Baum Lyman Frank

Aunt Jane's Nieces at Work

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Edith Van Dyne
Aunt Jane's Nieces at Work

CHAPTER I
MISS DOYLE INTERFERES

"Daddy," said Patricia Doyle at the breakfast table in her cosy New York apartment, "here is something that will make you sit up and take notice."

"My dear Patsy," was the reply, "it's already sitting up I am, an' taking waffles. If anything at all would make me take notice it's your own pretty phiz."

"Major," remarked Uncle John, helping himself to waffles from a fresh plate Nora brought in, "you Irish are such confirmed flatterers that you flatter your own daughters. Patsy isn't at all pretty this morning. She's too red and freckled."

Patsy laughed and her blue eyes danced.

"That comes from living on your old farm at Millville," she retorted. "We've only been back three days, and the sunburn sticks to me like a burr to a kitten."

"Pay no attention to the ould rascal, Patsy," advised the Major, composedly. "An' stop wavin' that letter like a white flag of surrender. Who's it from?"

"Kenneth."

"Aha! An' how is our lad?"

"Why, he's got himself into a peck of trouble. That's what I want to talk to you and Uncle John about," she replied, her happy face growing as serious as it could ever become.

"Can't he wiggle out?" asked Uncle John.

"Out of what?"

"His trouble."

"It seems not. Listen – "

"Oh, tell us about it, lassie," said the Major. "If I judge right there's some sixty pages in that epistle. Don't bother to read it again."

"But every word is important," declared Patsy, turning the letter over, " – except the last page," with a swift flush.

Uncle John laughed. His shrewd old eyes saw everything.

"Then read us the last page, my dear."

"I'll tell you about it," said Patsy, quickly. "It's this way, you see. Kenneth has gone into politics!"

"More power to his elbow!" exclaimed the Major.

"I can't imagine it in Kenneth," said Uncle John, soberly. "What's he in for?"

"For – for – let's see. Oh, here it is. For member of the House of Representatives from the Eighth District."

"He's flying high, for a fledgling," observed the Major. "But Kenneth's a bright lad and a big gun in his county. He'll win, hands down."

Patsy shook her head.

"He's afraid not," she said, "and it's worrying him to death. He doesn't like to be beaten, and that's what's troubling him."

Uncle John pushed back his chair.

"Poor boy!" he said. "What ever induced him to attempt such a thing?"

"He wanted to defeat a bad man who now represents Kenneth's district," explained Patsy, whose wise little head was full of her friend's difficulties; "and – "

"And the bad man objects to the idea and won't be defeated," added the Major. "It's a way these bad men have."

Uncle John was looking very serious indeed, and Patsy regarded him gratefully. Her father never would be serious where Kenneth was concerned. Perhaps in his heart the grizzled old Major was a bit jealous of the boy.

"I think," said the girl, "that Mr. Watson got Ken into politics, for he surely wouldn't have undertaken such a thing himself. And, now he's in, he finds he's doomed to defeat; and it's breaking his heart, Uncle John."

The little man nodded silently. His chubby face was for once destitute of a smile. That meant a good deal with Uncle John, and Patsy knew she had interested him in Kenneth's troubles.

"Once," said the Major, from behind the morning paper, "I was in politics, meself. I ran for coroner an' got two whole votes – me own an' the undertaker's. It's because the public's so indiscriminating that I've not run for anything since – except th' street-car."

"But it's a big game," said Uncle John, standing at the window with his hands deep in his pockets; "and an important game. Every good American should take an interest in politics; and Kenneth, especially, who has such large landed interests, ought to direct the political affairs of his district."

"I'm much interested in politics, too, Uncle," declared the girl. "If I were a man I'd – I'd – be President!"

"An' I'd vote fer ye twenty times a day, mavourneen!" cried the Major. "But luckily ye'll be no president – unless it's of a woman's club."

"There's the bell!" cried Patsy. "It must be the girls. No one else would call so early."

"It's Beth's voice, talking to Nora," added her father, listening; and then the door flew open and in came two girls whose bright and eager faces might well warrant the warm welcome they received.

"Oh, Louise," cried Patsy, "however did you get up so early?"

"I've got a letter from Kenneth," was the answer, "and I'm so excited I couldn't wait a minute!"

"Imagine Louise being excited," said Beth, calmly, as she kissed Uncle John and sat down by Patsy's side. "She read her letter in bed and bounced out of bed like a cannon-ball. We dressed like the 'lightning change' artist at the vaudeville, and I'm sure our hats are not on straight."

"This bids fair to be a strenuous day," observed the Major. "Patsy's had a letter from the boy, herself."

"Oh, did you?" inquired Louise; "and do you know all about it, dear?"

"She knows sixty pages about it," replied Major Doyle.

"Well, then, what's to be done?"

The question was addressed to Patsy, who was not prepared to reply. The three cousins first exchanged inquiring glances and then turned their eager eyes upon the broad chubby back of Uncle John, who maintained his position at the window as if determined to shut out the morning sunlight.

Louise Merrick lived with her mother a few blocks away from Patsy's apartment, and her cousin Beth DeGraf was staying with her for a time. They had all spent the summer with Uncle John at Millville, and had only returned to New York a few days before. Beth's home was in Ohio, but there was so little sympathy between the girl and her parents that she was happy only when away from them. Her mother was Uncle John's sister, but as selfish and cold as Uncle John was generous and genial. Beth's father was a "genius" and a professor of music – one of those geniuses who live only in their own atmosphere and forget there is a world around them. So Beth had a loveless and disappointed childhood, and only after Uncle John arrived from the far west and took his three nieces "under his wing," as he said, did her life assume any brightness or interest.

Her new surroundings, however, had developed Beth's character wonderfully, and although she still had her periods of sullen depression she was generally as gay and lovable as her two cousins, but in a quieter and more self-possessed way.

Louise was the eldest – a fair, dainty creature with that indescribable "air" which invariably wins the admiring regard of all beholders. Whatever gown the girl wore looked appropriate and becoming, and her manner was as delightful as her appearance. She was somewhat frivolous and designing in character, but warm-hearted and staunch in her friendships. Indeed, Louise was one of those girls who are so complex as to be a puzzle to everyone, including themselves.

Beth DeGraf was the beauty of the group of three, and she also possessed great depth of character. Beth did not like herself very well, and was always afraid others would fail to like her, so she did not win friends as easily as did Louise. But those who knew the beautiful girl intimately could read much to admire in the depth of her great dark eyes, and she was not the least interesting of the three nieces whose fortunes had been so greatly influenced by Aunt Jane and Uncle John Merrick.

