SHERWOOD ANDERSON

POOR WHITE

Sherwood Anderson

Poor White

Anderson S.

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Содержание

Sherwood Anderson
Poor White: A Novel

BOOK ONE

CHAPTER I

Hugh McVey was born in a little hole of a town stuck on a mud bank on the western shore of the Mississippi River in the State of Missouri. It was a miserable place in which to be born. With the exception of a narrow strip of black mud along the river, the land for ten miles back from the town—called in derision by river men "Mudcat Landing"—was almost entirely worthless and unproductive. The soil, yellow, shallow and stony, was tilled, in Hugh's time, by a race of long gaunt men who seemed as exhausted and no-account as the land on which they lived. They were chronically discouraged, and the merchants and artisans of the town were in the same state. The merchants, who ran their stores —poor tumble-down ramshackle affairs—on the credit system, could not get pay for the goods they handed out over their counters and the artisans, the shoemakers, carpenters and harnessmakers, could not get pay for the work they did. Only the town's two saloons prospered. The saloon keepers sold their wares for cash and, as the men of the town and the farmers who drove into town felt that without drink life was unbearable, cash always could be found for the purpose of getting drunk.

Hugh McVey's father, John McVey, had been a farm hand in his youth but before Hugh was born had moved into town to find employment in a tannery. The tannery ran for a year or two and then failed, but John McVey stayed in town. He also became a drunkard. It was the easy obvious thing for him to do. During the time of his employment in the tannery he had been married and his son had been born. Then his wife died and the idle workman took his child and went to live in a tiny fishing shack by the river. How the boy lived through the next few years no one ever knew. John McVey loitered in the streets and on the river bank and only awakened out of his habitual stupor when, driven by hunger or the craving for drink, he went for a day's work in some farmer's field at harvest time or joined a number of other idlers for an adventurous trip down river on a lumber raft. The baby was left shut up in the shack by the river or carried about wrapped in a soiled blanket. Soon after he was old enough to walk he was compelled to find work in order that he might eat. The boy of ten went listlessly about town at the heels of his father. The two found work, which the boy did while the man lay sleeping in the sun. They cleaned cisterns, swept out stores and saloons and at night went with a wheelbarrow and a box to remove and dump in the river the contents of out-houses. At fourteen Hugh was as tall as his father and almost without education. He could read a little and could write his own name, had picked up these accomplishments from other boys who came to fish with him in the river, but he had never been to school. For days sometimes he did nothing but lie half asleep in the shade of a bush on the river bank. The fish he caught on his more industrious days he sold for a few cents to some housewife, and thus got money to buy food for his big growing indolent body. Like an animal that has come to its maturity he turned away from his father, not because of resentment for his hard youth, but because he thought it time to begin to go his own way.

In his fourteenth year and when the boy was on the point of sinking into the sort of animal-like stupor in which his father had lived, something happened to him. A railroad pushed its way down along the river to his town and he got a job as man of all work for the station master. He swept out the station, put trunks on trains, mowed the grass in the station yard and helped in a hundred odd ways the man who held the combined jobs of ticket seller, baggage master and telegraph operator at the little out-of-the-way place.

Hugh began a little to awaken. He lived with his employer, Henry Shepard, and his wife, Sarah Shepard, and for the first time in his life sat down regularly at table. His life, lying on the river bank through long summer afternoons or sitting perfectly still for endless hours in a boat, had bred in him a dreamy detached outlook on life. He found it hard to be definite and to do definite things, but for all his stupidity the boy had a great store of patience, a heritage perhaps from his mother. In his new place the station master's wife, Sarah Shepard, a sharp-tongued, good-natured woman, who hated the town and the people among whom fate had thrown her, scolded at him all day long. She treated him like a child of six, told him how to sit at table, how to hold his fork when he ate, how to address people who came to the house or to the station. The mother in her was aroused by Hugh's helplessness and, having no children of her own, she began to take the tall awkward boy to her heart. She was a small woman and when she stood in the house scolding the great stupid boy who stared down at her with his small perplexed eyes, the two made a picture that afforded endless amusement to her husband, a short fat bald-headed man who went about clad in blue overalls and a blue cotton shirt. Coming to the back door of his house, that was within a stone's throw of the station, Henry Shepard stood with his hand on the door-jamb and watched the woman and the boy. Above the scolding voice of the woman his own voice arose. "Look out, Hugh," he called. "Be on the jump, lad! Perk yourself up. She'll be biting you if you don't go mighty careful in there."

Hugh got little money for his work at the railroad station but for the first time in his life he began to fare well. Henry Shepard bought the boy clothes, and his wife, Sarah, who was a master of the art of cooking, loaded the table with good things to eat. Hugh ate until both the man and woman declared he would burst if he did not stop. Then when they were not looking he went into the station yard and crawling under a bush went to sleep. The station master came to look for him. He cut a switch from the bush and began to beat the boy's bare feet. Hugh awoke and was overcome with confusion. He got to his feet and stood trembling, half afraid he was to be driven away from his new home. The man and the confused blushing boy confronted each other for a moment and then the man adopted the method of his wife and began to scold. He was annoyed at what he thought the boy's indolence and found a hundred little tasks for him to do. He devoted himself to finding tasks for Hugh, and when he could think of no new ones, invented them. "We will have to keep the big lazy fellow on the jump. That's the secret of things," he said to his wife.

The boy learned to keep his naturally indolent body moving and his clouded sleepy mind fixed on definite things. For hours he plodded straight ahead, doing over and over some appointed task. He forgot the purpose of the job he had been given to do and did it because it was a job and would keep him awake. One morning he was told to sweep the station platform and as his employer had gone away without giving him additional tasks and as he was afraid that if he sat down he would fall into the odd detached kind of stupor in which he had spent so large a part of his life, he continued to sweep for two or three hours. The station platform was built of rough boards and Hugh's arms were very powerful. The broom he was using began to go to pieces. Bits of it flew about and after an hour's work the platform looked more uncleanly than when he began. Sarah Shepard came to the door of her house and stood watching. She was about to call to him and to scold him again for his stupidity when a new impulse came to her. She saw the serious determined look on the boy's long gaunt face and a flash of understanding came to her. Tears came into her eyes and her arms ached to take the great boy and hold him tightly against her breast. With all her mother's soul she wanted to protect Hugh from a world she was sure would treat him always as a beast of burden and would take no account of what she thought of as the handicap of his birth. Her morning's work was done and without saying anything to Hugh, who continued to go up and down the platform laboriously sweeping, she went out at the front door of the house and to one of the town stores. There she bought a half dozen books, a geography, an arithmetic, a speller and two or three readers. She had made up her mind to become Hugh McVey's school teacher and with characteristic energy did not put the matter off, but went about it at once. When she got back to her house and saw the boy still going doggedly up and down

the platform, she did not scold but spoke to him with a new gentleness in her manner. “Well, my boy, you may put the broom away now and come to the house,” she suggested. “I’ve made up my mind to take you for my own boy and I don’t want to be ashamed of you. If you’re going to live with me I can’t have you growing up to be a lazy good-for-nothing like your father and the other men in this hole of a place. You’ll have to learn things and I suppose I’ll have to be your teacher.

“Come on over to the house at once,” she added sharply, making a quick motion with her hand to the boy who with the broom in his hands stood stupidly staring. “When a job is to be done there’s no use putting it off. It’s going to be hard work to make an educated man of you, but it has to be done. We might as well begin on your lessons at once.”

Hugh McVey lived with Henry Shepard and his wife until he became a grown man. After Sarah Shepard became his school teacher things began to go better for him. The scolding of the New England woman, that had but accentuated his awkwardness and stupidity, came to an end and life in his adopted home became so quiet and peaceful that the boy thought of himself as one who had come into a kind of paradise. For a time the two older people talked of sending him to the town school, but the woman objected. She had begun to feel so close to Hugh that he seemed a part of her own flesh and blood and the thought of him, so huge and ungainly, sitting in a school room with the children of the town, annoyed and irritated her. In imagination she saw him being laughed at by other boys and could not bear the thought. She did not like the people of the town and did not want Hugh to associate with them.

Sarah Shepard had come from a people and a country quite different in its aspect from that in which she now lived. Her own people, frugal New Englanders, had come West in the year after the Civil War to take up cut-over timber land in the southern end of the state of Michigan. The daughter was a grown girl when her father and mother took up the westward journey, and after they arrived at the new home, had worked with her father in the fields. The land was covered with huge stumps and was difficult to farm but the New Englanders were accustomed to difficulties and were not discouraged. The land was deep and rich and the people who had settled upon it were poor but hopeful. They felt that every day of hard work done in clearing the land was like laying up treasure against the future. In New England they had fought against a hard climate and had managed to find a living on stony unproductive soil. The milder climate and the rich deep soil of Michigan was, they felt, full of promise. Sarah’s father like most of his neighbors had gone into debt for his land and for tools with which to clear and work it and every year spent most of his earnings in paying interest on a mortgage held by a banker in a nearby town, but that did not discourage him. He whistled as he went about his work and spoke often of a future of ease and plenty. “In a few years and when the land is cleared we’ll make money hand over fist,” he declared.

When Sarah grew into young womanhood and went about among the young people in the new country, she heard much talk of mortgages and of the difficulty of making ends meet, but every one spoke of the hard conditions as temporary. In every mind the future was bright with promise. Throughout the whole Mid-American country, in Ohio, Northern Indiana and Illinois, Wisconsin and Iowa a hopeful spirit prevailed. In every breast hope fought a successful war with poverty and discouragement. Optimism got into the blood of the children and later led to the same kind of hopeful courageous development of the whole western country. The sons and daughters of these hardy people no doubt had their minds too steadily fixed on the problem of the paying off of mortgages and getting on in the world, but there was courage in them. If they, with the frugal and sometimes niggardly New Englanders from whom they were sprung, have given modern American life a too material flavor, they have at least created a land in which a less determinedly materialistic people may in their turn live in comfort.

In the midst of the little hopeless community of beaten men and yellow defeated women on the bank of the Mississippi River, the woman who had become Hugh McVey’s second mother and in whose veins flowed the blood of the pioneers, felt herself undefeated and unbeatable. She and her

husband would, she felt, stay in the Missouri town for a while and then move on to a larger town and a better position in life. They would move on and up until the little fat man was a railroad president or a millionaire. It was the way things were done. She had no doubt of the future. “Do everything well,” she said to her husband, who was perfectly satisfied with his position in life and had no exalted notions as to his future. “Remember to make your reports out neatly and clearly. Show them you can do perfectly the task given you to do, and you will be given a chance at a larger task. Some day when you least expect it something will happen. You will be called up into a position of power. We won’t be compelled to stay in this hole of a place very long.”

The ambitious energetic little woman, who had taken the son of the indolent farm hand to her heart, constantly talked to him of her own people. Every afternoon when her housework was done she took the boy into the front room of the house and spent hours laboring with him over his lessons. She worked upon the problem of rooting the stupidity and dullness out of his mind as her father had worked at the problem of rooting the stumps out of the Michigan land. After the lesson for the day had been gone over and over until Hugh was in a stupor of mental weariness, she put the books aside and talked to him. With glowing fervor she made for him a picture of her own youth and the people and places where she had lived. In the picture she represented the New Englanders of the Michigan farming community as a strong god-like race, always honest, always frugal, and always pushing ahead. His own people she utterly condemned. She pitied him for the blood in his veins. The boy had then and all his life certain physical difficulties she could never understand. The blood did not flow freely through his long body. His feet and hands were always cold and there was for him an almost sensual satisfaction to be had from just lying perfectly still in the station yard and letting the hot sun beat down on him.

Sarah Shepard looked upon what she called Hugh’s laziness as a thing of the spirit. “You have got to get over it,” she declared. “Look at your own people—poor white trash—how lazy and shiftless they are. You can’t be like them. It’s a sin to be so dreamy and worthless.”

Swept along by the energetic spirit of the woman, Hugh fought to overcome his inclination to give himself up to vaporous dreams. He became convinced that his own people were really of inferior stock, that they were to be kept away from and not to be taken into account. During the first year after he came to live with the Shepards, he sometimes gave way to a desire to return to his old lazy life with his father in the shack by the river. People got off steamboats at the town and took the train to other towns lying back from the river. He earned a little money by carrying trunks filled with clothes or traveling men’s samples up an incline from the steamboat landing to the railroad station. Even at fourteen the strength in his long gaunt body was so great that he could out-lift any man in town, and he put one of the trunks on his shoulder and walked slowly and stolidly away with it as a farm horse might have walked along a country road with a boy of six perched on his back.

The money earned in this way Hugh for a time gave to his father, and when the man had become stupid with drink he grew quarrelsome and demanded that the boy return to live with him. Hugh had not the spirit to refuse and sometimes did not want to refuse. When neither the station master nor his wife was about he slipped away and went with his father to sit for a half day with his back against the wall of the fishing shack, his soul at peace. In the sunlight he sat and stretched forth his long legs. His small sleepy eyes stared out over the river. A delicious feeling crept over him and for the moment he thought of himself as completely happy and made up his mind that he did not want to return again to the railroad station and to the woman who was so determined to arouse him and make of him a man of her own people.

