CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE "CHILD OF THE TEMPEST"—HEIR APPARENT.

AN OPULENT GROWTH.

Under the census of 1900 West Virginia numbered near a million souls, and now, a year later, no doubt the million mark has been reached. Its statistics show an even larger growth in commerce and development. Among the coal-mining States, it is already third, and the production steadily increases. In no State in the Union has the tide of prosperity risen higher. From all sources—the local press, private correspondence, newspaper intelligence, the testimony of tourists and visitors—comes the uniform report of an opulent, unprecedented development, present and prospective, of the natural riches of this region, so long locked from the world of business enterprise by the repulsive policy of Old Virginia. While these last pages are being written, a local paper comes to hand with the statement that sixty-three railroads are at this time (November, 1901), proposed and under construction within the State, ranging in length from ten miles to sixty. The same paper contains the Thanksgiving proclamation of Governor White, wherein he says:

We are truly a favored people among the nations of the world, and the citizens of no State in the Union have more abundant reasons for thanksgiving than those of West Virginia. Our
national prosperity has been very great, and we have been shielded from pestilence and distress. Our State has probably been blessed above all others in the progress of material development and in the increased production of the great riches with which God has favored us.

The happy geographical position of West Virginia, her genial climate; her riches in soil, coal, stone, timber, iron and oil, will make her another Pennsylvania in industry, wealth and population; and her fine school system, crowned by the University at Morgantown, assures an intellectual growth adapted to the natural aptitude of her people.

Until after the War of the Rebellion, the territory embraced in West Virginia had but one railroad; and that corporation being devoted primarily to the enrichment and glorification of one family, it did not promote a policy of local improvements. Unfriendly legislative control at the head of James River also discouraged and retarded development of the West in any direction. The ex-Confederate control of the New State for twenty years was also a check on immigration and enterprise; which made some progress, however, in spite of it. Railroad extension in this territory, especially rapid within a few years, has put a different face on the transportation and industrial situation within its borders and is opening the State's resources to the eager quest of outside enterprise and capital. Great as the progress has been since the infant was baptised thirty-eight years ago, it has only begun. All the rich valleys lying between the Ohio and the Alleghenies are destined to be traversed by lines of rail which will carry to waiting markets West, South, North and East her crops, cattle,
sheep, wool, fruit, timber; the products of her mines and the oil in her subterranean caverns, which have lain hidden since creation waiting for their hour to come.

Looking to the far-away future, one sees these beautiful hills and valleys stripped of nature's adornment; the hills denuded of their forests, the valleys lighted by the flames of coke-ovens and smelting furnaces; their vegetation seared and blackened with soot and gases; derricks rising like skeletons along the streams in company with tanks of petroleum, waiting to tempt (if not already captured by) the Standard's millions; yawning mines and piles of slack disfiguring the once pleasing landscape—and one could wish that such an Arcadia might have been spared such ravishment. But the needs of the race are insatiable and unceasing. They must be supplied; and one after another the reserves stored by nature in the hidden places of the earth must be brought out to feed the perpetual hunger of the world's commerce.

It would not be easy to give good reasons why a State whose progress can be only in the development of natural resources and in the fostering of industries allied to them should not ally itself with a National policy calculated to promote such home interests; yet the party of free-trade and pro-slavery traditions held West Virginia solid for nearly twenty-five years. The Republican control of the first half dozen years succeeding the erection of the State was due largely to exceptional circumstances: the overthrow of the rebellion, the dominance for the time of the loyal element even where not in distinct majority, the exclusion of the ex-Confederates from political functions and the moral subjugation of others who had sympathized with
the insurrection but kept out of it. Save along the northern and western borders, the population of Western Virginia had a large leaven of secession. The pro-slavery virus of Old Virginia was strong in the educated and wealthier classes. The prejudice was both political and social—the social bias even stronger than the political. Grazing and small farming had been the chief occupations for generations. These interests bred a pastoral and provincial temper in districts away from the towns and from the solitary railroad, whose people looked askance at the "outlanders" of the manufacturing towns along the border. Lawyers and office-holders shaped the political feeling in these pastoral districts; and they were very generally in sympathy with the regime at Richmond, which from time immemorial had been devoted to the interests of their peculiar institution and in more recent years dominated by men in sympathy with the dream of a great slave empire rapidly ripening into conspiracy and revolt. It takes time for any people to recast all their ideas down to fundamental bases. War is an iconoclast; it is a rapid teacher of new lessons; but no part of any country's population is so slow to learn as the dwellers in remote mountain districts, away from the activities of commerce and the attrition of travel.

But at last the stagnation in West Virginia hills has been stirred. Forty years of disconnection from Old Virginia and pro-slavery influences are showing their fruits. Even in the heads of the hollows, the "moss-backs" are being hustled out of their hibernation and jostled by the business world that has come along with money to buy their timber lands and mineral rights. Their country is being invaded and overrun again a good deal as it was in
1861. But the arguments are not so summary, the weapons less deadly than then; and in the gleam of Northern gold and the rustle of "Abolition" greenbacks, the resolutions of '98 and other dicta of the earlier Jefferson—as illustrated by the later—are fading from memory and losing interest; while the vulgar ambitions of the modern world, eager for riches and power, are—sadly be it said—replacing the fine old abstractions of the fine old Virginians which once filled so large a place in the political speculations of this fringe of Southland. The few who still resent this intrusion of the outside rude and jostling world into their sacred preserves are being outclassed and elbowed aside. The children are being won away from the abstractions of the fathers to the gospel of business and money-making. To the ideal sense, the change is a loss; but out of consideration for the practical bread-and-butter-eating and clothes-wearing world—considering that children are all the while being born which have to be fed and clothed and old people all the while dying who have to be buried, that vulgar money will do both, but political abstractions neither—the change is one to rejoice in.