But Patricia Doyle – usually called "Patsy" by her friends – was after all the general favorite with strangers and friends alike. There was a subtle magnetism about the girl's laughing, freckled face and dancing blue eyes that could not well be resisted. Patsy was not beautiful; she was not accomplished; she had no especial air of distinction. But she was winning from the top of her red hair to the tips of her toes, and so absolutely unaffected that she won all hearts.

"And for wisdom she's got Solomon beat to a frazzle," declared the Major to Uncle John, in discussing his daughter's character. But it is possible that Major Doyle was prejudiced.

"Well, what's to be done?" demanded Louise, for the second time.

"We don't vote in Ken's district," remarked the Major, "or there would be six votes to his credit, and that would beat my own record by four!"

"Ken is so impressionable that I'm afraid this defeat will ruin his life," said Beth, softly. "I wish we could get him away. Couldn't we get him to withdraw?"

"He might be suddenly called to Europe," suggested Louise. "That would take him away from the place and give him a change of scene."

Patsy shook her head.

"Kenneth isn't a coward," she said. "He won't run away. He must accept his defeat like a man, and some time try again. Eh, Uncle John?"

Uncle John turned around and regarded his three nieces critically.

"What makes you think he will be defeated?" he asked.

"He says so himself," answered Patsy.

"He writes me he can see no hope, for the people are all against him," added Louise.

"Pah!" said Uncle John, contemptuously. "What else does the idiot say?"

"That he's lonely and discouraged, and had to pour out his heart to some one or go wild," said Patsy, the tears of sympathy filling her eyes.

"And you girls propose to sit down and allow all this?" inquired their uncle sternly.

"We?" answered Louise, lifting her brows and making a pretty gesture. "What can we do?"

"Go to work!" said Uncle John.

"How?" asked Patsy, eagerly.

"Politics is a game," declared Mr. Merrick. "It's never won until the last card is played. And success doesn't lie so much in the cards as the way you play 'em. Here are three girls with plenty of shrewdness and energy. Why don't you take a hand in the game and win it?"

"Oh, Uncle John!"

The proposition was certainly disconcerting at first.

"Yes, yes!" laughed the Major, derisively. "Put on some blue stockings, read the history of woman's suffrage, cultivate a liking for depraved eggs, and then face Kenneth's enraged constituents!"

"I shouldn't mind, daddy, if it would help Kenneth any," declared Patsy, stoutly.

"Go on, Uncle John," said Beth, encouragingly.

"Women in politics," observed their uncle, "have often been a tremendous power. You won't need to humiliate yourselves, my dears. All you'll need to do is to exercise your wits and work earnestly for the cause. There are a hundred ways to do that."

"Mention a few," proposed the Major.

"I will when I get to Elmhurst and look over the ground," answered Uncle John.

"You're going on, then?"

"Yes."

"I'll go with you," said Patsy promptly.

"So will I," said Beth. "Kenneth needs moral encouragement and support as much as anything else, just now."

"He's imagining all sorts of horrors and making himself miserable," said Louise. "Let's all go, Uncle, and try to cheer him up."

By this time Uncle John was smiling genially.

"Why, I was sure of you, my dears, from the first," he said. "The Major's an old croaker, but he'd go, too, if it were not necessary for him to stay in New York and attend to business. But we mustn't lose any time, if we're going to direct the politics of the Eighth District Election the eighth of November."

"I can go any time, and so can Beth," said Louise.

"All I need is the blue stockings," laughed Patsy.

"It won't be play. This means work," said Uncle John seriously.

"Well, I believe we're capable of a certain amount of work," replied Beth. "Aren't we, girls?"

"We are!"

"All right," said Mr. Merrick. "I'll go and look up the next train. Go home, Louise, and pack up. I'll telephone you."

"That bad man 'd better look out," chuckled the Major. "He doesn't suspect that an army of invasion is coming."

"Daddy," cried Patsy, "you hush up. We mean business."

"If you win," said the Major, "I'll run for alderman on a petticoat platform, and hire your services."

CHAPTER II
THE ARTIST

To most people the great rambling mansion at Elmhurst, with its ample grounds and profusion of flowers and shrubbery, would afford endless delight. But Kenneth Forbes, the youthful proprietor, was at times dreadfully bored by the loneliness of it all, though no one could better have appreciated the beauties of his fine estate.

The town, an insignificant village, was five miles distant, and surrounding the mansion were many broad acres which rather isolated it from its neighbors. Moreover, Elmhurst was the one important estate in the county, and the simple, hard-working farmers in its vicinity considered, justly enough, that the owner was wholly out of their class.

This was not the owner's fault, and Kenneth had brooded upon the matter until he had come to regard it as a distinct misfortune. For it isolated him and deprived him of any social intercourse with his neighbors.

The boy had come to live at Elmhurst when he was a mere child, but only as a dependent upon the charities of Aunt Jane, who had accepted the charge of the orphan because he was a nephew of her dead lover, who had bequeathed her his estate of Elmhurst. Aunt Jane was Kenneth's aunt merely in name, since she had never even married the uncle to whom she had been betrothed, and who had been killed in an accident before the boy was born.

She was an irritable old woman, as Kenneth knew her, and had never shown him any love or consideration. He grew up in a secluded corner of the great house, tended merely by servants and suffered to play in those quarters of the ample grounds which Aunt Jane did not herself visit. The neglect which Kenneth had suffered and his lonely life had influenced the youth's temperament, and he was far from being an agreeable companion at the time Aunt Jane summoned her three nieces to Elmhurst in order to choose one of them as her heiress. These girls, bright, cheery and wholesome as they were, penetrated the boy's reserve and drew him out of his misanthropic moods. They discovered that he had remarkable talent as an artist, and encouraged him to draw and paint, something he had long loved to do in secret.

Then came the great surprise of the boy's life, which changed his condition from one of dependency into affluence. Aunt Jane died and it was discovered that she had no right to transfer the estate to one of her nieces, because by the terms of his uncle's deed to her the property reverted on her death to Kenneth himself. Louise Merrick, Beth DeGraf and Patsy Doyle, the three nieces, were really glad that the boy inherited Elmhurst, and returned to their eastern homes with the most cordial friendship existing between them all.

Kenneth was left the master of Elmhurst and possessor of considerable wealth besides, and at first he could scarcely realize his good fortune or decide how to take advantage of it. He had one good and helpful friend, an old lawyer named Watson, who had not only been a friend of his uncle, and the confidant of Aunt Jane for years, but had taken an interest in the lonely boy and had done his best to make his life brighter and happier.

When Kenneth became a landed proprietor Mr. Watson was appointed his guardian, and the genial old lawyer abandoned the practice of law and henceforth devoted himself to his ward's welfare and service.

They made a trip to Europe together, where Kenneth studied the pictures of the old masters and obtained instruction from some of the foremost living artists of the old world.