Hugh looked at his father asleep and snoring in the long grass on the river bank. An odd feeling of disloyalty crept over him and he became uncomfortable. The man’s mouth was open and he snored lustily. From his greasy and threadbare clothing arose the smell of fish. Flies gathered in swarms and alighted on his face. Disgust took possession of Hugh. A flickering but ever recurring light came into his eyes. With all the strength of his awakening soul he struggled against the desire to give way to the

inclination to stretch himself out beside the man and sleep. The words of the New England woman, who was, he knew, striving to lift him out of slothfulness and ugliness into some brighter and better way of life, echoed dimly in his mind. When he arose and went back along the street to the station master's house and when the woman there looked at him reproachfully and muttered words about the poor white trash of the town, he was ashamed and looked at the floor.

Hugh began to hate his own father and his own people. He connected the man who had bred him with the dreaded inclination toward sloth in himself. When the farmhand came to the station and demanded the money he had earned by carrying trunks, he turned away and went across a dusty road to the Shepard's house. After a year or two he paid no more attention to the dissolute farmhand who came occasionally to the station to mutter and swear at him; and, when he had earned a little money, gave it to the woman to keep for him. "Well," he said, speaking slowly and with the hesitating drawl characteristic of his people, "if you give me time I'll learn. I want to be what you want me to be. If you stick to me I'll try to make a man of myself."

Hugh McVey lived in the Missouri town under the tutelage of Sarah Shepard until he was nineteen years old. Then the station master gave up railroading and went back to Michigan. Sarah Shepard's father had died after having cleared one hundred and twenty acres of the cut-over timber land and it had been left to her. The dream that had for years lurked in the back of the little woman's mind and in which she saw bald-headed, good-natured Henry Shepard become a power in the railroad world had begun to fade. In newspapers and magazines she read constantly of other men who, starting from a humble position in the railroad service, soon became rich and powerful, but nothing of the kind seemed likely to happen to her husband. Under her watchful eye he did his work well and carefully but nothing came of it. Officials of the railroad sometimes passed through the town riding in private cars hitched to the end of one of the through trains, but the trains did not stop and the officials did not alight and, calling Henry out of the station, reward his faithfulness by piling new responsibilities upon him, as railroad officials did in such cases in the stories she read. When her father died and she saw a chance to again turn her face eastward and to live again among her own people, she told her husband to resign his position with the air of one accepting an undeserved defeat. The station master managed to get Hugh appointed in his place, and the two people went away one gray morning in October, leaving the tall ungainly young man in charge of affairs. He had books to keep, freight waybills to make out, messages to receive, dozens of definite things to do. Early in the morning before the train that was to take her away, came to the station, Sarah Shepard called the young man to her and repeated the instructions she had so often given her husband. "Do everything neatly and carefully," she said. "Show yourself worthy of the trust that has been given you."

The New England woman wanted to assure the boy, as she had so often assured her husband, that if he would but work hard and faithfully promotion would inevitably come; but in the face of the fact that Henry Shepard had for years done without criticism the work Hugh was to do and had received neither praise nor blame from those above him, she found it impossible to say the words that arose to her lips. The woman and the son of the people among whom she had lived for five years and had so often condemned, stood beside each other in embarrassed silence. Stripped of her assurance as to the purpose of life and unable to repeat her accustomed formula, Sarah Shepard had nothing to say. Hugh's tall figure, leaning against the post that supported the roof of the front porch of the little house where she had taught him his lessons day after day, seemed to her suddenly old and she thought his long solemn face suggested a wisdom older and more mature than her own. An odd revulsion of feeling swept over her. For the moment she began to doubt the advisability of trying to be smart and to get on in life. If Hugh had been somewhat smaller of frame so that her mind could have taken hold of the fact of his youth and immaturity, she would no doubt have taken him into her arms and said words regarding her doubts. Instead she also became silent and the minutes slipped away as the two people stood before each other and stared at the floor of the porch. When the train on which she was to leave blew a warning whistle, and Henry Shepard called to her from the station platform, she put

a hand on the lapel of Hugh's coat and drawing his face down, for the first time kissed him on the cheek. Tears came into her eyes and into the eyes of the young man. When he stepped across the porch to get her bag Hugh stumbled awkwardly against a chair. "Well, you do the best you can here," Sarah Shepard said quickly and then out of long habit and half unconsciously did repeat her formula. "Do little things well and big opportunities are bound to come," she declared as she walked briskly along beside Hugh across the narrow road and to the station and the train that was to bear her away.

After the departure of Sarah and Henry Shepard Hugh continued to struggle with his inclination to give way to dreams. It seemed to him a struggle it was necessary to win in order that he might show his respect and appreciation of the woman who had spent so many long hours laboring with him. Although, under her tutelage, he had received a better education than any other young man of the river town, he had lost none of his physical desire to sit in the sun and do nothing. When he worked, every task had to be consciously carried on from minute to minute. After the woman left, there were days when he sat in the chair in the telegraph office and fought a desperate battle with himself. A queer determined light shone in his small gray eyes. He arose from the chair and walked up and down the station platform. Each time as he lifted one of his long feet and set it slowly down a special little effort had to be made. To move about at all was a painful performance, something he did not want to do. All physical acts were to him dull but necessary parts of his training for a vague and glorious future that was to come to him some day in a brighter and more beautiful land that lay in the direction thought of rather indefinitely as the East. "If I do not move and keep moving I'll become like father, like all of the people about here," Hugh said to himself. He thought of the man who had bred him and whom he occasionally saw drifting aimlessly along Main Street or sleeping away a drunken stupor on the river bank. He was disgusted with him and had come to share the opinion the station master's wife had always held concerning the people of the Missouri village. "They're a lot of miserable lazy louts," she had declared a thousand times, and Hugh, agreed with her, but sometimes wondered if in the end he might not also become a lazy lout. That possibility he knew was in him and for the sake of the woman as well as for his own sake he was determined it should not be so.

The truth is that the people of Mudcat Landing were totally unlike any of the people Sarah Shepard had ever known and unlike the people Hugh was to know during his mature life. He who had come from a people not smart was to live among smart energetic men and women and be called a big man by them without in the least understanding what they were talking about.

Practically all of the people of Hugh's home town were of Southern origin. Living originally in a land where all physical labor was performed by slaves, they had come to have a deep aversion to physical labor. In the South their fathers, having no money to buy slaves of their own and being unwilling to compete with slave labor, had tried to live without labor. For the most part they lived in the mountains and the hill country of Kentucky and Tennessee, on land too poor and unproductive to be thought worth cultivating by their rich slave-owning neighbors of the valleys and plains. Their food was meager and of an enervating sameness and their bodies degenerate. Children grew up long and gaunt and yellow like badly nourished plants. Vague indefinite hungers took hold of them and they gave themselves over to dreams. The more energetic among them, sensing dimly the unfairness of their position in life, became vicious and dangerous. Feuds started among them and they killed each other to express their hatred of life. When, in the years preceding the Civil War, a few of them pushed north along the rivers and settled in Southern Indiana and Illinois and in Eastern Missouri and Arkansas, they seemed to have exhausted their energy in making the voyage and slipped quickly back into their old slothful way of life. Their impulse to emigrate did not carry them far and but a few of them ever reached the rich corn lands of central Indiana, Illinois or Iowa or the equally rich land back from the river in Missouri or Arkansas. In Southern Indiana and Illinois they were merged into the life about them and with the infusion of new blood they a little awoke. They have tempered the quality of the peoples of those regions, made them perhaps less harshly energetic than their forefathers, the pioneers. In many of the Missouri and Arkansas river towns they have changed but little. A visitor to

these parts may see them there to-day, long, gaunt, and lazy, sleeping their lives away and awakening out of their stupor only at long intervals and at the call of hunger.

As for Hugh McVey, he stayed in his home town and among his own people for a year after the departure of the man and woman who had been father and mother to him, and then he also departed. All through the year he worked constantly to cure himself of the curse of indolence. When he awoke in the morning he did not dare lie in bed for a moment for fear indolence would overcome him and he would not be able to arise at all. Getting out of bed at once he dressed and went to the station. During the day there was not much work to be done and he walked for hours up and down the station platform. When he sat down he at once took up a book and put his mind to work. When the pages of the book became indistinct before his eyes and he felt within him the inclination to drift off into dreams, he again arose and walked up and down the platform. Having accepted the New England woman's opinion of his own people and not wanting to associate with them, his life became utterly lonely and his loneliness also drove him to labor.

Something happened to him. Although his body would not and never did become active, his mind began suddenly to work with feverish eagerness. The vague thoughts and feelings that had always been a part of him but that had been indefinite, ill-defined things, like clouds floating far away in a hazy sky, began to grow definite. In the evening after his work was done and he had locked the station for the night, he did not go to the town hotel where he had taken a room and where he ate his meals, but wandered about town and along the road that ran south beside the great mysterious river. A hundred new and definite desires and hungers awoke in him. He began to want to talk with people, to know men and most of all to know women, but the disgust for his fellows in the town, engendered in him by Sarah Shepard's words and most of all by the things in his nature that were like their natures, made him draw back. When in the fall at the end of the year after the Shepards had left and he began living alone, his father was killed in a senseless quarrel with a drunken river man over the ownership of a dog, a sudden, and what seemed to him at the moment heroic resolution came to him. He went early one morning to one of the town's two saloon keepers, a man who had been his father's' nearest approach to a friend and companion, and gave him money to bury the dead man. Then he wired to the headquarters of the railroad company telling them to send a man to Mudcat Landing to take his place. On the afternoon of the day on which his father was buried, he bought himself a handbag and packed his few belongings. Then he sat down alone on the steps of the railroad station to wait for the evening train that would bring the man who was to replace him and that would at the same time take him away. He did not know where he intended to go, but knew that he wanted to push out into a new land and get among new people. He thought he would go east and north. He remembered the long summer evenings in the river town when the station master slept and his wife talked. The boy who listened had wanted to sleep also, but with the eyes of Sarah Shepard fixed on him, had not dared to do so. The woman had talked of a land dotted with towns where the houses were all painted in bright colors, where young girls dressed in white dresses went about in the evening, walking under trees beside streets paved with bricks, where there was no dust or mud, where stores were gay bright places filled with beautiful wares that the people had money to buy in abundance and where every one was alive and doing things worth while and none was slothful and lazy. The boy who had now become a man wanted to go to such a place. His work in the railroad station had given him some idea of the geography of the country and, although he could not have told whether the woman who had talked so enticingly had in mind her childhood in New England or her girlhood in Michigan, he knew in a general way that to reach the land and the people who were to show him by their lives the better way to form his own life, he must go east. He decided that the further east he went the more beautiful life would become, and that he had better not try going too far in the beginning. "I'll go into the northern part of Indiana or Ohio," he told himself. "There must be beautiful towns in those places."

Hugh was boyishly eager to get on his way and to become at once a part of the life in a new place. The gradual awakening of his mind had given him courage, and he thought of himself as armed

and ready for association with men. He wanted to become acquainted with and be the friend of people whose lives were beautifully lived and who were themselves beautiful and full of significance. As he sat on the steps of the railroad station in the poor little Missouri town with his bag beside him, and thought of all the things he wanted to do in life, his mind became so eager and restless that some of its restlessness was transmitted to his body. For perhaps the first time in his life he arose without conscious effort and walked up and down the station platform out of an excess of energy. He thought he could not bear to wait until the train came and brought the man who was to take his place. “Well, I’m going away, I’m going away to be a man among men,” he said to himself over and over. The saying became a kind of refrain and he said it unconsciously. As he repeated the words his heart beat high in anticipation of the future he thought lay before him.

CHAPTER II

Hugh McVey left the town of Mudcat Landing in early September of the year eighteen eighty-six. He was then twenty years old and was six feet and four inches tall. The whole upper part of his body was immensely strong but his long legs were ungainly and lifeless. He secured a pass from the railroad company that had employed him, and rode north along the river in the night train until he came to a large town named Burlington in the State of Iowa. There a bridge went over the river, and the railroad tracks joined those of a trunk line and ran eastward toward Chicago; but Hugh did not continue his journey on that night. Getting off the train he went to a nearby hotel and took a room for the night.

It was a cool clear evening and Hugh was restless. The town of Burlington, a prosperous place in the midst of a rich farming country, overwhelmed him with its stir and bustle. For the first time he saw brick-paved streets and streets lighted with lamps. Although it was nearly ten o'clock at night when he arrived, people still walked about in the streets and many stores were open.

The hotel where he had taken a room faced the railroad tracks and stood at the corner of a brightly lighted street. When he had been shown to his room Hugh sat for a half hour by an open window, and then as he could not sleep, decided to go for a walk. For a time he walked in the streets where the people stood about before the doors of the stores but, as his tall figure attracted attention and he felt people staring at him, he went presently into a side street.

