

# A Hoosier Chronicle

By MEREDITH NICHOLSON

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"The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings; they have made them crooked paths; whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace. Tramping in Adirondacks. Baptized Elizabeth at Harris."

It was almost like eavesdropping to come in this way upon that curiously abrupt Ware-like statement of the minister's: "Tramping in Adirondacks. Baptized Elizabeth at Harris."

The discussion in the parlor had become heated and occasionally words in a voice not Ware's reached Sylvia distinctly. Some one was alternately beseeching and threatening the minister. It was clear from the pauses in which she recognized Ware's deep tones that he was yielding neither to the importunities nor the threats of his blustering caller. Sylvia had imagined that the storms of life had passed over the retired clergyman, and she was surprised that such an interview should be taking place in his house. She was about to retreat to the dining room to be out of reach of the voices when the parlor door opened abruptly and Thatcher appeared, with anger unmistakably showing in his face, and apparently disposed to resume in the hall the discussion which the minister had terminated in the library. Sylvia rose with the book still in her hand and walked to the end of the room; but any one in the house might have heard what Thatcher was saying.

"That's the way with you preachers; you talk about clean politics, and when we get all ready to clean out a bad man, you duck; you're a lot of cowardly dodgers. I tell you, I don't want you to say a word or figure in this thing at all; but you give me that book and I'll scare Mort Bassett out of town. I'll scare him clean out of Indiana, and he'll never show his head again. Why, Ware, I've been counting on it, that when you saw we were in a hole and going to nose you'd come down from your high horse and help me out. I tell you, there's no doubt about it; that woman's the woman I'm looking for! I guessed it the night you told that story up there in the house-boat."

"Quit this business, Ed," the minister was saying. "I'm an old friend of yours. But I won't budge an inch. I'd never breathed a word of that story before and I shouldn't have told it that night. It was so far back that I thought it was safe. But your idea that Bassett had anything to do with that is preposterous. Your hatred of him has got the better of you, my friend. Drop it; forget it. If you can't whip him fair, let him win."

"Not much I won't; but I didn't think you'd go back on me; I thought better of you than that!"

Thatcher strode to the door and went out, slamming it after him. The minister peered into the library absent, and then, surprised to find Sylvia, advanced to meet her, smiling gravely. He took both her hands, and held them, looking into her face.

"What's this you've been reading? Ah, that book!" The volume slipped into his hands and he glanced at it, frowning impatiently. "Poor little book. I ought to have burned it years ago; and I ought to have learned by this time to keep my mouth shut. There've always said I looked like an Indian, but an Indian never tells anything. I've told just one story too many. Mea maxima culpa!"

He sat down in the big chair beside his desk, placed the book within reach, and kept touching it as he talked.

"I saw Mr. Thatcher," said Sylvia. "He seemed very much aroused. I couldn't help hearing a word now and then."

"That's all right, Sylvia. I've known Thatcher for years, and last fall I went up to his house-boat on the Kankakee for a week's shooting. Allen and Dan Harwood were the rest of the party—and I happened to tell the story of this little book—an unfinished story. We ought never to tell stories until they are finished. And it seems that Thatcher, with a zeal worthy of a better cause, has been raking up the ashes of an old affair of Bassett's with a woman, and he's trying to hitch it on to the story I told him about this book. He says by shaking this at Bassett he can persuade him that he's got enough ammunition to blow him out of the water. But I don't believe a word of it; I won't believe such a thing of Morton Bassett. And even if I did, Thatcher can't have that book. I owe it to the woman whose baby he baptized up there in the hills to keep it. And the woman may be living, too, for all I know. I think of her pretty often. She was game; wouldn't tell anything. If a man had deceived her she stood by him. Whatever she was—I know she was not bad, not a bit of it—the spirit of the hills had entered into her—and these are cleansing airs up there. I suppose it all made the deeper impression on me because I was born up there myself. When I strike Adirondacks in print I put down my book and think a while. It's a picture word. It brings back my earliest childhood as far as I can remember. I call words that make pictures that way moose words; they jump up in your memory like a scared moose in a thicket and crash into the woods like a cavalry charge. I can remember things that happened when I was three years old: one day father shot a deer in our cornfield and I recall it perfectly. The general atmosphere of the old place steals over me yet. The very thought of the pointed spruces, the feathery tamaracks, all the sounds and smells of summer, and the long white winters, does my soul good now. The old Hebrews understood the effect of landscape on character. They knew most everything those old chaps. I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help. Any strength there is in me dates back to the hills of my youth. I'd like to go back there to die when the bugle calls."

