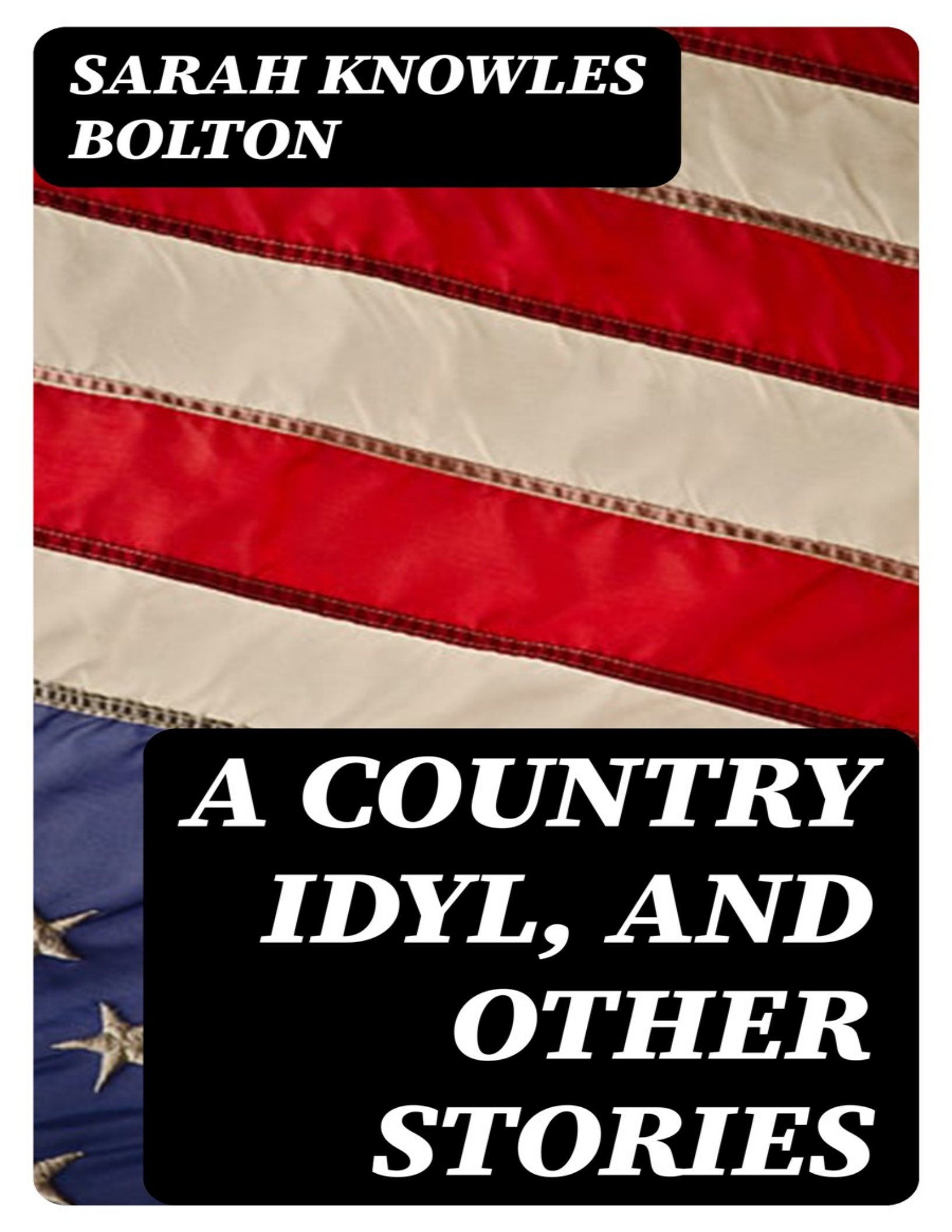


The background of the entire image is a close-up, slightly angled view of the American flag. The red and white stripes are prominent, with the blue field and white stars visible in the bottom left corner. The flag appears to be made of a textured fabric, possibly silk or satin, with visible stitching along the edges of the stripes.

***SARAH KNOWLES
BOLTON***

***A COUNTRY
IDYL, AND
OTHER
STORIES***

Sarah Knowles Bolton

A Country Idyl, and Other Stories

EAN 8596547345053

DigiCat, 2022

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A COUNTRY IDYL AND OTHER STORIES.



A COUNTRY IDYL.

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IN THE midst of New England mountains, covered with pine and cedar, lies the quiet town of Nineveh, looking towards the sea. Years ago it had mills where lumber was sawed and grain was ground; but now the old wheels alone are left, the dams are broken, and the water falls over the scattered rocks, making music in harmony with the winds among the pines. The houses have gone to decay; the roofs have fallen in, leaving the great, rough chimneys standing like the Druid towers of Ireland.

