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NO. 24.

ROB MCGREGOR.

BY MARTHA McCULLOCH WILLIAMS.

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SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS INSTALLMENTS.
In order that new readers of THE ENQUIRER may begin with the following installment of the story, and understand it just the same as though they had read it all from the beginning, we here give a synopsis of that portion of it which has already been published:

CHAPTER I.—Life in Walnut Creek, in Tennessee, centers around Topmark's store. Magnolia Tubbs, a mysterious newcomer in the neighborhood, not without attractions of a coarse type, is a nocturnal caller on Topmark.

CHAPTER II.—Mrs. Topmark dies from the poison of herbs brought to the store by a charm working Negress, ostensibly to kill mice. Gossips and W managing are trying to bring about a match between Topmark's niece, Alice Winfold, and aristocratic Colonel Talbot's son Jack. But spirited Rob McGregor, heiress of Roscoe, has been before Jack's eyes from childhood.

CHAPTER III.—Topmark covets the Roscoe acres, which are heavily mortgaged and adjoin his own. Rob is the mainstay and comfort of her widowed and blind father.

CHAPTER IV.—Jack Talbot is a frequent caller at Roscoe. So is the newly made widow. Topmark and Jack propose, but Rob meets with a good humored repulse.

CHAPTER V.—Magnolia Tubbs holds a mysterious land claim of value, and Topmark seeks to control it.

CHAPTER VI.—Alice Winfold places a stumbling block in the path of true love by telling Rob that Jack has proposed to her.

CHAPTER VII.—Mrs. Talbot prevails upon Jack to act as the escort of Alice Winfold. He does so reluctantly, but ends in trifling with her while his heart is set upon Rob McGregor.

CHAPTER VIII.—A series of mysterious persecutions of the people of Roscoe inaugurated by the theft of Rob's favorite saddle horse.

CHAPTER IX.—Jack drives Alice Winfold to the great annual church meeting. Rob is there in the company of Topmark, having arranged to settle Jack Talbot for his supposed double dealing. She believes Alice Winfold's story.

CHAPTER X.—All the gossips have it that Jack Talbot and Alice Winfold are engaged, but Jack again proposes to Rob. She cleverly evades the question.

CHAPTER XI.—Jack Talbot and his mother, ride horseback to church at night. Mrs. Talbot tells Jack of her desire to see him happily married. They are joined by Miss Winfold and Nina and later by Rob and Topmark. Jack overheard an interesting conversation between Rob and the widower.

CHAPTERS XII and XIII.—Bethel experiences a great revival in which Teddy Barton, among others, professed conversion. Topmark enters on Magnolia and leaves a few gauds and gewgaws. Mrs. Winfold gives a quilting party to which Teddy is not invited because Topmark chafed.

CHAPTER XIV.—Rob visits Aunt Pheny's cabin where she finds a stranger. The deputy sheriff and a posse stop at the cabin. Topmark enters on Magnolia and leaves a few gauds and gewgaws. Mrs. Winfold gives a quilting party to which Teddy is not invited because Topmark chafed.

CHAPTERS XV and XVI.—Rob attends the party at Winfold's and excites jealous feeling among the girls. She sets the company agog by having Jack take her home. Jack excuses her plans for the convict. Aunt Pheny gets a visit from night riders and is rescued by Rob.

CHAPTER XVII.—Topmark talks with Lawyer Howell and describes an interview with Rob.

CHAPTER XVIII.
Mr. Howell came back from Roscoe with the look of a whipped hound, though he brought Mr. Topmark the wished-for message. "You have not delivered it to her yet, Topmark."

"That young woman will not be bullied, even by you. Confound her! She came nearer putting me in a blue funk than ever a supreme judge did. I shall not know whether to envy or pity you if you get your own way with her, of which I have my doubts."

"Mr. Topmark was more hopeful when he saw Rob, white and heavy eyed. She made no pretense of greeting, but went straight at the heart of things. "I want money, \$5,000," she said. "You know what for. Will you let me have it and take the land for it when it comes to be mine?"