Mrs. Ware had not yet come in. Ware lighted the lamp and freshened the fire. While he was doing this, Sylvia moved to a chair by the table and picked up the book. What Ware had said about the hills of his youth, the woods, the word tamarack that he had dropped carelessly, touched chords of memory as lightly as a breeze vi-

brates a wind harp. Was this merely her imagination that had been stirred, or was it indeed a recollection? Often before she had been moved by similar vague memories or longings, whatever they were. They had come to trouble her girlhood at Montgomery, when the snow whitened the campus and the wind sang in the trees. She was grateful that the minister had turned his back. Her hands trembled as she glanced again at the scribbled leaf, and more closely at the words penciled at the bottom: "Baptized Elizabeth at Harris." Thatcher wanted this book to use against Bassett. Bassett was a collector of fine bindings; she had heard it spoken of in the family. It was part of Marian's pride in her father that he was a bookish man. When the minister returned to his seat Sylvia asked as she put down the book:

"Who was Elizabeth?"

And then, little by little, in his abrupt way, he told the story, much as he had told it that night on the Kankakee, with pauses for which Sylvia was grateful—they gave her time for thought, for filling in the lapses, for visualizing the scene he described. And the shadow of the Morton Bassett she knew crept into the picture. She recalled their early meetings, that first brief contact on the shore of the lake; their talk on the day following the convention when she had laughed at him; that wet evening when they met in the street and he had expressed his interest in Harwood and the hope that she might care for the young lawyer. With her trained habits of reasoning she rejected this or that bit of testimony as worthless; but even then enough remained to chill her heart: Her hands were cold as she clasped them together. Who was Elizabeth?

Ah, who was Sylvia? The phrase of the song that had brought her to tears that starry night on the lake when Dan Harwood had asked her to marry him smote her again. Her grandfather's evasion of her question about her father and mother and the twinges of heartache she had experienced at college when other girls spoke of their homes, assumed now for the first time a sinister meaning. Had she, indeed, come into the world in dishonor, and had she in truth known that far hill country, and had she in truth known that far hill country, with its evergreens and glittering snows?

Ware had finished his story and sat staring into the crackling fire. At last he turned toward Sylvia. In the glow of the desk lamp her face was white, and she gazed with unseeing eyes at the inscription in the book.

The silence was still unbroken when a few minutes later Mrs. Ware came in with Harwood, whom she had met in the street and brought home to dinner.

Dan was full of the situation in the Legislature, and the table talk played about the topic.

"We're sparring for time, that's all, and the people pay the freight! The deadlock is clamped on tight. I never thought Thatcher would prove so strong. I think we could shake loose enough votes from both sides to precipitate a stampede for Ramsay, but he won't hear to it. He says he wants to do the State one patriotic service before he dies by cleaning out the bosses, and he doesn't want to spoil the record by taking the senatorship himself. Meanwhile Bassett stands fast and there's no telling when he'll break through Thatcher's lines."

"Thatcher was here to see me today—the third time. He won't come back. You know what he's after?" said Ware.

"Yes; I understand," Dan answered. "There won't be anything of that kind, will there, Dan?"

Dan shrugged his shoulders, and glanced at Sylvia and Mrs. Ware.

"Mrs. Ware knows about it; I had to tell her," remarked the minister, chuckling. "When Ed Thatcher makes two calls on me in one week, and one of them at midnight, there's got to be an explanation. And Sylvia heard him raving before I showed him out this afternoon."