In one of these old houses, before the young men of New England had gone West to seek their fortunes, lived a miller and his wife. The Crandall family were happy, save that no children had come into the home. Finally a sister of the wife died, bequeathing her little girl to the Nineveh household.

Nellie Crandall grew from babyhood the picture of health, an innocent, cheerful girl, in sweet accord with the daisies of the fields and the old-fashioned flowers she cared for in her foster-mother's garden.

In the house across the way lived John Harding, a tall, awkward boy, the pride of the country school for his good scholarship, and in principle as strong as the New England hills he lived among.

John and Nellie had played together from childhood. He had made chains for her neck of the pine needles; she had fastened golden coreopsis in his homespun coat; and, while no word had been spoken, the neighboring people expected that a new house would sometime be built in Nineveh, and a

young couple begin anew the beautiful commonplaces of life.

There was considerable excitement one morning in the quiet town. Byron Marshall, a city youth, had come to Nineveh to visit the Monroe family, cousins of the Hardings. Byron was a handsome, slender lad, well-mannered, just leaving college and ready for a profession. He met Nellie Crandall, and was pleased with the natural country girl.

"No good'll come of it," said one of the old ladies of Nineveh. "I never believed in mismating. John Harding would give his life for that girl, while the city youth, I know, is a selfish fellow."

The summer wore away with rides and picnics, and if John's heart was pained at the attentions given to Nellie, and accepted by her, he said nothing.

After Byron's return to the city a correspondence was begun by him.

One Sunday evening, when John came as usual to see Nellie, and they were sitting in the moonlight beside the old mill at the bridge, he said abruptly, "I'm going away from home, Nellie. I have begun to think you wouldn't mind since Byron came."

"But I do mind," said the girl. "I like Bryon, and he seems fond of me; but, John, I don't want you to go, we've been such good friends."

"Yes, but we must be all in all to each other or I can't stay. I've loved you all these years with never a thought of another. I've loved every flower in your garden because you have tended it. This old mill seems precious because you have sat here. All Nineveh is sacred to me because it is your home, but I cannot stay here now."

Nellie was young; she had seen little of the world, did not know the true from the false, and, half captivated with the college youth, she dare not give her promise to John.

They parted in the moonlight, he heavy of heart at going and she regretting that two loved her. John went to a distant State and found employment. No word came from him, and Nellie, who missed him sadly, depended more than ever on the letters which came from Byron.

The next summer Byron spent at Nineveh, and it was talked about the little town that Nellie was engaged, and would soon be a city lady, living in comfort and prominence.

Two years later there was a wedding at the Crandall home, and the pretty bride said good-by to the old mill and the great pines, and left the miller and his wife desolate. Two years afterwards, when she brought back a little son, named Samuel, after the miller, they were in a measure comforted, though they never liked Byron as well as John, "who was of their kind."

When John Harding knew that Nellie was really lost to him and married to another, he, longing for companionship, married a worthy girl, prospered in business, and was as happy as a man can be who does not possess the power to forget. He had learned what most of us learn sooner or later—that life does not pass according to our plan, plan we ever so wisely; that, broken and marred, we have to take up the years and make the mosaic as perfect as we can.

As time passed some of the Nineveh families died, and some moved away to other and busier scenes. Samuel Crandall had been laid in the little cemetery, and Mrs. Crandall was more lonely than ever.

One night there came a wagon to the door, and Nellie Marshall, her face stained with tears, alighted, with her three children. "We have come to stay, mother," said the broken-hearted woman. "Byron has gone, nobody knows where. He has used the money of others, and we are penniless."

Mrs. Crandall wept on her daughter's neck, as she told somewhat of the hardships of her life with her unfaithful and

dishonest husband.

Other years passed, and another grave was made beside that of Samuel Crandall, and Mrs. Marshall, now grown white-haired, lived for her three children, and reared them as best she could in their poverty.

One day there was a rumor in the town that John Harding was coming to Nineveh on a visit. He was well-to-do now, and would come in a style befitting his position. Mrs. Marshall wondered if he would call upon her, and if he would bring Mrs. Harding to see the woman so changed from her girlhood in looks, but nobler and sweeter in character.

Mr. Harding had been in Nineveh for a week. Nellie Marshall had heard of it, and her heart beat more quickly at any footstep on the threshold. One moonlight night she could not resist putting just one spray of golden coreopsis in the buttonhole of her black dress, for if he should come that night he would like to see it, perhaps; for, after all, women do not forget any more than men.

About eight o'clock there was a knock at the door; she was agitated. "Why should I be? He is married," she assured herself.