"Well, you see, \$5,000 is er heap er money, er mighty heap er money," Mr. Topmark answered slowly. "It would be the wust sort er thing for my business ter sink that much in er remainder in trus". But then that ain't nothin hardly I won't try ter do ter "blige good neighbors. Fact is, I been tryin ter jew down that thar lawyer. I told him he hadn't no conscience whatever!"

"So he said," Rob broke in. "Excuse me, but I am so anxious. "Mr. Topmark, please say simply yes or no. If you cannot oblige me, I must try elsewhere. I sent for you because I know you have ready money. Besides the place lies so it is worth more to you than most people."

"Yes, I'm bound ter say it is," Mr. Topmark admitted impartially, with the air of one conferring a favor. "But, you see, er remainder in trus"—I ain't meanin the least disrespec", Miss Rob. I know your word's better er bond. But the place won't be yours till the old gentleman's gone. S'posin you die first?"

"You shall not suppose such a thing," Rob said, with a quick shiver. "To do it would be to deny the mercy of God. I shall live to take care of him. I will do it in spite of everything. What you have said, though, shows me the case is hopeless, so far as it concerns you. I can only beg your pardon for having troubled you."

"You know it ain't no trouble, not the least. Why, Miss Rob, I'd do just anything for you an glad er chance," Mr. Topmark said eagerly. "Now, don't you fret an think you're goin ter be turned out er house an home. That shan't never happen while Ben Topmark's yours ter command!"

"Excuse me. You must know I cannot accept any but such help as may come strictly in the way of business," Rob said, her eyes beginning to shine. "Forgive me if I seem bold, Mr. Topmark, but I must say in justice to myself that in thus applying to you I took

account not of your gallantry, but of your well known shrewdness. I am offering you for \$5,000 what I know you want very much and otherwise would not get at all."

"You mean jest Roscoe, I s'pose," Mr. Topmark said, grinning. "I do want it, Miss Rob, but, Lord, not half, nor er hundredth part, as bad as I want you. Now, don't you try ter stop me. You sent for me, remember. I got er right ter speak. I know you don't keer nothin in the world erbout me, an I'm er fool ter keep on arter you like I do. I ain't no handsome young sprig ter take your fancy. Neither I ain't er p'ison snake. So you jest say you'll eben consider me, an I pledge you my word you shan't have no mo' trouble with this yere Roscoe gang!"

"Thank you, but that is wholly impossible," Rob said, a deep scarlet staining her pallid face, "so impossible," she went on, "we will forget what you have said."

"What makes it impossible?" Topmark asked doggedly.

Rob shivered faintly, then drew back, saying, "The fact that I am myself and you yourself."

"You're the only woman round yere I couldn't have fer the askin'," Mr. Topmark began in his most aggrieved voice. "In spite of her deep trouble, Rob broke into a laugh and answered gayly: "I have not the least doubt of it. Dear Mr. Topmark, do go and take one of them. You don't know how guilty I shall feel if I think myself the occasion of so excellent a husband going to waste."

Her laughing provoked Mr. Topmark beyond words, more than even her steady refusal of himself. He could thus whistle him and his money down the wind with rain starting her in the face. It must be she did not realize what she was about. He had spoken fair words. Now he must try what virtue lay in rough ones.

"You say you love your ole father," he began. "Thar won't be many ter believe that when they see him in the porchouse an know you could er kept him cut er it."

"Perhaps," Rob said, though she got white to the lips. "But it seems to me, Mr. Topmark, we had better say no more. We are not likely to agree, and it is utterly foolish to quarrel."

"We must agree on something er else it'll be the wust day's work was ever done fer you an him," Mr. Topmark almost shouted. "You think, I reckon, other help will come. I tell you I won't, it shan't. I can give you er name as will shet every door in the county in your face. Now, take your choice—be my wife, have all that life kin give er else the road an the world lookin at you as the dust under its feet! Choose quick too. You've tried me long enough."