Sylvia's plate was untouched; her eyes searched those of the man who loved her before she spoke.

"That's an ethical point, Mr. Ware. If it were necessary to use that—if every other resource failed—would you use it?"

"Not if Bassett's success meant the utter destruction of the State. I don't believe a word of it. I haven't the slightest confidence in Thatcher's detective work; and the long arm of coincidence has to grasp something firmer than my pitiful little book to convince me."

Dan shook his head.

"He doesn't need the book, Mr. Ware. I've seen the documents in the case. Most of the evidence is circumstantial, but you remember your friend Thoreau said about circumstantial evidence—something to the effect that it's sometimes pretty convincing, as when you find a trout in the milk."

"But has Thatcher found the trout?"

"Well, no; he hasn't exactly found the trout, but there's enough, there's altogether too much," ended Dan despairingly. "The caucus doesn't meet again till tomorrow night, when Thatcher promises to show his hand. I'm going to put in the time trying to persuade Ramsay to come round."

"But do you think he has any idea what Thatcher has up his sleeve?" asked Ware.

"It's possible; I dare say he knows it. He's always been master of the art of getting information from the enemy's camp. But Thatcher has shown remarkable discretion in managing this. He tells me solemnly that nobody on earth knows his intentions except you, Allen, and me. He's saving himself for a broadside, and he wants its full dramatic effect."

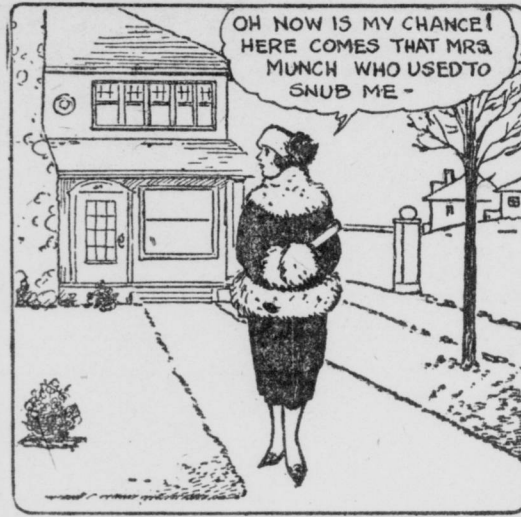
Sylvia had hardly spoken during this discussion; but the others looked at her curiously as she said:

"I don't think he has it to fire; it's incredible! I don't believe it."