It was while they were abroad, a year before the time of this story, that the boy met Aunt Jane's three nieces again. They were "doing" Europe in company with a wealthy bachelor uncle, John Merrick, a generous, kind-hearted and simple-minded old gentleman who had taken the girls "under

his wing," as he expressed it, and had really provided for their worldly welfare better than Aunt Jane, his sister, could have done.

This "Uncle John" was indeed a whimsical character, as the reader will presently perceive. Becoming a millionaire "against his will," as he declared, he had learned to know his nieces late in life, and found in their society so much to enjoy that he was now wholly devoted to their interests. His one friend was Major Doyle, Patsy's father, a dignified but agreeable old Irish gentleman who amused Uncle John nearly as much as the girls delighted him. The Major managed John Merrick's financial affairs, leaving the old millionaire free to do as he pleased.

So he took the girls to Europe, and the four had a fine, adventurous trip, as may be imagined. Kenneth and Mr. Watson met them in Sicily, and afterward in the Italian cities, and the friendship already existing between the young people was more firmly cemented than before.

In the spring Kenneth returned with his guardian to Elmhurst, where he devoted himself largely to painting from the sketches he had made abroad, while Mr. Watson sat beside him comfortably smoking his pipe and reading his favorite authors. The elder man was contented enough in his condition, but the boy grew restless and impatient, and longed for social intercourse. His nature was moody and he had a tendency to brood if left much to himself.

Uncle John had carried his nieces to a farm at Millville, in the Adirondack region, for the summer, so that Kenneth heard but seldom from his friends.

Such was the disposition of the characters when our story opens.

Kenneth Forbes, although I have called him a boy, had attained his majority on the fifteenth day of May. At this time Mr. Watson rendered his accounts and turned over the estate to its owner. He would then have retired, but Kenneth would not let him go. Twenty-one years of age sounds mature, but the owner of Elmhurst was as boyish and inexperienced as it is possible for one twenty-one years old to be. He had grown accustomed, moreover, to depend much on Mr. Watson's legal acumen in the management of his affairs, and would have been embarrassed and bewildered if obliged to shoulder the burden all at once.

The lawyer, who had always had an affection for the young man, perceived this clearly; so an arrangement was made that he should remain with his young friend indefinitely and strive to teach him such elements of business as would enable him in time to attend to his extensive interests understandingly and wisely.

The country around Elmhurst is thickly settled with agriculturists, for the farms are rich and productive in that part of the state. But it is not a flat country, and Nature has given it many pretty woodland glades and rocky glens to add to its charm.

From the hill country at the west came several rushing streams which tumbled along rocky paths to the river nine miles below Elmhurst, and there are scenes along these routes that might well delight the eye of an artist. Kenneth had often wandered into these out-of-the-way places when a half-forgotten, neglected lad, but had not visited them for years. Now, however, with the spirit of loneliness upon him, he suddenly thought of a glen that would make an interesting study for a picture; so one morning he mounted his horse and rode away to pay the place a preliminary visit.

The farmers along the road nodded at the young fellow good-naturedly as he passed them. Everyone knew him well by sight, yet Kenneth could not have named many of his neighbors, having held little intercourse with them. It struck him, this morning, that they had little cause to be interested in him. He had been an unsociable lad, and since he had become master of Elmhurst had done little to cultivate acquaintance with the people who lived around him.

One reason for this was that they held little in common with him. The neighboring farmers were honest, thrifty souls, and among them were many both shrewd and thoughtful; but they naturally would not force themselves upon the society of the one really rich man in their community, especially as that man had shown no desire to know them.

Kenneth was the subject of much speculation among them, and opinions widely differed concerning his character. Some called him a "prig" and declared that he was "stuck up" and conceited. Others said he was a "namby-pamby" without brains or wit. But there were a few who had occasionally talked with the boy, who understood him better, and hinted that he might develop into "quite a man" in time.

Kenneth surprised himself this morning by greeting several of his neighbors with unusual cordiality. He even stopped a man who was driving along the highway to inquire about his horse, which he perceived was very lame. The boy knew something about horses and suggested a method of treatment that he thought would help the nag; a suggestion the farmer received with real gratitude.

This simple incident cheered Kenneth more than you might suppose, and he was actually whistling as he rode through the glen, where the country road wound its way beside the noisy, rushing stream.

Pausing in front of the picturesque "table rock" that he had come to inspect, the boy uttered an exclamation of chagrin and disappointment. Painted broadly upon the face of the rock, in great white letters, was the advertisement of a patent medicine. The beauty of the scene was ruined – only the glaring advertisement caught and held the eye of the observer.

At first Kenneth's mind held only a feeling of disgust that such a desecration of Nature's gifts to humanity should be allowed. Then he remembered another place further along the glen which was almost as pretty as this had been before the defiling brush of the advertiser had ruined it. So he spurred his horse and rode up the winding way to the spot. There a red-lettered announcement of "Simpson's Soap" stared him in the face.

This was too much for his temper, and his disappointment quickly turned to resentment. While he sat on his mare, considering the matter, the man with the lame horse, whom he had passed, overtook him.

"Can you tell me," Kenneth asked, "who owns this property?"

"Why, I do," replied the man, reining up.

"And you permitted these vile signs to be painted on the rocks?" demanded the boy angrily.

"O' course," replied the man, with a grin of amusement. "I can't farm the rocks, can I? An' these 'ere signs pays me ten dollars a year, each."

Kenneth groaned.

"I'll give you fifteen dollars a year each if you'll let me wash off the letters and restore the scene to its original beauty," he declared.

"I'm willin'," was the response. "But ye see they're contracted. I'd git into trouble with the sign-painter."

"Who is he?"

"Lives in Cleveland. I've got his name up t' th' house, if you'll come along. He comes up here every spring and paints fences an' rocks, payin' spot cash fer th' privilege."

"Oh, I see."

"Then he contracts with the soap man an' the medicine man to paint up their ads. You're the young 'un from Elmhurst, ain't ye?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'd like to earn that extra five, well enough. My name's Parsons. I've got three signs let on my property in the glen. Ef ye'll jest ride up t' the house I'll giv' ye the feller's name."

"All right. Come along," said Kenneth, with sudden resolve.

The farmer rode a time in silent thought. He could not go fast, for the beast was very lame. Finally he remarked:

"Ef ye buy up the sign painters, so's ye can wash off the letters, like enough ye'll hev to pay him fer th' paint an' paintin', too."

"I don't mind," was the response.

The farmer chuckled. Here was an interesting adventure, for a fact. What on earth could possess the "young 'un" from Elmhurst to object to signs, and be willing to pay for having them erased?

"Like enough ye'll hev to pay back the money the soap an' medicine men guv th' painter, too," he hazarded.

"Like enough," said Kenneth, grimly.

