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A SOUTHERN STORY OF ANTE BELLUM DAYS,
BY
JEANNETTE H. WALWORTH

CHAPTER XII.

"You are a Union man?" She looked at him in horror, recoiling as from some visible reptile.

"I am. I repeat, the whole thing is an infernal mistake, according to my way of thinking. After awhile there will be more men to hold my views. Just now our people are intoxicated, they are dashing themselves to pieces on a rock hidden from sight by the high tide of frenzied emotion. They are fighting like heroes, but hopelessly, for an *æææ*. A starved child wrestling with a well fed giant.

"But all this has no bearing on my personal attitude. This is the slave owner's fight. I am nothing but the son of a slave driver. I had hoped to shed some luster on a name that had been dimmed by centuries of low service, but not by donning a gay uniform and flashing my way into fame as a warrior. All my soul went out in direction of the learned professions.

"Perhaps the idea of a Martin dispensing justice from the judge's bench allured me with its novelty. The Martins had been groveling so long. Justice, the administration of even handed justice, is alluring to the fancy of one who has suffered keenly from injustice."

"I know, I know. Don't let us open that wound."

She nodded her head quickly.
"I was willing to forego every indulgence, almost every necessity, for the means of purchasing books. I was going to be a great lawyer. Nothing short of the topmost round on the legal ladder was to have satisfied my ambition. I had no help, but I did not mind that. Destiny's spiteful mood lasts long. I am still at the foot of the ladder."

A low, dull reverberating sound penetrated the cabin walls.

"Listen! That is the cannon at Vicksburg. How many men within its beleagured walls will bite the dust before its stubborn resistance is broken by sheer force of numbers? How many widows and orphans are manufactured every time that almost unheeded noise breaks on our ears? Do you suppose every man fighting behind those ramparts went into this thing from a calm conviction of the righteousness of the cause? How many went into it under stress of physical excitement? How many were stung into it by fear of public opinion?"

"I have learned tonight how potent a factor the fear of scorn may become. I had no public until you came. No one's scorn mattered a rush. I was content to let them fight it out among themselves. I did not believe that every man who wore a uniform was a hero any more



"Is you heard the news?"
"I than I believed that every man who did not look at things differently. Where's the use trying to steer against the current when it is so much easier to drift with it?"

"I have stood under pretty hot fire tonight, Mamie. Your guns were heavily shot, and before you came I had been trying to convince my brother that this was no concern of ours.

"I have been trying to convince myself that I was not needed on either side—I, such a miserable failure, already forgotten by the world. I could not fight for slavery. I did not want to fight against the men who owned slaves. But you have said things tonight that have made me long to court a bullet hole or saber thrust as a pleasant relief.

"I may not be worthy to stand side by side with the professor, my dear, but at least I shall no longer skulk in the chimney corner. My duty in this matter has not been quite clear, my path not well defined. You will have the credit of having armed two combatants—your father and your lover."

All the scorn was gone out of her face, leaving it white and sad. She lifted startled eyes to him, where he stood close to her chair. Stern resolution was written in every line of his worn face.

"I don't think I quite understand you, Strong."

"No?"

"Do you mean to say that you are going to do something that your conscience

does not approve of simply because you think I want you to do it?"

Evidently she did not understand him. He would not enlighten her. Poor little one, he would not by one feather's weight add to her sorrows or her anxieties. He smiled wistfully down into her upturned face and answered evasively:

"Conscience generally does get worsted in a hand to hand combat with love, don't you think? I simply mean that I am going to do battle for my principles. I am going out to take my chances of being shot at along with countless better men, perhaps a few worse ones."

She leaned back wearily in her big chair and closed her eyes. Tears were crowding hot and fast under their lids.

"I don't know what to say or what to unsay. It seems so wicked for you to keep all your strength and health and vigorous young manhood shut away from the world in this way—but, Strong, Strong!"

She stood up swiftly and stretched both hands toward him with the look of a terrified child in her eye.

"Mamie! My dear! What is it?"

"If anything should happen to you?"

"You will respect me—dear."