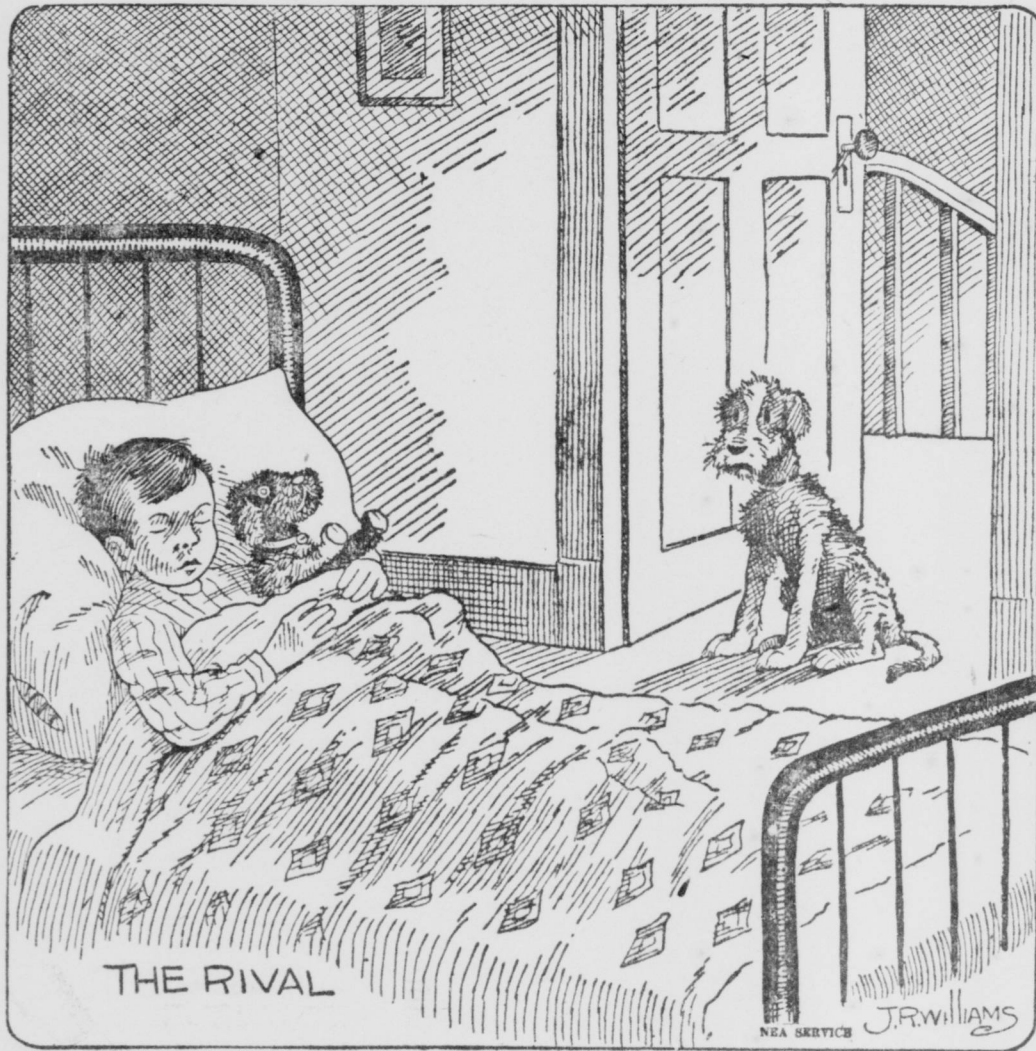
"Neither do I, Sylvia," said the minister earnestly.

The talk at the Wares' went badly that evening. Harwood's mind was on the political situation. As he sat in the minister's library he knew that in upper chambers of the Statehouse, and in hotels and boarding houses, members of the majority in twos and

## DOINGS OF THE DUFFS—



## OUT OUR WAY—By WILLIAMS



## FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS—By BLOSSER



## THEM DAYS IS GONE FOREVER—

## Thrum This On Your Thermometer

## —By AL POSEN



## THE OLD HOME TOWN—By STANLEY



## OUR BOARDING HOUSE—By AHERN



three, or here and there a dozen, were speculating and plotting. He had personally projected Ramsay's name one night in the hope of breaking the Bassett phalanx, but the only result was to arouse Thatcher's wrath against him. Bassett's men believed in Bassett.

He was making the fight of his life, and he was beyond question a "game" fighter; the opposition newspaper

most bitterly opposed Bassett tempered their denunciations with this concession.

And so pondering, it was no wonder that Dan brought no joy to John Ware's library that night. The minister himself seemed unwontedly preoccupied; Sylvia stirred at the fire as though seeking in the flames answers to unanswerable questions. Mrs. Ware

back to her teaching, and when they met she talked of her work and of impersonal things. Once he had broached the subject of marriage—soon after her return to town—but she had made it quite clear that this was a forbidden topic. The good comradeship and frankness of their intercourse had passed, and it seemed to his despairing lover's heart that it could never be regained. She carried her head a

little higher; her smile was not the smile of old. He shrank from telling her that nothing mattered if she cared for him as he believed she did. She gave him no chance, for one thing, and he had never in his bitter self-communing found any words in which to tell her so. More than ever he needed Sylvia, but Sylvia had looked and barred the doors against him.

Used cars in India are not much in demand. Half price is a good price. The other day an Australian horse sold at auction for eleven times as much as a five-seated used car of American make.

Unemployment in England is on the increase, jumping 50,000 during November alone. The new Parliament considers it its greatest domestic problem.

To Be Continued