One of his stubborn moods had seized him. At all hazards he was resolved to eliminate those ugly signs.

He got the name of the sign painter, accepted a glass of buttermilk at the farm house, and then rode slowly home by another route, so that he might not have to face the signs again.

But on this route he saw even more. They were painted on the fences and barns as he passed along. He scowled at each one, but they did not appear to him quite so inharmonious as those which marred the more picturesque and retired spots which were his favorite haunts.

CHAPTER III
DON QUIXOTE

When Kenneth got home he told Mr. Watson of his discovery and asked the old gentleman to write to the sign painter and find out what could be done. The lawyer laughed heartily at his young friend's whim, but agreed to help him.

"If you are going to try to prevent rural advertising," he remarked, "you'll find your hands full."

Kenneth looked up smiling.

"Thank you," he said.

"For what?"

"For finding me something to do. I'm sick of this inaction."

Again the lawyer laughed.

"What is your idea?" he asked.

"To remove such eyesores as advertising signs from the neighborhood of Elmhurst."

"It's a Titan's task, Ken."

"So much the better."

The lawyer grew thoughtful.

"I believe it's impossible," he ventured.

"Better yet. I don't say I'll succeed, but I promise to try. I want something to occupy myself – something really difficult, so that I may test my own powers."

"But, my dear boy! This foolish proposition isn't worthy your effort. If you want to be up and doing we'll find something else to occupy your mind."

"No, Mr. Watson; I'm set on this. It's a crime to allow these signs to flaunt themselves in our prettiest scenes. My instinct revolts at the desecration. Besides, no one else seems to have undertaken the task of exterminating them."

"True enough. If you're serious, Ken, I'll frankly say the thing can't be done. You may, perhaps, buy the privilege of maintaining the rocks of the glen free from advertising; but the advertisers will paint more signs on all the approaches, and you won't have gained much."

"I'll drive every advertising sign out of this country."

"Impossible. The great corporations who control these industries make their fortunes by this style of advertising. The rural districts are their strongholds. And they must advertise or they can't sell their products."

"Let them advertise in decent ways, then. What right has any soap maker to flaunt his wares in my face, whether I'm interested in them or not?"

"The right of custom. People have submitted to these things so long that the manufacturers consider themselves justified in covering every barn, rock and fence with their signs. I see no way to stop them."

"Nor I, at present. But there must be a way."

"Drive out one, and another will take his place. They pay liberally for locations – "

"Pshaw! Ten dollars a year for a rock as big as a barn!"

"But they rent thousands of such positions, and in the aggregate our farmers get large sums from them."

"And ruin the appearance of their homes and farms."

Mr. Watson smiled.

"They're not artists, Ken. They can't realize on appearances, but they can use the money the signs bring them."

"They need to be educated, that's all. These farmers seem very honest, decent fellows."

"They are, Ken. I wish you knew them better."

"So do I, Mr. Watson. This campaign ought to bring us closer together, for I mean to get them to help me."

"You'll have to buy them, I'm afraid."

"Not all of them. There must be some refinement among them."

But the lawyer was not convinced. However, it was not his desire to stifle this new-born enthusiasm of Kenneth's, even though he believed it misdirected. He wanted the young man to rouse himself and take an interest in life, and if his antagonism to advertising signs would effect this, the futile fight against them was to be welcomed. It would cost the boy something, but he would gain his money's worth in experience.

After a few days the sign painter answered the letter. He would relinquish the three signs in the glen for a payment of fifty dollars each, with the understanding that no other competing signs were to take their place. Kenneth promptly mailed a check for the amount demanded and early next morning started for the glen with what he called his "eliminators."

These "eliminators" consisted of two men with cans of turpentine and gasoline and an equipment of scrubbing brushes. Parsons, the farmer, came over to watch this novel proceeding, happy in the possession of three crisp five-dollar notes given in accordance with the agreement made with him. All day the two men scrubbed the rocks faithfully, assisted at odd times by their impatient employer; but the thick splashes of paint clung desperately to the rugged surface of the rock, and the task was a hard one. When evening came the letters had almost disappeared when viewed closely; but when Kenneth rode to the mouth of the glen on his way home and paused to look back, he could see the injunction "Take Smith's Liver Pills" staring at him, in grim defiance of the scrubbing brushes.

But his energy was not exhausted. No one ever knew what it cost in labor and material to erase those three signs; but after ten days they had vanished completely, and the boy heaved a sigh of satisfaction and turned his attention to extending the campaign.

On the farm nearest to Elmhurst at the north, which belonged to a man named Webb, was a barn, facing the road, that displayed on its side a tobacco sign. Kenneth interviewed Mr. Webb and found that he received no money for the sign; but the man contended that the paint preserved his barn from the weather on that side. So Kenneth agreed to repaint the entire barn for him, and actually had the work done. As it took many coats of paint to blot out the sign it was rather a expensive operation.

By this time the campaign of the youthful proprietor of Elmhurst against advertising signs began to be talked of throughout the county, and was the subject of much merriment among the farmers. Some of them were intelligent enough to admire the young Quixote, and acknowledged frankly that it was a pity to decorate their premises with signs of patent medicines and questionable soaps.

But the majority of them sneered at the champion, and many refused point-blank to consider any proposition to discard the advertisements. Indeed, some were proud of them, and believed it a mark of distinction to have their fences and sheds announce an eye-remedy or several varieties of pickles.

Mr. Watson, at first an amused observer of the campaign, soon became indignant at the way that Kenneth was ridiculed and reviled; and he took a hand in the fight himself. He decided to call a meeting of the neighboring farmers at the district school-house on Saturday night, where Kenneth could address them with logical arguments and endeavor to win them over to his way of thinking.

The invitation was promptly accepted by the rural population; not so much because they were interested in the novel ideas of the young artist as because they expected to be amused by hearing the boyish master of Elmhurst "lecture at 'em." So they filled the little room to overflowing, and to add to the dignity of the proceedings the Hon. Erastus Hopkins, State Representative for the district, lent his presence to the assemblage.

Not that the Honorable Erastus cared a fig about this foolish talk of exterminating advertising signs. He was himself a large stockholder in a breakfast-food factory, which painted signs wherever

it could secure space. These signs were not works of art, but they were distinctly helpful to business, and only a fool, in the opinion of the Honorable Erastus, would protest against the inevitable.

What brought the legislator to the meeting was the fact that he was coming forward for re-election in November, and believed that this afforded a good chance to meet some of his constituents and make a favorable impression. So he came early and shook hands with everyone that arrived, and afterward took as prominent a seat as possible.

Indeed, the gathering had at first the appearance of being a political one, so entirely did the Representative dominate it. But Mr. Watson took the platform and shyly introduced the speaker of the evening.