In a few minutes he became utterly lost. He went through what seemed to him miles of streets lined with frame and brick houses, and occasionally passed people, but was too timid and embarrassed to ask his way. The street climbed upward and after a time he got into open country and followed a road that ran along a cliff overlooking the Mississippi River. The night was clear and the sky brilliant with stars. In the open, away from the multitude of houses, he no longer felt awkward and afraid, and went cheerfully along. After a time he stopped and stood facing the river. Standing on a high cliff and with a grove of trees at his back, the stars seemed to have all gathered in the eastern sky. Below him the water of the river reflected the stars. They seemed to be making a pathway for him into the East.

The tall Missouri countryman sat down on a log near the edge of the cliff and tried to see the water in the river below. Nothing was visible but a bed of stars that danced and twinkled in the darkness. He had made his way to a place far above the railroad bridge, but presently a through passenger train from the West passed over it and the lights of the train looked also like stars, stars that moved and beckoned and that seemed to fly like flocks of birds out of the West into the East.

For several hours Hugh sat on the log in the darkness. He decided that it was hopeless for him to find his way back to the hotel, and was glad of the excuse for staying abroad. His body for the first time in his life felt light and strong and his mind was feverishly awake. A buggy in which sat a young man and woman went along the road at his back, and after the voices had died away silence came, broken only at long intervals during the hours when he sat thinking of his future by the barking of a dog in some distant house or the churning of the paddle-wheels of a passing river boat.

All of the early formative years of Hugh McVey's life had been spent within sound of the lapping of the waters of the Mississippi River. He had seen it in the hot summer when the water receded and the mud lay baked and cracked along the edge of the water; in the spring when the floods raged and the water went whirling past, bearing tree logs and even parts of houses; in the winter when the water looked deathly cold and ice floated past; and in the fall when it was quiet and still and lovely, and seemed to have sucked an almost human quality of warmth out of the red trees that lined its shores. Hugh had spent hours and days sitting or lying in the grass beside the river. The fishing shack in which he had lived with his father until he was fourteen years old was within a half dozen long strides of the river's edge, and the boy had often been left there alone for a week at a time. When his father had gone for a trip on a lumber raft or to work for a few days on some farm in the country back

from the river, the boy, left often without money and with but a few loaves of bread, went fishing when he was hungry and when he was not did nothing but idle the days away in the grass on the river bank. Boys from the town came sometimes to spend an hour with him, but in their presence he was embarrassed and a little annoyed. He wanted to be left alone with his dreams. One of the boys, a sickly, pale, undeveloped lad of ten, often stayed with him through an entire summer afternoon. He was the son of a merchant in the town and grew quickly tired when he tried to follow other boys about. On the river bank he lay beside Hugh in silence. The two got into Hugh's boat and went fishing and the merchant's son grew animated and talked. He taught Hugh to write his own name and to read a few words. The shyness that kept them apart had begun to break down, when the merchant's son caught some childhood disease and died.

In the darkness above the cliff that night in Burlington Hugh remembered things concerning his boyhood that had not come back to his mind in years. The very thoughts that had passed through his mind during those long days of idling on the river bank came streaming back.

After his fourteenth year when he went to work at the railroad station Hugh had stayed away from the river. With his work at the station, and in the garden back of Sarah Shepard's house, and the lessons in the afternoons, he had little idle time. On Sundays however things were different. Sarah Shepard did not go to church after she came to Mudcat Landing, but she would have no work done on Sundays. On Sunday afternoons in the summer she and her husband sat in chairs beneath a tree beside the house and went to sleep. Hugh got into the habit of going off by himself. He wanted to sleep also, but did not dare. He went along the river bank by the road that ran south from the town, and when he had followed it two or three miles, turned into a grove of trees and lay down in the shade.

The long summer Sunday afternoons had been delightful times for Hugh, so delightful that he finally gave them up, fearing they might lead him to take up again his old sleepy way of life. Now as he sat in the darkness above the same river he had gazed on through the long Sunday afternoons, a spasm of something like loneliness swept over him. For the first time he thought about leaving the river country and going into a new land with a keen feeling of regret.

On the Sunday afternoons in the woods south of Mudcat Landing Hugh had lain perfectly still in the grass for hours. The smell of dead fish that had always been present about the shack where he spent his boyhood, was gone and there were no swarms of flies. Above his head a breeze played through the branches of the trees, and insects sang in the grass. Everything about him was clean. A lovely stillness pervaded the river and the woods. He lay on his belly and gazed down over the river out of sleep-heavy eyes into hazy distances. Half formed thoughts passed like visions through his mind. He dreamed, but his dreams were unformed and vaporous. For hours the half dead, half alive state into which he had got, persisted. He did not sleep but lay in a land between sleeping and waking. Pictures formed in his mind. The clouds that floated in the sky above the river took on strange, grotesque shapes. They began to move. One of the clouds separated itself from the others. It moved swiftly away into the dim distance and then returned. It became a half human thing and seemed to be marshaling the other clouds. Under its influence they became agitated and moved restlessly about. Out of the body of the most active of the clouds long vaporous arms were extended. They pulled and hauled at the other clouds making them also restless and agitated.

Hugh's mind, as he sat in the darkness on the cliff above the river that night in Burlington, was deeply stirred. Again he was a boy lying in the woods above his river, and the visions that had come to him there returned with startling clearness. He got off the log and lying in the wet grass, closed his eyes. His body became warm.

Hugh thought his mind had gone out of his body and up into the sky to join the clouds and the stars, to play with them. From the sky he thought he looked down on the earth and saw rolling fields, hills and forests. He had no part in the lives of the men and women of the earth, but was torn away from them, left to stand by himself. From his place in the sky above the earth he saw the great river going majestically along. For a time it was quiet and contemplative as the sky had been when he

was a boy down below lying on his belly in the wood. He saw men pass in boats and could hear their voices dimly. A great quiet prevailed and he looked abroad beyond the wide expanse of the river and saw fields and towns. They were all hushed and still. An air of waiting hung over them. And then the river was whipped into action by some strange unknown force, something that had come out of a distant place, out of the place to which the cloud had gone and from which it had returned to stir and agitate the other clouds.

The river now went tearing along. It overflowed its banks and swept over the land, uprooting trees and forests and towns. The white faces of drowned men and children, borne along by the flood, looked up into the mind's eye of the man Hugh, who, in the moment of his setting out into the definite world of struggle and defeat, had let himself slip back into the vaporous dreams of his boyhood.

As he lay in the wet grass in the darkness on the cliff Hugh tried to force his way back to consciousness, but for a long time was unsuccessful. He rolled and writhed about and his lips muttered words. It was useless. His mind also was swept away. The clouds of which he felt himself a part flew across the face of the sky. They blotted out the sun from the earth, and darkness descended on the land, on the troubled towns, on the hills that were torn open, on the forests that were destroyed, on the peace and quiet of all places. In the country stretching away from the river where all had been peace and quiet, all was now agitation and unrest. Houses were destroyed and instantly rebuilt. People gathered in whirling crowds.

The dreaming man felt himself a part of something significant and terrible that was happening to the earth and to the peoples of the earth. Again he struggled to awake, to force himself back out of the dream world into consciousness. When he did awake, day was breaking and he sat on the very edge of the cliff that looked down upon the Mississippi River, gray now in the dim morning light.

The towns in which Hugh lived during the first three years after he began his eastward journey were all small places containing a few hundred people, and were scattered through Illinois, Indiana and western Ohio. All of the people among whom he worked and lived during that time were farmers and laborers. In the spring of the first year of his wandering he passed through the city of Chicago and spent two hours there, going in and out at the same railroad station.

He was not tempted to become a city man. The huge commercial city at the foot of Lake Michigan, because of its commanding position in the very center of a vast farming empire, had already become gigantic. He never forgot the two hours he spent standing in the station in the heart of the city and walking in the street adjoining the station. It was evening when he came into the roaring, clanging place. On the long wide plains west of the city he saw farmers at work with their spring plowing as the train went flying along. Presently the farms grew small and the whole prairie dotted with towns. In these the train did not stop but ran into a crowded network of streets filled with multitudes of people. When he got into the big dark station Hugh saw thousands of people rushing about like disturbed insects. Unnumbered thousands of people were going out of the city at the end of their day of work and trains waited to take them to towns on the prairies. They came in droves, hurrying along like distraught cattle, over a bridge and into the station. The in-bound crowds that had alighted from through trains coming from cities of the East and West climbed up a stairway to the street, and those that were out-bound tried to descend by the same stairway and at the same time. The result was a whirling churning mass of humanity. Every one pushed and crowded his way along. Men swore, women grew angry, and children cried. Near the doorway that opened into the street a long line of cab drivers shouted and roared.

Hugh looked at the people who were whirled along past him, and shivered with the nameless fear of multitudes, common to country boys in the city. When the rush of people had a little subsided he went out of the station and, walking across a narrow street, stood by a brick store building. Presently the rush of people began again, and again men, women, and boys came hurrying across the bridge and ran wildly in at the doorway leading into the station. They came in waves as water washes along a beach during a storm. Hugh had a feeling that if he were by some chance to get caught in the

crowd he would be swept away into some unknown and terrible place. Waiting until the rush had a little subsided, he went across the street and on to the bridge to look at the river that flowed past the station. It was narrow and filled with ships, and the water looked gray and dirty. A pall of black smoke covered the sky. From all sides of him and even in the air above his head a great clatter and roar of bells and whistles went on.

With the air of a child venturing into a dark forest Hugh went a little way into one of the streets that led westward from the station. Again he stopped and stood by a building. Near at hand a group of young city roughs stood smoking and talking before a saloon. Out of a nearby building came a young girl who approached and spoke to one of them. The man began to swear furiously. "You tell her I'll come in there in a minute and smash her face," he said, and, paying no more attention to the girl, turned to stare at Hugh. All of the young men lounging before the saloon turned to stare at the tall countryman. They began to laugh and one of them walked quickly toward him.

Hugh ran along the street and into the station followed by the shouts of the young roughs. He did not venture out again, and when his train was ready, got aboard and went gladly out of the great complex dwelling-place of modern Americans.

Hugh went from town to town always working his way eastward, always seeking the place where happiness was to come to him and where he was to achieve companionship with men and women. He cut fence posts in a forest on a large farm in Indiana, worked in the fields, and in one place was a section hand on the railroad.

On a farm in Indiana, some forty miles east of Indianapolis, he was for the first time powerfully touched by the presence of a woman. She was the daughter of the farmer who was Hugh's employer, and was an alert, handsome woman of twenty-four who had been a school teacher but had given up the work because she was about to be married. Hugh thought the man who was to marry her the most fortunate being in the world. He lived in Indianapolis and came by train to spend the week-ends at the farm. The woman prepared for his coming by putting on a white dress and fastening a rose in her hair. The two people walked about in an orchard beside the house or went for a ride along the country roads. The young man, who, Hugh had been told, worked in a bank, wore stiff white collars, a black suit and a black derby hat.

On the farm Hugh worked in the field with the farmer and ate at table with his family, but did not get acquainted with them. On Sunday when the young man came he took the day off and went into a nearby town. The courtship became a matter very close to him and he lived through the excitement of the weekly visits as though he had been one of the principals. The daughter of the house, sensing the fact that the silent farm hand was stirred by her presence, became interested in him. Sometimes in the evening as he sat on a little porch before the house, she came to join him, and sat looking at him with a peculiarly detached and interested air. She tried to make talk, but Hugh answered all her advances so briefly and with such a half frightened manner that she gave up the attempt. One Saturday evening when her sweetheart had come she took him for a ride in the family carriage, and Hugh concealed himself in the hay loft of the barn to wait for their return.

Hugh had never seen or heard a man express in any way his affection for a woman. It seemed to him a terrifically heroic thing to do and he hoped by concealing himself in the barn to see it done. It was a bright moonlight night and he waited until nearly eleven o'clock before the lovers returned. In the hayloft there was an opening high up under the roof. Because of his great height he could reach and pull himself up, and when he had done so, found a footing on one of the beams that formed the framework of the barn. The lovers stood unhitching the horse in the barnyard below. When the city man had led the horse into the stable he hurried quickly out again and went with the farmer's daughter along a path toward the house. The two people laughed and pulled at each other like children. They grew silent and when they had come near the house, stopped by a tree to embrace. Hugh saw the man take the woman into his arms and hold her tightly against his body. He was so excited that he nearly fell off the beam. His imagination was inflamed and he tried to picture himself in the position of the

young city man. His fingers gripped the boards to which he clung and his body trembled. The two figures standing in the dim light by the tree became one. For a long time they clung tightly to each other and then drew apart. They went into the house and Hugh climbed down from his place on the beam and lay in the hay. His body shook as with a chill and he was half ill of jealousy, anger, and an overpowering sense of defeat. It did not seem to him at the moment that it was worth while for him to go further east or to try to find a place where he would be able to mingle freely with men and women, or where such a wonderful thing as had happened to the man in the barnyard below might happen to him.