"If anything should happen to you—I would be your murderer. And the world—oh, Strong, the world would be so horribly empty."

(To be Continued.)



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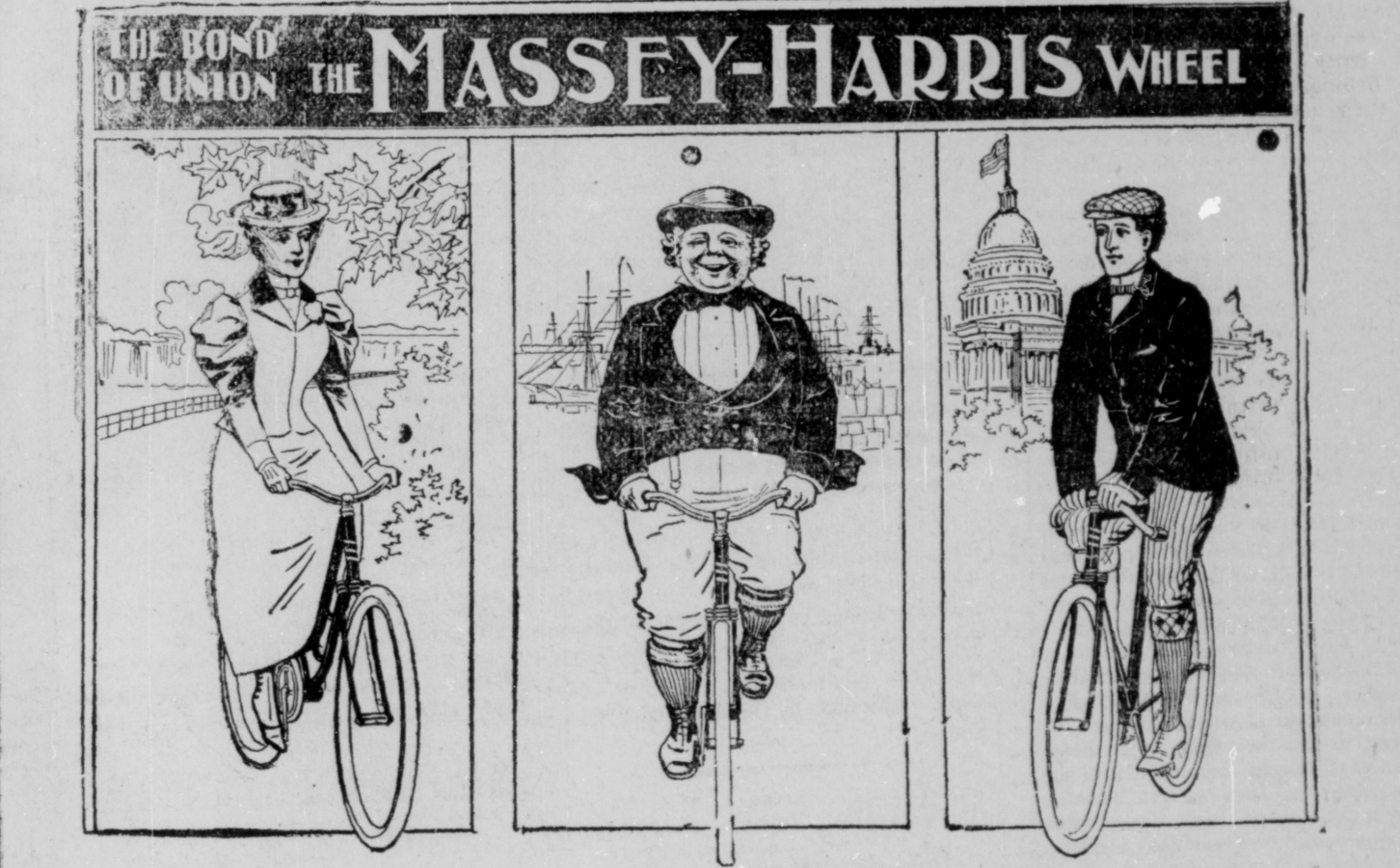
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