The farmers all knew Mr. Watson, and liked him; so when Kenneth rose they prepared to listen in respectful silence.

Usually a young man making his maiden speech is somewhat diffident; but young Forbes was so thoroughly in earnest and so indignant at the opposition that his plans had encountered that he forgot that it was his first public speech and thought only of impressing his hearers with his views, exulting in the fact that on this occasion they could not "talk back," as they usually did in private when he tried to argue with them. So he exhorted them earnestly to keep their homes beautiful and free from the degradation of advertising, and never to permit glaring commercialism to mar the scenery around them. He told them what he had been able to accomplish by himself, in a short time; how he had redeemed the glen from its disgraceful condition and restored it to its former beauty. He asked them to observe Webb's pretty homestead, no longer marred by the unsightly sign upon the barn. And then he appealed to them to help him in driving all the advertising signs out of the community.

When he ended they applauded his speech mildly; but it was chiefly for the reason that he had spoken so forcibly and well.

Then the Honorable Erastus Hopkins, quick to catch the lack of sympathy in the audience, stood up and begged leave to reply to young Forbes.

He said the objection to advertising signs was only a rich man's aristocratic hobby, and that it could not be indulged in a democratic community of honest people. His own firm, he said, bought thousands of bushels of oats from the farmers and converted them into the celebrated Eagle-Eye Breakfast Food, three packages for a quarter. They sold this breakfast food to thousands of farmers, to give them health and strength to harvest another crop of oats. Thus he "benefited the community going and coming." What! Should he not advertise this mutual-benefit commodity wherever he pleased, and especially among the farmers? What aristocratic notion could prevent him? It was a mighty good thing for the farmers to be reminded, by means of the signs on their barns and fences, of the things they needed in daily life.

If the young man at Elmhurst would like to be of public service he might find some better way to do so than by advancing such crazy ideas. But this, continued the Representative, was a subject of small importance. What he wished especially to call their attention to was the fact that he had served the district faithfully as Representative, and deserved their suffrages for renomination. And then he began to discuss political questions in general and his own merits in particular, so that Kenneth and Mr. Watson, disgusted at the way in which the Honorable Erastus had captured the meeting, left the school-house and indignantly returned to Elmhurst.

"This man Hopkins," said Mr. Watson, angrily, "is not a gentleman. He's an impertinent meddler."

"He ruined any good effect my speech might have created," said Kenneth, gloomily.

"Give it up, my boy," advised the elder man, laying a kindly hand on the youth's shoulder. "It really isn't worth the struggle."

"But I can't give it up and acknowledge myself beaten," protested Kenneth, almost ready to weep with disappointment.

"Well, well, let's think it over, Ken, and see what can be done. Perhaps that rascally Hopkins was right when he advised you to find some other way to serve the community."

"I can't do better than to make it clean – to do away with these disreputable signs," said the boy, stubbornly.

"You made a fine speech," declared Mr. Watson, gravely puffing his pipe. "I am very proud of you, my lad."

Kenneth flushed red. He was by nature shy and retiring to a degree. Only his pent-up enthusiasm had carried him through the ordeal, and now that it was over he was chagrined to think that the speech had been so ineffective. He was modest enough to believe that another speaker might have done better.

CHAPTER IV
KENNETH TAKES A BOLD STEP

"This man Hopkins gets on my nerves," said Mr. Watson, a week or two after the eventful meeting in the school-house. He was at the breakfast table opposite Kenneth, and held up a big, glaring post-card which was in his mail.

"What is it now?" asked the boy, rousing himself from a fit of abstraction.

"An announcement offering himself for renomination at the primaries. It's like a circus advertisement. Isn't it a shame to think that modern politics has descended to such a level in our free and enlightened republic?"

Kenneth nodded, stirring his coffee thoughtfully. He had lost his spirit and enthusiasm since the meeting, and was fast relapsing into his old state of apathy and boredom. It grieved Mr. Watson to note this.

"Hopkins isn't fit to be the Representative for this district," observed the old gentleman, with sudden energy.

The boy looked at him.

"Who is Hopkins?" he asked.

"His mother once kept a stationery shop in town, and he was stable boy at the hotel. But he was shrewd and prospered, and when he grew up became a county-clerk or tax-collector; then an assessor, and finally he ran last term for State Representative from this district and was elected by a mighty small majority."

"Why small?" asked Kenneth.

"Because he's a Democrat, and the district is strongly Republican. But Thompson ran against him on the Republican ticket and couldn't win his party vote."

"Who's Thompson?"

"The general store keeper. He has a reputation for short weights and measures."

The boy sipped his coffee thoughtfully.

"Tell me, sir; how did you happen to know all this?" he asked.

"I've been looking up Hopkins's record. I have disliked the man ever since he treated us so shabbily on the night of the meeting."

"Never mind him. We've done with him."

Mr. Watson shifted uneasily in his chair.

"I wonder if we have?" he said.

"Why not, sir?"

"Well, Kenneth, we have to reside at Elmhurst, which is Hopkins's district. Also I believe Elmhurst to be the most important estate in the district, and you to be the largest taxpayer. This man wishes to go to the State Legislature and make laws for you to obey."

"Well?"

"Well, it's our duty to watch him. If he isn't a fit man it's our duty to prevent him from representing us."

The young man nodded somewhat dreamily.

"Some of these country yokels must represent us," he observed. "It doesn't matter much whether it's Hopkins or someone else."

"Except that you, being a prominent man, owe it to the community to protect its interests," added the lawyer.

"Do you want me to mix in these petty politics?" asked the boy, irritably.

"Oh, do as you like, my boy. If you can shirk your duties with a clear conscience, I've nothing to say."

For a time the young man was silent. Finally he asked:

"Why isn't Hopkins a good Representative?"

"He's what is called a 'grafter'; a term signifying that he is willing to vote for any measure that he is paid to vote for, whether it benefits his constituents or not."

"Oh. Is he singular in this?"

"By no means. The 'grafter' is all too common in politics."

Again the boy fell into a thoughtful mood.

"Mr. Watson, am I a Democrat or a Republican?"

The old gentleman laughed outright.

"Don't you know, Ken?"

"No, sir, I haven't asked myself before."

"Then I advise you to be a Republican."

"Why?"

"Because Hopkins is a Democrat, and we may then fight him openly."

"What is the difference, sir, between the two parties?"

"There is no difference of importance. All Americans are loyal citizens, whichever side they adopt in politics. But the two parties are the positive and negative poles that provide the current of electricity for our nation, and keep it going properly. Also they safeguard our interests by watching one another."

"What is your preference, sir?"

"I've always been a Republican, whenever I dabbled in politics, which hasn't been often."

"Then I will be a Republican."

"Very good."