Hugh spent the night in the hayloft and at daylight crept out and went into a nearby town. He returned to the farmhouse late on Monday when he was sure the city man had gone away. In spite of the protest of the farmer he packed his clothes at once and declared his intention of leaving. He did not wait for the evening meal but hurried out of the house. When he got into the road and had started to walk away, he looked back and saw the daughter of the house standing at an open door and looking at him. Shame for what he had done on the night before swept over him. For a moment he stared at the woman who, with an intense, interested air stared back at him, and then putting down his head he hurried away. The woman watched him out of sight and later, when her father stormed about the house, blaming Hugh for leaving so suddenly and declaring the tall Missourian was no doubt a drunkard who wanted to go off on a drunk, she had nothing to say. In her own heart she knew what was the matter with her father's farm hand and was sorry he had gone before she had more completely exercised her power over him.

None of the towns Hugh visited during his three years of wandering approached realization of the sort of life Sarah Shepard had talked to him about. They were all very much alike. There was a main street with a dozen stores on each side, a blacksmith shop, and perhaps an elevator for the storage of grain. All day the town was deserted, but in the evening the citizens gathered on Main Street. On the sidewalks before the stores young farm hands and clerks sat on store boxes or on the curbing. They did not pay any attention to Hugh who, when he went to stand near them, remained silent and kept himself in the background. The farm hands talked of their work and boasted of the number of bushels of corn they could pick in a day, or of their skill in plowing. The clerks were intent upon playing practical jokes which pleased the farm hands immensely. While one of them talked loudly of his skill in his work a clerk crept out at the door of one of the stores and approached him. He held a pin in his hand and with it jabbed the talker in the back. The crowd yelled and shouted with delight. If the victim became angry a quarrel started, but this did not often happen. Other men came to join the party and the joke was told to them. "Well, you should have seen the look on his face. I thought I would die," one of the bystanders declared.

Hugh got a job with a carpenter who specialized in the building of barns and stayed with him all through one fall. Later he went to work as a section hand on a railroad. Nothing happened to him. He was like one compelled to walk through life with a bandage over his eyes. On all sides of him, in the towns and on the farms, an undercurrent of life went on that did not touch him. In even the smallest of the towns, inhabited only by farm laborers, a quaint interesting civilization was being developed. Men worked hard but were much in the open air and had time to think. Their minds reached out toward the solution of the mystery of existence. The schoolmaster and the country lawyer read Tom Paine's "Age of Reason" and Bellamy's "Looking Backward." They discussed these books with their fellows. There was a feeling, ill expressed, that America had something real and spiritual to offer to the rest of the world. Workmen talked to each other of the new tricks of their trades, and after hours of discussion of some new way to cultivate corn, shape a horseshoe or build a barn, spoke of God and his intent concerning man. Long drawn out discussions of religious beliefs and the political destiny of America were carried on.

And across the background of these discussions ran tales of action in a sphere outside the little world in which the inhabitants of the towns lived. Men who had been in the Civil War and who had

climbed fighting over hills and in the terror of defeat had swum wide rivers, told the tale of their adventures.

In the evening, after his day of work in the field or on the railroad with the section hands, Hugh did not know what to do with himself. That he did not go to bed immediately after the evening meal was due to the fact that he looked upon his tendency to sleep and to dream as an enemy to his development; and a peculiarly persistent determination to make something alive and worth while out of himself—the result of the five years of constant talking on the subject by the New England woman—had taken possession of him. "I'll find the right place and the right people and then I'll begin," he continually said to himself.

And then, worn out with weariness and loneliness, he went to bed in one of the little hotels or boarding houses where he lived during those years, and his dreams returned. The dream that had come that night as he lay on the cliff above the Mississippi River near the town of Burlington, came back time after time. He sat upright in bed in the darkness of his room and after he had driven the cloudy, vague sensation out of his brain, was afraid to go to sleep again. He did not want to disturb the people of the house and so got up and dressed and without putting on his shoes walked up and down in the room. Sometimes the room he occupied had a low ceiling and he was compelled to stoop. He crept out of the house carrying his shoes in his hand and sat down on the sidewalk to put them on. In all the towns he visited, people saw him walking alone through the streets late at night or in the early hours of the morning. Whispers concerning the matter ran about. The story of what was spoken of as his queerness came to the men with whom he worked, and they found themselves unable to talk freely and naturally in his presence. At the noon hour when the men ate the lunch they had carried to work, when the boss was gone and it was customary among the workers to talk of their own affairs, they went off by themselves. Hugh followed them about. They went to sit under a tree, and when Hugh came to stand nearby, they became silent or the more vulgar and shallow among them began to show off. While he worked with a half dozen other men as a section hand on the railroad, two men did all the talking. Whenever the boss went away an old man who had a reputation as a wit told stories concerning his relations with women. A young man with red hair took the cue from him. The two men talked loudly and kept looking at Hugh. The younger of the two wits turned to another workman who had a weak, timid face. "Well, you," he cried, "what about your old woman? What about her? Who is the father of your son? Do you dare tell?"

In the towns Hugh walked about in the evening and tried always to keep his mind fixed on definite things. He felt that humanity was for some unknown reason drawing itself away from him, and his mind turned back to the figure of Sarah Shepard. He remembered that she had never been without things to do. She scrubbed her kitchen floor and prepared food for cooking; she washed, ironed, kneaded dough for bread, and mended clothes. In the evening, when she made the boy read to her out of one of the school books or do sums on a slate, she kept her hands busy knitting socks for him or for her husband. Except when something had crossed her so that she scolded and her face grew red, she was always cheerful. When the boy had nothing to do at the station and had been sent by the station master to work about the house, to draw water from the cistern for a family washing, or pull weeds in the garden, he heard the woman singing as she went about the doing of her innumerable petty tasks. Hugh decided that he also must do small tasks, fix his mind upon definite things. In the town where he was employed as a section hand, the cloud dream in which the world became a whirling, agitated center of disaster came to him almost every night. Winter came on and he walked through the streets at night in the darkness and through the deep snow. He was almost frozen; but as the whole lower part of his body was habitually cold he did not much mind the added discomfort, and so great was the reserve of strength in his big frame that the loss of sleep did not affect his ability to labor all day without effort.

Hugh went into one of the residence streets of the town and counted the pickets in the fences before the houses. He returned to the hotel and made a calculation as to the number of pickets in all

the fences in town. Then he got a rule at the hardware store and carefully measured the pickets. He tried to estimate the number of pickets that could be cut out of certain sized trees and that gave his mind another opening. He counted the number of trees in every street in town. He learned to tell at a glance and with relative accuracy how much lumber could be cut out of a tree. He built imaginary houses with lumber cut from the trees that lined the streets. He even tried to figure out a way to utilize the small limbs cut from the tops of the trees, and one Sunday went into the wood back of the town and cut a great armful of twigs, which he carried to his room and later with great patience wove into the form of a basket.

BOOK TWO

CHAPTER III

Bidwell, Ohio, was an old town as the ages of towns go in the Central West, long before Hugh McVey, in his search for a place where he could penetrate the wall that shut him off from humanity, went there to live and to try to work out his problem. It is a busy manufacturing town now and has a population of nearly a hundred thousand people; but the time for the telling of the story of its sudden and surprising growth has not yet come.

From the beginning Bidwell has been a prosperous place. The town lies in the valley of a deep, rapid-flowing river that spreads out just above the town, becomes for the time wide and shallow, and goes singing swiftly along over stones. South of the town the river not only spreads out, but the hills recede. A wide flat valley stretches away to the north. In the days before the factories came the land immediately about town was cut up into small farms devoted to fruit and berry raising, and beyond the area of small farms lay larger tracts that were immensely productive and that raised huge crops of wheat, corn, and cabbage.

When Hugh was a boy sleeping away his days in the grass beside his father's fishing shack by the Mississippi River, Bidwell had already emerged out of the hardships of pioneer days. On the farms that lay in the wide valley to the north the timber had been cut away and the stumps had all been rooted out of the ground by a generation of men that had passed. The soil was easy to cultivate and had lost little of its virgin fertility. Two railroads, the Lake Shore and Michigan Central—later a part of the great New York Central System—and a less important coal-carrying road, called the Wheeling and Lake Erie, ran through the town. Twenty-five hundred people lived then in Bidwell. They were for the most part descendants of the pioneers who had come into the country by boat through the Great Lakes or by wagon roads over the mountains from the States of New York and Pennsylvania.

The town stood on a sloping incline running up from the river, and the Lake Shore and Michigan Central Railroad had its station on the river bank at the foot of Main Street. The Wheeling Station was a mile away to the north. It was to be reached by going over a bridge and along a piked road that even then had begun to take on the semblance of a street. A dozen houses had been built facing Turner's Pike and between these were berry fields and an occasional orchard planted to cherry, peach or apple trees. A hard path went down to the distant station beside the road, and in the evening this path, wandering along under the branches of the fruit trees that extended out over the farm fences, was a favorite walking place for lovers.

The small farms lying close about the town of Bidwell raised berries that brought top prices in the two cities, Cleveland and Pittsburgh, reached by its two railroads, and all of the people of the town who were not engaged in one of the trades—in shoe making, carpentry, horse shoeing, house painting or the like—or who did not belong to the small merchant and professional classes, worked in summer on the land. On summer mornings, men, women and children went into the fields. In the early spring when planting went on and all through late May, June and early July when berries and fruit began to ripen, every one was rushed with work and the streets of the town were deserted. Every one went to the fields. Great hay wagons loaded with children, laughing girls, and sedate women set out from Main Street at dawn. Beside them walked tall boys, who pelted the girls with green apples and cherries from the trees along the road, and men who went along behind smoking their morning pipes and talking of the prevailing prices of the products of their fields. In the town after they had gone a Sabbath quiet prevailed. The merchants and clerks loitered in the shade of the awnings before the doors of the stores, and only their wives and the wives of the two or three rich men in town came to buy and to disturb their discussions of horse racing, politics and religion.

In the evening when the wagons came home, Bidwell awoke. The tired berry pickers walked home from the fields in the dust of the roads swinging their dinner pails. The wagons creaked at their heels, piled high with boxes of berries ready for shipment. In the stores after the evening meal crowds gathered. Old men lit their pipes and sat gossiping along the curbing at the edge of the sidewalks on Main Street; women with baskets on their arms did the marketing for the next day's living; the young men put on stiff white collars and their Sunday clothes, and girls, who all day had been crawling over the fields between the rows of berries or pushing their way among the tangled masses of raspberry bushes, put on white dresses and walked up and down before the men. Friendships begun between boys and girls in the fields ripened into love. Couples walked along residence streets under the trees and talked with subdued voices. They became silent and embarrassed. The bolder ones kissed. The end of the berry picking season brought each year a new outbreak of marriages to the town of Bidwell.

In all the towns of mid-western America it was a time of waiting. The country having been cleared and the Indians driven away into a vast distant place spoken of vaguely as the West, the Civil War having been fought and won, and there being no great national problems that touched closely their lives, the minds of men were turned in upon themselves. The soul and its destiny was spoken of openly on the streets. Robert Ingersoll came to Bidwell to speak in Terry's Hall, and after he had gone the question of the divinity of Christ for months occupied the minds of the citizens. The ministers preached sermons on the subject and in the evening it was talked about in the stores. Every one had something to say. Even Charley Mook, who dug ditches, who stuttered so that not a half dozen people in town could understand him, expressed his opinion.

In all the great Mississippi Valley each town came to have a character of its own, and the people who lived in the towns were to each other like members of a great family. The individual idiosyncrasies of each member of the great family stood forth. A kind of invisible roof beneath which every one lived spread itself over each town. Beneath the roof boys and girls were born, grew up, quarreled, fought, and formed friendships with their fellows, were introduced into the mysteries of love, married, and became the fathers and mothers of children, grew old, sickened, and died.

Within the invisible circle and under the great roof every one knew his neighbor and was known to him. Strangers did not come and go swiftly and mysteriously and there was no constant and confusing roar of machinery and of new projects afoot. For the moment mankind seemed about to take time to try to understand itself.

In Bidwell there was a man named Peter White who was a tailor and worked hard at his trade, but who once or twice a year got drunk and beat his wife. He was arrested each time and had to pay a fine, but there was a general understanding of the impulse that led to the beating. Most of the women knowing the wife sympathized with Peter. "She is a noisy thing and her jaw is never still," the wife of Henry Teeters, the grocer, said to her husband. "If he gets drunk it's only to forget he's married to her. Then he goes home to sleep it off and she begins jawing at him. He stands it as long as he can. It takes a fist to shut up that woman. If he strikes her it's the only thing he can do."