"Choice is impossible," Rob said, her face white and scornful, "since nothing else on earth could be to me so hard, so degrading, so entirely unbearable, as even the contemplation for one minute of being your wife."

Mr. Topmark swung upon his heel and came face to face with Aunt Pheny, who had been standing just outside the grape arbor throughout the interview. The old woman was still speechless. Otherwise she showed no sign of the outwardly midnight attack. Rob had almost forced her to come and share Mam Liza's house in a corner of the yard. She had been shelling peas in the arbor while Rob talked with the lawyer that morning. Now she stood looking at Mr. Topmark with the eye of a basilisk. Thrice she nodded at him, then raised her hand and pointed him away.

"Cut er my way, you ole witch!" he shouted, rushing past her. Rob had sunk, shaken and breathless, upon the turf seat within. The old woman went to her and softly stroked her head, then took the girl's face between her two hands and looked into the eyes as though she tried to comfort her.

A tall shadow fell across the sunny door. Jack Talbot came through it and sat down beside Rob, saying:

"My mysterious passenger sent you a message, Rob—a message more mysterious than even himself. He bade me say to you, 'Darkness is coming, with light behind.' What do you make of that? Do you think he was crazy?"

"I hope not," Rob said, trying to speak steadily. "The darkness has come, Jack, quickly enough. Let us hope the light will follow."

Before Jack could answer Aunt Pheny caught Rob's hand and kissed it, with smiles all over her deeply wrinkled face.

Fate sometimes disposes of her mightiest men by means of trifles light as air. Not that Miss Winfold was a trifle. Perish the insinuation! But if Lawyer Howell had not chosen to ride abroad just when and where he did, he would certainly not have encountered her and—

—and! But let the event be duly chronicled.

The lawyer rode, soliloquizing, half aloud: "George, but Topmark is a jolly fellow! He thinks he can tame that pretty piece of pride. Confound it! I wish I had not seen her. I want to throw up the case when I think of her eyes. Of course I shall not do it. But who without seeing her would ever understand Topmark's infatuation? The wonder is that, having seen her, I no longer wonder over it. She might be dangerous to me, only she sees too far into me. Then there is that stubborn fact—Jack Talbot. Only a fool would overlook him. But the other one, Topmark's niece—she's almost as astonishing, considering the stock she springs from. What a way she has! It was worth a lot to see how she cooed and purred the other night. I might think of calling there, only I hope to get out of this tomorrow at the latest."

Sound of other hoofs here made him slacken speed. His road ran into another some 20 yards away. Through the thin growth of the intervening point he saw Miss Winfold, mounted upon the tall, gray, family horse, with Major, a scrap of black boy, up behind. At sight of Mr. Howell he set up an atrocious snigger, crying aloud: "Miss Alice! Miss Alice! Dar de v'y man Marse Ben took'n fotch ter we all's house t'arrer night, de man from town mammy say she s'peet gwine cut out all your yother beans."

"You, Major, hush, this minute!" Miss Winfold said, her face taking on a brick dust hue. She had taken stock of Mr. Howell upon their first encounter, and her mind was made up that, failing Jack Talbot, she could do no better than marry him. She was untelegically glad of the chance that threw him in her way, but maiden modesty, as she understood it, forbade her to seem conscious of his presence until unconsciousness was no longer possible. Even after that he had exchanged greetings she kept a distant front toward him until he drew directly beside her, saying, with a lazy laugh:

"Miss Winfold, you must be here as a direct answer to prayer. I was thinking of you, and, behold, I look up and see you!"

"Oh, indeed! Now, I wonder what you were thinkin of poor me unless you were wonderin how you managed to talk to such a little goose," Miss Winfold said, with an arch lift of her brows.