"I am sorry to say that I know nothing about politics and have no convictions on the subject. Who is to oppose the Honorable Erastus on the – on *our* side?"

"I don't know yet. The primaries for the nomination are not to be held for two weeks, and the Republican candidates seem shy about coming forward."

"Didn't you say the district was Republican?"

"Yes; but since Hopkins defeated them last term they seem to be terrified, and no one likes to offer himself as a possible sacrifice."

"That feeling will probably elect Mr. Hopkins," declared Kenneth, with conviction.

"Unless – "

"Unless what, sir?"

"Unless we come to the rescue of the Republicans and take a hand in local politics ourselves, my lad."

Kenneth pushed back his chair and rose from the table. He walked to the window and stood there whistling for a few moments, and then left the room without a word.

For a time Mr. Watson sat silently musing.

"Perhaps I'm inviting trouble," he murmured; "but I am sure I am doing right. The boy needs a good shaking up and more knowledge of his fellow-men. If I can get Kenneth interested, this plan of mine will be of great benefit to him."

Then he, too, left the breakfast table, and wandering into the garden saw Kenneth busy at his easel in a shady corner.

For a day or so the, subject was not resumed, and then Mr. Watson casually introduced it.

"A law could be passed in the State Legislature forbidding the display of all advertising signs in public places in this county," he suggested.

The boy looked at him eagerly.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"I am positive," was the answer. "It is merely a question of privilege."

"And you think we might hire Hopkins to pass such a law?"

"No; we couldn't trust him."

"Then what do you propose?"

"I'll think it over, my lad, and let you know."

Then he walked away, leaving Kenneth much pleased with the idea he had advanced. Indeed, he was so much interested in the suggestion that he himself referred to the subject at the first opportunity.

"I don't like to be beaten, sir, once I've undertaken to do a thing," he said. "So if such a law can be passed I'll do all I can to elect the man who will pass it."

"I thought as much," the old lawyer replied, smiling. "But there's only one man who could go to the legislature with enough influence to win the votes to carry such a unique measure through."

"And who is that, sir?"

"Kenneth Forbes, the owner of Elmhurst, and the largest taxpayer in the county."

"Me, sir?"

"You're the man."

"A State Representative?"

"It's an honorable office. It's an important office, properly filled. You might not only beautify your district by having those objectionable signs prohibited, but do many other things to better the condition of the farmers. And that isn't all."

"What's the rest, Mr. Watson?"

"You owe something to yourself, lad. All your young life you've been too self-contained and exclusive in your habits. 'The noblest study of mankind is man.' It would broaden you to go into politics for a time, and do much to develop your character and relieve the monotony of your existence."

Kenneth frowned.

"It won't be easy, you know. It'll be a fight, and a hard one, for Hopkins won't give up his job if he can help it."

The boy brightened again.

"I like a good fight," he said, wistfully. "If I thought – if I believed I could fill the position with credit – I might undertake it."

"I'll answer for that," retorted the old man, highly pleased with his easy victory. "You win the fight, Ken, and I'll guarantee you'll outclass the majority of your fellow Representatives. It's a good state, too."

So the thing was undertaken, and both the young man and the old threw themselves into the contest with energy and determination.

Mr. Watson rode in his buggy all over their district during the next fortnight, and interviewed the farmers and townsmen of the legislative district. When it became noised about that the young owner of Elmhurst, now barely twenty-one, had determined to enter politics, and asked for the nomination of Representative, no other Republican ventured to oppose him.

It was understood to mean a hard fight, and even the most sturdy Republican was inclined to fear that the present incumbent of the office would be elected to succeed himself.

So the primaries were held and Kenneth attended and made a speech, and was warmly applauded. His nomination was a matter of course, and he went home the unanimous choice of his party, because none of the older and more discreet politicians ventured to risk defeat.

The Hon. Erastus Hopkins well knew this feeling, and smiled in his pompous and most sardonic manner when he learned who was his opponent. Having conquered an old and tried Republican warrior in the last campaign, he had no fears in regard to this mere boy, who could know little of political intrigue.

"He won't put up enough of a fight to make it interesting, I'm afraid," Mr. Hopkins confided to his cronies.

But he didn't intend to take chances, so he began the campaign with his usual vigor.

It was now the middle of September, and the election was to be early in November.

CHAPTER V
PLANNING THE WORK

The Honorable Erastus Hopkins was thoroughly enjoying his campaign.

He was not an especially popular man in his district, and he knew it. Physically he was big and stout, with a florid face and small eyes that blinked continually. His head was bald, his hands fat and red and his feet enormous.

To offset this Mr. Hopkins wore a silk hat and a "Prince Albert" coat morning, noon and night. His gold watch-chain was huge and imposing; he had a big diamond shirt-stud, and upon his puffy fingers several rings. He conveyed, nevertheless, the impression that he was more prosperous than refined, and the farmers and townsmen were as quick to recognize this as was Mr. Watson himself.

Moreover, the Honorable Erastus was dubbed "close-fisted" by his neighbors. He never spent a penny on anyone but himself, and being unscrupulous in politics he was naturally unscrupulous in smaller things of a business nature. But since he had risen from a stable-boy to his present affluent position he had never been unwise or careless enough to be caught in any crooked action; and while his acquaintances had an indefinite fear of dealing with him they could not accuse him openly.

It seems strange that such a man should have been chosen to represent a wealthy and important district in the State Legislature, but politics can show many a similar case. In the first place, Mr. Hopkins was aggressive, and knew political methods thoroughly. He had usurped the position of Democratic leader in his community and the others were afraid to antagonize him openly. When he was nominated for Representative he managed to dictate, by shrewd methods, the nomination of Thompson, the store-keeper, on the Republican ticket. Thompson owed Hopkins a large sum of money and Hopkins held a mortgage on the stock. Therefore Thompson dared not make a fight, and although the Republican vote was normally the largest in the district, Hopkins had managed to win enough of them to his side to win.

He had been a little anxious about his renomination, because he knew that he had not represented his district very satisfactorily; but when Kenneth Forbes received the nomination on the Republican ticket he felt that "all was over but the shouting" and that he would "win in a walk." Had it been an issue between the personality of the two men, Hopkins would have had little chance of success; but young Forbes had already raised another issue by his anti-sign speech at the school-house, and Hopkins intended to force that issue and so defeat Kenneth because of the ridicule the latter's position had already brought upon him.

He began to circulate humorous stories about Kenneth's antipathy to sign-boards, saying that the young man demanded that the signs be taken off the Zodiac, and that he wouldn't buy goods of the village grocer because the man had a sign out.

Mr. Hopkins also printed thousands of large hand-bills reading "The Signs of the Times vs. Aristocratic Snobbery. Vote for the Hon. Erastus Hopkins, the man who believes in advertising."