Allie Mulberry the half-wit was one of the highlights of life in the town. He lived with his mother in a tumble-down house at the edge of town on Medina Road. Beside being a half-wit he had something the matter with his legs. They were trembling and weak and he could only move them with great difficulty. On summer afternoons when the streets were deserted, he hobbled along Main Street with his lower jaw hanging down. Allie carried a large club, partly for the support of his weak legs and partly to scare off dogs and mischievous boys. He liked to sit in the shade with his back against a building and whittle, and he liked to be near people and have his talent as a whittler appreciated. He made fans out of pieces of pine, long chains of wooden beads, and he once achieved a singular mechanical triumph that won him wide renown. He made a ship that would float in a beer bottle half filled with water and laid on its side. The ship had sails and three tiny wooden sailors who stood at attention with their hands to their caps in salute. After it was constructed and put into the bottle it was too large to be taken out through the neck. How Allie got it in no one ever knew. The clerks

and merchants who crowded about to watch him at work discussed the matter for days. It became a never-ending wonder among them. In the evening they spoke of the matter to the berry pickers who came into the stores, and in the eyes of the people of Bidwell Allie Mulberry became a hero. The bottle, half-filled with water and securely corked, was laid on a cushion in the window of Hunter's Jewelry Store. As it floated about on its own little ocean crowds gathered to look at it. Over the bottle was a sign with the words—"Carved by Allie Mulberry of Bidwell"—prominently displayed. Below these words a query had been printed. "How Did He Get It Into The Bottle?" was the question asked. The bottle stayed in the window for months and merchants took the traveling men who visited them, to see it. Then they escorted their guests to where Allie, with his back against the wall of a building and his club beside him, was at work on some new creation of the whittler's art. The travelers were impressed and told the tale abroad. Allie's fame spread to other towns. "He has a good brain," the citizen of Bidwell said, shaking his head. "He don't appear to know very much, but look what he does! He must be carrying all sorts of notions around inside of his head."

Jane Orange, widow of a lawyer, and with the single exception of Thomas Butterworth, a farmer who owned over a thousand acres of land and lived with his daughter on a farm a mile south of town, the richest person in town, was known to every one in Bidwell, but was not liked. She was called stingy and it was said that she and her husband had cheated every one with whom they had dealings in order to get their start in life. The town ached for the privilege of doing what they called "bringing them down a peg." Jane's husband had once been the Bidwell town attorney and later had charge of the settlement of an estate belonging to Ed Lucas, a farmer who died leaving two hundred acres of land and two daughters. The farmer's daughters, every one said, "came out at the small end of the horn," and John Orange began to grow rich. It was said he was worth fifty thousand dollars. All during the latter part of his life the lawyer went to the city of Cleveland on business every week, and when he was at home and even in the hottest weather he went about dressed in a long black coat. When she went to the stores to buy supplies for her house Jane Orange was watched closely by the merchants. She was suspected of carrying away small articles that could be slipped into the pockets of her dress. One afternoon in Toddmore's grocery, when she thought no one was looking, she took a half dozen eggs out of a basket and looking quickly around to be sure she was unobserved, put them into her dress pocket. Harry Toddmore, the grocer's son who had seen the theft, said nothing, but went unobserved out at the back door. He got three or four clerks from other stores and they waited for Jane Orange at a corner. When she came along they hurried out and Harry Toddmore fell against her. Throwing out his hand he struck the pocket containing the eggs a quick, sharp blow. Jane Orange turned and hurried away toward home, but as she half ran through Main Street clerks and merchants came out of the stores, and from the assembled crowd a voice called attention to the fact that the contents of the stolen eggs having run down the inside of her dress and over her stockings began to make a stream on the sidewalk. A pack of town dogs excited by the shouts of the crowd ran at her heels, barking and sniffing at the yellow stream that dripped from her shoes.

An old man with a long white beard came to Bidwell to live. He had been a carpet-bag Governor of a southern state in the reconstruction days after the Civil War and had made money. He bought a house on Turner's Pike close beside the river and spent his days puttering about in a small garden. In the evening he came across the bridge into Main Street and went to loaf in Birdie Spink's drug store. He talked with great frankness and candor of his life in the South during the terrible time when the country was trying to emerge from the black gloom of defeat, and brought to the Bidwell men a new point of view on their old enemies, the "Rebs."

The old man—the name by which he had introduced himself in Bidwell was that of Judge Horace Hanby—believed in the manliness and honesty of purpose of the men he had for a time governed and who had fought a long grim war with the North, with the New Englanders and sons of New Englanders from the West and Northwest. "They're all right," he said with a grin. "I cheated them and made some money, but I liked them. Once a crowd of them came to my house and threatened to

kill me and I told them that I did not blame them very much, so they let me alone." The judge, an ex-politician from the city of New York who had been involved in some affair that made it uncomfortable for him to return to live in that city, grew prophetic and philosophic after he came to live in Bidwell. In spite of the doubt every one felt concerning his past, he was something of a scholar and a reader of books, and won respect by his apparent wisdom. "Well, there's going to be a new war here," he said. "It won't be like the Civil War, just shooting off guns and killing peoples' bodies. At first it's going to be a war between individuals to see to what class a man must belong; then it is going to be a long, silent war between classes, between those who have and those who can't get. It'll be the worst war of all."

The talk of Judge Hanby, carried along and elaborated almost every evening before a silent, attentive group in the drug store, began to have an influence on the minds of Bidwell young men. At his suggestion several of the town boys, Cliff Bacon, Albert Small, Ed Prawl, and two or three others, began to save money for the purpose of going east to college. Also at his suggestion Tom Butterworth the rich farmer sent his daughter away to school. The old man made many prophecies concerning what would happen in America. "I tell you, the country isn't going to stay as it is," he said earnestly. "In eastern towns the change has already come. Factories are being built and every one is going to work in the factories. It takes an old man like me to see how that changes their lives. Some of the men stand at one bench and do one thing not only for hours but for days and years. There are signs hung up saying they mustn't talk. Some of them make more money than they did before the factories came, but I tell you it's like being in prison. What would you say if I told you all America, all you fellows who talk so big about freedom, are going to be put in a prison, eh?

"And there's something else. In New York there are already a dozen men who are worth a million dollars. Yes, sir, I tell you it's true, a million dollars. What do you think of that, eh?"

Judge Hanby grew excited and, inspired by the absorbed attention of his audience, talked of the sweep of events. In England, he explained, the cities were constantly growing larger, and already almost every one either worked in a factory or owned stock in a factory. "In New England it is getting the same way fast," he explained. "The same thing'll happen here. Farming'll be done with tools. Almost everything now done by hand'll be done by machinery. Some'll grow rich and some poor. The thing is to get educated, yes, sir, that's the thing, to get ready for what's coming. It's the only way. The younger generation has got to be sharper and shrewder."

The words of the old man, who had been in many places and had seen men and cities, were repeated in the streets of Bidwell. The blacksmith and the wheelwright repeated his words when they stopped to exchange news of their affairs before the post-office. Ben Peeler, the carpenter, who had been saving money to buy a house and a small farm to which he could retire when he became too old to climb about on the framework of buildings, used the money instead to send his son to Cleveland to a new technical school. Steve Hunter, the son of Abraham Hunter the Bidwell jeweler, declared that he was going to get up with the times, and when he went into a factory, would go into the office, not into the shop. He went to Buffalo, New York, to attend a business college.

The air of Bidwell began to stir with talk of new times. The evil things said of the new life coming were soon forgotten. The youth and optimistic spirit of the country led it to take hold of the hand of the giant, industrialism, and lead him laughing into the land. The cry, "get on in the world," that ran all over America at that period and that still echoes in the pages of American newspapers and magazines, rang in the streets of Bidwell.

In the harness shop belonging to Joseph Wainsworth it one day struck a new note. The harness maker was a tradesman of the old school and was vastly independent. He had learned his trade after five years' service as apprentice, and had spent an additional five years in going from place to place as a journeyman workman, and felt that he knew his business. Also he owned his shop and his home and had twelve hundred dollars in the bank. At noon one day when he was alone in the shop, Tom Butterworth came in and told him he had ordered four sets of farm work harness from a factory in Philadelphia. "I came in to ask if you'll repair them if they get out of order," he said.

Joe Wainsworth began to fumble with the tools on his bench. Then he turned to look the farmer in the eye and to do what he later spoke of to his cronies as “laying down the law.” “When the cheap things begin to go to pieces take them somewhere else to have them repaired,” he said sharply. He grew furiously angry. “Take the damn things to Philadelphia where you got ‘em,” he shouted at the back of the farmer who had turned to go out of the shop.

Joe Wainsworth was upset and thought about the incident all the afternoon. When farmer-customers came in and stood about to talk of their affairs he had nothing to say. He was a talkative man and his apprentice, Will Sellinger, son of the Bidwell house painter, was puzzled by his silence.

When the boy and the man were alone in the shop, it was Joe Wainsworth’s custom to talk of his days as a journeyman workman when he had gone from place to place working at his trade. If a trace were being stitched or a bridle fashioned, he told how the thing was done at a shop where he had worked in the city of Boston and in another shop at Providence, Rhode Island. Getting a piece of paper he made drawings illustrating the cuts of leather that were made in the other places and the methods of stitching. He claimed to have worked out his own method for doing things, and that his method was better than anything he had seen in all his travels. To the men who came into the shop to loaf during winter afternoons he presented a smiling front and talked of their affairs, of the price of cabbage in Cleveland or the effect of a cold snap on the winter wheat, but alone with the boy, he talked only of harness making. “I don’t say anything about it. What’s the good bragging? Just the same, I could learn something to all the harness makers I’ve ever seen, and I’ve seen the best of them,” he declared emphatically.

During the afternoon, after he had heard of the four factory-made work harnesses brought into what he had always thought of as a trade that belonged to him by the rights of a first-class workman, Joe remained silent for two or three hours. He thought of the words of old Judge Hanby and the constant talk of the new times now coming. Turning suddenly to his apprentice, who was puzzled by his long silence and who knew nothing of the incident that had disturbed his employer, he broke forth into words. He was defiant and expressed his defiance. “Well, then, let ‘em go to Philadelphia, let ‘em go any damn place they please,” he growled, and then, as though his own words had re-established his self-respect, he straightened his shoulders and glared at the puzzled and alarmed boy. “I know my trade and do not have to bow down to any man,” he declared. He expressed the old tradesman’s faith in his craft and the rights it gave the craftsman. “Learn your trade. Don’t listen to talk,” he said earnestly. “The man who knows his trade is a man. He can tell every one to go to the devil.”

CHAPTER IV

Hugh McVey was twenty-three years old when he went to live in Bidwell. The position of telegraph operator at the Wheeling station a mile north of town became vacant and, through an accidental encounter with a former resident of a neighboring town, he got the place.

The Missourian had been at work during the winter in a sawmill in the country near a northern Indiana town. During the evenings he wandered on country roads and in the town streets, but he did not talk to any one. As had happened to him in other places, he had the reputation of being queer. His clothes were worn threadbare and, although he had money in his pockets, he did not buy new ones. In the evening when he went through the town streets and saw the smartly dressed clerks standing before the stores, he looked at his own shabby person and was ashamed to enter. In his boyhood Sarah Shepard had always attended to the buying of his clothes, and he made up his mind that he would go to the place in Michigan to which she and her husband had retired, and pay her a visit. He wanted Sarah Shepard to buy him a new outfit of clothes, but wanted also to talk with her.

Out of the three years of going from place to place and working with other men as a laborer, Hugh had got no big impulse that he felt would mark the road his life should take; but the study of mathematical problems, taken up to relieve his loneliness and to cure his inclination to dreams, was beginning to have an effect on his character. He thought that if he saw Sarah Shepard again he could talk to her and through her get into the way of talking to others. In the sawmill where he worked he answered the occasional remarks made to him by his fellow workers in a slow, hesitating drawl, and his body was still awkward and his gait shambling, but he did his work more quickly and accurately. In the presence of his foster-mother and garbed in new clothes, he believed he could now talk to her in a way that had been impossible during his youth. She would see the change in his character and would be encouraged about him. They would get on to a new basis and he would feel respect for himself in another.

Hugh went to the railroad station to make inquiry regarding the fare to the Michigan town and there had the adventure that upset his plans. As he stood at the window of the ticket office, the ticket seller, who was also the telegraph operator, tried to engage him in conversation. When he had given the information asked, he followed Hugh out of the building and into the darkness of a country railroad station at night, and the two men stopped and stood together beside an empty baggage truck. The ticket agent spoke of the loneliness of life in the town and said he wished he could go back to his own place and be again with his own people. “It may not be any better in my own town, but I know everybody there,” he said. He was curious concerning Hugh as were all the people of the Indiana town, and hoped to get him into talk in order that he might find out why he walked alone at night, why he sometimes worked all evening over books and figures in his room at the country hotel, and why he had so little to say to his fellows. Hoping to fathom Hugh’s silence he abused the town in which they both lived. “Well,” he began, “I guess I understand how you feel. You want to get out of this place.” He explained his own predicament in life. “I got married,” he said. “Already I have three children. Out here a man can make more money railroading than he can in my state, and living is pretty cheap. Just to-day I had an offer of a job in a good town near my own place in Ohio, but I can’t take it. The job only pays forty a month. The town’s all right, one of the best in the northern part of the State, but you see the job’s no good. Lord, I wish I could go. I’d like to live again among people such as live in that part of the country.”

The railroad man and Hugh walked along the street that ran from the station up into the main street of the town. Wanting to meet the advances that had been made by his companion and not knowing how to go about it, Hugh adopted the method he had heard his fellow laborers use with one another. “Well,” he said slowly, “come have a drink.”