"What a slander!" laughed the lawyer, and at once rode on beside her. He was in the humor to see what was under and within this undulant plumpness. The girl lacked fascination wholly, but he seemed to discern in her a quality of subtle subservience which might mean much to a career such as he had mapped out for himself.

Still, nothing might have come of it but for Major, though he was the unlikely possible Cupid. "Dat boy, he dest got ter be mean er bust," his mother habitually said of him, and just now he was ill content with the estate in which he found himself. There was small chance for mischief riding thus within six inches of Miss Winfold's immaculate and starched pink shoulders—unless, that is, one had Major's genius for it. By the time they had gone a mile in Mr. Howell's company the lad had found a long pin which he recalled having hidden that morning somewhere in his woolly crown. Next minute he had thrust it into old gray so sharply that sober animal gave a great bound, and Miss Winfold lay in a heap upon the road.

Major was there, too, a moaning lump of arms and legs. But Mr. Howell took no thought of him. He knelt beside Miss Winfold, noting even in that distracted minute how firmly the neat flaxen braids sat in place. As he slid an arm beneath her head she opened her eyes and gasped faintly, "Water, water!" then collapsed against the arm from whose support she had chastely withdrawn herself.

"Water, water!" Major echoed in precisely her key.

"Shut up! You are not hurt, you monkey!" Mr. Howell said masterfully. "I does bleebe I kin walk," Major answered, with a grin; then, darting nimbly to the roadside: "Dest you run ter Miss Alice, Mr. Man! I gwine fetch er whole bucketful er water soon as eber I gets back from Uno' Joe Tom's house."

As he vanished Mr. Howell looked down at the round cheek against his shoulder. It was soft and smooth, trebly tempting to lips lacking the charm of love. He stooped and kissed it. Then instantly the pale eyes opened with a glance that he could not misread. He had met artifice and cunning fit to cope with his own. He smiled a little behind his mustache and said as he led her horse to the roadside, where she stood ready to remount:

"That was a lucky overset. Without it we might have wasted six months in coming to an understanding."

CHAPTER XIX.
Rob was destined to demonstrate that even the unrighteous are sometimes not forsaken. She was distinctly of the unrighteous, according to those whose standard was Miss Winfold, yet at the first word of her trouble friends came hurrying to her aid. Mr. Payne and Colonel Talbot, of course, were foremost, and each looked to find a limp, white, tearful creature, hunted, driven, not knowing whither to turn. Instead they found a collected young woman, faintly smiling, with eyes that grew wet for all her bravery when they let her know upon what errand they had come.

Yet she was not ice or marble, this wicked Rob. It was only that she had been stirred to a heat of wrath so white it burned away apprehension. The stealing of her stock, the midnight outrage upon Aunt Pheny, last of all Ben Topmark's pursuit of herself, had nerved her to set her teeth and say:

"Fight! Yes; I will fight this monstrous claim, fight as I would never do in a mere matter of money. There is so much more at stake—the honor of my name. No McGregor ever took advantage of ignorance or helplessness. I owe it doubly to my father to prove that he speaks truth in saying we are lawfully seized of what we possess."

"You are better than gold, the most, the finest, gold, you good, dear friends!" she said to the two old men. "But please let me work out our salvation—if it can be done, I mean. If it cannot, then, because you have been so kind, I will put my pride in my pocket and take all the help I shall need."

After that there was nothing for it but to let her have her way, or at least agree to let her think she had it. Yet the very next day Mr. Payne rode to Oldbridge, intending to bid his own lawyer, Judge Graball, take the case and spare no pains, looking to him for fees. The judge heard him half through, the while fidgeting in his chair, then broke in upon the old gentleman, who, between haste and wrath, was short of breath:

"See here, Payne, a man may be a lawyer without being also an unconscionable scoundrel. Take that counsel

