a hound as to steal a flag!"

It was natural that young Riverboro should have red, white, and blue dreams on the night after the new flag was raised. A stranger thing, perhaps, is the fact that Abner Simpson should lie down on his hard bed with the flutter of bunting before his eyes, and a whirl of unaccustomed words in his mind.

"For it is your star, my star, all our stars together."

"I'm sick of goin' it alone," he thought; "I guess I'll try the other road for a spell;" and with that he fell asleep.

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