The two men went into a saloon and stood by the bar. Hugh made a tremendous effort to overcome his embarrassment. As he and the railroad man drank foaming glasses of beer he explained that he also had once been a railroad man and knew telegraphy, but that for several years he had been doing other work. His companion looked at his shabby clothes and nodded his head. He made a motion with his head to indicate that he wanted Hugh to come with him outside into the darkness. "Well, well," he exclaimed, when they had again got outside and had started along the street toward the station. "I understand now. They've all been wondering about you and I've heard lots of talk. I won't say anything, but I'm going to do something for you."

Hugh went to the station with his new-found friend and sat down in the lighted office. The railroad man got out a sheet of paper and began to write a letter. "I'm going to get you that job," he said. "I'm writing the letter now and I'll get it off on the midnight train. You've got to get on your feet. I was a boozer myself, but I cut it all out. A glass of beer now and then, that's my limit."

He began to talk of the town in Ohio where he proposed to get Hugh the job that would set him up in the world and save him from the habit of drinking, and described it as an earthly paradise in which lived bright, clear-thinking men and beautiful women. Hugh was reminded sharply of the talk he had heard from the lips of Sarah Shepard, when in his youth she spent long evenings telling him of the wonder of her own Michigan and New England towns and people, and contrasted the life lived there with that lived by the people of his own place.

Hugh decided not to try to explain away the mistake made by his new acquaintance, and to accept the offer of assistance in getting the appointment as telegraph operator.

The two men walked out of the station and stood again in the darkness. The railroad man felt like one who has been given the privilege of plucking a human soul out of the darkness of despair. He was full of words that poured from his lips and he assumed a knowledge of Hugh and his character entirely unwarranted by the circumstances. "Well," he exclaimed heartily, "you see I've given you a send-off. I have told them you're a good man and a good operator, but that you will take the place with its small salary because you've been sick and just now can't work very hard." The excited man followed Hugh along the street. It was late and the store lights had been put out. From one of the town's two saloons that lay in their way arose a clatter of voices. The old boyhood dream of finding a place and a people among whom he could, by sitting still and inhaling the air breathed by others, come into a warm closeness with life, came back to Hugh. He stopped before the saloon to listen to the voices within, but the railroad man plucked at his coat sleeve and protested. "Now, now, you're going to cut it out, eh?" he asked anxiously and then hurriedly explained his anxiety. "Of course I know what's the matter with you. Didn't I tell you I've been there myself? You've been working around. I know why that is. You don't have to tell me. If there wasn't something the matter with him, no man who knows telegraphy would work in a sawmill.

"Well, there's no good talking about it," he added thoughtfully. "I've given you a send-off. You're going to cut it out, eh?"

Hugh tried to protest and to explain that he was not addicted to the habit of drinking, but the Ohio man would not listen. "It's all right," he said again, and then they came to the hotel where Hugh lived and he turned to go back to the station and wait for the midnight train that would carry the letter away and that would, he felt, carry also his demand that a fellow-human, who had slipped from the modern path of work and progress should be given a new chance. He felt magnanimous and wonderfully gracious. "It's all right, my boy," he said heartily. "No use talking to me. To-night when you came to the station to ask the fare to that hole of a place in Michigan I saw you were embarrassed. 'What's the matter with that fellow?' I said to myself. I got to thinking. Then I came up town with you and right away you bought me a drink. I wouldn't have thought anything about that if I hadn't been there myself. You'll get on your feet. Bidwell, Ohio, is full of good men. You get in with them and they'll help you and stick by you. You'll like those people. They've got get-up to them. The place you'll work at there is far out of town. It's away out about a mile at a little kind of outside-like place

called Pickleville. There used to be a saloon there and a factory for putting up cucumber pickles, but they've both gone now. You won't be tempted to slip in that place. You'll have a chance to get on your feet. I'm glad I thought of sending you there."

The Wheeling and Lake Erie ran along a little wooded depression that cut across the wide expanse of open farm lands north of the town of Bidwell. It brought coal from the hill country of West Virginia and southeastern Ohio to ports on Lake Erie, and did not pay much attention to the carrying of passengers. In the morning a train consisting of a combined express and baggage car and two passenger coaches went north and west toward the lake, and in the evening the same train returned, bound southeast into the Hills, The Bidwell station of the road was, in an odd way, detached from the town's life. The invisible roof under which the life of the town and the surrounding country was lived did not cover it. As the Indiana railroad man had told Hugh, the station itself stood on a spot known locally as Pickleville. Back of the station there was a small building for the storage of freight and near at hand four or five houses facing Turner's Pike. The pickle factory, now deserted and with its windows gone, stood across the tracks from the station and beside a small stream that ran under a bridge and across country through a grove of trees to the river. On hot summer days a sour, pungent smell arose from the old factory, and at night its presence lent a ghostly flavor to the tiny corner of the world in which lived perhaps a dozen people.

All day and at night an intense persistent silence lay over Pickleville, while in Bidwell a mile away the stir of new life began. In the evenings and on rainy afternoons when men could not work in the fields, old Judge Hanby went along Turner's Pike and across the wagon bridge into Bidwell and sat in a chair at the back of Birdie Spink's drug store. He talked. Men came in to listen to him and went out. New talk ran through the town. A new force that was being born into American life and into life everywhere all over the world was feeding on the old dying individualistic life. The new force stirred and aroused the people. It met a need that was universal. It was meant to seal men together, to wipe out national lines, to walk under seas and fly through the air, to change the entire face of the world in which men lived. Already the giant that was to be king in the place of old kings was calling his servants and his armies to serve him. He used the methods of old kings and promised his followers booty and gain. Everywhere he went unchallenged, surveying the land, raising a new class of men to positions of power. Railroads had already been pushed out across the plains; great coal fields from which was to be taken food to warm the blood in the body of the giant were being opened up; iron fields were being discovered; the roar and clatter of the breathing of the terrible new thing, half hideous, half beautiful in its possibilities, that was for so long to drown the voices and confuse the thinking of men, was heard not only in the towns but even in lonely farm houses, where its willing servants, the newspapers and magazines, had begun to circulate in ever increasing numbers. At the town of Gibsonville, near Bidwell, Ohio, and at Lima and Finley, Ohio, oil and gas fields were discovered. At Cleveland, Ohio, a precise, definite-minded man named Rockefeller bought and sold oil. From the first he served the new thing well and he soon found others to serve with him. The Morgans, Fricks, Goulds, Carnegies, Vanderbilts, servants of the new king, princes of the new faith, merchants all, a new kind of rulers of men, defied the world-old law of class that puts the merchant below the craftsman, and added to the confusion of men by taking on the air of creators. They were merchants glorified and dealt in giant things, in the lives of men and in mines, forests, oil and gas fields, factories, and railroads.

And all over the country, in the towns, the farm houses, and the growing cities of the new country, people stirred and awakened. Thought and poetry died or passed as a heritage to feeble fawning men who also became servants of the new order. Serious young men in Bidwell and in other American towns, whose fathers had walked together on moonlight nights along Turner's Pike to talk of God, went away to technical schools. Their fathers had walked and talked and thoughts had grown up in them. The impulse had reached back to their father's fathers on moonlit roads of England, Germany, Ireland, France, and Italy, and back of these to the moonlit hills of Judea where shepherds

talked and serious young men, John and Matthew and Jesus, caught the drift of the talk and made poetry of it; but the serious-minded sons of these men in the new land were swept away from thinking and dreaming. From all sides the voice of the new age that was to do definite things shouted at them. Eagerly they took up the cry and ran with it. Millions of voices arose. The clamor became terrible, and confused the minds of all men. In making way for the newer, broader brotherhood into which men are some day to emerge, in extending the invisible roofs of the towns and cities to cover the world, men cut and crushed their way through the bodies of men.

And while the voices became louder and more excited and the new giant walked about making a preliminary survey of the land, Hugh spent his days at the quiet, sleepy railroad station at Pickleville and tried to adjust his mind to the realization of the fact that he was not to be accepted as fellow by the citizens of the new place to which he had come. During the day he sat in the tiny telegraph office or, pulling an express truck to the open window near his telegraph instrument, lay on his back with a sheet of paper propped on his bony knees and did sums. Farmers driving past on Turner's Pike saw him there and talked of him in the stores in town. "He's a queer silent fellow," they said. "What do you suppose he's up to?"

Hugh walked in the streets of Bidwell at night as he had walked in the streets of towns in Indiana and Illinois. He approached groups of men loafing on a street corner and then went hurriedly past them. On quiet streets as he went along under the trees, he saw women sitting in the lamplight in the houses and hungered to have a house and a woman of his own. One afternoon a woman school teacher came to the station to make inquiry regarding the fare to a town in West Virginia. As the station agent was not about Hugh gave her the information she sought and she lingered for a few moments to talk with him. He answered the questions she asked with monosyllables and she soon went away, but he was delighted and looked upon the incident as an adventure. At night he dreamed of the school teacher and when he awoke, pretended she was with him in his bedroom. He put out his hand and touched the pillow. It was soft and smooth as he imagined the cheek of a woman would be. He did not know the school teacher's name but invented one for her. "Be quiet, Elizabeth. Do not let me disturb your sleep," he murmured into the darkness. One evening he went to the house where the school teacher boarded and stood in the shadow of a tree until he saw her come out and go toward Main Street. Then he went by a roundabout way and walked past her on the sidewalk before the lighted stores. He did not look at her, but in passing her dress touched his arm and he was so excited later that he could not sleep and spent half the night walking about and thinking of the wonderful thing that had happened to him.

The ticket, express, and freight agent for the Wheeling and Lake Erie at Bidwell, a man named George Pike, lived in one of the houses near the station, and besides attending to his duties for the railroad company, owned and worked a small farm. He was a slender, alert, silent man with a long drooping mustache. Both he and his wife worked as Hugh had never seen a man and woman work before. Their arrangement of the division of labor was not based on sex but on convenience. Sometimes Mrs. Pike came to the station to sell tickets, load express boxes and trunks on the passenger trains and deliver heavy boxes of freight to draymen and farmers, while her husband worked in the fields back of his house or prepared the evening meal, and sometimes the matter was reversed and Hugh did not see Mrs. Pike for several days at a time.

During the day there was little for the station agent or his wife to do at the station and they disappeared. George Pike had made an arrangement of wires and pulleys connecting the station with a large bell hung on top of his house, and when some one came to the station to receive or deliver freight Hugh pulled at the wire and the bell began to ring. In a few minutes either George Pike or his wife came running from the house or fields, dispatched the business and went quickly away again.

Day after day Hugh sat in a chair by a desk in the station or went outside and walked up and down the station platform. Engines pulling long caravans of coal cars ground past. The brakemen waved their hands to him and then the train disappeared into the grove of trees that grew beside the

creek along which the tracks of the road were laid. In Turner's Pike a creaking farm wagon appeared and then disappeared along the tree-lined road that led to Bidwell. The farmer turned on his wagon seat to stare at Hugh but unlike the railroad men did not wave his hand. Adventurous boys came out along the road from town and climbed, shouting and laughing, over the rafters in the deserted pickle factory across the tracks or went to fish in the creek in the shade of the factory walls. Their shrill voices added to the loneliness of the spot. It became almost unbearable to Hugh. In desperation he turned from the rather meaningless doing of sums and working out of problems regarding the number of fence pickets that could be cut from a tree or the number of steel rails or railroad ties consumed in building a mile of railroad, the innumerable petty problems with which he had been keeping his mind busy, and turned to more definite and practical problems. He remembered an autumn he had put in cutting corn on a farm in Illinois and, going into the station, waved his long arms about, imitating the movements of a man in the act of cutting corn. He wondered if a machine might not be made that would do the work, and tried to make drawings of the parts of such a machine. Feeling his inability to handle so difficult a problem he sent away for books and began the study of mechanics. He joined a correspondence school started by a man in Pennsylvania, and worked for days on the problems the man sent him to do. He asked questions and began a little to understand the mystery of the application of power. Like the other young men of Bidwell he began to put himself into touch with the spirit of the age, but unlike them he did not dream of suddenly acquired wealth. While they embraced new and futile dreams he worked to destroy the tendency to dreams in himself.

Hugh came to Bidwell in the early spring and during May, June and July the quiet station at Pickleville awoke for an hour or two each evening. A certain percentage of the sudden and almost overwhelming increase in express business that came with the ripening of the fruit and berry crop came to the Wheeling, and every evening a dozen express trucks, piled high with berry boxes, waited for the south bound train. When the train came into the station a small crowd had assembled. George Pike and his stout wife worked madly, throwing the boxes in at the door of the express car. Idlers standing about became interested and lent a hand. The engineer climbed out of his locomotive, stretched his legs and crossing a narrow road got a drink from the pump in George Pike's yard.