You couldn't keep me out of it with a log chain. Rob McGregor is my old college chum. Do you think his daughter needs any surety with me? Besides all that, I'm aching for a chance to get at Lawyer Howell. He's the very sharpest scoundrel on our bar, and that's saying a heap for him. I don't mind admitting to you that on the surface he has far the better case. Still, law is like poker in this—a pair of bowie knives have been known to beat four aces, especially when there is reason to think the deal was not strictly fair. I'd fight the thing through with pleasure if the girl were a mere cozy lump instead of the best girl I've seen this 20 years. I shall not forget—the way she came here, white and dry eyed, telling me, in the straightest, cool fashion, all she had to fear—facts, not feelings, too, mind you, not a word of surmise or maundering from beginning to end. If courage were a ponderable quality, I swear she'd weigh all of a ton. She's an inspiration. If I can't win her suit outright, I'll keep the thing hanging 20 years or as long as the other side chooses to stand up to the rack."

Judge Graball had the name of being a mighty hard man, one who, it was said, cared for nothing beyond law and the emoluments thereof. Naturally Mr. Payne left him in a state of jubilant amazement. As he went out of the office he encountered Colonel Talbot, with Jack at his elbow, bent, he had no doubt, upon an errand like his own.

"No use to go there," he said, nodding to the door behind him. "I tried, but Graball snapped me up so I haven't quite got back my breath."

"So he is retained for the other side," Jack said, his face falling. "Well, there are more lawyers in town if you're not quite so good."

"Oh, you won't need to hunt them!" Mr. Payne said, with a chuckle. "Graball has fallen in love with the case, he says—I believe it's the client—so much in love he might fling you out of the window if you went talking money, as I did."

Rob smiled demurely when she came to know the result of these embassies. Then she said, with dim eyes, looking away to where her father sat in the sun: "Only help me to keep him happy until—until we know the end. That is, more than anything, the very best help you can give."

They had agreed with her and gladly done her bidding. No hint, no whisper, of coming trouble reached the blind man. He knew only that somehow he was happier, had more company and more of friendly sympathy than for some years back. He was glad of it too. He felt himself weakening daily, and as life slipped from him he came to prize more and more the kindly human contact that gilded his darkness.

Rob was unutterably tender of him. She marked his falling away, but let no trace of grief and dread creep into her voice. Instead she was gay and high with him, full of quips and cranky jests, making a pretense of flogging the gold-

pieces from his pocket to console herself for the loss of Mr. Topmark, who, as she reported, had shamelessly deserted her for the mature charms of Miss Mandie Allen. Much as she recoiled from the man, even from mention of him, she knew her father would need some other than the true explanation of why the widower came no longer and seized upon the one nearest at hand.

So she got through the weeks before court sat. Then Mrs. Payne would hear of nothing but that the McGregors should come to them for a fortnight. "Cynthia will love to take care of your father. He delights to hear as she to tell of Lady Walton's perfections. Of the good lady said, with a mild twinkle, "and we will take you to the courthouse without ever letting the daddy guess what we have been about."

Rob could not speak. She dropped her head on Mrs. Payne's broad breast, and for the first time sobbed hard. But afterward she was docile as a child, even making herself fine without a murmur in the dark green gown, with little touches of gilt, that set off her dark beauty as it deserved, for Mrs. Payne had said when the garment was laid before its wearer, "You must let me do for Helen's daughter a little part of what she would do for mine."

Walking into the courtroom between the gray haired couple, Rob was glad they had taken thought for her. She knew herself the focus of all eyes and rejoiced that the most captious should see her look as became the heiress of Roscoe. "My, but don't she walk proud on them little feet?" one spectator said aside to another. "Tain't no wonder she wouldn't eben weigh 'em on Ben Topmark."