She opened the door, and John, grown stouter in form and more attractive in face than ever, stood before her. He met her cordially, talked with the children, and seemed more joyous than when a boy.

"And where is Mrs. Harding?" Nellie finally found the courage to ask.

"She is not with me," was the answer.

The call, really a long one, seemed short.

"When do you leave for the West, Mr. Harding?" She had almost said "John," for she had thought of him all these years by the old familiar name.

"Not for two or three weeks, and I shall see you again."

Day after day passed, and he did not come. And now she realized, as she had never before, that this was the only man she had ever loved; that his presence made day, his absence night; that she had loved him from childhood. And now all was too late.

The time came for him to return to the West, and once more he stood by the flower-beds along the walk to the Nineveh house, this time just as the sun was setting over the cedars. He kissed the children. "I have none of my own," he said, and took Nellie's hand, holding it a little longer than he had held it before. Her lips trembled, and her eyes must have told all her heart.

"I have felt so deeply for you," he said; and his own voice grew tremulous. "And will you let me leave this little remembrance for the children?" He slipped a roll of bills into her hand, and was gone in a moment.

Weeks passed, and finally a letter came. She knew the handwriting. What could John wish of her? Perhaps he was inclined to adopt one of her children, and, if so, which could she spare?

Not the oldest boy, for he was her pride; not the second, a girl, who was her comfort and companion; not the youngest, for somehow he looked like John, and he was dearer to her than all beside. When Byron was unkind her heart always turned to John, and perchance stamped her thoughts upon the open, frank face of her youngest child.

She put the letter in her pocket; she must be calm before she read it. She would go out and sit by the mill where he and she sat together. She opened it there and read:

MY DEAR OLD-TIME FRIEND: I am alone in the world. I told you my wife was not with me. She died some years ago. I wanted to see if you loved me, as I believed you did. I hope and believe you do still. You know me better than any one else, and you know whether I should care tenderly for your children. If you are willing to come and brighten my home, say so. How I longed to fold you in my arms as I left you, but restrained myself! Telegraph me if I shall come to take you.

A message was sent from Nineveh: "Come."

The Crandall home has fallen like the others. The flower-beds have vanished, save here and there a self-sown golden coreopsis grows among the weeds. The moon shines silently upon the mill as of old. The few remaining aged people of Nineveh still tell of the faithful love of John Harding for the miller's adopted daughter.

THE SECOND TIME.

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THE HON. John Crawford had become a prominent man in his community. He had begun life in poverty, had learned economy early, and fortunately had married a girl with tastes and habits similar to his own. Both desired to rise in the world, and she, forgetting herself, bent all her energies toward his progress and success. She did her own housework for years, made her own clothes and those of her children, and in every way saved, that John might be rich and influential. Her history was like that of thousands of other New England women—she wore herself out for her family. She never had time for social life, and not a very great amount of time for reading, though she kept up as well as possible with the thought of the day; but her one aim was to have her husband honored.

John Crawford was a good husband, though not always considerate. He thought nobody quite so good and helpful as Betsey, nobody cooked so well, nobody was more saving, and he was proud to rise by her help. He failed sometimes to consider how large a matter that help had been in his life. If he had been asked who made his money he would have replied without hesitation, "I made it." That Betsey was entitled to half, or even a third, would never have occurred to him. He provided for her and the children all they seemed to need. He was the head of the family, and that headship had made him somewhat selfish and domineering.

As the children grew older, and Mrs. Crawford looked out into the future and realized the possibility of leaving the world before her husband, she thought much of their condition under a changed home. Mr. Crawford would marry again, probably, and her children might have little or none of the property which they together had struggled to earn.

One evening she said, as they sat before the open fire, the children having gone to bed: "John, it seems to me things are unequal in the world. You and I have worked hard, and I have been proud to have you succeed. We both love the children, and want everything done for them. What if I should die, and you should marry again and have other children?"

"Why, Betsey! You don't think I could forget our own precious children? No second wife could or would influence me against my children. You and I have worked together, and I should feel dishonorable to leave them helpless and care for others. You must think me a villain."

"Oh, no, John! But I have seen cases like that. Only the other day the Rev. Cornelius Jones married a young wife, and gave her all his property, leaving nothing to his three daughters. Now, if a minister would do that, what should we expect of others?"

"There must have been peculiar circumstances. He could not have been in his right mind."

"You know, John, if you were to die I should receive a third of what I have helped you earn, and the rest would go to the children; while if I were to die nothing would go to the children. I should like to have at least the third which the law considers mine go to them at my death, as it does in some countries of the Old World, where a man cannot marry a second time till he has settled a portion on his first children."

"But that would be a great inconvenience," replied Mr. Crawford. "A man has money in business, and to take

out a third if his wife dies might sadly embarrass him. Or even the use of a third, set apart for them, might cripple him."