These things had their effect upon all classes of people. There were many good-natured laughs at young Forbes's expense. All this was soon realized at Elmhurst, and had the effect of plunging the youthful aspirant for political honors into the depths of despair. The campaign was hot against him, but Kenneth made no defense.

At this juncture, with election but three weeks away, he received a telegram asking him to send the drag and baggage wagon to the noon train. It was signed by John Merrick, and the boy was overjoyed at the prospect of seeing his jolly old friend again. And the girls? Well, some of them surely must be coming, or Uncle John wouldn't have asked for the drag.

"Now then, the election can go to blazes," said Kenneth, cheerfully, to Mr. Watson. "The sight of some friendly faces will be a great relief."

The old lawyer sighed. His attempt to "wake up" Kenneth had resulted in failure, mainly because the boy had become discouraged so early in the game. Kenneth felt keenly the humiliating experiences he had passed through, and had sunk back into his old moody reserve.

But here was a welcome diversion. The visitors, whoever they might prove to be, would afford relief to the situation and brighten the dullness of life at the big house. So both Kenneth and Mr. Watson were with the drag at the station when the noon train drew in.

And there were Patsy Doyle, Beth DeGraf, and Louise Merrick, a bevy of dainty and sprightly girls, alighting eagerly from the coaches, with Uncle John handing out the grips and packages and giving the checks for the baggage, with business-like celerity, to Thomas the groom.

"We've come for a visit, Ken!" cried Palsy, laughing at his eager delight. "Are you glad to see us, boy? And do you suppose old Martha has our rooms aired?"

"And it's a long visit, too," added Uncle John, "as you'll believe when you see the pile of baggage. You'd think these minxes were prepared for a tour of the world. Each one of 'em brought a carload of clothes."

But they couldn't phase Kenneth in that way. His sensitive face had not beamed with so much animation for months.

The guests were helped into the tall drag and merrily they drove the five miles to Elmhurst, not a word of politics being spoken on the way.

The girls had not been to the house since Aunt Jane's death, two years ago, and after a hasty luncheon they began an inspection of every room, as well as the garden, grounds and stables. The horses, cows, pig and chickens were alike inspected, the roses and dahlias visited and admired, and after all this they returned to their rooms with old Martha, the housekeeper, and proceeded to unpack their trunks and get settled. Kenneth had been their guide and companion in these various explorations, but when the girls went to their rooms he wandered into the library where Uncle John and Mr. Watson had been having a quiet talk over their pipes of tobacco. They welcomed the young man, but adroitly turned the topic of conversation, and again the subject of was rejoined.

It was a merry dinner party that graced the table during dinner that evening, and the boy forgot his troubles and was as jolly and sociable as he had ever been in his life.

But when they were all assembled in the long living room where they grouped themselves around the fireplace, a sudden change took place in the demeanor of the young ladies. Patsy, the delegated leader, looked gravely at the boy and asked:

"How goes the campaign, Ken?"

"Wh – what campaign?" he stammered, to gain time.

"Why, this election business. Tell us about it," said Patsy.

"Some other time, girls," answered the boy, red and distressed. "It – it wouldn't interest you a bit."

"Why not?" asked Louise, softly.

"Because it doesn't interest me," he replied.

"Are you so sure of election?" inquired Beth.

"I'm sure of defeat, if you must know," he declared, scowling at the recollection of his predicament.

"You haven't been cowardly enough to give up?" asked Patricia, boldly.

"What do you mean by that, Patsy Doyle?" he asked, the scowl deepening.

"Just what I say, Ken. A brave man doesn't know when he's beaten, much less beforehand."

He looked at her fixedly.

"I'm not brave, my dear," he replied, more gently than they had expected. "The people here don't understand me, nor I them. I'm laughed at and reviled, a subject for contemptuous jeers, and – and it hurts me. I don't like to be beaten. I'd fight to the last gasp, if I had any show to win. But these conditions, which I foolishly but honestly brought about myself, have defeated me so far in advance

that I have absolutely no hope to redeem myself. That's all. Don't speak of it again, girls. Play me that nocturne that I like, Beth."

"We've got to speak of this, Kenneth, and speak of it often. For we girls have come down here to electioneer, and for no other reason on earth," declared Patsy.

"*What! You* electioneer?" – a slight smile curled his lips.

"Exactly. We're here to brace up and get to work."

"And to win," added Beth, quietly.

"And to put you in the Legislature where you belong," declared Louise.

Kenneth turned to Mr. Merrick.

"Talk to them, Uncle John," he begged.

"I have," said the little man, smiling, "and they've convinced me that they mean business. It's all up with you, my boy, as a private citizen. You're as good as elected."

Ken's eyes filled.

"You're all very kind, sir," he said, "as you were bound to be. And – and I appreciate it all – very much. But Mr. Watson will tell you that the case is hopeless, and there's nothing to be done."

"How about it, Watson?" inquired Uncle John, turning to the lawyer.

"I'll explain the proposition, sir, so you will all understand it," he replied, and drew his chair into the circle. "To begin with, Kenneth visited the glen one day, to make a sketch, and found his old table-rock covered with an advertising sign."

"How preposterous!" exclaimed Louise.

"There were three of these huge signs in different parts of the glen, and they ruined its natural beauty. Kenneth managed to buy up the spaces and then he scrubbed away the signs. By that time he had come to detest the unsightly advertisements that confronted him every time he rode out, and he began a war of extermination against them."

"Quite right," said Patsy, nodding energetically.

"But our friend made little headway because the sympathies of the people were not with him."

"Why not, sir?" inquired Beth, while Kenneth sat inwardly groaning at this baring of his terrible experiences.

"Because through custom they had come to tolerate such things, and could see no harm in them," replied the lawyer. "They permit their buildings which face the roads to be covered with big advertisements, and the fences are decorated in the same way. In some places a sign-board has been built in their yards or fields, advertising medicines or groceries or tobacco. In other words, our country roads and country homes have become mere advertising mediums to proclaim the goods of more or less unscrupulous manufacturers, and so all their attractiveness is destroyed. Kenneth, being a man of artistic instincts and loving country scenes, resented this invasion of commercialism and tried to fight it."

"And so ran my head against a stone wall," added the young man, with a bitter laugh.

"But you were quite right," said Patsy, decidedly. "Such things ought not to be permitted."

"The people think differently," he replied.

"Then we must educate the people to a different way of thinking," announced Louise.

"In three weeks?"

"That is long enough, if we get to work. Isn't it, girls?" said Beth.

"Kenneth accepted the nomination with the idea of having a law passed prohibiting such signs," explained the lawyer. "But Mr. Hopkins, his opponent, has used this very thing to arouse public sentiment against him. Farmers around here are thrifty people, and they fear to lose the trifling sums paid them for the privilege of painting signs on their premises."