Hugh walked to the door of his telegraph office and standing in the shadows watched the busy scene. He wanted to take part in it, to laugh and talk with the men standing about, to go to the engineer and ask questions regarding the locomotive and its construction, to help George Pike and his wife, and perhaps cut through their silence and his own enough to become acquainted with them. He thought of all these things but stayed in the shadow of the door that led to the telegraph office until, at a signal given by the train conductor, the engineer climbed into his engine and the train began to move away into the evening darkness. When Hugh came out of his office the station platform was deserted again. In the grass across the tracks and beside the ghostly looking old factory, crickets sang. Tom Wilder, the Bidwell hack driver, had got a traveling man off the train and the dust left by the heels of his team still hung in the air over Turner's Pike. From the darkness that brooded over the trees that grew along the creek beyond the factory came the hoarse croak of frogs. On Turner's Pike a half dozen Bidwell young men accompanied by as many town girls walked along the path beside the road under the trees. They had come to the station to have somewhere to go, had made up a party to come, but now the half unconscious purpose of their coming was apparent. The party split itself up into couples and each strove to get as far away as possible from the others. One of the couples came back along the path toward the station and went to the pump in George Pike's yard. They stood by the pump, laughing and pretending to drink out of a tin cup, and when they got again into the road the others had disappeared. They became silent. Hugh went to the end of the platform and watched as they walked slowly along. He became furiously jealous of the young man who put his arm about the waist of his companion and then, when he turned and saw Hugh staring at him, took it away again.

The telegraph operator went quickly along the platform until he was out of range of the young man's eyes, and, when he thought the gathering darkness would hide him, returned and crept along

the path beside the road after him. Again a hungry desire to enter into the lives of the people about him took possession of the Missourian. To be a young man dressed in a stiff white collar, wearing neatly made clothes, and in the evening to walk about with young girls seemed like getting on the road to happiness. He wanted to run shouting along the path beside the road until he had overtaken the young man and woman, to beg them to take him with them, to accept him as one of themselves, but when the momentary impulse had passed and he returned to the telegraph office and lighted a lamp, he looked at his long awkward body and could not conceive of himself as ever by any chance becoming the thing he wanted to be. Sadness swept over him and his gaunt face, already cut and marked with deep lines, became longer and more gaunt. The old boyhood notion, put into his mind by the words of his foster-mother, Sarah Shepard, that a town and a people could remake him and erase from his body the marks of what he thought of as his inferior birth, began to fade. He tried to forget the people about him and turned with renewed energy to the study of the problems in the books that now lay in a pile upon his desk. His inclination to dreams, balked by the persistent holding of his mind to definite things, began to reassert itself in a new form, and his brain played no more with pictures of clouds and men in agitated movement but took hold of steel, wood, and iron. Dumb masses of materials taken out of the earth and the forests were molded by his mind into fantastic shapes. As he sat in the telegraph office during the day or walked alone through the streets of Bidwell at night, he saw in fancy a thousand new machines, formed by his hands and brain, doing the work that had been done by the hands of men. He had come to Bidwell, not only in the hope that there he would at last find companionship, but also because his mind was really aroused and he wanted leisure to begin trying to do tangible things. When the citizens of Bidwell would not take him into their town life but left him standing to one side, as the tiny dwelling place for men called Pickleville where he lived stood aside out from under the invisible roof of the town, he decided to try to forget men and to express himself wholly in work.

CHAPTER V

Hugh's first inventive effort stirred the town of Bidwell deeply. When word of it ran about, the men who had been listening to the talk of Judge Horace Hanby and whose minds had turned toward the arrival of the new forward-pushing impulse in American life thought they saw in Hugh the instrument of its coming to Bidwell. From the day of his coming to live among them, there had been much curiosity in the stores and houses regarding the tall, gaunt, slow-speaking stranger at Pickleville. George Pike had told Birdie Spinks the druggist how Hugh worked all day over books, and how he made drawings for parts of mysterious machines and left them on his desk in the telegraph office. Birdie Spinks told others and the tale grew. When Hugh walked alone in the streets during the evening and thought no one took account of his presence, hundreds of pairs of curious eyes followed him about.

A tradition in regard to the telegraph operator began to grow up. The tradition made Hugh a gigantic figure, one who walked always on a plane above that on which other men lived. In the imagination of his fellow citizens of the Ohio town, he went about always thinking great thoughts, solving mysterious and intricate problems that had to do with the new mechanical age Judge Hanby talked about to the eager listeners in the drug-store. An alert, talkative people saw among them one who could not talk and whose long face was habitually serious, and could not think of him as having daily to face the same kind of minor problems as themselves.

The Bidwell young man who had come down to the Wheeling station with a group of other young men, who had seen the evening train go away to the south, who had met at the station one of the town girls and had, in order to escape the others and be alone with her, taken her to the pump in George Pike's yard on the pretense of wanting a drink, walked away with her into the darkness of the summer evening with his mind fixed on Hugh. The young man's name was Ed Hall and he was apprentice to Ben Peeler, the carpenter who had sent his son to Cleveland to a technical school. He wanted to marry the girl he had met at the station and did not see how he could manage it on his salary as a carpenter's apprentice. When he looked back and saw Hugh standing on the station platform, he took the arm he had put around the girl's waist quickly away and began to talk. "I'll tell you what," he said earnestly, "if things don't pretty soon get on the stir around here I'm going to get out. I'll go over by Gibsonburg and get a job in the oil fields, that's what I'll do. I got to have more money." He sighed heavily and looked over the girl's head into the darkness. "They say that telegraph fellow back there at the station is up to something," he ventured. "It's all the talk. Birdie Spinks says he is an inventor; says George Pike told him; says he is working all the time on new inventions to do things by machinery; that his passing off as a telegraph operator is only a bluff. Some think maybe he was sent here to see about starting a factory to make one of his inventions, sent by rich men maybe in Cleveland or some other place. Everybody says they'll bet there'll be factories here in Bidwell before very long now. I wish I knew. I don't want to go away if I don't have to, but I got to have more money. Ben Peeler won't never give me a raise so I can get married or nothing. I wish I knew that fellow back there so I could ask him what's up. They say he's smart. I suppose he wouldn't tell me nothing. I wish I was smart enough to invent something and maybe get rich. I wish I was the kind of fellow they say he is."

Ed Hall again put his arm about the girl's waist and walked away. He forgot Hugh and thought of himself and of how he wanted to marry the girl whose young body nestled close to his own—wanted her to be utterly his. For a few hours he passed out of Hugh's growing sphere of influence on the collective thought of the town, and lost himself in the immediate deliciousness of kisses.

And as he passed out of Hugh's influence others came in. On Main Street in the evening every one speculated on the Missourian's purpose in coming to Bidwell. The forty dollars a month paid him by the Wheeling railroad could not have tempted such a man. They were sure of that. Steve Hunter the jeweler's son had returned to town from a course in a business college at Buffalo, New

York, and hearing the talk became interested. Steve had in him the making of a live man of affairs, and he decided to investigate. It was not, however, Steve's method to go at things directly, and he was impressed by the notion, then abroad in Bidwell, that Hugh had been sent to town by some one, perhaps by a group of capitalists who intended to start factories there.

Steve thought he would go easy. In Buffalo, where he had gone to the business college, he had met a girl whose father, E. P. Horn, owned a soap factory; had become acquainted with her at church and had been introduced to her father. The soap maker, an assertive positive man who manufactured a product called Horn's Household Friend Soap, had his own notion of what a young man should be and how he should make his way in the world, and had taken pleasure in talking to Steve. He told the Bidwell jeweler's son of how he had started his own factory with but little money and had succeeded and gave Steve many practical hints on the organization of companies. He talked a great deal of a thing called "control." "When you get ready to start for yourself keep that in mind," he said. "You can sell stock and borrow money at the bank, all you can get, but don't give up control. Hang on to that. That's the way I made my success. I always kept the control."

Steve wanted to marry Ernestine Horn, but felt that he should show what he could do as a business man before he attempted to thrust himself into so wealthy and prominent a family. When he returned to his own town and heard the talk regarding Hugh McVey and his inventive genius, he remembered the soap maker's words regarding control, and repeated them to himself. One evening he walked along Turner's Pike and stood in the darkness by the old pickle factory. He saw Hugh at work under a lamp in the telegraph office and was impressed. "I'll lay low and see what he's up to," he told himself. "If he's got an invention, I'll get up a company. I'll get money in and I'll start a factory. The people here'll tumble over each other to get into a thing like that. I don't believe any one sent him here. I'll bet he's just an inventor. That kind always are queer. I'll keep my mouth shut and watch my chance. If there is anything starts, I'll start it and I'll get into control, that's what I'll do, I'll get into control."

In the country stretching away north beyond the fringe of small berry farms lying directly about town, were other and larger farms. The land that made up these larger farms was also rich and raised big crops. Great stretches of it were planted to cabbage for which a market had been built up in Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Cincinnati. Bidwell was often in derision called Cabbageville by the citizens of nearby towns. One of the largest of the cabbage farms belonged to a man named Ezra French, and was situated on Turner's Pike, two miles from town and a mile beyond the Wheeling station.

On spring evenings when it was dark and silent about the station and when the air was heavy with the smell of new growth and of land fresh-turned by the plow, Hugh got out of his chair in the telegraph office and walked in the soft darkness. He went along Turner's Pike to town, saw groups of men standing on the sidewalks before the stores and young girls walking arm in arm along the street, and then came back to the silent station. Into his long and habitually cold body the warmth of desire began to creep. The spring rains came and soft winds blew down from the hill country to the south. One evening when the moon shone he went around the old pickle factory to where the creek went chattering under leaning willow trees, and as he stood in the heavy shadows by the factory wall, tried to imagine himself as one who had become suddenly clean-limbed, graceful, and agile. A bush grew beside the stream near the factory and he took hold of it with his powerful hands and tore it out by the roots. For a moment the strength in his shoulders and arms gave him an intense masculine satisfaction. He thought of how powerfully he could hold the body of a woman against his body and the spark of the fires of spring that had touched him became a flame. He felt new-made and tried to leap lightly and gracefully across the stream, but stumbled and fell in the water. Later he went soberly back to the station and tried again to lose himself in the study of the problems he had found in his books.

The Ezra French farm lay beside Turner's Pike a mile north of the Wheeling station and contained two hundred acres of land of which a large part was planted to cabbages. It was a profitable

crop to raise and required no more care than corn, but the planting was a terrible task. Thousands of plants that had been raised from seeds planted in a seed-bed back of the barn had to be laboriously transplanted. The plants were tender and it was necessary to handle them carefully. The planter crawled slowly and painfully along, and from the road looked like a wounded beast striving to make his way to a hole in a distant wood. He crawled forward a little and then stopped and hunched himself up into a ball-like mass. Taking the plant, dropped on the ground by one of the plant droppers, he made a hole in the soft ground with a small three-cornered hoe, and with his hands packed the earth about the plant roots. Then he crawled on again.

Ezra the cabbage farmer had come west from one of the New England states and had grown comfortably wealthy, but he would not employ extra labor for the plant setting and the work was done by his sons and daughters. He was a short, bearded man whose leg had been broken in his youth by a fall from the loft of a barn. As it had not mended properly he could do little work and limped painfully about. To the men of Bidwell he was known as something of a wit, and in the winter he went to town every afternoon to stand in the stores and tell the Rabelaisian stories for which he was famous; but when spring came he became restlessly active, and in his own house and on the farm, became a tyrant. During the time of the cabbage setting he drove his sons and daughters like slaves. When in the evening the moon came up, he made them go back to the fields immediately after supper and work until midnight. They went in sullen silence, the girls to limp slowly along dropping the plants out of baskets carried on their arms, and the boys to crawl after them and set the plants. In the half darkness the little group of humans went slowly up and down the long fields. Ezra hitched a horse to a wagon and brought the plants from the seed-bed behind the barn. He went here and there swearing and protesting against every delay in the work. When his wife, a tired little old woman, had finished the evening's work in the house, he made her come also to the fields. "Come, come," he said, sharply, "we need every pair of hands we can get." Although he had several thousand dollars in the Bidwell bank and owned mortgages on two or three neighboring farms, Ezra was afraid of poverty, and to keep his family at work pretended to be upon the point of losing all his possessions. "Now is our chance to save ourselves," he declared. "We must get in a big crop. If we do not work hard now we'll starve." When in the field his sons found themselves unable to crawl longer without resting, and stood up to stretch their tired bodies, he stood by the fence at the field's edge and swore. "Well, look at the mouths I have to feed, you lazies!" he shouted. "Keep at the work. Don't be idling around. In two weeks it'll be too late for planting and then you can rest. Now every plant we set will help to save us from ruin. Keep at the job. Don't be idling around."