Rob caught the whisper and flushed faintly, drawing a trifle behind her friends. When the three were safely seated, she let her eyes range the courtroom until they fell upon Magnolia Tubbs sitting between Mrs. Annis and her son. It was her first conscious sight of the girl in whose behalf her own right was disputed. Rob had heard vaguely her story, barely enough to know that for some reason or for none the girl was wildly anxious to come into ready money. She had heard, too, of her coarse, luxuriant beauty, her passion for flaming gauds, some hint, too, of her abject, doglike devotion to the brutal bully, Noah Annis. So the heiress of

Roscoe had a shrewd comprehension of much that lay under the cards of the game against herself.

Until today she had felt for the girl Magnolia a sort of raging contempt. Ignorance, she had told herself, could in nowise excuse dishonesty. The principles of right were so plain they could not be fogged unless the eyes were willfully blind. "And they know, these people, that their claim is wholly false," she had said. "Roscoe was lawfully bought and liberally paid for. Some enemy, spying out the flaw in our title, a flaw due mainly to my father's kindly justice, has set them on to make it, that in the end the spy may profit by it. I do not name the spy, but think I know very well who he is."

Now, looking across at the other girl, Rob felt a thrill of compassion. Magnolia was deadly pale, so pale as to make ghastly the staring blotches of rouge upon either cheek. Her frock was of dark, gay plaid, with many fluttering ends of ribbon and the crowning glory of a gorgeous sash, but for all its splendor the wearer looked drawn and withered. Her eyes were hollowed. Her stubby fingers worked painfully within their mail of new kid gloves. Most of the time she stared straight in front of her, but now and again she looked in furtive appeal toward Noah, glowering behind her in fine, new clothes.

"Poor thing! She is so afraid of that fellow," Rob said in Mrs. Payne's ear. "Yet she does not look as though she were easily made afraid. She loves him, I think. That is the secret of it."

"Don't look at her, dear. She—she is not the sort you should speak about," Mrs. Payne said, very low. But Rob did not take away her eyes. After a little she whispered further:

"Aunt Payne, I am sorry for the poor thing, so sorry that if we had it I would give her the money she wants just for admitting the truth that our land is our own. Of course I could not give her Roscoe, not even the finest bit, but—but the hunger in her face, not physical, but something I can't define, will haunt me if I cannot find out how to take it away."

"Hush, dear!" Mrs. Payne said, pressing Rob's hand, with a sigh. She knew only too well in what grave peril of loss the girl stood. Even now her husband and other friends were plotting a compromise that would leave the McGregors at least in possession for so long as the blind man lived.

Rob, of course, knew nothing of that, though the lawyer had been too kindly wise to let her underestimate the strength of her opponents. "We must fight for delay," he had said, "wear them out. It's almost our only chance. Your father is the only person within reach who could testify to the missing deed's existence and explain why it is missing. Don't think I shall let him do it, though. Even if I were so heartless as to undo in a minute all your brave work through years, it would scarcely be wise. He is so infirm and fanciful. Then, as the real party in interest, his testimony in the law's eye would be tainted, though we and everybody know it would be gospel truth. If I can manage to get the case put over two terms or three—well, my dear, I think a settlement will be mighty near in sight."

Nobody in Walnut Creek dreamed of questioning that Judge Graball ran himself. So Rob was reasonably content as she sat at Mrs. Payne's side and took note of Mr. Howell, who, she had heard, was now firmly engaged to Miss Winfold. And Mrs. Winfold, her gossips had assured her, said over it: "I really was mighty sorry for Jack Talbot, pore fellow! But, then, Alice never had, as you might say, incouraged him. Her goin about with him had been mostly because his mother was so insistent. Alice never had the least idea of him as er husband, though he wanted her bad, so bad she did but hope he wouldn't go an take ter drink over not gettin her. But no girl couldn't, not of she had been well raised, think er missin sex er chance as Mr. Howell. Why, it would be flyin in the face er Providence an trother both. Brother never did favor Jack Talbot an was jest de-lighted over Alice's engagement. Of co'se he had never let ter the Talbots how he felt—he couldn't, not on account of the sto' an them workin so many niggers—but fer my part I was glad ter let out things. I was so tired er ber perlitte just from the teeth. An then ter think what er romants it was—Mr. Howell fallin in love the very minute he saw Alice! Sech er compliment! Now, of only Ninesy done as well in marryin—he couldn't no ways do no better—I wouldn't have nothin more ter wish fer this side er heaven."