Patsy nodded gravely.

"We will change all that," she said. "The thing is really more serious than we expected, and more difficult. But we came here to work and win, and we're going to do it. Aren't we, Uncle John?"

"I'll bet on your trio, Patsy," replied her uncle. "But I won't bet all I'm worth."

"It's all foolishness," declared Kenneth.

"I do not think so," said the lawyer, gravely. "The girls have a fine show to win. I know our country people, and they are more intelligent than you suppose. Once they are brought to a proper way of thinking they will support Kenneth loyally."

"Then we must bring them to a proper way of thinking," said Patsy, with decision. "From this time on, Ken, we become your campaign managers. Don't worry any more about the matter. Go on with your painting and be happy. We may require you to make a few speeches, but all the details will be arranged for you."

"Do you intend to permit this, Uncle John?" asked Kenneth.

"I'm wholly in sympathy with the girls, Ken, and I believe in them."

"But consider the humiliation to which they will subject themselves! I've had a taste of that medicine, myself."

"We're going to be the most popular young ladies in this district!" exclaimed Patsy. "Don't you worry about us, Ken. But tell me, how big is your district?"

"It includes parts of three counties – Monroe, Washington and Jackson Counties."

"What county is this?"

"Monroe."

"Any cities?"

"No; only a few towns. It's mostly a rural district. Fairview, just across the border in Washington County, is the biggest village."

"Have you an automobile?"

"No; I don't like the things. I've always loved horses and prefer them to machines."

"How much money are you prepared to spend?"

"How much – what's that?" he asked, bewildered.

"You can't win a political election without spending money," declared Patsy, wisely. "I'll bet the bad man is scattering money in every direction. It will cost something on our side to run this campaign in a way to win."

The young man frowned.

"I don't mind spending money, Patsy," he said, "but I don't approve of buying votes, and I won't allow it, either!"

"Tut-tut! Who said anything about buying votes? But we're going to work on a broad and liberal basis, I assure you, and we need money."

"Spend all you like, then, so long as you don't try to corrupt the voters."

"Very good. Now, then, how much land do you own at Elmhurst?"

Kenneth looked inquiringly at the lawyer.

"About twelve hundred acres," said Mr. Watson. "It is divided into small farms which are let out on shares."

"How many votes do you control among your servants and tenants?" proceeded Patsy, in a business-like tone.

"Perhaps thirty or forty."

"And what is the total vote of the district?"

"Thirty-five hundred."

Patsy gasped.

"So many?"

"Fully that many," said Mr. Watson, smiling.

"Then we've got to have over seventeen hundred and fifty votes to elect Kenneth?"

"Exactly."

The girl drew a long breath and looked at Beth and Louise. Then they all laughed.

"Suppose you resign as campaign managers," said Kenneth, beginning to be amused.
"Oh, no! It's – it's easier than we expected. Isn't it, girls?"
"It's child's play," observed Louise, languidly.
The boy was astonished.
"Very well," said he. "Try it and see."
"Of course," said Patsy, cheerfully. "Tomorrow morning we begin work."

CHAPTER VI
A GOOD START

At an early breakfast next morning Patsy announced the program for the day.

"Uncle John and I will drive over to the village," she said, "and perhaps we'll be gone all day. Don't worry if we're not back for luncheon. Louise and Mr. Watson are going in the phaeton to visit some of the near-by farmers. Take one road, dear, and follow it straight along, as far as it keeps within our legislative district, and visit every farm-house on the way."

"The farmers will all be busy in the fields," said Kenneth.

"Louise doesn't care about the farmers," retorted Patsy. "She's going to talk to their wives."

"Wives don't vote, Patsy."

"They tell their husbands how to vote, though," declared Louise, with a laugh. "Let me win the women and I'll win the men."

"What am I to do?" asked Beth.

"You're to stay at home and write several articles for the newspapers. There are seven important papers in our district, and five of them are Republican. Make a strong argument, Beth. You're our publicity department. Also get up copy for some hand-hills and circular letters. I want to get a circular letter to every voter in the district."

"All right," said Beth. "I know what you want."

There was an inspiring air of business about these preparations, and the girls were all eager to begin work. Scarcely was breakfast finished when the two equipages were at the door. Louise and Mr. Watson at once entered the phaeton and drove away, the girl delighted at the prospect of visiting the farmers' wives and winning them by her plausible speeches. Conversation was Louise's strong point. She loved to talk and argue, and her manner was so confiding and gracious that she seldom failed to interest her listeners.

Patsy and Uncle John drove away. In Kenneth's buggy to the town, and during the five-mile drive Patsy counseled gravely with her shrewd uncle in regard to "ways and means."

"This thing requires prompt action, Patsy," he said, "and if we're going to do things that count they've got to be done on a big scale."

"True," she admitted. "But oughtn't we to be a little careful about spending Kenneth's money?"

"I'll be your temporary banker," said the old gentleman, "and keep track of the accounts. If we win we'll present Kenneth our bill, and if we fail I'll have the satisfaction of getting rid of some of that dreadful income that is swamping me."

This was always Uncle John's cry. His enormous fortune was a constant bugbear to him. He had been so interested in his business enterprises for many years that he had failed to realize how his fortune was growing, and it astounded him to wake up one day and find himself possessed of many millions. He had at once retired from active business and invested his millions in ways that would cause him the least annoyance; but the income on so large a sum was more than he could take care of, and even Major Doyle, who managed these affairs for his brother-in-law, was often puzzled to know what to do with the money that accumulated.

Doubtless no one will ever know how much good these two kindly men accomplished between them in their quiet, secretive way. Dozens of deserving young men were furnished capital to start them in business; dozens more were being educated at universities at Uncle John's expense. Managers of worthy charities were familiar with John Merrick's signature on checks, and yet the vast fortune grew with leaps and bounds. Mr. Merrick's life was so simple and unostentatious that his personal expenses, however erratic some of his actions, could not make much headway against his interest account, and nothing delighted him more than to find a way to "get even with fate by reckless squandering," as he

quaintly expressed it. He was far too shrewd to become the prey of designing people, but welcomed any legitimate channel in which to unload his surplus.

So Mr. Merrick had been revolving the possibilities of this unique political campaign in his mind, and had decided to do some things that would open the bucolic eyes of Kenneth's constituents in wonder. He did not confide all his schemes to Patsy, but having urged his nieces to attempt this conquest he had no intention of allowing them to suffer defeat if he could help it.

The little town of Elmwood was quiet and practically deserted when they drove into it. The farmers were too busy with the harvest to "come to town for trading" except on Saturdays, and the arrival and departure of the two daily trains did not cause more than a ripple of excitement in the village.

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