I can fancy how some of the old-time cattle-kings in Harrison would resent the encroachment of strangers ranging over their pastures looking for oil or coal, frightening the herds of sleek, mild-eyed steers which gather around in wonder and alarm ready to break into a stampede in which they would run off many a pound of their tender flesh, if no worse disaster happened them. Alas, that even royalty should have its price! Under the Midas touch, the generous pastures nourish the fat steer no longer. He has gone to market for the last time from many a district
once given over to his summer haunt; and the oil-derrick rises or the coke-oven blazes where he used to graze and browse beside the brook in the early morning and cool himself in its pools in the heat of midday.

Already the peaceful seclusion of those hills and vales is a thing of the past. The timber-hunters, the oil-explorers, the coal-buyers, the projectors of new railroads, the seekers after cheap lands for homes or for investment, are everywhere; and railroad locomotives are sticking their noses into most unexpected places. The old people who have the stuff to sell—who had not expected to be disturbed in their time, but are not proof against the seductions of lucre when it comes their way—are shaken up as never before. It is a peaceful but mighty revolution; a transformation which in a few years will put capital and commerce into domination in this young Commonwealth; and will, I am sorry to add, give its great natural wealth to the further enrichment of combinations and trusts unless its people and Legislatures be possessed of a wisdom and virtue not to be found in any other part of the world.

Thirty years ago the party barriers which had hedged in the Republican administration of the State, weakened by the unwillingness of a large and influential element in the Republican party to continue the policy of disabilities inherited from the war, gave way before the pressure of the ex-Confederate flood. The waters prevailed for near a quarter of a century. At length they have somewhat assuaged, and there is reason to think the ark of progress has found solid ground; that the dark ages for the State are past; that a policy of enlightened self-interest has dawned. There was nothing surprising in the reaction following the
war. Political reactions are part of the history of every country. After the high moral tension under Cromwell and the Commonwealth, how England, under the dissolute rule of the second Charles, "the Merry," rioted and wallowed in the mire of vice and immorality. After the Jacobin September and Robespierre, came Bonaparte with his "whiff of grapeshot,"—the Directory—the Empire. The ex-Confederate domination in West Virginia was the inevitable swing from one extreme to the other. In a large sense, it was not specially to be deplored. It has not been without its compensation; for it gave the reactionists an opportunity to show how they were wedded to their ancient idols; how unequal they were to the demands of the new era succeeding the extirpation of slavery and the policies it fostered; to show also their incapacity and lack of principle. A single instance will illustrate. In their revision of the State constitution on old-fogy and ex-Confederate lines in 1872, they wholly omitted the provision of the first constitution requiring the State to assume its equitable share of the Virginia debt and to make settlement with Virginia, so that share might be ascertained and provided for. This was one of the prime conditions upon which Congress had passed the bill of admission and upon which President Lincoln had approved it. The matter was not overlooked by this Convention. It was discussed, and the omission was intentional. This left the State without any recognition of that obligation; left the Legislature without authority to act respecting it; and left West Virginia in the attitude of deliberate repudiation. Notice of the fact was taken a few months ago at the world's financial center and West Virginia posted, along with Mississippi and Louisiana, as a repudiator.
The narrowness and the bitterness of that time are passing away. In future, intelligent business administration will be demanded of any party that may control the State. The people who have chosen "Montani semper liberi" for their motto have, in common with the rest of the modern world, put their hand to the plow. Some of them may at times look back with longing for the "flesh-pots;" may sometimes sit down and lament, as the children of Israel did by the rivers of Babylon; but time and tide will not wait for them, and, however reluctant, they will have to fall in and move on with the column.

If West Virginia shall be true to the high purposes of her founders—to the protection of her citizenship, to the preservation of public faith—she ought to be henceforth one of the most inviting fields in the world for capital and energy. She has had her great political reaction; has risen from the slough; has shaken off the Circean spell of slavery, and should henceforward advance along wiser and broader ways to an imperial destiny.
In West Virginia skies are blue,
The hills are green and hearts are true;
A joyous welcome waiteth you,
In West Virginia.

In West Virginia skies are bright,
The twinkling stars make glad the night;
And noble hearts uphold the right,
In West Virginia.

In West Virginia happy beams
The sun that kisses crystal streams;
Enduring love is what is seems,
In West Virginia.

In West Virginia there is rest
For tempest-tossed and sore distressed;
Here loving hearts are ever blest,
In West Virginia.

In West Virginia man is free;
He dwells beneath his own roof-tree;
Oh come, my love, and dwell with me,
In West Virginia.

—H. L. Swisher, in “Briar Blossoms.”