Memory of it all brought a shadowy dimple to lurk about Rob's mouth as she sat serenely facing her enemies in court. Mr. Topmark had come in, but did not glance her way. He held stonily aloof, too, from Magnolia, though he answered with a constrained greeting when Noah called jauntily across to him. He looked ill and worn indeed. The wrinkles below the jaw were deeper and his hard, shiny skin unwholesomely red. Rob saw him look eagerly at the line of huddled blacks at the back of the courtroom. Something, she knew not what, moved her to let her eyes also rest there. To her amazement, she saw Aunt Pheny sitting primly apart and leaning upon her crocheted stick till her face was half hidden.

Until the week before court sat Judge Graball had held to the comforting belief of his world as to his own potency in legal affairs. Then suddenly he was made aware that an elective judiciary sometimes takes account of more things than enter into strictly legal procedure. Judge Waxem of the honorable court was a candidate for re-election, and his only dangerous competitor was peculiarly strong in Walnut Creek—Walnut Creek, which cast 400 votes, 250 of which were safely controlled by Mr. Topmark. All through a heated canvass that gentleman had sat impartially on the fence, but at the eleventh hour he gave out that, "cordin ter his way er seein things, Judge Waxem come nearer doin right'n any new man could be looked ter hit it, an Waxem'd have his vote an influence shore."

So, when the case of Tubbs versus McGregor came up, Judge Graball was not astonished to find that the plaintiff's most servicable attorney sat in the place of judgment. Do what Graball might, things went at railroad speed. Motions were denied, overruled, set at naught, until he became so defiantly and impudently cheerful those who understood him best felt his case was hopeless, for in the most desperate cases his air of confidence became something superhuman. More than once it had carried the jury his way in the face of law and evidence. But juries are never candidates, reading to regard the sun, the winds, of popular favor. The more Graball maneuvered the more flinty hard grew Judge Waxem's face.

The case had been called in the early afternoon. It still lacked hours of nightfall. Mr. Graball was on his feet speaking against time, indeed, when the judge presiding, who had listened with an air of polite fatigue, as one who tolerates another's babble solely from self respect, yawned behind his hand, then began to say:

"As you have nothing to offer beyond adverse possession, Judge Graball, I think we had as well not waste more time. Mr. Clerk, enter judgment for—"

A stir about the door startled him into pausing a breath's space. Before he could go on there was a hubbub that silenced him. An old woman, hunched faced, weakened, bent, with skin like brown parchment below a thatch of stiff gray hair, was half leading, half dragging, a tall figure up the aisle toward the bar. At the rail they stopped short. The long figure painfully straightened itself and said in a husky whisper:

"Mammy, ask 'em—ask 'em of we air in time?"

Noah Annis half sprung upright at sight of the wasted face. His mother drew him back heavily, deeply frowning. Lawyer Howell was on his feet, speaking to the judge, who, as he listened, called sharply:

"Officer, remove these disturbers from the presence of the honorable court."

TO BE CONTINUED.

was a single sheet of paper, large or small, from Boston to New York or Philadelphia, cost 18¢ cents; and this at a time when the purchasing power of a cent was five times what it is at present. To carry a letter from Philadelphia, then the capital of the United States, to Boston, and bring back an answer by return mail, would have consumed from 12 to 18 days, according to the season of the year and the weather.

ON SIGNING ONE'S NAME.
"Do tell the women," begged a lady of great wealth the other day, "tell the women never to sign a paper the contents of which they do not fully understand. In the sorrow and excitement of a certain hour, I put my name to a document which placed my money and affairs at the mercy of a money changer for a dozen years. Had I only told him that I would think it over before signing, I should have had fewer sleepless nights and fewer gray hairs. Why did my father or my husband never tell me this?"

