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HIS RISE TO POWER CHAPTER XII. Locusts and Wild Honey.

SON of the old regime returning to New Chelsea after four years would have found vast improvements wrought. Nor was the prosperity thus attested merely the crumbs from the table of thriving Plumville. It was all New Chelsea's own, and it had come by the avenue of Stephen Hampden's speculation, for the coal company, despite the rules of the game, was a success for all concerned. Already it was paying dividends.

But a great deal more than a "boom" can happen in four years. That number of cycles saw William Murchell's power shaken, totter and crash to the earth. Most people credited this to the craft of Mark Sherrod, state treasurer and the new minister, and his able lieutenant, Governor Parrott. Murchell would have placed the credit or blame elsewhere. Had he had the habit of discussing his mistakes he would have added a year to our calculation and said that the initial blow had been struck at his power when on a certain June day, in company with Jim Sheehan, he had sought to press a bright faced young man into his service.

If it was your good fortune to be a resident of New Chelsea at that time you will remember how John Dunmeade appeared when he was thirty-five—a grave, quiet man, looking older than his years, as carefully dressed as men are apt to be who are dreaming of big things. His hair was beginning to thin at the temples. He walked with a slight stoop and with less spring—the long, slow stride of a man who thinks much on his feet.

He made, it a point, however unhappily his cause was progressing, never to seem downcast. You would leave him, probably thinking it a pity that such an attractive man should be so unpractical and the object of so many bitter and powerful enemies. If the truth must be told, New Chelsea was more than a little disappointed in John Dunmeade.

His health was not always good. He had suffered a serious illness during one winter and, between the duties of office, the cares of a growing private practice and the incessant labors of politics, his body had been sadly overtaxed. He was still district attorney, last trophy of the reform wave that had swept over the shattered machine. Under the leadership of Greene, an ex-gambler and former lieutenant of Sheehan, less obviously the brute and far shrewder than the deposed boss, the Plumville organization had risen from its ashes. He had recaptured all the county offices, except when John, a candidate for re-election, had won through personal popularity and by a scant margin.

Politics is a hard taskmaster. John found poor compensation in the fact that he had become well known throughout the state. The year after the Benton county reform he had joined himself to the cause of Judge Gray, an honest and capable lawyer who dared to ask the old party nomination for governor against the organization's choice. With the judge John made a vigorous stumping campaign in every county of the state. He was now, he was enthusiastic, he was daring. People listened. Parrott was nominated easily according to the "state." Judge Dunmeade was not nominated to the supreme court that year; hence the breach of a lifelong friendship, increased bitterness against his son and many I-told-you-soes from Miss Roberta. But John preached on. He did more than attack. He devised and proffered remedies with a naive disregard of the conservative habit of the American mind that inclined mirth in some, apprehension in others and bewilderment in still others. It is not necessary here to enumerate his remedies. They have since become respectable.

He learned in common with other young iconoclasts something of the existence and character and aims of the personal government which lay behind the formal and of the marvellously woven system by which the dominant personalities twisted the form of government to their purpose. Being a young man who thought himself inspired, he was aghast and the more determined to destroy that system. Not wholly lacking a sense of proportion, he realized the temerity of him who undertook such wholesale destruction. But his youthful optimism and faith in the people had not failed. His task was to expound the machine to the people of his state. Always he saw victory just one year ahead.

In those days—to be exact, three years after the destruction of the Sheehan machine—there was strife in the organizations of both parties. Upon the devoted heads of Murchell and Duffy, the respective bosses, burdened abuse from strange quarters. Anxious cries rang from the deck of the ship Murchell had steered so long. Then the storm burst.

The biennial election of a state treasurer was at hand. There appeared to John one day a plausible gentleman who discussed the troubled waters. He was in a state of righteous indignation. Murchell's domination had continued too long! Patience with his tyrannical ways had ceased to be a virtue. His unfitness had been proved by his breach of contract to let Sherrod succeed Beck. And he, the messenger, was glad to say, in confidence, that those able and distinguished patriots and leaders, Mark Sherrod and Philander Parrott, were organizing a revolt and proposed to make the treasurer nomination a test of strength. And they had commissioned him to urge that other able, etc., John Dunmeade, the man who had "licked

Murchell in his own back yard," to join the reform. He was deeply hurt when John refused. Halg, who also had made New Chelsea his legal residence, invented sundry lurid epithets to describe John's folly and urged reconsideration. John shook his head. "But I thought you wanted to put Murchell out of business?" "Not Murchell. I've grown past that. I'm rather sorry for him just now. And I'd rather have him run things than Sherrod. It's the institution we've got to destroy—as he told me himself once. Nothing's gained if we substitute one boss for another."