In the spring of his second year in Bidwell, Hugh went often in the evening to watch the plant setters at work in the moonlight on the French farm. He did not make his presence known but hid himself in a fence corner behind bushes and watched the workers. As he saw the stooped misshapen figures crawling slowly along and heard the words of the old man driving them like cattle, his heart was deeply touched and he wanted to protest. In the dim light the slowly moving figures of women appeared, and after them came the crouched crawling men. They came down the long row toward him, wriggling into his line of sight like grotesquely misshapen animals driven by some god of the night to the performance of a terrible task. An arm went up. It came down again swiftly. The three-cornered hoe sank into the ground. The slow rhythm of the crawler was broken. He reached with his disengaged hand for the plant that lay on the ground before him and lowered it into the hole the hoe had made. With his fingers he packed the earth about the roots of the plant and then again began the slow crawl forward. There were four of the French boys and the two older ones worked in silence. The younger boys complained. The three girls and their mother, who were attending to the plant dropping, came to the end of the row and turning, went away into the darkness. "I'm going to quit this slavery," one of the younger boys said. "I'll get a job over in town. I hope it's true what they say, that factories are coming."

The four young men came to the end of the row and, as Ezra was not in sight, stood a moment by the fence near where Hugh was concealed. “I’d rather be a horse or a cow than what I am,” the complaining voice went on. “What’s the good being alive if you have to work like this?”

For a moment as he listened to the voices of the complaining workers, Hugh wanted to go to them and ask them to let him share in their labor. Then another thought came. The crawling figures came sharply into his line of vision. He no longer heard the voice of the youngest of the French boys that seemed to come out of the ground. The machine-like swing of the bodies of the plant setters suggested vaguely to his mind the possibility of building a machine that would do the work they were doing. His mind took eager hold of that thought and he was relieved. There had been something in the crawling figures and in the moonlight out of which the voices came that had begun to awaken in his mind the fluttering, dreamy state in which he had spent so much of his boyhood. To think of the possibility of building a plant-setting machine was safer. It fitted into what Sarah Shepard had so often told him was the safe way of life. As he went back through the darkness to the railroad station, he thought about the matter and decided that to become an inventor would be the sure way of placing his feet at last upon the path of progress he was trying to find.

Hugh became absorbed in the notion of inventing a machine that would do the work he had seen the men doing in the field. All day he thought about it. The notion once fixed in his mind gave him something tangible to work upon. In the study of mechanics, taken up in a purely amateur spirit, he had not gone far enough to feel himself capable of undertaking the actual construction of such a machine, but thought the difficulty might be overcome by patience and by experimenting with combinations of wheels, gears and levers whittled out of pieces of wood. From Hunter’s Jewelry Store he got a cheap clock and spent days taking it apart and putting it together again. He dropped the doing of mathematical problems and sent away for books describing the construction of machines. Already the flood of new inventions, that was so completely to change the methods of cultivating the soil in America, had begun to spread over the country, and many new and strange kinds of agricultural implements arrived at the Bidwell freight house of the Wheeling railroad. There Hugh saw a harvesting machine for cutting grain, a mowing machine for cutting hay and a long-nosed strange-looking implement that was intended to root potatoes out of the ground very much after the method pursued by energetic pigs. He studied these carefully. For a time his mind turned away from the hunger for human contact and he was content to remain an isolated figure, absorbed in the workings of his own awakening mind.

An absurd and amusing thing happened. After the impulse to try to invent a plant-setting machine came to him, he went every evening to conceal himself in the fence corner and watch the French family at their labors. Absorbed in watching the mechanical movements of the men who crawled across the fields in the moonlight, he forgot they were human. After he had watched them crawl into sight, turn at the end of the rows, and crawl away again into the hazy light that had reminded him of the dim distances of his own Mississippi River country, he was seized with a desire to crawl after them and to try to imitate their movements. Certain intricate mechanical problems, that had already come into his mind in connection with the proposed machine, he thought could be better understood if he could get the movements necessary to plant setting into his own body. His lips began to mutter words and getting out of the fence corner where he had been concealed he began to crawl across the field behind the French boys. “The down stroke will go so,” he muttered, and bringing up his arm swung it above his head. His fist descended into the soft ground. He had forgotten the rows of new set plants and crawled directly over them, crushing them into the soft ground. He stopped crawling and waved his arm about. He tried to relate his arms to the mechanical arms of the machine that was being created in his mind. Holding one arm stiffly in front of him he moved it up and down. “The stroke will be shorter than that. The machine must be built close to the ground. The wheels and the horses will travel in paths between the rows. The wheels must be broad to provide traction. I will gear from the wheels to get power for the operation of the mechanism,” he said aloud.

Hugh arose and stood in the moonlight in the cabbage field, his arms still going stiffly up and down. The great length of his figure and his arms was accentuated by the wavering uncertain light. The laborers, aware of some strange presence, sprang to their feet and stood listening and looking. Hugh advanced toward them, still muttering words and waving his arms. Terror took hold of the workers. One of the woman plant droppers screamed and ran away across the field, and the others ran crying at her heels. “Don’t do it. Go away,” the older of the French boys shouted, and then he with his brothers also ran.

Hearing the voices Hugh stopped and stared about. The field was empty. Again he lost himself in his mechanical calculations. He went back along the road to the Wheeling station and to the telegraph office where he worked half the night on a rude drawing he was trying to make of the parts of his plant setting machine, oblivious to the fact that he had created a myth that would run through the whole countryside. The French boys and their sisters stoutly declared that a ghost had come into the cabbage fields and had threatened them with death if they did not go away and quit working at night. In a trembling voice their mother backed up their assertion. Ezra French, who had not seen the apparition and did not believe the tale, scented a revolution. He swore. He threatened the entire family with starvation. He declared that a lie had been invented to deceive and betray him.

However, the work at night in the cabbage fields on the French farm was at an end. The story was told in the town of Bidwell, and as the entire French family except Ezra swore to its truth, was generally believed. Tom Foresby, an old citizen who was a spiritualist, claimed to have heard his father say that there had been in early days an Indian burying-ground on the Turner Pike.

The cabbage field on the French farm became locally famous. Within a year two other men declared they had seen the figure of a gigantic Indian dancing and singing a funeral dirge in the moonlight. Farmer boys, who had been for an evening in town and were returning late at night to lonely farmhouses, whipped their horses into a run when they came to the farm. When it was far behind them they breathed more freely. Although he continued to swear and threaten, Ezra never again succeeded in getting his family into the fields at night. In Bidwell he declared that the story of the ghost invented by his lazy sons and daughters had ruined his chance for making a decent living out of his farm.

CHAPTER VI

Steve Hunter decided that it was time something was done to wake up his native town. The call of the spring wind awoke something in him as in Hugh. It came up from the south bringing rain followed by warm fair days. Robins hopped about on the lawns before the houses on the residence streets of Bidwell, and the air was again sweet with the pregnant sweetness of new-plowed ground. Like Hugh, Steve walked about alone through the dark, dimly lighted residence streets during the spring evenings, but he did not try awkwardly to leap over creeks in the darkness or pull bushes out of the ground, nor did he waste his time dreaming of being physically young, clean-limbed and beautiful.

Before the coming of his great achievements in the industrial field, Steve had not been highly regarded in his home town. He had been a noisy boastful youth and had been spoiled by his father. When he was twelve years old what were called safety bicycles first came into use and for a long time he owned the only one in town. In the evening he rode it up and down Main Street, frightening the horses and arousing the envy of the town boys. He learned to ride without putting his hands on the handle-bars and the other boys began to call him Smarty Hunter and later, because he wore a stiff, white collar that folded down over his shoulders, they gave him a girl's name. "Hello, Susan," they shouted, "don't fall and muss your clothes."

In the spring that marked the beginning of his great industrial adventure, Steve was stirred by the soft spring winds into dreaming his own kind of dreams. As he walked about through the streets, avoiding the other young men and women, he remembered Ernestine, the daughter of the Buffalo soap maker, and thought a great deal about the magnificence of the big stone house in which she lived with her father. His body ached for her, but that was a matter he felt could be managed. How he could achieve a financial position that would make it possible for him to ask for her hand was a more difficult problem. Since he had come back from the business college to live in his home town, he had secretly, and at the cost of two new five dollar dresses, arranged a physical alliance with a girl named Louise Trucker whose father was a farm laborer, and that left his mind free for other things. He intended to become a manufacturer, the first one in Bidwell, to make himself a leader in the new movement that was sweeping over the country. He had thought out what he wanted to do and it only remained to find something for him to manufacture to put his plans through. First of all he had selected with great care certain men he intended to ask to go in with him. There was John Clark the banker, his own father, E. H. Hunter the town jeweler, Thomas Butterworth the rich farmer, and young Gordon Hart, who had a job as assistant cashier in the bank. For a month he had been dropping hints to these men of something mysterious and important about to happen. With the exception of his father who had infinite faith in the shrewdness and ability of his son, the men he wanted to impress were only amused. One day Thomas Butterworth went into the bank and stood talking the matter over with John Clark. "The young squirt was always a Smart-Aleck and a blow-hard," he said. "What's he up to now? What's he nudging and whispering about?"

As he walked in the main street of Bidwell, Steve began to acquire that air of superiority that later made him so respected and feared. He hurried along with a peculiarly intense absorbed look in his eyes. He saw his fellow townsmen as through a haze, and sometimes did not see them at all. As he went along he took papers from his pocket, read them hurriedly, and then quickly put them away again. When he did speak—perhaps to a man who had known him from boyhood—there was in his manner something gracious to the edge of condescension. One morning in March he met Zebe Wilson the town shoemaker on the sidewalk before the post-office. Steve stopped and smiled. "Well, good morning, Mr. Wilson," he said, "and how is the quality of leather you are getting from the tanneries now?"

Word regarding this strange salutation ran about among the merchants and artisans. “What’s he up to now?” they asked each other. “Mr. Wilson, indeed! Now what’s wrong between that young squirt and Zebe Wilson?”

In the afternoon, four clerks from the Main Street stores and Ed Hall the carpenter’s apprentice, who had a half day off because of rain, decided to investigate. One by one they went along Hamilton Street to Zebe Wilson’s shop and stepped inside to repeat Steve Hunter’s salutation. “Well, good afternoon, Mr. Wilson,” they said, “and how is the quality of leather you are getting from the tanneries now?” Ed Hall, the last of the five who went into the shop to repeat the formal and polite inquiry, barely escaped with his life. Zebe Wilson threw a shoemaker’s hammer at him and it went through the glass in the upper part of the shop door.

Once when Tom Butterworth and John Clark the banker were talking of the new air of importance he was assuming, and half indignantly speculated on what he meant by his whispered suggestion of something significant about to happen, Steve came along Main Street past the front door of the bank. John Clark called him in. The three men confronted each other and the jeweler’s son sensed the fact that the banker and the rich farmer were amused by his pretensions. At once he proved himself to be what all Bidwell later acknowledged him to be, a man who could handle men and affairs. Having at that time nothing to support his pretensions he decided to put up a bluff. With a wave of his hand and an air of knowing just what he was about, he led the two men into the back room of the bank and shut the door leading into the large room to which the general public was admitted. “You would have thought he owned the place,” John Clark afterward said with a note of admiration in his voice to young Gordon Hart when he described what took place in the back room.

Steve plunged at once into what he had to say to the two solid moneyed citizens of his town. “Well, now, look here, you two,” he began earnestly. “I’m going to tell you something, but you got to keep still.” He went to the window that looked out upon an alleyway and glanced about as though fearful of being overheard, then sat down in the chair usually occupied by John Clark on the rare occasions when the directors of the Bidwell bank held a meeting. Steve looked over the heads of the two men who in spite of themselves were beginning to be impressed. “Well,” he began, “there is a fellow out at Pickleville. You have maybe heard things said about him. He’s telegraph operator out there. Perhaps you have heard how he is always making drawings of parts of machines. I guess everybody in town has been wondering what he’s up to.”

Steve looked at the two men and then got nervously out of the chair and walked about the room. “That fellow is my man. I put him there,” he declared. “I didn’t want to tell any one yet.”

The two men nodded and Steve became lost in the notion created in his fancy. It did not occur to him that what he had just said was untrue. He began to scold the two men. “Well, I suppose I’m on the wrong track there,” he said. “My man has made an invention that will bring millions in profits to those who get into it. In Cleveland and Buffalo I’m already in touch with big bankers. There’s to be a big factory built, but you see yourself how it is, here I’m at home. I was raised as a boy here.”

The excited young man plunged into an exposition of the spirit of the new times. He grew bold and scolded the older men. “You know yourself that factories are springing up everywhere, in towns all over the State,” he said. “Will Bidwell wake up? Will we have factories here? You know well enough we won’t, and I know why. It’s because a man like me who was raised here has to go to a city to get money to back his plans. If I talked to you fellows you would laugh at me. In a few years I might make you more money than you have made in your whole lives, but what’s the use talking? I’m Steve Hunter; you knew me when I was a kid. You’d laugh. What’s the use my trying to tell you fellows my plans?”

Steve turned as though to go out of the room, but Tom Butterworth took hold of his arm and led him back to a chair. “Now, you tell us what you’re up to,” he demanded. In turn he grew indignant. “If you’ve got something to manufacture you can get backing here as well as any place,” he said. He became convinced that the jeweler’s son was telling the truth. It did not occur to him that a Bidwell

young man would dare lie to such solid men as John Clark and himself. “You let them city bankers alone,” he said emphatically. “You tell us your story. What you got to tell?”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.