"Think over a paper, or at least to read it carefully before signing! This precept should be taught every girl and woman as the alphabet of business affairs. Many things may be safely left to her to learn by experience, but not this. Too often it means her gentle acquiescence in a man's 'Sign here,' with a consequent adoption of other persons' obligations or the abrogation of her own perquisites and property."

A person's signature, standing before the law for one's self, is entitled to proper respect; and how to sign is scarcely less important than what not to sign. Everybody should adopt and cling to the use of a certain style of autograph. Women should use their Christian names, never their husband's, and omit Mrs. or Miss as a prefix. A signature should never be left carelessly on pieces of blank paper where unscrupulous use might be made of it, and it should be distinctly legible.

A woman should learn also to respect the signature of those of even her nearest kin. Messenger boys say that they are daily asked by ladies if they shall sign their own or their husbands' names on receipt books. The New York Tribune recently portrayed a pretty bride with no practical knowledge of a check book. The deliverer of a choice piece of bric-a-brac had insisted on payment at the door. The young woman explained that evening to her husband that as she had fortunately remembered how he had drawn a check the previous day, and where he had left his check book, she made one out for the merchant, and added: "You do not know how well Alonzo B. Tompkins looked in my handwriting!"

It is needless to add that no time was lost by the distracted young husband in recovering that most innocently forged check!

THE WORLD'S BICYCLE.—"If all the bicycles in the world were brought to a central point and reconstructed into one giant machine," says one of the leading bicycle publications, "the result would be a machine six miles long and over four high, with wheels almost three miles in diameter. To construct such a monster would require 15,000,000 cycles, and if built in proportion of weight and thickness the only available course over which some atlas might hump his back and scorch would be on the boundless prairie of the west, or in the heart of the Desert of Sahara. The average human mind cannot well conceive of 15,000,000 modern bicycles all thrown into one mammoth machine, the wheels of which have a circumference of nine miles, no more than the traveling capacity of such a wonderful thing could be even remotely conceived."

Miscellaneous Reading.
THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF NATIONS.
Every nation prides itself on its independence. It maintains armies and fleets to protect itself against interference. It resents everything in the least suggesting disrespect for its rights. Yet national independence moves within extremely narrow limits. Even of the strongest nations it cannot be said that they are at liberty to do exactly what they would.

When the war between China and Japan ended, why was not Japan free to exact what terms she chose from her conquered enemy? It was because Russia, France and Germany concluded that it would not do to have Japan too strong; and they compelled a moderation of the Japanese demands in material particulars.

Cuba belongs to Spain. Why may not Spain govern her own as she pleases? Why is it the business of the United States to make suggestions or to volunteer meditation? It is because we cannot afford to have so turbulent a neighbor, and because our pecuniary and commercial interests are adversely affected by the continuance of the war on the island.

The claim of the great Powers of Europe to regulate the government of Turkey rests on a similar basis. Misgovernment and massacre in Turkey injure the interests and threaten the peace of Europe. If so lawless and cruel a neighbor will not behave herself, she must be made to behave. That is what the "reat of concerted coercion means."

But it is not the weaker nations only that have to moderate their policy because of the interests or prejudices of other nations. England would like undisputed possession of Egypt; but she has to respect the jealousies of France, and so declares that her occupation of Egypt is but temporary. When she started her expedition into the Sudan, she took money from the Egyptian reserve fund to pay the bills; but foreign custodians of that fund protested, and she had to pay the money back.

When Doctor Jameson raided the Transvaal, German resentment at what seemed English aggression flamed up so quickly that international trouble could hardly have been avoided if it had not been so soon made clear that Jameson's act was unauthorized.

But on the other hand, when German expressions of sympathy with President Kruger became somewhat effusive, England made ready at short notice a powerful flying squadron, apparently as an intimation of what she could do, if attacked.

Russia,