"Better that there be a little inconvenience than a wrong done to children," said Mrs. Crawford. "The husband may lose every cent of what the wife has struggled and saved all her life to help him accumulate. Marriage is a partnership, and, like other partnerships, must suffer some change and inconvenience, it may be, if one of the partners dies. There must, necessarily, be a new adjustment of interests."

"But the law allows you to make a will and give away your property, my dear, just as it does me."

"Yes, what I have inherited before or since my marriage; but I have inherited none, and you have not. We have made ours together, and you have often said that you owe as much to my skill and economy as to your foresight and ability."

"And so I do, it is true; but the law makes no provision about our common property."

"But make it yourself then, John, if the law does not. Make a will so that in case of my death my two daughters shall have at least a third of all you are worth at that time, or, if you prefer, put a third—I might feel that it ought to be half—in my name, or perhaps the home, and let that go to our daughters."

"But if I put the home in your name, so that in case of losses something would be saved from creditors, I should want it willed back to me at your death, so that I could still have a home and do as I liked with it."

"And then nothing would go to the children at my death? That is not fair, John, and I have worked too hard and long to be willing."

"Well, Betsey, you can trust me to do the right thing. I will think it over," and he kissed her as they closed the not

altogether satisfactory conversation.

As was to be expected, Betsey Crawford broke down from the wear and tear of life, and died, leaving her two daughters to the care of a fond and not ungenerous father. The loss was a great one to John Crawford. She had been his competent adviser, with tact and good sense to keep matters right. She had guided more than he ever suspected. He mourned her sincerely, as did her two devoted daughters.

He was lonely, and in time married again, a woman considerably younger than himself, a member of the same church, an ambitious and not over-scrupulous woman. When her son was born she became desirous that every advantage should be placed before him, that he might attain to wealth and honor. She convinced Mr. Crawford in a thousand nameless ways that the boy would need most of the property for business, to marry well, and to carry down the family name. The girls would doubtless marry and be well provided for by their husbands. She talked with Mr. Crawford about the uncertainty of life, and, with tact, urged that other things besides a spiritual preparation for death were necessary. A man should think of the younger members of his family who would be left comparatively helpless.

People said that the strong-willed John Crawford had become very much under the sway of his younger wife; that he had grown less dominant, more appreciative, and more thoughtful of her needs and wishes. He idolized his son, but he seemed no dearer than the daughters of Betsey. He was a more expensive child, for he needed all sorts of playthings, the best schooling, the best clothes, and a somewhat large amount of spending money. It was evident that John Crawford, Jr., would require more money than his half-sisters.

In course of time, Mr. Crawford, having served a term in Congress through good ability and the discreet use of money in organizing his forces, and having done well for his constituency, followed Betsey to the other world. To the surprise of all save the second Mrs. Crawford the property was left to her and her son, with the merest remembrance to the unmarried daughters of hard-working Betsey Crawford.

"I wouldn't have thought it," said a prominent lady in the church. "Why, John Crawford was a deacon, and professed to live according to right and justice! There must have been undue influence. His first wife worked like a slave to help earn that money. I never supposed a man would be unfair to his children."

"You never can tell what folks will do," said another church member. "Youth and tact are great forces in the world. John Crawford never meant to be unjust, but he couldn't help it. A third of that property ought to have gone to those daughters. Why didn't his wife make him fix it before she died?"

"Maybe she tried, who knows?" said the person addressed. "If the law didn't make him do his duty, how could you expect his conscience to do it? We need some new laws about the property which men and women earn together."

Mr. Crawford's injustice resulted in the early death of one daughter, and left bitter memories of her father in the heart of the other.

FIFTEEN THOUSAND DOLLARS.

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JASON and Eunice Kimball had always longed for money. They had spent their fifteen years of married life on a New England farm, with all its cares and hardships, its early rising, long hours of labor, and little compensation.

The white house, with its green blinds, roof sloping to the rear, and great fir-trees in the front yard, had grown dingy with dust and rain, and there had been no money to repair it.

The children, Susie, James, and little Jason, fourteen, twelve, and ten years old, had worked like their thrifty parents, gaining the somewhat meagre schooling of a half-deserted New England town.

Now a great change had come to the Kimball family. A relative had died and had left to Mrs. Kimball fifteen thousand dollars. It seemed an enormous amount in one way, but not enormous in another. The children must be better dressed and prepared for college, the father must give up the slow gains of the farm and go into business, and Mrs. Kimball must make herself ready in garb and manner for the new life. It was evident that they must move to some village where schools were good and business would be prosperous. What town and what business? These were the exciting topics that were discussed by night and by day. Jason knew how to till the soil, to harvest grain, to be an