"Then what are you going to do, my destructive friend?" "Try to slip in between them. I think—put up an independent candidate."

John made his campaign. When the primaries had been held, he was himself astonished to discover that nearly a quarter of the delegates chosen were pledged to his independent candidate. But before daylight on the night before the convention John learned that he had been used to draw delegates from Murchell for Sherrod's purpose; he saw his hand dwindle to a faithful handful. When the convention met, Sherrod was in control. After the preliminaries John, answering to the roll call of counties, placed his candidate in nomination in a speech that could hardly be heard for jeers and catcalls. It was brought to an abrupt conclusion by a yell from the gallery. "Sit down, sonny!" Only money talks in this convention. Even the delegates joined in the roar of laughter. And then the coup was accomplished. The Parrott-Sherrod candidate was withdrawn and Sherrod himself substituted. A mild confusion that amounted almost to a riot he was nominated.

A nonpartisan candidate was put up that fall. John and Jerry Brent were most active in his support. They made what was said to be a remarkable campaign, and in every county they were met with tremendous enthusiasm. People flocked by thousands to hear them and cheered themselves hoarse as the young orators extolled the bosses. But on election day the people marched to the polls, voted as they had always done and elected the old party ticket by a majority of more than 100,000.

The campaign fixed John's place firmly in the public mind. This place, one that a practical man would have thought twice before seeking, was won at the cost of much of his buoyant optimism. It almost cost him his life also. A heavy cold contracted during the last days of the campaign eventually settled into a stubborn case of pneumonia. There were many anxious days in the Dunmeade home. Mrs. Miss Roberta's anxiety unshared. Through three consecutive nights Hugh Dunmeade never sought his couch, but kept a constant vigil by his son's bedside, listening to the painful breathing and, without protest, to the reproaches of an inner voice. When the Christmas holidays arrived John was still confined to his room.

That winter Senator Murchell varied his program by spending the congressional recess at his legal residence. And one Sunday morning he came face to face with the judge and Miss Roberta in the vestibule of the Presbyterian church. It was the first meeting in more than two years.

"The doctor tells me John ought to go south and won't. If it's on account of—er—money matters," the senator looked carefully out into the street. "I'll be glad to help out."

"No, sir," the judge put in stiffly. "If John needs money it is my right to provide it." It had not occurred to him before to exercise the right. "Stuff," said the senator. "I know how you're fixed. Hugh. You can't afford it. I can."

"We Dunmeades, Senator Murchell, don't accept charity from our political enemies."

"Our political enemies! Have you turned reformer, Judge?" Murchell inquired innocently. "I thought you didn't believe in agitation."

"At least my son is an honorable gentleman," the judge retorted. "He doesn't go about deceiving his friends with promises he has no intention of keeping." Here the judge certainly scored.

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"Aunt Roberta," he said, "you're the worst fraud in Christendom." Murchell sank back into habitual lack of interest. The only notable political feature of that year was the quiet contest within the organization between the old boss and the new, a struggle in which Murchell was forced to yield. When a man sees the best years of his life slipping away with no accomplishment, when he has suffered not only denunciation and misrepresentation, which are not easy to bear, but also treachery and ridicule, which are harder, and misunderstanding and indifference from the people he is trying to serve, which are hardest of all, he cannot be greatly blamed for wanting sometimes to "chuck the game," as Halg put it to John one evening in early winter. The bantering friendship between them, grown deeper as the years passed, had been worn more to John than he quite realized. "Why don't you chuck the game? You're further back than you were four years ago. The novelty's worn off, and the dear pee-pu's tired of hearing you, and they believe that somehow you're worse than an anarchist. And you're even going to be kicked out of office here next spring. Do you know that? You're breaking down your health. You're doing the work of three men and a small boy—for nothing. This county is growing. There's going to be plenty of law business. And you could be the biggest lawyer around here. You are that now in point of ability, though the Lord knows where you find time to study your cases. Why don't you chuck it? Serving the people is the most worthless, thankless job in the world."